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COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 26 | JANUARY 2021

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WEATHER

Max: 33°C
Min: 16°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Thai 13
Tithi: Thrayodashi
Star: Thiruvathirai
Rahukalam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam:
9 am to 10.30 am

Centre uses CBI, DRI to threaten non-BJP states, says Rahul

Karur: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday accused the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led BJP government at the Centre, of threatening non-BJP ruled state governments using the CBI and DRI machinery, and acted as a mute spectator to the misdeeds of the AIADMK government in the state. Rahul Gandhi, who is now campaigning for his party in Tamil Nadu for the last two days and attended several meetings in and around Karur, said, "I would like to know whether the Chief Minister is giving something to Prime Minister Modi for not taking any action against its misdeeds." ■ P3

COUNTER POINT



Foolproof security arrangements, sir... no threat even from tractors!

At talks, India and China agree to pursue early disengagement

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

In what seems to be a breakthrough, India and China on Sunday during Corps Commanders level talks "agreed to push for an early disengagement of the frontline troops" in the Eastern Ladakh, according to a joint statement issued by Indian army and PLA. Both sides agreed to "hold the 10th round of the Corps Commander level meeting at an early date to jointly advance de-escalation." India and China on Sunday held the 9th round of Corps Commanders level talks to resolve the military stand-off in the Eastern Ladakh. The meeting which started at around 11 am in Moldo on the Chinese side of LAC went for nearly 16 hours till 2:30 am.

"The two sides had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on disengagement along the Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector of China-India border areas," said the joint statement. ■ P4

MINOR FACE-OFF, SAYS ARMY

Indian, Chinese soldiers hurt in Sikkim skirmish

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

Amid their tense standoff in eastern Ladakh, Indian and Chinese troops were involved in a physical clash in the high-altitude Naku La region in Sikkim on January 20, an incident the Indian Army described as a "minor face-off" on Monday.

The incident was described by the Indian Army on Monday as a "minor face-off". Playing down the incident, the Army said it was resolved by local commanders and there was no use of weapons.

"It is clarified that there was a minor face-off at Nakula area of North Sikkim on 20 January 2021 and the same was resolved by local commanders as per established protocols. Media is requested to refrain from overplaying or exaggerating reports which are factually incorrect," said Indian Army. "It is learnt that troops

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said he didn't have anything to offer on the incident but urged India to exercise restraint

from both sides sustained minor injuries in the physical brawl in Naku La," a PTI report said. People familiar with the developments along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in north Sikkim said the Chinese troops attempted to transgress into the Indian side of the frontier in Naku La but were stopped by the Indian military personnel. They said both sides brought in additional troops to Naku La following the brawl and the situation was under control so far.

It is also learnt that defence minister Rajnath Singh and the top military brass were apprised about the incident. The incident at Naku La became public on Monday hours after senior commanders of both the armies concluded a nearly 16-hour-long meeting in an attempt to defuse

tension in eastern Ladakh. Naku La, located at an altitude of 16,000 feet, is the same site where Indian and Chinese troops had engaged in a fierce clash in May last year days after a violent face-off between the two sides in Pangong lake area in eastern Ladakh. Nearly 150 Indian and Chinese military personnel were engaged in the face-off in Naku La on May 9. At least 10 soldiers from both sides sustained injuries.

The incident in the Pangong lake area triggered the now nine-month-long military standoff in eastern Ladakh between the two sides. When asked about the incident in Naku La, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said: "On the specific incident you mentioned, I don't have any information to offer." ■ P4

SPB, Shinzo Abe, Paswan, Lal among Padma award winners

DCCORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, singer S.P. Balasubramaniam (posthumously), sculptor Sudarshan Sahoo and archaeologist B.B. Lal are among this year's seven recipients of the Padma Vibhushan, the country's second highest civilian award, the government

announced on Monday while releasing the list of winners of the Padma Awards.

Former Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, former principal secretary to PM Nripendra Misra, former Union minister Ram Vilas Paswan (posthumous), former Assam CM Tarun Gogoi (posthumous), Gujarat CM Keshubhai

Patel (posthumous) and religious leader Kalbe Sadiq (posthumous) are among this year's 10 recipients of the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award.

Archaeologist B.B. Lal had floated the "pillar base theory" at the disputed Babri Masjid site, claiming that they had identifications similar to those found in Hindu temples.

Galwan hero Col Santosh Babu awarded Maha Vir Chakra

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

Col Bikumalla Santosh Babu, Commanding Officer of 16 Bihar who lost his life while fighting Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley on June 15 has been awarded the second-highest wartime gallantry medal Mahavir Chakra posthumously on the Republic Day this year. ■ P4

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SHORT TAKES

PWD chief engineer suspended for dam breach

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

PWD has suspended its chief engineer of water resources department, K Asokan, for alleged lapses in the construction of a check dam across South Pennaiyar which led to its breach on January 23.

A notification from the PWD said that an enquiry under Rule 17 (b) of Tamil Nadu Civil Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules was also being contemplated against Asokan, who has been instructed not to leave Chennai, his designated headquarters.

The check dam constructed at a cost of Rs 25.35 crore between Thalavur village in Villupuram district and Enathirimaingalam village in Cuddalore district gave way leading to a serious damages on Saturday.

Proposals sought from women entrepreneurs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

Golden Jubilee Biotech Park for Women Society in Chennai requests proposals from women entrepreneurs, who hold 51 per cent or more equity in a private limited company incorporated in India as a startup.

A press release said that the startups need to be working in the field of cutting edge technologies like Biotechnology, Med-Tech, food-tech, environmental sciences, industrial biotech or allied areas of life sciences. Interested women can login to <https://www.biotechpark.co.in/seed-fund.htm> for applications and submit them before February 15, the release said.

Security tightened at airport for Republic Day

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

Security arrangements have been beefed up and entry of visitors were banned in Chennai airport in the wake of intelligence reports warning of possible terror attacks across the country to disrupt the Republic Day celebrations,

officials said.

According to airport officials, security was enhanced and several restrictions were put in place for passengers in the view of Republic Day on Tuesday. Entry of visitors has been banned till January 31. All vehicles entering the airport were thoroughly checked.

As part of enhanced security arrangements, additional Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel were also deployed, airport officials said on Sunday. Apart from the CISF personnel, more than 100 personnel from the state police were deployed round the clock. After the mandatory checks by the CISF offi-

cials, who were manning the security area, the passengers were checked thoroughly by security personnel before boarding aircraft. Police sources said that apart from the Chennai airport, security has been tightened at railway stations, bus terminus and places where public gather in large numbers.



Ripon Buildings illuminated on the eve of Republic Day. —DC

Chennai city police chief, two others chosen for President's police medal

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

Chennai City police commissioner Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal and two other senior officers were chosen by the centre for the president's police medal for distinguished services.

Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal, the 1994-batch IPS officer has earlier been conferred with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Police Medal for Excellence in Public Service and also the Police Medal for Meritorious Service and Chief Minister's Medal for Outstanding Devotion to Duty. He has served Tamil

Nadu police in different capacities, including as Commissioner of Police in Tirunelveli and Madurai, Inspector General of Police, Special Investigation Division, Crime Branch CID and Additional Commissioner of Police, Chennai (South). He played a key role in the management of migrant workers during the Covid-19 lockdown in the State.

The other two officers chosen for the medal are ADGP S. Davidson Devasirvatham and Inspector of Police, P. Manikandakumar, Tamil Nadu Special Police

(Battalion-IV), Kovaipudur Davidson Devasirvatham, presently ADGP, Technical Services, Chennai, has served as Madurai Police Commissioner, Chief of Intelligence in the capacity of IGP, Special Branch CID. His earlier postings include IGP, West Zone, Coimbatore, IGP, Administration, Chennai, and Superintendent of Police, 'Q' Branch CID.

The release from the office of Director General of Police said that 17 officers have been chosen for the police medal for meritorious service. They are:

(1) T.S.Anbu, IPS., Inspector General of Police, Idol Wing CID, Chennai.

(2) Kapil Kumar C. Saratkar IPS, Inspector General of Police, Special Investigation Division, CBCID, Chennai

(3) Santosh Kumar, IPS., Inspector General of Police, Administration, Chennai.

(4) S. Johnson, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Armed Reserve, Salem District.

(5) M. Jeevanandam,

Assistant Commissioner of Police, St. Thomas Mount Range, South Zone, Greater Chennai Police

(6) C. Murali, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Hosur Sub-Division, Krishnagiri District

(7) K.V. Kalaiselvam, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Kancheepura m.

(8) P.S. Kandasamy, Inspector of Police, Security Branch CID, Chennai.

(9) A. Sivasankaran, Inspector of Police, Tamil

Nadu Special Police IX Battalion, Manimuthar.

(10) D. Suganya, Inspector of Police, Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, City-I, Chennai.

(11) N. Srinivasan, Sub-Inspector of Police, Special Branch CID, Headquarters, Chennai.

(12) J. Suresh, Sub-Inspector of Police, Special Task Force, Erode.

(13) N. Siddharthan, Sub-Inspector of Police, Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Head

Quarters, Chennai.

(14) V. Ravichandran, Special Sub-Inspector of Police, Computer Wing, State Crime Record Bureau, Chennai.

(15) S. Stephen, Special Sub-Inspector of Police, "Q" Branch CID, Kannyakumari.

(16) R. Karunakaran, Head Constable 48496, Special Branch CID, Headquarters, Chennai.

(17) P. Ramesh, Head Constable 19696, Special Branch CID, Headquarters, Chennai.

Man held for conning farmer of ₹40K

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

Police have arrested a 29-year-old man who offered to help a farmer withdraw money from the ATM and cheated him of Rs 40,000. Police have also seized 12 ATM cards from him.

The farmer has been identified as Chandran (50) of Chithiramedu in Kancheepuram district.

Police said the incident happened on January 16,

when he went to a public sector bank ATM on Indira Gandhi road, Kancheepuram, to withdraw money. However, he was left confused as to how to use the card.

At that time, the accused who came there to withdraw money offered to help him and got to know his ATM PIN number. Saying he was not able to withdraw money due to some reasons he replaced

Chandran's ATM card with an expired ATM card without him noticing it.

Meanwhile, the next day Chandran was in for a shock when he got a message in his phone saying Rs 40,000 was debited from his account, and while checking his card he found that it was somebody else's expired card. He immediately went to the bank manager and raised a complaint. He also registered a case in

the Sivakanchi police station.

The police had a look at the CCTV footage of the ATM and started searching for the culprit. On Sunday, the police picked up a person waiting for a long time in an ATM centre and enquired him on charges of suspicion. As he gave evasive replies, they thoroughly checked him and found 12 ATM cards with different names.

They took him to Siva Kanchi police station and upon enquiry found that the person was Ezhumalai (29) of Thakkolam village near Kancheepuram. He confessed to cheating Chandran and that his job was to cheat the gullible who try to withdraw money from ATM. Police later seized ₹50,000 from his home. Further investigations are on.

HC: Effective, scientific probe shall be carried out against Justice Karnan

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

Pointing out that effective, quality and scientific investigation shall be carried out, especially in the light of the allegations levelled against the accused (Justice C.S.Karnan, former judge of the Madras high court, arrested in connection with allegedly making derogatory remarks against some of the sitting and former judges of the Supreme Court and high court), the Madras high court has said since a special team has been formed, this court is optimistic that necessary endeavour would be made.

A division bench comprising Justices M.Sathyannarayanan and A.A.Nakkiran made the observations while passing further interim orders on a petition filed by the Bar Council of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, represented by its secretary C.Rajakumar, seeking a direction to the authorities to register a case against Justice C.S.Karnan and one M.Dhanasekaran, based on his complaint/representation dated November 6, 2020, sent to the Commissioner of Police, Chennai.

The BCTP sought registration of a case against Justice Karnan for allegedly making serious scandalous, vituperative, obscene and unpatriotic utterances against former judges and some of the sitting judges of the Supreme Court of India

as well as former judges and sitting judges of the Madras high court as well as the family members, especially, the women-folk, which have been uploaded and circulated by Dhanasekaran through visual media platforms.

