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The vaccine for remaining 18 states and UTs will be received from their respective government medical store depots. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

HC slaps fine on tahsildar

Vijayawada: The Andhra Pradesh High Court slapped a fine of ₹2,000 on a tahsildar for failing to implement its orders. The court had issued an order earlier not to take assigned lands for implementation of Navaratnalu schemes. However, Musunuru tahsildar from Krishna district Madan Mohana Rao flouted it. The court took the issue on suo moto basis and imposed a fine of ₹2,000 and awarded two months jail term in case the official failed to pay the fine.

DON'T ARREST CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 7

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday issued an interim order directing the police not to arrest and initiate coercive steps against civil rights activists and posted the next hearing after two weeks.

High Court judge Justice M. Satyanarayana was hearing petitions filed by members of Poura Hakkula Sangram, Kula Nirmulana Porata Samiti and Virasam seeking to revoke cases booked against them on charges of supporting Maoists activities indirectly.

The petitioners' counsels argued that they were implicated in false cases denying them their fundamental rights.

After hearing both the parties, the court issued an interim order.

FORMER INTEL CHIEF GETS HC RELIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 7

Former intelligence chief A. B. Venkateswara Rao had a major relief as the Andhra Pradesh High Court issued an interim order on Thursday directing the state government not to initiate coercive steps against him for two weeks.

High Court judge justice K. Lalitha Kumari heard the petition filed by senior IPS officer Rao seeking sanction of anticipatory bail stating that the state government was trying to arrest him by the end of this week alleging irregularities in purchase of security equipment. He said that the government was intending to place him under suspension again after arresting him and keeping him in jail for 48 hours and sought intervention of the court to stop his arrest and pleaded the court to issue interim orders to both state government and the police.

The government counsel argued as to how a petition seeking sanction of an anticipatory bail could be filed even as no case was registered against the former intelligence chief.

Petitioner's counsel B. Adinarayana Rao asked the court for issue of interim orders to avoid any arrest of the petitioner.

After hearing both the parties, the judge issued an interim order and posted the next hearing in the case to January 18.

● The government counsel argued as to how a petition seeking sanction of an anticipatory bail could be filed even as no case was registered against the former intelligence chief.

FIRST PHASE TO BE COMPLETED BY FEBRUARY

From page 1

This will also help realise social development with the financial support from New Development Bank.

Earlier, on November 6, the State government, Centre and New Development Bank entered into an agreement for sanction of a loan. The two mega projects include AP Mandal connectivity, rural connectivity improvement project and AP roads and bridges reconstruction project with each costing ₹3,200 crore. The share of NDB will be 70 per cent with the State bearing the remaining 30 per cent.

The main purpose of the two projects is to lay double lane connectivity from district headquarters to mandal headquarters and also from mandal headquarters to the neighbouring mandal headquarters. In the first phase, 1,243 km distance roads will be developed at a cost of ₹2,978 crore and with reverse tendering ₹85.43 crore is likely to be saved.

The first phase will begin in February while DPR for the second phase of works are in preparation.

BJP leaders detained over attempt to visit Ram temple

GVL says he would bring the issue to the notice of Union home minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, JAN. 7

BJP state president Somu Veeraj, MLC P.V.N. Madhav and general secretary Vishnuvardhan Reddy were detained here as they tried to break the police cordon and reach the Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple atop Bodikonda in Ramateertham on Thursday, where an idol of Lord Rama had been decapitated.

In the melee, the BJP president fainted and fell down. What was styled as the BJP's Dharma Yatra, as announced by state party president a day ago, was stopped at Nellimerla junction in the morning.

This was the second time BJP leaders were detained over their attempt to enter Ramateertham. The first attempt was on Tuesday.

"We want to know who is attacking Hindu temples and why. As many as 21 temples were attacked in the state and not a single person was arrested. Why is the government not allowing only the BJP and Jana Sena to enter Ramateertham," Veeraj asked before he was detained.

The police told them that Section 30 of the Police Act was in force till the end of this month. None would be allowed to visit the temple. The BJP leaders had a heated argument with the cops and then tried to break the cordon.

Tight police deployment was seen on the steps leading to the temple and the entire Bodikonda Hill. Only government officials, temple priests and police officials are allowed inside the temple. The faithful are allowed with prior police permission, but for individuals or small groups only.

Rajya Sabha member G.V.L. Narsimha Rao, present at Nellimerla, said he would bring the issue to the notice of Union home minister Amith Shah.

SACK VELLAMPALLI, SAYS CHANDRA DEO

Visakhapatnam: Former MP Pradeep Chandra Deo demanded the immediate resignation of endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas for the beheading of Lord Rama idol at Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple in Ramateertham. He said on Thursday that beheading of Rama idol was beheading of all Hindus.

Deo said an efficient Chief Minister like Jagan Mohan Reddy should have an able administrator and competent person as the endowments minister.

CS: GOVT STAFF MUST WORK FOR PEOPLE

From page 1

Maintaining that a series of welfare programmes and developmental works are being taken up by the state government without political, casteist or religious considerations, the CS said these were receiving accolades nationwide. He made it clear that government employees and officers should work with the sole aim of providing benefits to the people beyond any narrow considerations.

REALTY | BIZ

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC
MAHBUBNAGAR, JAN. 7

With the arrest of former minister, Bhuma Akhila Priya, for the alleged kidnap of Praveen Rao and his brothers, and her husband Bhargava Ram still at large, the spotlight has once again fallen on the old links between Praveen Rao and the Bhuma family.

A close family member of Bhuma family said that Krishna Rao, father of Praveen Rao, used to work



BJP activists attend to state party president Somu Veeraj who fainted in the melee as police prevented them when they stage a protest on Ramtheertha Temple issue near Nellimarla in Vizianagaram district on Thursday.

TD seeks President rule in AP, CBI probe in temple attacks

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 7

Telugu Desam leaders met Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Thursday and submitted a representation seeking a CBI probe into the series of attacks on temples in the state in recent days. They also sought removal of the Jagan-led government and imposition of President's rule in the state.

Leaders Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar, Tenali Sravan Kumar, Varla Ramaiah and Buddha Venkanna informed the Governor that 140 temples were attacked since the YSRC came to power. This, they said, was a violation of fundamental rights of the people and dilution of Articles 25 and 26 providing religious freedom to the people.

They alleged that the state government has not taken any step to check such attacks even as desecration of idols was also happening.

The TD leaders said the vandalism of the sov-

● Lashing out at the state government for hurting the sentiments of Hindus, BJP OBC wing state vice-president Pasupuleti Sudhakar said they would intensify agitation if the government fails to contain activities of the anti-social elements damaging idols of the Hindu Gods and temples in the state. He addressed partymen after taking part in a rally organised by the BJP leaders at Kavali to welcome Sudhakar for his elevation as OBC wing vice-president.

ereign head of the Lord Ram idol at a temple in Ramateertham hurt sentiments of the Hindus in the state and slammed Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy for his "failure" to react on the issue even as he visited the district the next day.

They informed the Governor that though the silver lion statues on the chariot of goddess at the Kanaka Durga temple in Vijayawada went missing

in September, there was no progress yet in tracing them. They also alleged allotment of shops in Srisaillam temple in violation of GO No. 426 to non-Hindus. The presence of these non-Hindus was affecting the sanctity of the temple as they sold meat, liquor and drugs, it was alleged.

The TD leaders listed out a series of incidents that happened in the temples.

Later, TD leaders told the media that the government was not taking any action to curb these attacks. Instead, the government was trying to implicate TD leaders by filing false cases against them on such counts. The governor also expressed dismay when he was informed about attacks on so many temples, the leaders said.

They were critical of DGP Goutam Sawang for not acting tough in relation to temple attacks. They cautioned him against any attempt to implicate party chief N Chandrababu Naidu.

CM TO TAKE DARSHAN OF DEITY KANAKA DURGA TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 7

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to perform 'Bhoomi Puja' for two projects with one for reconstruction of demolished nine temples and another for development of Kanaka Durga temple and take a darshan of deity Kanaka Durga on Indrakeeladri Hill on Friday.

The CM will unveil two plaques set up at Saneeswara Swamy temple at 11.01 am.

The nine temples to be reconstructed include: Rahu-Ketu temple, Sri Sethamma Padala, Dakshinamurthy Anjaneya Swamy temple, Saneeswara temple, Boddu Bomma, Anjaneya Swamy temple, Sita Rama Lakshmana Samatha Dasanjaneya temple, Veerababu temple and Venugopala Krishna Mandir.

The CM will perform bhoomi puja for development and expansion of Kanaka Durga temple at a cost of 77 crore.

Govt gave free hand to police, says HM

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 7

Lauding the AP police department for bagging several national awards, as in better implementation of the Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), home minister Mekathoti Sucharitha said on Thursday the freedom given to them by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy helped them excel.

Participating in the closing ceremony of 63rd AP State Police Duty Meet here, the minister hailed the state police for winning 108 awards and said that the department was bringing laurels to the state by making use of the modern crime-detection technology.

"The police reforms in the state are a role model for other states. For instance, the ICJS is playing an important role in establishing rule of law and it helped in a new era of transparency, accountability and speedy justice. This initiative enabled seamless transfer of data and information among different pillars of the criminal justice system, like courts, police, jails and forensic science laboratories, from one platform", she said.

The minister said the CM was according top priority to the safety of women and hence there are several Disha police stations. For the first time, there was a scenario of Zero FIR in the state. On the AP Police Seva app, she said people now avail 67 services.

The minister said she would help organise the state police duty meet every year from now on as it would help in ensuring the upgrade of technology and making the department move ahead in areas it lagged behind.

TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy, who took part in the closing ceremony as guest of honour along with MP Bharat, appealed to the police to curb crime irrespective of the political affiliations of those behind wrongdoing, also in relation to the politically-motivated attacks on Hindu temples in the state.

"CM Jagan has given complete freedom to the police to maintain law and order in the state. Policemen bagging 108 awards in just 18 months since the formation of YSRC government is a testament to the good performance of the AP CM and the police departments," he said.

He said that over 35,000 CCTV cameras have been installed in temples, mosques and churches. The government is also ready to install more cameras. He thanked the police and the TTD vigilance department for the impeccable services they rendered to the visiting devotees in Tirumala.

Women and child welfare principal secretary AR Anuradha, Additional DGs N. Sridhar Rao, Harish, R.K. Meena, DIGs S. Paul Raj, Kranti Rana Tata, Xarvis, Chittoor SP S. Senthil Kumar, Tirupathi Urban SP Avula Ramesh Reddy, IPS officers and others were present.



Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharitha gives away memento to Chittoor district police wing, who bagged first prize in stalls display at the IGNITE 02021, the 63rd AP first state police duty meet, which was concluded in Tirupati on Thursday.

Police not biased: AP police assn president

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN 7

Police association state president Srinivasa Rao has condemned recent statements from some politicians accusing the state police of being religiously biased. "On the day of entry into the police force, we pledge to serve the people to the fullest, regardless of caste, religion or creed. Our khaki is our religion and caste."

He said principles of

public service and a humane sense will guide them in the performance of their duties. "We consider the Constitution and the laws of India as our Bhagavad Gita, the Quran and the Bible. Gandhiji taught us that the essence of all religions is one and being humane is the true religion."

He said the police department is a combination of many religions. He appealed to all to avoid making baseless allegations against the police force.

Govt to nominate governing bodies for weavers societies

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 7

The state government is preparing to constitute governing bodies for all weavers' cooperative societies in all 13 districts and officials are already on the job.

Unlike the trend earlier, the panel will be established directly by the government and effectively do away with elected members. Towards this, there will be five-member handloom co-operative societies and comes close on the heels of the tripartite committees for primary agricultural co-operative

OFFICIALS DISCUSS SIX-LANE ROAD

From page 1

The officials also discussed with the CM about development of the six-lane beach road from Bheemili to Bhogapuram

credit societies. There are about more than 30,000 people in the Kadapa district whose livelihood is directly or indirectly dependent on the handloom sector.

According to official figures, there are 195 weavers' co-operative societies in the Kadapa dis-

trict. Of these, the term of the governing bodies has ended for 172 societies. At present, officials from the handloom and textile department are preparing reports for establishing five-member committees for each society.

Srirangam Appaji, assistant director, district

handloom department, Kadapa, told *Deccan Chronicle* that societies that do not have governing bodies are being looked after by special officers. He said once formed, the five members of the governing body will have the right to vote in co-operative societies governed by special officers. Appaji said that the panels that will be constituted soon would be for 71 societies in Jammalamadugu, 51 in Proddatur, 9 in Badvelu, 13 in Mydukur, 11 in Rajampet, nine in Kamalapuram, five in Pulivendula and three in Railway Koduru.

