


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | FRIDAY | 29 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 31.0°C
Min: 19.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
31/19 °C

COVID-19 C O U N T

CASES

DEATHS

(+10,819)

(+109)

1,07,12,246

1,53,971

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+184)

(+1)

TS: 2,93,921

1,594

(+117)

(+0)

AP: 8,87,466

7,152

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,16,92,576

DEATHS

21,91,029

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana

Tithi: Pushya Bahula Padyami till 11.39 pm

Star: Ashlesha till 3.19 am (Saturday)

Variyam: 4.21 pm to 5.55 pm

Durmuhurtam: 9.07 am to 9.51 am; 12.51 pm to 1.36 pm

Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi- ul- Akhir 15, 1442 AH

PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.40 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.30 pm

Maghrib: 5.48 pm

Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.57 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 6.35 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 7.48 AM

COUNTER POINT



Can't we offer some sops to the people of Assam, Bengal and Tamil Nadu in the budget?

SHORT TAKES

No global flights till February 28

New Delhi: The coronavirus-induced suspension of scheduled international passenger flights has been extended till February 28, aviation regulator DGCA said on Thursday. "However, international scheduled flights may be allowed on selected routes by the competent authority on a case-to-case basis," it said.

Polio vaccine on January 31

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 28

The central government has postponed the Polio National Immunisation Day from January 17 to January 31.

In a communication to all states sent earlier, the Union ministry of health and family welfare said the polio vaccination programme has been rescheduled to January 31 on account of a nation-wide Covid-19 vaccination programme, which is being taken up from January 16 onwards.

The state health authorities will take up pulse polio programme on January 31 at booth level and on February 1 and 2 at a door-to-door level to administer polio vaccine to all the targeted beneficiary children.

The Centre has also requested all stakeholders to conduct NID activity in compliance with appropriate Covid-19 measures.

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UP tableaux wins first prize for R-Day

WORLD | 5



Russia details allies of jailed Navalny

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Ganguly undergoes another angioplasty

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Unrelenting farmers will not stop protests till laws repealed

Question cops why Red Fort protesters were not fired upon

SANJAY KAW and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN 28

Farmers protesting against the Centre's contentious farm laws refused to give up with Bharat Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait announcing that he was ready to face bullets.

Refusing to budge, Mr Tikait made it clear that he would vacate the site only after the three agriculture laws are repealed. "I will commit suicide. But I will not leave this place," an emotional kisan leader said while appealing to other protesters to bring forward their tractors to form a cordon around him. He claimed that even electricity and water was cut at the site. "I will now drink water which is brought through tankers by protesting farmers."

Earlier in the day, Mr Tikait had questioned why Delhi Police did not open fire to stop protesters from breaking into the Red Fort and hoist a religion flag there. "Who was the person who maligned an entire community and organisation?"

The crackdown on protesters continued with the Delhi Police issuing look-out notice against leaders who were named in the FIRs filed in connection with January 26 violence. The police has sought answers from the leaders in three days on why the agreement with the law enforcing agency was broken and rules flouted during the tractor parade.

The farmers have said there was a conspiracy to sabotage and malign their peaceful protest.

A statement issued by the police said: "A preliminary assessment suggests there was pre-conceived plan to break the agreement reached between three police and leaders of farmers organisations. Special cell is investigating larger conspiracy."



Union home minister Amit Shah visits a hospital to enquire about the health of a cop injured in violence during farmers tractor rally on Republic Day in New Delhi. — PTI

Bengal resolution wants farm laws out

Kolkata, Jan. 28: The West Bengal on Thursday became the sixth state to pass a resolution against the three contentious farm laws enacted by the Centre. State parliamentary affairs minister Partha Chatterjee moved the resolution urging the Centre that the three laws be repealed. Punjab, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Kerala have passed resolutions earlier.

■ Report on Page 4

Centre mulls motion on Red Fort breach

New Delhi, Jan. 28: The Narendra Modi government is likely to bring a motion condemning the Red Fort incident on the Republic Day, during the Budget Session of Parliament beginning from Friday. The government, sources said, wants Parliament to pass a resolution condemning the incident after "considering the sense of the House."

■ Report on Page 4

AP, SEC in Tom and Jerry fight

N VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN 28

The Tom-and-Jerry fight between the Andhra Pradesh State Election Commission and the state government does not seem to be ending and the latest episode is appointing the Secretary to the SEC.

Deviating from the usual practice of picking one from the panel of three officers recommended by the government, SEC N. Ramesh Kumar is said to have chosen senior bureaucrat M. Ravichandra for the post of Secretary.

On knowing this, the government immediately

appointed Ravichandra, who was denied posting for the last two months after being moved out of SC Welfare Department, as Secretary, health and family Welfare, to exclusively monitor the vaccination programme.

Chief Secretary Adityanath Das had sent a panel of three officers — Forest Secretary G.S.R.K.R. Vijay Kumar, Disaster Management special commissioner K. Kanna Babu, and Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty director P. Raja Babu.

The government attached so much significance to the posting of Ravicha-

ndra, whom it went on to describe as a senior officer with vast experience in health management, keeping in view his earlier stint as the managing director of medical infrastructure corporation. "It is a wonder why the government did not think of utilising his services when the vaccination drive was planned and launched," a senior official pointed out.

The SEC on the other hand surrendered then secretary A. Vani Mohan and complained of non-cooperation from the government in appointing a new secretary. He, however, recommended the

appointment of Ravichandra deviating from the procedure which is even followed by the Election Commission of India for appointing the Chief Electoral Officers.

His blow-hot blow-cold approach towards senior officials Gopalakrishna Dwivedi and Girija Shankar also came as a surprise.

After recommending censure against the two officials, the SEC indicated that censure against them could be withdrawn depending on their role as senior panchayat raj officials in the conduct of the polls.

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

India will soon make available many more Covid vaccines to other countries after two Made-In-India jabs have already been introduced to the world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday while emphasising the country's global responsibility in fighting the pandemic.

In a special address at the World Economic Forum's online Davos Agenda Summit, Modi also said he wants to assure the global business community that situation will now change rapidly on the economic front also and invited businesses from all over to participate in India's growth journey. Modi said that some had said in February-March 2020 that India would be the worst affected country by Covid and would face a "tsunami of corona infections".

"Some had talked about 70-80 crore people expect-



Narendra Modi

ed to get infected in India, while some talked about over 20 lakh possible deaths but India did not let the disappointment get better of it," he said. Modi said, "We transformed the fight against coronavirus into a people's movement and today India is among the most successful countries in saving lives."

"We focussed on developing Covid-specific health infrastructure, we trained our human resources to fight against this pandemic and we made full use of tech for testing and tracking," he said.

Modi said India has started the world's largest coronavirus vaccination programme and its speed

can be imagined from the fact that over 23 lakh health workers have been vaccinated in just 12 days.