Referring to the threat wielded out to senior counsel S.Prabhakaran, the bench said it was brought to the knowledge of this court that he has been provided with two personal security officers on turn duty and two policemen were also posted in his house on turn duty. In the light of the materials placed, especially, in the light of the earlier status report of the Commissioner of Police, dated December 16, 2020, this court was of the considered view that enhanced security was to be provided to S.Prabhakaran and accordingly directs the authorities to do the needful in this regard, the bench added.

The bench said Amalraj, chairman, BCTP was also present to assist the court and he submitted that he being the chairman of the statutory body which had filed the present petition, was also facing similar threat as that of S.Prabhakaran and in the light of the said submission made by Amalraj, Chairman of an important statutory body, the authorities were directed to do the needful. The bench posted to March 12, 2021, further hearing of the case.

Postal ballot for disabled, aged and Covid-19 hit

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

The Election Commission of India, with a view to empowering every eligible voter in the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic situation has extended the facility of Postal ballot to electors marked as Persons with Disabilities (PwD), senior citizens above the age of 80 years and Covid-19 suspect or affected persons, Governor Banwarilal Purohit said.

Speaking at the National Voters' Day celebrations, organised by the Chief Electoral Officer at Kalaivanar Arangam on Monday, he said the Election Commission of India provided a theme for the day every year and this year it was 'Making our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed.'

The theme also aimed to ensure safe voting during the prevailing Covid-19 situation, the Governor, who was the chief guest at the state level National Voters' Day Celebrations, organised by the Chief Electoral Officer.

"It is on this very day, the Election Commission of India was established in January 1950 with immense responsibilities. Its efficient function-



Postcard and election awareness CD released by Governor Banwarilal Purohit on Monday to mark 11th National Voters Day celebrations. —DC

ing ushered in a strong bearing on the quality of democracy in the country," Purohit said.

"The initiatives taken by the Election Commission to make the process of enrolment easier and convenient, and the voting experience, people-friendly is laudable," he said. Eligible voters have been encouraged to verify and ensure that their names are all enlisted by using the Voter Helpline App and also through the www.nvsp.in website.

The First Level Checking (FLC) of EVMs/VVPATs for

the ensuing general elections to Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly 2021 was going on and was scheduled to be completed by January 31, the Governor said.

Considering the need to maintain social distancing during the Covid-19, polling stations are limited to 1,000 electors, instead of the existing 1,500 electors. This exercise will result in creation of more than 23,000 additional polling stations from the existing 67,775 polling stations, with assured minimum facilities, he added.

EC teams to visit poll-bound TN, Kerala, Puducherry after Jan. 26

New Delhi, Jan 25: Election Commission teams would visit Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry after Republic Day to take stock of poll preparations as the three assemblies enter the final leg of their respective terms, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said on Monday.

He said the poll panel is preparing to conduct elections in four states -- West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala -- and the Union Territory of Puducherry in the near future.

"The Commission also spent four days in Assam and West Bengal..After January 26, we shall be going to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry," Arora said in his address to the 11th National Voters' Day event here.

The terms of the legislative assemblies of the four states and Puducherry are ending on different dates in May and June, and polls are expected to take place in April-May. The Commission -- the CEC and fellow Election Commissioners -- usually take stock of poll preparedness before announcing schedules of elections. But it visited Bihar after announcing poll dates. Arora also reiterated the Commission's determination to conduct safe and secure elections, which has been lauded by democracies across the world.

Chennai customs seizes gold and mobile phones worth ₹40.12 L

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

The customs officers at the Chennai international airport on Monday seized gold and mobile phones worth ₹40.12 lakh.

According to airport sources, based on information Rawther Naina Mohamed, 50, and Ibrahim, 46, both of Ramanathapuram who arrived from Dubai by Emirates Flight EK-544 were intercepted at exit on suspicion of carrying gold.

On their personal search 4 gold paste bundles weighing 640 grams were found concealed in rectum. On extraction 545 grams of gold valued

at ₹27.77 lakh was recovered.

On further search 11 gold cut bits and one gold plate totally weighing 160 grams worth ₹8.15 lakh were recovered from their pant pocket and hand bags. Total 705 grams of gold worth ₹5.92 lakh were recovered and seized under the Customs Act.

On examination of their check in bags six mobile phones, three I-Phone 12 pro and three Samsung Galaxy worth ₹4.2 lakh were recovered and seized under Customs Act. 705 grams of gold and six mobile phones totally worth ₹40.12 lakh were recovered. Further investigation on.

Moving parcel van catches fire

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

A moving private van carrying parcels from Tirupur to Chennai caught fire near Anakaputhur on Tambaram-Maduravoyal Bypass road on Monday

morning. Fire tenders were rushed to put out the fire. The incident resulted in traffic snarl for a few minutes.

According to police, on Monday at around 5 am, the rear part of the parcel truck caught fire. However it was unnoticed

by the driver. Meanwhile, other motorists who noticed the fire, alerted the driver who pulled over.

Local police and fire tenders from Tambaram and Maduravoyal were immediately rushed to the spot. The fire was put out with efforts of the firefighters.

However, the cabin of the van was completely damaged, the police said adding that properties worth several lakhs were damaged in the fire.

The reason for the incident is yet to be ascertained. Shankar Nagar police registered a case.

Speak Out

End roadside parking

The corporation has beautified Kalvi Varu Street, Mylapore (Near Mundakanni Amman koil street MRTS station). They have taken pains to lay wider footpaths on both sides of the road, narrowing the width of the street. Now the problem has compounded as one side of this shortened road is used as parking space for cars and vans. This problem will become worse once Vidhya Mandir starts functioning as every parent is keen to drop their ward just in front of the school gate. The authorities should ensure that no vehicle is allowed to park on Kalvi Varu Street, Mylapore.

N. Mahadevan,
Chennai.

Why park heavy vehicles in residential areas?

This truck remains parked on 12th Street, Nandanam Extension, from night till late in the morning almost every day.

Water tankers, entering the colony, are terribly inconvenienced by the hindrance as they have to nec-

essarily take a detour. Also, passers-by use it as a shield to relieve themselves on the adjacent footpath. Will the authorities please remove the block for good?

P.G. Menon,
Chennai.

SPEAKOUT IS A WEEKLY COLUMN.

Letters to this page should be typed or written on one side of the paper. All letters, including those sent by email, should bear the name, address and phone number of the writer. We will not use complaints without these details. If you have a complaint against a vendor or a corporate, mail the letter with supporting documentary evidence, or bring the same to the DC office. speakout.chennai@deccanmail.com Letters must reach by Friday.

Pondy Minister Namassivayam quits as minister, MLA, suspended from Cong primary membership

Puducherry, Jan 25:

Puducherry PWD Minister A Namassivayam on Monday resigned from the Ministry and also from the Assembly after the ruling Congress suspended him from primary membership on charges of anti-party activities.

Another Congress legislator E Theppainathan also quit from the Assembly and the two submitted their resignation to Speaker V P Sivakolundhu at his office, bringing down the strength of the ruling Congress to 12 in the 30-member House.

The development comes months ahead of the Assembly polls in the union territory likely to be held during April or May. Namassivayam, who was No.2 in the cabinet, made known his decision to quit the V Narayanasamy ministry and also as a legislator amid speculation that he was planning to join the BJP. The strength of the cabinet has now come down to five.

Earlier, Puducherry Congress Committee president A V S u b r a m a n i a n announced at a press meet earlier in the day that Namassivayam

was suspended from the primary membership of the party for 'anti-party activities'. Namassivayam and Theppainathan submitted the letters of resignation to the Speaker at his office, according to sources close to them. With the resignation of the two MLAs, the strength of the ruling Congress which was returned from 15 constituencies in the 2016 Assembly polls has come down to 12 in the 30-member House.

Namassivayam represented Villianoor constituency while Theppainathan was

elected from Oussudu (reserved) constituency. Congress legislator N Dhanavelou was disqualified in July last year by the Speaker under the Anti-Defection Act. The Congress has the support of the three DMK members from outside.

Namassivayam also submitted his resignation letter as Minister to the Speaker as the Chief Minister was not present at his office, sources close to him said. In his letter, he thanked the Chief Minister for the opportunity given to him to serve the people of the union territory. —PTI

IN BRIEF

Farmers' union on indefinite fast against farm lawsDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, JAN. 25

Tension prevailed for a while when M.P. Chinnadurai, president of the Tiruchy district unit of the Tamil Nadu Vivasayil Sangam, commenced the outfit's indefinite fast in front of the collector's camp office at Tiruchy on Monday.

Mr. Chinnadurai urged the Tamil Nadu Government to order holding of grama sabha meetings, and pass a resolution against the Union Government's farm laws in the forthcoming assembly session on February 2, and retrieve the Katcha Theevu. The police took Mr. Chinnadurai into the custody and let off later this evening.

A section of onion farmers staged a novel demonstration by placing perished onion crops in front of the Tiruchy collectorate on Monday demanding Rs 50,000 per acre of onion crop as compensation.

Girl students pursuing degree courses at three private colleges in the city staged a dharna at the Tiruchy collectorate on Monday demanding free laptops immediately.

No gram sabha until further ordersDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

The Commissioner of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, K. S. Palanisamy, has ordered that no Gram Sabha meetings shall be held on Republic Day in view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation.

In a letter to the district collectors, Palanisamy urged him to issue necessary directions to the village panchayats not to convene Gram Sabha meeting until further orders from the government.

AIADMK leaders sneer at Stalin's grievance redressDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 25

DMK president M. K. Stalin's assurance that the people's grievances, expressed through the complaints that he would be receiving during his 30-day tour of the State, would be addressed in 100 days after the party wins the elections, has drawn sneers from AIADMK leaders.

Fisheries Minister D. Jayakumar and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami retorted to Stalin's promise to set up a separate department to look into the complaints of the people, received during his next phase of campaign, 'Stalin in your constituency,' by saying that the petitions received from the people of Stalin's constituency had not been addressed so far.

Stalin, addressing the media at the Gopalapuram



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami at the consecration of Om Kaliyamm temple at Konerupatti near Edappadi on Monday.

—DC

residence in the morning, said the theme of his next campaign starting on Tuesday was 'tell me your grievances, I shall rectify them.' As part of the campaign he will visit all the 234 Assembly constituencies in the State and meet

the people.

Launching a scathing attack on the AIADMK for failing in all aspects to address the problems of the people in the last 10 years, he said that those who would be unable to attend his meeting and

submit their petitions could register the complaints through the website www.stalinani.com or through the telephone 9171091710.

He also accused the AIADMK of plunging the State government into a debt of Rs five lakh crore and not attracting substantial investment in the State, besides large scale corruption.

Later in the day, he criticised the government for not allowing the conduct of the gram sabha meetings on Republic Day, saying that it was yet another instance of the AIADMK government throttling grassroots democracy.

In another statement, Stalin expressed the DMK's support to the farmer's tractor rally to be held at New Delhi on Republic Day and urged the farmers' wing members of his party to take part in the rally.

Stalin's gram sabhas, a bluff: RajuARULOLI. M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, JAN. 25

DMK president M.K. Stalin is hoodwinking the people for their votes in the name of gram sabhas, said Minister for Information and publicity Kadambur C. Raju here on Monday.

Charging Stalin of trying to create a political rift in villages in the name of gram sabhas, Raju said that gram sabhas are apolitical platforms meant for welfare of villagers, where

they can reap the benefits of government projects. But Stalin has been convening only 'paid' gram sabha meetings, he added.

"Stalin's gram sabha meetings will only create a political rift among the villagers. Reacting to Stalin's claim of conducting 22,000 gram sabhas in a few months, Raju quipped, "In how many gram sabha meetings did Stalin participate in the five years between 2006 and 2011, when he was state minister

for local administration?"

Reacting to Stalin's claim that the DMK would capture power in the 2021 election, Raju said, "He claimed so in 2011, but the AIADMK won and formed the government under 'Ammu', and later in 2016, he even rehearsed for a change, but was badly defeated by us, and now he has been making such claims for the third time, definitely to get drubbed by the AIADMK one more time."