Praveen's father used to scout for lands stuck in dispute in and around Hyderabad for settlement

Bhuma kin-Praveen Rao relationship back in spotlight

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC
MAHBUBNAGAR, JAN. 7

With the arrest of former minister, Bhuma Akhila Priya, for the alleged kidnap of Praveen Rao and his brothers, and her husband Bhargava Ram still at large, the spotlight has once again fallen on the old links between Praveen Rao and the Bhuma family.

A close family member of Bhuma family said that Krishna Rao, father of Praveen Rao, used to work

for the three-time Member of Parliament Bhuma Nagi Reddy, who was known for strong-arm tactics. He said Krishna Rao, who died in 2008, used to scout for lands stuck in dispute in and around Hyderabad for settlement.

Nagi Reddy with his army of supporters used to sort out the disputes for a consideration, either in cash or in kind. Between 1999 and 2004, when Nagi Reddy was an MP, there was a land acquisition spree and many land

parcels near Hitec City, Miyapur, and other areas came under their control, the family member said. "The Hafeezpet land parcel of 50 acres is peanuts. There is much more to be unearthed," he said. Akhila Priya was arrested for alleged kidnap pertaining to Hafeezpet land.

With the death of Nagi Reddy in 2017, his children including Akhila Priya, were reportedly clueless about the properties he had amassed and who had the title deeds and legal

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With the death of Nagi Reddy in 2017, his children including Akhila Priya, were reportedly clueless about the properties he had amassed and who had the title deeds and legal

papers, the family member said. A.V. Subba Reddy, a rela-

tive of Nagi Reddy, was also his most trusted aide and reportedly knew about most of the 'contracts' and business deals. But Akhila Priya could not get down to the nitty-gritty of properties and others turned their back, he said.

Nagi Reddy, though belonging to Allagadda in Kurnool, entered Mahbubnagar and had business partnerships with people fronted by Krishna Rao. He used to run cinema theatres and liquor business, he said. Praveen Rao's broth-

ers continued the cinema business. Rao's family and Subba Reddy continued to work together even after the death of Nagi Reddy.

A minister belonging to the undivided Mahbubnagar district and an MP were allegedly supporting Rao's family as they were assured of a share in the lands, the family member said.

Minister Srinivas Goud reacted to the issue on Wednesday and said that "Ravalaseema goondaism" will not run in Telangana

state. He said that on coming to know of the kidnap of Praveen Rao, he had spoken to the local DCP and quickly resolved the kidnap drama.

TRS MP Maloth Kavitha was the first person who alerted the Bownpally police about the kidnap, the family member said.

A leader in Kurnool said a detailed investigation was required into find out Krishna's motive for joining hands with Nagi Reddy and the assets they had acquired.

SHORT TAKES

RENOWNED
DOCTOR PSRK
PASSED AWAYDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 7

Famous physician and former member of Nellore Civic body, Dr Pelluru Siva Rama Krishna Murthy, 76, passed away because of some cardiac issues at his home in Nellore on Thursday. Popularly known as Dr PSRK, he is regarded as the doctor of the masses as he used to treat patients for mere ₹5 or ₹10 and even free of cost.

Unlike many other doctors in the field, Dr PSRK used to attend to bedridden patients at their homes even as hundreds of patients flock to his dispensary at Tipparajuvuri Street round the clock.

Besides developing his ward as a Councillor of Nellore Municipality, he took an active part in Brahmin Associations. He is the managing trustee of Tipparaju Venkata Subbaiah choultry located at Trunk Road to date.

Dr PSRK is survived by two sons and a daughter apart from his wife. His second son Karthik is a surgeon, and he has been taking care of the clinic. Several doctors and political leaders condoled his death while stating that his demise is a great loss to the poor and oppressed.

PM TOLD TO
ROLLBACK
FARM BILLSDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 7

Former State President of the CITU S. Punyavathi demanded the union government roll back the three controversial bills on agriculture while alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies favour the corporate companies in the country.

Taking part in a program here on Thursday, she also demanded a ban on Ambani's and Adani's products while appealing the people to unite for forbidding their products. Ms

Punyavathi said the bills being opposed by the farming community are clear indicators for the Centre's support to the corporate companies.

4 PERSONS DIE
AS CAR HITS
PARKED LORRYDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 7

In yet another major road accident incident involving stationary lorries parked wrongly on the national highways, four persons died and two others were injured critically when a speeding car hit a parked Trolley lorry near Marturu in Prakasam district during the early hours of Thursday. The victims belonging to Eluru in West Godavari district were returning to their hometown after a pilgrimage to Tirumala. The deceased have been identified as Vuyyuru Ravindra Nadh Chowdari, 60, and his wife Parvathaneni Venkata Vijay Lakshmi, 58, of NR Peta in Eluru, Rekandar Kanakamah Lakshmi, 58, and her husband Bajjila Sathyanarayana, 63, Assistant Public Prosecutor at a sub-curt in Eluru, living at Agrigold Apartment in Eluru.

BIRD FLU | SCARE

Festive vibes at Secretariat in Andhra Pradesh



Youngsters wearing Tiger masks and dress at the Sankranti celebrations at Secretariat premises at Velagapudi in Guntur district on Thursday.

— DC

Covid-19 hits cockfights
and hospitality industry

Covid-19 has badly hit the hotel industry and economic activities

VADREVI SRINIVAS I DC
KAKINADA, JAN. 7

Lack of enthusiasm for cockfights and Covid-19 scare have badly hit the hospitality sector in Godavari districts, especially Bhimavaram in West Godavari.

Although only a week remains for Sankranti, many hotels are without any bookings. Incidentally, although the town's population is 1.50 lakh as per 2011 census, there are over 30 hotels, including three star hotels. In normal circumstances, rooms were booked two to 10 months before Sankranti. The

visitors included those coming for cockfights, software engineers, NRIs and industry players. Aqua sector thrives in West Godavari district and various companies and traders stay in lodges and hotels. In fact, relatives of local residents also stay in lodges due to the poor living conditions in their residences during the festive season. "There is no proper response from the people and bookings are very dull. We are also not taking bookings as we don't know the Covid-19 situation and the government's stand after January 10" said

Viswanadha Raju, chairman of Anand Inn hotel. He said business was bad even for Christmas and on January 1. According to sources, usually cockfight organisers used to book hotels and guest houses for participants in advance. But this time none of them has booked rooms. "Covid-19 has badly hit the hotel industry and economic activity has not recovered. So there is no money with people. Agriculture has also been hit by cyclones" said hotelier V. Nagaraju. He said that if government policies don't favour them, then there

was no question of a more lucrative 2021-22. Meanwhile, Trujet Airlines has announced massive festive discounts from Kadapa airport to Hyderabad and other destinations ahead of Sankranti. According to Anipakula Bhavyan Kumar, manager at Trujet, Kadapa, tickets will be priced from Rs. 921 plus taxes. Passengers have to book their tickets from January 8 to 15. They have to travel from January 9 to October 30. Trujet runs its flights every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from Kadapa to Hyderabad.

Re-install Nehru's statue, PCC demands KMC

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 7

Pradesh Congress Committee president Sake Sailajanath demanded that the Kakinada Municipal Corporation (KMC) re-install the statue of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at Balaji Cheruvu centre

here. Party activists, led by Sailajanath and former Union minister M.M. Pallam Raju staged a dharna at Balajicheruvu centre. Sailajanath said that KMC had shown the government site as a private site and had removed the statue. He said that the ruling party

should re-install the statue at the same place by purchasing the private site. He said that if necessary, the Congress party would give some part of the amount to the Corporation. He warned the government of organising satyagrahas till the statue was back in its place. He said that

during the YSRC rule, there was no safety to the people in particular middle class sections. He demanded the government to order probe into the attacks on temples. Pallam Raju said that the ruling party is threatening and creating flutters in a peaceful city like Kakinada.

AP records 295 Covid
cases, one deathDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 7

Andhra Pradesh registered 295 new Covid-19 cases and one death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin on Thursday reporting that out of 59,410 samples tested, 295 persons were found infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,21,64,531 samples tested so far, 8,84,171 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,74,223 were recovered while 2,822 are still active with Covid-19.

Among daily cases of Covid-19, Krishna reported the highest number

of 45 followed Chittoor, 35 in Guntur, 32 in East Godavari, 30 in Anantapur, 24 in Nellore, 22 in Visakhapatnam, 21 in West Godavari, 12 each in Prakasam and Kurnool, 10 in Kadapa, nine in Srikakulam and four in Vizianagaram.

Nellore district reported the highest number of cumulative Covid-19 active cases with 443 followed by 416 in Krishna, 411 in Guntur, 283 in East Godavari, 261 in Chittoor, 226 in West Godavari, 217 in Visakhapatnam, 171 in Kadapa, 130 in Anantapur, 78 in Kurnool, 74 in Srikakulam, 72 in Prakasam and 40 in Vizianagaram.

AP reported a single

case of Covid-19 death from Krishna rising toll to 7,126.

Chittoor continued to be the worst hit with the highest number of deaths of 845 followed by 669 in Krishna, 667 in Guntur, 636 in East Godavari, 580 in Prakasam, 597 in Anantapur, 554 in Visakhapatnam, 539 in West Godavari, 506 in Nellore, 487 in Kurnool, 461 in Kadapa, 347 in Srikakulam and 238 in Vizianagaram.

AP discharged so far 368 Covid-19 infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours. AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,27,800 samples per one million popula-

Skoda Auto India to
launch midsize SUVDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 7

Skoda Auto India has said that its latest offering, a midsize SUV, Skoda Kushaq, will be the first in a series of vehicles tailored to meet the needs and demands of customers from the domestic market as well as those in emerging economies the world over.

The roll-out of these vehicles will happen over the next 18 months, the company said in a release.

Skoda said, Kushaq, is the first vehicle designed and developed under the compa-

ny's 'India 2.0' project. According to Zac Hollis, brand director, Skoda Auto India, the Kushaq offers a combination of the "brand's timeless design ideals, unmatched performance, superior build quality, exemplary value proposition, and enhanced safety and security."

It is deemed to be the best seller in its class, setting the benchmark for functionality, practicality, spaciousness, and convenience, Hollis said. The name of the Skoda's latest entrant into the Indian auto market is derived from

Sanskrit: The word 'Kushak' denotes a king or an emperor; the company said. The powerful vehicle, the company said, not only personifies its moniker, but also reflects upon Skoda's 125 years of history and heritage, a legacy that substantiates the brand's claim, "Driven by inventiveness and clever ideas — since 1895."

The name, starting with a K and ending with a Q, "also resonates the virtues of the Skoda SUV family — Kodiaq, Karoq, and Kamiq," the automaker said.

REHABILITATION COLONIES TO BE COMPLETED WITHIN SIX MONTHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 7

West Godavari Joint Collector (Development) Himanshu Sukla directed the officials to create infrastructure facilities in rehabilitation colonies for the

victims of the Polavaram Project within six months. He reviewed the rehabilitation colonies and R&R package of the Polavaram project victims, along with R&R Special Commissioner V. Anand in Eluru on Thursday. He said that the

employees of different departments are being deployed for supervising the R&R works and rehabilitation colonies and facilities like roads, drains, school buildings, anganwadi buildings, should be completed within six months.

THREE EMPLOYEES OF DWARAKA TIRUMALA
TEMPLE FACE DISCIPLINARY ACTIONDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 7

The Regional Joint Commissioner and also the Executive Officer of Lord Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple at Dwaraka Tirumala (China Tirupati) of West Godavari District has taken disciplinary actions against the three employees - then Assistant Executive Officer, the

Temple Superintendent and the Senior Assistant on the charges of allotting shops in a particular community in the name of Brahmin Corporation with low prices for rent.

These three officials would lose two increments with cumulative effect each and they have to pay ₹6.80 lakh each to the temple for recovery of the rental amount.

POLICE NAB SERVANT-MAID, RECOVER
23 SOVEREIGNS OF GOLDDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 7

The Amalapuram Town police have nabbed a servant-maid May Sunitha of Gurazala Village in Guntur District within 23 hours after the theft in a house. According to Amalapuram DSP Y.Madhava Reddy told the reporters on Thursday that Sunitha came to Palacharla Anantha Lakshmi's house as a servant-maid on Wednesday. On the joining day, she had stolen 23 sovereigns of gold ornaments worth ₹8.6 lakhs

from the house. The police led by Amalapuram Circle Inspector Mr Bajilal nabbed the servant-maid within 23 hours of the theft and arrested her with stolen ornaments.

Mr Madhava Reddy said that already 11 theft cases were registered against Sunitha various police stations and two cases were booked in Visakhapatnam police station. He greeted the CI Mr Bajilal, Sub-Inspectors Mr Yesubabu, Mr Chiranjeevi and M. Usman and other personnel to nab the accused.

