

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | WEDNESDAY 6 | JANUARY 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 26°C  
**Min:** 23°C  
**Rainfall:** 4 mm

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Margazhi 22  
**Tithi:** Ashtami,  
**Star:** Hastham  
**Rahukalam:**  
12 noon to 1.30 pm  
**Yamagandam:**  
7.30 am to 9.00 am

### PRAYERS

**Fajar:** 5.15 am  
**Zohar:** 12.17 pm  
**Asar:** 3.28 pm  
**Maghrib:** 5.53 pm  
**Isha:** 7.09 pm

**SUNSET TODAY** 5.57 PM  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 6.33 AM  
**MOONRISE TODAY** 12.10 AM  
**MOONSET TOMORROW** 12.04 PM

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+16,817)	(+252)
1,03,74,386	1,50,138

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+820)  
**TN:** 8,22,370 12,177

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

8,64,70,477

### DEATHS

18,69,188

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES  
218

worldometers.info

## TN monitoring borders for bird flu

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Health secretary J Radhakrishnan urged the people not to panic over the possibility of bird flu coming to the State as the authorities were keeping a watch over it in the borders.

Speaking to the media at the DMS complex, where he was supervising the preparations for the launching the Covid-19 vaccine, he said Bird Flu cases have been now detected in Haryana and Kerala. Since the state shares a border with Kerala, 26 check posts had been set up to monitor the vehicles, cattle and birds entering through the districts of Kanyakumari, Tenkasi, Theni, Coimbatore and Nilgiris. Disinfectants were also used to prevent the spread of Bird Flu, he said.

## COUNTER POINT



He will flag off the vaccination drive, but on one condition. Don't force him to take it first!

## Pak ups activity; BSF sends more troops to Punjab border districts

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

Sensing increased activity on the Pakistan side along the border areas of Punjab, the Border Security Force (BSF) has rushed additional troops to the India-Pakistan border in Punjab sector. Sources said 4,000-5,000 more troops have been deployed in the sensitive border districts of

Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Amritsar and Taran Taran, "virtually sealing" the entire border.

Sources claimed they had specific intelligence inputs that Pakistan would try large-scale infiltration into Punjab and was now focusing on this region instead of the Kashmir Valley. The decision follows an intense security review for the border districts.

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**CM's help sought to resolve Gudalur power**



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**Georgia election to decide fate of Biden presidency**

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**VVS expects century from Rohit**



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— 2-1 VERDICT HOLDS PERMISSIONS VALID —

# Record rainfall inundates Chennai, suburban areas

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Normal life was affected in Chennai and surrounding districts on Tuesday after incessant rains, billed as heaviest in 100 years, and resultant waterlogging inundated several low-lying areas. The authorities released water from the city reservoirs, including Chembarambakkam lake, to prevent further inundation. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted cloudy weather with light to moderate rains in the next 24 hours but the city recorded 6 cm of rain, much more than the expected 3.7 cm. A senior Regional Meteorological Centre official here said the rainfall was caused by an easterly trough.

Moderate rainfall is likely in several northern districts on Wednesday with Villupuram, Cuddalore and other neighbouring districts expected to receive isolated heavy showers.

According to weather expert Pradeep John, Chennai received a record rainfall in 100 years and it is the heaviest in January



Vehicles wade through a waterlogged GST road in Pallavaram after heavy rain lashes throughout the Chennai and its suburbs on Tuesday.

— E.K.SANJAY

since 1915. "There are no cyclone, depression or low pressure," he said. "Yet we have got over 7 times the rains than normal in January in less than 15 hours."

The sudden downpour prompted officials to release surplus water from the reservoirs around Chennai. Initially they released 500 cusecs of water from the Chembarambakkam dam

and later stepped it up to about 3,000 cusecs. Similarly, 1,500 cusecs were released from the Puzhal lake, and 2,970 cusecs from Poondi. PWD officials said. These reservoirs are the primary resources of Chennai's drinking water needs. Authorities have advised people residing in areas close to the banks of Adyar river and other channels that carry surplus water

from the reservoirs to be careful and not get close to the water bodies.

Water entered houses in a few low lying areas like Chitlapakkam and civic officials were engaged in clearing flooded subways and key intersections. After almost non-stop battering for hours together in some places, the rains stopped in most parts of the city and suburban localities after 3 pm.

## ANOTHER MIN QUILTS MAMATA MINISTRY, TMC

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC**  
KOLKATA, JAN. 5

Former cricketer and West Bengal minister of state for sports and youth services Laxmi Ratan Shukla resigned from the ministry and quit the Trinamul Congress, in a shocking birthday blow to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, on Tuesday, the day she turned 66.

Mr Shukla is the second rebel minister after Shubhendu Adhikari to quit Ms Banerjee's ministry and party in less than two months. This left many in the TMC stunned, amid speculation about his switchover to the BJP.

The 39-year-old, one of the state's youngest MLAs, is among those in the rebel TMC camp with a clean image in Howrah who is likely to join the BJP in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah on January 12. ■ **P4**

— INDIA TO INVITE ANOTHER LEADER FOR R-DAY —

# Johnson cancels India trip as UK goes into strict lockdown

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cancelled his planned India visit later this month to be chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations due to the grim Covid-19 situation in Britain and the "speed at which the new coronavirus variant is spreading" that led to a fresh national lockdown, the British government said Tuesday. Mr Johnson had already spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi "to express his regret", it said, adding Mr Johnson hopes to visit India by June this year.

India is now expected to invite another foreign leader as chief guest for the January 26 parade.



New Delhi said Tuesday evening that in a phone conversation with Mr Modi, Mr Johnson "regretted his inability to attend ... in view of the changed Covid-19 context prevailing in UK", but said he was keen to "visit India in the near future".

New Delhi said "Prime Minister (Modi) expressed his understanding of the exceptional situation in

the UK, and conveyed his best wishes for the quick control of the pandemic spread", adding "he looked forward to receiving Prime Minister Johnson in India at the earliest opportunity after normalisation of the situation".

The invitation to Mr Johnson was announced during British foreign secretary Dominic Raab's visit to New Delhi last month.

The UK on Tuesday entered a tough new stay-at-home lockdown on Tuesday after Mr Johnson said it has been "both frustrating and alarming" to see the speed with which the new variant of the coronavirus is spreading and declared that hospitals in the country are under more pressure from the deadly virus than at any time in the pandemic.

## EMBARGO GOES, QATAR EMIR LANDS IN SAUDI

**Al-Ula (Saudi Arabia), Jan. 5:** Qatar's ruling emir arrived in Saudi Arabia and was greeted with an embrace by the kingdom's crown prince on Tuesday, following an announcement that the kingdom would end its yearslong embargo on the Arab state.

The decision to open borders was the first major step toward ending the diplomatic crisis that has deeply divided US defense partners, frayed societal ties and torn apart a traditionally clubby alliance of Arab states. The arrival of Sheikh Tamim-bin-Hamad Al Thani to the kingdom's ancient desert city of Al-Ula was broadcast live on Saudi TV. He was seen descending from his plane and being greeted with a hug by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The emir is in Al-Ula for an annual summit of Arab leaders that is expected to produce a détente between Qatar and four Arab states. —AP

# CISF to review Taj security after 4 wave saffron flags

● **As part of the security protocol, all visitors to the ASI monument are checked using metal-detectors, they cannot carry posters or any writing material**

New Delhi, Jan. 5: A day after four people were held for waving saffron flags on the Taj Mahal premises, the CISF, which has the responsibility to guard it, Tuesday said it will review its surveillance and intelligence gathering at the Mughal-era monument to ensure such incidents don't recur.

The four youths have been booked for allegedly promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion. "Since it's a security

breach, we have sought a report from the CISF in the next two to three days to understand what happened," Vasant Swarnkar, Superintending Archaeologist, ASI (Agra Circle), told PTI.

Police said the four youths who have been arrested are

members of a right-wing outfit and they had entered the Taj Mahal Monday afternoon through the Eastern Gate. They waved saffron flags and also uploaded a 10-second video of the act on YouTube.

As part of the security protocol, all visitors to the ASI

monument are checked using metal-detectors, they cannot carry posters or any writing material. However, the use of selfie-sticks is not banned. Physical checking has been stopped at the gates of Taj Mahal after it reopened for visitors following the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

"Tourists carry all kinds of clothes inside the premises. It is difficult to prevent them from carrying pieces of clothing like handker-

chiefs or dupattas and they can be of different colours and may have any religious connotation. "However, we are updating our surveillance around the site, increasing and intensifying intelligence gathering and even patrolling. There are some steps internally that we are contemplating to ensure that such incidents do not happen again," CISF commandant Yadav told PTI.



**KAMAL SEEKS BLESSINGS**

Kamal Haasan seeks blessings from freedom fighter and INA veteran Annasakaram Sivagami Ammal. She had joined Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian national army then.

— DC  
■ **Report on P2**



## OTHER STORIES

Co-op bank  
told to pay ₹1LDC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Cuddalore has directed the Primary Agriculture Co-operative Bank Ltd in the coastal district to pay ₹1 lakh to a person.

In a petition, P. Kannan of Semmandalam, Cuddalore stated that he deposited ₹7,027 with Vazhudalampattu Primary Agriculture Co-operative Bank Ltd., Karumatchipalayam, Kullanchavadi in 1998. The bank promised that on maturity after 20 years it would pay ₹1 lakh. Last year he approached the bank seeking the maturity amount, but it didn't give a reply. A notice was sent to the bank. Hence, he filed the complaint seeking direction to the bank to release the maturity amount.

In the reply, the bank denied the allegation and stated that as per the guidelines of RBI, the bank shall give only the prevailing rate of interest and not the rate of interest mentioned at the time of deposit. As per the circular dated November 30, 2003 and November 6, 2004 of the Registrar, Co-operative Society, Chennai an interest of 7 per cent was calculated on the deposit amount. It was informed to the complainant.

The interest was calculated at the rate of 13.5 percent upto 2004 and from January 1, 2005 he was entitled only 7 per cent interest. Hence the bank requested the commission to dismiss the complaint.

The bench comprising president, R.V.R. Deenadayalan and member T.V. Babu directed the bank to pay Rs 1 lakh towards the matured deposit amount and a sum of Rs 3,000 towards litigation expenses to the complainant in three months.

VJ Chitra's husband  
Hemnath held  
again in medical  
seat fraud scamDC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

The Central Crime Branch of Chennai Police on Tuesday arrested late actor-VJ Chitra's husband Hemnath in a medical college seat scam. Hemnath was arrested by the police on the charges of abetment to the Chitra's suicide. As the investigations into the Actor's death are still going, the CCB has arrested him on the charges of cheating.

According to the sources, Hemnath had collected an amount of ₹1.5 crore, while giving assurances to procure medical seats, with a complaint subsequently being filed by parents of students at the J.J. Nagar police station in Chennai in 2015.

The case has now been shifted to the Crime Branch's document and fraud prevention division, with Hemnath being arrested once again and taken for interrogation from Puzhal Jail where he was imprisoned.

It may be recalled that the popular television actor Chitra was found dead at the hotel room she was staying in, with her husband Hemnath, during the early hours of December 9. Six days later, her husband Hemnath was arrested by the police on the charges of abetment to suicide. Last week, Chithu's mother had submitted a letter to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister cell demanding a CB-CID enquiry into her daughter's death. Chitra's parents have stated that there needs to be transparency in the investigation of her case.

