

SHORT TAKES

INDIA LIKELY TO FINALISE \$2.5BN DEAL FOR IAF

New Delhi: India is likely to finalise in the next few months a mega deal to procure 56 transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force at a cost of \$2.5 billion, official sources said on Tuesday. The project will be implemented by aerospace giant Airbus along with an Indian entity as it will be implemented under the broad framework of the Make in India initiative in the defence sector, they said. As per decisions, 16 C-295 transport aircraft will be supplied by the Airbus in fly-away condition while 40 planes will be manufactured in India. The procurement process for the aircraft has almost been completed and a final decision on the deal is likely to be made soon, said a source. In a report, the defence ministry said the case of procurement of 56 C-295 from Airbus with participation of an Indian production agency for manufacture of 40 aircraft in India is at approval stage and a contract is likely to be signed in the near future. "The case is first of its kind which envisages participation of private companies and would prove to be a boost for our defence industry," it said. The government is procuring the aircraft to replace the IAF's Avro planes. The defence ministry has been giving final touches to a number of long-pending procurement projects to boost India's overall military capability. Last month, it had approved procurement of weapons and military equipment worth ₹28,000 crore. — PTI

PLEA IN HC CLAIMS ILLEGAL WORK AT MOHAN MARKET

New Delhi: The Delhi high court has sought response of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the south Delhi Municipal Corporation on a PIL alleging that authorities were not taking any action against the illegal construction going on at Mohan Singh market in R.K. Puram here. A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan issued notice to the DDA and SDMC seeking their stand on the plea by an NGO which has contended that despite complaints to the civic body and the special task force looking into alleged unauthorised constructions, no action has been taken. The NGO has contended that there were news reports that the alleged illegal constructions in the market were set to be demolished on orders of the task force, but no steps have been taken. It has claimed that when the task force was approached to take action, nothing was done. The DDA and SDMC, during the hearing, told the bench that there was a plan to redevelop the market. They said they will indicate their stand on affidavit before the next date of hearing on January 28, 2021. — PTI

2 ARRESTED FOR KILLING MAN IN NORTHEAST DELHI

New Delhi: A 24-year-old man, along with his friend, was arrested for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to kill his brother-in-law suspecting that he was having an extra-marital affair with another woman. The accused, Monu, hatched a conspiracy with his 23-year-old friend Ankit Rajput to kill his brother-in-law, Rajesh, who owned a jeans manufacturing factory at Seelampur in northeast Delhi. Ankit, who worked at the victim's factory as an employee, along with Monu, killed Rajesh by hitting on his head twice with a gas cylinder on the night of January 1, police said, adding no one was present in the factory at that time. "We received inputs on January 2 that a person named Rajesh, a resident of Gautampuri, was admitted in JPC hospital and declared brought dead. The victim had injuries on his head and blood was oozing out from his left ear," said Ved Prakash Surya, DCP (Northeast). During investigation, call detail records were analysed and CCTV footage was also checked wherein suspicious movement of the accused was seen, he said. During interrogation, the arrested accused, Ankit, confessed to his crime and disclosed that he killed Rajesh at the behest of his brother-in-law, Monu, who was also arrested subsequently, the DCP said. — PTI

DELHI RIOTS 'Sufficient material on record to proceed against JNU leader in communal violence case'

Prima facie Umar, Tahir, others plotted together: Court

New Delhi, Jan. 5: There was reasonable ground to prima facie show that former JNU student leader Umar Khalid, suspended AAP Councillor Tahir Hussain and others conspired on north-east Delhi riots last year, a court here said on Tuesday while taking cognisance of the supplementary charge sheet filed in the case.

Chief metropolitan magistrate Dinesh Kumar said there was sufficient material on record to proceed against Khalid in the case related to the communal violence in Khajuri Khas area in February last year.

The court said a witness statement was sufficient to show that during the rele-

vant time, Khalid was allegedly in contact with Hussain, accused as the main conspirator who had funded the communal riots and instigated the mob from his house to rob the people and burn down properties.

It noted that the prosecution has alleged in the charge sheet that Khalid was an active participant in the criminal conspiracy to instigate communal riots in various parts of Delhi.

Due to the instigation by the accused persons, a mob had gathered which had robbed persons and burnt down the properties including houses and shops. They had also destroyed the public prop-



Umar Khalid Tahir Hussain

▶ **UMAR KHALID** was arrested in the case in October, 2020, and was in judicial custody. He was arrested in September last year in a separate case related to the conspiracy in the riots

erty, it said in its order.

It noted that the prosecution has relied upon the statement of a witness named Rahul Kasana and a perusal of his statement under section 161 (examination by police) CrPC would show that he has stated that he was working as driver of Hussain at the relevant time. The court

said as per his statement, Kasana had seen accused Hussain allegedly distributing money to the persons who were participating in the demonstration against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

It said the statement alleged that on January 8, 2020, he had taken Hussain to Shaheen Bagh where

the latter had entered in an office after debording the car and after sometime he had seen Umar Khalid along with Khalid Saifi allegedly entering inside the office.

The court said: After about 1-1.5 hours, accused Tahir Hussain had come out of the office. The statement of this witness is sufficient to show that during the relevant time, accused Umar Khalid was in contact with accused Tahir Hussain against whom there is sufficient material on record to prima facie show that he was the main conspirator who had funded the communal riots and instigated the mob from his house to rob the per-

sons and to burn down the properties.

Thus, there is reasonable ground to prima facie show that accused Umar Khalid, accused Tahir Hussain and other accused persons had conspired together to commit offences as mentioned in the charge sheet. Hence, there is sufficient material on record to proceed against accused Umar Khalid.

The court directed the investigating officer to supply a copy of the supplementary charge sheet to Khalid through the concerned jail superintendent.

Meanwhile, the court also issued notice to the police on an application moved by Khalid alleging

that a vicious Media campaign was being conducted against him. The application claimed that sections of the media were getting access to the charge sheet even before the accused or his counsel got it.

The police had filed the supplementary charge sheet against Khalid in the case on December 26 last year. The main charge sheet was filed against 15 persons, including Hussain, in June last year.

Khalid was arrested in the case in October, 2020, and was in judicial custody. He was arrested in September last year in a separate case related to the conspiracy in the riots. — PTI

AAP, BJP blame each other for demolition of 100-yr-old temple

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

The demolition of a Hanuman temple triggered a political war of words between Delhi BJP and the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

The AAP blamed BJP-ruled North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) for the demolition of the century-old temple. BJP hit back at AAP, saying the 100-year-old temple was part of the Delhi government's ongoing beautification plan.