DMK president MK Stalin on Monday announced that his second leg of campaign for the upcoming Assembly election will begin on January 29 from Tiruvannamalai. Addressing the reporters, Stalin said he will launch a special initiative 'Ungal Thoguthiyil Stalin (Stalin in your constituency)' through which he will address the public grievances across the 234 constituencies in Tamil Nadu. He added that if DMK comes in power, all these grievances will be addressed within 100 days.

—DC

Parties pay homage to language martyrsR. VALAYAPATHY | DC
TIRUCHY, JAN. 25

Members of the Tiruchy rural and urban districts students wing of the ruling AIADMK led by their secretaries C. Karthikeyan (chairman, Aavin) and T. Ariyazhagan placed a wreath on the memorial of language martyrs Keelapalur Chinnasamy and Viralaimalai Shanmugam, at Tiruchy on Monday on the occasion of martyrs' day.

Among others, former Rajya Sabha member T.

Rathinavel, ministers Vellamandi Natarajan and S. Valarmathi, party's Tiruchy rural north district secretary and former minister M. Paranjothi and the party's rural south district secretary and former Lok Sabha member P. Kumar and others were also present. They came in a silent procession from MGR's statue to the martyrs memorial.

Similarly, members of the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam led by the party's treasurer R. Manohar and urban district secretary

Srinivasan placed a wreath on the martyrs memorial.

The DMK members led by party's principal secretary K.N. Nehru, party's south district in charge Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi MLA also placed the wreath on the martyrs memorials.

Members of the Marumalarchi DMK, Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi, Nam Tamilar Katchi, Tamil Desiya Katchi, Tamil Nadu Kalai Ilakkia Perumandram, and other like-minded organizations also paid their homage at the martyrs memorial.

KKNPP unit-2 shut for refuellingDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUNELVELI, JAN. 25

The second unit of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) has been shut down for refueling for the third time since the unit commenced commercial operation in 2016.

One of the two largest reactors with generation capacity of 1,000 MW in the country, Unit II of KKNPP, has generated a total of 6,709 million units

of electricity since it was reconnected to the grid in March last year, after the second refueling process.

The spent fuel assemblies of the unit has been shut down for the third refueling process, said S. V. Jinna, site director, KKNPP, adding that fresh uranium oxide fuel rods would be installed. The spent fuel assemblies removed from the reactor core would be stored at the temporary spent fuel stor-

age pool inside the reactor complex. The spent fuel can be stored for seven years at the 'temporary spent fuel storage pool', having the maximum storage capacity of 565 fuel assemblies, he added.

The spent fuels, however, are said to be shifted to the permanent storage, away from the reactor (AFR) facility which is under construction within the KKNPP premises.

Besides the refueling process, which is expected

to extend up to 60 days, maintenance of systems and equipment and all the scheduled surveillance tests at Unit - II will also be held during this third annual outage," said Jinna. All related safety systems would be tested and overhauled as per the regulatory norms of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).

The other operating reactor, KKNPP Unit-I is said to be functioning at its full capacity.



(Left) Frosting on lawns in Ooty suburbs on Monday morning.

(Top) Frosting over a vehicle parked in the open sky in Ooty suburb on Monday morning.

—DC

Frosting appears amid chill winter in OotyB. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, JAN. 25

Signs of severe winter has began to appear here, as frosting was seen in Ooty's suburbs on Monday morning. As mercury levels began plummeting, nights here have turned colder now.

While the pandemic had upset almost everything, the winter this season here also was a marked deviation from the normal, as rains and clouds enveloped the hills till Pongal week. Frosting, the normal weather condition in

the winter here, especially in Ooty and its suburbs, was totally missing.

Though the peak of frosting and the winter season generally begin to fade from mid-January, this year, the onset of winter has just commenced in the far end of January, which may be indicative that winter could continue here till March.

Temperature readings on Monday recorded a maximum of 18 degree Celsius and a minimum of 7 degree Celsius within Ooty town limits. However, the suburbs of Ooty town like

Thalaikundah and Kulicholai areas, experienced frosting in the low-lying areas, indicating that the mercury level in these places had dipped further, resulting in frosting.

The onset of winter makes the day shining with a clear sky and a warm temperature, cradled in cold and chilliness between dusk and dawn.

While residents and tourists use woolen garments to keep themselves warm, farmers felt that the frosting at this time of the year, could ruin tea and vegetable crops in the coming weeks.

Feeling blessed, grateful and responsible: Bombay Jayashri

FROM P1

Sharing her happiness with DC, eminent musician Bombay Jayashri Ramnath said, "It is all because of the blessings of my great guru Lalgudi sir and my other gurus. I represent them in receiving this big honour. I feel blessed, grateful and responsible."

It was popular yesterday actor and comedian late N.S. Krishnan who recognized the talent of villupattu artiste Subbu Arumugam and brought him to Chennai from Tirunelveli decades ago. The veteran artiste had written



(Left to right) Bombay Jayashri Ramnath, Subbu Arumugam, Soloman Pappaiah and Anita

scripts, lyrics and dialogues for several films then. Speaking to DC, Arumugam's daughter Bharathi Thirumagan said, "My father (veteran musician and villupattu artiste Subbu Arumugam) is very happy that his long illustrious career, spanning over 75 years, dedicated to this traditional art, has been recognized and

appreciated by the government and Tamil Thai. He dedicates this Padma award at the feet of Goddess Kalaiyani. This villupattu art is based on ahimsa and my father wouldn't complete his villupattu without mentioning Gandhian principles. He thanked all the people for this honour."

Dr Thiruvengadam Veeraraghavan, known as 'Two rupees doctor', ran a charitable clinic for underprivileged sections of society in North Chennai. Pappaiah, who is best known for moderating patti mandrams' with humour on television, is a household name in the state. Meanwhile, popular playback singer

K.S. Chithra has bagged Padma Bhushan this year. With over 25,000 tracks across languages to her credit, the well-known singer Chithra has won several national awards. The singer's ability to deliver both innocence and maturity, and to ace high notes has set her apart from her contemporaries.

Campaign to seek Bedi's recall begins tomorrow

Puducherry, Jan 25: The Congress-led Secular Democratic Alliance (SDA) is to launch a campaign on Tuesday to collect signatures from the public to urge the Centre to recall Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi.

PCC leader A V Subramanian, in a press release on Monday, said the campaign would be addressed by Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, his Cabinet colleagues and leaders of alliance partners. —PTI

**No longer a pipe dream**

A project to supply drinking water to the residents of Chittlapakkam town panchayat through individual household connections was launched by Tamil official language and culture minister K. Pandiarajan on Monday. Among the town panchayats on the southern suburbs of Chennai, around 2,400 houses receive drinking water through individual water connections. There are about 47,000 residents in Chittlapakkam with over 11,200 households, including multi-storied apartments.

The town panchayat has 7 overhead water tanks and the local body receives 11 lakh litres of drinking water a day through the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board, another 16 lakh litres through the Chittlapakkam-Madambakkam combined water supply scheme in addition to water generated from local sources. Since there was no augmentation of resources in the past 15 years and increasing demand from residents for individual water connections, Monday's project launch brings a lot of hope to the residents of the town panchayat.

—E.K.Sanjay

Rahul slams PM, Edappadi

FROM P1

Rahul said that Prime Minister Modi was working hard to protect the proprietors of five corporate companies, by writing off several lakh crores of their loans, whereas he miserably failed to help the people in important aspects like GST, demonetization, and Covid 19. Modi's support to the five corporate companies would destroy the tiny and small-scale industries, and also break the spine of farmers. He wondered as to why Prime Minister Modi did not question the action of Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on GST implementation. It's just because Palaniswami is running a corrupt government, he wants to appease Modi, which ultimately affects the people of the state, added Rahul.



Rahul Gandhi poses for a selfie with a girl who came running towards him during his final day of election campaign in Tamil Nadu.

—DC



Kalaivanar Arangam getting ready for Assembly session.

—DC

Sasikala set to be released tomorrow, says Dhinakaran

Chennai, Jan 25: Expelled AIADMK leader V. K. Sasikala, serving a jail term in Bengaluru in a corruption case and presently under treatment for coronavirus, will be released from prison on Wednesday "according to all our expectations," her nephew T. T. V. Dhinakaran said on Monday.

With the former aide of late Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa recuperating in a Bengaluru hospital, her discharge from the medical facility will be made known later, he said in a tweet.

"According to all our expectations... Chinnamma (Sasikala) will be released (from prison) day after tomorrow, 27-01-2021," Dhinakaran said.

Independent legislator Dhinakaran, Sasikala's

● "According to all our expectations... Chinnamma (Sasikala) will be released (from prison) day after tomorrow, 27-01-2021," Dhinakaran said. Sasikala, under treatment at Victoria Hospital, had been earlier moved out of the ICU there after her virus symptoms reduced

nephew and founder of Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) said his aunt was recuperating from coronavirus and that her discharge from the hospital will be made known later after consulting doctors.

Sasikala, under treatment at Victoria Hospital, had been earlier moved out of the ICU there after her virus symptoms reduced.

SHORT TAKES

COVID-19 CASES
SHOW NO SIGNS OF
LET UP IN KERALAGILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JAN. 25

With 72,891 total active cases, 6,000 plus cases reported during the last five consecutive days and a test positivity rate of 12.48 per cent, the Covid-19 situation in Kerala continues to be worrying.

The state is recording the highest number of daily cases in the country at the moment. Ernakulam and Kozhikode districts have reported more than 1,000 cases daily over the past few days.

If the situation continues in this manner, various affected districts might face shortage of ventilators and ICU beds. While schools (higher classes), colleges, cinema, theatres, bars have all started functioning, there is laxity in enforcing safety protocols.

The effective break-the-chain campaign that was witnessed in the state for many months, too has slackened now. Though a majority of people are wearing masks in public places, there is crowding in malls, shopping centres, social gatherings including marriages and parks which is a cause of concern.

But the government sources maintain that the situation is under control. Dr Mohammad Asheel who is part of the government's high level Covid management team, said the current cases in the state were on the expected lines. Unlike many other states, Kerala had delayed the peak of Covid-19 pandemic, due to stringent restrictions and effective infection control measures. This is one of the reasons that the state is continuing to report a high number of cases.

STATES TOLD TO
CHECK 'VACCINE
RUMOURS'DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

The Centre has asked state governments to "check vaccine rumours" and take penal actions against those indulging in spreading falsehood over the efficacy and safety of the Covid-19 vaccines.

"Such kind of rumour mongering, particularly by vested interests, can create unwarranted doubts among people at large, and there is, therefore, a need to check all kinds of unfounded scare-mongering relating to the safety and immunogenicity of the vaccines," Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla has told the state governments. He added penal action may be taken against the persons or organisations found to have been indulged in rumour mongering under the relevant provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

On Monday, the 10th day of the vaccination drive, close to 3.35 lakh healthcare and frontline workers got inoculated. So far more than 19.5 lakh people have got the jab. There were 13,203 fresh cases of Covid-19 detected in the last 24 hours and 131 deaths were reported.

As per Union health ministry, India's active caseload has fallen to 1.84 lakh and the share of active cases in the total positive cases has further shrunk to 1.73%. "A bulk of the active cases are contributed by merely two states. Kerala and Maharashtra alone account for more than 64.71% of the total active cases. Kerala accounts for 39.7% of the active cases whereas Maharashtra contributes 25% of the total active cases," the health ministry said.

Mahavir Chakra for
Col. Santosh Babu

Babu led his troops against the Chinese attack in Galwan

FROM PAGE 1

Five soldiers have been given third highest war time gallantry award Vir Chakra for their bravery in the Galwan Valley clash, out of which four are posthumously. 14 have been awarded Sena Medal (Gallantry) posthumously for their bravery against Chinese troops. Those who have been awarded Vir Chakra posthumously are Naib Subedar Nuduram Soren (16 Bihar), Hav K Palani (81 Field Regiment), NK Deepak Singh (16 Bihar) and Sep Gurtej Singh (3 Punjab). Hav Tejinder Singh from 3 Medium Regiment has also been awarded with Vir Chakra for his bravery during Galwan Valley clash with PLA soldiers.

