

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

NELLORE | THURSDAY | 28 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 31.0°C
Min: 22.5°C
RH: 77%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: clear.
 Max/Min temp. 31/22 °C

COVID-19 CUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+12,159)	(+138)
1,07,01,427	1,53,862
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+147)	(+1)
TS: 2,93,737	1,593
(+111)	(+2)
AP: 8,78,828	7,152

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

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

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Purnima till 12.42 am (Friday)
Star: Pushyami till 3.48 am (Friday)
Variyam: 11.47 am to 1.23 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.36 am to 11.21 am; 3.06 pm to 3.50 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
 Jamadi- ul- Akhir 14,1442 AH
PRAYERS (SHAHI MASJID)
Fajar: 5.24 am
Zohar: 12.22 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 6.06 pm
Isha: 7.19 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.07 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.38 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 5.48 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.03 AM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

SC stays HC order on sexual assault

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

Delhi HC quizzes Centre on EIA

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



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Tandav makers fail to get relief

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Trump likely to be acquitted in trial

SPORTS | 8

Sindhu, Srikanth lose opening matches



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CM orders house site distribution in 3 days

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has called for completion of house site patta distribution under Navaratnalu-Pedalandariki Illu scheme in the next two-three days. He was reviewing the progress of the scheme at his camp office in Tadepalli on Wednesday. The Chief Minister said that 87.17 per cent house pattas were distributed in 13 districts and asked the officials to distribute the remaining in the two-three days. He further instructed sanction of house sites to eligible persons within 90 days of receiving applications and stated that the housing scheme and issue of title deeds were a continuous process. He said volunteers and staff of the village secretariat must complete phys-

THE CHIEF MINISTER said that 87.17 per cent house pattas were distributed in 13 districts and asked the officials to distribute the remaining in the two-three days.

HE FURTHER instructed sanction of house sites to eligible persons within 90 days of receiving applications

ical verification within 12 days of receiving the application and beneficiaries should be identified through social audit. The Chief Minister directed the officials to take steps to ensure uniformity and quality in the structures and to furnish full details on facilities provided and their mode of construction. He said internet facilities should be provided in

YSR Jagananna colonies. He said bio-mining should be conducted for dumping yards and it should begin as soon as possible. The officials briefed about the steps being taken to create infrastructure in YSR Jagananna colonies. They said a detailed project report for the same would be completed by March 31. They said steps are being taken for Anganwadi centres, YSR clinics, primary health centres, schools, bus stops proportionate to the population in the colonies. Housing minister Cherukuvada Ranganatha Raju, Chief Commissioner for Land Administration Nee-rab Kumar Prasad, principal secretaries Y. Srilakshmi (municipal affairs), Ajay Jain (housing), Usharani (revenue), Chief Minister's principal adviser Nilam Sawhney and others were present.

3 MORE RAFALES LEAVE FOR INDIA FROM FRANCE

New Delhi, Jan. 27: A third batch of three more Rafale fighter jets on Wednesday took off from France for a non-stop flight to India, in a further boost to the strike capability of the Indian Air Force. The Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) of the United Arab Emirates will provide mid-air refuelling to the three Rafale jets, according to the Indian Embassy in France. The first batch of five Rafale jets arrived in India on July 29, 2020, nearly four years after India signed an inter-governmental agreement with France to procure 36 of the aircraft at a cost of ₹59,000 crore. The second batch of three Rafale fighter jets arrived in India on November 3. —PTI

AP gives Covid-19 jab to 1.5L people

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Nearly 1.5 lakh healthcare staff have been administered the Covid-19 vaccine in AP since January 16. Though it was initially planned to conduct the first phase of vaccination up to January 20, this phase will continue till January 29. Except for two days — holidays on January 24, Sunday, and January 26, Republic Day — the vaccination programme continued uninterrupted. The authorities maintain that Covishield or Covaxin was given to nearly 1.49,760 persons. Out of these, about 50 persons developed minor adverse reactions following immunisation — like fever, body pain, giddi-

ness, headache. It is being ascertained how the death of a 44-year-old ASHA worker occurred at the government hospital in Guntur a few days after taking the vaccine shot. Her pathology and autopsy reports are awaited. After the completion of Covid-19 vaccination on January 29, the authorities will give a few days' gap. Pulse polio vaccination will be taken up at booth level up to February 2, at door-to-door level. The second phase of the Covid-19 vaccination will start either on February 5 or 7, targeting frontline workers from departments like police, revenue, municipal administration and panchayat raj.

■ Page 2: AP got 10 lakh Covid vaccine shots



Family members pay homage to martyr Lieutenant Colonel Rishabh Sharma, who died on January 25 in a helicopter crash between Pathankot and Kathua in Jammu, in Faridabad, on Wednesday. — PTI

SHOW | TIME

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

More people allowed into film theatres

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

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

from February 1, there shall be no restriction on inter-state and intra-state movement of people and goods including those for cross land-border trade. Social, religious, sports, entertainment, educational, cultural, religious gatherings have been permitted up to a maximum of 50 per cent of the hall capacity, with a ceiling of 200 people in closed spaces and in keeping with the size of open spaces. The caps on these gatherings will be subject to stan-

dard operating procedure (SOP) of the state and Union Territory concerned, the home ministry said. "Cinema halls and theatres have already been permitted up to 50 per cent of seating capacity. Now they will be permitted to operate at higher seating capacity, for which a revised SOP will be issued by the ministry of information and broadcasting in consultation with MHA," the guidelines said. Cinema houses opened are

running to house full shows, and managements have asked the government to allow them to all more viewers per show, both in view of public demand and to cover the losses sustained during the lockdown period. Tamil Nadu briefly allowed 100 per cent capacity in theatres. Swimming pools have already been permitted for use of sports persons. Now these will be permitted for use of all, for which a revised standard operating procedure will be

issued by ministry of youth affairs and sports in consultation. Gyms have reopened several months back, as well as parks, and the reopening of swimming pools gives those keeping a fitness regimen another avenue to keep fit. For casual swimmers, this order comes just in time for the traditional opening of swimming pools ahead of the summer. Business to business (B2B) exhibition halls have already been permitted. Now all types of exhibition

halls will be permitted, for which a revised standard operating procedure will be issued by the department of commerce. The main focus of the guidelines is to consolidate the substantial gains that have been achieved against the spread of Covid-19 disease which is visible in the steady decline in number of active and new cases in the country over the last four months, the ministry of home affairs said in the statement.

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

A day after the national capital witnessed unprecedented violence during the Republic Day tractor rally, two farmer unions — the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) — on Wednesday broke away from protests against the contentious agriculture laws at Delhi borders. AIKSCC leader V.M. Singh said his organisation is withdrawing from the agitation with immediate effect because the format of the protest is "unacceptable" to it. "We are discontinuing our agitation but our fight for the rights of the farmers will continue," he said at Ghaziipur border. Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait, who has been at the forefront of the agitation, has alleged that the violence was part of a conspiracy of certain forces to defame their "genuine" movement to protect the interests of the farmers.

Bharatiya Kisan Union president Thakur Bhanu Pratap Singh said he too is withdrawing from the protest as he was pained to see the violence in Delhi. Even after the two farmer unions withdrew from the protests, the Samyuktha Kisan Morcha made it clear that they will not call off their agitation. The Delhi police on Wednesday arrested 19 protesters and detained over 50 others on charges of rioting, damaging public property and attacking police personnel. The police also lodged cases against several farmer leaders.



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

FARMERS BLAME DEEP SIDHU FOR RELIGIOUS FLAG

Chandigarh, Jan. 27: Actor-turned-activist Deep Sidhu is in the eye of a storm for being among the protesters who put up a religious flag atop the Red Fort on Republic Day. Many farmers' bodies blamed him for inciting protesters to head towards the Red Fort on Tuesday. They accused 36-year-old Sidhu of allegedly trying to defame the farmers' peaceful agitation against the agri reforms introduced by the Centre. Sidhu has been considered by several farm bodies as an "agent" of the government. —PTI

Cops blame farmer leaders for violence

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

A day after the national capital saw unprecedented violence during the farmers' Republic Day tractor rally, Delhi police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava said on Wednesday some farmers' leaders were also involved in the violence and that all those involved will not be spared. A Special Investigation Team has been constituted to investigate the incident. The police has registered 25 FIRs for rioting, robbing, attempt to murder

and other criminal offences across against several people, including some farmers' leaders, and 19 people have been arrested while around 200 other were detained and 50 were questioned. The Delhi police has named 37 farmers' leaders, including Medha Patkar and Yogendra Yadav, in an FIR registered at the Samaypur Badli police station in connection with the violence. According to the FIR, the protesters also robbed an official pistol with 10 rounds of ammunition along with two gas guns.