CONTROVERSY ON PROTOCOL ISSUE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 7

There was a controversy taking place in Sakshinetipalli village in a laying stone ceremony of developing a road on Thursday. The Central Government sanctioned Rs.11 crores under PMJSY scheme for developing road linking three villages-Sakshinetipalli village-Rameswaram-Sakshinetipalli lanka villages- in Sakshinetipalli mandal. The Amalapuram MP Chinta Anuradha, Razole MLA Rapaka Vara Prasad and Mala

Corporation Chairman Pedapati Ammaji and others participated in the programme. But, Ms.Ammaji's name was not printed on the plaque. Ms.Ammaji strongly objected and the officials have not followed the protocol issues on her; though she is holding a Corporation Chairperson post. The officials said that the protocols are being followed as per directions of the District Collector and District Revenue Officer's instructions. She said that the officials have insulted her and she would complain against them with the higher officials on the issue.

Rajahmundry Railway
Station Yard remodelledDC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, JAN. 7

The major yard of Rajahmundry Railway Station in Vijayawada-Visakhapatnam section has been remodelled and commissioned and it will help improvement in the train handling capability within the station yard due to the facility of simultaneous receipt and despatch of trains along with the new infrastructure modifications and removing existing bottlenecks at the station which located nearer to the Two Godavari Bridges.

The Remodelling works for Rajahmundry Yard have been sanctioned in 2017-18 with an estimated cost of ₹27 crores and earlier, the train operations at this station required running of trains at a speed of 15 kmph for a distance of 600 meters as one side of the station is almost near and connected with the two important Bridges, resulting in extra detention to train movements.

To overcome this, the yard has been completely redrawn and constructed with 40 points and crossings and centralised electronic

● The Remodelling works for Rajahmundry Yard have been sanctioned in 2017-18 with an estimated cost of ₹27 crores and earlier, the train operations at this station required running of trains at a speed of 15 kmph for a distance of 600 meters as one side of the station is almost near and connected with the two important Bridges, resulting in extra detention to train movements.

interlocking system with 260+ routes through which incoming and outgoing trains from Godavari Bridge can be dealt simultaneously.

The South Central Railway General Manager Mr Gajanan Mallia said that the commissioning of remodelled Rajahmundry Yard would bring a paradigm shift in train operations and help in dealing increased number of both passenger and freight trains.

Special teams were to be formed to keep close watch on migratory birds visit

AP gears up to contain spread of bird flu

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 7

Andhra Pradesh has geared up its machinery to contain spread of bird flu in case it infects poultry birds and migratory birds as has been reported in several states.

The state animal husbandry authorities have formed 829 rapid response teams (RRTs) with each team comprising a veterinary doctor, two para-veterinary assistants and two attendants at mandal level. Their job is to keep tabs on mortality of poultry in commercial farms, migratory birds in protected areas and water bodies, domestic fowl at homes and on other animals after

showing symptoms of bird flu and report to the authorities for action.

Poonam Malakondaiah, Special Chief Secretary, animal husbandry and dairy development, directed the collectors to constitute special task forces at the district level with the collector as its chairman. Instructions were issued to procure PPE kits and N95 masks locally in order to give the RRTs as they go for inspections to check unusual death of birds.

In districts like Nellore, Guntur, West Godavari and East Godavari and others where migratory birds visit them, special teams were to be formed to keep close watch on them for any symptoms of bird flu.

● 829 rapid response teams (RRTs) with each team comprising a veterinary doctor, two para-veterinary assistants and two attendants at mandal level have formed to contain the bird flu in the state. These formed teams will keep tabs on mortality of poultry.

In case of any finding of unusual death of poultry/migratory birds in large numbers, samples of their blood, nasal excretion and excreta are to be sent for analysis at Veterinary Biological and Research Institute in Vijayawada and also the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases at Bhopal, the Bengaluru-based Southern Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratory-Institute of Animal Health and Veterinary Biologicals

and to any other related facility based on need.

In case of confirmation of presence of bird flu, the authorities are supposed to cull the birds located within a one-km radius and bury them and declare a 10-km radius area as an alert zone and take up disinfection.

The presence of commercial poultry is very high in East Godavari, Chittoor, West Godavari and Krishna districts in the state. Poultry farmers sound con-

fident that their birds may not get infected as they immunise them with bird flu vaccine at the age of 11 to 19 weeks and later at the age of 50 weeks in case they find any spread of new strain of the virus in their area.

AP Poultry Farmers Federation secretary Padala Subba Reddy said, "We have not received any information on any poultry bird infected with bird flu out of nearly seven to eight crore birds in the state."

Animal husbandry director Dr Amarendra Kumar said, "We have issued instructions to form teams at mandal level and they are asked to keep watch on any unusual symptoms of bird flu among poultry

birds and also on migratory birds and their mortality to report to the concerned authorities to initiate necessary action. As there is no official vaccine for bird flu, we are not vaccinating poultry birds in the state."

Meanwhile, minister for animal husbandry Dr Sidiri Appalaraju issued a statement stating that the state government was taking all necessary measures in the wake of spread of bird flu and advised the people not to be carried away by misinformation campaign on its spread and asked the people to consume properly boiled and cooked eggs and meat to avoid getting infected with the virus.

SHORT TAKES

‘VICTIM SHOULD NOT HAVE GONE OUT IN EVENING’

Budaun (UP), Jan. 7: The brutal gangrape and murder of a 50-year-old woman in Uttar Pradesh’s Budaun district could have been avoided if the victim had not gone out in the evening, said a member of the National Commission for Women (NCW) on Thursday while expressing her dissatisfaction with the police action in the case.

“I tell women again and again that they should never go out at odd hours under anyone’s influence,” said NCW member Chandramukhi Devi after meeting the woman’s family members.

“I think if she had not gone out in the evening or was accompanied by any child of the family perhaps this incident could have been avoided. But this was pre-planned as she was called through a phone call. She went (out) and then returned in such a state,” she told reporters at the victim’s village in the district.

On Sunday, the 50-year-old anganwadi worker who had gone to a temple was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Her family members have accused the temple priest and his aides of raping and murdering her.

A case has been registered against the accused and two of them were arrested on Tuesday night, while the priest is still absconding.

“I am not satisfied with the role of the police. Had timely action been taken, perhaps the life of the victim could have been saved,” said Devi, who arrived in the village on Wednesday night.

ODISHA RECORDS FRESH COVID-19 DEATH

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 7

A 70-year-old man from Odisha’s Khorda district died of Covid-19 on Thursday, taking the total number of deaths in the disease to 1,888. The fresh casualty came after the state recorded nil death cases on Tuesday and Wednesday.

“Regret to inform the demise of 70-year-old male Covid positive patient of Khorda district who was also suffering from Chronic Liver Disease with Pulmonary Hypertension & Chronic Kidney Diseases,” tweeted the state health and family welfare department.

The first death due to Covid-19 was reported on April 7 last year in Odisha after a 72-year-old man of Jharpada area here succumbed to the virus on April 6, 2020 while undergoing treatment at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar.

The state has so far recorded 3,31,151 Covid-19 cases, including the 230 new cases reported since Wednesday. As many as 21,652 tests were conducted on Wednesday, the government said on Thursday. While 3,27,008 cases have recovered, 2,202 are still active.

CONG FUMES OVER ‘SAMBHAJINAGAR’ NAME USE

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 7

The relations within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government over the renaming of Aurangabad were further strained as the Congress took a strong objection to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray’s official social media account referring the city as Sambhajnagar. Maharashtra Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat has warned the MVA allies to avoid playing politics on the renaming issue.

“The Directorate of Information and Publicity should not rename cities on its own. It should remember that official government work is a legal document,” said Thorat, who was left fuming after Maharashtra CMO in one of the tweets about cabinet decisions mentioned Aurangabad as Sambhajnagar.

“Approval has been granted to additional 165 beds and creation of 360 new posts at the government medical college and cancer hospital in Sambhajnagar (Aurangabad),” said the CMO tagging minister for medical education Amit Deshmukh, who belongs to Congress. Reacting strongly to it, Thorat, who is also a revenue minister in the state government, said that renaming cities is not part of the MVA’s common minimum programme. “We again want to reassert that we are opposed to renaming any city to ensure that social harmony prevails.”

Govt announces ₹28k crore industrial package for J&K

Bid to create 4.5 lakh jobs; Package to remain in force for 17 years

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, JAN. 7

The government on Thursday announced a ₹28,400 crore industrial package for Jammu and Kashmir and said that it would help towards creating as many as 4.5 lakh jobs besides paving the way for ₹20,000 crore investments in the Union Territory.

“The package approved by the Centre will give boost to J&K’s industrial potential and will remain in force for 17 years,” said UT’s Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, at a press conference in Jammu.

Called ‘Industrial Development Package-2021’, the scheme aims at providing a huge boost to the existing industrial sector, he said asserting that the Government of India “has once again showed its commitment towards sowing the seeds of growth, prosperity and employment in J&K”.

He said, “This is a historic industrial package that will give a boost to the industrial sector in J&K, create employment and pave way for outside investments as well.” He added that the package will act as a big relief to the existing industries and will cover the manufacturing units as well as the service sector that includes the Tourism and Information Technology. “This will give J&K’s economy a new boost and lead the UT towards growth and sustainable development,” Mr. Sinha said.

L-G says 4G services may be restored soon in 18 dist.

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, JAN. 7

Jammu and Kashmir’s Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday gave hints on restoration of high speed 4G internet services in the remaining 18 districts of the Union Territory soon.

“I know 4G is working in just two districts of J&K. There is a committee examining the issue. Hopefully, there will be good news soon in the coming days,” he said while replying a question at a press conference in Jammu. J&K witnessed a complete communication blackout for weeks after the Centre stripped it of its special status and split it up into two UTs on August 5, 2019. Though landline and mobile phone services have been restored fully, the high speed internet services continue to remain suspended in 18 out of the 20 districts of the UT. Even 2G bandwidth serv-

He stated that the administration headed by him was working on a long and short term strategy for streamlining the power infrastructure in J&K. He said, “J&K has earned the first slot on road connec-

ices are frequently suspended at places on the pretext of law and order issues, causing huge inconvenience to people particularly students, traders and media persons. 4G services were restored in two districts — Udhampur and Ganderbal — a few months ago “on experimental basis” following SC’s observations on the issue.

Replying another question, Sinha said that he was aware of the conflicting versions put forth by the Army and J&K police and the families of three Valley youth on purported encounter that took place in Srinagar’s Lawaypora last week and that he will come up with facts on it at appropriate time.

He said, “Let me tell you that J&K is a very sensitive place. I have noted all versions including that of the (security) forces and the families (of the slain youth). I will come up with facts before you at an appropriate time.” Major General H.S. Sahi,

General Officer Commanding (GoC) of the Army’s counterinsurgency Kilo Force, had told reporters here last week that the slain were militants “who were planning a big strike on the Srinagar-Baramulla highway to gain publicity.”

He also claimed that weapons including an AK-47 assault rifle, two pistols and a few hand grenades were found on them after they were killed in an encounter at Lawaypora.

But the families of the youth Aijaz Maqbool Ganai, Athar Mushtaq Wani and Zubair Ahmed Lone have questioned the Army’s claim and termed it a fake encounter in which “our innocent children were brutally murdered.” They claimed that the youth — two being students and the third a mason by profession — had suddenly disappeared after leaving their respective homes in twin districts of south Kashmir on December 29 morning. — PTI

said its main purpose is to generate employment beyond government jobs in both manufacturing and service sectors which directly leads to the socio-economic development of the region.

Central team to inspect Karuvatta

Alappuzha, Jan. 7: A three-member Central team arrived here on Thursday to assess the situation arising out of outbreak of bird flu in Alappuzha and Kottayam districts, official sources said.

The team comprising Union health ministry’s public health specialist Dr Ruchi Jain, Pune National Institute of Virology scientist Dr Shailesh Pawar and Delhi RML Hospital physician Dr Anith Jindal held discussions with district authorities at the collectorate here, they said.

Later, the team left for Karuvatta, one of the hotspots of the flu outbreak. According to the state government, over 69,000 birds, including ducks and chicken, were culled in the districts of Alappuzha and Kottayam till Wednesday to contain the H5N8 strain of bird flu. The outbreak was initially reported in four panchayats of Nedumudi, Thakazhy, Pallippad and Karuvatta in Kuttanad region of the Alappuzha district and Neendoor in Kottayam district.

19 Rapid Response Teams have been engaged in culling birds in both the districts and the regions suspected to have infected

the birds will be sanitised on Thursday. State animal husbandry minister K. Raju has said there is no history of the H5N8 virus being transmitted to humans. Authorities have banned sale of bird meat and eggs in the affected regions. To provide relief to the affected farmers, the state government has decided to compensate them for culling their birds.