Meanwhile, the external affairs ministry said India will supply 1 crore doses of the Covid vaccine to African nations. New Delhi is supplying the vaccine both on commercial basis and as "gifts" (free of cost) to foreign nations. India is also supplying the vaccine to a few nations on a commercial basis that includes Canada. India will also supply 10 lakh doses of the vaccine to UN health workers.

MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said, "From January 20, we gifted over 55 lakh doses to our neighbours and in our extended neighbourhood — Bhutan (1.5 lakh), Maldives (1 lakh), Nepal (10 lakh), Bangladesh (20 lakh), Myanmar (15 lakh), Mauritius (1 lakh), Seychelles (50,000), Sri Lanka (5 lakh) and Bahrain (1 lakh). These supplies are based on requests from these countries.

India's Covid graph flat, no new case in 146 districts: Minister

New Delhi, Jan. 28: India has flattened its Covid-19 graph and 146 districts have reported no new case of the viral disease in the last seven days, 18 in 14 days, six in 21 days and 21 districts in the last 28 days, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said on Thursday.

This has been achieved due to pro-active testing with more than 19.5 crore Covid-19 tests conducted in the country so far, Vardhan, who chaired the 23rd meeting of the high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) on Covid-19 through a video-conference, said, according to a

statement issued by the health ministry.

The current testing capacity is 12 lakh tests per day, the minister added.

Of the over 700 districts in the country, around 20 per cent have not reported any Covid-19 case in the last one week. — PTI

CM: Spruce up medical colleges

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 28

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed officials to speed up the development of old medical colleges, as also land acquisitions for new such colleges and other works being taken up by the government at an estimated cost of ₹16,270 crore under the Nadu-Nadu programme.

The CM was holding a review meeting along with deputy CM Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas and senior officials from the transport and health departments at his Camp Office here on Thursday.

"Complete the tender processes fast to start development of old medical colleges and begin construction of new ones by April 15," he said.

The CM said measures must also be in place for

their proper maintenance of these buildings.

"There is need to finalise a plan for administrative sanction and recruitment of staff for the hospitals," the Chief Minister said.

The officials said the works for development of 10,011 YSR Village Health Clinics would be complete by the end of April and development of 1,133 PHCs by October end. The Nadu-Nedu works related to area hospitals would be completed by December end, officials said.

With the construction of super specialty hospitals and new medical colleges, the officials said the state will have a total built-up area of 3.1 crore square feet which is four times more than of the Beijing airport.

■ Page 2: CM takes update on YSR Arogya Sri

16 PARTIES TO SKIP PRESIDENT PARL ADDRESS

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

The leaders of 16 Opposition parties said Thursday they will boycott President Ram Nath Kovind's address to both Houses of Parliament on the opening day of the Budget Session on Friday over the controversial farm laws.

The 16 parties include the Congress, Trinamul Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena, DMK and Samajwadi Party. The remaining 10 parties are the National Conference, CPI(M), CPI, RJD, PDP, Muslim League, RSP, MDMK, Kerala Congress and AIDUP.

Announcing the decision, Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad said the 16 parties also sought an independent probe into the Centre's role in the violence that shook the nation's capital on Republic Day. They also condemned the violence and expressed regret for the injuries sustained by Delhi police personnel during the violent clashes on January 26, when groups of protesters reached the Red Fort.

In a joint statement, the Opposition leaders said the farm laws were an assault on state governments and violated the spirit of the Constitution. It said: "If not repealed, these laws will effectively dismantle the edifice of national food security that rests upon MSP, government procurement and the public distribution system. The farm bills were brought without any consultations with states and farmers' unions."

SHORT TAKES

REVENUE STAFF
RECOVERS GRABBED
GOVT LANDDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 28

Continuing their special drive, the Visakhapatnam revenue authorities freed 3.2 acres of government land in Kapulauppada under Bhimili constituency and in Bakurupalem village under Ananandapuram mandal in Visakhapatnam city on Thursday.

An official said around 2.88 acres of land was seized back under survey Nos67/1, 67/8, 69/29, 69/30 and 69/36 in Kapulauppada. Similarly, 39 cents of land was recovered under survey No. 59 in Bakurupalem village under Kapulauppada. This parcel of land was close to a private layout and costs around ₹1.25 crore. In all ₹7.2 crore worth land was freed from encroachment, an official said.

Sources in the revenue department said the government, in its effort, created a huge land bank for the purpose of the capital, launched a special drive to identify encroached government land and take it back.

CM TAKES UPDATE
ON YSR
AAROgyASRI

From Page 1

The Chief Minister reviewed the implementation of the YSR Aarogya Sri scheme referral system and inquired about the training being given to the health staff working in village/urban clinics and PHCs. He directed the officials to take feedback from the patients who availed facilities under the health scheme. The CM laid stress on ensuring that the 104 and 108 vehicles must be maintained properly. He called for strengthening the healthcare system in rural areas.

On Covid-19, the officials informed the CM that the rate of recovery was at 99.04 per cent while the death rate was 0.81 per cent.

The CM enquired with officials about the health of the people affected by the mystery illness in Pulla and Komadavole villages in West Godavari.

"Test reports confirmed that the quality of water and food was good in Pulla. We are yet to receive test reports on food items lifted at Komadavole," they said.

The CM met the children who underwent cochlear implant surgeries successfully and engaged in a chat with them.



Jana Sena leader Nadendla Manohar addresses the media after they met Governor BB Harichandan at Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada on Thursday. BJP state former president Kanna Lakshminarayana is also seen.

JS, BJP LEADERS
REQUEST GOV TO
MONITOR POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 28

A delegation of leaders from Jana Sena and BJP met Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan at Raj Bhavan here on Thursday and requested him to personally monitor the conduct of gram panchayat polls and direct the state government to hold the polls safeguarding the democracy.

Jana Sena political affairs committee chairman Nadendla Manohar said that they briefed the Governor about the prevailing political situation in the state and added that referring to earlier poll related violence, they asked the Governor to ensure recurrence of no such cases again.

BJP state president Somu Veerajulu said they had urged the Governor to ensure conduct of polls in a democratic manner at the backdrop of clashes in previous polls resulting in many persons getting injured.

He alleged that the state government was acting indifferently on attacks on temples and even foisted false cases on the BJP and its allied party workers.

SEC urged to exempt
50-yr-olds from poll duty

People suffering from chronic diseases prone to get infected: Employees

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 28

A section of state government employees has made a fervent appeal to the State Election

Commissioner to grant exemption from poll duty to those aged above 50 years and those suffering from multiple health complications in the ensuing gram panchayat polls.

They said people suffering from chronic diseases like heart ailments, kidney-released issues and cancer are more prone to get infected with coronavirus, while on election duty. They have also asked for exemption to pregnant and lactating women employees.