Meanwhile, a senior official of the NDMC said the temple was demolished as an "encroachment" under the high court order.

Addressing the media, AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj claimed that on December 20 last year, the NDMC deputy commissioner had sworn in court to demolish the temple and said Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta should clarify on it. "The deputy commissioner of the MCD had said in an affidavit that the Hanuman temple could not be demolished due to Diwali, but now, all preparations to demolish the structure were made," he said.

Hitting back, BJP's Delhi unit condemned the demolition and claimed that the temple was demolished as part of ongoing Chandni Chowk beautification plan being implemented by the AAP government.

Mr Gupta claimed that the public works department (PWD) of the Delhi government had, in October 2019, said the MCD and the police were not cooperating with it and sought a court direction for the removal of the temple to continue its work under the Chandni Chowk redevelopment



Vishwa Hindu Parishad supporters take part in a protest in Chandni Chowk area on Tuesday after a 100-year-old temple of Lord Hanuman was demolished on court orders. — PTI

project.

"The Religious Affairs Committee of the Arvind Kejriwal government, chaired by a minister, could have saved the temple by telling the court that adjustments could be made in the redevelopment project, but it did not do so. The Kejriwal government is completely responsible for the demolition of the temple," he said.

The BJP leader said the AAP government should reconstruct the temple and probe why its Religious Affairs Committee did not make any efforts to save the structure.

BJP MP and the party's former Delhi unit chief Manoj Tiwari also demanded the Delhi government to reconstruct the temple.

VHP, Bajrang Dal members protest demolition, detained

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

The members of the Hindu outfits Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal were detained by the police during a protest, on Tuesday, over the demolition of a Hanuman temple at Chandni Chowk in Delhi.

The temple was demolished, on Sunday, by the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) in accordance with court orders as part of the ongoing Chandni Chowk beautification plan.

The protesters, carrying saffron flags and raising slogans, took out a march from the Gauri Shankar Mandir to the site where the temple existed. They were stopped by the police at a barricade.

According to VHP spokesperson Mahendra Rawat, around 15-20 workers and leaders, including Delhi unit president Kapil Khanna, vice president Surendra Gupta, secretary Raviji, and Bajrang Dal state convener Bharat Batra were detained during

the protest. A senior police official said that 27 protesters, who gathered near the Gauri Shankar temple on Tuesday, were detained owing to Covid-19 guidelines.

"They were taken to a nearby police station and released later. These protesters belonged to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal outfits," said the senior police official.

"As a precautionary measure, security personnel have been deployed in the area," said the police.

2 held for bid to extort ₹30L from bizman

New Delhi, Jan. 5: Two men were arrested from Madhya Pradesh's Tikamgarh district for allegedly trying to extort ₹30 lakh from a Delhi-based businessman at whose factory the duo had worked as labourers, police said on Tuesday.

Balram and Prem Narayan were arrested from their native village in the district, police said.

The businessman had reported the extortion bid at the Model Town police station in northwest Delhi on December 31, police

said. In his complaint, the businessman said he had received threat messages from an unknown mobile-phone number and that the callers had demanded ₹30 lakh from him and threatened him of dire consequences, they said.

Based on information and technical surveillance, the location of the mobile-phone number was traced to Tikamgarh, said deputy commissioner of police (Northwest) Vijayanta Arya.

Call detail records were analysed and the identity

▶ **THE ARRESTED ACCUSED** were arrested from Madhya Pradesh's Tikamgarh district. They had worked as labourers at a factory of a Delhi-based businessman, the Delhi police said.

of the perpetrators was established. Subsequently, a team was sent to Tikamgarh and the duo was arrested, she said.

"During interrogation, the accused confessed to their involvement in the offence and disclosed that

earlier, they were engaged as labourers for a construction work at the complainant's factory. They went to their village recently and arranged a SIM card for sending the threat messages and extorting the amount," Mr Arya added.

Balram was the one who sent the messages and made the calls while his associate, Narayan, provided the SIM card, the DCP said. The mobile phone and SIM card used in the crime have been seized, the police said.

SDMC earns ₹3.72cr by exporting surplus solar power to BSES

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

In a bid to ramp up its efforts to go green and earn revenue simultaneously, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) has earned ₹3.72 crore by exporting surplus solar power to BSES.

In a function organised at its SDMC headquarters, officials of BSES presented a cheque of ₹3.72 crore to mayor Anamika, Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta, and commissioner Gyanesh Bharti. On the occasion, Leader of House Narendra Chawla, councillors, and senior officials of SDMC were present.

On the occasion, Ms Anamika said that the SDMC has, till date, installed a total capacity of 9.3 MW of solar plant on 209 municipal buildings.

"Most of the properties are now self-sufficient in meeting their electricity requirements and the excess electricity generated from these solar panels is being fed to the grid, thereby

▶ **IN THE** year 2019-20, 73.33 lakh units of electricity have been generated, out of which 47 lakh units have been exported to the grid earning revenue at average power purchase," she said.

The mayor further stated that in the financial year 2019-20, 73.33 lakh units of electricity have been generated by these solar plants, out of which 47 lakh units have been exported to the grid. SDMC has earned ₹3.72 crore by generating electricity from these solar rooftop plants.

Mr Bharti said that with consistent efforts during the last four years, SDMC has generated 103.43 lakh units of electricity from solar panels installed at SDMC buildings.

"Out of the total electricity generated, 72.31 lakh units surplus electricity has been exported to the power company. Through this move, the corporation has earned nearly ₹5.3 crore revenue," he said.

AIIMS head says Covid vaccination voluntary

New Delhi, Jan. 5: Getting immunised against Covid-19 will be a voluntary exercise and it is important that both doses of the vaccine be administered to an individual for developing better immune response against the disease, AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria has said. Protective levels of antibodies generally develop two weeks after receiving the second dose, he said.

The senior pulmonologist also stressed that the vaccine introduced in India will be as effective as any vaccine developed by other countries.

With the Covid-19 vaccine expected to be rolled out within a few days, Dr Guleria answered some FAQs about the vaccination drive in a video uploaded on the health ministry's website.

He responded to questions such as whether taking the coronavirus vaccine was mandatory, how long does it take for the antibodies to develop and if it was necessary for a Covid-recovered person to take the vaccine. — PTI



Indian Army Chief General M.M. Naravane interacts with Covid warriors at Base Hospital, Delhi Cantonment, on Tuesday. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

I-T DEPARTMENT
QUIZES VADRA
FOR 2ND DAY

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

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

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

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

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

Officials had said the questioning was linked to the purchase of some land parcels by a firm linked to Vadra in Rajasthan's border town of Bikaner in which another central probe agency, the ED, had filed a money laundering case in 2015. —PTI

RJD TO TAKE OUT
'DHANYAWAD
YATRA' SOON

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, JAN. 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The first women rescuers' team is already on ground. Recently, the UP government requisitioned an NDRF team and they (women) went there (Garh Mukteshwar). The team handled the rescue boats

and related equipment," NDRF director general S.N. Pradhan said.