Culled birds which are over two-month-old will be given ₹200 each and those under the age of two-months will be compensated at ₹100 each, the government has said. Eggs destroyed due to avian flu will be given a compensation of ₹5 each.

The minister said 61,513 birds including ducks and chicken have been culled in Alappuzha while 7,729 were culled in Kottayam.

Culling of ducks, hens and other domestic birds in and around one km radius of the affected areas in Alappuzha and Kottayam districts is being conducted as per the guidelines issued by the government. The operation was launched after results of the samples tested at the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal confirmed the outbreak. — PTI

White blanket



An aerial view of Dal Lake and its surrounding areas after heavy snowfall in Srinagar on Thursday. The Srinagar-Jammu National Highway was shut for traffic for the fifth consecutive day on Thursday in the wake of heavy snowfall over the past four days, even as the minimum temperature across the Valley stayed below the freezing point, officials said.

VITAL | EVENT

ITBP, camel-mounted band of BSF will also be part of parade

NSG commandos to be part of R-Day event

New Delhi, Jan. 7: A contingent of the NSG ‘black cat’ commandos and a tableau of the country’s largest paramilitary force CRPF will be part of the forthcoming Republic Day parade in the national capital, official sources said on Thursday.

Marching and band contingents of the Delhi Police, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the famed camel-mounted band of the Border Security Force will also be part of the annual parade on January 26 that is going to be curtailed this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, they said.

The National Security Guard (NSG) commandos, who first came on the Rajpath for this event in 2017, are making a come-

back this year, sources said.

The commandos, called ‘black cats’ due to their black-coloured overalls and stealth techniques, will be seen sporting their sophisticated weapons like the MP-5 assault rifle, dagger, night vision head-gear, bullet proof jackets and counter-terror equipments like hydraulic lifts and anti-hijacking van ‘sherpa’.

The special force was raised in 1984 as the federal unit to undertake specialist counter-terror, counter-hijack and hostage rescue operations across the country.

The NSG, every year, also provides a sniper and combat security cover to the Republic Day event as part of its “immediate backup support” to secure

the Rajpath and its nearby areas. The Central Reserve Police Force tableau will depict the three primary areas of its deployment in the country — anti-Naxal operations theatre, duties in Jammu and Kashmir and counter-insurgency

● THE NSG, every year, also provides a sniper and combat security cover to the Republic Day event as part of its ‘immediate backup support’ to secure the Rajpath.

● THE ANNUAL parade displays India’s military might, rich cultural diversity and socio-economic progress.

duties in the north east of the country — apart from assisting in various law and order duties like guarding the annual Amarant Yatra route, sources said.

The about 3.25 lakh personnel strong force is designated as the lead internal security force of the country and this is the first time that its float will roll down the Rajpath as part of the parade.

Band personnel of the border guarding force BSF, dressed in their ceremonial regalia and sitting atop caparisoned camels, will play martial tunes and patriotic songs during the parade, like every year, sources said.

This ‘ship of the desert’ contingent first became part of the Republic Day parade in 1976 after it

● L-G SAID, This is a historic industrial package that will give a boost to the industrial sector in J&K, create employment and pave way for outside investments as well.

“The scheme is being implemented with the vision that industry and service led development of J&K needs to be given a fresh thrust with emphasis on job creation, skill development and sustainable development by attracting new investment and nurturing the existing ones. It will provide a major support to local industry, besides creation of new business opportunities”, he said. He said the scheme is also about bringing radical transformation in the existing industrial ecosystem of J&K with emphasis on job creation, skill development and sustainable development by attracting new investment and nurturing the existing ones, “thereby enabling J&K to compete nationally with other leading industrially developed states and UTs of the country”. He said it is anticipated that the scheme is likely to attract unprecedented investment and give direct and indirect employment to about 4.5 lakh persons.

Additionally, because of the working capital interest subvention, the scheme is likely to give indirect support to about 35,000 persons.



Farmers sit around a bonfire to warm themselves on a cold evening at Delhi-UP Ghazipur border on Thursday.

— PTI

Centre may make farm laws optional for states

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

There is a growing view among the highest quarters in the government that states could be given the choice to implement the contentious farm laws rather than making it mandatory.

States like Punjab and Rajasthan have already refused to implement the new Bills. Union home minister Amit Shah has been holding a series of meetings with agriculture minister Narendra Tomar and other senior government functionaries ahead of a crucial meeting with farmers unions on Friday.

Sources claimed that Centre was keen to find an early resolution to the ongoing farmers agitation. Thus, the home minister has been playing a very active role even though formal talks are being led by the agriculture minister.

Shah has held several

rounds of discussions with Tomar, railway minister Piyush Goyal and senior BJP leaders from Punjab.

The home minister had also held one round of discussion with the farmer leaders about a fortnight ago. However, the deadlock continues as farmers are adamant on their two main demands that the three laws are repealed and a new law be framed to assure the Minimum Support Price.

Now ahead of the next round of talks Centre is keen to find a way of forward and can possibly offer the agitating farmers a new proposal that the decision to implement the three new farms laws would be left to the respective states. As of now it is mandatory for the states also to implement the new laws but Centre is willing to make this “optional” if the farmer unions agree to the same.

PLEA SEEKS BAR ON LAWMAKERS’ RE-ELECTION TO SAME HOUSE

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

The Supreme Court on Thursday sought response from the Centre and the Election Commission on a petition seeking to debar the law-makers from re-contesting election during the term of the same House (assembly/parliament) after quitting it or being disqualified under 10th Schedule of the Constitution – anti-defection law.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde also comprising Justice A. S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian gave the Centre and the ECI four weeks time to respond to the plea that any member of the House giving up the membership of a political party and resigning from the legislature should also

come under the purview of 10th Schedule of the Constitution and attract the consequences of disqualification under the anti-defection law.

The PIL petitioner Madhya Pradesh Congress general secretary Jaya Thakur has sought the implementation of the Article 191(1)(e) of the Constitution, read with para 2 of the tenth Schedule.

“Once a member of the House incurs disqualification under the Xth Schedule, he cannot be permitted to contest again during the term for which he was elected. Article 172 makes a membership of a House co-terminus with the term of 5 years of the House except in circumstances mentioned therein.” Jaya Thakur has stated in her petition.

SHORT TAKES

WOMAN SHOT DEAD IN CAPITOL A DON SUPPORTER

Washington, Jan. 7: The woman who died Wednesday of a bullet wound during the violent storming of the US Capitol was shot by police, authorities said. The only fatality tied to Wednesday's unrest was the woman, reportedly a dedicated Donald Trump backer and air force veteran who was among a throng of supporters of the president that invaded the US legislature.

Washington police chief Robert Contee said three other people, one woman and two men, had died Wednesday in the area around the Capitol, but did not link those deaths to the violence.

Each of the three "appeared to have suffered medical emergencies which resulted in their deaths," Contee told reporters.

HOST OF OFFICIALS RESIGN AFTER CAPITOL PROTEST

Washington, Jan. 7: US Deputy National Security Advisor Matt Pottinger, first lady Melania Trump's chief of staff Stephanie Grisham and White House Deputy Press Secretary Sarah Matthews have resigned following the violence at the US Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump.

Grisham, who previously served as the White House press secretary before making way for current White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany in April, was the first to submit her resignation on Wednesday. "It has been an honour to serve the country in the White House," Grisham said in a statement posted on Twitter. Matthews also tendered her resignation. "As someone who worked in the halls of Congress, I was deeply disturbed by what I saw today," she said.

Trump's deputy national security advisor Pottinger also resigned. White House social secretary Rickie Niceta also submitted her resignation.

2 CONVICTED IN CHINA'S #METOO MOVEMENT

Taipei (Taiwan), Jan. 7: In a potential blow to the #MeToo movement in China, a young man and woman were convicted of defaming a prominent Chinese journalist for publishing an account accusing him of sexual misconduct.

A court in the eastern city of Hangzhou ruled on Tuesday that the evidence provided by former journalists Zou Sicong and He Qian against Deng Fei was "not enough to allow someone to firmly believe without any hesitation that what was described truly happened."

The court ordered He and Zou to pay 11,712 yuan (\$1,813) in damages. The pair plan to appeal the ruling. The case was based on an article written by He that Zou published online in 2018, in which he alleged Deng lured her to a hotel room in 2009 to discuss story ideas, then took off her clothes while trying to kiss and grope her. He said that at the time, she was a 21-year-old intern at a news magazine where Deng was chief reporter.

SYRIA RESPONDS TO 'ISRAELI AGGRESSION'

Damascus, Jan. 7: Syrian air defence forces responded late Wednesday to "Israeli aggression" in the south of the country, the state news agency said.

Israel launched missiles in the air attack from the disputed Golan Heights at around 11 pm (2100 GMT), SANA reported, citing a military source.

"Our anti-air defences responded, targeting most of the missiles," the source added. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) later said that the Israeli strikes caused "deaths and injuries" but did not give details.

SOHR said the Israeli raids targeted several positions south of Damascus and came two days after a delegation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard visited the area.

Israel has not commented on the incident.

Last month, Israel said it had hit about 50 targets in the neighbouring country in 2020.

The Jewish state has consistently vowed to prevent its arch-enemy Iran from gaining a foothold in Syria, where Tehran has backed President Bashar al-Assad throughout the nearly decade-long war.



Violent protesters, loyal to President Donald Trump, storm the Capitol on Wednesday in Washington. — AP/PTI



People stand around media equipment destroyed by Trump supporters outside the US Capitol in Washington DC on Wednesday. — AFP



Trump supporters face off with police and security forces in front of the US Capitol in Washington DC on Wednesday. — AFP

US riot: World leaders appalled

Some single out Trump for harsh criticism, say there should be a peaceful transfer of power

London, Jan. 7: Leaders around the world condemned the storming of the US Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump on Wednesday, expressing shock at the chaos unfolding in a country they once relied upon for global leadership. "Disgraceful scenes in US Congress," tweeted Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, a staunch ally of the United States over generations. "The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power."

Other allies were similarly appalled at what they described as an attack on American democracy, though some said they believed US democratic institutions would withstand the turmoil. Some leaders singled out Trump for harsh criticism.

"Trump and his supporters should finally accept the decision of the American voters and stop trampling on democracy," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas wrote on Twitter. "From inflammatory words come violent deeds." He added that "contempt for democratic institutions has disastrous effects." "The beauty of democracy" with a shrug emoji was the reaction tweeted by Bashir Ahmad, a personal assistant to the president of Nigeria, which has seen several coups since independence — including one led decades ago by President Muhammadu Buhari, who most recently entered the office via a vote.

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera and Colombian President Ivan Duque were among those in Latin America who denounced the protesters, but both also said they were confident that American democracy and the rule of law would prevail. "In this sad episode in the US, supporters of fascism showed their real face: anti-democratic and aggressive," tweeted Luis Roberto Barroso, Brazilian Supreme Court justice and the head of the country's electoral court. He said he hoped "American society and institutions react with vigor to this threat to democracy."

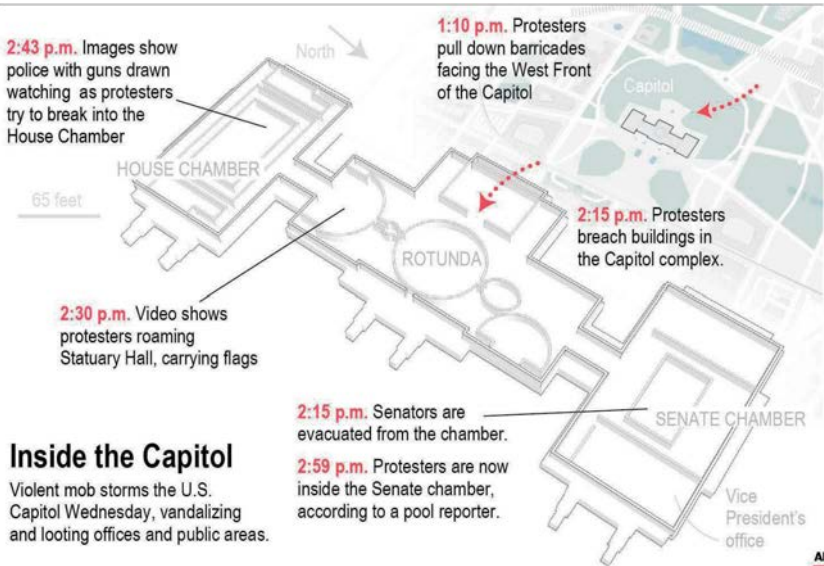
Venezuela, which is under US sanctions, said

the events in Washington show that the US "is suffering what it has generated in other countries with its politics of aggression." Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has survived US-backed opposition efforts to oust him despite accusations of human rights abuses, civil unrest and a humanitarian crisis that has forced millions to flee the oil-rich country.