The employees have also urged the SEC to revise the time schedule claiming that the duration was too long. They say that at present, polling will be held from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm spread over nine hours unlike the earlier practice of 7 am to 1.30 pm. They wanted an increase in polling booths and reduce the number of voters to cast their vote so that it helps complete the polling early and counting of votes will be taken up soon in order to get the results on the same day.

They said that a limited number of voters at polling booths helps strict compliance with Covid-19 protocol as long queues of voters can be avoided and social distancing can be maintained.

AP United Teachers Federation state president Sheikh Sabji said, "We appeal to the State Election Commission to exempt aged employees and those suffering with multiple health issues and pregnant/lactating women from poll duty so that they will not fall victims to Covid-19. Reduced hours of polling will be having multiple benefits too."

On the other hand, the state employees are also asking for rescheduling gram panchayat polls phases-2 and 3 and arrange Covid-19 vaccination to those who are posted for poll duty to save them from the virus.

They want the intervention of the chief secretary Aditya Nath Das to take their plea to the notice of the State Election Commission for a favourable decision.

AP Revenue Services Association state president Bopparaju Venkateswarlu said, "We



● The minister accused SEC Nimmagadda of becoming a pawn in the hands of Chandrababu Naidu, who has been using the SEC to take revenge on the bureaucrats and government employees.

● Minister for panchayat raj Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy came down heavily on Telugu Desam Party Chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu for releasing party manifesto for the panchayat elections. He found fault with Naidu for releasing a manifesto for the panchayat elections, which usually is not held by party symbols.

● Accusing Naidu of conspiring to create havoc in the panchayat election, the minister said that the state government had encouraged unanimous elections to save public resources.

Naidu has violated
constitutional
guidelines: YSRCDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 28

Minister for Panchayat Raj, Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy came down heavily on Telugu Desam Party Chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu for releasing party manifesto for the panchayat elections, violating the constitutional guidelines and trying to create a lot of confusion among the voters.

In view of panchayat elections, the minister and Dy CM K. Narayana Swamy held a strategy meeting with MLAs and key party leaders.

Speaking to media persons after the meeting, the Panchayat raj minister found fault over Naidu releasing a manifesto for the panchayat elections, which usually is not held by party symbols. He questioned, "Who gave Naidu the right to release a manifesto when the election code is in force?"

Accusing Naidu of conspiring to create havoc in the panchayat election, the minister said that the state government had encouraged unanimous elections to save public resources.

"Unanimous election rule has been in vogue since 2002. There is noth-

have seen several of our employees lose their lives after getting infected with Covid-19 while at work. To avoid it, we want the sec-

ond and third phase of polls to be rescheduled so that all employees on poll duty can be given the vaccination."

was mischievous, misconceived and misleading the court and prayed for its dismissal.

The court expressed its displeasure as the plea from the petitioner was having no substance and lacking legality. When the court asked the response from the petitioner's counsel on why the petitioner failed to register as voter, there was no response. When the court intended to dismiss the petition, the petitioner's counsel sought some time to come up with details and accordingly, the court posted the next hearing in the case to January 29.

Ramachandra Reddy also said that SEC Ramesh has been misusing his official position and the constitutional powers to arm-twist the state's official fraternity.

and third phase of polls to be rescheduled so that all employees on poll duty can be given the vaccination."

NAIDU TO VOTERS:
BE ALERT AGAINST
IRREGULARITIESDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 28

Criticising the ruling YSR Congress government for seeking unanimous elections in the Gram Panchayat polls, Telugu Desam leader N. Chandrababu Naidu urged the people to be on the alert against likely irregularities including "unanimous elections via coercion" in the state.

Speaking to the media at NTR Bhavan on Thursday, the former CM opposed the call given by the YSRC for unanimous elections to the posts of ward members and sarpanches. He said there was no chance for this, as such elections in the past were done under intimidation of candidates.

He drew a comparison between scenarios of unanimous elections in 2014 and the 2020 March local body polls, and said, "Out of 9,696 MPPTC seats that were up for polls in March, 2020, nearly 2,248 seats were filled without election, meaning unanimously - forming 23 per cent. Out of 2,092 MPPTC seats that went for polls in 2014, only 270 seats saw unanimous election. With regard to ZPTC seats too, only one seat was filled unanimously in the 2014 polls as against 125 seats were in 2020 polls.

Naidu alleged that though his party had taken up the issue of irregularities vis-a-vis unanimous elections with the state election commissioner, he failed to take any action.

He also referred to the elections in Kadapa where 11 MPPTCs were elected unanimously in the 2014 elections and 428 in the 2020 polls. The ruling party, with support from the police, managed to ensure a large number of unanimous elections, he said, and warned the YSRC that the TD would not tolerate such practice in the coming polls.

He called upon the youth to remain alert and check such "illegal" practices. "Elect the leaders genuinely and develop their villages with the funds released from the Centre under various schemes," Naidu proposed.

SHOW-CAUSE
NOTICE ISSUED
TO FIVE AROSDC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, JAN. 28

District collector and election officer of Srikakulam J. Niwas issued a show-cause notice to five assistant returning officers for not attending training classes for conducting the Gram Panchayat elections. The notices were issued on Thursday. They were asked to explain the notices within three days.

As per the rules of election commission, the collector said persons appointed as assistant returning officers must attend the training classes. All the five appointed for election duties are government school teachers.

● Yerra Veera Venkata Satyanarayana has given his 0.56 cents of land for the housing scheme. The government credited nearly ₹30.80 lakh to his account.

accounts. But, the three middlemen who claimed they were from the YSR Congress offered help to us and opened separate bank accounts in another bank at Yanam in the Union Territory of Puducherry. I withdrew an amount of ₹17.92 lakh



The idols of Lord Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana carried by the priests during the installation on the premises of the main Ramateertham temple at Ramateertham near Nellimalla in Vizianagaram district on Thursday.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana idols
consecrated at RamateerthamDC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, JAN. 28

The ministry of endowments has organised the consecration ceremony of Lord Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in Baalalayam Ramateertham of Nellimarla in Vizianagaram district amidst Vedic hymns on Thursday.

Lord Rama's idol at Sri Kodandarama temple atop Bodikonda was disfigured during the last week of December. The incident drew the attention of the entire nation with Opposition parties demanding severe action against the culprits. The government has immediately asked Tirumala Trupati Devas-

● As per the instructions, Sita, Rama and Lakshmana's idols were brought to Ramateertham on January 25 and pujas were performed for three days. On Thursday the idols were installed in Baalalayam (temporary temple), and priests performed all rituals and pujas.

thanams to make idols and send them within a month and sanctioned ₹3 crores for the temple's development.

As per the instructions, Sita, Rama and Lakshmana's idols were brought to Ramateertham on January 25 and pujas were

performed for three days. On Thursday the idols were installed in Baalalayam (temporary temple), and priests performed all rituals and pujas.