The case has now been shifted to the Crime Branch's document and fraud prevention division, with Hemnath being arrested once again and taken for interrogation from Puzhal Jail where he was imprisoned

On Tuesday, amid intense showers, vehicles moved at a snail's pace while bikers and drivers of auto-rickshaws and cars found it very difficult to negotiate roads covered by sheets of water in several areas

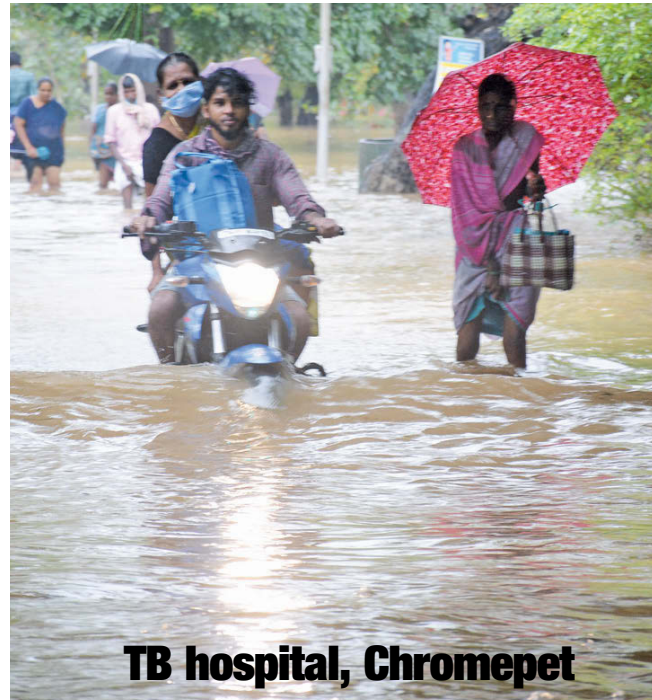
## Margazhi rain stuns Chennaiites



KK Nagar



Madipakkam



TB hospital, Chromepet



GST road, Tambaram sanatorium

City reservoirs get 1,304 mcft  
more water in a monthT. SUDHEESH | DC  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

The reservoirs in the city received at least 1,304 Mcft additional water within a month after cyclone Nivar and subsequent floods forced the authorities to release water from the reservoirs including Chembarambakkam and Poondi.

A month after heavy rains once again forced the Public Works Department (PWD) to release water, the total storage level in the city reservoirs now stands at 10,986 Mcft against the total capacity of 11,757. This is double compared to last year's figure of just

5,734. The storage level was 9,682 Mcft on last December 4.

The PWD authorities on Tuesday said that more than 30 mm rainfall has been recorded in the catchment areas and both Chembarambakkam and Redhill reservoirs had been receiving 500 cusecs of water. The same amount of water will be released to the Adyar and the Kosasthalaiyar rivers to avoid a flood situation.

At the 140 ft. Poondi reservoir, the biggest in the city, the water level has now touched 3,135 Mcft (additional 268 Mcft in a month) from 2,867 Mcft (88 percent) on

December 4 against the full capacity of 3,231. The water level on the same day last year was 1,444 Mcft.

The water level in Chembarambakkam reservoir rose to 3,364 Mcft (additional 227 Mcft in a month) from 3,137 Mcft (86 percent) in a month against the total capacity of 3,645. The water level on the same day last year was 1,685.

At Redhill, the water level on Tuesday is 3,206 (additional 328 Mcft in a month) against the full capacity of 3,300 Mcft. The water level on December 4 was 2,878 (87 percent) while storage level was

2,536 in the same period last year.

The water level in Cholavaram is way high this year compared to last year. Now the level stands at 881 Mcft while the storage level in the same period last year was just 69 Mcft. Cholavaram has received at least 291 Mcft more water within a month as the water level on December 4 was 590 Mcft (54 percent full) against 1,081-full capacity.

According to the PWD officials, the situation is completely under control as they started releasing water in a controlled manner to maintain the water level due to rain forecast.

## 100% occupancy in theatres

## Will take it up with revenue dept, says health secy

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR &  
D. SEKAR | DC  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Was the state government's decision to allow 100 per cent occupancy in cinema halls – the first state to do it after the nationwide lockdown was imposed following the coronavirus pandemic – taken without consulting the matter with the health department?

It looks so, going by the statement of health secretary J. Radhakrishnan, who, when asked how social distancing could be maintained in the theatres if full occupancy was allowed, said: "I saw the GO issued by the revenue department and we will take up the matter with them."

Radhakrishnan was speaking to the media after overseeing the arrangements for the administration of Covid-19 vaccine at the DMS Complex on Tuesday when he said that they would look into the Government of India guidelines and standard operating procedures, besides the challenges in allowing 100 occupancy, and take it to the notice of the revenue department.

Open letter from doctor  
goes viral on social mediaDC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Day after the state government decided to allow all theatres at 100 per cent capacity, an open letter to the government and actors Vijay and Simbu from "a tired resident doctor" went viral on the social media.

Aravinth Srinivas, junior resident doctor of Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education & Research (per his FB profile), in his FB post, says, "I am tired. We are all tired. Thousands of doc-

Elsewhere, on social media and other forums, opposition for the government's move was vociferous. "Extremely unwise decision. Hope people are more sensible and stay away. 2.5 hours in a closed room with hundred others at close range is a textbook super spreader situation," said a tweet.

Another tweet called it a 'disastrous move' and another one said, 'Now it's up to TN people, if they want to die in theatres for state's economy or want to live life Covid free!'

Many doctors also expressed their apprehension over permitting full houses in cinema halls,

some of them putting up angry posts in social media, one of them saying that health care professionals were already tired. A Tirunelveli-based advocate is said to have sent in a complaint to the Governor, seeking registration of a case against Palaniswami, revenue minister R. B. Udhayakumar, actor Vijay and local administration minister S. P. Velumani under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

His contention was that corruption was involved in the decision of the government and that it was a criminal conspiracy. Many social media users

tors like me are tired. Health care workers are tired. Police officials are tired. Sanitary workers are tired..." He criticized the decision as it would put the lives of fans at risk. He further said people are dying and it is not right to trade lives for money.

too expressed the doubt that the government was unfairly influenced by actor Vijay, whose next film 'Master' is scheduled to be released for Pongal. T. R. Silambarasan's film 'Eeswaran' is also due for release and he too had made a request to the government through a statement.

The general impression, however, was the move could accelerate spread of the Coronavirus, which has not actually been done away with in the State. Some health experts the government could have waited for the vaccination to roll out before allowing the theatres to have a full house audience.

Two jailed for killing  
endangered king cobraDC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Forest department officials arrested two persons for allegedly killing a five feet cobra near Thirukazhukundram in Chengalpet district.

The arrested persons allegedly demolished a snake anthill near Sri Thandumariamman temple on Sangumettu street in Thirukazhukundram, with poclain machine, when endangered King cobra inside the anthill was crushed.

J. Senthil (47), a resident of Thirukazhukundram owns land near Sri Thandumariamman temple. On Monday evening, he employed one S. Jayashankar (27) to level his land with a poclain

machine. Police sources said Jayashankar reportedly demolished an Anthill on Senthil's land. However, a five feet king cobra present inside the hill was found crushed under the debris.

Irked locals, who witnessed the incident, surrounded the vehicle and staged a protest. People in the region have termed the incident as unfortunate as even spotting a king Cobra is rare. Thirukazhukundram police were called in to control the situation.

The police held talks with the locals and dispersed them. Chengalpet forest department officials were alerted about the incident.

A team headed forest

ranger D.Pandurangan arrived and inspected the spot. The officials confirmed the snake to be king cobra, a highly endangered species.

Forest officials said that king cobras are normally not spotted downhill and they need dense forest cover. It is very unfortunate that it was killed even though it didn't harm anyone. The forest ranger sent the carcass of the cobra to the Government veterinary hospital in the district. Senthil and Jayashankar were arrested under sections 9, 51, 59 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The officials also seized the machine.

On Tuesday afternoon, the duo was produced before Chengalpet court and sent to prison.

CM's help sought to  
resolve Gudalur powerB RAVICHANDRAN | DC  
OOTY, JAN. 5

The Centre for Consumer, Human resources and Environment Protection (CCHPEP) at Gudalur, on the western border here, has urged Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to intervene and resolve the power crisis and frequent disruption of power supply in the Gudalur belt, due to

inefficient and insufficient power sub-station in Gudalur.

CCHPEP president, S. Sivasubramaniam, said that the Gudalur revenue division in the Nilgiris has a population of over 2.50 lakh people. It has been struggling the most with frequent power disruptions. One of the major reasons for the situation is the non-availability of a 110 KV sub-station. The up-gradation of 66 KV sub-station to 110 KV sub-station has been a very



long pending (25 years), request of people here.

Late chief minister J. Jayalalithaa in 2003, was kind enough to sanction Rs 1.63 crore for a 110 KV sub-station and inaugurated the project work during one of her visits to Ooty. But the work was abandoned mid-way by authorities who installed only 58 towers out of the total 98 towers required for the process. In these 17 years, several trees have grown up, which now needs the approval of a Central-empowered com-

mittee for felling, without which the remaining 40 towers cannot be installed. The project has not been moving forward for the approval of the empowered committee.

The present 66 KV sub-station which was installed in 1931, is very old and is not able to cater the requirement of the present population. This regular power disruption is causing hindrances to all sectors of life.

"In this regard, Gudalur residents have started sending one lakh e-mails to Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to seek his personal intervention to resolve this issue. This request for a 110 KV sub-station is from the place where around 225 MW power is generated from TNEB hydro-power plants which includes Singara, Moyar and Pykara in Gudalur vicinity," added Sivasubramaniam

No titles, call me civil servant,  
says Kamal in DharmapuriDC CORRESPONDENT  
DHARMAPURI, JAN. 5

The Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan launched his election campaign here on Tuesday.

First, he visited the house of freedom fighter 'Annasakaram Sivagami Ammal', who joined the Indian national army of Subash Chandra Bose. Later, she returned to India and now stays with her relatives here in Dharmapuri.

After his meeting with the octogenarian, Kamal Haasan



told reporters, "Sivagami Ammal fought the British. I received her blessings for

victory in my battle against the corrupt."

Later, the actor attended a public meeting in Dharmapuri town.

Addressing the gathering there, Kamal Haasan said, "I have had many titles in my profession as an actor. Above all, I wish to be called with the new title 'civil servant'.

Commenting on the trend in the political arena, Kamal Haasan said, "Ministers are currently addressed with the title 'Honourable'. They should be given such title only after their tenure according to the good work

done by them. I wish to follow my views, and reject all previous titles (except civil servant) given to me."

He recalled the historical background of Dharmapuri district, and promised a museum of international standard and also make the district a global tourism hub. He wished to bring more socio-economic schemes for Dharmapuri, as this district, according to him, was used as the social laboratory in 1989 by introducing self-help groups before the project was expanded to other places in the state.







## SHORT TAKES

## DEATH OF CROWS TRIGGERS PANIC IN MP VILLAGES

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 5

Panic has gripped many villages in Madhya Pradesh after scores of crows were found dead on the roads and farmlands in the past couple of days.

At least seven districts in the state have reported deaths of crows. "We have received reports of at least 400 crows deaths from seven districts in the state. The deaths were caused due to a virus", state animal husbandry director Dr R.K. Rokre said on Tuesday.

Samples of the dead crows retrieved from Khargone and Mandasaur were sent to the High Security Animal Disease Laboratory at Bhopal for tests to identify the virus that caused death of the birds, sources said.

Earlier, strains of H5N8 avian flu have been detected from the dead crows recovered from Indore.

The district officials in Indore have conducted a door-to-door survey within a radius of one km from the premises of a local college where maximum numbers of crows were found dead.

"No one has been found to have any symptoms. But, 10 people in the area have been found to have caught cough and cold", a senior district official said. The Indore zoo has been alerted to take necessary steps in view of the development.

## PRAGYA EXEMPTED FROM COURT APPEARANCE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 5

A special NIA court in Mumbai on Tuesday granted exemption from regular personal appearance to BJP MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur during 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case trial. The court, however, asked Sadhvi Pragya, who had appeared before the court on Monday, to attend the court as and when directed. She had sought exemption on health and security issues.

After defying the court's directive to appear before it multiple times, Thakur appeared before a special NIA court on Monday.