EXPULLED AIADMK LEADER SASIKALA FREE, NEW JAYA MEMORIAL IN TN

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

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami inaugurated the phoenix-themed memorial for party supremo late J. Jayalalithaa amid a huge show of strength in Chennai while in Bengaluru expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala, a close associate of the former CM, was released after serving four years of imprisonment in a corruption case. Sources said she is likely to leave for Chennai in the first week of February. Speaking to reporters, MLA T.T.V. Dhinakaran, Sasikala's nephew and founder of Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK), said "the release of Chinnama" (Sasikala) was the happiest moment for all of them. "People in TN are eagerly waiting for her," he said. Sasikala is suffering from Covid and has to remain at the Victoria Hospital for another three days. A large number of Sasikala supporters lined up outside the hospital, raised slogans in her favour and distributed sweets in celebration. Back in Chennai, the memorial, also housing a digital museum, spread across 50,422 square feet, built at a cost of ₹80 crore, is expected to boost the morale of party cadre.

SHORT TAKES

ANGANWADI
WORKERS STAGE
DHARMA IN APDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 27

Thousands of Anganwadi teachers and workers staged a dharna across the state as a part of nation-wide agitation on Wednesday. In Andhra Pradesh, the main demand was not to start YSR pre-schools at Anganwadi centres and if implemented the government should treat the teachers on par with the school teachers and pay them accordingly.

The other main demands were to hike the budget for ICDS, implement Amma Vadi, house sites, insurance and hike in the salaries from the present ₹11,500 to ₹21,000.

General-secretary of the AP Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union K. Subbaravamma said that the present government hiked the wages by just ₹1,000 after Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy came to power. "Jagan Reddy did not give us house sites or include in the social welfare schemes," she said.

IAS, IPS OFFICERS
APPEAR BEFORE
HIGH COURTDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Several senior IAS and IPS officers appeared in person before the High Court in two contempt of court cases here on Wednesday.

Single Judge Justice Bhattu Devanand held the hearing in a contempt of court case.

Petitioner R.V. Papa Rao, working as an attorney at Sri Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi College for Women in Rajahmundry, stated that despite the High Court direction to implement full-time scale to him in 2018, it was not implemented. Endowments commissioner Arjuna Rao and collegiate education special commissioner M. M. Nayak, college correspondent Ramamohan Rao appeared before the court. However, as collegiate education regional joint director David Kumar failed to appear before it, the court issued a non-bailable warrant against him and directed Rajahmundry Urban SP to produce him in person before the court in the next hearing that is posted for February 15.

In another case, home principal secretary Kumar Vishwajeet, DGP Gautam Sawang and IG Mahesh Chandra Laddha appeared before the court in person. One V. Rama Rao filed a contempt of court petition stating that in spite of a court direction to promote him (an SI) as CI, it was not implemented.

CHIRU TO RETURN
TO POLITICS
THROUGH JSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Noted film actor Chiranjeevi is likely to join his younger brother and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan in politics in Andhra Pradesh.

Jana Sena political affairs committee chairman Nandendla Manmohar disclosed it here on Wednesday that Chiranjeevi assured to support his younger brother in politics. However, he did not explain in which way Chiranjeevi would support his younger brother and when. But, he hinted that Chiranjeevi would make a re-entry into politics soon in the state.

Earlier, both BJP state president Somu Veerajulu and Jana Sena PAC chairman announced that both the parties would contest jointly in the ensuing gram panchayat polls in the state.

CHRISTIAN BODY FOR
ACTION AGAINST
NAIDU FOR REMARKSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

AP State Christians Joint Action Committee (APSCJAC) has demanded that politicians stop blaming Christians for political gains, pointing to Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu's remarks against the minority community. The demand came after Christian leaders of JAC met at Vijayawada on Wednesday. The meeting decided to hold protests against Naidu's remarks in all districts of the state. APSCJAC convenor Yalamanchili Praveen Kumar, addressing media persons, objected to a few political parties blaming Christians for attacks on religious places within the state to gain political mileage.

SEC welcomes unanimous
polls in state with caution

SEC takes a critical view of advertisements encouraging unanimous elections

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Finding no wrong in holding of unanimous elections, state election commissioner (SEC) N. Ramesh Kumar, however, instructed officials to keep a close watch on them. "Take appropriate decision in case the number of such unanimous elections is high," he observed.

Speaking to media persons here on Wednesday, the election commissioner underlined that unanimous elections have been an age-old practice, where villagers elected only elders, whom they trusted for their capability and efficiency. He ruled out any wrong in case some ward members and sarpanches are elected unanimously in the ensuing gram panchayat polls get in AP.

Referring to objections raised by certain political parties on state government incentivising unanimous elections, the SEC said their apprehensions have been taken into consideration. Accordingly, officials have been instructed to ensure due diligence in case of unanimous elections if their number went up beyond reason.

The election commissioner took a critical view of advertisements encouraging unanimous elections in a section of the media. He maintained that the commission has not been consulted in this regard. Following this, he has called for an explanation from commissioners of information and panchayat raj departments.

The SEC sounded confident of holding gram panchayat polls as scheduled peacefully, as the chief secretary and director general of police are extending all cooperation. On adverse reactions from a section of employees fearing safety for their lives, he expressed optimism that the commission would get their support in holding of the polls.

Explaining his requisition for enrolling himself as voter at his native village Duggirala in Guntur district though he was not residing locally, Ramesh Kumar said with an expectation of exercising his vote in ensuing gram panchayat polls, he had surrendered his vote in Hyderabad. He said he is disappointed that his request for enrolling as voter in Duggirala has been rejected. However, he said he would apply to the district collector to register him as a voter. He cautioned that if he failed to become a voter, he would not hesitate to move the judiciary.

Welcoming the Supreme Court verdict on PR polls, which eased the tense situation in AP with regard to panchayat elections, the SEC cautioned that if there are any violations in conduct of polls, the commission would certainly move judiciary.

Meanwhile, Kadapa district collector Chevuru Harikiran directed officials to ensure holding the panchayat elections in a transparent manner. "The Model Code of Conduct is mandatory," He had a meeting with the election nodal officers on Wednesday after a video conference with the Election Commissioner, the DGP and other officials.

He directed officials to carry out the tasks assigned to them in compliance with the Covid-19 rules and regulations. Earlier, he told the State Election Commissioner that all arrangements were being made for panchayat elections in the district.



State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar reviews the Gram Panchayat Elections preparation through video conference with district collectors and SPs in Vijayawada on Wednesday. Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, DGP Gautam Sawang are also seen.

SEC finds fault with two senior
panchayat officials over rollsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

State Election Commissioner (SEC) N. Ramesh Kumar has found fault with senior panchayat raj officials for failing to update electoral rolls being used during the ensuing elections to panchayat raj bodies.

He was particularly critical of panchayat raj principal secretary Gopala Krishna Dwivedi and panchayat raj commissioner M. Girija Sankar for failing to update electoral rolls, thereby depriving the right to vote to nearly 3.62 lakh first-time voters in the ensuing gram panchayat (GP) polls.

The State Election Commissioner justified his censure of the two officials stating it was his responsibility as state election commissioner to ensure that no eligible voter is denied her or his right to vote guaranteed under the Indian Constitution.

CONG TO SHOW ITS
STRENGTH IN LOCAL
BODY POLLS: APCCDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 27

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president Sake Sailajanath said on Wednesday that the Congress party will prove its strength in the local body elections if the poll process is done in a fair manner and no violence is indulged in by the ruling party.

"If the ruling YSRC engages goons in this election, we will resist such actions," he said and urged the officials to hold the elections in an impartial manner.

Addressing the media at the district Congress office here, the Congress chief said that the ruling party had committed irregularities and intimidated the nominees of other political parties in the last polls. "The YSRC government is planning to make the elections a unanimous by use of force," he alleged.

Sailajanath said he would meet the SEC soon to seek smooth conduct of the polls. "The BJP and the Jana Sena are not speaking out against attacks on Dalits. The BJP is trying to tie the country to corporate powers," he said. He said Jagan and Naidu are not having the guts to question Prime Minister Modi while Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan has become a pawn in the hands of the BJP.

HC TO HEAR PETITION SEEKING STAY
ON ELECTION NOTIFICATION TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

The High Court will hear a petition seeking issue of stay order on notification for conduct of gram panchayat polls on Thursday.

A student identified as Dhulipalla Akhila hailing from Guntur filed a petition in the court seeking its intervention stating that the panchayat polls were to be held on the basis of electoral rolls prepared in 2019 and not on latest rolls prepared in 2021 resulting in deprival of right to vote to 3.62 lakh first-time voters in the state.

He, however, maintained that personally, he has no grudge against the officials. In this context, he asked the panchayat raj commissioner to lead the video conference held with collectors and SPs, as he was the state election authority.

Ramesh Kumar, however, obliquely deplored remarks made by panchayat raj minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy.

He said he has requested Governor Biswabhusan

Harichandan to advise chief secretary Aditya Nath Das to restrain cabinet ministers from making adverse comments against the State Election Commission.