In Puerto Rico, many people took to social media and joked that the US territory no longer wanted statehood. Independence, they said, looked appealing for the first time in decades. In fact, it was that pursuit of independence that marked one of the last times the US Congress was stormed violently. Four members of Puerto Ricos Nationalist Party opened fire on the House floor in March 1954, wounding five lawmakers. Italians watched the events with shock, having always considered the US to be the model of democracy and the country that rescued Italy after its fascist descent during World War II.

"This is the widely anticipated outcome of Trumpism," tweeted a retired Italian center-left politician, Pierluigi Castagnetti. "And unfortunately it wont end today. When politics is replaced by deception and fanaticism of the people the drift is inevitable." European Parliament President David Sassoli, who leads one of the largest legislatures in the world, also denounced the scenes at the Capitol.

The European Union has spent four cantankerous years dealing with the Trump administration, and its top officials have repeatedly said they are looking forward to a better relationship under President-elect Joe Biden. "This is insurrection. Nothing less. In Washington," tweeted Carl Bildt, a former prime minister of Sweden. Turkey, a NATO ally that has sometimes been at odds with Washington, expressed concern over the images of angry Trump supporters trying to thwart the certification of Biden as the new president. The chaos forced lawmakers to be rushed from the building. A Turkish Foreign Ministry statement urged all parties in



China goes online to mock 'beautiful sight' of US chaos

Beijing, Jan. 7: China's internet erupted in mirth at America's troubled democracy after supporters of President Donald Trump broke into the US Capitol, with Beijing criticising the "sharp contrast" between Washington's response to the chaos and the 2019 Hong Kong anti-government protests.

On Thursday morning, state media tabloid *Global Times* tweeted side-by-side photo comparisons of Hong Kong protesters occupying the city's Legislative Council Complex in July 2019 with Wednesday's Washington riots.

The latter saw hardcore Trump fans invade the US Capitol to protest the election defeat, taking selfies, scuffling with security and ransacking parts of the building. "@SpeakerPelosi once referred to the Hong Kong riots as 'a beautiful sight to behold'," the *Global Times* said in the tweet, referring to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's June 2019 comment about Hong Kong's mass pro-democracy demonstrations, which at that time were mostly peaceful.

"It remains yet to be seen whether she will say the same about the recent developments in Capitol Hill." China's Communist Youth League also described the unrest as a "beautiful sight" on the Twitter-like Weibo platform.

Beijing's foreign ministry echoed those sentiments, saying "the reaction of some people in the US, including that of some media outlets, is completely different." Speaking at a press briefing Thursday, ministry spokeswoman Hua Chinying said that the "sharp contrast (in reactions) makes one ponder, and deserves serious and profound reflection." The hashtag "Trump supporters storm US Capitol" pinned across China's Weibo on Thursday, racking up 570 million views, as users compared the global support for Hong Kong's protesters with the outpouring of condemnation for the pro-Trump mob.

"At present, all European countries' leaders have shown double standards and condemned it (Washington rioting)," read one Weibo comment which gained over 5,000 likes. — AFP

Nations Assembly, said he was saddened by the developments. But, he tweeted, "I believe that peace & respect for democratic processes will prevail in our host country at this critical time." Polish President Andrzej Duda, who twice visited Trump at the White House and hosted him in Poland, said on Twitter that his country had "full confidence in the power of American democracy." — AP

General Secretary of the 193-member UN body, "I'm saddened & concerned by today's developments at the Capitol in #WashingtonDC. The US is one of the world's major democracies. I believe that peace & respect for democratic processes will prevail in our host country at this critical time." The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international organisation that promotes world-wide parliamentary dialogue and representative democracy, also denounced the violence. The IPU and the parliamentary community strongly condemn the violence and the assault on the US Capitol by protesters, it said in a statement.

"The integrity of this bastion of democracy and of the representatives of the people of the United States must be respected," IPU said. — PTI

FB bans Trump till Biden inauguration

Washington, Jan. 7: Facebook will bar President Donald Trump from posting on its system at least until the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, the platform said Thursday. In a post announcing the unprecedented move, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said the risk of allowing Trump to use the platform is too great following the president's incitement of a mob that touched off a deadly riot in the US Capitol on Wednesday. Zuckerberg says Trump's account will be locked "for at least the next two weeks" but could remain locked indefinitely.

Twitter on Wednesday began limiting the reach of tweets stoking an assault on the US Capitol by a mob intent on overturning the election results.

"We have been significantly restricting engagement with tweets labeled under our Civic Integrity Policy due to the risk of violence," the Twitter support team said.

"This means these labeled tweets will not be able to be replied to, retweeted, or liked." Twitter and other social platforms were facing challenges amid the unrest after President Donald Trump, a fervent Twitter user, had rallied supporters in the capital city as Congress was set to certify the November election won by Joe Biden. — AFP

UN chief, UNGA Prez show concern

United Nations, Jan. 7: Top United Nations leadership expressed sadness and concern over the violence in Washington DC by pro-Trump demonstrators who stormed the United States Capitol as lawmakers gathered to certify the presidential election results.

"The Secretary-General is saddened by the events at the US Capitol in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday," Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, said in a note to correspondents.

"In such circumstances, it is important that political leaders impress on their followers the need to refrain from violence, as well as to respect democratic processes and the rule of law," the United Nations chief said.

President of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Volkan Bozkir, tweeted that as

President of the 193-member UN body, "I'm saddened & concerned by today's developments at the Capitol in #WashingtonDC. The US is one of the world's major democracies. I believe that peace & respect for democratic processes will prevail in our host country at this critical time."

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international organisation that promotes world-wide parliamentary dialogue and representative democracy, also denounced the violence. The IPU and the parliamentary community strongly condemn the violence and the assault on the US Capitol by protesters, it said in a statement.

"The integrity of this bastion of democracy and of the representatives of the people of the United States must be respected," IPU said. — PTI



Supporters of US President Donald Trump protest outside the US Capitol, in Washington, DC on Wednesday. — AFP



A demonstrator loyal to President Donald Trump, is removed by police, Wednesday, at the Capitol. — AP/PTI



Supporters of US President Donald Trump enter the US Capitol on Wednesday, in Washington, DC. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

8 JANUARY 2021

Trump's 'insurrection' was the final straw...

The violence unleashed by an invading mob ransacking the citadel of modern democracy was unbelievably shocking not only because they took place on Capitol Hill in Washington DC. The insurrection was sparked by the President of USA, Donald Trump, who incited his hard-core supporters to riot against this highly regarded symbol of the free world. All this would have been unthinkable if not for it being too predictable, as it was triggered by one of the most quixotic men to occupy the White House.

A day of such chaos as to shake the core of American democracy proved so futile in the end that its mastermind Mr Trump conceded he would respect the results of the election. Joe Biden of the Democratic Party had indubitably won the Electoral College votes as well as the voice of the people by seven million and is set to succeed him, after his victory was formally certified by the Congress at four o' clock in the morning. Reason as well as law and order had dawned again.

It would be extremely charitable of the Republican Party that Mr Trump belongs to if it were not to give greater force to the thought that he should be declared mentally unfit and stripped of presidency less than two weeks before his term runs out. After seeing Mr Trump elected to the highest office without winning all the people over in 2016, the Republicans lost the majority in the House of Representatives in 2018, the Presidential election in 2020 and a majority in the Senate in the two runoff elections in Georgia in 2021.

The first ever Senate wins for the Democrats in a long time in Georgia were a final rebuke to Mr Trump, who had contributed by sowing doubts in democratic elections. How they allowed such a leader so much latitude in behaving as he did post November 3 is a mystery. Senior leaders like Mitch McConnell and Mike Pence did the right thing finally in disavowing their President. Vice-president Pence

had, in the nick of time, upheld the highest traditions of democracy in carrying out the transfer of power, which is the very bedrock of democracy.

The scope allowed by the police forces in the Capitol for lumpen elements of the far Right to vandalise the Speaker's office and lord it over the Senate chamber for a while was appalling. And while a tweeting Mr Trump acted out the modern version of Nero playing the fiddle, Mr Pence ordered in the National Guard to secure the Capitol and save it from a perfidious set of rogues set loose on the word of an obnoxious master.

It is no more a puzzle how blind loyalty can drive people as illustrated in an overzealous lady who had to be shot outside the door of the chambers into which lawmakers had been locked in for their safety. Of course, the greater is the responsibility among leaders to discipline their flock. Mr Trump's biggest failure lay not in his buffoonery while in office and not even in his inability to lead when it came to personally dealing with an adverse poll result. His devilish goading of people to violence was responsible for the mayhem for which he will never be forgiven. He deserves his place in the dustbin of history.

Bird flu: Remain on alert

Most nations hit by pandemic Covid-19 are not in a position to face another health exigency but India has been called upon to pull up its socks against the avian flu which has till now killed thousands of migratory birds and poultry in four states and threatens to spread to more areas. The Union government has sent an alert to all states to monitor their avian stock especially in forest areas and in water bodies. As of now, 12 epicentres of the flu have been identified in four states — Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala.

It has been clarified that the flu this time is spread mainly through migratory birds that travel thousands of kilometres from the icy cold climes to their tropical destinations from October to February. The government's attempt is to stop the secondary spread of the virus, and the state governments have already started addressing the issue. Thousands of infected ducks have already been culled in Kerala.

Economic activity on the ground has been halted for almost a year now, and a bird flu outbreak is a shock most poultry farmers would not be able to absorb, especially at a time when the markets have started slowly looking up. The government must work with the farmers to ensure that all the infected birds are properly dispensed with and that all the farmers who comply with the norms are compensated forthwith. The government must also think of extending financial help to encourage farmers to upscale their hygiene standards so that they do not fall prey to such outbreaks so easily. There must also be a mechanism to ensure that even the slightest of suspicions of the disease is scientifically addressed and acted upon without loss of time. All these measures call for close coordination among the state and central institutions and agencies. They could draw from the experience they have gathered while fighting Covid-19.

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Subhani

Hindus and patriotism: Why RSS chief is wrong



Karan Thapar

As I See It

We are all prone to saying foolish things. I do so quite often. In fact, it's probably one of the qualities that makes us human. On the other hand, robots or creatures that work on artificial intelligence are never foolish, although they could be wrong. However, there's a significant difference between the harmlessly foolish and the defiantly stupid. The latter, particularly when its acted upon, can be dangerous. I'm afraid that the comments made by the *sarsanghchalak* of the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh fall squarely into the latter category. I know my saying so will infuriate RSS members and the *sarsanghchalak's* army of fans but that can't be helped. I would have to call a spade a fruit fork if I opted for gentler terminology!

At a book launch last Friday Mohan Bhagwat said: "If someone is Hindu, he has to be patriotic, that will be his or her basic character and nature". Just in case that wasn't clear enough, he added: "A Hindu can never be anti-Indian". Much as he might want that to be the case, it simply isn't true.

First of all, our history establishes that there is no shortage of Hindus who have been traitors — it's another matter that the country may not have been called India at the time. Amongst the earliest was Raja Aambhi of Taxila. Apparently, he had helped build the bridge cross the Indus river which enabled Alexander to invade the country. That was way back in 326 BC.

Jump a few centuries to Raja Jaichand. In

1192, he supported Muhammad of Ghor against Prithviraj Chauhan. It didn't matter to him that Chauhan was his son-in-law. It's said the desire for revenge because Chauhan had eloped with his daughter outweighed any qualms about assisting the Afghan invader.

However, don't assume it's only in ancient or medieval times that Hindus were traitors. Modern Hindus are really no different. We have several examples of Hindu treachery from the British Raj. One of the most striking is Jayajirao Scindia, the Maharaja of Gwalior, who in 1857 supported our conquerors. There are accounts that suggest his part in helping the British capture the Rani of Jhansi was by no means inconsequential.

And so to our own time. I'm not sure how one should think of the likes of Chhota Rajan, Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi or, even, Lalit Modi. I certainly wouldn't accuse them of treason, but I would hardly call them patriots. And remember, every one of them is a Hindu.

However, I suspect that Mr Bhagwat would simply brush aside all the evidence of history that I have just marshalled. I believe his actual, but unstated, point is that India's minorities cannot be as patriotic as its Hindu citizens. This, presumably, is what he means when he said a Hindu is patriotic by "his or her basic character and nature", and "a Hindu can never be anti-Indian".