Colonel Babu was deployed in Galwan Valley (Eastern Ladakh) during Operation Snow Leopard on 15 June last year and was tasked to establish an Observation Post in face of the enemy. "Organising and briefing his troops about the situation with a sound plan, he successfully executed the task," said the citation.

PREZ APPROVES JEEVAN RAKSHA
PADAK AWARDS FOR 40 RESCUERS

New Delhi, Jan. 25: President Ram Nath Kovind has approved the conferring of Jeevan Raksha Padak awards for meritorious acts of saving lives to 40 people, including a Kerala man who will be honoured with the Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak posthumously.

According to a Home Ministry statement, Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak will be conferred to eight persons and Jeevan Raksha Padak to 31 others.

Jeevan Raksha Padak series of awards are given in three categories namely Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak, Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak and Jeevan Raksha Padak. Muhammed Muhsin (posthumous) of Kerala has been named for the Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak 2020.

Persons from all walks of life are eligible for these awards, given for meritorious acts of human nature in saving the life of a person, the statement said. —PTI

While holding the position his column faced stiff resistance from the adversary who attacked using lethal and sharp weapons along with heavy stone pelting from a d o i n i n g heights."Undaunted by the violent and aggressive action by overwhelming strength of enemy sol-

diers, the officer in true spirit of service before self, continued to resist the enemy's attempt to push-back Indian troops," it said. "Despite being grievously injured, Colonel Babu led from the front with absolute command and control despite hostile conditions to deter the vicious enemy attack



Pawar slams Modi over farmers' stir, asks do they belong to Pak?

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 25

NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Monday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of turning a blind eye towards the farmers' protest at Delhi asking "Do they belong to Pakistan?" He also slammed Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari for not meeting the farmer's delegation in Mumbai.

Addressing a huge rally held at the historic Azad Maidan on Monday, Pawar said, "For the past 60 days, the farmers from UP, Haryana and Punjab are protesting near Delhi braving the cold, the sun and rains. But has the PM enquired about them? They (Centre) say they are only Punjab farmers. Are they from Pakistan? They are our own."

Pawar also lashed out at Koshiyari saying Maharashtra has never seen such a Governor before. "He has the time to meet Kangana (Ranaut), but not the farmers. It was the moral duty of the Governor to meet the farmers, who were seeking to submit a memorandum to him against the farm laws. But he did not even show the courtesy to remain in Raj Bhavan," he said.

However, the Governor's office clarified that the farmer leaders had been informed that Koshiyari, having the additional charge of Goa Governor, had a pre-arranged programme to address the neighbouring state's Assembly and that the principal secretary would receive the delegation.



Farmers sit on tractors during their ongoing agitation against the Centre's farm reform laws, at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Monday. Thousands of farmers will enter the national capital on their tractors under heavy security on Republic Day, even as they announced a foot march to Parliament on February 1, when the annual Budget is presented, to press for their demands including a repeal of the three new agriculture laws.

—PTI

India, China to push for
an early disengagement

FROM PAGE 1

The meeting which started at around 11 am in Moldo on the Chinese side of LAC went for nearly 16 hours till 2:30 am.

"The two sides had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on disengagement along the Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector of China-India border areas," said the joint statement.

It said that the two sides agreed that this round of meeting was positive, practical and constructive, which further enhanced mutual trust and understanding.

"The two sides agreed to push for an early disengagement of the frontline troops. They also agreed

to follow the important consensus of their state leaders, maintain the good momentum of dialogue and negotiation, and hold the 10th round of the Corps Commander Level Meeting at an early date to jointly advance de-escalation," it said.

The two sides also agreed to continue their effective efforts in ensuring the restraint of the frontline troops, stabilize and control the situation along the LAC in the Western Sector of the China-India border, and jointly maintain peace and tranquility.

The Indian delegation was led by 14 Corps commander Lt-General PGK Menon and also included a joint secretary from the

external affairs ministry.

India and China have been involved in a military stand-off in Eastern Ladakh from last nine months where each side has deployed around 50,000 troops along with tanks, and artillery. Despite temperatures dipping to minus 30 degrees Celsius in the region, both India and China have maintained troops at forward posts this winter at LAC in Ladakh.

Earlier in June and then in July, India and China had agreed to mutually move back from Galwan Valley, Gogra Post, Hot Springs and Pangong Tso. However, it was only in Galwan Valley that both troops had moved back to some extent.

Indian-origin poet Bhanu Kapil
wins T.S. Eliot Prize in UK

London, Jan 25: Indian-origin author-poet Bhanu Kapil has been named the winner of the prestigious T.S. Eliot Prize, named after the renowned 20th-century American-British poet. Kapil, who was born in England and grew up in London, beat nine other shortlisted entries with her winning title 'How to Wash a Heart', which

explores the relationship between an immigrant guest and a citizen host.

The prize, announced on Sunday, is seen as the most valuable prize in British poetry and the only major poetry prize judged purely by established poets. It comes with a winner's cheque for 25,000 pounds and all the shortlisted poets are pre-

sented with cheques for 1,500 pounds each.

"I wanted to write something that could be read in the time it took to make a drink, a cup of tea. I wanted to write about migration, about host and guest relations; I wanted to think about a threshold and what a welcome might portend" said Kapil. —PTI

DIDI WARNS OF
BEFITTING REPLY
TO HER 'INSULT'RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 25

Branding the 'Jai Shree Ram' sloganeers as "religious fanatics" for "teasing" her in presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre's Parakram Diwas celebration in Victoria Memorial, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday warned the BJP of her retaliation with a "befitting reply" to her "insult" in the Assembly election.

The Trinamul Congress supremo also made it clear that she would prefer to "slit her throat" by herself instead of bowing down to the saffron party. At Purshura in Hooghly she alleged, "Netaji belongs to all. When I attended the event on him, some religious fanatics and illiterate teased me in front of the PM. How dare they? They do not know me."

Warning the BJP of her retaliation, the angry CM said, "I will pay them back with a befitting reply through politics instead of guns. At the event I expressed gratitude on my part. Had they chanted Netaji, I would have given them a salute. Instead, they insulted Bengal and Netaji. Earlier they disrespected Rabindranath Tagore and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar also."

She claimed, "As long as I live, I will fight keeping my head high. If I have to bow down, I will do it in front of the mass. Rather than bowing down to the BJP, it is better for me to slit my throat."

Describing the TMC turncoats as "thieves", Banerjee argued that they defected to the BJP to stash their ill-gotten wealth because they knew her party would not give them tickets this time to contest the polls.

HC's skin-to-skin
verdict: Maha govt
urged to file appealSHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 25

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) asked the Maharashtra government on Monday to file an urgent appeal against a recent Bombay High Court judgment that said an act cannot be termed as sexual assault if there is no "skin-to-skin" contact.

A single Judge bench of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court in its judgment passed on January 19, ruled that groping without 'skin-to-skin' contact is not sexual assault as defined under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act. According to this judgment an act cannot be termed as sexual assault if there is no "skin-to-skin contact".

The court opined that touching a minor's chest would not amount to sexual assault unless the accused removed the top worn by the child or slid their hand

within the child's garment. Following this judgment Priyanka Kanoongo the chairperson of the NCPCR wrote a letter to the state chief secretary. In her letter she has asked the government of Maharashtra to file an urgent appeal against the HC order. She has stated that the words "skin-to-skin touch with sexual intention without penetration" mentioned in the judgement also need to be reviewed and the state should take note of this as it seems to be derogatory to the minor victim in the case.

The judgement has drawn the ire of child rights bodies and activists across the country.

Kanoongo in her letter has also stated that considering the seriousness of the issue, the commission being the monitoring body under section 44 of the POCSO Act, 2012 requests you to take necessary steps in the matter and file an urgent appeal against the aforesaid impugned judgment of the High Court.

India's 1st snow igloo
café comes up in J&KYUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, JAN. 25

India's first snow igloo café has come up at Gulmarg, one of the Asia's premier ski resorts situated in the Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas at an altitude of 2,650 m (8,694 ft) and about 56 km from capital Srinagar.

Set up by a local group of hotels on the lawns of its property in the cup-shaped valley, the igloo is 22 feet wide and 12.5 feet high from inside and can accommodate 16 people at any given time for lunch or dinner or just to have coffee or tea. The owners claim the café can make to the Limca book of records for it being Asia's biggest igloo.

An igloo, also known as a snow house or snow hut, is a type of shelter built of 'suitable' snow. Gulmarg like many other parts of the Valley received several spells of major snowfall in recent weeks and has recorded below-freezing temperatures constantly since mid-November last.

Waseem Shah, managing director of Kolahoi Green Group of Hotels and Resorts, said that the idea to set up Kashmir's very first igloo café crept into his mind after the family built a small (8x7 feet) igloo at its Srinagar home. "The idea of building an igloo café

emerged after we built one at my home during the snow season in Srinagar. It garnered a lot of attention and we all got excited. Soon thereafter we decided to build one outside our Gulmarg hotel," he said. He added, "Its outside dimensions are 26 feet wide and 15 feet high. And we are already in talks of getting it recorded as Asia's biggest igloo".

Shah said, "The concept of a snow restaurant is very new to India although it has been tested successfully in Finland, Canada, Switzerland and some other countries. We wanted to do something dramatic for our guests and patrons and hence we came up with an idea of a snow restaurant". The task was accomplished with a team of 20 members working in two shifts in 15 days.

Snow igloos are normally built in a catenary curve, a shape more closely resembling a paraboloid and are necessarily not spherical. This is done so that the stresses of snow, as it ages and compresses, do not cause to buckle because in an inverted paraboloid or catenoid the pressures are nearer to being exclusively compressive. "We threw it open for the public today (Monday). The response has been mashaAllah (what God has willed) tremendous," he added.

HIGHEST HONOURS

Archaeologist Lal known for his 'pillar base theory' at Babri gets Padma Vibhushan

16 get Padma award posthumously this year

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

The government on Monday announced the Padma Awards on the eve of the Republic Day. This year, the President has approved 119 Padma Awards. The list comprises 7 Padma Vibhushan, 10 Padma Bhushan and 102 Padma Shri Awards. As many as 29 of these awardees are women and the list also includes 10 persons from the category of Foreigners, NRI, PIO and OCI while were 16 are Posthumous awardees and one transgender awardee.

The prominent awardees this year include former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe and singer S.P.



S.P. Balasubramaniam

Shinzo Abe

Balasubramaniam among the Padma Vibhushan recipients.

Noted archaeologist B.B. Lal has also been given the Padma Vibhushan. He had floated the "pillar base theory" at the disputed Babri Masjid site claiming that these pillars were identi-

fied as those of temples. Padma Bhushan was given posthumously to former Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, former Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, former Gujarat CM Keshubhai Patel, Former Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, religious



Sumitra Mahajan

Ram Vilas Paswan

Tarun Gogoi

leader Kalbe Sadiq and former Principal Secretary to PM. Nripendra Mishra have also been awarded the Padma Bhushan.

Former Governor of Goa Mridula Sinha has been awarded Padma Shri posthumously. 1971 Bangladesh war vet-

eran Lt Col Quazi Sajjad Ali Zahid and Bangladeshi artist Sanjida Khatun were awarded Padma Shri.

Other Pasma Shri awardees include P. Anitha for sports, Rajni Bector for Trade and Industry, Peter Brook from United Kingdom for Art, Nicholas



Kazanas from Greece for Literature and Education.

The list of Padma Shri awardees has a maximum of 102 people both from India and abroad which also includes some posthumously in different fields like medicine, arts, culture.

SHORT TAKES

19 CHARRED BODIES FOUND IN MEXICO

Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, Jan. 25: At least 19 charred corpses have been discovered in Mexico near the US border in an area where drug cartels often clash, the Tamaulipas state prosecutor's office said.