It is the SEC's responsibility to conduct polls in a free and fair manner, he maintained. Incidentally, the state government has returned the censure proceedings issued by the State Election Commission without initiating any action against the two officials.

With regard to electoral rolls, he maintained that the Central Election Commission (CEC) had released a consolidated electoral list on January 16.

SAJJALA ACCUSES
SEC OF TRYING TO
TERRORISE OFFICIALSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Government advisor Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy accused State Election Commissioner (SEC) Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar of trying to terrorise and demoralise officials. "But the state shall protect them in case of any unwarranted censure," he remarked at a press conference here on Wednesday.

Ramakrishna Reddy maintained that Ramesh Kumar issuing proceedings against panchayat raj principal secretary Gopal Krishna Dwivedi and commissioner M. Girija Shankar are not in good taste. Further, he pointed out that the SEC has no powers proceed against IAS officials using objectionable language. "He can at most keep them away from duties. But using remarks that may affect their career is not in good taste," the government advisor remarked.

He accused Ramesh Kumar of misusing his powers to benefit opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu. "The SEC seems to be working in tandem with or to benefit Naidu, who is conspiring to create a chaotic atmosphere, instead of encouraging unanimous polls," Ramakrishna Reddy observed.

With regard to electoral rolls, he maintained that the Central Election Commission (CEC) had released a consolidated electoral list on January 16.

YSRC: SEC OPPOSING
UNANIMOUS POLLS
IS A CONSPIRACYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy said here on Wednesday that the state government is seeking a peaceful atmosphere in villages and fraternal feeling among the people by encouraging the cause of unanimous, uncontested elections for the local bodies. "The State Election Commissioner should say where was politics involved in this," he said.

The minister said the system of extending financial incentives to Gram Panchayats that go for unanimous elections has been existing for decades. Why did the SEC not oppose this system when the TDP was in power? Why elections were not held in the time of the previous government and why the SEC didn't move court on existing GO, he asked.

The minister said the SEC opposing unanimous polls in a democratic process was itself a political conspiracy. Why is Nimmagadda worried about the unanimous elections in Gram Panchayats and what's the necessity to speak about it before the nominations are filed, he asked. He wondered how far it was reasonable for the SEC to speak out at a press conference on this matter and create an impression that a particular party will be benefitted by unanimous polls and other parties do not benefit.

DGP tells temple
officials to initiate
security measuresDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

DGP Gautam Sawang has instructed all temple committees and management to initiate security and protective measures on a priority basis.

He was participating in an awareness programme organised by the Endowments department at Durga Malleswara Swamy temple here on Wednesday.

Sawang stressed upon the need for appropriate coordination between temple administrators and police to check attacks on temples and desecration of idols.

He sought that all sections of the society should come forward for the protection of temples that reflect the country's rich cultural heritage. He said that there were many ancient temples in the State, which can be protected by management by having CCTV surveillance, among other measures.

He said that the department faced a lot of allegations and criticism during the theft of three silver lions in Durga temple but the police successfully caught the culprit. He recalled that the burning of a chariot at Antarvedi had changed the scenario in the State.

The DGP said that as many as 59,443 temples were geo-tagged and 47,734 CCTV cameras installed in 13 districts. He said that village defence committees have been formed for protection of 23,832 temples and 373 culprits were arrested for attacks on temples.

Commissioner of Endowments P Arjuna Rao, Durga temple EO M. V. Suresh Babu, temple

SADHU PARISHAD
CHIEF DEMANDS
DISMISSAL OF GOVTDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 27

President of Sadhu Parishad of Andhra Pradesh Srinivas Saraswathi has demanded dismissal of the AP government following attacks on the temples and grabbing of temple lands.

Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday, Srinivas Saraswathi said that 140 attacks have taken place on the temples so far and the government had failed to make any significant arrests.

He said the Sadhu Parishad was also disturbed with the death of Peethadhipathi Achyutanandagiri Swamy in Chittoor who was found hanging. It was a case of murder as told by the Mathaji of the ashram to the police and village elders, he said and added that the police system has been weakened under the present government.

"We will ask the Central government to intervene and seek the dismissal of the present AP government," he said.

priests and others welcomed the DGP while Additional DGP (Law and order) Ravi Sankar Ayyanar, Vijayawada commissioner of police B Srinivasulu, Joint Director of ACB, GVG Ashok Kumar, DIG, Technical services Pala Raju, Vijayawada DCP Vikranth Patil and others attended the awareness meeting.

CID makes no headway
in Ramateertham caseDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 27

The state CID that took over the investigation of decapitation of Lord Rama of Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple atop Bodikonda in Ramateertham in Nellimerla mandal of Vizianagaram district made no headway in its probe. The government handed over the case to the CID on January 5.

"This is the most mysterious case the CID has taken up in its history," said a senior officer of the CID department based in Visakhapatnam.

He said that during the past 15 days they brought several suspected persons for questioning but little they found from them. There were no clues except for the hacksaw which they found on the

temple premises and might have been used for beheading.

Sources said a larger conspiracy could be behind the beheading. Mischievous elements can be rounded off with ease as they leave behind some evidence. "The attackers thought we would never find the head and the hacksaw blade that were thrown into the pond. This indicates a conspiracy carefully planned," said superintendent of police, Vizianagaram, B. Rajakumari.

She said the conspirators selectively targeted Rama temple since Lord Ram assumes importance in the present times.

The government also constituted a 26-member SIT on January 9 to probe all the temple cases in the state including Ramateertham.

HC to Centre: Give status
of petition on PolavaramDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

The Andhra Pradesh High Court directed the Centre to inform it about the status of a petition on Polavaram funding pending in the Supreme Court and listed the case for next hearing on March 17.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Aroop Kumar Goswami and Ch. Praveen Kumar held the hearing on the case here on Wednesday and directed the assistant solicitor general N. Harinath to inform it about the status of the petition in the apex court.

Former Rajya Sabha member K.V.P. Ramachandra Rao had filed a petition in the High Court in 2017, seeking its direction to the Centre to release Rs 3,800 crore immediately and also the amount spent by the AP government on execution of the Polavaram project, following a statement from the Centre it would release funds spent up to 01-04-2014. The petitioner described the Centre's move as against the AP Reorganisation Act, 2014, and also against the provisions of the Constitution of India.

NANDYAL DAIRY The elections, held after 26 years, opened doors for the ruling YSRC to have 3 of its members get elected

Stormy end to Bhuma family's 26-year reign over chairman post

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 27

In a major setback to the Bhuma family, for the first time in 26 years, they have lost control of Nandyal Vijaya Milk Dairy.

A chairman has been elected from outside their

stronghold, and this has led to tension on Wednesday. Police registered cases of kidnap against former MLA Bhuma Btamananda Reddy and outgoing chairman Bhuma Narayana Reddy as a candidate fielded from their camp turned hostile. This

has paved the way for the election of YSRC Congress Party candidate S.V. Jagan Mohan Reddy as Chairman of Kurnool District Milk Producers' Mutually Aided Cooperative Union Ltd.

The elections, held after 26 years, opened the doors for the ruling YSRC to have

three of its members get elected in the 15-member board that directs the milk business of Kurnool district milk producers' mutually aided cooperative union.

Nandyal CI Mohan Reddy said that based on a complaint of kidnap lodged

by one Mallikarjuna, one of the contestants for directors' post, a case has been registered against them.

Power equations have changed and it has slipped away from the control of the Bhuma family after three YSRC supporters, including SV Jagan Mohan

Reddy with 67 votes, Jayasimha Reddy with 65 votes and Ravikantha Reddy with 61 votes were elected as new directors of the board on Wednesday.

The elections are necessitated as every year three directors retire on a rotation basis but are eligible

for reappointment.

Bhuma Narayana Reddy, uncle of former MP Bhuma Nagireddy, has been the chairman for 26 years irrespective of the political party coming to power. Jagan Mohan Reddy is a cousin of former Kurnool MLA SV Mohan Reddy.

SHORT TAKES

SPIRITUAL GURU
MURDERED IN
CHITTOOR DISTDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 27

Achyutanandagiri Swamy, a local spiritual guru and organiser of Bhagawan Sri Ramatheertham Ashram, died under mysterious circumstances in his ashram at Gundlapalli village in Irala mandal of Chittoor district late Tuesday night.

Police said the 75-year-old was allegedly murdered by some unknown person.

According to eye-witness Lakshamma (Swamiji's servant), an unknown person barged into the ashram late in the night and started attacking Swamy with a blunt object. Later, he strangled Swamy to death and fled from the spot.

On being informed, DSP N. Sudhakar Reddy, CI Lakshminikanth Reddy, SI Srikanth Reddy and others reached the spot and collected details. The Clues team was deployed to collect evidence. They recorded the statement of Lakshamma and other inmates of the ashram.