Alas, even by this interpretation, the *sarsanghchalak* is simply wrong. And since it is acts of valour against the Pakistanis that are most likely to impress

him, let me gently remind him of the honours won by Muslim soldiers in battles against our western neighbour — although he has no business to have forgotten about them! Havildar Abdul Hamid won the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest award for gallantry, in 1965. Brig. Mohammad Usman posthumously won the Maha Vir Chakra in 1947. Lt. Col. Salim Caleb in 1965.

If this fails to convince Mr Bhagwat, then let me add what should be the clincher. The Army Chief who defeated Pakistan in 1971 — a victory that the RSS holds in high esteem — was a Parsi. The general who by common consensus has been accorded the greatest credit for India's military performance in 1965 was a Sikh. The chief of staff of the Eastern Command who left Pakistan's Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi no option but to surrender in Dhaka in December 1971 was a Jew. None of the three would have been offended to be called a Hindu, but each of them would have considered the *sarsanghchalak's* statement ridiculous.

Unfortunately, it's a lot more than that. It's dangerous. The *sarsanghchalak's* statement divides us, the people of India, on the spurious grounds that Hindus are automatically and naturally patriotic whilst the rest of us are not. This is not just untrue, it's also wicked. It seeks to sow the seeds of doubt, suspicion, distrust and, eventually, difference between Indians.

The undeniable truth is that patriotism is

If we want our country to survive and flourish, let's stop trying to define patriotism as a Hindu attribute and let's discard the belief that Hindus are special or better. Otherwise, we could end up like Yugoslavia.

defined by the love of one's country, not by the character of one's religion. And it's important to remember the opposite is also true. Hindus are as capable of hating their country as an Indian of any another religion.

There is, however, a further, though tiny, question the *sarsanghchalak* hasn't asked himself. What would patriotism amount to for the millions of Hindus who have left India to settle abroad and become citizens of another country? They carry British, Canadian or United States passports. Often their children don't speak an Indian language. In fact, only in terms of origin do they accept their connection with India. In every other way they consider themselves British, Canadian or American. Does Mr Bhagwat realise and accept that for them patriotism would be love of the country they were born in, whose passport they hold and whose future will determine their own?

Let me make one last point. The *sarsanghchalak* has also said that "if one loves his country, that doesn't only mean the land, it means its people, rivers, culture, traditions and everything". Here I agree with him but only because this is a statement of the obvious. More importantly, it's not something that applies only to Hindus who love India. It's as true of the French and the Germans, Nigerians and Burundians, Australians and Argentinians and even, dare I say it, the good folk of Lapland.

I guess the point I'm making is simple. If we want our country to survive and flourish, let's stop trying to define patriotism as a Hindu attribute and let's discard the belief that Hindus are special or better. Otherwise, we could end up like Yugoslavia.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

FARMERS' OMBUDSMAN

The Supreme Court is finally going to hear the pleas on farm laws (SC to hear pleas against agri laws, farmer protest, DC, Jan. 7). The SC must consider the plight of farmers and direct the Centre to include farmers ombudsman to so that farmers get confidence in buyers.

S.S.N. Sarma
Visakhapatnam

Now it's up to Modi to scrap the contentious farm laws in view of the rigid stand by Sanyukt Kisan Morcha and initiate the farm Bills afresh after meeting on January 8. It may be kept in mind that farming cooperatives are an old concept tried as early as 1950s without success. Even the NDA could not pursue its own initiative to set up 10,000 farmer producer organisations with ₹6,865 crore.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

TRUE NATIONALISTS

The farmers holding Bhagat Singh's image in hand during protests shows semblance of what the revolutionary leader stood for. The perception of Bhagat Singh in the minds of millennials is that of a violent revolutionary. He stood for raising his opinion even though he had differences with Gandhi. He admired the man and wrote that India can achieve independence only in the Gandhian way. The India today needs a younger generation like him committed to be the true nationalist without demeaning the ones who don't believe in his way.

Ratnaraj Jain
Rajahmundry

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

TPS claim on PM's assurance denied

HYDERABAD, January. 7 TELANGANA Praja Samithi Chairman M. Chenna Reddy's statement, that the Prime Minister has conceded "in principle" the demand for a separate Telangana State, was today described as "incorrect and misleading" by the Ruling Congress Party circles.

The Ruling Congress circles expressed their surprise and concern at the reported statement of Dr. Chenna Reddy.

A spokesperson of the Pradesh Congress Committee emphatically denied any knowledge of "such thinking on the part of the Prime Minister."

Mary Mitzy



Ensuring justice in virtual courts: Who controls the mute button?

On this day last year, people all over the world were nursing new resolutions. The coronavirus shattered their hopes and dreams in no time. It spared none — not even the most important pillar of democracy — the judiciary. After the initial onslaught, it is said to have partially resumed its duties. So how did the Supreme Court of India function during the pandemic?

The Court completely shut the entry of advocates into its premises. In an epoch-marking decision, it threw all its former reservations vis-à-vis digital operations to the winds, and finally went online. The Court revived the e-filing portal, introduced long back but not in use by advocates. And, only urgent matters were taken up for the "virtual hearing". The platform used by the Court is the Vidyo app.

During the initial stages of this changeover, the registry gave instructions to advocates over phone on how to log into the Vidyo app, when to log in, and so on. This was almost nine months ago. Today, nine months on, the

Supreme Court still takes up only urgent matters for hearing. Its functional can at best be said to be partial. Most benches now have three judges sitting on alternate days for a few hours.

The online system is convenient for many advocates who returned to their hometown during the lockdown and don't want to return to Delhi. Today we have lawyers appearing from various parts of the country before the Supreme Court as well as other courts. That aside, it has not been smooth sailing. Tech glitches and lack of Internet savvy plays a spoilsport in the day-to-day work of the court even after so many months have gone by.

Indian courts follow the system of an open court hearing. Everyone can watch the proceedings. But the Vidyo app has a limit in terms of the number of participants who can be admitted and the Supreme Court, too, came out with a notification restricting the advocates from sharing the link for appearance. It has affected mostly young advocates keen to learn court craft from watching the courts function.

But there's been worse happening. Many a time, during hearing a case, the advocate was logged out at the relevant moment and was unable to log in. This resulted in the case being decided in their absence. It is with great difficulty that one gets one's case listed for hearing and if it is decided in one's absence then one's entire effort becomes futile. On top of that, there is the pain of humiliation before one's client.

The appearance of the advocates before the court is run by the control room, comprising a team of technical hands who are almost completely unfamiliar with the legal process. It is their job to identify the lawyers for each case as per the item numbers written before their names. The control room decides whose mic should be unmuted and whose video made visible.

Now, the cases heard by the Supreme Court have anywhere between two and 30 parties. Who decides who will be unmuted? A control room that has no idea about the proceedings of a case?

Advocates keep sending requests to be unmuted or for the senior advocate to be allowed to speak. But only if they are lucky will their request be granted before the case is over. Or else, you just count yourself to be on the "unlucky list". Besides, in a virtual court, there are limitations to the ways in which an advocate can try and persuade the bench to unmute them, once it has muted them to do which it has the powers. In a physical court hearing, the practice is to try and persuade the bench to hear them even if it puts the file down, and many do succeed in their efforts.

Then there is the interesting question of how come those who don't want themselves to be visible appear on the screen when they are least expecting to be seen. The new practice is that, once the court starts hearing a case, the screen will show only those advocates who are arguing that particular case. But many a time, lawyers were caught on screen dressed casually and doing something else even when their case was not being

heard. It led to much embarrassment in legal circles. Such situations could have been avoided if the control room had been more careful.

But the larger question is this: Are we going to continue to function in such a handicapped manner, and for how long? There are a large number of cases needing proper disposal. Many litigants' lives depend on the disposal of their long awaited cases. Some of them are languishing in jails, some are waiting for their salary, some waiting to be appointed to a job to sustain themselves and their families. Is it not time for the highest court of the country to resume physical functioning like every other organisation, observing strict social distancing rules?

If this anarchy continues, people may have to turn to other ways to redress their grievances and one fine morning we may find that we can do without the services of the judiciary.

The writer is a Supreme Court lawyer

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
aSensex	48,093.32	-0.17
Nifty 50	14,137.35	-0.06
S&P 500*	3,803.45	1.48
Dollar (₹)	73.31	-0.25
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.68	0.07
Euro (₹)	89.97	0.26
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,335₹714	1.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	54.51	0.21
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.892	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.073	0.031

* As of 8:30 PM IST

State Bank raises \$600 mn at 1.8% coupon

State Bank of India raised \$600 million by selling bonds to international investors at a coupon of 1.80 per cent. The issue, oversubscribed by 2.1 times, is part of the bank's \$10 billion medium-term note programme, the ratings of which were withdrawn by Moody's on Wednesday. The 5.5-year issue denominated in US dollars was priced at 140 bps over the US treasury, which is the lowest pricing for any Reg S/144a issue in India, SBI said.

PM to interact with economists for Budget views



Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with economists and sectoral experts on Friday to deliberate on measures that may be included in the upcoming Budget. The virtual meeting is being organised by Niti Aayog. It will also be attended by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Participants include Arvind Panagariya, K. V. Kamath, Rakesh Mohan, Shankar Acharya, Shekhar Shah, Arvind Virmani and Ashok Lahri.

Elon Musk, world's richest man, is worth \$188.5 bn

Tesla's Elon Musk surpassed Amazon's Jeff Bezos to become the world's richest man, Bloomberg News reported on Thursday. Including the day's gains in Tesla shares, Musk, 49, had a net worth of over \$188.5 billion, \$1.5 billion more than Bezos. Tesla shares were up as much as 7.4% on Thursday at a record high of \$811.61. Reacting to the development, Musk tweeted, "How strange. Well, back to work."

LIC provides another chance to revive policies

LIC has launched a Special Revival Campaign starting from January 7 till March 6 for its customers to revive their lapsed individual policies. It has authorised its 1,526 satellite offices to revive policies where special medical tests are not required. "Policies of specific eligible plans can be revived within five years from the date of the first unpaid premium subject to terms and conditions," LIC said.



■ Manufacturing could contract by 9.4% NSO sees 7.7% dip in growth in FY21

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

As a part of its first advance estimates of the economic growth, the government, on Thursday, said that its economy could shrink by 7.7 per cent in the current financial year 2020-21 (FY21) as compared to 4.2 per cent growth in FY20. The government said the contraction was because of the nationwide lockdown imposed in March 2020 to counter the coronavirus pandemic.

"The Real GDP or GDP at constant prices (2011-12) in the year 2020-21 is likely to attain Rs 134.40 lakh crore levels, down 7.7 per cent as compared to Rs 145.66 lakh crore in 2019-20," said the National Statistical Office (NSO) in its advance GDP estimates. The Reserve Bank of India's estimate for the current fiscal is 7.5 per cent contraction.

The Real GVA (gross value added) at basic prices is estimated at Rs 123.39 lakh crore for 2020-21 as against Rs 133.01 lakh crore in 2019-20, showing a contraction of 7.2 per cent. According to NSO estimates, nominal GDP, or GDP at current prices, in the current fiscal is likely to be Rs 194.82 lakh crore as against Rs 203.40 lakh crore in year 2019-20. The growth in nominal GDP during 2020-21 is estimated at -4.2 per cent.

As per the estimate, there was contraction in almost all sectors, with the exception of agriculture. The manufacturing sector is

ESTIMATES POINT TO SUSTAINED V-SHAPED RECOVERY: FINMIN

New Delhi, Jan. 7: The finance ministry said the latest GDP estimates suggest a continued resurgence in economic activity in second half of the current fiscal and point at post-lockdown sustained V-shaped recovery. The ministry was commenting on the first advanced estimates

likely to see a contraction 9.4 per cent against flat growth of 0.03 per cent in the previous year. The NSO estimates significant contraction in mining and quarrying, and trade, hotels, transport, communication and services related to broadcasting.

Reacting to the government's advance estimate, economists and industry captains are of view that the recovery momentum seen in the last few months will need to be further sustained in the coming months.

While Chandrajit Banerjee, director general, CII, said, "The advance estimate for the full year pegged the contraction in GDP at 7.7 per cent, showing a much shallower decline than earlier expected. Government spending did much of the heavy lifting in supporting growth along with a healthy agriculture performance, which was aided by a good

(AE) of the national income. "The AE (advance estimates) of 2020-21 reflect continued resurgence in economic activity in Q3 and Q4 which would enable the Indian economy to end the year with a contraction of 7.7 per cent," it said in a statement. —PTI

monsoon. In the last few months, there has been a strong economic recovery which will require to be nurtured especially in supporting the critical pillar of consumption."

Aditi Nayar, principal economist, Iera, said, "While the advance estimates of GDP for FY2021 have been based on data that is available for only the first six to eight months, the modifications made in the extrapolation process seem to have captured the impending upturn expected in the remainder of this extremely tumultuous year."