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

The move to include women personnel in the NDRF combat ranks was in the works for some time. The force, since it was raised over a decade ago, was till now an all-male affair.

More than 100 women personnel have joined the NDRF over the last few months and they are being deputed with its battalions across the country as soon as they finish their pre-induction course and training, the DG said.

He said the numbers are expected to go over 200 women personnel in the near future. —PTI

States on alert for bird flu as Haryana
reports 4L poultry deaths in 10 days

New Delhi, Jan. 5: Several states on Tuesday sounded an alert to contain the H5N8 strain of bird flu and sent samples for testing while Kerala began culling of chickens and ducks.

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu stepped up surveillance and formed guidelines following the outbreak of the viral infection in neighbouring Kerala, where around 1,700 ducks have died due to the flu.

In Haryana, over four lakh poultry birds have died at farms in Panchkula district in the past 10 days, officials said, adding a team from Jalandhar's Regional Disease Diagnosis Laboratory has collected samples.

There are no confirmed reports of avian influenza till now, a RDDL spokesperson said.

In Madhya Pradesh, officials said that 155 dead crows in Indore have been found with the H5N8 strain since the pathogen was first detected in the city a week back, while in Rajasthan, after Jhalwar, birds in Kota and Baran were found with the infection.

However, no cases have been reported yet in Maharashtra, which shares borders with Madhya Pradesh.

Officials in Himachal Pradesh surveyed the area around the Pong Dam Lake sanctuary in Kangra district to check the spread of the flu to domestic poultry birds, a day after samples of dead migratory birds there tested positive for H5N8.

Till now, 2,700 migratory birds, mostly bar-headed geese, have been found dead in the lake area and samples have been sent for testing, state animal husbandry officials said.

The operation to cull birds in and around a one-



Women carry dead ducks in a village in Alappuzha district of Kerala on Tuesday. A special team of health officials has been deployed to cull the birds, in order to contain the further spread of the Avian Influenza (bird flu). —PTI

km radius of the affected areas in Alappuzha and Kottayam in Kerala was launched a day after results of samples tested at the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal confirmed the outbreak of the bird flu in the two districts.

Rapid response teams, set up by the administration, began culling ducks, hens and other domestic birds as per guidelines, officials said.

Culling of birds in four panchayats of Nedumudi, Thakazhy, Pallippad and Karuvatta in Kuttanad region, where the outbreak has been reported, is expected to be completed by Wednesday evening, Alappuzha district author-

ities said.

In Karuvatta panchayat alone, around 12,000 birds will be culled, an official said.

In the affected areas of Neendoor panchayat in Kottayam district, the rapid response teams have culled some 3,000 birds so far, authorities said. On a farm in Neendoor, around 1,700 ducks had died due to the viral infection.

Officials have said around 40,000 domestic birds, including 34,000 in the Kuttanad region alone, will be culled to check the spread of the H5N8 virus.

Though the situation has been brought under control, authorities have sounded a high alert in the districts, considering the

potential of the virus to infect humans.

The Alappuzha district collector has banned the use and trade of meat, eggs and waste of domestic birds, including ducks and chicken, in Kuttanad and Karthikappalli Taluqs, officials said.

In Indore, the presence of bird flu was first detected on December 29, when about 50 crows were found dead on the Daly College campus of the Residency area, and tests run on two of the carcasses confirmed the presence of the pathogen.

Madhya Pradesh veterinary department deputy director Pramod Sharma said 155 crows were detected with the H5N8 virus in

the Residency area in the last eight days.

The deadly avian influenza has not been found in any other bird species apart from crows in Indore so far, he said.

"Samples from 120 live hens and roosters from the area and 30 migratory birds from Sirpur Lake have been sent to a laboratory in Bhopal to check for bird flu. The reports are awaited," Mr Sharma said.

Jammu and Kashmir sounded an alert and started collecting samples to check the health of winged guests flocking to the Union territory during winters, officials said as neighbouring Himachal Pradesh reported cases of bird flu. —PTI

'Need to build
guidelines for
Indo-Pacific'

If required, India and US will build redlines: Outgoing envoy Ken Juster

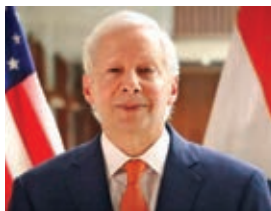
New Delhi, Jan. 5: Noting that the US and India are laying the foundation for a stronger Indo-Pacific architecture, outgoing American envoy Ken Juster on Tuesday said the two countries should focus on giving further "substance" to it by developing guidelines and, if necessary, even "redlines" as he outlined various security threats including from those choosing "suicide vests or military incursions".

In a farewell address days before he relinquishes his position, Mr Juster extensively talked about key bilateral issues, including "frictions and frustrations" on the trade and investment front as also growing bilateral defence and security cooperation.

The US welcomed India's emergence as a leading power, Mr Juster said, adding the "close coordination" between the two sides has been important as New Delhi confronts, perhaps on a sustained basis, "aggressive" Chinese activity on its border.

"We are now building out the foundation of a stronger Indo-Pacific architecture that will enable us to tackle challenges that lie ahead. Our mission over the next five years and beyond should be to give this endeavour further form and substance to develop guidelines and, if necessary, even redlines," he said.

This should enable all countries to prosper from a region that respects sovereignty, a rules-based order, and the peaceful



Ken Juster

resolution of disputes, in accordance with international law, he said, adding that the US and India both recognise that much of the Indo-Pacific region if not the world is depending on our efforts.

The US envoy said the two countries "purposefully" deepened the defence and security cooperation to keep the two nations safe from a growing array of threats and to provide security beyond our own borders, and suggested that the evolving international environment may require New Delhi to adjust how it expresses its "strategic autonomy".

Mr Juster said that Washington considers New Delhi as a critical partner in preserving and expanding the peace and prosperity in Indo-Pacific region.

"We have both been influenced by the legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. But we know that not everyone thinks as we do, and some choose suicide vests or military incursions. That is why the United States and India are committed to strengthening our defence and security cooperation in the words of Sardar Patel, 'cultivating strength to challenge oppression'," he said. —PTI

Border with Pak 'virtually sealed' in Punjab

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

Border Security Force (BSF) has rushed additional troops to increase security along the India-Pakistan border in Punjab sector. Sources said additional 4,000-5,000 troops have been deployed in sensitive border districts of Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Amritsar and Taran Taran thus "virtually sealing" the entire border.