The special judge P.R. Sitre granted her exemption from appearing before the court after Sadhvi's lawyer J.P. Mishra filed a written application pointing out that she has difficulty in travelling regularly due to her health and security reasons.

According to the lawyer, Thakur has multiple illnesses and is undergoing treatment at AIIMS. Even while she was in Mumbai (on Monday) she had undergone some tests at Kokilaben Hospital where doctors told her she was having multiple complications and needs to be treated by a team of doctors, the lawyer told the court.

Talking about threat to Thakur's life, the lawyer said that due to the threat, the Madhya Pradesh police has provided her six armed police personnel for her security.

Besides them, two personal aids accompany her wherever she goes. "It is very difficult for her to travel with all these security personnel," he added.

## CLEARANCES TO CENTRAL VISTA VALID, SAYS SC

From Page 1

On December 7, last year the top court had allowed the Centre to proceed with the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Central Vista project on December 10 after the government assured it that no construction or demolition work would commence till the apex court decides the pending pleas on the issue.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had laid the foundation stone for the new Parliament building and the construction is expected to be completed by 2022 at an estimated cost of Rs 971 crore.

The apex court had earlier said that any change at the ground level made by authorities for the Central Vista project will be "at their own risk".

It had made it clear that the fate of the project, which includes several new government buildings and a new Parliament House, will depend on its decision. The Centre had earlier argued that the project would "save money" which is paid as rent for housing central government ministries. — *PTI*

## I-T DEPARTMENT QUIZZES VADRA FOR 2ND DAY

New Delhi, Jan. 5: The Income Tax department questioned Robert Vadra, son-in-law of Congress president Sonia Gandhi, for the second consecutive day on Tuesday in connection with its probe against him under the benami assets law, official sources said.

A team from the Chandigarh investigation unit of the department, that is handling the probe, was seen going inside Vadra's office in the Sukhdev Vihar area of the national capital around 3 pm. Vadra is married to Congress leader and Sonia Gandhi's daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

After he was questioned on the first day on Monday, the 52-year-old had said the aim of the tax department's action was to "digress" from the "real issues" concerning the country like the farmers' agitation.

On Monday, he was questioned for about eight hours and his statement was recorded as part of the proceedings related to the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, sources had said.

Tax department sources had said Vadra was asked to join the investigation at their office but as he cited the prevailing Covid-19 restrictions, I-T officials decided to visit his premises.

Officials had said the questioning was linked to the purchase of some land parcels by a firm linked to Vadra in Rajasthan's border town of Bikaner in which another central probe agency, the Enforcement Directorate, had filed a money laundering case in 2015. The ED has questioned Vadra in this case in the past and had attached assets worth ₹4.62 crore of his firm Ms Sky Light Hospitality (P) Ltd (now LLP) in 2019. — *PTI*

## Bird flu scare is back



Women carry dead ducks in a village in Alappuzha district of Kerala on Tuesday. A special team of health officials has been deployed to cull the birds, in order to contain the further spread of the Avian Influenza (bird flu), which has been detected in some parts. J&K sounded an alert and started collecting samples from migratory species after Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh also reported cases of the avian influenza. — *PTI*

## Assam: Saikia loses status of LoP in Assembly

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, JAN. 5

With two Congress legislators joining BJP, Congress Legislature Party leader Debabrata Saikia has lost the status of Leader of the Opposition in the 126-member Assam Assembly.

In an official notification Assam Assembly secretariat said that the Assembly has withdrawn the status from Saikia as the present strength of the Congress is one less than the required number of 21 MLAs. Saikia represents Nazira constituency in eastern Assam.

The notification stated, "The present strength of the Indian National Congress Legislature Party, Assam Legislative Assembly, is not equal to the quorum fixed to constitute a sitting of the House that is one-sixth of the total number of Members of the House as required... therefore, the Speaker, Assam Legislative Assembly, has been pleased to withdraw the recognition of Debabrata Saikia, MLA, as Leader of the Opposition, with effect from January 1, 2021."

The Congress had won 26 seats in the 2016 Assembly elections to take the second spot after the BJP bagged 60 seats.

Six months later, Baithalangso MLA Mansing Rongpi quit the Congress and got re-elected on a BJP ticket. In 2019, Jania MLA Abdul Khaleque resigned after winning the Barpeta Lok Sabha seat as the Congress candidate. The All India United Democratic Front's Rafiqul Islam won the seat in the by-election.

Between February and November 2020, the Congress' Sibisagar MLA Pranab Kumar Gogoi and former chief minister Tarun Gogoi, who represented Titabar, passed away. In December 2020, two Congress MLAs — Ajanta Neog (Golaghat) and Rajdeep Goala (Lakhimpur) — quit and joined the BJP.

Reacting to the notification Congress MP Abdul Khaleque said that it is not logical to withdraw the status. The notification of the acting secretary is illogical and that he has done it under the pressure of the government.

## WOMEN | RESCUERS

## More than 100 women personnel have joined NDRF over the last few months

## India gets its 1st women's team in disaster combat

New Delhi, Jan. 5: In yet another example of shattering of the proverbial glass ceiling, the first batch of over 100 women disaster combatants and rescuers have been inducted in the country's federal calamity force NDRF.

An all-woman team of freshly trained National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel was recently deployed for contingency duties on the banks of the Ganga river in Uttar Pradesh's Garh Mukteshwar town, a senior force officer said.

"The first women res-

cuers' team is already on ground. Recently, the UP government requisitioned an NDRF team and they (women) went there (Garh Mukteshwar). The team handled the rescue boats and related equipment," NDRF director general S.N. Pradhan said.

"These personnel have all the skills to be called complete rescuers," he said.

The move to include women personnel in the NDRF combat ranks was in the works for some time. The force, since it was raised over a decade

## We cannot decide policy: SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that it was bound by the constitutional mandate and could not be called upon to govern as it has neither the powers nor the wherewithals and expertise in that regard.

"Courts operate within the boundaries defined by the Constitution. We cannot be called upon to govern. For, we have no wherewithal or prowess and expertise in that regard" said Justice A.M. Khanwilkar who authored the majority judgment upholding Modi's government's project for the construction of a new parliament building and the redevelopment of Central Vista.

Pointing out that the role of the court was "limited to examining the constitutionality including legality of the policy and govern-

ment actions", Justice Khanwilkar said, "the constitutionally envisaged system of 'checks and balances' has been completely misconstrued and misapplied in this case.

The principle of "checks and balances" posits two concepts - "check" and "balance". Whereas the former finds a manifestation in the concept of judicial review, the latter is derived from the well enshrined principle of separation of powers."

Making it clear that the courts should desist from venturing into the domain of the other organs of the state, Justice Khanwilkar said that the "political issues including regarding development policies of the government of the day must be debated in the Parliament, to which it is accountable. The role of the court is limited to examining the constitutionality including legality of the policy and government actions."

The right to development, Justice Khanwilkar said is a "basic human right" and no organ of the State is expected to become an "impediment" in the process of development "as long as the government proceeds in accordance with law".

The court said this in a postlude while referring to the arguments by one of the petitioners urging the court to ask the

government to spend funds being spent on the central vista project for other pressing issues.

"We are compelled to wonder if we, in the absence of a legal mandate, can dictate the government to desist from spending money on one project and instead use it for something else, or if we can ask the government to run their offices only from areas decided by this court, or if we can question the wisdom of the government in focusing on a particular direction of development."

It further said, "We are equally compelled to wonder if we can jump to put a full stop on execution of policy matters in the first instance without a demonstration of irreparable loss or urgent necessity, or if we can guide the government on moral or ethical matters without any legal basis."

## A case of misplaced priorities: Cong

New Delhi, Jan. 5: Soon after the Supreme Court cleared the deck for the ambitious Central Vista project on Tuesday, the Congress said the project is not a legal issue but a case of misplaced priorities of "an autocrat seeking to etch his name in the annals of history".

The opposition party

also described the project as "a colossal waste of public money" in times of the coronavirus pandemic and an economic recession.

The Congress has been opposing the Central Vista project that involves the construction of a new Parliament building by

"The Rs 13,450 crore Central Vista Project is not a legalistic issue but a case of 'misplaced priorities' of a 'whimsical autocrat' seeking to etch his name in the annals of history with cement and mortar." Congress's chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala tweeted. Senior spokesperson of

the party Anand Sharma said, "We are living in strange times. No relief for the migrant labour, no Justice for India's farmers fighting for their rights in bitter cold, pouring rain, tear gas and braving lathis. As we approach 'Ganatantra Diwas' need to reflect on state of Republic." — *PTI*

He said the initial feedback to the first women's team in disaster combat has been good. "They are performing well. From initial feedback, I think they will be a great efficiency multiplier and also a great symbol of pride, inclusion and gender sensitivity which is also part of the Prime Minister's ten-point agenda for disaster response," he said.

The DG added the force is continuously creating women-oriented infrastructure at its existing and futuristic bases across the country. — *PTI*

## Trinamul minister quits party

## Laxmi Ratan Shukla resigns as minister on Didi's birthday

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 5

As West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee turned 66 on Tuesday, former cricketer Laxmi Ratan Shukla resigned from her government as minister of state for sports and youth services and also quit the Trinamul Congress, in a shocking birthday blow ahead of the Assembly elections.

Shukla is the second rebel minister after Shubhendu Adhikari to quit Banerjee's Cabinet and party in less than two months. This left many in the TMC stunned, amid speculation about his switchover to the BJP.

The 39-year-old, one of the state's youngest MLAs, is among those from the rebel TMC camp with a clean image in Howrah who is likely to join the BJP in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah on January 12. Shukla, in his resignation letter, said he wished to leave politics to devote more time to sports. He also quit as TMC Howrah (Urban) district chief.

Shukla, who joined the TMC nearly five years ago, won from Howrah North constituency in the 2016 Assembly polls and became a minister, has not yet resigned as an MLA.

Accepting his resignation, Banerjee forwarded it to Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, and said, "Laxmi is a good boy.

● **SHUKLA IS second rebel minister after Shubhendu Adhikari to quit Mamata's Cabinet.**

Seeking relief from politics, he resigned because he wants to return to cricket. That is what he wrote to me. I certainly want him also to play because he is from sports. My good wishes are with him. There is no misunderstanding in it."

Senior TMC MP Sougata Roy said, "I am sad to learn about Laxmi's resignation. He was a good cricketer and minister. He never shared his problems within the party. We urge him to withdraw his resignation. Let him be... though it's the CM's prerogative on who is in the Cabinet."

Standing by Shukla another rebel TMC MLA from Howrah, Baishali Dalmiya, alleged, "He faced obstacles in working freely and was hurt. There are some negative-minded people who once held posts in the party and are creating a disturbance. They don't allow anyone to work. They also belittle and oppose others."

The Bally legislator said, "Whenever we faced insults, it came from our own party leaders rather than the CPI(M), Congress or BJP. Tomorrow Laxmi may be called a traitor. But aren't those nibbling the party like terminates the actual traitors? They should be thrown out first."



Tejashwi Yadav

## RJD TO TAKE OUT DHANYAWAD YATRA SOON

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, JAN. 5

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav is preparing to take out '*Dhanyawad Yatra*' to thank people of the state for voting in favour of the party during recently held Assembly elections.

Sources said that the party is making preparations to take out the Yatra in a phased manner after Makarsankranti and workers have been asked to make necessary arrangements in their districts.

According to RJD spokesperson Shakti Yadav, "Tejashwi Yadav will thank the people of the state for making RJD a single largest party in Bihar. The idea is also to strengthen our party's base and seek public support in case a midterm poll is held in the state".

The RJD has been of the view that midterm election is likely in the state owing to the internal conflict within the NDA especially after six of the seven MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh joined the BJP in December. The NDA-led by Nitish Kumar had won 125 seats, three more than the number required to form the government in Bihar.

However, it was the RJD which emerged as the single largest party with 75 seats. The BJP became the second-largest party with 74 seats while Nitish Kumar's JD(U) slipped to number three position in the state.