The GDP growth rate contracted by 7.5 per cent in the second quarter (July-September), after shrinking by an unprecedented 23.9 per cent in April-June. Last month, the Reserve Bank of India had predicted the growth rate may enter the positive territory in the October to December quarter.

India to have 50-plus unicorns in 2021: Nasscom

New Delhi, Jan. 7: India saw 12 new unicorns being created in 2020, the highest ever addition in a single year, and is on track to have a 50-plus strong 'unicorn club' in 2021, a Nasscom-Zinnov report said.

Unicorns are companies having valuation of more than \$1 billion.

The report said the Indian tech start-up base is witnessing a steady growth of 8-10 per cent year-on-year, and over 1,600 tech start-ups were added in 2020.

Although cautiously optimistic, the report said 2021 promises a return to normalcy for the Indian tech start-up ecosystem and deep-tech, and new start-up hubs will continue to grow at 40-45 per cent CAGR.

India is on track to have a 50-plus strong 'unicorn club' in 2021 (from 38 in 2020), and M&A deals and IPO pipeline are also expected to accelerate in 2021, said the report, titled Indian Tech Start-up Ecosystem on the March to Trillion Dollar Digital Economy.

It said over 2,100 start-ups are leveraging deep-tech, up from over 1,600 in 2019, and 20 per cent of the deep-tech start-ups are based outside known start-up hubs.

Fintech, health-tech, edtech, agritech and enterprise tech segments are witnessing rapid digital adoption, it said. —PTI

Real estate stocks rally on Maha incentive

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 7

Shares of real estate sector companies rallied after the Maharashtra government reduced construction premium by 50 per cent.

The BSE Realty Index rose over 3.5 per cent intra-day and closed the day up 1.23 per cent.

"With reduced cost of premiums, a developer can look to pay the entire approval cost upfront and potentially launch a new project at an attractive price owing to cost savings and drive higher sales bookings during the initial launch of a project," analysts wrote.

Currently, the various FSI (Floor Space Index, also known as Floor Area Ratio) premiums/fungible FSI and payments for other concessions account for 25-33 per cent of the overall project (including land) and the waiver may result in a 12-17 per cent saving on overall project cost, analysts said.

Earlier in August the state had reduced the stamp duty charges, which triggered a huge rise in real estate buying on pent-up demand.

The top gainers included Indiabulls Real Estate (14.28 per cent), Sobha (7.61 per cent), Brigade Enterprises (2.44 per cent), Mahindra Lifespace Developers (2.26 per cent), Sunteck Realty (2.20 per cent) and DLF (1.89 per cent).

"The Government of Maharashtra's Urban Development Department in a notification issued on January 6 has approved a



MAHA PREMIUM CUT TO BOOST DEMAND: CREDAI & NAREDCO

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Realtors' apex bodies Credai and Naredco on Thursday hailed the Maharashtra government's decision to cut premiums charged on realty projects, saying it will lead to reduction in construction cost and boost property demand.

On Wednesday, the state government cut premiums levied by the civic bodies on real estate development by 50 per cent till December 31, if the developers bear the homebuyers' stamp duty burden.

"The 50 per cent cut in various premiums levied by the Maharashtra government on construction

projects till December 31, 2021, is the first-of-its-kind step taken by the state government," Credai national chairman Jaxay Shah said.

"We hail the proactive and progressive measure as it will have a strong impact on investments in the affordable housing sector," Shah said.

Naredco president Niranjan Hiranandani said: This move will go a long way in expediting the project completion and the industry will witness new launches in the market. The industry applauds this booster dose making many projects viable. —PTI

50 per cent discount/concession on all the various premiums levied by the government on construction projects till December 31, 2021. This also includes concessions in the premiums levied by all planning authorities/local administrations in Maharashtra." ICICI Securities said in a note. "A rider is that develop-

ers availing the discount need to bear the stamp duty costs of 5-6 per cent of agreement value on behalf of buyers," it said.

"Developers with significant Mumbai exposure, including Oberoi Realty, Godrej Properties, Phoenix Mills, Prestige Estates and Sunteck Realty stand to benefit," ICICI Securities said.

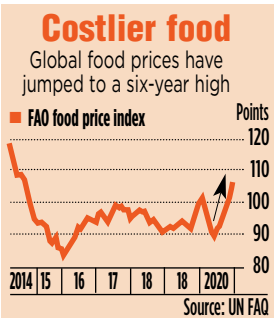
Global food prices at six-year high, set to go up further

AGNIESZKA DE SOUSA & MEGAN DURISIN
JAN. 7

Global food prices reached a six-year high in December and are likely to keep rising into 2021, adding to pressure on household budgets while hunger surges around the world.

A United Nations gauge of food prices has jumped 18 per cent since May, as adverse weather, government measures to safeguard supplies and robust demand helped fuel rallies across agricultural commodities from grains to palm oil. Prices will likely climb further, the UN's Food & Agriculture Organization said.

The spike threatens to push up broader inflation, making it harder for central banks to provide more stimulus to shore up economies, while stirring memories of food-price crises a decade ago. It's bad news for consumers whose incomes have been hurt by the Covid-19 crisis, and adds to concerns about global food security



that's being affected by conflicts and weather shocks. That's especially true for the poorest countries having to contend with limited social safety nets and purchasing power, said the FAO.

"We do at this point see more factors pushing up global food prices," said Abdolreza Abbassian, an economist at the FAO. "Food inflation is a reality. While people have lost income, they are as we speak going through a tremendously difficult hardship."

Corn and soy futures rallied to six-year highs as drought threatens crops in South America at a

time of surging Chinese demand, while palm oil—used in about half of all supermarket goods—is near a 10-year high. Protectionist measures are also propping up markets, with Argentinian farmers planning a protest strike after the government suspended corn-export licences, while wheat giant Russia will curb grain exports from mid-February to tame food inflation.

Commodities priced in dollars should remain supported as the greenback falls further this year, Abbassian said. Plus, an economic recovery in some parts of the world will probably fuel consumer spending and food demand.

The FAO's food price index has risen for the past seven months, with annual prices capping the highest average in three years. Still, costs remain well below peaks in 2008 and 2011, when soaring prices caused political and economic instability around the world. —Bloomberg

WTO: India main user of anti-dumping duty

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 7

India has been cracking down on cheap imports from certain destinations in the last few years to safeguard domestic manufacturing. No wonder the country has emerged as the main user of anti-dumping duty under the WTO regime. The average tariff rates levied by the country on imported goods have also increased in the last five years, as per India's trade policy review underway at the World Trade Organisation.

"India continues to be an active user of anti-dumping measures; it is currently the main user of anti-dumping measures in the WTO," finds the trade policy review. Between 2015 and 2019, India initiated 233 investigations on complaints of dumping of products. This was a sharp increase compared to the 2011-14 period when the number of initiations stood at 82.

Most of the investigations initiated relate to products originating in China, followed by those from the Republic of Korea and the EU-28. By the end of 2019, India had imposed 254 anti-dumping duties. These duties were mainly levied on chemicals and products, which account for 40.6 per cent of all measures. The average length of anti-dumping measures in force as at December 2019 was 5.9 years. However, 58 measures, which applied mainly to imports originating in China, have been in place for more than 10 years.

During 2015-20, India initiated 20 countervailing investigations, and there were 11 measures in place. Most of the measures applied to imports originating in China. India is also an active user of safeguard measures and as of June 2019 India had initiated 46 investigations. These are 12 per cent of all the safeguard investigations initiated by WTO members.

Further, the review found that the average Most Favoured Nation tariff levied on imports by India has gone up from 13 per cent in 2014-15 to 14.3

per cent in 2020-21. MFN tariffs are normal non-discriminatory tariffs charged on imports, excluding preferential tariffs under free trade agreements and other schemes.

According to the review, there has been a decrease in the percentage of lower rate tariffs. As a result, while tariff rates continue to range from zero to 150 per cent, the share of tariff lines with rates between 0 per cent and 10 per cent declined from 79.1 per cent in 2015 to 67.8 per cent in 2020-21.

The share of tariff lines that bear rates between 10 and 30 per cent increased from 12.1 per cent in 2014-15 to 21.3 per cent in 2019-20 and to 22.1 per cent in 2020-21.

Further, those with rates above 30 per cent rose from 2.8 per cent in 2014-15 to 4 per cent in 2020-21. The highest rates—above 60 per cent—apply to products such as alcoholic beverages (150 per cent), followed by animals and their products, fruit, vegetables and plants, coffee and tea and certain motor vehicles, all with tariffs of 100 per cent.

mate change, and a longer period needs to be studied to assess their significance, these extreme values fit with the expected consequences of a decades-long warming trend for the atmosphere and oceans that is influencing risks," said Ernst Rauch, chief climate and geoscientist at Munich Re.

The year's single worst disaster was flooding across China during its monsoon that amounted to \$17 billion, of which only about 2 per cent was insured, Munich said. Globally, 60 per cent of 2020's losses weren't insured. The growing Asian economies saw the least number of insured losses.

United States." Six of the most expensive disasters happened in the US, including a destructive derecho in the Midwest, a record number of tropical storms and hurricanes strikes and an all-time high acreage burn in California. US damages totalled at least \$95 billion, with \$87 billion of that in insured losses, said Munich.

The disasters piled up as the world came within 0.01 Celsius of tying the warmest year on record set in 2016, Munich said. While it didn't draw direct link between 2020's disasters and climate change, the insurer said the ongoing issues caused by a warming world would raise the potential for more perilous years ahead.

"Even if the weather disasters for one year cannot be directly linked to cli-

MUNICH RE | REPORT

Six of the most expensive disasters happened in the US

Second-warmest year costs world \$210 bn

BRIAN K. SULLIVAN
JAN. 7

The second-warmest year on record brought storms, fires and floods that killed at least 8,200 people and cost the world \$210 billion in losses, according to a report by Munich Re. The insurer is still calculating where 2020 ranks against other calamitous years but said damages last year exceeded those of 2019, which saw \$166 billion in losses.

"Natural catastrophe losses in 2020 were significantly higher than the previous year," Torsten Jeworrek, a member of Munich's board of management said in the report. "Record numbers for many relevant haz-



ards are a cause for concern, whether we are talking about the severe hurricane season, major wildfires or the series of thunderstorms in the

United States." Six of the most expensive disasters happened in the US, including a destructive derecho in the Midwest, a record num-

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—Bloomberg

BMW DRIVES IN MINI PADDY HOPKIRK

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JAN. 7

BMW on Thursday launched a special edition of Mini Paddy Hopkirk three-door hatchback priced at Rs 41.70 lakh at Delhi showroom. The German automajor will import only 15 completely built-up unit (CBU) units of the Mini Paddy Hopkirk Edition for the Indian market.



SHORT TAKES



BCCI president Sourav Ganguly waves as he leaves for his residence after being discharged from a hospital in Kolkata on Thursday.

— Pritam Bandyopadhyay

Dada discharged from hospital

Kolkata: Sourav Ganguly, the former test captain who is president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, was discharged from a hospital on Thursday after treatment for a mild heart attack. The 48-year-old Ganguly "suffered a blackout" while exercising at his personal gym last Saturday morning and was taken to a Kolkata hospital, where he underwent an angioplasty.

On the first day of the third test between India and Australia in Sydney, the BCCI posted an update on Twitter to say Ganguly had been released from the hospital.

"I thank the doctors at the hospital for the treatment," Ganguly was quoted as saying in the BCCI post. "I am absolutely fine. Hopefully, I will be ready to fly soon." Ganguly, a left-handed opening batsman, scored 7,212 Test runs with 16 centuries. — AP

IPL trade window to close on Feb. 4

New Delhi: The IPL's governing council has decided that the eight franchises will be allowed to submit the names of their retained players by January 21, league's chairman Brijesh Patel said on Thursday.

Patel and members of the IPL GC recently had a virtual meeting earlier this week where the planning and preparations of the next IPL was discussed at length.

"We will have the players' retention till January 21 and the trading window for the franchises closes on February 4," Patel, the former India Test batsman said while informing that the date of the auction is yet to be finalised.

It is expected that the mini auction that is supposed to be held this year for the existing eight teams will be held in the second or third week of February.

The eight IPL teams enjoy a players' purse of ₹85 crore and Patel said that there will be "no increase of purse" for the 2021 auction. — PTI

76ers pip Wizards despite Beal's 60

Los Angeles: Joel Embiid's 38 points and 28 from Seth Curry saw the Philadelphia 76ers withstand a 60-point performance from Washington's Bradley Beal in a 141-136 NBA win over the Wizards on Wednesday.

Tobias Harris and Shake Milton scored 19 points each and Ben Simmons added 17 points and 12 assists as the 76ers notched their fifth win in a row and pushed their league-leading record to 7-1.