Joint commissioner of endowments D. Bhamaramba said that the pujas would continue in Baalalayam until the construction and renovation of the temple atop Bodikonda Hill.

Professor A. Srinivasacharyulu of Venkateswara Vedic University, the executive officer of Ramateertham temple Ch. Ranga Rao and others participated in the programme.

A huge number of devotees were also present and performed pujas.

Cops nab Ganesh idol thieves

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 28

Vemula police have arrested thieves who stole an idol from an ancient Ganesh temple in Chagaleru village in Vemula mandal. This ancient idol of Vinayaka was stolen and smashed in the belief that it contained dia-

monds in the belly. The idol disappeared from the temple on the night of the January 7. Police arrested the accused on Thursday and registered a case.

The SI said that cell-phones, a hammer used to smash the statue, and a damaged idol of Vinayaka, were seized from the accused.

TS, AP told to share
Telugu Academy
assets as per ActDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

The Telangana High Court has directed the Telugu Academy and the governments of Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh to apportion the assets and liabilities of the academy as had existed on June 2, 2014, between the AP Telugu Academy Society and the Telugu Academy at Hyderabad.

This must be done as per provisions in Section 53(1) of the AP Reorganisation Act 2014 in the ratio 58.32 to 41.68 within two months.

A division bench of Justice M.S. Ramachandra Rao and Justice T. Amarnath Goud issued these directions in response to a plea from 17 outsourcing employees of the Telugu Academy. All were working at the centre in Vijayawada. They had been appointed on contract/daily-wage basis as data entry operators and hamalis from 2002.

Since employees were not allocated between the successor entities even after June 2, 2014, they

remained under the administrative control of the Telugu Academy at Hyderabad, which is under control of the Telangana state government. Their salaries were paid by it, though the petitioners are working in the regional centers situated in the residuary state of Andhra Pradesh.

They complained that because of their AP nativity, they were refused grant of enhanced salary and wages from 2013 while the same was granted to those employed in the regional centres in Telangana state and the head office at Hyderabad.

The court directed the Telugu Academy in Hyderabad to pay wages to the petitioners on par with those employed in similar capacities in Telangana state from December 1, 2019, within six weeks.

The court directed both the Telugu academies of Telangana and AP to discuss and agree on the modalities/guidelines for allocation of employees as on June 2, 2014, including the petitioners, within two months.

HIGH COURT KEEPS
DECISION ON
ASHOK ASIDEDC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, JAN. 28

The High Court on Thursday set aside the AP government order to remove TD leader Ashok Gajapathi Raju as hereditary trustee of three temples, following the attack on the Ramateertham temple last month.

The AP government had on January 2 removed the TD leader from the post of chairman of Kodandarama Swamy Devasthanam in Ramateertham, Sri Pyditalli Ammavari Devasthanam and Sri Mandeswara Swamy temples in East Godavari district.

The government had stated that he had "failed in discharging his legitimate duties" and "address security issues" of the temples.

Following the HC order, Raju Tweeted: "The order to remove me as hereditary trustee/chairman of Ramateerthalu has been set aside by High court today, I saw in the news that is the Pratishtha at Ramateerthlu when Lord Rama blessed me on this auspicious day to continue in his service."

At the stage of admission, the High Court found that the order did not follow procedure under the statute, Raju said in a statement.

It its order, the government had said: "Ashok Gajapathi Raju has failed to discharge his legitimate duties and address the issues relating to the security aspects of the temple and failed to take steps to prevent the vandalism of Lord Rama's idol in Sri Rama Swamy Devasthanam, Vizianagaram district."

He has requested the farmers to inform him or higher officials if anyone is trying to cheat them and take away the money.

MONEY | DIVERSION

Revenue officials say they acted in a transparent manner in processing AP housing scheme

Middlemen role come out in land acquisition process

VADREVVU SRINIVAS | DC
KAKINADA, JAN. 28

Middlemen claiming to be YSRC leaders are taking away a part of the money credited to farmers' bank accounts as compensation for land acquired from them for the AP government's house-sites distribution scheme meant for the homeless poor.

The beneficiaries of the scheme are mostly from the Backward Classes and Schedule Caste as also the illiterates. Revenue officials say they acted only in

a transparent manner.

One such incident came to light in Chollangi village in Tallarevu mandal of East Godavari district. Nearly 230 acres of land was acquired for the housing scheme, out of which 3.80 acres of land, belonging to D. Patta, was under cultivation. Five farmers have alleged that they were fooled by middlemen.

They say the Land Acquisition Officer fixed the land cost at ₹55 lakh per acre. After acquiring the land, the LAO directly credited the full amount to

the bank accounts of the farmers. Middlemen "transferred half of the amount from each of our accounts to their accounts," they complain.

For example, Yerra Veera Venkata Satyanarayana has given his 0.56 cents of land for the housing scheme. The government credited nearly ₹30.80 lakh to his account. In the same manner, the compensation amounts were credited to the other four farmers who have given 48 cents each for the scheme.

"We are having our bank

from the bank, but the remaining ₹12.88 lakh was drawn by these middlemen who transferred the amount to their accounts."

"After, receiving a message from the bank on my cell phone, I was surprised and asked the middlemen about the remaining amount. The three have threatened us and insisted that they would not give back the money. I hope officials would intervene and do justice to me," he said.

Telugu Janata president P e d d i m s e t t y Venkateswara Rao said

nearly ₹90 lakh was looted by middlemen from the housing scheme beneficiaries. He threatened an agitation to force officials plough back the amount to the beneficiaries. "Due to such behaviour of some party leaders, the YSRC is earning a bad name in the land acquisition process"

He lodged a complaint with the Tallarevu MRO, seeking justice to the farmers.

Tallarevu tahsildar G. Chinababu said the revenue department did the transaction as per rules.

The land acquisition amount was fixed initially to level the lands also. Possibly, there is some confusion in this respect, resulting in the present allegation by farmers. He said he has convened a meeting with all farmers who gave their lands to the housing purpose, and stressed the process was done in a transparent manner.

He has requested the farmers to inform him or higher officials if anyone is trying to cheat them and take away the money.

SHORT TAKES

INDIA FLAYS
OMAR SHEIKH'S
RELEASE IN PAKDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

India on Thursday termed the freeing of dreaded terrorist Omar Saeed Sheikh by the Pakistani Supreme Court as a "travesty of justice", adding that "this case truly demonstrates Pakistan's intent on taking action on the terror front". Sheikh was earlier convicted in Pakistan for the beheading of *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Daniel Pearl in 2002.

MEA Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said, "I had mentioned earlier about the very low conviction rate in Pakistan when it comes to sentencing of terror accused. This case truly demonstrates Pakistan's intent on taking action on terror front. It is a travesty of justice not to find Omar Saeed guilty of any charges in this heinous act of terror. Our position on Pakistan taking sustained, verifiable, credible and irreversible action against terrorism and terrorist funding emanating from all territory under its control remain unchanged."