After the results were declared in November, Tejashwi had issued an ultimatum to the NDA government led by Nitish Kumar to keep its poll promises of creating job opportunities.



## SHORT TAKES

## 20 migrants sink en route Panama

**Bogota:** Rescue workers in Colombia are trying to locate more than 20 migrants whose boat sank as it tried to reach Panama. The sinking was reported on Monday by officials in Acandí, a municipality along the Gulf of Uraba, an inlet of the Caribbean sea that is lined by dense jungle. Thousands of undocumented migrants cross the gulf each year on small boats. Migrants traveling through the Uraba region are mostly trying to make it to the United States. Many come from Cuba and Haiti. But it is also common to see migrants from Africa and Asia along this route. Colombia's navy confirmed the shipwreck and says it is still trying to determine how many migrants were on the boat, and how many survived the accident.

## Indian-American is Ohio senator

**Washington:** Niraj Antani has been sworn-in as Ohio's senator, making him the first Indian-American to serve in the state's Senate. Antani, 29, who was elected to the Ohio state Senate from the 6th District, was sworn-in on Monday. "I am so grateful to be able to represent the community in which I was born and raised as a State Senator," Antani said soon after being sworn-in. Antani will serve a full four-year term. "I will continue to work hard every day for each Ohioan so that they can have the opportunity to achieve their American dream. In this uncertain economic and health time, we must diligently strive to enact policies for the benefit of all Ohioans," Antani said. Antani formerly served as State Representative for the 42nd Ohio House District since 2014.

## Don-appointed US attorney resigns

**Atlanta:** The top federal prosecutor in Atlanta left his position Monday, a day after an audio recording was made public in which President Donald Trump called him a "never-Trumper." Byung J. "BJay" Pak, who was appointed by Trump, announced his resignation as US attorney for the Northern District of Georgia in a news release. The statement did not say why Pak was leaving or what he plans to do next. "It has been the greatest honour of my professional career to have been able to serve my fellow citizens as the US Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia," Pak said in the release. "I have done my best to be thoughtful and consistent, and to provide justice for my fellow citizens in a fair, effective and efficient manner. I am grateful to President Trump and the United States Senate for the opportunity to serve, and to former Attorneys General Sessions and Barr for their leadership of the Department."

## Jihadists kill over 100 in Niger violence

**Dakar (Senegal), Jan. 5:** More than 100 civilians were killed in Niger over the weekend by extremists who attacked two villages, as insurgent violence mounts in the West African nation. The attacks on the western villages of Tchombangou and Zaroumdareye took place on the same day that Niger announced that presidential elections would go to a second round on February 21. Nigers Prime Minister Brigi Rafini visited the two villages on Sunday. "We came to provide moral support and pres-

ent the condolences of the president of the republic, the government and the entire Niger nation," he said. The villages in the insecure Tillabéri region were attacked on Saturday after residents killed two rebel fighters, local officials said. The attacks are among the deadliest in Niger and come on the heels of several others, including one by the Islamic State West Africa Province in the Diffa region a few weeks ago in which dozens of people were killed.

— AP

## UK enters tough lockdown

New rules to stay in place till mid-Feb with review based on infection rates

**London, Jan. 5:** The UK entered a tough new stay-at-home lockdown on Tuesday after Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it has been "both frustrating and alarming" to see the speed with which the new variant of the Coronavirus is spreading and declared that hospitals in the country are under more pressure from the deadly virus than at any time in the pandemic.

While Scotland's new rules, which involve school and business closures become legal from Tuesday, England's rules — akin to the stringent measures of the first wave of the pandemic in March 2020 — become law in the early hours of Wednesday. However, Johnson has urged the public to begin following the strict work from home rules right away.

The new rules are expected to stay in place until mid-February with a review planned based on vaccine rollout data and infection rates. "Our scientists have confirmed this new variant is between 50 and 70 per cent more transmissible — that means you are much, much more likely to catch the virus and to pass it on," Johnson said in his televised address to the nation on Monday night. "We must therefore go into a national lockdown which is tough enough to contain this variant. That means the government is once again instructing you to stay at home. You may only leave home for limited reasons permitted in law, such as to shop for essentials, to work if you absolutely cannot work from home, to exercise, to seek medical assistance such as getting a Covid test, or to escape domestic abuse," he said.

The devolved regions of Wales and Northern Ireland were already



The Trafalgar square is empty as Britain enters a national lockdown in London on Tuesday. England's six-week lockdown, which began at midnight, emulates the first national Coronavirus curbs in place from March to June — but goes further than another instituted in November when schools remained open.

— AFP

● **ACCORDING TO** the latest data, in England alone, the number of Covid-19 patients in hospitals has increased by nearly a third in the last week, to almost 27,000.

under strict lockdown measures since the middle of last month.

According to the latest data, in England alone, the number of Covid-19 patients in hospitals has increased by nearly a third in the last week, to almost 27,000. That number is 40 per cent higher than the first peak of the pandemic in April. On December 29, more than 80,000 people tested positive for Covid across the UK — a new record — and the number of deaths is up by 20 per cent over the last week. — PTI

## France promises speedy virus vaccination process

**Paris, Jan. 5:** Amid public outcry, France's health minister has promised an "exponential" acceleration of his country's slow Coronavirus vaccination process.

After barely 500 people in France were vaccinated in the first six days, Health Minister Olivier Veran defended the government's strategy of giving the vaccines first to residents of nursing homes. But he vowed on Tuesday to simplify a bureaucratic consent process blamed in part for France's lagging

vaccinations. Veran said the government will expand the number of vaccination centres and categories of people eligible for early vaccines, and allow people to sign up for vaccinations on an app or by phone. The growth of vaccinations in the coming days "will be exponential, rest assured," he said on RTL radio. But he insisted that the government would not forego safety guidelines in a country facing broad vaccine scepticism.

While neighbouring countries are imposing

strict new lockdowns amid surging infections, Veran said France is weighing its options and "cannot relax," but announced no new measures. Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer said on radio that he doesn't want to "deprive children of school." Veran said France has confirmed 10 or 15 cases of the new, more contagious virus variant identified in Britain, and that overall French infections and hospital rates are currently at a plateau.

— AP

## EU TO REDOUBLE EFFORTS TO SAVE IRAN NUKE DEAL

**Brussels, Jan. 5:** The European Union says it will redouble its efforts to save the Iran nuclear agreement despite what it calls Tehran's "important breach" of commitments made in the 2015 deal by starting to enrich uranium to new levels. EU spokesman Peter Stano said that Iran's actions "will have serious implications when it comes to nuclear nonproliferation." Stano said it was in everyone's interest to rescue the deal and said the 27-nation bloc "will strengthen" its attempts to make sure all adhere to the commitments made in the landmark deal. Iran began enriching uranium on Monday to levels unseen since its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

## Pak orders rebuilding of temple

**Islamabad, Jan. 5:** Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Evacuee Property Trust Board (EPTB) to start reconstruction of a century-old Hindu temple that was vandalised and set on fire by a mob in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province last week, saying the attack has caused "international embarrassment" to the country.

The apex court, which took notice of the attack and ordered the local authorities to appear before the court on Tuesday, a three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed also directed the EPTB to clear encroachments from

temples across the country and take action against officials involved in the encroachments. Justice Ahmed said that the Karak incident had caused "international embarrassment to Pakistan". The EPTB is a statutory board that manages religious properties and shrines of Hindus and Sikhs who had migrated to India following the partition.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief secretary, police chief, and Dr Shoaib Suddle, the head of a commission on minorities' rights, were also present during the hearing.

Suddle, who visited the temple in Karak district and presented a comprehensive report in the case to the Supreme Court on Monday after it asked the one-man commission on the rights of minorities to probe the attack, told the court that the provincial EPTB "did not protect the shrine", the paper said. Justice Ijazul Ahsan then questioned the police chief on how the attack could have happened when there was a police check post next to the temple. "Where were your intelligence agencies?" the judge asked.

— PTI

## HK judge warns Saudi to lift Qatar embargo

**Dubai, Jan. 5:** Saudi Arabia will open its airspace and land border to Qatar in the first step toward ending a years-long diplomatic crisis that deeply divided US defense partners, frayed societal ties and tore apart a traditionally clubby alliance of Gulf states, officials said late on Monday.

Qatar's only land border has been mostly closed since mid-2017, when Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain launched a blockade against the tiny Gulf state, accusing it of supporting Islamist extremist groups and of having warm ties with Iran. The Saudi border, which Qatar relied on for the import of dairy products, construction materials and other goods, opened briefly during the past three years to allow Qataris into Saudi Arabia to perform the

Islamic hajj pilgrimage. It was unclear what concessions Qatar had made or is promising to make regarding a shift in its policies. Kuwait, which had been mediating throughout the dispute, was first to announce the diplomatic breakthrough through its foreign minister. Earlier on

Monday, the foreign minister had reportedly traveled to Doha to deliver a message to Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. While the Saudi decision marks a major milestone toward resolving the Gulf spat, the path to ward full reconciliation is far from guaranteed. — AP

## FINANCIAL | SCAM Lai Xiaomin found guilty of bigamy after living with a woman outside his marriage

## China's ex-banker gets death for \$260 mn bribery

**Beijing, Jan. 5:** The former chairman of one of China's largest state-controlled asset management firms was sentenced to death on Tuesday for soliciting \$260 million in bribes, corruption, and also bigamy.

Lai Xiaomin, a former Communist Party member, gave a detailed televised confession on state broadcaster CCTV last January, which showed footage of safes and cabinets stuffed with cash in a Beijing apartment allegedly belonging to him.

Lai had abused his posi-

tion in attempting to obtain the vast sum, a court in the northern city of Tianjin said, describing the bribes as "extremely large" and labelling the circumstances "particularly serious".

He had shown "extreme malicious intent," the court ruling added.

The former chairman of the Hong Kong-listed China Huarong Asset Management Co. — a distressed debt group — was also found guilty of bigamy after living with a woman "as man and wife for long periods" outside



Lai Xiaomin

of his marriage and fathering illegitimate children.

Huarong is one of four companies set up in 1999 to help clean up bad debt piles choking China's banking system, and the

company later expanded into investment, loan and property businesses.

Lai's downfall began in April 2018 as investigators removed him from his job and stripped him of his party position.

He was also alleged to have used his position to embezzle over 25 million yuan (\$3.8 million) in public funds between 2009 and 2018.

During his TV confession, Lai said he "did not spend a single penny, and just kept it there... I did not dare to spend it." He had referred to the apartment where he kept the

money as the "supermarket", given his regular visits there to deposit cash.

CCTV showed luxury cars and gold bars reportedly accepted as bribes by Lai, who worked in the central bank and the China Banking Regulatory Commission prior to his leadership roles in Huarong.

The channel often broadcasts interviews with suspects admitting to crimes before they have appeared in court — a practice that has long been condemned by lawyers and rights organ-

isations as forcing confessions under duress.

The court said Lai would have all personal assets confiscated and be stripped of his political rights.

Photos published by the court showed Lai standing up and facing the judge to be sentenced, flanked by two police officers wearing face masks.

The sentencing brings an end to one of the country's biggest financial crime cases, and comes as Beijing takes an increasingly tough stance on corporate wrongdoing.

— AFP

## Georgia election to decide fate of Biden presidency

**Atlanta, Jan. 5:** Polls opened in the US state of Georgia on Tuesday in two runoff elections that will determine control of the US Senate and shape the first years of the new Democratic presidency — after a hard-fought campaign that pulled in Donald Trump and president-elect Joe Biden.

For nearly 20 years Georgia has voted reliably Republican in the presidential election and Senate contests.

But Biden pulled out a shock victory in Georgia in November, one of several states that he flipped to win the White House, and the races for the Senate have come down to the wire in the biggest, most expensive congressional runoffs in US history.