Police on Saturday found two burnt-out vehicles containing human remains on a country road near the town of Camargo. Preliminary investigations suggested the victims had been shot, then their bodies set alight. Because no bullet casings were found at the scene, police said it was possible the victims were killed in a different location.

Autopsies are underway, but identification of the corpses will be complicated due to their condition.

A prosecutor's office official said that an investigation has been launched to determine whether the victims were undocumented migrants.

AID GROUPS WANT YEMEN REBELS' 'TERROR' LIST OUT

Dubai, Jan. 25: Twenty-two aid groups working in Yemen urged US President Joe Biden on Sunday to remove the war-torn country's Huthi rebels from a terror blacklist, saying it could put millions of lives at risk. The Trump administration's move against the insurgents had come into effect the day before Biden took office, to resounding criticism from experts, the United Nations and aid groups.

"This designation comes at a time when famine is a very real threat to a country devastated by six years of conflict, and it must be revoked immediately," said a joint statement Sunday by 22 groups.

"Any disruption to lifesaving aid operations and commercial imports of food, fuel, medicine and other essential goods will put millions of lives at risk."

The Iran-allied Huthis seized the capital Sanaa and much of northern Yemen in 2014, sparking a Saudi-led intervention the following year.

SURROUNDED, U.S. POLICE CAR HITS CROWD

Washington, Jan. 25: A police officer surrounded by a crowd in the US state of Washington struck and injured at least one person with his car as he sought to drive away, authorities said.

About 100 people and several cars were blocking an intersection, reportedly for an illegal car rally, on Saturday night in downtown Tacoma when police were called to the area.

After an officer in his car tried to clear the area, a crowd began hitting the vehicle's body and windows, Tacoma police said in a statement.

"While trying to extricate himself from an unsafe position, the officer drove forward, striking one individual and may have impacted others," the police said, adding that the person was taken to a hospital in unknown condition. Tacoma resident Sarah Jones told CBS she witnessed the scene that included a "mountain of people" being hit.

"I don't know if he panicked or what but his car was surrounded," Jones said.

GREECE, TURKEY IN FIRST CRISIS TALK SINCE 2016

Istanbul, Jan. 25: Greece and Turkey bowed to EU and NATO pressure on Monday and opened the first direct talks in nearly five years over their explosive eastern Mediterranean standoff.

The Istanbul meeting is not expected to make major headway after the two NATO neighbours' gunboats collided in August as their dispute over energy and borders threatened to spiral out of control.

But it adds to the positive tone Turkish President Recep Erdogan has been setting as he tries to repair damaged relations with Europe in the face of a potentially more hostile US administration under President Joe Biden.

And it could lay the groundwork for the eventual delineation of one of the world's most recently discovered regions of proven natural gas reserves. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said over the weekend that Athens was entering the so-called exploratory talks "in good faith" — a comment echoed by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

GOP opposes Don impeachment trial

Washington, Jan. 25: As the House prepares to bring the impeachment charge against Donald Trump to the Senate for trial, a growing number of Republican senators say they are opposed to the proceeding, dimming the chances that former president will be convicted on the charge that he incited a siege of the US Capitol. House Democrats will carry the sole impeachment charge of "incitement of insurrection" across the Capitol late Monday evening, a rare and ceremonial walk to the Senate by the prosecutors who will argue their case.

They are hoping that strong Republican denunciations of Trump after the Jan. 6 riot will translate into a conviction and a separate vote to bar Trump from holding office again. But instead, GOP passions appear to have cooled since the insurrection. Now that Trump's presidency is over, Republican senators who will serve as jurors in the trial are rallying to his legal defense, as they did during his first impeachment trial last year. "I think the trial is stupid. I think it's counterproductive," said Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla.

He said that "the first chance I get to vote to end this trial, I'll do it" because he believes it would be bad for the country and further inflame partisan divisions. Trump is the first former president to face impeachment trial, and it will test his grip on the Republican Party as well as the legacy of his tenure, which came to a close as a mob of loyal supporters heeded his rally cry by storming the Capitol and trying to

BIDEN TO DROP TRANSGENDER BAN IN MILITARY

Washington, Jan. 25: President Joe Biden is set to issue an executive order to reverse a Pentagon policy that largely bars transgender individuals from joining the military, dumping a ban ordered by President Donald Trump in a tweet during his first year in office.

Biden has been widely expected to overturn the Trump policy in his early days in office. The White House could announce the move as early as Monday, according to the person briefed on the decision who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the order. The move to reverse the policy has the support of Biden's newly confirmed defence secretary, retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, who spoke of the need to overturn it during his Senate confirmation hearing last week. — AP

overturn Joe Biden's election. The proceedings will also force Democrats, who have a full sweep of party control of the White House and Congress, to balance their promise to hold the former president accountable while also rushing to deliver on Biden's priorities.

Arguments in the Senate trial will begin the week of Feb. 8. Leaders in both parties agreed to the short delay to give Trump's team and House prosecutors time to prepare and the Senate to confirm some of Biden's Cabinet nominees. — AP

'Made in America' goods get US nod

Washington, Jan. 25: US President Joe Biden will sign a series of executive orders on Monday to promote "Made in America" products and strengthen supply chains, senior officials said, asserting that the new administration remains committed to working with partners and allies to modernise international trade rules.

Prominent among the executive orders include a strict enforcement of procuring products made inside the country by federal agencies. This is very significant given that contracting alone accounts for nearly \$600 billion in federal spending. Biden is taking action to reset the US government's longstanding approach to domestic preferences to create an approach that will remain durable for years to come and grow quality, union jobs, according to a senior administration official. It is long overdue that the US government utilises the full force of current domestic preferences to support America's workers and businesses, strengthening the economy, workers, and communities across the country, the official said. — PTI

PIOs APPOINTED TO KEY ENERGY DEPT POSTINGS

Washington, Jan. 25: The Biden Administration has appointed four Indian-Americans to senior positions in the crucial Department of Energy. The administration appointed Tarak Shah as the Chief of Staff, making him first Indian-American to serve in that position.

Tanya Das has been named as the Chief of Staff to the Office of Science,

Narayan Subramanian will occupy the position of Legal Adviser in the Office of General Counsel, and Shuchi Talati has been appointed as Chief of Staff in the Office of Fossil Energy.

"These talented and diverse public servants will deliver on President Biden's goal to tackle the climate crisis and build an equitable clean energy future," said Shah as the Department of Energy announced 19 senior-level appointments. — PTI

RELIGIOUS CORRIDOR

Majestic architecture will have a distinct Arabian look

Dubai Hindu temple to open Diwali'22

Dubai, Jan. 25: A majestic new Hindu temple with a distinct Arabian look is expected to open its doors for worshippers in Dubai by October next year during Diwali, according to media reports here.

The new temple is being constructed adjacent to

the Guru Nanak Darbar in Jebel Ali, making the locality a multi-religious corridor in the city. The temple is an extension of the Sindhi Guru Darbar Temple in Souq Baniyas, Bur Dubai, one of the oldest Hindu temples in the United Arab Emirates, open since the 1950s.

According to a report in *Khaleej Times*, the 25,000 sq ft temple will be built at an estimated cost of Dirham 75 million (Rs 1,48,86,24,396). Raju Shroff, an Indian businessman and one of the trustees of the Sindhi Guru Darbar Temple, announced on Sunday

that the construction of the temple is underway, and the basement of the structure is complete. "Piling, shoring and casting of basements one and two are complete as of now. We are on track to open during Diwali 2022," *Khaleej Times* quoted Shroff as saying. The tem-

US to re-impose travel ban, says White House official

Curbs applicable on non-US citizens who went to UK, Brazil, most of EU

Washington, Jan. 25: US President Joe Biden will re-impose a Covid-19 travel ban on most non-US citizens who have been in Britain, Brazil, Ireland and much of Europe, a White House official said Sunday, as the new administration ramps up its pandemic response.

Biden will also on Monday extend the ban to travelers who have recently been to South Africa amid warnings that new, more transmissible coronavirus variants are already establishing themselves in the United States, the official said, confirming US media reports.

The new president last week tightened mask wearing rules and ordered quarantine for people flying into the United States, as he seeks to tackle the country's worsening coronavirus crisis.

Biden has said that the Covid-19 death toll would likely rise from 420,000 to half a million next month -- and that drastic action was needed.

"We're in a national emergency. It's time we treated it like one," he said on Thursday.

In his last days in office, Donald Trump announced that a Covid-19 ban on travelers arriving from much of Europe and Brazil would be lifted -- but the Biden administration immediately said it would reverse the order due to come into effect on January 26.

Trump had announced an initial ban on January 31, 2020 on non-American travelers entering from China to try to stop the spread of the coronavirus. The ban was extended to European countries on March 14 as the pandemic entered full force.

More than 25 million Covid-19 cases have been recorded in the US since the pandemic began, according to the Johns Hopkins University tally on Sunday.

The milestone was reached only five days after the US, the world's wealthiest and hardest-hit nation, recorded 400,000 deaths from the disease.

Biden has made fighting the coronavirus a priority and is pushing for Congress to approve a \$1.9-trillion relief package that would include billions of dollars to boost vaccination rates. The president, who was inaugurated on January 20, has said he wants 100 million people vaccinated within his first 100 days in office, and he has called for Americans to wear masks for 100 days. — AFP



A burnt out Covid-19 testing centre is seen after being set on fire in Urk, 80 kilometres (50 miles) northeast of Amsterdam. Dutch police have clashed with protesters demonstrating against the country's lockdown in the capital Amsterdam and the southern city of Eindhoven. — AP

Dutch protesters, cops clash

● **IN THE Netherlands, a Covid-19 testing centre was burned in one village, while police used tear gas against demonstrators in Eindhoven, where cars were burned and businesses looted, and deployed water cannon and dogs in central Amsterdam.**

Paris, Jan. 25: Clashes broke out in the Netherlands on Sunday as anti-curfew demonstrators protested against coronavirus restrictions, while France imposed new border controls with numerous countries under pressure to slow the spread of new variants.

France introduced a requirement for incoming travellers from EU neighbours to show a recent negative coronavirus test and Israel announced it would "close" its skies to almost all aircraft.

In the US, Johns Hopkins University said the coun-

try had topped 25 million cases, remaining the hardest-hit after almost 99 million infections and over 2.1 million deaths worldwide.

In the Netherlands, a Covid-19 testing centre

was burned in one village, while police used tear gas against demonstrators in Eindhoven, where cars were burned and businesses looted, and deployed water cannon and dogs in central Amsterdam.

"The fire in a screening centre in Urk goes beyond all limits," Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said.

The clashes came on the first day of a new 9 pm to 4:30 am curfew, the country's first since World War II.

In Denmark, two men were arrested on Saturday

night for burning an effigy of Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at an anti-restriction protest, while thousands marched against virus measures in Spanish capital Madrid.

France imposed a requirement for a negative PCR test for arrivals by sea and air from European Union neighbours — a measure required for non-EU arrivals since mid-January.

The rule does not apply to those travelling by land, including thousands of cross-border workers. — AFP

MEXICO'S PREZ SAYS HE'S TESTED +VE FOR COVID-19

Mexico City, Jan. 25: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has said that he has tested positive for Covid-19 and that the symptoms are mild. Mexico's president, who has been criticised for his handling of his country's pandemic and for not setting an example of prevention in public, said on his official Twitter account that he is under medical treatment.

"I regret to inform you that I am infected with Covid-19," he tweeted. "The symptoms are mild but I am already under medical treatment. As always, I am optimistic. We will all move forward." José Luis Alomia Zegarra, Mexico's director of epidemiology, said López Obrador had a "light" case of Covid-19 and was "isolating at home." — AP

Israel targets flights, religious scofflaws as infections rage

Jerusalem, Jan. 24: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said Israel will be closing its international airport to nearly all flights, while Israeli police clashed with ultra-Orthodox protesters in several major cities and the government raced to bring a raging Coronavirus outbreak under control. The entry of highly contagious variants of the virus, coupled with poor enforcement of safety rules

in ultra-Orthodox communities, has contributed to one of the world's highest rates of infections.