Sheikh was among the terrorists freed by India in December 1999, to secure the release of passengers on board the aircraft of erstwhile Indian Airlines that was hijacked by Pakistan-backed terrorists from the Kathmandu and finally taken to Kandahar.

INDIA RECORDS
11,666 NEW
COVID CASES

New Delhi, Jan. 28: India's Covid-19 tally of cases crossed 1.07 crore with 11,666 new Coronavirus infections being reported in a day, while the national recovery rate climbed to 96.94 per cent, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Thursday. The total infections have mounted to 1,07,01,193. The death toll increased to 1,53,847 with 123 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,03,73,606 pushing the national Covid-19 recovery rate to 96.94 percent. The Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.44 per cent. Active cases remained below 2 lakh for the ninth consecutive day. There are 1,73,740 active Coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 1.62 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 19,43,38,773 samples have been tested up to January 27 with 7,25,653 samples being tested on Wednesday.

The 123 new fatalities include 32 from Maharashtra, 20 from Kerala, 10 from Punjab and 9 from Delhi.

UTTAR PRADESH
WINS BEST R-DAY
TABLEAU AWARD

New Delhi, Jan. 28: Uttar Pradesh's tableau at this year's Republic Day parade was adjudged the best and awarded by Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday, said the Defence Ministry.

In total 32 tableaux - 17 from state and union territories, nine from Union ministries, departments and paramilitary forces, and six from the Defence ministry - were part of this year's parade on Rajpath.

The theme of Uttar Pradesh's tableau was 'Ayodhya: Cultural Heritage of Uttar Pradesh'. The cultural heritage of Ayodhya, replica of a Ram temple, glimpse of 'Deepotsav' and various stories from Ramayana epic were depicted in the tableau.

"The tableau of Tripura was adjudged the second best. It depicted promotion of eco-friendly tradition for achieving self-reliance (*aatmanirbhar*) in socio-economic parameters," the Defence ministry's statement noted.

Uttarakhand's tableau on the theme 'Dev Bhoomi - The Land of the Gods' was adjudged third among the states and union territories. The tableau of CPWD bagged a special prize for paying tribute to the fallen heroes of the armed forces.

Farmers agitation on UP NH ends

Protesters allege cops entered their tents, used force on sleeping farmers and chased them away

Baghpat (UP), Jan. 28: A farmers' protest against three farm laws of the Centre, which was continuing on a national highway in this Uttar Pradesh district since December 19 last year, has come to an end with the protesters alleging use of force by police.

The police, however, claimed that the matter was resolved through deliberations and the protesting farmers were sent home on Wednesday night.

The protesters have alleged that police personnel entered their tents late on Wednesday night, used force on the sleeping farmers and chased them away. Thamba Chaudhary, Brijpal Singh, Baljaur Singh Arya, Vikram Singh and other farmers who took part in the protest on Thursday said their agitation against the farm laws was going on on one side of the national highway.

Late on Wednesday night, a large number of police personnel entered their tents, resorted to lathicharge on the sleeping farmers and chased them away, they told reporters.

Charging the police with adopting repressive measures, they claimed that their tents were uprooted. About 40 farmers were present at the spot at that time, they said.

Refuting the charges, Circle Officer Alok Singh said the protest ended after deliberations with the farmers and the police did not resort to lathicharge on the protesters.

Whatever happened was in agreement with those present there, he said, adding that the protesting farmers returned home peacefully.

Meanwhile, ADM Amit Kumar Singh said the Project Director of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Sanjay Misra, had written a letter complaining that work on the Delhi-Saharanpur highway was being hampered because of some anarchic elements.

Acting on the letter, the protesters were removed from the national highway and sent home, the ADM said. The protest was launched on the national highway at Badaut on December 19 last year.

- PTI



Security personnel conduct a flag march at Ghazipur border during the ongoing farmers' agitation against Centre's farm reform laws in New Delhi on Thursday.

- PTI

WB Assembly passes resolution against farm laws

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 28

After Kerala, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Rajasthan, West Bengal became the sixth non-BJP ruled state on Thursday to pass a resolution against the three farm laws in the Assembly as chief minister Mamata Banerjee

sought the Centre to repeal the laws or else Prime Minister Narendra Modi and union home minister Amit Shah should resign.

The anti-farm laws resolution was moved by state parliamentary affairs minister Partha Chatterjee on behalf of the ruling Trinamul Congress in the

House on the second day of a two-day Assembly session.

Speaking in its favour, Ms Banerjee said, "The central government passed the three laws without consulting us. It is trying to enforce them on the country. Its effect will be felt on the farmers of our state also. We might have

different political ideologies which however should not deter us from standing by the farmers." Slamming the BJP for branding the farmers as "traitors" for opposing the farm laws she told the saffron party, "Either the Centre abolishes the three laws or else you must step down from power."

Later at another event, Ms Banerjee said, "If the farm laws are not repealed, the PM and the union home minister have to resign."

The CM also demanded the waiver of the farm loans. She lashed out at the saffron party for spreading fake information about the farmers'

stir at Red Fort on January 26. Protesting against her, the BJP MLAs however staged walk-out of the House shouting *Jai Shree Ram* slogan.

The resolution was later passed with the support of 101 votes from the Trinamul Congress against 27 of the Opposition.

Lens on funds for
farmers protestDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

Following FIRs on farmer leaders in connection with the violence on the Republic Day, intelligence agencies have started a massive investigation to trace all hawala channels and operators through whom funds are coming from abroad for the ongoing farmers agitation.

In view of the violence reported from different parts of the Capital by farmers during the tractor rally, the Home Ministry has been acting extremely tough. As a first step, a number of FIRs have been lodged against union leaders and

some other in connection with the violence and events that unfolded at Red Fort. However, there is a growing view within the Capital's security establishment that there is an urgent need for a detailed investigation into the funding pattern of the ongoing agitation on the Capital's borders, particularly at Singhu and Tikri.

"It is largely suspected that a number of NRIs belonging to Punjab have been illegally sending money to fund this agitation. So clearly this money is not coming through legal and official channels," a senior intelligence official said.

Parliament Budget session starts today

New Delhi, Jan. 28: The crucial Budget session of Parliament is set for a stormy start with as many as 18 opposition parties announcing their decision to boycott the President's address to a joint sitting of both houses on Friday, in solidarity with the farmers agitating against the three contentious farm laws.

The session is also likely to witness acrimonious scenes, with the opposition all set to corner the government on issues like recession, job losses, handling of Covid crisis, LAC stand-off with China and the WhatsApp chat leaks of Arnab Goswami.

Alleging that the farm laws have been pushed by the BJP government without a national consensus,

the opposition parties announced their decision on Thursday to boycott the President's address, a move termed as "most unfortunate" by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi.