Polls opened at 7:00 am (1200 GMT) in the southern state. A record three million-plus people have voted early, election officials say, and final results may not be known for several days.

A staggering \$832 million has been spent on the two contests, including spending in the primary and general elections, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

"The future of the country is on the line here," one of the Republican

candidates seeking re-election in Georgia, David Perdue, said on Tuesday morning. "This is the last line of defense for our way of life, really." The Republican and Democratic parties have made Georgia their political ground zero, with thousands of volunteers leaving no door unknocked and current and future presidents and vice presidents barnstorming the state for every last vote.

If Democrats flip both seats they win back the Senate, effectively handing Biden all levers of political power in Washington and helping him enact his ambitious legislative agenda.

"One state — one state! — can chart the course, not just for the next four years but for the next generation," Biden told a rally in Atlanta where he campaigned Monday with the races' two Democrats. Republicans argue that keeping Senate control would serve as a check on the incoming Biden administration.

"The stakes in this election could not be higher," Trump told a raucous rally in Dalton, Georgia hours after Biden's Atlanta showing. "Make sure your vote is counted." — AFP

## Xi asks military to stay on high alert

**Beijing, Jan. 5:** Chinese President Xi Jinping has asked the military to strengthen training to hone its combat skills and remain on high alert as the new revised defence law expanding the powers of the armed forces came into force from this year.

The 67-year-old leader, who also heads the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) besides the Central Military Commission (CMC) — the overall high command of the two million strong military — signed the commission's first order for 2021, which listed priorities in the training of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police Force (PLAF), official media here reported on Tuesday.

The order instructed the armed forces to stick to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as their guiding principle and uphold Xi

Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military as well as military strategies in the new era.

It said the CCP will enhance its guidance over the military's training, urging the armed forces to focus on improving their combat readiness and continuing to reform their training system. The first such order was issued in January 2018, when Xi addressed a massive training and commencement ceremony at a shooting range in northern China.

Xi has repeatedly stressed the importance of combat readiness training and joint operations to the armed forces since he became commander-in-chief in late 2012. In his order this year, he said the military must train their officers and soldiers in realistic combat scenarios, place more attention on research about war and military operations. — PTI

CHENNAI METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER-I, CONSTRUCTION WING,  
TOWER-II, 9<sup>th</sup> FLOOR, EGMORE, CHENNAI - 600 008.

## SEALED TENDER NOTICE Dt. 04.01.2021

Sealed Tenders are invited by the Superintending Engineer-I, Construction Wing, CMDA, Egmore, Chennai - 08, from Registered Contractors / Registered Reputed Agency under Two Cover System for the work of "1) Maintenance for Up Keeping. 2) Maintenance of Common Toilets & Drinking Water System and 3) Providing Security System in Puratchi Thalaivar Dr.MGR Bus Terminus at Koyambedu. Chennai-107".

Tender Notice No. : 7/2020-21 dt. 04.01.2021  
Last date & Time of receipt : 21.01.2021 at 3.00 P.M.  
Downloading by Free of Cost : From 07.01.2021 to 20.01.2021 upto 4.00 P.M.

For further details visit website : [www.tenders.tn.gov.in](http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in)

SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER-I  
CW, CMDA, Chennai-600 008.

மதுரை மாநகராட்சி மதுரை ஒப்பந்தப்பள்ளி அறிவிக்கை எண். 87/ 2020				
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இதர விபரங்களை <a href="https://tntenders.gov.in">https://tntenders.gov.in</a> என்ற இணையதளத்தில் தெரிந்து கொள்ளலாம். e-mail Address: <a href="mailto:commr.madurai@tn.gov.in">commr.madurai@tn.gov.in</a> Contact No: 0452-2532412 செ.ம.தொ.இ/32/ஒப்பந்தப்பள்ளி/2021 ஆணையாளர், மதுரை மாநகராட்சி				



# DECCAN Chronicle

6 JANUARY 2021

## Nod for Central Vista: SC gives govt latitude

In a 2-1 judgment, the Supreme Court on Tuesday approved the Modi government's deeply controversial Central Vista project, which is an egregious example of executive excess. This paves the way for the spending of ₹20,000 crore to build a new Parliament House, a new residence as well as a new office complex for the Prime Minister, a new residence for the vice-president, the demolition of some half-a-dozen fine standing buildings along the Rajpath lawns which house ministries, and their replacement along this majestic boulevard with new structures.

The government has not offered cogent reasons for a new house for the PM and the vice-president, but if news reports are anything to go by, then the explanation for a fancy home for the PM may be thought to be embedded in the notion of vanity, like the idea of a special aircraft for the exclusive use of the PM (on the lines of Air Force One of the US President).

Why a new Parliament House? The government's answer is that the present structure is old, it is not spacious enough, and the building also has problems to do with age (it is less than a hundred years old). Were extensions, renovations, not possible as are routinely done with the centuries-old British Parliament?

Why new government buildings? The official answer is that many departments of a ministry are scattered in the city and their being together will improve efficiency. No treatise of public administration or political science cites this as a reason for red tape and in-built deep inefficiencies in the Indian bureaucratic structure.

Either the top court did not sufficiently grill the government on these and related matters or the Supreme Court was too willing to see reason in the government's justifications, actions, and possible motives which have been ripped apart by the country's top experts in architecture, architectural design, city planning, conservationists, heritage professionals, environmentalists, besides retired top civil servants.

There is another important issue. Do we need to spend the officially estimated ₹20,000 crore on this blatantly futile venture when the economy is hovering around the negative growth territory? In the time of pandemic, is this the best use for the country's dwindling resources? Or, is this a foolish luxury the nation can ill afford?

The Central Vista in New Delhi leads the gaze down from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate and is regarded as among the most majestic views among the world's principal cities, with green lawns on either side for public use. It is crowded with grand heritage buildings, including the Houses of Parliament. If there is a no-go area for urban destruction, redesign of spaces and change of land use in New Delhi, it is this. Major changes here are akin to changing the land use of the Taj Mahal complex in Agra or the Vatican in Rome.

From start to finish, the technically required official permissions — pertaining to change in land use, and heritage and environmental clearances — have been rushed through in record time, cutting corners, as if magically. Opaqueness of procedure was rampant. To deliberate over such a venture, which strikes at the root of history and heritage, the Parliament was never summoned. But the Supreme Court is unseeing. Maximum government, minimum judiciary, is a sorry maxim.

## Trump must leave gracefully

The US President Donald Trump's never-ending effort to overturn the result of an election that he has lost has become much more than an embarrassment to sane elements in his Republican Party. Mr Trump may seem like a drowning man flailing when his fate has been sealed but such antics are posing a serious threat to the very foundational principles that have governed the world's oldest working democracy tracing its election history 200-plus years. The President's phone call to Georgia's Secretary of State, Brad Raffensburger, asking him to change the result by somehow finding close to 12,000 votes for him is the most brazen abuse of power by a White House occupant, which warrants criminal prosecution. There has also been a fleeting thought in Mr Trump's growing bank of critics that he should be impeached before January 20, which is the date Joe Biden should be taking over.

The US presidential election was long over with all 50 states certifying their results. Mr Trump's legal challenges aimed at sowing doubts over an election that drew a record number of voters have been summarily dismissed by judges right across the country. Under the circumstances, what the country's elected representatives must do in Congress on Wednesday is to formally declare Mr Biden as the winner and ask Mr Trump to go home. He can leave his task of disrupting future elections to young and eager mavericks, who are taking after him in mocking the system and trying to subvert the will of the voters.

Such events as witnessed after the poll on November 3 are more in keeping with authoritarian parts of the planet and banana republics than in the citadel of freedom that the Capitol Hill housing the Senate, the Houses of Representatives and the Supreme Court represents. It is important for every part of the free world that the clownish Donald Trump depart the White House and allow the likes of his Vice-President Mike Pence to retain his dignity while preserving democracy in its very

Subhani



## Challenges for Modi as world faces Biden era



K.C. Singh

The new year brought some cheer for a Covid-infested world with several vaccines — Pfizer, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Moderna — cleared to join battle to counter the pandemic, which cost the planet a year of social freedom, economic growth and mental peace. However, a second spike across Europe and the United States, a bitter American presidential election and clever repositioning by China have left international relations in an uncertain flux. Meanwhile, global stock markets have soared, reflecting more a sanguine assessment of the future than the troubled present.

The lone black swan is Donald Trump and Iran settling scores in the dying moments of Mr Trump's presidency, with unforeseen consequences. Otherwise, three developments will condition global geopolitics hereafter. One, the swearing-in of Joe Biden as the next US President on January 20. Two, China quickly spearheading two major agreements; the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trade agreement centred around the 10 Asean nations plus Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and China; and a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the European Union and China. Both were under negotiation for almost a decade. While the former was finalised in mid-November 2020, days after the US election, the latter followed a month later. India was part of the negotiating process of the former, but chose in 2019 to walk out, dissatisfied with the guarantees available in a playing field that appeared to be tilted towards the better positioned producers of goods in China, South Korea and Japan. Three, the success of the vaccination programme in pushing back the pandemic in developed Western countries, especially the US, and reviving jobs, demand and growth.

Normally, outgoing US Presidents lower their profile after their successor is elected and the two administrations create policy and implementation coordination through their transition teams. Mr Trump, who keeps repeating on the social media and whenever he's in front of a microphone that his win has been stolen, has undermined that seamless process, which undermines trust in the United States. Mr Biden's national security adviser (designate) Jake Sullivan tweeted on December 21 that they would "welcome early consultations with our European partners on our common concerns on China's practices". Despite that, the EU under the half-yearly presidency of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, 10 days later signed the CAI with China. This reflected both European concern that Mr Trump may have lost but Trumpism survives and can return the loser having polled 74 million votes, as indeed the European dependence on the Chinese market. While Chinese investment in Europe is 120 billion euros, European return investment in China is 140 billion euros. All but Ireland already had investment agreements with China, but these were to protect investments, whereas the CAI assures market access in goods and services and provides one set of rules for all 27 EU members. China has also promised to enter the International Labour Organisation (ILO) accords on labour protection and thus satisfy the common complaint about forced labour.

This undermines President-elect Biden's hope for a united front of democra-

cies and like-minded nations against China. All may not have been lost yet as the agreement will take time to be implemented. Similarly, by finessing the RCEP, China negated Mr Trump's attempt to isolate and decouple trade and investment from it. If the CAI sends a signal to the Nato allies of the US abandoning it on economic and trade issues, the RCEP has showed that even in its immediate Asian neighbourhood, and despite its expansionist and aggressive conduct, China has managed to use the carrot to offset the stick.

After four years of being Trump *bhaks*, where does it leave the Indian government? The disruption caused by Mr Trump even in the Islamic world, by exacerbating the Shia-Sunni and intra-Sunni divisions, has immediate implications for India on multiple counts, due to India having ridden the American wave rather than eke out an independent course. For instance, the excessive chumminess with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, built on existing excellent relations, begot increased counter-terror cooperation and their distancing from Pakistan. But the cost has been India damaging its bridges with Iran, Qatar and Turkey. Thus, like the rest of the world, India is now running to cover the exposed ground as the sun sets on the Trump administration. India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar surfaced in Doha, Qatar, on December 27-28. This was not surprising as the last high-level visit was in 2016 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to Qatar. Since 2017, when Mr Trump began his foreign travel as President

by his visit to Riyadh, and the Saudis and Emiratis aligned against Qatar, India just followed their lead and ignored Qatar.

Nearer home, without Iran, any independent Afghan policy becomes a non-starter as India lacks any land connectivity. That will start becoming more apparent as the Taliban, gradually consolidating their hold over more areas in Afghanistan, take their fight-and-talk to the next level. They are waiting for the exit of US troops and financial aid and air cover to diminish before moving to finish the game.