It also has threatened to undercut Israel's highly successful campaign to vaccinate its population against the virus. In just a month, Israel has vaccinated over a quarter of its 9.2 million people.

At the same time, the virus continues to race through the country, with authorities confirming an

average of over 8,000 new cases a day. Late Sunday, the Israeli Cabinet approved a tight closure on nearly all incoming and outgoing air traffic.

The government said it would make exceptions for a small number of humanitarian cases — such as funerals and medical patients — and cargo flights. "We are closing the skies hermetically, except for really rare exception," Netanyahu said. — AP

B'desh gets vaccines from India

Dhaka, Jan. 25: Bangladesh on Monday received the first consignment of the 5 million doses of Covishield vaccines from India under a procurement agreement, four days after New Delhi gifted 2 million doses of the vaccine to Dhaka. A special Air India flight carrying the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine co-manu-

factured by Serum Institute of India reached the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport earlier in the day to be initially stored at a warehouse of private Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd ahead of their planned countrywide distribution.

Bangladesh has so far purchased 30 million doses from the Serum Institu-

te of India through private Beximco pharmaceuticals under a tripartite agreement. The vaccines are being transported to Beximco warehouses in Tongi on the outskirts of the capital Dhaka in special freezer vans, Beximco Pharma's managing director Nazmul Hassan told reporters after receiving the consignment at the airport.

Health officials said the government experts would check the vaccine samples to see if any temperature fluctuation affected their efficacy and the expiry dates. "Beximco Pharma will send the vaccines to civil surgeons at all of the 64 districts after obtaining certificates from the Drug Administration," a health ministry said.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYAT RAJ DEPARTMENT Villupuram District Notice Inviting Tender		
Upgradation / Strengthening of Panchayat Union / Village Panchayat Roads under SCPAR 2020-2021 Scheme		
1. For full details, visit www.tntenders.gov.in		
2. e-Bids are invited by the Project Director, DRDA, Villupuram District for the Upgradation / Strengthening of 94 No. of Panchayat / Panchayat Union Roads under SCPAR 2020-2021 Scheme, package wise under Two Cover System.		
3. The Package wise bid documents can also be downloaded free of cost in the website www.tntenders.gov.in from 25.01.2021 to 11.02.2021		
4. Common date and time for downloading of Bid document, submission and opening:		
1) Last Date and Time for downloading and submission of e-Bid Documents		: 11.02.2021 upto 3.00 PM
2) Last Date and Time of online opening of e-Bid Documents		: 11.02.2021, 4.00 PM onwards
Project Director, DRDA, Villupuram		

DIPR/509/TENDER/2021

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU / KUMBakonam MUNICIPALITY Roc. No.337/2021/E2 EXPRESSION OF INTEREST NOTICE Dated : 22.01.2021		
1.	Tender Inviting Authority Designation Address	Commissioner Kumbakonam Municipality
2. a	Name of work :Expression of Interest To Maintain and lease the Main Office Building Council Hall, Generator Room, Old stock Room, Record Room, Audit Room, Electrical Superintendent Room Store Room 1 Store Room 2, Vehicle Shed -1 Vehicle Shed - 2 & Driver room Buildings in Old Municipal Office Venue at Dr Moorthy Road including functional and management for a period of 3 years (Initial terms)	
b)	Bid Security	Rs. 5,00,000/-
c)	Processing Fee (Non refundable)	Rs. 10,000/-
3)	Date and Time for the Bid documents available (it can be downloaded at free of cost	15.02.2021 upto 3.00 P.M (Both online and off line)
4.	Due date and time for submission of the bids	15.02.2021 upto 3.00 p.m.
5.	Date and time of opening	15.02.2021 at 3.30 p.m.
DIPR/529/Tender/2021 Commissioner, Kumbakonam Municipality		

DECCAN
Chronicle

26 JANUARY 2021

A time to introspect, and tackle crises with vision

This Republic Day, which comes at the end of our *annus horribilis*, the miserable year of 2020 during which the world was devastated due to the novel Coronavirus pandemic, has to be one in which we must summon fortitude and determination in the face of great adversity, rather than prepare for the celebration of any achievement, for there are none.

The aftershocks of China's continuing invasion of Indian territory in Ladakh have still to be dealt with. This invasion has shown that our guard was down — diplomatically and militarily. The great farmers' uprising — the biggest since Independence — to protest against three agricultural laws is still ongoing.

If steps are not taken on an emergency basis, this can spin out of control. We urge the government to be practical for the sake of the country and show flexibility and compassion, rather than rigidity or exhibit the coercive powers of the State.

The world has fast-tracked the established procedures of science to deal with Covid-19 on an emergency basis and vaccines have at last become available. In India, we are manufacturing an international brand as well as a home-made one.

The best hope is that the available vaccines will at least not cause damage to the human body even if they don't prove wholly efficacious or effective against the virus.

These bring hope, but also uncertainties. It is too early to judge the outcomes of vaccination being administered under emergency protocols.

The best hope is that the available vaccines will at least not cause damage to the human body even if they don't prove wholly efficacious or effective against the virus. After millions of deaths the world over and in India more than one lakh, we also don't know whether or not to expect a second wave.

The role of the government in India has raised many questions. Proactively, the government imposed the world's most severe lockdown to contain the virus' transmission and prayed for the rest. Not placing faith in science at the start, it condoned the transfer of blame for the virus on a communal basis to the country's largest minority. An already fragile social life was rendered more vulnerable. Due to some wholly irrational steps that were taken, the already battered economy now stands devastated. The rate of growth is at minus seven per cent, according to official data.

The hard to digest aspect of the government's response has been its stubborn refusal to release funds, except on the most perfunctory basis, to the vulnerable sections of the people and the economy in order to kickstart economic activity. This was the opposite of what other major nations did.

Ironically, in the pandemic period, the assets of billionaires in India have gone up 35 per cent, according to a recent Oxfam report, which refers to Covid-19 as the "inequality virus". At the same time, roughly 100 million Indians found themselves out of work. These were the seasonal workforce or workers in the informal sector, which is the biggest generator of employment outside agriculture.

The Budget is around the corner and the finance minister is on test. Will she take effective steps to ameliorate the conditions of the majority of the population or pay lip service to them while working principally for those who were the beneficiaries of the pandemic economy. The government must act as the first responder in any crisis. This Republic Day it must resolve to respond with vision and energy.

Symbol of a noisy republic

The might of the Indian Republic and national pride will be reflected in the military precision of the traditional parade on New Delhi's Rajpath on Tuesday. Joining on this special day, as a democratic counterpoint to the State's pomp and pageantry, will be the solidarity of a collection of farmers fighting a battle against three contentious farm laws. A republic is defined as a system of governance that allows a country to be democratic. No great clash of principles, therefore, stands in the way of allowing this demonstration of the will of a section of the people. To keep the peace during the rally is, of course, the farmers' responsibility, while it's the State's duty to provide security.

There are multiple voices to be heard in a democracy and minor irritants like inspired campaigns, like the one the Delhi police is complaining of, said to be emanating from 300-plus Pakistani Twitter handles, shouldn't be allowed to disrupt the process of peaceful life. A nation that knows how to switch off the Internet for over a year in the Kashmir Valley due to fears of disruptive voices from across the border should be capable of taking on mischievous elements sprouting propaganda through social media disinformation. How long does it take to respond tactically to those who are inimical to the idea of a diverse and pluralist democracy that is India?

The threat from the stoking of divisive tendencies by reviving the idea of "Khalistan" may be real enough, but history tells us that India has come through such threats without being too badly burnt. It should be no different this time, when it is important for rulers to be able to lend an ear to various voices and address problems that are real. As 20,000-plus tractors roll on New Delhi's Outer Ring Road on Tuesday, they may be symbolic of a noisy republic that we may have become in 70-plus years since January 26, 1950. That is no reason to be distracted from the task of listening to our own people.

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Aakar Patel



Growth is just not picking up, but no end to triumphalism

We have entered the 13th consecutive quarter of economic slowdown in India. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), meaning the total value of services and goods produced in this country in the last 12 months, has shrunk in 2020-2021, compared to 2019-2020. We made less than we did in the previous year. To return to where we were in January 2020, it will take perhaps another year. Perhaps longer, we do not know.

The problem did not begin with the Covid-19 pandemic; it existed much before that. Growth began declining from January 2018 and has declined sequentially, meaning every quarter since then. The government has tried to tweak some of the numbers, something that Americans refer to as "putting lipstick on a pig", but to no avail. It is a sequential decline over three years. The India growth story is over and has been over for a few years now. You can make all the speeches that you want, you cannot argue against 39 straight months of slowing down.

Speaking loudly of competing with China and America but then

falling behind even Bangladesh's per capita GDP does not inspire confidence. The fact is that even without the lockdown we were in a crisis, a word that is used loosely but can be said to be accurate here. The government has no idea why the economy began to stall from January 2018. There are theories from the outside, but they are not discussed or debated in the government — who will tell the king that his rule is incompetent? Nobody, unless they want to lose their head (or at least their job), and so we continue to bumble on, along the same path that has brought us to this disaster.

The signs of our decay are all around us. Work that has left China because of Donald Trump's trade war and Covid-19 has not come to India but to Vietnam and Bangladesh.

Our neighbour has crept ahead of us in per capita GDP because its exports (powered by high-labour garments manufacturing) are growing, while ours have not grown since 2014. We have six years of zero growth in exports. It is also ahead because it has a much higher participation of women in

the labour force. In India, the patriarchy is more concerned about who Indians marry rather than why they are not working. India is the most dangerous place for women in the world. According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation's World's Most Dangerous Countries for Women, we were at fourth place in 2011 and then fell to last place in 2018, where presumably we still remain.

The low participation of women in the workforce has many complex reasons, but the failure of the State and indeed the inability of this current government to stop the slide further, is also responsible.

We have more of the same to look forward to in 2021. We will not see the economy pick up, but we will see more bombast from the government about how well we are doing. The enormous hole in the economy that was created in the first quarter of last year (April-June) because of the lockdown will have been filled over the last few months. When results for the same quarter year on year appear sometime in the middle of 2021, Prime Minister Modi will exclaim that we are the world's fastest growing economy

and pretend that the 25 per cent increase is not just the filling up of a hole he had himself created but some miracle he has delivered to the Indian economy. *The Economist* has reported that Mukesh Ambani's wealth rose 350 per cent in 2020 and Gautam Adani's rose over 700 per cent, but we are at record unemployment, which is hovering around the nine per cent mark. And it is not higher still only because many crore Indians have removed themselves from the job market. Those who are not employed and are not actively looking for work are not considered unemployed. The real figure could be approaching 15 per cent, and perhaps even higher than that. On every conceivable metric that you can think of, from bank credit growth to automobile sales, the revelation is not only that there is no India growth story but there is a decline that has set us back years, perhaps a decade.

And yet the triumphalism carries on. The BJP won almost half the seats in West Bengal in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, and one will be very surprised if they do not win the Assembly election there later

this year. The amount of resources they have because of the electoral bonds and because of the broad support that Narendra Modi gets from Corporate India can't be matched by any other party and in fact can't be matched by all the other parties put together.