Meanwhile, one Sriramulu Reddy, brother of Achyutanandagiri Swamy, has alleged that a property dispute is the cause behind the murder.

"My brother had purchased a building in Mitturu several years back for conducting annadanam for Srivari devotees. The occupants of the building did not vacate the property. Recently, he requested them to vacate so that he could construct Annadana Satram", he said.

He expressed doubts over the role of the building occupants in the murder. However, police, who are yet to comment on this, shifted the body to the government general hospital in Chittoor for autopsy. A case has been registered by the Irala police and further investigation is on.

SURVEY HALTED
AFTER MINERS'
OBJECTION

From Page 1

The Karnataka authorities have informed AP in December: "The Supreme Court has concluded that interstate boundary shall be as per the Bellary Reserve Forest Map of 1896 which is available in original with Karnataka."

Based on that, it was agreed between Karnataka and AP to erect boundaries as per RF Map of 1896. Erection of pillars was undertaken on alignment coordinate approved by the Supreme Court. But, a document from the apex court granting approval to the Survey of India or a committee appointed by the apex court for this purpose has not been received by the SoI teams to verify the correctness of the pillars and the stones erected. However, 76 pillars have already been erected.

With objections raised by a group of mining companies, the authorities have, in a letter in December last, stated that documents claimed to be the basis for undertaking the erection work were not available and suggested that these documents be furnished to the survey team.

The process of fixing borders in between AP and Karnataka through Kodalu in Sandur taluk of Bellary district and Malapanagudi village of the erstwhile Rayadurg taluk in Anantapur district was halted following the objection raised by the mining owners.

T. Syamsundar, a mining company owner from the border area observed that the present system to fix the border pillars wasn't genuine. He said the mineral and non-mineral zones were not marked out in the survey.

₹12 CR RELEASED
FOR NIVAR
DAMAGESDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 27

In a GO, RT No. 4 dated January 27, 2021, the State Government has released ₹12 crore to restore the water supply, roads, storm water drainage and parks damaged during Nivar cyclone in 2020 in various urban local bodies in Nellore and Chittoor districts.

Municipal Administration department sought the funds based on a report submitted by the Collectors concerned on the damages to the extent of ₹25 crore.

The civic bodies include Gudur, Venkatagiri, Sullurpeta, Naidupeta, Srikalahasti, and Tirupati.

New twist in double murder

Police report brought to light the series of events that led to murder

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 27

The sensational double murder case reported in Madanapalli has taken a new turn with a report filed by the taluk police before the local magistrate established a series of events that led the highly-educated couple to kill their own daughters.

According to the report, the accused father Dr Valleru Purushotham Naidu and his wife V. Padmaja told the police that when their younger daughter Sai Divya, 22, went out for a walk last week, she accidentally stepped on some strange things at a three-road junction and fell sick.

Since then, the younger girl was fearing that some evil forces were roaming in their new house and developed a phobia that she would die. She had begged them to take her away from there and even threatened to jump off the terrace. In this regard, on January 23 the accused father brought a local sorcerer with the help of his colleague G.P. Raju and performed pujas at their

house. The sorcerer also tied talismans (amulets) to all the family members.

The father of the deceased girls also told the police that both his daughters have been performing Shakti pooja since Sunday morning to drive away the evil forces from the house. However, Divya's fear continued and even the elder one Alekhya was said to have supported her suicidal thoughts. The parents claimed that they tried hard to bring their daughters to normalcy, but in vain.

On the day of crime, i.e., on January 24, Divya once again started crying loud in fear of dying because of the apprehensions that evil forces are still around her. This time, the family members including the couple and elder daughter Alekhya had beaten Divya with neem leaves at first and after her weird acts intensified, they hit her head with a dumbbell and caused cut wounds on her body, killing her instantaneously at around 1 pm.

After a brief while, Alekhya also started behaving in the same

Sleepless night on
first day for parentsDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 27

Valleru Purushotham Naidu and his wife V. Padmaja, the couple who are accused in the murder of their two unmarried daughters, were produced before the Judicial Magistrate on Tuesday evening and were placed under remand till February second week.

They were lodged at the Madanapalli sub-jail, where the accused mother Padmaja continued to remain in a state of trance, as per the Sub-Jail superintendent Ramakrishna, who also told the media persons that the couple has spent a sleepless night on their first day in the prison.

The fellow prisoners in

the women prisoner's area had also spent a sleepless night with Padmaja, who was seen meditating, kept on shouting the name of Lord Shiva aloud the whole night. In view of this, the couple was once again taken to a psychiatrist at the Madanapalli government hospital on Wednesday morning.

"The doctor advised us to admit them to a psychiatric ward either at SVIMS or SVR Ruia government general hospital in Tirupati. We will present the psychiatrist's recommendations before the local magistrate and based on his directions, we will shift them to Tirupati for better treatment," jail authorities told the media.

They were lodged at the Madanapalli sub-jail, where the accused mother Padmaja continued to remain in a state of trance, as per the Sub-Jail superintendent Ramakrishna, who also told the media persons that the couple has spent a sleepless night on their first day in the prison.

The fellow prisoners in

hit their elder daughter's head with a dumbbell, killing her on the spot at around 4.30 pm-5 pm, according to the couple's confession.

While the accused mother was still in a trance, Purushotham Naidu gained some consciousness and called one of his friends Gowri Shankar at around 7.30 pm and told him the series of events. Naidu's friend immediately reached the spot and was shocked to see the crime scene. He later informed the police and lodged a complaint against the couple on charge of murdering their own daughters. Police had registered a case in Cr. No.31/2021 u/s 302 IPC r/w 34 IPC.

It has to be mentioned that, in a video that went viral on social media, the accused father told the police that his elder daughter had tied her sister's soul by drawing a "Muggu", and convinced them to kill her so that she could reunite with Divya's soul and bring her back as Kali yuga is ending and Satya yuga is starting on Monday.

Workers protest



Anaganwadi workers stage protest against the government demanding their pending salaries opposite labour office at MVP Colony in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— DC

AP fishermen seize
18 boats from TNDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 27

In yet another incident of clashes between AP and Tamil Nadu fishermen over fishing in the prohibited areas, fishermen of Allur mandal in Nellore district captured 18 boats belonging to their counterparts in Tamil Nadu after they ventured into restricted zone for fishing

on Wednesday.

The fishermen of Nellore coastal mandals are at loggerheads with the Tamil Nadu fishermen from a long time for frequently entering the state borders violating the zonal restrictions.

The fishermen of Allur mandal shifted 100 odd TN fishermen manning the boats to a temple in Isakapalli village.

Sundarakanda
pathanam heldDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 27

The Ninth phase of Akhanda Sundarakanda Pathanam by TTD was held at Nada Neerajanam platform in Tirumala on Wednesday.

As part of Loka Kalyana Parayana Yagnam mullied by TTD ever since Covid-19

lockdown, the mantra parayanam completed 293 days, while the Sundarakanda pathanam was carried out for 231 days and concluded on January 27.

Sundarakanda Pathanam in 16 phases will yield prosperity and good health to the entire humanity, TTD has so far completed eight phases.

ANAM OBJECTS
TO NOT BEING
INVITEDDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 27

Alleging that he has not received any invitation for Republic Day celebrations held in Nellore on Tuesday, Venkatagiri legislator Anam Ramanarayana Reddy said that he will complain about the same to privileges committee of AP State Legislative Assembly.

Speaking to media persons at Venkatagiri on Wednesday, the ruling YSRC MLA said he spoke to some other legislators from the district. They too confirmed that they had not received any invitation for R-Day celebrations.

"Do officials think we do not deserve to attend official programmes? I have not experienced this kind of embarrassment during my 40 years of political career," he remarked.

Incidentally, this is the second incident in the recent past when he came out openly.

Medical officer took
ill after vaccinationDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 27

A general duty medical officer, Dr Dhanalakshmi, BDS, working at GGH in Ongole was rushed to Apollo Hospital in Chennai late on Tuesday night after she took ill because of alleged reaction after Corona vaccination.

She was hired last year to treat Covid patients at the GGH. According to the District Collector of Prakasam, Pola Bhaskar, Dr Dhanalakshmi was vaccinated on January 23 and she got herself admitted to the GGH on January 24 following a high fever.

Doctors treating her shifted her to Sangamitra

Hospital in Ongole after her BP levels started indicating abnormal variations on Monday.

"Finding no improvement in her condition, doctors of GGH and Sangamitra discussed and decided to rush her to Apollo Hospital in Chennai in view of advanced equipment available at the institution," the Collector said.

Claiming that they have also discussed with the parents of Dr Dhanalakshmi, he said they have sent her in a specially equipped ambulance and deputed a medical team to accompany her to Chennai while indicating that government would take care of all her treatment needs.

AP records 111 new
Covid cases, 2 deathsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 27

Andhra Pradesh registered 111 fresh cases of Covid-19 and two deaths.