Therefore, as the Indian government repositions to counter the new reality, it has some advantages and two major domestic drawbacks. The advantage is that the US also has less space remaining for manoeuvre, increasing India's value as a quasi-ally. NSA designate Jake Sullivan had on Fareed Zakaria's CNN programme articulated the Biden administration's worldview, debunking notions of a US decline, as they have the capacity for correction, renewal and improvement. The notion of "foreign policy for the middle class" is hearkening to core values and obtaining positive results for the people and the world. Foreign and domestic policies are intertwined.

All this could also be valid advice for the Modi government, that is nearing its two-year mark in its second term. The drawbacks are mainly two. It must win the trust of farmers and stop minority baiting by its various state governments and using bigotry as ballast for its electoral machine. Otherwise, while the Chinese have redeployed geopolitically, keeping one foot on India's neck in Ladakh, the US shall not show Trumpian indulgence for its majoritarianism. Meanwhile, more and more Indians are beginning to ask whether the Modi government is all theatre or really a defender of the people and national interests.

*The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambksingh.*

### LETTERS

#### VACCINES FOR COVID-19

India has reached a very crucial phase in its battle against Covid- 9 pandemic as the country is all set to administer two indigenously made vaccines on three crore frontline and health workers in the coming weeks. While the two approved vaccines Covaxin and Covishield by Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for emergence use have more similarities such as both have used an attenuated version of coronavirus, they could present different efficacy and safety challenges. Under these circumstances, it is very pertinent to monitor the adverse effects and possible variations in their immunogenicity. Considering the fact that two vaccines were approved for emergency use even as their final phase of trials are in progress and are yet to be over, we need to ensure monitoring and surveillance systems remain more robust and tweaked accordingly.

**M. Jeyaram, Sholavandan**

#### NOT A WISE DECISION

THE DECISION of the Tamil Nadu government to allow opening of all cinema theatres with full seating capacity never appears to be a wise and prudent one especially when the news media are full of the news of the spread of a new strain of Covid all over the world. Indicating that the world will continue to be under the threat of a new pandemic while the old corona virus itself has not yet been fully conquered over. The effect of the various anti-Covid serums invented by Indian scientists is yet to be ascertained and evaluated. In these circumstances the opening of theatres with full seating capacity is sure to nix and negate all the efforts made by the state government to contain the pandemic.

**S. Nagarajan Iyer, Coimbatore**

#### GONE TO DOGS

THIS REFERS to the report that the nose of a dead man was bitten off by a dog when the body was kept in the mortuary of Tiruvallur district government hospital. The matter came to light when the family members had arrived at the hospital to claim the body after post-mortem. The appalling conditions prevailing in our government hospitals are apt to give jitters to anyone. The cavalier attitude of doctors and others has to be seen to be believed. When the patients themselves do not get the desired attention, the manner in which the dead are dealt with is far from surprising. State health minister Dr C. Vijayabaskar, who is considered a go-getter, should give the GH officials a dressing down before things go beyond redemption.

**P.G. Menon, Chennai**

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Sanjiwan Sahni



## India requires key structural changes in way it is governed

A view is gaining wider acceptability that the precondition for sustainable, all-round progress in India is structural change in our governance model.

To understand this better and more simply, let's listen to what three eminent thinkers, who have vast experience in governance, in the government and in the private sector, in think tanks and more, have to say:

Arun Maira, who among multiple achievements was mandated when in the Planning Commission to catalyse fresh thinking on solving this problem, says: "What is the solution then? Going back to the basics, to the ground, and to the people. There are some good ideas emerging and being applied in many parts of the world. The essence is, realising that solutions at the top are not working — and cannot work with the present framework, they are built on a different frame."

Wajahat Habibullah, who was part of former PM Rajiv Gandhi's team in developing the panchayati raj concept, states: "The answer lies in more closely ensuring people's participation in governance as conceived by the Mahatma who identified the panchayat as an instrument of self-governance. That is still in my view the only viable alterna-

tive, but not in the form as it exists even after the 73rd and 74th Amendment."

Kiran Karnik brings a technology edge to the discussion: "To me a long-term solution is structural: we need to decentralise in a serious and substantial way. The framework exists in the constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) that create a formal third layer of government by devolving powers to panchayats and urban bodies. If this can actually be implemented, by ensuring the 3 Fs needed (finance, functions and functionalities), we will have more accountable, transparent and effective governance and be substantially liberated from the whims and tyrannies of the Centre (or even states). Such decentralisation may not be sufficient by itself, but it is a necessary condition."

As a solution, he also refers to the influence of technology: "What is exciting is that new technologies make such decentralisation of politics and manufacturing possible. Dispersal of factories and offices, jobs close to home, decongestion of cities, less pollution, lower crime: these and many other consequences make this almost utopia. The vector is important; while a slower speed will mean that we may not get there for long, the direction is clear."

Recent economic thought is also from

a different route coming to a similar broad viewpoint. Arun Maira said productivity, particularly labour productivity, increases encouraged by policy initiatives, similar to what Japan did in the 1970s. Dr Rathin Roy emphasised that economic growth will arise from meeting the needs of the currently poorer, deprived sections of society in contrast to the limited higher net worth segment. These include: Low-cost housing; Food — a balanced basket of nutrition; Affordable clothing; Education; Healthcare. All these for the masses.

This emphasis, changed from catering to middle class needs, is also in the direction of meeting the needs of "the bottom of the pyramid".

"Small is beautiful" and profit at the bottom of the pyramid are thought processes which converge with such proposed structural changes.

There is enormous management literature and practice which highlights the need of decentralisation for success, rather than control and giving directions from the top. In other words, even in the corporate world, there is recognition of the desirability of decentralised structures. Therefore, there is underlying congruence in this thought process at multiple levels but is cur-

rently most deficient in government and most required in that domain.

While on all of the above, there can be little disagreement, the ground reality still requires some additional steps to help get there.

Assume there is merit in recognising that decentralisation is a central theme relevant and necessary for most (not all) forms of governance. The effort should be to see how this thought can be mainstreamed. Approaches are required from multiple directions which not only encourage it in their respective domains but also string it together as a national theme. This is a challenge which needs working upon.

Since this is a long-term challenge, the catalyst to get there must focus on young people. At one level, potential young leaders need to be won over.

In practice, as potential champions of the cause, think of Sachin Pilot, Raghav Chadha, Mahua Moitra, Kanhaiya Kumar and others from politics.

In the corporate world, talent is plentiful. The young have become unicorns — Vijay Shekhar Sharma, Paytm; the Bansals of Flipkart fame; Ritesh Aggarwal, Oyo. Young Indians are heading leading global corporations — Satya Narayana Nadella at Microsoft;

Sundar Pichai at Alphabet and Google; besides many others. They are already champions but need to be persuaded and inducted to champion this cause.

Even in established business houses, control is going to the next generation — Roshni Nadar, HCL Technologies, Rishad Premji, Wipro. Several similar examples are available from the world of sports and entertainment. Some prominent names in the last category include Swara Bhaskar and Anurag Kashyap.

Diversified champions from amongst these need to be won over, who will highlight the underlying thought process in multiple domains and encourage its deployment. Their collective voice will have a better chance of making an impact. Therefore, there is a vital need for avenues and forums through which this can be exercised.

The key next steps, apart from the changes in the governing setup, without which nothing will happen, are winning over the younger generation, making champions from amongst them, and providing a collective forum to help make decentralisation a central artery.

*The writer is a management and economic adviser*



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,437.78	0.54
Nifty 50	14,199.50	0.47
S&P 500*	3,712.92	0.33
Dollar (₹)	73.18	-0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.34	0.49
Euro (₹)	89.81	-0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,969,335	0.65
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	53.12	2.03
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.850	-0.008
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.942	0.025

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## RBI imposes ₹2.5 cr penalty on Bajaj Finance

The RBI has imposed a penalty of Rs 2.5 crore on Bajaj Finance, for violation of directions, including on recovery and collection practices. "This penalty has been imposed... taking into account the failure of the company to ensure that its recovery agents did not resort to harassment or intimidation of customers as part of its debt collection efforts and thereby failing to adhere to the ...directions issued by RBI," the RBI said.

## Google Cloud appoints Bajwa as Apac leader



Google Cloud announced the elevation of Karan Bajwa as its new leader for Asia Pacific. He currently leads Google Cloud in India. Bajwa will lead all regional revenue and go-to-market operations for Google Cloud, including on Google Cloud Platform and Google Workspace from Jan. 5, a statement said. He succeeds Rick Harshman. Bajwa is currently based in Gurgaon, but will relocate to Singapore in 2021.

## VIP Industries MD Sudip Ghose puts in papers

VIP Industries said its managing director Sudip Ghose has resigned from the company. His resignation will be effective from January 31, and Anindya Dutta will take over as the new MD from February 1. The company's board of directors at its meeting on Tuesday approved the resignation of Ghose as MD and key management personnel with effect from January 31, 2021, the firm said in a regulatory filing.

## Renault to unveil compact SUV Kiger on Jan. 28

French automaker Renault said it will unveil its upcoming compact SUV Kiger in India later this month. Renault will be globally premiering the eagerly awaited Kiger in India on January 28, the automaker said. The company plans to launch the model in India first and then follow the same in other markets. Renault said Kiger will come loaded with several smart attributes and features.

## ■ US treasury+145 bps bonds lapped up Exim Bank sells \$ bonds at 2.25%

**Mumbai, Jan. 5:** The Exim Bank has started the new year on a high note raising \$1 billion through a dollar-bond sale to international investors, offering just 2.25 per cent for the ten-year money, setting a new low in pricing.

The issue was oversubscribed four times or worth \$4 billion as against \$1 billion on offer, managing director David Rasquinha said, adding that in Asia the issue was oversold within three hours of the launch with the order book hitting \$1.75 billion on Monday morning.

"At 2.25 per cent (US treasury+145 bps), the coupon is a record low for any 10-year bond issuance out of the country," he said.

The issue has many a firsts, Rasquinha said, pointing to the lowest coupon (2.25 per cent per annum) ever for a large USD bond offering by a domestic issuer and is also the first investment-grade dollar bond sale from Asia ex-Japan in 2021. Besides, this is the first EMBI (Emerging Market Bond Index) eligible 144a/RegS bond from Asia ex-Japan in 2021.

Regulation S/144a bonds are issued by foreign issuers in the US debt market and are denominated in US dollars.

I-bankers are expecting higher debt money to come to domestic shores this year given the record low interest rates. Companies will also be raising money



to meet the likely capex need or repayment demands as the economy returns to normalcy after the year-long pandemic.

In January 2020, the Exim Bank had raised \$1 billion in 10-year dollar money offering US treasury plus 1.70 bps. Normally, the bank issues 5, 7 and 10-year debt to meet its project export needs.

For Exim Bank, the current issue saw the largest order book and over-subscription (four times) for a RegS issuance.

The Exim Bank, with a substantially dollarised balance sheet, is one of the largest domestic issuers of long-term debt in international debt capital markets and its paper is treated as quasi-sovereign as the bank is fully owned by the government.

The funds from the sale will be used to support project exports, overseas investment by way of long-term credit and its export lines of credit portfolio, the bank said.

Taking a cue from the massive over subscription in Hong Kong and

Singapore, the bank tightened the initial price guidance by 40 bps from T+185 bps. At close, with US investors chipping in, the issue was oversubscribed by over four times, the bank said.

As much as 55 per cent of demand came in from Asia, 29 per cent from the US and 16 per cent from the EMEA (Eastern & Middle-eastern Africa) region and 68 per cent of the issue was snapped by fund managers, 17 per cent by sovereign wealth funds, central banks and insurers, 14 per cent by banks and the remaining 1 per cent by private banks, others.

The issue is rated BBB- by Fitch and Moody's. Harsha Bangari, deputy managing director of the bank said this is the only 10-year sale by a domestic financial institution in the last year.

"The EMBIG index eligibility of the bonds has helped in price tightening by 40 bps, demonstrating strong confidence of investors in the India story and in Exim Bank," she said.