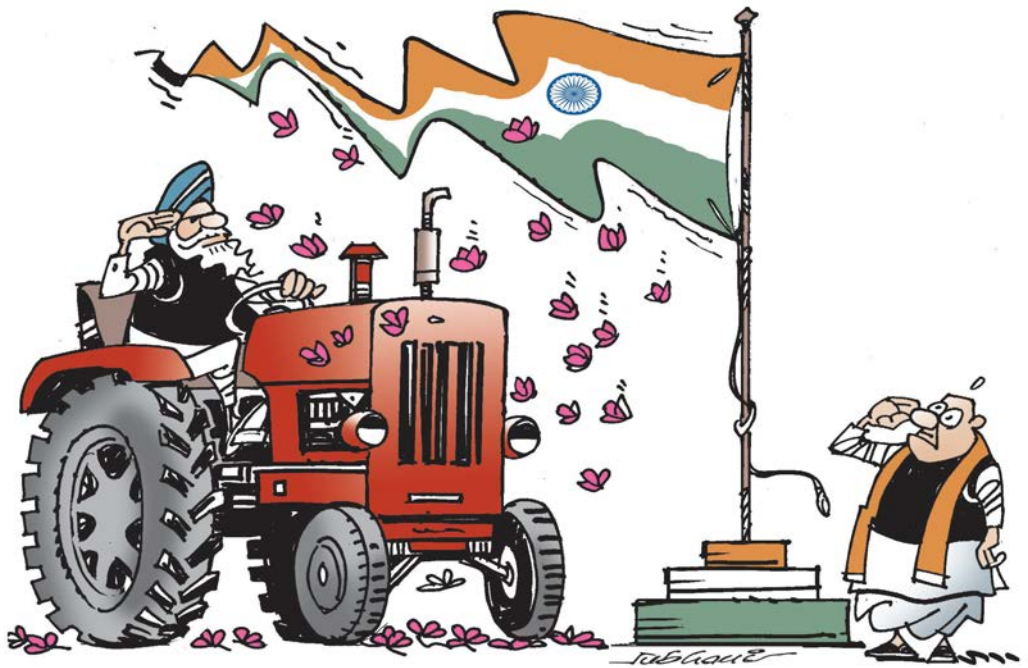
Another state will fall to the BJP, and if it doesn't this time then certainly it will the next.

Elsewhere, society has been torn apart, most likely in a way that cannot ever be repaired. I am not saying this out of despair, but one has to be realistic. This amount of poison being injected from the top cannot be detoxified without resistance and one sees no resistance to it.

On every parameter, from economic decline to national security failures to unemployment to social tensions, India will continue on the path that it has chosen for itself since 2014. But at least Narendra Modi will continue to be popular, making his daily sermons about how much better things are under him and how bad it was in the past.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

Subhani



Battle for Bengal: BJP to face hidden pitfalls



Shikha Mukerjee

Before it can defeat Mamata Banerjee, the BJP has to find a way of disarming the Bengali. As a target, Mamata Banerjee could be vulnerable if the grievances of the discontented were the only issue. But the Trinamul Congress and its leader are embedded in the tricky topography of West Bengal, which is peppered with hidden pitfalls.

Armed with its brand and its scorecard in elections across India, the BJP is anticipating a tough fight to attain its goal of fusing the state with the main body of a saffronised Bharat, of reaching the point where it can claim that the nation is governed by one party. Yet, the seemingly closer it gets to pulling off an election victory in West Bengal, the more elusive its target appears.

The Bengali spirit has insinuated itself between the BJP's hopes and Mamata Banerjee's fightback. It was this that was out in the open when Ms Banerjee launched the year-long celebrations of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's 125th birth anniversary on January 23, with a rally and a spontaneous burst of song, a surging crowd of people and finally a ringing assertion that Bengal was the crucible that crafted a new vision of a modern India, gave birth to the national movement and defined patriotism by the struggles and sacrifices of its mesmerising leaders. In contrast, the curated, organised and hygienicaly wrapped celebrations for an audience of essentially one, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and television viewers was a sanitised, lifeless, joyless programme, minus the exuberance and pride that is quintessentially Bengali.

Voters and their contradictory allegiances and

primordial attachments are whimsical and wayward; none more so than the Bengalis. Impressions matter; though not necessarily the first ones.

When Ms Banerjee declined to speak at Victoria Memorial at the spectacle organised by the Union government because she felt insulted by her hosts, she upstaged the Prime Minister, the hecklers and the BJP, by shrewdly turning it into a desecration of the spirit by bully boys primed to create trouble. Television and Twitter went into a frenzy of reactions. The BJP's army of defenders went on the offensive, asserting that Mamata Banerjee had insulted Shri Ram and Netaji. The Trinamul Congress went into overdrive, accusing the BJP and its leadership of intimidation, harassment and disrespect.

Having already paid her homage to Netaji by hitting the streets in a 6 km walk and a rally where she demanded a list of changes in his name, Ms Banerjee was ready to checkmate the BJP and Modi. In doing so she heavily underlined the difference between celebrating Netaji and his vision and reworked by generations of authors and amateur and professional researchers. In every Kolkata para (locality) events; Mr Modi's was entirely alien to the Bengali tradition. While the jury is inclined to believe that the homage to Netaji was debased by petty politics, the verdict will be delivered sometime in May, when the ballots are counted for the state Assembly elections.

If the BJP had studied the traditions of the celebration of Netaji Jayanti in West Bengal over the decades, it would have discovered the facts and stopped itself from inventing a fiction. In the scramble to and cover up the mistimed and misdirect-

ed attack on Mamata, the BJP's IT cell boss Amit Malviya was so rattled that he declared she had walked out of the event in a huff. To cover that up, the BJP's army of defenders declared that Netaji's birthday had never been celebrated in style in West Bengal. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact that the All India Forward Bloc's headquarters are in Kolkata is incontrovertible evidence that Netaji's birth anniversary was dutifully and faithfully observed every year. As the party set up by the leader in 1939, when he asked members to swear a blood oath to devote themselves to the cause of a militant freedom struggle, the Forward Bloc's small presence in West Bengal politics is nevertheless a meaningful one.

For decades, rickety scaffolding was annually erected at the Netaji statue in Esplanade and at the Shyambazar five-point crossing, where generations of Forward Bloc leaders have ascended the steps to garland the icon, as have leaders from the Congress and the CPM and the CPI, as homage to a Bengali and a national hero, cruelly snatched by a mysterious death from becoming Independent India's tallest leader, be it as Prime Minister or as President.

The memory of Netaji lives on in humble homes as a framed portrait. It lives in the conspiracy theories written and reworked by generations of authors and amateur and professional researchers. In every Kolkata para (locality) Netaji Jayanti is a local affair; children practise marching to the drums weeks in advance and then the procession through the streets mimicking the Azad Hind Fauj progressing to free the nation from

imperial bondage. In consonance with this spirit, Ms Banerjee's celebration was inclusive and participatory.

Netaji's grand-nephew Sugata Bose, the eminent historian, led the concluding event.

It was the right occasion for Mamata Banerjee to invoke the injured aspirations of the Bengali people. She demanded that Kolkata should be returned to its former status as a national capital; the Planning Commission should be revived, because it was conceived by Netaji; a monument to the Azad Hind Fauj should be erected in New Delhi. These were sentiments that are the dull nagging ache in every Bengali heart, where the idea that Bengal was the birthplace of India's nationalism, its radical social reforms and its ideology of secularism, unity, communal harmony and diversity.

The distance between Bengali pride and the BJP's blunders can be measured in the last-moment inclusion of the visit to Netaji Bhavan in the Prime Minister's itinerary. To close the gaps in its knowledge of and familiarity with the Bengali mind, spirit, traditions and contradictions the BJP has a mere three months before the elections.

For the BJP to become local, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to poach "local" leaders from the Trinamul Congress and destabilise the party. It has to organically integrate. As is evident, this is an endeavour that would be difficult because of the contest between Bengali narratives of nationalism and its development over time and the BJP's hybrid version, enshrined in books — Hindutva, Hindu Rashtra Darshan — and now being translated into practice.

Steering between the simplistic and the messy complexities of identity politics in West Bengal, the BJP is travelling over a minefield.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

BEYOND FARM YARDS

If the government had felt that the enacted laws are in order and farmer friendly it could have marketed the proposals to the stakeholders of the agri sector with greater persuasion before tabling the bills or dealt more firmly with the agitations now that they have become law. In plain terms, it wanted the pie and eat it too as it needs the farmer vote bank as much as it needs to show its executive supremacy. Let us hope the government learns lasting lessons, beyond farmyards.

R. Narayanan, Chennai

CONFUSED TN ELECTORATE

THE HONEYMOON between DMK and Congress seems to be coming to an end going by the recent happenings in Tamil Nadu. There is no denying that the political scenario in Tamil Nadu is becoming confusing. The relationship between the AIADMK and the BJP too has not been too good since the beginning. There are so many parties at present vying with one another to align with a party having maximum chances of winning the elections. No party seems to be in a commanding position at present. The DMDK, PMK and VCK could give support to any party in the coming days. Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam seems to be the only party having the guts to contest alone in all 234 constituencies. It is the people who will be facing a difficult time in selecting the right party for a stable government.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

COVID VACCINATION

EXTRAORDINARY SITUATIONS need extraordinary remedies. When a swarm of mosquitoes bites, you don't count the number of mosquitoes or study their genre but use a mosquito bat or spray to kill them. Hence a vaccine that is 100 per cent reliable is not possible anywhere in the world when a dreaded virus is taking a heavy toll of people's lives. Doomsayers might point out the hasty approval for the two vaccines as well their side-effects like pain, redness, swelling or itching, but such side effects are common to all vaccines. Rather than spread lies and rumours about the vaccines they must step forward and assist in the vaccination. Indeed our scientists have burnt their midnight oil and the government has already tried the vaccines on more than a million doctors, nurses, sanitary workers and nurses without serious side effects. The Lancet magazine says the side effects of these vaccines on people have been mild and moderate. And WHO has welcomed India's vaccine initiative.

Kangayam R. Nrasimhan, Chennai

**TOP
PAIRS
SIGNAL
WITH MOST
CARDS**

SHORT TAKES

Mouma among 6 to get Padma Shri

New Delhi: Veteran table tennis player Mouma Das was among six sportspersons who were awarded the prestigious Padma Shri by the Government of India on the eve of the country's 72nd Republic Day.

Besides Mouma, basketball player P. Anitha, athletics coach Madhavan Nambiar, athlete Sudha Hari Narayan Singh, Deaf Olympics gold medalist wrestler Virender Singh, and a legendary dwarf athlete KY Venkatesh have also been awarded the prestigious award in the sports category for the year.

Every year, the award winners are announced on the eve of Republic Day. The Padma awardees are felicitated by the President of India.

— PTI

Hockey girls end tour undefeated

Santiago, Chile: The visiting Indian women's junior hockey team pipped the Chile senior side 2-1 in sixth and final match to end the tour unbeaten. Forward Beauty Dungdung's brace scored in the 6th and 26th minutes gave India a much deserved win while the lone goal for the hosts was scored by Francisca Tala (40th) on Sunday.

With their narrow victory in the sixth and final match, the young Indian team returns to the country with an undefeated streak, winning five and drawing one game.

In Buenos Aires, the Indian women's senior hockey team suffered their second consecutive loss on the tour of Argentina, going down 2-3 to the hosts' B side in a thrilling clash here. — PTI

India U-16 edge UAE in friendly

New Delhi: Second-half substitute Suhail Ahmed Bhat struck the target in the 79th minute from Taison Singh's cross as India's U-16 football team earned a 1-0 victory over their counterparts from UAE in Dubai.

Suhail, who came off the bench and scored the decisive goal on Sunday night, dedicated his goal to his teammates.

This was his first international goal wearing the India jersey.

"I'm very happy to have scored my first international goal. I would like to dedicate this goal to my teammates. It was a result of pure team effort and nothing else," the young attacker said. Although the hosts pushed hard from the word go, Indian defenders kept them at bay. — PTI

Clippers stretch winning streak

Los Angeles: Kawhi Leonard scored a game-high 34 points as the Los Angeles Clippers extended their season-high NBA win streak to seven games with a 108-100 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder on Sunday.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Pakistan vs South Africa: First Test, Day 1 from 10.30 am on Sony Ten 2 HD

Big Bash League: Melbourne Renegades vs Hobart Hurricanes from 10.40 am; Melbourne Stars vs Sydney Sixers from 2.20 pm on Sony Six, HD

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 Tournament: Quarterfinals — Punjab vs Karnataka from 11.55 am; Tamil Nadu vs Himachal Pradesh from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

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

English Premier League: Newcastle United vs Leeds United from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; Crystal Palace vs West Ham United from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2; West Brom vs Manchester City from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on Star Sports Select 1; Southampton vs Arsenal from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on Star Sports Select HD

WWE

Superstar Spectacle: Bouts from 8 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes (left) shoots over the wall to score from a free kick in their English FA Cup fourth round match against Liverpool at Old Trafford in Manchester on Sunday.