The state health authorities issued Covid-19 bulletin here on Wednesday reporting that out of 33,808 persons tested, 111 were found infected with Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,29,75,961 samples tested so far, 8,87,349 persons were found infected with Coronavirus and of them, 8,78,828 were recovered during treatment while 1,369 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus, Krishna registered highest number of 19 followed by 16 in Chittoor; 14

in West Godavari, 13 in East Godavari, 11 each in Guntur and Visakhapatnam, eight each in Anantapur and Kadapa, five in Kurnool, four in Nellore and two in Srikakulam.

Krishna topped the state by recording highest number of cumulative Coronavirus active cases at 256 followed by 177 in East Godavari, 167 in Guntur, 139 in Chittoor, 130 in Visakhapatnam, 94 in Kadapa, 87 in West Godavari, 75 in Nellore, 71 in Prakasam, 66 in Anantapur, 51 in Kurnool, 35 in Srikakulam and 21 in Vizianagaram.

Among daily cases of deaths, Anantapur and West Godavari reported one each raising the toll to 7,152.

FULLTIME SCHOOL FOR CLASS VI TO X

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 27

School Education Department has decided to conduct the classes full time, that is from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm to all students of Class VI to X, starting from Wednesday.

In a press release on Wednesday, District Education Officer P.

Ramesh directed all the headmasters to follow the timings by duly observing the precautions related to Covid-19 to prevent the spread of the dreaded virus. He also instructed all the deputy education officers and mandal education officers to keep a tab on the functioning of all the schools under their jurisdiction.

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IN BRIEF

No SC relief in 'Tandav' case

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

'COVAXIN WORKS AGAINST UK VARIANT TOO'

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

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

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

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

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

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, JAN. 27

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

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

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

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

TERRITORY | DISPUTE

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 27

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

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

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

Farmers cancel Budget Day march

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

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Lone INLD MLA Abhay Singh Chautala resigns

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the letter to Gupta,

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

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

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

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

— PTI

9 HELD UNDER NEW ANTI-CONVERSION LAW IN INDORE

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

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

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

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

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

RSS ideology poses danger, says Rahul

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN. 27

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Uddhav accuses K'taka of deliberately changing Belgaum's name

Belgaum should be UT, says Uddhav



DESPITE THE matter being in court, the Karnataka government deliberately changed the name of Belgaum city. They made Belgaum the second capital where they also held an Assembly session. Maharashtra is following the rule of law but the Karnataka government does not.

— **UDDHAV THACKERAY** Maharashtra Chief Minister

as a Union Territory as long the case is in court," Thackeray said on Wednesday.

"Despite the matter being in court, the Karnataka government deliberately changed the name of Belgaum city. They made Belgaum the second capital where they also held an

Assembly session. Maharashtra is following the rule of law but the Karnataka government does not. We should all come together to put an end to their arrogance. We will strive hard to bring the border region in Maharashtra for sure," he said after a meeting with the High

Power Committee constituted for the border dispute with Karnataka.

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

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

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

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

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

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

India to despatch 5 lakh doses of Covishield to Sri Lanka

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

Continuing its neighbourhood diplomacy of gifting Covid-19 vaccines, India will on Thursday despatch five lakh doses of the Indian-manufactured Covishield (Oxford-AstraZeneca) vaccine to southern maritime neighbour Sri Lanka. India had delivered the vaccine recently to neighbours Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. New Delhi was awaiting regulatory clear-

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

RIVER OF LAVA FROM VOLCANO IN INDONESIA

Yogyakarta (Indonesia), Jan. 27: Indonesia's most active volcano erupted Wednesday with a river of lava and searing gas clouds flowing 1,500 metres (4,900 feet) down its slopes. It was the Mount Merapi's longest lava flow since authorities raised the volatile volcano's danger level in November, said Hanik Humaida, the head of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Centre. The alert level was being maintained for now at the second-highest level, she said, and people should stay out of the existing 5-kilometre (3-mile) danger zone around the crater as the local administrations in Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces closely monitor the situation. The 2,968-metre (9,737-foot) volcano is on the densely populated island of Java and near the ancient city of Yogyakarta.

TREAT SAILORS FAIRLY, CHINA TELLS INDONESIA

Beijing, Jan. 27: China's government called on Indonesia on Wednesday to treat a group of detained Chinese sailors fairly but gave no indication what their oil tanker was doing when it was found at sea transferring fuel from an Iranian ship. The Iranian-flagged MT Horse and Panamanian-flagged MT Freya were seized Sunday and are suspected of illegally transferring fuel at sea, shutting off their identification systems and other offences. Indonesian authorities said 36 Iranian and 25 Chinese crew members were detained. Iran has sold oil on the black market since then-President Donald Trump imposed sanctions in 2018 and threatened to penalise countries that bought Iranian crude. Indonesian authorities confirmed to the Chinese Embassy crew members are "in good condition," said foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian.

IRAN PREZ FLAYS PROSECUTION OF TELECOM MIN

Tehran, Jan. 27: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday criticised Iran's hard-liner dominated judiciary over last week's prosecution of the country's telecommunications minister. Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi was released on bail after he was summoned for prosecution. Judiciary officials cited his refusal to block Instagram and impose limitations on the bandwidth of other foreign social media and messaging systems. Speaking in a Cabinet meeting Wednesday, Rouhani said improving the bandwidth of the Internet was done on his orders. "If you want to try someone, try me. It was my order," he said. Under pressure from hard-liners, the Iranian government has long blocked access to many websites and social media platforms, from YouTube and Facebook to Twitter and Telegram. The relatively moderate Rouhani said increasing bandwidth would help improve business and an anti-corruption campaign.

U.S.: ERITREA SOLDIERS MUST LEAVE TIGRAY

Nairobi, Jan. 27: The United States said all soldiers from Eritrea should leave Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region "immediately." A State Department spokesperson cited "credible reports of looting, sexual violence, assaults in refugee camps and other human rights abuses." "There is also evidence of Eritrean soldiers forcibly returning Eritrean refugees from Tigray to Eritrea," the spokesperson said. The statement reflects new pressure by the Biden administration on the government of Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country and the anchor of the Horn of Africa, and other combatants as the deadly fighting in Tigray nears the three-month mark. The AP this week cited witnesses who fled the Tigray region as saying Eritrean soldiers were looting, going house-to-house killing young men and even acting as local authorities. The Eritreans have been fighting on the side of Ethiopian forces as they pursue the fugitive leaders of the Tigray region, though Ethiopia's government has denied their presence.

Fog engulfs Eiffel Tower



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

Impeachment trial: Don likely to be acquitted

Democrats fail to get enough support from Republicans

Washington, Jan. 27: Former US President Donald Trump is likely to be acquitted in his impeachment trial as the Democrats failed to garner enough support required from Republican Senators. The Democrats who have impeached Trump in the House charging him with "incitement of insurrection," needs two-thirds of the vote for the Senate impeachment. Currently both the Democrats and the Republicans have 50 members each in the 100-seat Senate. The Democrats need the support of at least 17 Republican Senators to reach the two-thirds majority mark. Trump is the first US president who facing an impeachment trial after he left the presidency. This is for the second time in about a year that Trump is likely to be acquitted by the Senate. "I can't see how you get 17. I think that was a test vote," Republican Senator John Boozman said after 45 of the 50 Republican Senators voted for the motion that the impeachment trial of Trump after he left the presidency is unconstitutional. The article of impeachment was delivered by the House to the Senate Monday night. "The next step, as you all have reported and people watching at home know, is for the Senate to proceed with their trial. He's going to allow them to move forward at the pace and manner that the leaders in the Senate determine. And I can promise you that we will leave the vote counting to leaders in the Senate from now on," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at her daily news conference.