To seek the cooperation of various parties for the smooth functioning of the Budget session, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has convened a meeting of all political parties on Friday which is expected to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The session will begin with the President's address followed by the presentation of the Economic Survey.

The Union Budget will be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February

1. Both the houses will also debate on the Motion of thanks to the President's address after the budget presentation.

The session will be held in two parts - January 29 to February 15 and March 8 to April 8 and will have a total of 33 sittings.

With the session starting barely days after the national capital witnessed unprecedented violence on Republic Day during the farmers tractor parade, the issue is expected to echo in Parliament.

It is after almost six months that the Parliament will be convened, as the Winter session could not be held due to the Covid pandemic.

With a view to have a paperless Budget, all the documents and the

Economic Survey would be made available online soon after the authenticated copies are laid on the Table of the House.

This session will be held as per Covid-19 protocols, with Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha meeting in shifts of five hours each - with the upper house meeting from 9 am to 2 pm and the lower house from 3 PM to 8 PM.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha Adhir Chowdhury said in Kolkata that intelligence failure on the part of the Delhi Police was to blame for the chaos and violence at Red Fort on January 26.

He also cast doubt on the Centre's intention, stating that the Union government probably did not do much to avert violence as it "might have wanted to

take advantage of the situation".

Chowdhury said that the Delhi Police had given designated routes to the farmers to take out the tractor parade. "But the farmers took different routes and a section of them breached the Red Fort. Surely, it was due to intelligence failure on the part of Delhi Police and other agencies," he said.

Accusing the BJP of branding any and every issue raised against the saffron party as "anti-national, Pakistani or Khalistani", Chowdhury, further said, "At times I feel that the central government deliberately allowed this (January 26 incident) to happen to take advantage of the situation."

- PTI

LEGAL | MATTERS

The trial court's punishment of six years was reduced to one year by HC

Holding kid, fly open, not sexual assault: HC

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 28

The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court, whose judgment on 'no offence under POCSO is made out if there was no skin-to-skin touch', in an another judgment passed earlier this month acquitted a man from provision of POCSO observing that holding a child's hand and unzipping pants do not fall under the POCSO Act.

The prosecution case is that on February 12, 2018 the mother of five-year-old lodged a complaint at Gadchiroli police station that when she returned from her duty, she noticed the accused was in her house and was holding

hands of her daughter. The complainant also noticed that the zip of the pant of the accused was open. She started shouting at the accused and soon her neighbours also gathered, but the accused ran away. Later, the victim told her that the accused had unzipped his pant and asked her to come to the bed to sleep.

The trial court convicted the accused under two different counts and sentenced him to suffer rigorous imprisonment for one year and five years, concurrently.

The accused challenged this judgement before the high court and Justice Pushpa Ganediwalla decided the appeal on January

15, in which she held that, "The acts of 'holding the hands of the prosecutrix', or 'opened zip of the pant' as has been allegedly witnessed by PW-1 (the girl's mother), in the opinion of this court, does not fit in the definition of 'sexual assault'."

In a detailed judgement the judge said that the

accused is prosecuted for the charge of 'aggravated sexual assault'. As per the definition of 'sexual assault', a 'physical contact with sexual intent without penetration' is essential ingredient for the offence. The definition starts with the words - "Whoever with sexual intent touches the vagina,

penis, anus or breast of the child or makes the child touch the vagina, penis, anus or breast of such person or any other person or does any other act with sexual intent....."

According to the judgment the words 'any other act' encompasses within itself, the nature of the acts which are similar to the acts which have been specifically mentioned in the definition on the premise of the principle of 'ejusdem generis (of the same kind)'. The act should be of the same nature or closure to that. Hence the judge said, "The acts of 'holding the hands of the prosecutrix', or 'opened zip of the pant' as has been allegedly wit-

nessed by PW-1, in the opinion of this Court, does not fit in the definition of 'sexual assault'."

"The minimum sentence for this offence is five years imprisonment. Considering the nature of the offence and the sentence prescribed, the aforesaid acts are not sufficient for fixing the criminal liability on the appellant/accused for the alleged offence of 'aggravated sexual assault'. At the most the minor offence punishable under Section 354-A(1)(i) of the IPC r/w Section 12 of the POCSO Act is proved against the appellant," the court held.

With the above observations, the court reduced his sentence to one year.

MODI TO VISIT
BANGLADESHDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

With Bangladesh celebrating 50 years of its existence this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will soon visit Bangladesh.

Both countries are also celebrating 50 years of establishment of diplomatic relations with each other this year.

The Indian armed forces' victory over Pakistan in the war in December 1971, had led to the liberation of the erstwhile East Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh.

"India and Bangladesh will be holding the next round of Foreign Office Consultations in New Delhi on January 29," the MEA said.

SHORT TAKES

CANNES FEST POSTPONED TO JULY 2021

Cannes, Jan. 28: The 2021 edition of the Cannes Film Festival has been postponed and will now take place in July.

In a brief statement, the festival's organisers said that the festival has been pushed by two months due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. "As announced last autumn, the Festival de Cannes reserved the right to change its dates depending on how the global health situation developed," Cannes said in the statement.

"Initially scheduled from May 11 to 22, 2021, the festival will therefore now take place from July 6 to 17, 2021," it added. The announcement comes after days of speculation that the festival might be postponed as cases continue to surge across Europe.

Last year's edition was cancelled due to the pandemic and replaced by a low-key event in October.

2 INDONESIANS CANED 77 TIMES FOR GAY SEX

Banda Aceh (Indonesia), Jan. 28: Two men in Indonesia's conservative Aceh province were publicly caned each 77 times Thursday after neighbours reported them to Islamic religious police for having sex.

Dozens of people witnessed the caning at Banda Aceh's Tamansari city park. It's the third time that Aceh, the only province in Indonesia to practice Shariah law, has caned people for homosexuality since the Islamic law was implemented in 2015 as a concession made by the government to end a long-running separatist rebellion. The men, aged 27 and 29, were whipped across the back and winced with pain as a team of five enforcers wearing robes and hoods took turns, relieving one another after every 40 strokes. The men were arrested in November after residents became suspicious and broke into their rented room where they were caught having sex.

CONTINUE WITH AFGHAN TALKS, KHALILZAD TOLD

Washington, Jan. 28: The Biden Administration has asked Zalmay Khalilzad, who served as a Special US Representative for Afghan reconciliation under the previous Trump Administration, to continue with his peace talks, a top American diplomat said on Wednesday. At the same time, the Biden Administration has started the process of reviewing the peace deal with the Taliban, Secretary of State Tony Blinken told reporters at his maiden news conference here. "With regard to Afghanistan, one of the things that we need to understand is exactly what is in the agreements that were reached between the United States and the Taliban to make sure that we fully understand the commitments that the Taliban has made as well as any commitments that we've made," Blinken said in response to a question.