—PTI

## BEAUTY STARTUP NYKAA PLANS MEGA IPO THIS YEAR

**BAIJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY**  
JAN. 5

Nykaa E-Retail is planning an initial public offering this year that could value the online cosmetic retailer at a minimum \$3 billion, according to people familiar with the matter.

The startup founded by Falguni Nayar, a former investment banker, is working with advisers to prepare for the share sale in Mumbai, the people said. Nykaa is leaning toward a domestic listing, though an overseas share sale is also under consideration, said the people.

Deliberations are ongoing and details of the offering, including the size and timeline could change, the people said. A representative for Nykaa declined to comment.

Founded in 2012, Nykaa's platform lists more than 1,200 brands ranging from makeup, skincare to health supplements and hair dryers, according to its website, which logs 55 million monthly visits. It has six warehouses across India and receives over 13 million orders each month.

The company was preparing for an IPO in two years, its founder and chief executive officer Nayar said in 2018.

Nykaa counts TPG and tycoon Sunil Munjal's family office Hero Enterprise among its backers.

—Bloomberg

## Anjan Dey chosen to head Oriental Insurance

**MADHUSUDAN SAHOO**  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

Public sector general insurer Oriental Insurance Company (OIC) will get a new chief as the Banks Board Bureau (BBB) has recommended Anjan Dey, director and general manager (GM) of GIC Re, for the position of chairman-cum-managing director of OIC. Besides, the BBB has also kept Suchita Gupta, GM, GIC Re, as a standby candidate for the vacancy.

The CMD post has been lying vacant since November after the then CMD S.N. Rajeswari was appointed as the member (distribution) of Irda. BBB, the official head-

hunting body for selecting CEOs of state-owned banks and insurance firms, conducted virtual interviews of five candidates on Monday to pick a CMD for the insurer.

"The members of Banks Board Bureau interfaced with 5 candidates on January 04, 2021 for the forthcoming vacancy of CMD in OICL. Keeping in view their performance in the interface and their overall experience, the Bureau recommends Anjan Dey for the position of OIC CMD and Suchita Gupta as the candidate on the reserve list for the said vacancy," the BBB announced soon after the interview on Monday.

Though Rajeswari has been appointed as the member, Irda in November, she is yet to join the Hyderabad-based insurance regulatory body as the Ministry of Finance wants a new CMD to take charge of the company before she moves to the Irda, said a ministry source.

The year 2021 is expected to witness large-scale top-notch vacancies in the PSU insurance companies, including Life Insurance Company and the Irda where Subhas Khuntia, chairman, will be completing his three-year tenure in May. There will also be new CMDs in all the four PSU general insurers this year.

## Brand ambassador penalised

**SANGEETHA G**  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Celebrities who endorse consumer goods as brand ambassadors will have to be cautious hereon. A consumer redressal forum in Kerala has asked a film actor to pay compensation for promoting a hair cream brand.

Malayalam actor Anoop Menon and Dhathri Ayurveda, a Kerala-based manufacturer of personal care products, have been asked to pay Rs 10,000 each to a consumer for making "false promises" in an advertisement.

Anoop Menon had featured in an advertisement of Dhathri Hair Cream, which claimed "lush hair

growth within six weeks".

The consumer, Francis Vadakkan, who had bought the product in January 2012 after watching Menon's advertisement, approached the District Consumer Redressal Forum in Thrissur seeking compensation of Rs 5 lakh. He alleged that there was no improvement despite using the cream and was humiliated after being ridiculed by family and friends for buying the product.

Menon said he "never used the product". On this, the forum commented: "It is clear that the brand ambassador appeared in the advertisement without even using the product".

The Consumer Protect-

ion Act, 2019 makes the endorser of a brand liable for a misleading ads.

In another development involving brand ambassador, Adani Wilmar has paused all advertisements featuring former Indian skipper Sourav Ganguly, who has been endorsing Fortune Rice Bran Cooking Oil as a 'heart healthy oil'.

Ganguly was recently diagnosed with heart ailments. Following criticism on social media, the company said Ganguly will continue as the brand ambassador. "We have only taken a temporary break in our TV commercial till we again sit with him and take things forward," a company official said.

## Job postings up in select sectors

**SANGEETHA G**  
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Though some sectors like textiles, telecom and IT and software services have indicated positive growth in new job postings on a month-on-month basis, only retail has seen a growth against last year, according to employment websites.

Textiles and garments, telecom, paper, fertilisers and pesticides, IT and software services, tyres and healthcare reported positive growth in new job postings in November against the previous month, according to Naukri JobSpeak.

As per the Monster Employment Index, a few more sectors, including FMCG, food and packaged products, retail, BFSI and



home appliances too have seen positive growth. Among them, tyres, paper and banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) indicated good growth over the previous month.

However, a majority sectors continued to de-grow in terms of new job postings on a month-on-month basis. None of the sectors reported a year-

on-year growth, as per Naukri JobSpeak. However, Monster.com found retail to have seen some positive growth over the previous year.

Defence & government was the worst affected in terms of job postings both in terms of yearly and monthly performance as this sector de-grew by over 30 per cent. The hospitality, airlines, restaurants and travel sector was down by 60 per cent on a yearly basis. However, compared to October, the November postings were less negative. Travel and tourism was the worst-hit in both the surveys. Industrial products and heavy machinery too was down over 30 per cent year-on-year.

The unemployment rate,

meanwhile, rose sharply to 9.1 per cent in December 2020, the highest since the beginning of the recovery from the lockdown in June, according to CMIE, a private think-tank.

The unemployment rate stood at 10.99 per cent in June 2020. It has been coming down in the subsequent months and had touched 6.5 per cent in November.

"The influx of people looking for work swelled. The labour force increased from an estimated 421 million in November to 427 million in December. But, labour markets were not ready for this surge of six million people in the labour market. It thus left them largely unemployed," the report said.

## JEEP TO LAUNCH FOUR NEW SUVs IN TWO YEARS; COMPACT SUV TO FOLLOW

**MICHAEL GONSALVES**  
PUNE, JAN. 5

Jeep, the iconic American sports utility vehicle maker, is investing Rs 1,850 crore or \$250 million to produce four new SUVs over the next two years.

This investment is in addition to about Rs 3,289 crore or \$450 million that it has put in its India operations in five years.

"Our new investment of \$250 million will give us a competitive edge in multiple segments with our new

Jeep SUVs rolling out of Ranjangaon factory near Pune," Partha Datta, MD at FCA India, said.

He said the four new cars would be launched in India by the end of 2022. While the new Jeep Compass would be introduced on

January 7, the first ever mid-size three-row 7-seat Jeep, codenamed the H6, the iconic Jeep Wrangler and the nextgen Grand Cherokee SUVs would be assembled in Ranjangaon which would drastically reduce the prices.

## Audi launches A4 sedan at ₹42.34 L

**MICHAEL GONSALVES**  
PUNE, JAN. 5

Audi, India's third biggest luxury car maker, has lined up a raft of product launches for this year, as part of its product offensive strategy to boost sales, with models such as the A3, Q3, Q5, Q7, in the Indian market.

The German brand, which ruled the roost as numero uno, has its strategy in place for this year to take on rivals

Mercedes-Benz and BMW. Audi is set to launch a new car every other month, but will stick to a petrol-only line-up.

On Tuesday it launched the new version of its popular sedan Audi A4 with prices starting at Rs 42.34 lakh. "The fifth generation new Audi A4 is a perfect blend of class, elegance and sporty appeal. The car is equipped with the latest technology," Balbir Singh Dhillon, head of Audi India, said.



### GIVING BACK | TO PLANET

## Amazon founder launched his Bezos Earth Fund last year

## Bezos \$10-bn gift tops 2020 charity list

**Silver Spring (US), Jan. 5:** The world's richest person made the single-largest charitable contribution in 2020, according to *The Chronicle of Philanthropy's* annual list of top donations—a \$10 billion gift that is intended to help fight climate change.

Amazon's founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos, whose real-time worth *Forbes* magazine estimates at roughly \$188 billion, used the contribution to launch his Bezos Earth Fund. The fund, which supports non-profits involved in the climate crisis, has paid out \$790 million to 16 groups so far, according to the *Chronicle*.

Setting aside Bezos' whopping gift, the sum

total of the top 10 donations last year, at \$2.6 billion, was the lowest since 2011, even as many billionaires vastly increased their wealth in the stock market rally that catapulted technology shares in particular last year.

According to the left-leaning Americans for Tax Fairness and the Institute for Policy Studies, from March 18 through Dec. 7, Bezos' wealth surged by 63 per cent from \$113 billion to \$184 billion.

Phil Knight, who with his wife, Penny, made the second- and third-largest donations last year, increased his wealth by about 77 per cent over the same March-to-December period. Knight and his



Jeff Bezos

wife gave more than \$900 million to the Knight Foundation and \$300 million to the University of Oregon.

Fred Kummer, founder of construction company HBE Corporation, and his wife, June, gave \$300 million to establish a foundation to support programmes at the Missouri University of Science and

Technology. Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, delivered the fourth-largest donation on the *Chronicle's* list: A \$250 million gift to the Center for Tech and Civic Life, which worked on voting security issues in the 2020 election.

Zuckerberg, whose wealth nearly doubled to \$105 billion in the March-to-December period, according to Americans for Tax Fairness and the Institute for Policy Studies, has been widely criticised and been called to testify before Congress for his company's handling of disinformation in the runup to the 2020 presidential election.

In the fifth spot was

Arthur Blank, co-founder of Home Depot, who gave \$200 million through his foundation to Children's healthcare of Atlanta to build a new hospital.

Bezos and the Zuckerbergs made up the next spots on last year's top 10 list, with \$100 million donations Bezos for Feeding America to aid food banks across the country and the Zuckerbergs to the same election security group.

They were followed by Stephen Ross, founder of real estate firm Related Companies; David Roux, co-founder of Silver Lake Partners, a private-equity firm, and his wife, Barbara and George and Renee Karfunkel, real-estate investors. —AP



## SHORT TAKES

**Djokovic, Nadal to return for ATP Cup**

**Sydney:** ATP Cup champion Novak Djokovic and runner-up Rafael Nadal are set to return for the season-opening men's team tennis event starting February 1, but the United States will be missing because of a change in format that has halved the field. The inaugural event last year featured 24 teams and was played in three Australian cities, with Djokovic's Serbia team beating Nadal and Spain in the final at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena. The second edition will involve 12 teams and be played entirely at Melbourne Park amid Covid-19 restrictions, along with WTA and ATP tournaments, in the week leading into the Australian Open. The draw will be held January 20, with teams divided into four groups. The winner of each round-robin group will advance to the semifinals. — *AP*

**Bajrang's camp in US gets extension**

**New Delhi:** Olympic-bound wrestler Bajrang Punia's training stint in the USA has been granted a one-month extension and will now go on till the first week of February, the Sports Authority of India said on Tuesday. Punia, who qualified for the Tokyo Games in the men's freestyle 65kg category, has been training at Cliff Kean Wrestling Club in Michigan since December 4. The additional one month training will cost ₹11.65 Lakhs and will be borne by the SAI. "This decision was taken at the Mission Olympic Cell meeting that took place last week," a press release from SAI said. "All facilities here are available, there is a gym, moreover I am getting very good sparring partners. The college boys who train here are good as well. I am getting access to everything I need to improve my level," Punia said. — *PTI*

**No postponement of Australia F1 GP**

**Melbourne:** Government officials in Australia are involved in live and active negotiations with Formula One organisers about the timing of the race that is scheduled to open the season on March 21 at Melbourne's Albert Park circuit. Media in Europe reported the Australian Grand Prix was likely to be postponed because of Covid-19 restrictions and staged later in the season. "As far as I know, there has been no decision made to cancel, move or otherwise with the Australian Grand Prix," Victoria state's Emergency Services minister Lisa Neville said on Tuesday. — *AP*

**Mumbai City breeze past BFC**

**Goa:** Mumbai City FC extended their unbeaten run in the Indian Super League with a comfortable 3-1 win over Bengaluru FC on Tuesday. Goals from Mourtada Fall (9'), Bipin Singh (15') and Bartholomew Ogbeche (84') helped Mumbai City remain unbeaten in their last eight games and climb to the top of the table. Sunil Chhetri (79') scored late but it wasn't enough to rescue BFC.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Australia vs India:** Third Test — Day One from 5 am (Thursday) on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

**Big Bash League:** Perth Scorchers vs Sydney Sixers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six

## FOOTBALL

**Italian League:** Cagliari vs Benevento from 5 pm on Sony Ten 2; Crotone vs Roma from 5 pm on Sony Six; Sampdoria vs Inter Milan from 7.30 pm; Napoli vs Spezia from 10.30 pm; AC Milan vs Juventus from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

**Indian Super League:** Kerala Blasters vs Odisha FC from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

## WWE

**NXT:** Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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## PACERS' PUZZLE

Shardul, Saini up for 3rd seamer's slot, Rohit replaces Mayank

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** The Indian team management is weighing its options for the third pacer's slot with Shardul Thakur and Navdeep Saini in contention but Rohit Sharma is certain to replace Mayank Agarwal at the top of the order against Australia in the third Test starting here on Thursday.