Biden inks orders for racial equity

Washington, Jan. 27: US President Joe Biden has signed a series of executive orders to ensure racial equity across the country, acting on one of his core campaign promises to dismantle "systemic racism" that has plagued America far too long. While announcing the four presidential actions on Tuesday at the White House, a week after being sworn in as the 46th US President, Biden cited the killing of George Floyd, a PoC man, by a Minneapolis police officer last May, which touched off demonstrations across the country. Biden called the killing "the knee on the neck of justice," and said that because of it, "the ground has shifted. It changed minds and mindsets." "In my campaign for President, I made it very clear that the moment had arrived as a nation where we face deep racial inequities in America and systemic racism that has plagued our nation for far, far too long," Biden said. — PTI

PIO LAWMAKERS IN CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES

Washington, Jan. 27: Indian-origin US lawmakers Pramila Jayapal and Raja Krishnamoorthi have been named to key congressional committees on budget and the Covid-19 pandemic by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. While Congresswoman Jayapal, 55, was named to the powerful budget committee, Congressman Krishnamoorthi, 47, was appointed to a key congressional committee on the Coronavirus crisis on Tuesday. The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis was established to provide oversight of the federal Covid-19 pandemic response. "I am honoured to join Chairman Clyburn and our colleagues on this panel to provide vital oversight of the federal Coronavirus response to protect the health and safety of the American people as we defeat the pandemic and rebuild our economy," said Krishnamoorthi, serving as the US Representative for Illinois's 8th congressional district since 2017. "I look forward to working with members of both parties as we ensure that the trillions of dollars in taxpayer funds dedicated to our country's response to this pandemic and its economic impacts are used as efficiently, transparently and effectively as possible," he said. Jayapal, the US Representative for Washington's 7th congressional district since 2017, was named as a member of the House Budget Committee. — PTI

YouTube suspends Trump indefinitely

San Francisco, Jan. 27: YouTube has suspended Donald Trump indefinitely from the platform and said it will also prevent the former president's lawyer Rudy Giuliani from being able to monetize his clips, US media reported. It comes a week after the social media giant confirmed it would extend a ban on Trump's channel - which has just under three million subscribers - joining other social media platforms in banning his accounts following the deadly January 6 Capitol riot. The Google-owned firm has faced some criticism over its slow response following the violence in Washington, as well as the proliferation of conspiracy theories on the platform. — AFP

Republican Senator Kevin Cramer said the Senate should not be wasting its time holding another impeachment trial. "We do not have solid constitutional standing to impeach a former president, and even if we did, this is not the time to use it. As I have said repeatedly, President Trump's comments on January 6 were rash and ill-advised but I do not believe they meet the constitutional standard for impeachment," he said. — PTI

Muslim attack plot: Two in trouble

Singapore/Berlin, Jan. 27: A Singaporean teenager planned to attack two mosques in the city-state on the anniversary of a massacre of Muslim worshippers in New Zealand, authorities said Wednesday. A German woman has been charged with preparing a far-right attack and other crimes on allegations she was in the process of building a bomb to target Muslims and local politicians in Bavaria, Munich prosecutors said Wednesday. The 16-year-old - picked up in December - made "detailed plans and preparations" to mount the attacks using a machete on March 15, two years after a shooting rampage in Christchurch by Australian white supremacist Brenton Tarrant, security officials said. Tarrant was last year sentenced to life in prison without parole after killing 51 worshippers in the attacks on two mosques during Friday prayers. He also explored making a bomb and planned to set fire to the mosques. — PTI

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

Maduro 'miracle' cure for Covid draws skeptics ire

Supply chains vulnerable: UN

Caracas, Jan. 27: Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro appears to be counting on yet another "miracle" to save his citizens from Covid-19, promoting a secretive solution with no published scientific evidence he claims will conquer the new Coronavirus. "Ten drops under the tongue every four hours and the miracle is done," Maduro said in a televised appearance on Sunday. "It's a powerful antiviral, very powerful, that neutralises the Coronavirus." But his government has released no evidence. He even kept secret the name of the "brilliant Venezuelan mind" behind it, saying he needed to protect them. Scientists at home and abroad remained skeptical. The local National Academy of Medicine said it appeared he derived from the common herb thyme. It's not the first time the Venezuelan leader has promoted a cure. In October, he notified the Pan American Health Organisation that Venezuelan scientists discovered a molecule that nullifies the replication capacity of the new Coronavirus. He hasn't spoken of that development since. He's also promoted a special herbal tea he claims can fend off the virus and other ailments. Other leaders too have embraced solutions dismissed by scientific studies. Former US President Donald Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro both stubbornly touted an antimalarial drug despite repeated studies finding it ineffective and possibly dangerous. The new Coronavirus hasn't hit Venezuela as hard as other South American countries such as Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, though many experts say that's likely because sanctions against Maduro's government have sharply limited travel there. — AP

The Hague, Jan. 27: The head of the World Food Programme said Wednesday that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need to strengthen vulnerable supply chains to impoverished nations struggling to feed their populations. David Beasley, executive director of the United Nations' Nobel Peace Prize-winning food programme, said that the pandemic put further stress on supply chains getting food to the hungry. "We've got to continue to work the system, we've got to make certain that we are ... less vulnerable to Covid type impacts," Beasley told a World Economic Forum virtual panel. "If you think you've had trouble getting toilet paper in New York, because of supply chain disruption, what do you think's happening in Chad and Niger and Mali and places like that?" Beasley stressed that the food supply system is "not broken" but that 10 per cent of the global population is in extreme poverty and need to be reached by suppliers and that the global pandemic exacerbated existing problems. — AP

Maduro said the treatment, which he called carvativir, has been under testing for nine months among Venezuelans ill with the Coronavirus. He said he plans to distribute it nationwide and to other nations as well. Dr David Boulware, professor of medicine and an infectious diseases physician at the University of Minnesota Medical School, noted the lack of scientific evidence. — AP

N-treaty extension gets Russian nod

EURO COURT SLAMS RUSSIA'S '08 WAR WITH GEORGIA

Moscow, Jan. 27: The lower house of Russian parliament on Wednesday approved the extension of the last remaining nuclear arms control pact days before it's due to expire. The State Duma voted unanimously to extend the New START treaty for five years. The vote came a day after a phone call between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which they voiced satisfaction with the exchange of diplomatic notes about extending the New START treaty. They agreed to complete the necessary procedures in the next few days, according to the Kremlin. The pact's extension doesn't require congressional approval in the US, but Russian lawmakers must ratify the move. Top members of the Kremlin-controlled parliament said they would fast-track the issue and complete the necessary steps to extend the treaty this week. — AP

Tbilisi, Jan. 27: Europe's top human rights court on Wednesday found Russia responsible for a swath of violations in Georgia's breakaway regions after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. Georgia hailed the verdict by the European Court of Human Rights as a major victory. President Salome Zurbishvili described the ruling as "historic," noting that Georgia was "recognised as a victim of this war and it is a great achievement for our country, our society, our history and our future." Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia also described the verdict as a landmark move, saying that "the case against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights has ended with Georgia's victory." — AP

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

Peshawar, Jan. 27: The owner of Indian film legend Raj Kapoor's ancestral home in Peshawar has refused to sell the building at the rate fixed by the provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, saying the prime-location property has been severely undervalued. Earlier in the month, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had approved the release of Rs 1.5 crore for Kapoor's ancestral home, with the aim to turn it into a museum in honour of the movie star. Haji Ali Sabir, the present owner of the haveli, in a chat with a private news channel on Wednesday, flatly refused to sell the property at Rs 1.5 crore. "Even half a Marla land in the area is not available for Rs 1.5 crore. How can I sell the six-marla property for Rs 1.5 crore?" he said. Marla, a traditional unit of area used in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is considered as equal to 272.25 square feet or 25,292.9 square metres. Sabir said the right valuation of the property is Rs 200 crore. Raj Kapoor's ancestral home, known as Kapoor Haveli, is situated in the famed Qissa Khwani Bazar. It was built between 1918 and 1922 by the legendary actor's grandfather Dewan Basheswarnath Kapoor. Raj Kapoor and his uncle Trilok Kapoor were born here. — PTI



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

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

Auschwitz survivors mark anniversary online due to Covid

Warsaw, Jan. 27: Tova Friedman hid among corpses at Auschwitz amid the chaos of the extermination camp's final days. Just 6 years old at the time, the Poland-born Friedman was instructed by her mother to lie absolutely still in a bed at a camp hospital, next to the body of a young woman who had just died. As German forces preparing to flee the scene of their genocide went from bed to bed shooting anyone still alive, Friedman barely breathed under a blanket and went unnoticed. Days later, on January 27, 1945, she was among the thousands of prisoners who survived to greet the Soviet troops who liberated the camp in Nazi-occupied Poland. Now 82, Friedman had hoped to mark Wednesday's anniversary by taking her eight grandchildren to the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial museum in Poland, Yad Vashem in Israel and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC also have online events planned. The presidents of Israel, Germany and Poland will be among those delivering remarks of remembrance and warning. The online nature of this year's commemorations is a sharp contrast to how Friedman spent the 75th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation last year, when she gathered under a huge tent with other survivors and dozens of European leaders at the site of the former camp. It was one of the last large international gatherings before the pandemic forced the cancellation of most large gatherings. — AP

Many Holocaust survivors in the United States, Israel and elsewhere find themselves in a state of previously unimaginable isolation due to the pandemic. Friedman lost her husband last March and said she feels acutely alone now. But survivors like her also have found new connections over Zoom: World Jewish Congress leader Ronald Lauder has organized video meetings for survivors and their children and grandchildren during the pandemic. — AP

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DECCAN
Chronicle

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China playing long game,
be vigilant and prepared

The skirmish involving Indian soldiers on the Sikkim-China border last week is just another event in a decades-long chain featuring Chinese expansionism. It may seem incongruous that while Commander level talks have been going on that an incursion should take place. Place the event against a historical perspective and the reality hits home that more things change the more China remains the same. The skirmish may indeed be a minor face-off as the Indian Army described it but if it true that the casualties in terms of injuries was on a scale of five to one on the Chinese side, it might just have served the purpose in sending the message across to the territorially ambitious northern neighbour. India is prepared to hold its positions, at least wherever it is placed advantageously in terms of terrain and is capable of giving it back. The gap between perceptions and reality is huge when it comes to India-China relations. While the political class might want 1.35 billion Indians to believe that not a square mile of territory has been surrendered to the Chinese since the 1962 war, the truth is huge swathes of disputed land, which in India's eyes is its, has been progressively taken over. It would not be far from the truth to suggest that the Chinese have come in as much as 25 to 30 km in places along the LAC and at least 5 to 8 km in the Finger area north of Pangong Lake in Ladakh. Historically speaking, this can be blamed on the unbridgeable gap in perceptions of LAC rather than weaknesses in the regimes in New Delhi, which, since the times of Vajpayee's prime ministership, have taken a harder stance on India-China border issues.