"And, with regard to Ambassador Khalilzad, we've asked them to continue the vital work that he's performing," Blinken said in response to a question.

SCHOOL NAMES: WASHINGTON, LINCOLN TO GO

San Francisco, Jan 28: The San Francisco school board has voted to remove the names of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln from public schools after officials deemed them and other prominent figures, including Sen. Dianne Feinstein, unworthy of the honour. After months of controversy, the board voted 6-1 in favour of renaming 44 San Francisco school sites with new names with no connection to slavery, oppression, racism or similar criteria, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported.

Feinstein's name was added to the list because as mayor she replaced a vandalised Confederate flag that was part of a long-standing flag display in front of City Hall. Critics called the process slapdash, with little to no input from historians and a lack of information on the basis for each recommendation. In one instance, the committee didn't know whether Roosevelt Middle School was named after Theodore or Franklin Delano. "I must admit there are reasons to support this resolution, but I can't," said community member Jean Barish.

Russia detains allies of jailed leader Navalny

Moscow, Jan. 28: Several allies and supporters of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny were detained in Moscow early Thursday after mass protests last Saturday demanding his release from prison drew tens of thousands to the streets in over 100 Russian cities.

Navalny's top ally Lyubov Sobol, Dr. Anastasia Vasilyeva from the Alliance of Doctors union backed by Navalny and Maria Alyokhina from the Pussy Riot punk collective have been detained for 48 hours along with Navalny's brother Oleg.

All four are reported to be suspects in a criminal probe into alleged violations of Coronavirus regulations during the mass rally in Moscow. The raids came four days before new protests that Navalny's supporters have called for Sunday. The 44-year-old Navalny, the most well-known critic of President Vladimir Putin's government, was arrested January 17 upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusations. The overnight detentions of his supporters came after more than a dozen raids on apartments and offices of Navalny's family, associates and supporters in connection to the probe.

Searched locations included Navalny's apartment, where police detained his brother, and a rented apartment where Navalny's wife, Yulia, has been living. Also Thursday, Russia's Investigative Committee said it opened a criminal probe against Navalny's top strategist Leonid Volkov, accusing him of encouraging minors to participate in unauthorised rallies.

In a further challenge to Putin, two days after Navalny's arrest, his organisation released an extensive video report on a palatial seaside compound allegedly built for Putin. It has been viewed

HR SITUATION IN RUSSIA CONCERNS U.S.: BLINKEN

Washington, Jan. 28: The United States is concerned about the human rights situation in Russia and is worried about the safety and security of the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, US Secretary of State Tony Blinken told reporters here on Wednesday.

"We've already expressed our deep concern for the treatment of Mr Navalny specifically and more generally with the human rights situation in Russia, and it remains striking to me how concerned and maybe even scared the Russian government seems to be of one man, Mr Navalny," Blinken said at his maiden news conference.

Across the board, he said the US is reviewing all of these actions that are of deep concern to the United States, whether it is the treatment of Navalny or the apparent use of a chemical weapon in an attempt to assassinate him.

— PTI

over 98 million times, further stoking discontent. Demonstrations calling for Navalny's release took place in more than 100 cities across the nation last Saturday, a strong show of rising anger toward the Kremlin.

Nearly 4,000 people were reported arrested at those protests. Navalny fell into a coma while aboard a domestic flight from Siberia to Moscow on August 20. He was transferred from a hospital in Siberia to a Berlin hospital two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to the Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

— AP

MEXICO'S NEW CASE RECORD OF ALMOST 28,000

Mexico City, Jan. 28: Mexico posted its highest one-day total of newly confirmed Coronavirus cases Wednesday, with 27,944 infections, and a near-record 1,623 confirmed deaths.

That brings the country's total so far to just over 1.8 million cases and 153,639 deaths. However, Mexico has an extremely low rate of testing, and estimates of excess deaths suggest the real toll is over 195,000.

A group of over a dozen of the country's top universities and medical institutes also reported Wednesday that the use of face masks be made mandatory in Mexico, a move that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his advisers have long opposed.

The president himself seldom wears a mask, and over the weekend tested positive for Coronavirus.

— AP

Pfizer vax effective against mutations

Paris, Jan. 28: The vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech appears to retain its effectiveness against Coronavirus mutations in worrying new variants that have emerged recently in Britain and South Africa, the firms said Thursday.

Several new variants — each with a cluster of genetic mutations — have sparked fears over an increase in infectiousness as well as suggestions that the virus could begin to elude immune response, whether from prior infection or a vaccine.

Pfizer/BioNTech, which had previously said it was unlikely that the strain originally found in Britain could escape vaccine protection, said Thursday that early tests suggest their immunisation would be similarly protective against the variant in South Africa.

In a statement, the two companies said these preliminary findings "do not indicate the need for a new vaccine to address the emerging variants".

They said they are "prepared to respond" if a new

Ukrainians' 'taxing' stir



Demonstrators, including small businesses owners, holding flags reading "Save small business" take part in a march to demand the recall of the law cancelling the simplified tax system in Kiev, Ukraine on Thursday.

— AFP

Release Pearl murder prime suspect: Pak SC

Daniel, the WSJ South Asia bureau chief, was killed in '02

Islamabad, Jan. 28: Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed appeals against the acquittal of British-born al-Qaeda terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh in the kidnapping and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002 and ordered his release in the sensational case.

Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal*, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda. Sheikh and his three aides were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder

● A THREE-JUDGE bench of the apex court led by Justice Mushir Alam on Thursday dismissed the Sindh government's appeal against the Sindh High Court's decision to overturn the conviction of Sheikh in the Pearl murder case.

case of Pearl in Karachi in 2002. Pearl's murder took place three years after Sheikh, along with Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, was released by India in 1999 and given safe pas-

sage to Afghanistan in exchange for the nearly 150 passengers of hijacked Indian Airlines Flight 814. He was serving a prison term in India for kidnappings of Western tourists in the country.

A three-judge bench of the apex court led by Justice Mushir Alam on Thursday dismissed the Sindh government's appeal against the Sindh High Court's (SHC) decision to overturn the conviction of Sheikh in the Pearl murder case. The beheading of the American journalist in 2002 had grabbed international headlines.

According to the short verdict, the bench also directed to release the suspect. One member of the

bench opposed the decision. The bench upheld the SHC order by rejecting the appeals and ordered Sheikh should be set free, his lawyer Mahmood Sheikh told the media.

In April 2020, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment. The court also acquitted his three aides

Fahad Naseem, Sheikh Adil and Salman Sagib — who were serving life terms in the case, almost two decades after they were found guilty and jailed. The Sindh government and family of Pearl filed petitions in the apex court, challenging the high court verdict.