There has been an increased activity from the Pakistan side along the border areas of Punjab. Sources claimed they had specific intelligence inputs that Pakistan would try large-scale infiltration into Punjab and was now focusing on this region instead of the Kashmir Valley.

Following these developments intense security review was conducted for the border districts of Punjab by multiple agencies and it was decided to further increase deployment specially by the BSF Frontier Zone.

There are four major districts of Punjab that share their border with Pakistan — Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Amritsar and Taran Taran. Sources claimed that additional border forces between 4,000-5,000 have been deployed along these four districts. This is in addition to the regular deployments that is done by the BSF. Following these additional deployments the security sources claimed that the Pakistan border in Punjab sector has been "virtually sealed."

"We have done adequate

deployment in this sensitive sector and have almost sealed all the vulnerable spots. The situation is being monitored on regular basis and if some more corrective measures need to be taken we will do the same. It is unlikely that Pakistan will now try some misadventure in this sector," a senior security official remarked.

Over the last few days several attempts have been made to infiltrate from Punjab border. Further drones have been spotted frequently which has even dropped sophisticated weapons some of which were recovered by security forces in the Gurdaspur region. This increased activity by Pakistan is being linked to the ongoing farmers agitation in Punjab.

'Army ready for any challenge'

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

Indian troops are "well entrenched to counter any misadventure by Chinese forces" and continued to be deployed on high icy mountains "braving inclement weather", Defence ministry's annual report has said.

"Unilateral and provocative actions by the Chinese to change the status quo by force, in more than one area on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), were responded to in a firm and non-escalatory way, ensuring the sanctity of our claims in Eastern Ladakh," it said.

The report said that while Indian Army has maintained all protocols and agreements between the two countries, the PLA escalated the situation by utilisation of unorthodox weapons and amassing large number of troops.

"Indian Army with assistance from Indian Air Force, mobilised troops including accretionary forces in a very short duration including heavy equipment like guns, tanks as also ammunition, rations and clothing. Own engineers constructed roads, accommodation shelters and bridges to assist troop deployment," said the report.

Saikia loses LoP status in Assam House

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, JAN. 5

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

In an official notifica-

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

The notification stated, "The present strength of

the Indian National Congress Legislature Party, Assam Legislative Assembly, is not equal to the quorum fixed to constitute a sitting of the House that is one-sixth of the total number of Members of the House as required... therefore, the Speaker, Assam Legislative Assembly, has been pleased to

withdraw the recognition of Debabrata Saikia, M.L.A., as Leader of the Opposition, with effect from January 1, 2021."

The Congress had won 26 seats in the 2016 Assembly elections to take the second spot after the BJP bagged 60 seats but 6 MLAs quit the party later.

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS

In order to upgrade the infrastructure, Railway will undertake the Electronic Interlocking work in connection with Raj Nandgaon-Kalamna 3rd line of Nagpur Division from 06.01.2021 to 11.01.2021. During this period the following trains will be affected as under:-

Train No. & Train Name	Date from originating station
08237 Korba - Amritsar Jn. Festival Express Special	06.01.2021 & 08.01.2021
08238 Amritsar Jn. - Bilaspur Festival Express Special	08.01.2021 & 10.01.2021
02887 Visakhapatnam - Hazrat Nizamuddin Samta Exp.	05, 06, 07 & 09.01.2021
02888 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Visakhapatnam Samta Exp.	07, 08, 09 & 11.01.2021

NOTE: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., must be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

Security Helpline
No. 182

Integrated Helpline
No. 139

37/2021

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CANCELLATION/SHORT TERMINATION OF TRAINS DUE TO DOUBLING WORK

In the continuation of Cancellation/Short Termination notice published earlier regarding the Non-interlocking work for doubling at Haridwar-Laksar section of Moradabad Division, Northern Railway has decided to extend the cancellation/short termination dates of the following trains:-

Train No. & Train Name	Date(s) of Cancellation (from originating station)
02017/02018 New Delhi - Dehradun - New Delhi Shatabdi Special	06.01.2021 & 07.01.2021
02092/02091 Kathgodam - Dehradun - Kathgodam Jan Shatabdi Special	06.01.2021
02191 Jabalpur - Haridwar Jn. Special Express	06.01.2021
02192 Haridwar Jn. - Jabalpur Special Express	07.01.2021
04609 Rishikesh - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Special Express	06.01.2021 & 07.01.2021
04610 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Rishikesh Special Express	06.01.2021
04888 Barmer - Rishikesh Special Express	06.01.2021
04887 Rishikesh - Barmer Special Express	06.01.2021 & 07.01.2021
04113 Prayagraj - Dehradun Special Express	06.01.2021
04114 Dehradun - Prayagraj Special Express	07.01.2021
05005 Gorakhpur - Dehradun Special Express	06.01.2021
05006 Dehradun - Gorakhpur Special Express	07.01.2021
04041 Delhi - Dehradun Special Express	06.01.2021
04042 Dehradun - Delhi Special Express	06.01.2021 & 07.01.2021

Short Termination/ Partially Cancellation of Trains

Train No. & Name	Short Terminated at/Originated from	Partial Cancelled between Stations	Date (from the Originating Station)
09111 Valsad - Haridwar Spl. Express	at Meerut City	Meerut City - Haridwar	05.01.2021
09112 Haridwar - Valsad Spl. Express	from Meerut City	Haridwar - Meerut City	06.01.2021
09017 Bandra Terminus - Haridwar Special Express	at Meerut City	Meerut City - Haridwar	06.01.2021
09018 Haridwar - Bandra Terminus Special Express	from Meerut City	Haridwar - Meerut City	07.01.2021

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SHORT TAKES

After FIR against Khans, mantri says none above law

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, JAN. 5

A day after the Mumbai police lodged an FIR against celebrities Arbaaz Khan and Sohail Khan for allegedly violating the Covid protocol pertaining to institutional quarantine, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope said that nobody is above the law and everybody should follow the Covid protocols. The Mumbai Police on Monday registered a case against Arbaaz Khan, his brother Sohail Khan and the latter's Son Nirvaan Khan for allegedly violating the Covid-19 institutional quarantine norms. Speaking with the reporters in Mumbai on Tuesday, the minister said, "It is the duty of an ideal citizen to strictly adhere to the rules and regulations in the current pandemic situation." After their return from Dubai on December 25, the trio had been asked to stay at a hotel in Bandra, but they went to their homes instead. When asked if the state health department would take any action against the actors, Tope said, "We will take measures against it."