The way forward for India would be to keep building and buttressing border infrastructure, particularly for the IAF, safeguarding areas around roads India has built and moving armour and men into strategic areas

Pradesh or Ladakh about Chinese soldiers and civilians using Indian roads to expand their presence across the LAC and taking over land they would normally use for grazing their yaks are real, so too whispers of villages coming up on what we perceive to be our side. There is no denying China's propensity to keep up the pressure on the 4,000 km border, ranging from Ladakh in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east and including on land bordering Bhutan and Sikkim.

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

Kerala must step up Covid fight

Kerala, which once led other Indian states in containing the pandemic, Covid-19, appears to have lost its way and is now lagging behind them in most parameters, excepting the mortality rate. At present, the state has about 71,000 active cases, which make about 41 per cent of the total active cases in the country. Its test positivity rate of 12.48 is the highest in the country.

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

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

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

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Foreign assets
on IRS radar as
CBDT lobbies
for more funds

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

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

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

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

DON'T KEEP VIGILANCE CASES
PENDING, SAYS CVC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHARMA TO SPEARHEAD
MODI'S UP PLAN

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

Speculation is rife that Mr

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

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

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

Subhani



As farmers lose ground,
govt will take tough line



Parsa
Venkateshwar
Rao Jr

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

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

the trouble and violence that erupted on the streets, but they cannot escape the moral responsibility.

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

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

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

The confrontation

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

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

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

*The writer is a
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commentator and
analyst*

LETTERS

RED FORT BREACH

It was highly unfortunate that the farmers' tractor parade which was supposed to be peaceful, turned into anarchy on the streets and unprecedented scenes on a historic day (*History made on R-Day, DC, Jan. 27*). Both farmers' unions and the ruling dispensation are at fault for precipitating the issue.

**Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam**

History was marred, not made, on Republic Day by hoisting a flag other than the tricolor on Red Fort. It is a sacrilege, no less. The perpetrator did this blatantly without a mask in broad daylight while thousands of onlookers were enjoying the spectacle.

**K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam**

The hoisting of "Nishan Sahib", the Sikh flag, on the ramparts of Red Fort exposes external forces behind the prolonged agitation of farmers. Besides sustaining the two-month long agitation, these 'farmers' spent huge sum of money for the tractor rally. Now, the Govt. should take a firm stand on the farm laws. Such motivated agitations should not be tolerated.

**Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada**

DRAINS AND FLOODS

Those above 70 years are vulnerable to health issues. They were advised to confine to home in Covid. RBI instructed all banks to extend doorstep banking at a nominal rate. However, no bank took this instruction seriously. No such facility is being extended. While I appreciate the good gesture of RBI, I suggest it instructs all banks to make arrangement to comply with the guidelines in Covid time

**Kantamsetti Lakshman Rao
Visakhapatnam**

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN
Chronicle

Four-party accord on
450 seats: Jana Sangh

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

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

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

ByteDance cuts India workforce, unsure of future

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

JLR appoints creative chief to board



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

Reliance, Israeli firm in deal to sell breath test kit

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

Ethanol-blending target brought forward by 5 yrs

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



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

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 27

Revival of consumer sentiments, combined with festive season consumption, helped FMCG companies post impressive growth in revenues, volumes as well as profits in the third quarter. Health and hygiene products, food and refreshments and rural consumption supported the performance of fast moving consumer goods firms. Hindustan Unilever's total sales grew by 20 per cent in the December quarter, while its domestic consumer business grew by 7 per cent. Sales volumes, excluding acquisition of GSK, grew 4 per cent. Health, hygiene and nutrition, which form 80 per cent of HUL's portfolio, grew in double digits. Foods and refreshments were up by 19 per cent. Rural market, which grew in double digits, also supported sales.

HUL's profit after tax for the quarter went up 19 per cent to Rs 1,921 crore against Rs 1,616 crore in the year-ago quarter. As the commodity prices had gone up, HUL made double-digit price hike in tea and a 2.5 per cent increase in skin cleansing products during the quarter. "With Covid cases coming down sharply and increasing mobility, economic activity in the country continues to improve. The rapid rollout of vaccines will give further impetus to economic growth," said Sanjiv Mehta, chairman and MD of HUL.



"Good recovery in lag-gard parts, 80 per cent of portfolio grew in double digits, Minimal margin compression, strong brand investments continue, which is the right strategy in our view," finds Edelweiss. Securities. Emami reported 36.6 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at Rs 202.17 crore for the third quarter as revenue from operations surged by 13 per cent to Rs 845.37 crore. The company posted a strong growth of 16 per cent in its domestic business led by 13 per cent growth in volumes. "We are witnessing a consistent and all-round growth coming from all channels over the last two quarters and expect to continue with this growth trajectory. Most of our brands, including power brands and digital-first brands in the healthcare segment are on their growth path," said Harsha V. Agarwal, director, Emami.

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

modern trade registered growth of 51 per cent during the quarter for Emami. Marico reported a 13.04 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for the third quarter while revenue from operations went up by 16.33 per cent. Revenue from operations grew on the back of a strong domestic volume growth of 15 per cent. Marico saw robust demand for more than 95 per cent of its portfolio amidst steadily improving consumer confidence. Jyothy Labs reported an 18.23 per cent rise in consolidated net profit. Revenue from operations of the company was up 13.26 per cent. According to Jyothy Labs, revival of the consumer sentiment reflected in the company's performance across its brand portfolio. "The performance of FMCG companies have improved sequentially along with volume growth. Discretionary spends are also recovering. We should expect better performance in the coming quarters," said Kaustubh Pawaskar, AVP fundamental research at Sharekhan.

Market gains of this month wiped out

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN 27

Profit taking ahead of the Union Budget, the outcome of US Fed meeting and monthly futures & options contracts expiry led to Nifty and Sensex falling for the fourth consecutive session and wiping out of all the gains made this month. The Nifty-50 closed below the 14000 level at 13967.50, down by 271.40 points or 1.91 per cent while the Sensex closed at 47409.93, down by 937.66 points, or 1.94 per cent. The Sensex lost 2382.19 points, or 4.78 per cent, in the last four sessions. The sharp fall led to a notional loss of Rs 2.62 lakh crore of investors wealth on Wednesday and over Rs 8.07 lakh crore in the last four days. Investors are apprehensive of US Federal Reserve's next monetary policy move which will be known only on Thursday morning. "Global cues were weak as investors got cautious about possible roadblocks to US stimulus plan and ahead of Fed policy announcement. Absence of FII buying over last two days too added to the nervousness. The foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 1688.22 crore on Wednesday, much higher than the previous session. This is the first instance of the benchmark indices falling for four days in a row since September 2020...markets have erased all gains for CY21 year to date and turned negative," said Siddhartha Khemka of Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Govt plans ₹3 L cr spend to revive power utilities

SIDDHARTHA SINGH & DEBIT CHAKRABORTY JAN. 27

The government plans to spend Rs 3 lakh crore (\$41 billion) on a new plan to revive regional electricity retailers, people with knowledge of the matter said, after a previous attempt failed to stem losses at the utilities. The spending would be spread over a few years and is likely to be unveiled on February 1 as part of the government's budget for the year starting April 1, the people said, asking not to be identified as the proposal isn't public. The plan for carrying out reforms for reducing losses of state distribution utilities was sought by the power ministry and is under discussion. The government is focusing on turning around electricity distributors to ensure reliable power supplies, improving the financial health of generators and making the sector more attractive to foreign investors. The combined loss at the power distribution companies, mostly controlled by state administrations, jumped 69 per cent to Rs 49,620 crore in the year ended March 2019, the latest available data. The spending would focus on upgrading infrastructure and technology of the ailing utilities to make them more efficient and reduce financial losses, according to the people. Under the plan, the central government would provide annual grants to states that meet targets set by