While Agarwal's axing was only a matter of time after seven failures in last eight Test innings, the choice for the third pacer's slot has got a bit tricky with divergent opinions emerging on who could fit the role best in absence of an injured Umesh Yadav.

A few days back, Mumbai seamer and useful lower-order batsman Shardul Thakur was considered a favourite but it is learnt that there are some senior players, who feel that Saini, India's fastest bowler by a distance, could be used to unsettle the wobbly Australian batting line-up with his raw pace.

The Indian team had a net session at the overcast Sydney Cricket Ground on the day and all eyes were on Rohit Sharma, who looked pretty comfortable against both pace and spin.

The decision on the third pacer has been primarily delayed because on Tuesday, the SCG centre strip was covered due to overcast conditions.

On Wednesday, a look at the strip and the conditions will probably help them make a decisive choice.

If the conditions are overcast and there is bit more moisture on the strip, then Thakur is expected to be preferred.

If the track is on the flatter side, Saini, with his pace and ability to reverse the old ball, could prove to be a handful against a batting order that is struggling to put up even 200 runs on the board.

If Saini plays, it will be his debut in the longest format while for Thakur, it would be like a debut as he couldn't even finish his first over when it was officially his debut two years back.

There is a third angle to



Indian pacer Mohammed Siraj (left) talks to a teammate Navdeep Saini during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday, ahead of their third Test against Australia. — *AFP*

the pacer's debate and that is T. Natarajan, who has had a meteoric rise in the past four months. — *PTI*

**India expected squad** (from 12 in batting order): Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane (captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Mohammed Siraj, Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur/Navdeep Saini.

**RAHUL OUT OF SERIES WITH SPRAINED WRIST**

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** India batsman K.L. Rahul was on Tuesday ruled out of the remaining two Tests against Australia after sustaining a wrist injury during training in Melbourne, the BCCI said.

Rahul had not played any match of the ongoing series in which the third Test starts on Thursday here. "KL Rahul sprained his left wrist while batting in the nets at the MCG during Team India's practice session on Saturday," the BCCI said in a statement.

"The wicketkeeper-batsman will not be available for the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as he will need about three weeks time to recover completely and regain full strength," it added.

It has been learnt that the stylish right-hander suffered a sprain while facing one of the three throw-down specialists at the nets and had to call off his training session. — *PTI*

**WS EXPECTS CENTURY FROM ROHIT**

**New Delhi, Jan. 5:** The Australian wickets suit Rohit Sharma's batting style and if he can see off the pacers with the new ball, the Indian vice-captain can conjure a big century in the Sydney Test, reckons former India batsman V.V.S. Laxman.

An injury during the IPL forced Rohit to miss a major part of the Australia tour, where India lost the ODI series, won the T20 assignment and the Test series is locked at 1-1.

"The Indian team will be very pleased to have Rohit Sharma back, especially when Virat is not there. You want more experience in the Indian dressing room, because now is the perfect opportunity for us to go 2-1 in Sydney and then probably win 3-1," Laxman said on *Star Sports*' show.

"Rohit himself would like to showcase his talent, because I always feel that his style of batting and talent is very suited for the Australian wicket."

"So, if he gets his eye in, if he sees through the new ball, I'm sure that a big hundred is on the cards as far as Rohit's batting is concerned."

Laxman also said that Indian team fought back in splendid fashion after the Adelaide Test debacle.

"See, a lot can be talked off the field but I think the reply, and a very a fitting reply has been given by the Indian team."

"It's obvious that once you're bowled out for 36, various cricket experts will think that Virat Kohli leaving the series and (Mohammed) Shami being ruled out, the Indian team could sort off disintegrate and could result in a very poor outing in the reminder of the series but credit to the entire team, support staff, the way they bounced back positively." — *PTI*

## Kane's double ton puts Pak in shade

**Christchurch** (New Zealand), Jan. 5: Kane Williamson underscored his ranking as the world's premier batsman with a masterful double century as New Zealand took control of the second Test against Pakistan on Tuesday.

In between the showers at Hagley Oval in Christchurch, Williamson was in classic form, batting for nine hours 33 minutes for his 238 and leading New Zealand to an imposing 659 for six declared to lead Pakistan by 362.

At stumps on day three, the tourists were already in trouble at eight for one, with Kyle Jamieson adding to his five-wicket haul in the first innings by removing Shan Masood for a duck.

It was a relentless performance from Williamson, who became only the second New Zealander after Brendon McCullum to score four double centuries.

Daryl Mitchell, who wondered if he would ever get a bat while Williamson was at the crease, described his skipper as "a freak who's set us up with a chance to win".

Williamson delayed the declaration until Mitchell completed his maiden century and the all-rounder said despite his unbeaten 102 off 112 balls it remained a good pitch for the bowlers and should produce a result.

"If we put it in the right areas and bang those hard

● **It was a relentless performance from Kane Williamson, who became only the second New Zealander after Brendon McCullum to score four double centuries.**

lengths, there is a lot of pace there and hopefully we can put Pakistan under some pressure and see what happens," he said.

Williamson should have been out for 177 on the first ball after the first of two rain stoppages, but as has happened several times in the Test the chance was put down, this time by Azhar Ali, who earlier in the day had dropped Henry Nicholls short of his century.

Pakistan spinner Zafar Gohar, who went for an expensive 159 off 32 overs on debut, said the fielding errors hurt.

"The dropped catches cost us. There is no reason to drop catches but it happens in cricket," he said.

"Dropping Kane Williamson cost us a lot of big runs."

Williamson and Nicholls had rebuilt the innings after New Zealand were reduced to 71 for three on Monday's second day.

— *AFP*  
**Brief scores: Pakistan 297 & 8/1** (Abid 7 batting, Abbas 1 batting, Jamieson 1/1) **trail New Zealand 659/6 decl.** (Williamson 237, Nicholls 157, Mitchell 102 not out).



New Zealand's Kane Williamson en route to his 237 against Pakistan on Day Three of their second Test at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Tuesday. — *AP*

## Langer hopeful of Warner return, Pucovski to debut

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** A 'warrior' that he is, David Warner has done everything to be ready and is likely to compete in the third Test against India, Australia head coach Justin Langer said on Tuesday and assured that lack of four-day cricket for the opener in the last few months is not a concern.

Langer also announced that young batsman Will Pucovski will make his Test debut on Thursday.

Both Warner and Pucovski, who was primed for Test debut in Adelaide, missed the first two Tests of the series due to a groin injury and concussion-related issues respectively.

"Very hopeful that David will be ready to go (for the third Test), he is a bit of a warrior, isn't he? I have said this since



Australia's David Warner (left) and Will Pucovski jog at a training session in Sydney on Tuesday. — *AFP*

day one that he is doing everything possible to be ready," Langer said at a virtual conference.

"He is moving pretty well. He is very determined to play. He loves the competition and he loves playing Test cricket."

We will get some final eyes on him at training this afternoon and we will make a discussion on that. But I would say, he (Warner) is looking very likely to play the Test match," he added. — *PTI*

## Aussie coach lauds 'disciplined' India

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** The series is level for now but Australia coach Justin Langer on Tuesday said India have been distinctly well-planned and disciplined, especially in bowling, so far even as his side races to address their batting woes ahead of the third Test.

Asked about Australia's low-scoring in the current series and if that is a concern, Langer cited various factors, the biggest being India's lethal accuracy with the ball.

"...their greatest strength over the last couple of series has been their discipline. They (India) have been so well disciplined...I have loved the last two Tests because the wickets have been a contest between bat and ball and you have got to work a bit harder and that is what Test cricket is all about," Langer said.

According to Langer, a former opening batsman, India have taken a straighter line to couple of their batters and have accordingly placed their fields.

"So, I think, there is the factor of the wickets that we have played on, there is certainly some seam movement, there was a little bit of swing in both those wickets. India have (has) taken a straighter line to a couple of our batters and set the fields accordingly."

He also praised India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin for his performance so far saying it is difficult to score quickly against great bowlers.

"The great bowlers are the ones who are hard to score against and (Jasprit) Bumrah is certainly up there at the moment, Ashwin is up there at the moment, we are aware of it," he said. — *PTI*

## Saints add to leaders Liverpool's misery

**Southampton, Jan. 5:** Liverpool failed to win for the third consecutive Premier League game as Danny Ings's second-minute goal earned Southampton a 1-0 win at St. Mary's on Monday.

The English champions remain top of the table on goal difference over Manchester United, but have now played a game more than the Red Devils. Southampton are only four points off the top as they moved up to sixth in a tightly bunched division with just seven points separating Liverpool from West Ham in 10th.

A famous win continued a fine season so far for the Saints.

A first league defeat in

three months may hasten Liverpool's search for a centre-back in the January transfer window.

Without the injured Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip, Klopp started two of his first-choice midfielders from their title-winning campaign, Fabinho and Jordan Henderson, together at the heart of his defence.

Southampton had not scored in their last three games to temper their hopes of a push for European football, but took just two minutes to break the deadlock in style through former Liverpool striker Ings.

Liverpool did not deal with James Ward-



Southampton's Danny Ings (right) celebrates after scoring against Liverpool in an EPL match on Monday. — *AP*

Prowse's angled free-kick into the box and Ings perfectly hooked his shot over Alisson Becker into the far corner. Southampton had key

Vestergaard and Che Adams were out injured.

Fraser Forster was making his first Saints appearance since May 2019, but the former England international was rarely tested to earn his clean sheet.

The visitors could easily have found themselves 2-0 down before the break when Southampton substitute Nathan Tella was inches away from his first senior goal with a curling effort from the edge of the area that flew just wide.

If Reds were too passive in the first-half, they started the second-half with the intensity they have made their trademark in recent seasons as Saints were pinned inside their own half. — *AFP*

ting South Africa a reasonably challenging target on a difficult Johannesburg pitch for batsmen.

The tourists weren't able to do that as Karunaratne fell early trying a pull shot off fast bowler Anrich Nortje. He succeeded only in looping a catch to Wiaan Mulder. His overnight partner Niroshan Dickwella was out four balls later and Lanka's resistance faded.

South Africa's run chase was relatively untroubled.

Markram was given out in the over before lunch to a catch in the slips by Kusal Mendis but that decision was overturned when video replays showed the ball touched the ground as Mendis took it low down.

South Africa completed a first Test series win in two years and since beating Pakistan in early 2019. A month later, they were shocked to lose 2-0 at home to Sri Lanka, who became the first Asian team to win a Test series in South Africa. — *AP*

**Brief scores: Sri Lanka 157 & 211** (Karunaratne 103, Ngidi 4/44) **lost to South Africa 302 & 67/0** (Markram 36 not out).