Modi meets agri officials, discusses ways to end stir

■ Continued from Page 1

January 8. The Prime Minister has been a strong advocate of the new farm laws. But he seems to be keen to end the stalemate with the protesting farmers. Earlier he had said he was ready "with folded hands" to discuss every issue with farmers to allay their fears. He had also said that any talk about the new laws doing away with MSP "is the biggest lie ever."

BJP leaders Surjit Kumar Jyani, who is also a former Punjab minister, and Harjit Singh Grewal also met the Prime Minister at his residence on Tuesday. Mr Jyani was chairing the BJP's Kisan Coordination Committee for interacting with farmers in Punjab last year on the three farm bills which at that time had not been passed by Parliament.

Battling cold weather, unseasonal rain and thunderstorms, the representatives of 41 farmers' unions held a meeting at Singhu border on Tuesday to discuss their future strategy. The farmers will take out their proposed tractor march from all protest sites to the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal on Thursday. The tractor march was deferred for a day due to bad weather forecast. The unions reiterated their stand to intensify their agitation if their demands are not met.

The seventh round of talks on Monday between the Centre and farm leaders demanding the scrapping of the three contentious farm laws ended in a stalemate as three ministers said it was not possible to commit to a rollback of the legislation without wider consultations with higher authorities.

'Ready to roll out vaccine in 10 days, need Centre nod'

■ Continued from Page 1

priority for them at this point of time. "Vaccines are a global public health good and have the power to save lives and accelerate the return to economic normalcy at the earliest. Now that two Covid-19 vaccines have been issued emergency use authorisation (EUA) in India, the focus is on manufacturing, supply and distribution, such that people who need it the most receive high-quality, safe and efficacious vaccines. Both our companies are fully engaged in this activity and consider it our duty to the nation and the world at large to ensure a smooth roll-out of vaccines. Each of our companies continues their Covid-19 vaccine development activities as planned," the two companies said in a joint statement.

The decision to green-light Covaxin triggered a row with critics pointing to a lack of efficacy data at this time. Covaxin has completed only two of three required trial phases; the third — which tests for efficacy — began in November. The two earlier phases only ensured that the drug is safe.

Covishield has submitted data for all three phases, with trials taking place in India and around the world, and the DCGI has said the drug is 70.42 per cent effective.

L-G chairs meet on Amarnath Yatra

Calls for best-in-class arrangements

Jammu, Jan. 5: Lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday called for best-in-class arrangements for pilgrims during the Amarnath Yatra to the holy cave shrine in south Kashmir Himalayas.

The L-G was chairing a preparatory review meeting of Amarnath Yatra-2021 here at Civil Secretariat. He will personally oversee the preparations and setting up of on-ground facilities for the pilgrims, an official spokesman said.

Mr Sinha called for best-in-class arrangements for pilgrims to improve their yatra experience, he said. Laying special emphasis on providing the best medical facilities to the pilgrims, the L-G passed directions for the increase of accidental insurance to pilgrims during the yatra, besides doubling the number of life-saving ambulances, the spokesman



Manoj Sinha

said. Mr Sinha directed officials to explore the possibility of setting up a well-equipped and well-staffed CHC to handle emergency cases, he said. The L-G asked the CEO of the Amarnath shrine board to rope in the governments of neighbouring states to provide services of more doctors and paramedics, besides various NGOs that already send healthcare professionals during the yatra.

The L-G directed the officers concerned to improve the utilities en route, besides repair of roads and other infrastructure well in time.

He asked them to take all requisite measures and involve more NGOs and religious organisations to ensure smooth pilgrimage of the yatri. — PTI

ED attaches ₹452cr assets of firm based in Singapore

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached assets worth ₹452 crore of a Singapore-based "shell" company in connection with its money laundering probe in the IL&FS alleged payment default crisis.

The central probe agency in a statement issued here on Tuesday said, "The assets, provisionally attached under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) provisions, are in the form of shares belonging to A S Coal Pte Singapore, a shell company owned by British national Jaimin Vyas". The attached assets are in the form of 8.86 per cent shares of ILFS Tamil Nadu Power Company Limited (ITPCL) presently worth around ₹452 crore, said the ED.

This 2019 money laundering case was registered on the basis of FIR filed against IRL, ITNL (group companies of IL&FS), its officials and others by the Delhi police. The ED also took cognisance of a complaint filed by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office against IL&FS Financial Services (IFIN) and its officials. The ED said its probe found that there was a well-planned conspiracy to defraud IL&FS and Indian banks by Jaimin Vyas in connivance with officials on IL&FS and a Chinese EPC contractor named SEPCO III.

Central Vista project gets SC's nod

■ Continued from Page 1

MoEF to install the smog towers in all future major development projects, including those relating to government buildings, townships or even private ones, particularly in cities with a bad track record of air quality.

In his 179-page dissenting judgment Justice Sanjiv Khanna quashed the notification of March 20, 2020, on changes in the land use of six plots in the Central Vista, noting the petitioners' main grievance that the project was hurried without proper public consultation, and ordering fresh public

Blow to Mamata as 2nd mantri quits her Cabinet

■ Continued from Page 1

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

Senior Trinamul Congress MP Sougata Roy said: "I am sad to learn about Laxmi's resignation. He was a good

Heaviest Jan. rain in Chennai in 100 yrs

Normal life severely affected ■ MeT department predicts light to moderate rains in next 24 hours

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Normal life was affected in Chennai and surrounding districts after incessant heavy rain on Tuesday, resulting in waterlogging and inundation in low-lying areas. The authorities also released surplus water from the city reservoirs, including Chembarambakkam lake.

According to weather expert Pradeep John, Chennai city has received a record rainfall in 100 years and it is the heaviest in January since 1915. He said "there is no cyclone,

no depression and no low pressure. Yet we have seen heavy rainfall in Chennai and by January standards the rainfall is just 20 mm yet we have got over seven times in January rain in less than 15 hours."

Chennai and adjacent regions witnessed heavy-to-very heavy rainfall under the influence of an easterly trough, a senior Regional Meteorological Centre official here said. On Tuesday, Chennai city recorded 6 cm of rain, much more than the expected 3.7 cm.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has



Vehicles waded through a waterlogged road after heavy rains in Chennai on Tuesday.

— PTI

predicted cloudy weather with light to moderate rains in the next 24 hours.

Moderate rainfall is likely in several northern districts on Wednesday with

Villupuram, Cuddalore and other neighbouring districts expected to receive isolated heavy showers. The sudden downpour prompted officials to release surplus water from the reservoirs around Chennai. Initially, 500 cusecs of water were released from the Chembarambakkam dam and later stepped up to about 3,000 cusecs.