BUDGET MAY ADDRESS INVERTED DUTY STRUCTURE FOR STEEL GOODS

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

Centre may consider removing customs duties on raw materials used for manufacturing certain flat-rolled products of stainless steel. The import duty on key inputs for stainless steel flat products—ferro nickel and SS scrap—is now higher than the import duty on final goods coming in from Free Trade Agreement partners. —PTI

the Centre. The plan could include some specific measures such as separating power feeder grids for farmers and residential users, and installation of prepaid smart meters to stop pilferage and encourage timely payment, they said. It also plans to replace overhead cables with special insulated wires to prevent theft. Electricity retailers are the weakest link in the country's power supply chain, losing on an average about a fifth of their

revenue because of technical and commercial reasons, including loss of power supplies through theft, poor transmission infrastructure and inefficient billing and collection. The plan will be a modified version of an earlier programme unveiled in 2015 to revive power distributors through restructuring of their debt. That attempt remained unsuccessful in making retailers profitable by March 2019. —Bloomberg

Economy to get shot in arm from budget: Poll

TUSHAR GOENKA & SHALOO SHRIVASTAVA BENGALURU, JAN. 27

India's path to economic recovery will be stronger than previously thought as fiscal expansion and vaccine hopes help the country heal from Covid-19, a Reuters poll of economists showed. The vaccination drive and a steep fall in new coronavirus cases is supporting a recovery in the economy. Alongside that, nearly 60 per cent of respondents, 18 of 31, who responded to an additional question in the January 13-25 poll said the Union budget would help a significant economic recovery in financial year 2021-22. "We expect global economic activity to return to normality in fiscal Q2 and India to grow in fiscal 2021-22, with government stimulus packages expected to contribute," said Hugo Erken, head of international economics at Rabobank. "There is a strong sentiment the budget will aim to continue expenditure as growth is the only way India can come out of recent setbacks." The poll of over 50 econ-

omists showed the economy would grow 9.5 per cent next fiscal year—the highest since polling began for the year in March 2020—after contracting 8 per cent in the current fiscal year. It was expected to grow 6 per cent in fiscal year 2022-23. The poll predicted the economy would grow 21.1, 9.1, 5.9 and 5.5 per cent in each quarter of the 2021-22 fiscal year, largely upgraded from a poll taken two months ago. But when asked how long it would take for the economy to recover to its pre-Covid-19 level, 26 of 32 respondents said it would take up to two years, including six analysts said longer than that. Twelve analysts said within a year. "There is a lack of fiscal space to boost growth sufficiently and India is unlikely to reach its pre-Covid-19 levels any time soon despite policy support," said Sher Mehta, director at Virtuoso Economics. "Economic momentum will struggle to gain traction as there are fears of stagflation and the possible end of monetary policy easing." —Reuters

Banks turn cautious on retail loans

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JAN. 27

Banks are seeing new bad loan formation in consumer and MSME (micro small and medium enterprises) loans this quarter, something also warned by the apex bank last month in its Financial Stability Report. On Wednesday, public sector lender Bank of Baroda that announced its third quarter results warned of rising stress in the coming months from retail and MSME loans resulting from the Covid stress. Similarly, private lender Axis Bank said 83 per cent of its loan slippages during the quarter came from the retail segment, particularly from self employed

customers and mortgage customers. "The kind of stress we are seeing now is something which is unprecedented and therefore it is likely that there may be some slippages in MSME and retail," said Sanjiv Chadha, MD & CEO of Bank of Baroda at the earnings call, adding, "I am holding out caution. But we are well-positioned, as we have tightened underwriting. Around one per cent of our loan book is unsecured and more than 70 per cent of the retail loan book" comprises home loans. BoB's credit cost, including the impact of provisioning on proforma non-performing assets, was at 2.10 per cent. The bank

restructured Rs 9,600 crore of loans in the December 2020 quarter, 80 per cent of which was corporate loans. "We do recognise the fact that going ahead some stress will play out in the MSME and retail loan book," Chadha added. The bank on Wednesday reported a standalone net profit of Rs 1,061 crore for the December quarter on the back of lower provisions. It had posted a loss of Rs 1,407 crore in the same period last year. It reported provisions of Rs 3,957 crore in Q3 of FY21, down 45 per cent year-on-year. With proforma slippages (adjusted for the Supreme Court's interim order), gross and net NPA ratios would have been

9.63 per cent and 3.36 per cent, respectively. On the same lines, Axis Bank's rise in slippages from the retail portfolio led to tightening of credit norms by the bank for retail loans. "We have been adding rigour to our credit underwriting process. Our focus is to grow in the secured lending space in the retail portfolio," said Sumit Bali, president- retail lending and payments at Axis Bank. About retail loans turning bad, Puneet Sharma, CFO said, "These are accounts which were under moratorium between March and August." Axis Bank's net profit stood at Rs 1,116.6 crore compared with Rs 1,757 crore a year ago.

Bharat Biotech to manufacture GSK-PATH's malaria vaccine

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

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

licence on all rights pertaining to the RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine. GSK will retain the production of the adjuvant of the vaccine (AS01E) and will supply it to Bharat Biotech. The RTS,S/AS01E malaria vaccine, developed by GSK for more than 30 years, and in partnership with PATH since 2001, is being pilot-

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

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

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

Frozen fish pile-up in China threatens supply chains

ANN KOH JAN. 27

A huge pile up of fish cargoes at a Chinese port risks impacting shipments of frozen food across the country and beyond. Hundreds of containers are being held up in Dalian, a major port for seafood imports, as local authorities test the fish for the coronavirus before allowing them to clear customs, according to several freight forwarders, consultants and shipping companies. That's leading to scant availability of electric outlets to keep refrigerated containers, known as reefers, cold.

The shortage of plug points and dwindling space at the port have prompted shipping liners to cancel new reefer bookings into Dalian, and the congestion is now spreading to other refrigerated items like fruit and dumplings. It also means frozen containers are being diverted to other ports in China, leading to bottlenecks in Shanghai and Qingdao too. "Much of the recent concern for rollover cargo has focused on reefer containers," said Josh Brazil, chief operations officer of freight-data provider Ocean Insights. "If there are no power outlets at the port for reefers to be



plugged in, cargoes of perishable food could be damaged or entirely lost if they cannot be re-routed to another port." The scenes playing out in Dalian echo the start of the disruptions the world saw when Covid-19 snared global trade flows early last year. Back then, lockdowns in countries including

China meant ports were closed and ships couldn't unload cargoes, causing a dearth of vessels across the world with the ripple effect lasting for months. It also highlights the impact China's controversial testing of foreign food for the virus is having on supply chains. The country has been testing imported meat and seafood for traces of the virus on concern Covid-19 can spread to humans, despite the WHO saying there's no evidence of people catching the virus from food and food packaging. "China is probably the only country in the world which claims that the coro-

navirus can be spread through frozen food," said Ralph Leszczynski, head of research at shipbroker Bancro Costa & Co. "It might well impact container waiting times at ports." At least four cold-storage vessels have been waiting near Dalian port for as long as two months, nine container ships are docked at the port, and at least six more are waiting in the Yellow Sea to unload, according to Bloomberg data. Reefer containers typically travel together with thousands of normal containers on ships, as long as they have a power source to keep the cargo cold. —Bloomberg

Life insurers want GST cut to 12%

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN.27

Life insurance companies have called for a significant reduction in the goods and services tax (GST) to 12 per cent from the existing mark-up of 18 per cent. They argue that a financial product as critical as life insurance should have a low rate of GST to increase the penetration of life cover across the country. "A financial product as critical as life insurance should have a reduced GST, and get exemption on stamp duty for mandated products, so that the costs are not increased for the end customer," said Tarun Chugh, MD & CEO, Bajaj Allianz Life. "As per the GST norms, life insurance now falls under the slab of 18 per cent tax rate. Since insurance is an essential requirement of every individual for proper financial planning and protection, we believe that a reduction in GST to 12 per cent from 18 per cent or even lower is required," says Vignesh Shahane, MD & CEO, IDBI Federal Life. Besides, life insurers also want receipt of life insurance premia via the NRE account as an export service for GST reduction purpose. "The government can clarify that the receipt of life insurance premium through the NRE account of an NRI, in Indian rupees, is permitted and qualifies as export of services for GST purposes. This will help save costs for NRIs, and in turn, boost the life insurance business", Deloitte said. The industry has also asked for greater tax exemption for premium payers. "It would be an ideal time for the government to consider increasing the tax exemption limit for life insurance," Chugh said.

SHORT TAKES

Paine remains Oz captain, Wade out

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

Stranded Bopanna waits for freedom

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

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English test on card

Root & Co. arrive in Chennai for series

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI



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

Virat, Rohit top ODI rank

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

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

ODI appearance, has 870 points to his kitty.

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

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

up the top five in the batsmen's list.

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

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

— PTI

Shuttlers Sindhu, Srikanth lose in openers

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

Finals here on Wednesday.

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



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