The Sixers led by as many as 21 points in the third quarter, but the Wizards hung around and knotted the score at 131-131 with four minutes left to play.

In Orlando, Terrence Ross scored 20 points and Dwayne Bacon added 19 to lead the Magic to a 105-94 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

Big Bash League: Adelaide Strikers vs Melbourne Renegades from 12.40 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

UAE vs Ireland: First ODI from 11 am on Eurosport, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: North East United vs Hyderabad FC from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

FA Cup: Aston Villa vs Liverpool from 1.15 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Dry after drizzle

Oz recover from early blow on rain-hit day

Sydney, Jan. 7: Debutant Will Pucovski and Marnus Labuschagne smashed half-centuries as Australia recovered from an early setback to build a promising first innings in the rain-hit third Test against India Thursday.

Following David Warner's departure for five, the hosts recovered to 166 for two at stumps after more than three hours' play was lost due to persistent drizzle at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Labuschagne was not out 67 while Steve Smith, who has struggled for runs this series, hit an attacking unbeaten 31. Pucovski contributed 62 in an impressive maiden Test innings.

Fellow debutant Navdeep Saini and Mohammed Siraj, in only his second Test, shared the wickets in a clash both sides are desperate to win with the four-match series level at 1-1.

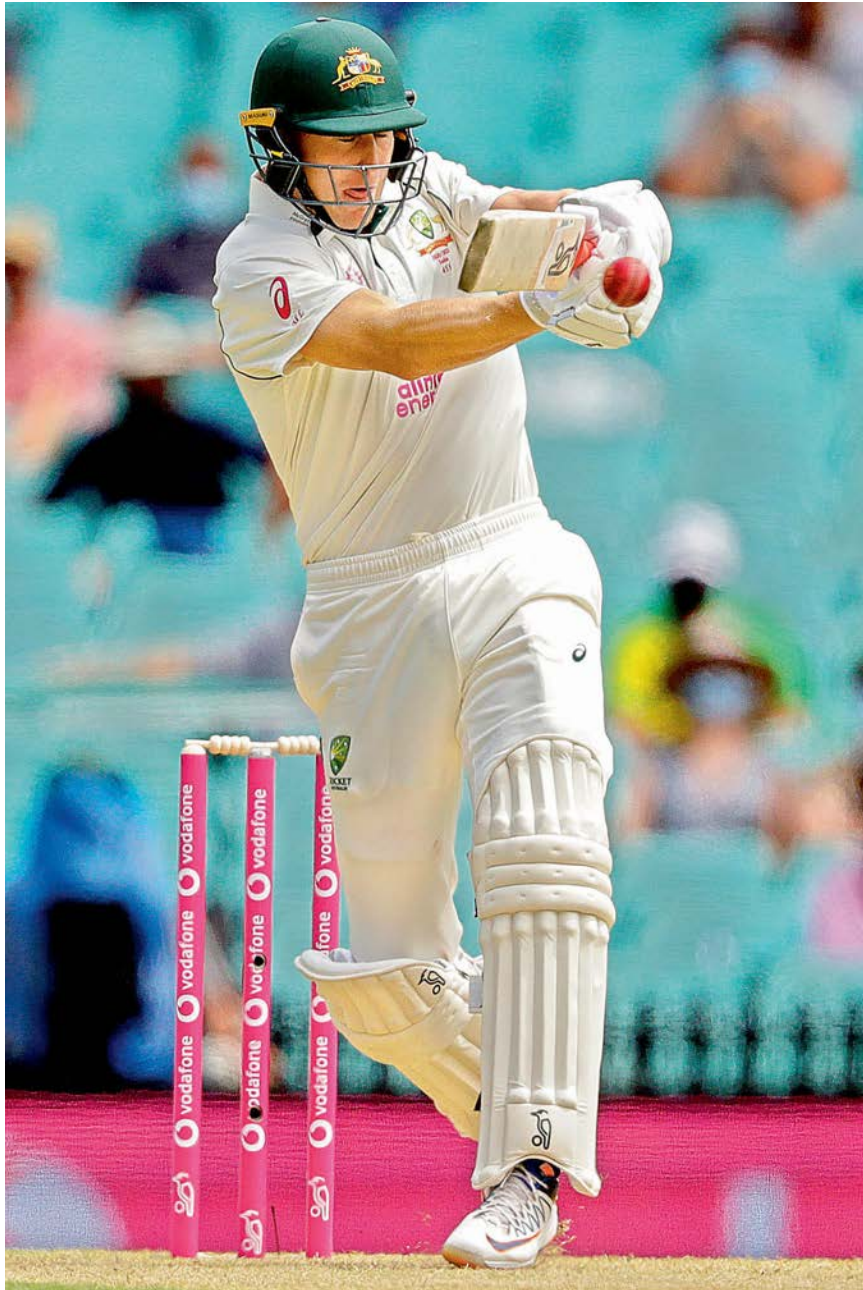
After captain Tim Paine won the toss and chose to bat in front of 8,692 socially-distanced fans, just under the quarter of capacity allowed, the rain started falling 35 minutes into the opening session.

It was enough time for Siraj to grab the key wicket of Warner on his return from injury, caught by Cheteshwar Pujara to put Australia on the back foot.

But a 100-run partnership between Pucovski and Labuschagne swung the momentum back in Australia's favour before the 22-year-old fell lbw to Saini.

The patient Labuschagne, who has been Australia's best batsman this series, survived an edge off Jasprit Bumrah on 11, which just failed to carry to slip, but was otherwise authoritative.

He brought up his ninth Test 50 with a boundary off Siraj, while Smith looked in ominous touch at the other end after failing to reach double figures in his four previous innings.



Australia's Marnus Labuschagne plays a shot on way to his half-century against India on the first day of their third Test at Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday. — AP

Smith hit five boundaries in his 31 which came off 64 balls. Pucovski resumed on 14 and Labuschagne two when play finally restarted at 3pm after the lengthy rain delay. Australia have high hopes for Pucovski, who

scored two double centuries in the Sheffield Shield this season but had been sidelined with a concussion, the ninth of his short career.

India tried to unsettle him early on with short balls and he rode his luck,

being dropped twice.

The first came on 26 when Ravi Ashwin enticed a thin edge, only for wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant to miss what should have been a simple catch.

Three overs later and Pant did it again. — AFP

SCORECARD

Australia 1st innings: Will Pucovski lbw b Navdeep Saini 62, David Warner c Cheteshwar Pujara b Mohammed Siraj 5, Marnus Labuschagne (batting) 67, Steven Smith (batting) 31. Extras (NB-1) 1. **Total (for 2 wickets in 55 overs) 166.**
Fow: 1-6, 2-106.
Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 14-3-30-0, Mohammed Siraj 14-3-46-1, Ravichandran Ashwin 17-1-56-0, Navdeep Saini 7-0-32-1, Ravindra Jadeja 3-2-2-0.

NUMBERS GAME

● Navdeep Saini became the 299th Indian Test player. The allrounder made his Test debut after playing 46 first class matches. He also played seven one-day internationals and 10 Twenty20 Internationals before making his debut in Tests.

● William Jan Pucovski became 460th Australian player to appear in a Test match. The right hand batsman from Malvern, Victoria, made his Test debut after playing 23 first class matches.

● The 100-run stand for the second wicket between Marnus Labuschagne and William Pucovski was Australia's 16th century stand for this wicket against India. It was 43rd time when over 100 runs were added for the second wicket at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

● Steven Smith became the 10th Australian and 48th batsman overall to hit 800 fours in Test cricket. The first four off fast bowler Bumrah during his unbeaten 31-run knock was his 800th in 136 innings of 76 Test matches.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

Rider Santosh in coma after crash

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Renowned Indian motorcycle racer C. S. Santosh suffered a crash during the ongoing Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia and was put in a medically-induced coma after being airlifted to a hospital in Riyadh.

The 37-year-old Santosh, who was representing Hero MotoSports in one of the world's biggest rallies, suffered the crash on Wednesday.

"We are pleased to share that he has no major physical injuries except for the dislocated right shoulder and head trauma. The latest scans have also shown no major issue that could impact his full recovery," Hero MotoSports said in a statement.

"The medical team attending to him have decided that the best approach to manage the injury is to reduce the body functions to a minimum and keep him in a sedated condition or an artificial coma," it added.

"He is receiving the best possible medical care and will continue to be under constant observation for the next few days," the statement further added.

According to reports, he was conscious when paramedics arrived on the scene before he was rushed to Riyadh.

The incident occurred on the same stage where last year, Hero MotoSport rider Paulo Gonçalves died



C. S. Santosh

while competing in the Dakar 2020. Hero MotoSport withdrew from the rally after the death of Gonçalves.

Santosh crashed around 135km into the stage on a gravel track and had to forfeit the stage.

This was Santosh's seventh attempt at the Dakar Rally, considered the world's most gruelling off-road motorsport event.

He was the first Indian to complete the race in 2015, and replicated the effort in two further editions.

Santosh had a near-fatal accident during the 2013 Abu Dhabi desert challenge, suffering burns to his neck after his Suzuki MX450X caught fire.

The January 2-16 rally divided into 12 stages has competitors traversing 7646km. Stage 4 is, incidentally, the longest stage of the rally, spanning a total of 813km. — PTI

BARTY, SERENA FOR OZ OPEN WARM UP EVENTS

Melbourne, Jan. 7: World number one Ashleigh Barty and 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams will spearhead the two WTA tournaments in Melbourne ahead of the Australian Open, with the top 32-ranked women split evenly across the simultaneous events, organisers said Thursday.

Players will arrive in Australia from January 15 and undergo a mandatory two-week quarantine before two WTA 500 and two ATP 250 events are held alongside the ATP Cup, all at Melbourne Park.

That will see the women play the Gippsland Trophy and Yarra Valley Classic from January 31-February 6, marking Barty's first appearance in 11 months after opting out of the US and European swing last year over Coronavirus fears. As well as Williams, the likes of world number two Simona Halep, defending Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin and previous Australian Open winners Naomi Osaka, Victoria Azarenka and Angelique Kerber will take part. — AFP

Siraj looks to unsettle Aussies

Sydney, Jan. 7: India pacer Mohammad Siraj called the Sydney pitch a batting beauty but said the turn it is offering to spinners has given him side a lot of hope moving forward after Australia claimed day one honours in the third Test here.

"It is very a flat wicket. Our plan was to build pressure and not try too much as it is a very easy wicket for the batsman. Even the bouncers are not carrying as well it was in the earlier games," said Siraj.

"But Test cricket it is all about patience and we must keep that in mind," he added.

The odd short balls from the fast bowlers did not trouble the home batsmen on the opening day.

Trusting the trueness of the pitch, the likes of Smith and Labuschagne



India's Mohammed Siraj celebrates after taking the wicket of Australia's David Warner during Day One of the third Test match at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday. — AFP

were not afraid to even step out against the spinners. But the turn late in the day has given India encouragement for Friday.

"It is because of the easy nature of the surface

that their batsmen stepped out but when they saw the ball turning sharply late in the day, they went back to the crease," Siraj observed.

"Let's see what happens tomorrow. The plan is to

bowl in one tight channel and build pressure," he added.

When the Indian national anthem was played out before the start of the game, Siraj got teary-eyed thinking about his father, who died in November. He had stayed back in Australia to fulfil his dream of seeing him play for India.

Asked about Thursday's emotional moment that was captured on camera, Siraj said, "Just remembered my father at that time. I was really emotional. He wanted me to see playing Test cricket."

"Wish he could see me playing for India," he further added.

On to the match again and Siraj said the bowlers made a conscious effort to send down an odd short bouncer to Will Pucovski.

— PTI

FERNANDINHO, STONES SCORE AS CITY SPARKLE IN MANCHESTER DERBY

Manchester, Jan. 7: Manchester City reached the League Cup final for fourth consecutive season as they inflicted more semifinal pain on Manchester United with a 2-0 win at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

John Stones and Fernandinho were the unlikely goalscorers for Pep Guardiola's men, who will face Jose Mourinho's Tottenham in the final at Wembley on April 25. City great Colin Bell was remembered before kick-off after he died, aged 74, on Tuesday with his former teammate Mike Summerbee reduced to tears as he watched on from the stands.

Stones breathed a sigh of relief that Marcus Rashford was flagged for offside after the ball rebounded off the defender and into the net after Rashford's initial effort was saved by Zack Steffen. At the other end Ilkay Gundogan thought he had continued his fine goalscoring form of late when he swept home Phil Foden's cross, but the German was also offside. — AFP



John Stones (right) of Manchester City celebrates after scoring the opening goal of his team against Manchester United during their English League Cup semifinal at Old Trafford in Manchester, England, on Wednesday. Manchester City won 2-0. — AP

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