Similarly, 1,500 cusecs were released from the Puzhal lake, and 2,970 cusecs from Poondi, PWD officials said. These reservoirs are the primary resources of Chennai's drinking water needs.

Avalanche warnings, fuel rationing in J&K



Vehicles covered under snow at a parking area during heavy snowfall in Srinagar on Tuesday. Authorities in Kashmir on Tuesday ordered rationing of petrol and diesel for

vehicles to overcome any shortage of fuel due to closure of Jammu-Srinagar National Highway amid heavy snowfall. The Jammu and Kashmir Disaster Management

Authority issued fresh medium and low-level avalanche warnings for the higher reaches of the avalanche-prone areas in the Union Territory.

— PTI

Naqvi slams politicians doubting India vaccine

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

Hitting out at those raising doubts on the restricted use approval to one of the "Made in India" Covid-19 vaccines, minority affairs minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Tuesday said "frustrated political players are doubting the efficacy of coronavirus vaccines made in India."

The minister, who was in Mumbai for the Haj Committee meeting, also informed that arrangements are being made to administer coronavirus vaccines to those going from India for the Haj pilgrimage. The last date for submission of application forms for Haj 2021 is January 10 and around 50 per cent of the total applicants so far are women and over 700 women have applied under the without "mehram" (male companion) category.

Without naming anyone, the minister said that those who used to raise questions on welfare measures taken by the Modi government during the Corona crisis, are now questioning the corona vaccines.

Over 2100 women had applied for Haj 2020 under that category. These women will go to Haj 2021 as the application filled up by them for Haj 2020 is also valid for Haj 2021, a statement from the minister's office said.

Mr Naqvi on Tuesday said some frustrated political players are doubting the efficacy of coronavirus vaccines made in India. He added that the government has tirelessly and effectively worked to provide relief to every needy person.

Ahead of civic polls, Sena woos Gujaratis in Mumbai

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 5

In a bid to woo the sizeable Gujarati community, which is the traditional vote bank of the BJP, the ruling Shiv Sena has started efforts ahead of BMC polls. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party has decided to hold a meet of Gujarati people on January 10 in Mumbai.

The meet will be held under the tagline "Mumbai ma Jalebi Fafda Uddhav Thackeray Aapda" (Just as Jalebi and Fafda belongs to Mumbai, Uddhav Thackeray belongs to us). Jalebi and Fafda are the favourite Gujarati snacks, which are also popular in Mumbai.

Hemraj Shah, Shiv Sena leader from the Gujarati

community, has organised the meet, which will be held at Navanit Gujarati Samaj Hall in Jogeshwari. The party has stated that the programme aims at creating awareness in Gujarati voters in Mumbai ahead of civic body polls.

The move to hold a meet of Gujarati people is in stark contrast to Shiv Sena's 'sons of the soil' politics. However, the Gujarati vote bank has a capacity to impact the result of sizeable number of seats in Mumbai.

The Sena campaign leaflet said that the BJP's Gujarati leadership is arrogant and narrow-minded, which denied an opportunity to a Marathi leader in Maharashtra. The BJP is upset over the fact that Uddhav snatched

the power from them in Maharashtra

The letter said, "Elections for the 10 municipal corporations including BMC will be held in February 2022. This election is going to be held in a very different situation. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has been doing a good job and also doing his best to maintain the religious harmony in Maharashtra. He has also managed to tide over the corona crisis. BJP leaders are not able to digest this and hence they have vowed to pull down the saffron flag of Shiv Sena from the BMC. Hence for Shiv Sena, this election is very prestigious and thus the party has organised this meet to awaken its Gujarati voter."

Bollywood actor Brijendra Kala, the main lead in Hindi short film *Mask*, talks with characters of Netaji Subhash and Gandhiji during shooting of the film at Kolkata maidan on Wednesday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

■ 'Role limited to examining constitutionality'

Parliament alone can debate policies, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

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

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

Besides Justice Khanwilkar, Justice Dinesh Maheshwari is the other judge in the majority judgment. Justice Sanjiv Khanna gave a dissenting judgment in the case.

Pointing out that the role of the court was "limited to examining the constitutionality including legality of the policy and government actions", Justice Khanwilkar said, "the constitutionally envisaged system of 'checks and balances' has been completely misconstrued and misapplied in this case.

■ MAKING IT clear that the constitutional courts can't cross the boundaries set by the Constitution, Justice Khanwilkar, in note of caution, said, 'In light of the settled law, we should be loath to venture into these areas'

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

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

The right to development, Justice Khanwilkar said is a "basic human right" and no organ of the State is expected to become an "impediment"

in the process of development "as long as the government proceeds in accordance with law".

The court said this in a postlude while referring to the arguments by one of the petitioners urging the court to ask the government to spend funds being spent on the central vista project for other pressing issues.

Referring to the arguments by the petitioners urging the court to venture into the "territories" that are way beyond the contemplated powers of a constitutional court, Justice Khanwilkar wondered, "We are compelled to wonder if we, in the absence of a legal mandate, can dictate the government to desist from spending money on one project and instead use it for something else, or if we can ask the government to run their offices only from areas decided by this Court, or if we can question the wisdom of the government in focusing on a particular direction of development."

Making it clear that the constitutional courts can't cross the boundaries set by the constitution, Justice Khanwilkar in note of caution said, "In light of the settled law, we should be loath to venture into these areas."

THE ASIAN AGE

6 JANUARY 2021

Nod for Central Vista: SC gives govt latitude

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

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

Why a new Parliament House? The government's answer is that the present structure is old, it is not spacious enough, and the building also has problems to do with age (it is less than a hundred years old).

The Supreme Court was only too willing to see reason in the government's justifications, actions, and possible motives which have been ripped apart by the country's top experts in architecture, design, city planning, heritage professionals, environmentalists, besides retired top civil servants

Were extensions, renovations, not possible as are routinely done with the centuries-old British Parliament?