— AFP

BRUNO BLASTS REDS

Fernandes gem knocks Liverpool out of FA Cup

Manchester, Jan. 25: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer hailed Bruno Fernandes's dedication to perfecting his free-kick technique as the Portuguese's stunning strike earned Manchester United a thrilling 3-2 win over Liverpool to reach the FA Cup fifth round on Sunday.

Solskjaer handed Fernandes a rare rest from the start with cup win of Jurgen Klopp's reign goes on to compound their faltering league form.

The English champions have fallen six points behind United after failing to score in their last four league games.

However, there was hope for Klopp of a revival as Mohamed Salah scored twice.

about 45 minutes after training yesterday shooting free kicks so I was pretty confident he could score one if he got the chance," said Solskjaer.

"He's never happy with me when I tell him to go inside after training when he's playing the next day, so he got some practice yesterday."

Liverpool's wait for a first domestic cup win of Jurgen Klopp's reign goes on to compound their faltering league form.

The English champions have fallen six points behind United after failing to score in their last four league games.

However, there was hope for Klopp of a revival as Mohamed Salah scored twice.

THE RESULTS

Manchester United	3
(Greenwood 26, Rashford 48, Fernandes 78)	
Liverpool	2
(Salah 18, 59)	
Everton	3
(Calvert-Lewin 29, Richardson 59, Mina 62)	
Sheffield Wednesday	0
Brentford	1
(Sorensen 7)	
Leicester	3
(Under 46, Tielemans 51-pen, Maddison 71)	
Fulham	0
Burnley	3
(Rodriguez 31, 71-pen, Long 81)	

"If you want to win here you have to be absolutely top and we were not," said Klopp, who is yet to win in six visits to Old Trafford as Liverpool manager.

Elsewhere, Leicester and Everton were also successful over Championship opposition to maintain their fine form.

The Foxes came from behind to beat Brentford 3-1 to set up a home tie against Brighton.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin struck on his return from injury as Everton saw off Sheffield Wednesday 3-0. Carlo Ancelotti's men will face the winners of Tottenham's trip to Wycombe on Monday.

Burnley beat Fulham 3-0 at Craven Cottage. — AFP

SUAREZ BANG ON TARGET FOR ATLETICO

Madrid, Jan. 25: Luis Suarez scored a brilliant team goal as Atletico Madrid came from behind to beat Valencia 3-1 on Sunday and move seven points clear at the top of La Liga.

After Real Madrid thrashed Alaves on Saturday, Barca had earlier followed suit with a scrappy win over Elche.

But Atletico were under-terred in the capital, as their considerable advantage was restored again, with a game in hand.

Suarez finished off a flowing move that had started almost on Atletico's goal-line before substitute Angel Correa capped another slick string of passes to end Valencia's resistance.

BARCA WIN WITHOUT MESSI

Barcelona won again without the suspended Lionel Messi as goals from Frenkie de Jong and Riqui Puig were enough to secure a scruffy 2-0 win over Elche.

De Jong poked the ball over the line just before half-time at the Martinez Valero, which would have proved a suitably scrappy winner before Puig came off the bench to head in a second late on.

Despite an uninspiring performance, Ronald Koeman will be relieved to see Barca make it two consecutive victories without Messi. — AFP

Lampard axed, Tuchel may be in

London, Jan. 25: Chelsea sacked manager Frank Lampard on Monday after 18 months in charge, with former Paris Saint-Germain boss Thomas Tuchel reportedly set to replace him at Stamford Bridge.

Sunday's 3-1 FA Cup fourth-round win against Championship side Luton was not enough to save Lampard, whose team have slumped to ninth place in the Premier League.

Chelsea said it had been a "very difficult decision" to part ways with the 42-year-old, who replaced Maurizio Sarri in July 2019.

"We are grateful to Frank for what he has achieved in his time as



Frank Lampard

head coach of the club," Chelsea said in a statement.

"However, recent results and performances have not met the club's expectations, leaving the club mid-table without any

clear path to sustained improvement."

The club's Russian owner Roman Abramovich said: "This was a very difficult decision for the club, not least because I have an excel-

lent personal relationship with Frank and I have the utmost respect for him.

"He is a man of great integrity and has the highest of work ethics. However, under current circumstances we believe it is best to change managers."

Former PSG boss Tuchel, who was abruptly sacked by the French champions in December, is in line to take over, reports said.

Chelsea are struggling in ninth place in the Premier League table, 11 points behind leaders Manchester United.

They have lost five of their past eight Premier League matches after a good start to the season. — AFP

MUSHTAQ ALI | KNOCKOUTS

TN to take on HP in quarters

Ahmedabad, Jan. 25: It will be the last chance for the domestic players to impress before the all-important IPL auction when the knock-outs from the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy begin here from Tuesday.

While Karnataka will go all out looking to retain the title, the seven other teams which have made it to the quarterfinals, will be itching to make an impact and get their names inscribed on the trophy.

A mighty Punjab team stands between Karnataka and their title defence as the two teams will square-off in the first quarterfinal, which is expected to be an even battle.

Punjab made it to the knock-outs from Elite Group 'A' after winning all their five games in the league stage, while Karnataka also scraped to the final eight, despite being second on the points table in Group 'A', having lost one game.

● **Karnataka will go all out looking to retain the title, the seven other teams which have made it to the quarterfinals, will be itching to make an impact and get their names inscribed on the trophy.**

In the second quarterfinal, for Tamil Nadu, attacking opener N. Jagadeesan, who is the leading run-getter in the tournament so far with 315 runs and skipper Dinesh Karthik, will again be the key players in their clash against Himachal Pradesh, who came through from Elite Group 'C'.

In the third quarterfinal too, it could be tough for Baroda to overcome the challenge of Haryana, without the services of the Pandya brothers — Hardik and Krunal. — PTI

SIBLEY, BUTTLER HELP ENG SWEEP LANKA SERIES

Galle (Sri Lanka), Jan. 25: Dom Sibley and Jos Buttler anchored a run chase after a jittery start as England beat Sri Lanka by six wickets on Monday in the second Test to sweep the series 2-0.

Sibley and Buttler put on an unbeaten 75-run stand as England, who were struggling at 89-4, got to their target of 164 in an extended final session on the fourth day in Galle.

The result gave England a second successive Test whitewash in Sri Lanka after winning all three matches in the island nation in 2018.

England were given a deadline to finish in the day after spinners Jack Leach and Dom Bess skittled out Sri Lanka for 126 in their second innings.

Left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya claimed three wickets that gave Sri Lanka hope and helped him to his Test-best match figures of 10-200. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 381 & 126 (L. Embuldeniya 40, Bess 4/49, Leach 4/59) lost to **England 334 & 164/4** (D. Sibley not out 56, J. Buttler not out 46; Embuldeniya 3/73).

Pant overcomes 'outside noise' to emerge winner

New Delhi, Jan. 25: Rishabh Pant has navigated a wave of criticism and ridicule with his electrifying strokes in Australia but not long ago, the wicket-keeper was "feeling the heat each and every day" even after cutting himself off from the outside world.

Up against one of the best bowling attacks of all time, Pant came into his own during the Test matches in Sydney and Brisbane, where he successfully powered India to an epic win days after failing to do so by a whisker in the third and penultimate match.

But the time prior to those two knocks of 97 and 89, the first one coming after he had taken two painkilling injections and sedatives, wasn't so kind on the player who has been carrying huge expectations since bursting on to the scene.

"I was feeling the heat each and every day, it's part and parcel of the game. But as an individual you need to believe in yourself," Pant, a key player in the team's 2-1 series triumph, told *India Today*.

"If you're moving forward then you're improving, this is what I've learnt



Rishabh Pant

during the tough phase. Focus so much on your game that you don't notice anything else. It's difficult also to block the outside noise because of social media but I have segregated myself from it.

"When you're doing well people will write good but when you're not, they will criticise you. It's part and parcel of a cricketer's life nowadays. So if you don't focus on the criticism and instead focus on your cricket then that's much better I guess," he added.

The 23-year-old's hard work paid dividends as he finished the four-match Test series as the third highest scorer with 274 runs from three matches.

Set a record target of 328 to win the match and series in Brisbane, Pant said he was always focused on going after it as draw was never an option for him.

"The mindset was always to play normal cricket, even the team management spoke about it in the first innings. Let's look to score runs, cash in on the loose balls, just stick in there and do whatever you can at that time."

"The team management's plan from the beginning of the match was 'let's look to win the match'. Even my thinking has always been to win. I just want to win every game, draw is always the secondary option," he said. — PTI

Footballers die in plane crash

Rio de Janeiro, Jan. 25: Four football players from Brazilian club Palmas died in a plane crash while traveling separately from the team after testing positive for the coronavirus, the club said.

The club's president also died in the crash after the plane suddenly plunged to the ground at the end of the runway while on take-off in the northern state of Tocantins, the team reported. The pilot also died.

The players were on their way to Goiania, in the central region of the country, to play a match against Vila Nova.

"The players were traveling in a private plane because they had tested positive for Covid-19," club spokesperson Izabela Martins informed.

● **The four players of Brazilian club Palmas were travelling in a private plane because they had tested positive for Covid-19. The club's president also died in the crash.**

Tocantins fire officials reported that the twin-engine Baron model had a capacity of six occupants. When firefighters arrived at the crash site, 500 meters from the runway, the aircraft was being consumed by fire. At least two explosions were registered, according to the official report.

The Brazilian Football Confederation expressed its solidarity with Palmas' family members and the club's fans in an official note, and it ordered a minute of silence in all matches played Sunday as a sign of mourning.

In 2016, a plane crash killed 19 players of the Chapecoense soccer club. Chapecoense's plane went down en route to the club's first-ever South American tournament final in Colombia after it ran out of fuel near Medellin.

"Unfortunately, we know what this moment of pain is like and we wish that no other group had to feel the same," Chapecoense said in a statement. — AP



Four Palmas players and the club president have been killed after their plane crashed on take-off.

— TWITTER/BRASIL FOOTBALL

NAPOLI LOSE AT VERONA AS JUVE MOVE INTO TOP FOUR

Milan, Jan. 25: Hirving Lozano scored after just nine seconds but Napoli lost 3-1 at Hellas Verona on Sunday, allowing Juventus to climb into the Serie A top four after beating Bologna.

Juventus, chasing a 10th straight Scudetto, won 2-0 earlier Sunday to move seven points behind leaders AC Milan with a game in hand.

AC Milan held onto top spot on Saturday despite falling to a 3-0 home defeat by Atalanta, while second-placed Inter settled for a goalless draw at Udinese.

Napoli missed the chance to move ahead of Juventus and sit sixth, two points adrift of the Champions League berths, equal on 34 points with Lazio who beat European rivals Sassuolo 2-1.

"We have only ourselves to blame," lamented Napoli coach Gennaro Gattuso.

"If you score and then at the first opportunity you fall apart, that's not good. We want to return to the Champions League but we can't if we perform like this."

Napoli are now equal on points with Lazio who rallied past Sassuolo, to stretch their winning streak to four games. — AFP

CHENNAI | TEST

ENGLAND WILL GET ONLY THREE DAYS TO TRAIN

London, Jan. 25: England will get only three days to train before the first Test in India from February 5 due to a six-day quarantine requirement for the visitors, who will land in the country after completing their tour of Sri Lanka.

The *Telegraph* reported that the England squad will fly to Chennai on Wednesday for the first two Tests of the four-match series and will undergo a strict quarantine on arrival.

Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer and Rory Burns, who were not part of the Sri Lanka series, arrived in India on Sunday night and will get five days to train following their hotel quarantine.

All players will be tested for Covid-19 thrice over six days. England players were allowed to train in Sri Lanka 48 hours after their arrival with only Moeen Ali returning a positive test on arrival.

It will be first international series to be held in India amid the pandemic.

The last two Tests had been played in Ahmedabad from February 24. — PTI