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

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

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

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

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

Trump must leave gracefully

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

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

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

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Subhani



Challenges for Modi as world faces Biden era



K.C. Singh

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

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

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

This undermines President-elect Biden's hope for a united front of democracies and like-minded nations against China. All may not have been lost yet as the agreement will take time to be implemented. Similarly, by finessing the RCEP, China negated Mr Trump's attempt to isolate and decouple trade and investment from it. If the CAI sends a signal to the Nato allies of the US abandoning it on economic and trade issues, the RCEP has showed that even in its immediate Asian neighbourhood, and despite its expansionist and aggressive conduct, China has managed to use the carrot to offset the stick. After four years of being Trump *bhakt*s, where does it leave the Indian government? The disruption caused by Mr Trump even in the Islamic world, by exacerbating the Shia-Sunni and intra-Sunni divisions, has immediate implications for India on multiple counts, due to India having ridden the American wave rather than eke out an independent course. For instance, the excessive chumminess with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, built on existing excellent relations, begot increased counter-terror cooperation and their distancing from Pakistan. But the cost has been India damaging its bridges with Iran, Qatar and Turkey. Thus, like the rest of the world, India is now running to cover the exposed ground as the sun sets on the Trump administration. India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar surfaced in Doha, Qatar, on December 27-28. This was not surprising as the last high-level visit was in 2016 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to Qatar. Since 2017, when Mr Trump began his foreign travel as President

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

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

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

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

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

The disruption caused by Mr Trump, even in the Islamic world, has immediate implications for India on multiple counts, due to India having ridden the American wave rather than eke out an independent course

LETTERS

GREEN HOPE FADING

The seventh round of talks between the government and the protesting farmers held on January 4 have also failed. The farmers said that the Union minister has told them to approach the Supreme Court for repeal of the laws. The Supreme Court has registered a suo motu case in the matter but only to examine attacks by police and paramilitary forces on them. With today's verdict in the Central Vista case coming in favour of the government, it does not look too good for the farmers.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

CRICKETERS, BE SAFE

HAPPY TO LEARN that all the players involved in the restaurant episode in Melbourne have tested negative for Covid-19. Already Team India are facing problems with its bowlers Mohammad Shami and Umesh Yadav having been declared unfit to play the rest of the series. Virat Kohli, who is on paternity leave, is also not available. In this situation, cricketers should be more responsible with their movements.

V. Nagendra Kumar
Hyderabad

APPEAL TO FM

I APPEAL TO the Union finance minister to reduce the tax burden on seniors as they have been struggling amid high inflation and Covid spread and earning very low on their savings deposited in banks. The tax exemption limit may be increased to ₹4 lakh for those aged between 60 and 70 years, ₹5 lakh for those aged between 70 and 80 years and ₹6 lakh for those above 80 years. The tax rate may be reduced to five per cent for income between ₹5 lakh and ₹10 lakh, 10 per cent for amounts between ₹10 lakh and ₹15 lakh and 15 per cent for income above ₹15 lakh.

K. L. Rao
Gurugram

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Sanjiwan Sahni



India requires key structural changes in way it is governed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recent economic thought is also from

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a management and economic adviser

SHORT TAKES

20 migrants sink en route Panama

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

Indian-American is Ohio senator

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

Don-appointed US attorney resigns

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

JIHADISTS KILL OVER 100 IN NIGER VIOLENCE

Dakar (Senegal), Jan. 5: More than 100 civilians were killed in Niger over the weekend by extremists who attacked two villages, as insurgent violence mounts in the West African nation.

The attacks on the western villages of Tchombangou and Zaroumdareye took place on the same day that Niger announced that presidential elections would go to a second round on February 21.

Nigers Prime Minister Brigi Rafini visited the two villages on Sunday. "We came to provide moral support and present the condolences of the president of the republic, the government and the entire Niger nation," he said. The villages in the insecure Tillabéri region were attacked on Saturday after residents killed two rebel fighters, local officials said.

The attacks are among the deadliest in Niger and come on the heels of several others, including one by the Islamic State West Africa Province in the Diffa region a few weeks ago in which dozens of people were killed. Niger and neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali are battling the spread of deadly extremist violence which is displacing large numbers of people, despite the presence of thousands of regional and international troops. A year ago, extremists staged mass attacks on Niger's military in the Tillabéri region, killing more than 70 in December 2019 and more than 89 in January 2020.

UK enters tough lockdown

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

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

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

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

The devolved regions of Wales and Northern Ireland were already



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

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

under strict lockdown measures since the middle of last month.

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

France promises speedy virus vaccination process

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

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

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

While neighbouring countries are imposing

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

Pak orders rebuilding of temple

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

The apex court, which took notice of the attack and ordered the local authorities to appear before the court on January 5, also directed the board to submit in court details of all func-

tional and non-functional temples and gurdwaras across Pakistan, *Dawn* newspaper reported. The attack on the temple in Terri village in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) Karak district on Wednesday by members of radical Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam party (Fazal ur Rehman group) drew strong condemnation from human rights activists and the minority Hindu community leaders.

During the hearing on Tuesday, a three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed also directed the EPTB to clear encroachments from

temples across the country and take action against officials involved in the encroachments. Justice Ahmed said that the Karak incident had caused "international embarrassment to Pakistan". The EPTB is a statutory board that manages religious properties and shrines of Hindus and Sikhs who had migrated to India following the partition. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief secretary, police chief, and Dr Shoab Suddle, the head of a commission on minorities' rights, were also present during the hearing.

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

(HK judge warns on law reforms

Hong Kong, Jan. 5: Hong Kong's outgoing top judge said on Tuesday that calls for reform of the city's judiciary cannot be based on dissatisfaction with court rulings, as pro-Beijing figures and state-owned media step up criticism of the city's legal system.

"(The) judiciary's position has all along been the same. If there's any room for improvement, we will pursue it. We will consider it," Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma said at a news conference ahead of his retirement on Sunday.

"But it's not particularly satisfactory if there's a call for reforms simply on the basis of a result one doesn't like," he said. "It is certainly not a good starting point or acceptable to say 'I want reforms to ensure that I will always get the result which I want.'" — AP

FINANCIAL | SCAM

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

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

Lai had abused his position in attempting to

HK judge warns on law reforms

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

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

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

Saudis to lift Qatar embargo

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

Qatar's only land border has been mostly closed since mid-2017, when Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain launched a blockade against the tiny Gulf state, accusing it of supporting Islamist extremist

groups and of having warm ties with Iran. The Saudi border, which Qatar relied on for the import of dairy products, construction materials and other goods, opened briefly during the past three years to allow Qataris into Saudi Arabia to perform the Islamic hajj pilgrimage. It was unclear what concessions Qatar had made or is promising to make regarding a shift in its policies.

Kuwait, which had been mediating throughout the dispute, was first to announce the diplomatic breakthrough through its

Georgia election to decide fate of Biden presidency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Xi asks military to stay on high alert

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

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

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

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

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

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

The rift between Abu Dhabi and Doha has been deepest, with the UAE and Qatar at sharp ideological odds. Following Kuwait's announcement, the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar

Gargash, tweeted that his country was keen to restore Gulf unity. However, he cautioned: "We have more work to do and we are in the right direction."

The lifting of the embargo by Saudi Arabia paves the way for Qatar's ruler to attend an annual summit of Gulf leaders on Tuesday that will be held in the kingdom's ancient desert site of Al-Ula. The summit would be chaired by Saudi King Salman, though his son and heir, the crown prince, may instead lead the meeting. — AP

Lai Xiaomin found guilty of bigamy after living with a woman outside his marriage

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



Lai Xiaomin

Huarong is one of four companies set up in 1999 to help clean up bad debt piles choking China's banking system, and the company later expanded into investment, loan and property businesses.

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

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

During his TV confession, Lai said he "did not spend a single penny, and just kept it there... I did not dare to spend it." He had referred to the apartment where he kept the money as the "supermarket", given his regular visits there to deposit cash.

CCTV showed luxury cars and gold bars reportedly accepted as bribes by Lai, who worked in the central bank and the China Banking Regulatory Commission prior to his leadership roles in Huarong. The channel often broadcasts interviews with suspects admitting to crimes before they have appeared in court — a practice that has long been condemned by lawyers and rights organisations as forcing confessions under duress.

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

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

The sentencing brings an end to one of the country's biggest financial crime cases, and comes as Beijing takes an increasingly tough stance on corporate wrongdoing. Critics say the wide-ranging anti-corruption campaign launched under President Xi Jinping has also served as a way to target his opponents and those of the Communist Party leadership. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,437.78	0.54
Nifty 50	14,199.50	0.47
S&P 500*	3,712.92	0.33
Dollar (₹)	73.18	-0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.34	0.49
Euro (₹)	89.81	-0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,969.335	0.65
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	53.12	2.03
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.850	-0.008
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.942	0.025

* As of 8:30 PM IST

RBI imposes ₹2.5 cr penalty on Bajaj Finance

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

Google Cloud appoints Bajwa as Apac leader



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

VIP Industries MD Sudip Ghose puts in papers

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

Renault to unveil compact SUV Kiger on Jan. 28

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEAUTY STARTUP NYKAA PLANS MEGA IPO THIS YEAR

BAJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY JAN. 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

Anjan Dey chosen to head Oriental Insurance

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brand ambassador penalised

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 5

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

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

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

growth within six weeks".

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

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

The Consumer Protect-

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

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

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

Job postings up in select sectors

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 5

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The unemployment rate,

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

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

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

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

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audi launches A4 sedan at ₹42.34 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 5

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

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

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

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



GIVING BACK | TO PLANET

Amazon founder launched his Bezos Earth Fund last year

Bezos \$10-bn gift tops 2020 charity list

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

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

Setting aside Bezos' whopping gift, the sum total of the top 10 dona-

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

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

Phil Knight, who with his wife, Penny, made the second- and third-largest donations last year, increased his wealth by about 77 per cent over the same March-to-December period. Knight and his wife gave more than \$900



Jeff Bezos

million to the Knight Foundation and \$300 million to the University of Oregon.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Djokovic, Nadal to return for ATP Cup

Sydney: ATP Cup champion Novak Djokovic and runner-up Rafael Nadal are set to return for the season-opening men's team tennis event starting February 1, but the United States will be missing because of a change in format that has halved the field.

The inaugural event last year featured 24 teams and was played in three Australian cities, with Djokovic's Serbia team beating Nadal and Spain in the final at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena. The second edition will involve 12 teams and be played entirely at Melbourne Park amid Covid-19 restrictions, along with WTA and ATP tournaments, in the week leading into the Australian Open.

The draw will be held January 20, with teams divided into four groups. The winner of each round-robin group will advance to the semifinals. — AP

Bajrang's camp in US gets extension

New Delhi: Olympic-bound wrestler Bajrang Punia's training stint in the USA has been granted a one-month extension and will now go on till the first week of February, the Sports Authority of India said on Tuesday. Punia, who qualified for the Tokyo Games in the men's freestyle 65kg category, has been training at Cliff Kean Wrestling Club in Michigan since December 4.

The additional one month training will cost ₹11.65 Lakhs and will be borne by the SAI. "This decision was taken at the Mission Olympic Cell meeting that took place last week," a press release from SAI said. "All facilities here are available, there is a gym, moreover I am getting very good sparring partners. The college boys who train here are good as well. I am getting access to everything I need to improve my level," Punia said. — PTI

No postponement of Australia F1 GP

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

The Victorian state government is a major backer of the Australian GP, which had to be cancelled in 2020 just two days before the first race of the season was set to begin. — AP

Mumbai City breeze past BFC

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

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

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

FOOTBALL

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

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

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PACERS' PUZZLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is a third angle to



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

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

— PTI

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

RAHUL OUT OF SERIES WITH SPRAINED WRIST

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Langer hopeful of Warner return, Pucovski to debut

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

— PTI

Aussie coach lauds 'disciplined' India

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saints add to leaders Liverpool's misery

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

The English champions remain top of the table on goal difference over Manchester United, but have now played a game more than the Red Devils.

Southampton are only four points off the top as they moved up to sixth in a tightly bunched division with just seven points separating Liverpool from West Ham in 10th.

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

A first league defeat in

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

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

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

Liverpool did not deal with James Ward-



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

Prowse's angled free-kick into the box and Ings perfectly hooked his shot over Alisson Becker into the far corner. Southampton had key absentees themselves with goalkeeper Alex McCarthy missing due to a positive test for coronavirus, while Oriol Romeu, Jannik

Vestergaard and Che Adams were out injured.

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

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

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

Kane's double ton puts Pak in shade

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

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



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

SA clinch series as Lankans fade

Johannesburg, Jan. 5: South Africa beat Sri Lanka by 10 wickets inside three days in the second and final Test on Tuesday to clinch the series 2-0 and gain some revenge for a surprise loss to the Sri Lankans the last time they toured.

South Africa bowled Sri Lanka out for 211 in their second innings at the start of the day at the Wanderers, leaving the Proteas with a simple target of 67 to win.

South Africa got there without losing a wicket. Aiden Markram was 36 not out and Dean Elgar 31 not out.

Sri Lanka's hopes faded when captain Dimuth Karunaratne was out soon after making a century. Karunaratne led their resistance in the second innings with his 103 but he went less than five overs into the day, and with his exit Sri Lanka lost their last six wickets for 35 runs.

Pace bowler Lungi Ngidi finished with 4/44 for South Africa.

Sri Lanka started the day 150-4, with Karunaratne on 91, and had hopes of set-

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

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

South Africa's run chase was relatively untroubled.

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

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

— AP

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