— PTI

BIDEN WARNS BEIJING OVER EXPANSIONISM

Washington, Jan. 28: One week into the job, US President Joe Biden has sent a clear warning to Beijing against any expansionist intentions in East and Southeast Asia. In multiple calls and statements, he and his top security officials have underscored support for allies Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines, signalling Washington's rejection of China's disputed territorial claims in those areas.

On Wednesday, Biden told Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that his administration is committed to defending Japan, including the Senkaku Islands, which are claimed both by Japan and China, which calls them the Diaoyu Islands.

That stance was echoed by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who told Japanese counterpart Nobuo Kishi on Saturday that the contested islands were covered by the US-Japan Security Treaty. Austin affirmed that the United States "remains opposed to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea," according to a Pentagon statement on the call.

Meanwhile, three days into the Biden administration, State Department spokesman Ned Price warned China about menacing Taiwan after it repeatedly sent more than a dozen military fighters and bombers through the island's air defence zone.

— AFP

US PUTS HOLD ON FOREIGN ARMS SALES

Washington, Jan 28: The Biden administration has put a temporary hold on several major foreign arms sales initiated by former President Donald Trump.

Officials say that among the deals being paused is a massive \$23 billion transfer of stealth F-35 fighters to the United Arab Emirates. That sale and several other massive purchases of US weaponry by Gulf Arab countries had been harshly criticised by Democrats in Congress.

The officials did not identify the other sales that had been temporarily halted. The new administration is reviewing the sales but has not made any determination about whether they will actually go through, the State Department said.

"The department is temporarily pausing the implementation of some pending US defence transfers and sales under Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales to allow incoming leadership an opportunity to review," the department said.

— AP

LOCAL | SIGN

Result of fighting case in EU against India move to get it registered as its product

Pakistan gets GI tag for its Basmati rice

Islamabad, Jan. 28: Pakistan has received the Geographical Indicator (GI) tag for its Basmati, paving the way for creating a local registry for the particular strain of rice and making a case in the international market, as the country fights a case in the EU against India's move to get Basmati rice registered as its product.

A GI tag is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess origin-based qualities and reputation in the region. Pakistan is

fighting a case in the 27-member European Union against India's move to get Basmati rice registered as its product.

Laws require that before applying for registration of any product in the international market it has to be protected under the geographical indication (GI) laws of that country. A top Pakistan official said on Tuesday that the country had received the Geographical Indicator (GI) tag for its Basmati. "I am glad to inform you that Pakistan has registered Basmati

● THE ISSUE of protecting Basmati rice as a product of Pakistan came to the forefront after India submitted an application to the European Union claiming sole ownership of the commodity in September last year.

Rice as a Geographical Indication (GI) under the Geographical Indications Act 2020. Under this Act, a GI registry has been formed which will register GIs and maintain the

basic record of proprietors & authorised users of GI," Commerce Advisor Abdul Razak Dawood announced on Twitter.

"This will provide protection of our products against misuse or imitation & hence will guarantee that their share in the international market is protected. I encourage you to send your suggestions of products that can be registered as GIs to the Intellectual Property Organisation of Pakistan," he said. It is believed that a GI tag would strengthen

Pakistan's case in the EU.

The issue of protecting Basmati rice as a product of Pakistan came to the forefront after India submitted an application to the European Union claiming sole ownership of the commodity in September last year.

In its application, India claimed that "Basmati" is special long grain aromatic rice grown and produced in a particular geographical region of the subcontinent. After highlighting the brief history of Basmati rice, India also

claimed that the region is a part of northern India, below the foothills of the Himalayas forming part of the Indo-Gangetic plain.

The Indian claim to the EU was challenged in December and the main argument by Pakistan was that Basmati rice was a joint product of India and Pakistan. Pakistan exported 500,000-700,000 tonnes of Basmati rice annually to different parts of the world out of which 200,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes is being shipped to EU countries.

— PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

29 JANUARY 2021

Budget: A challenge and an opportunity

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman would present her third Union Budget on Monday. In normal circumstances, it would have been an annual, monotonous and predictable affair that would have consisted mainly of a statement of the government's intent and allocation of money for different purposes. With consumption tax going out of the Central government's jurisdiction after the rollout of the Good and Services Tax, the Budget speech had lost even the power to influence prices — a fear factor that had made the Union Budget so special and frightening.

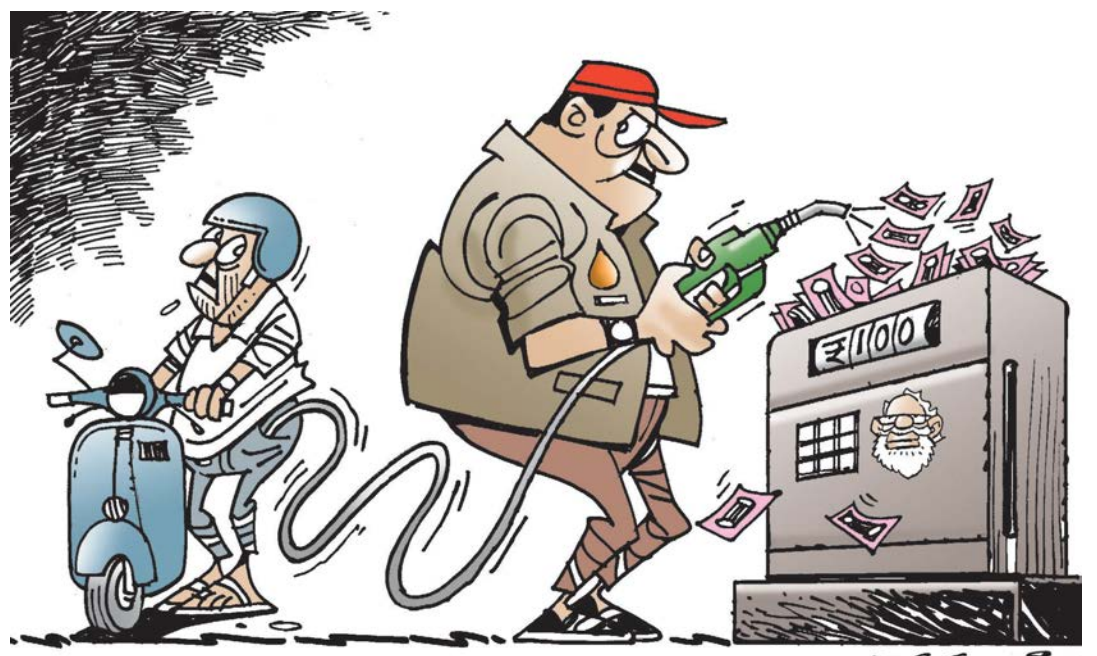
This year's Budget, however, could be special, especially in the wake of Covid-induced economic catastrophe in the country. There is a hope among people and businesspersons that the government — the country's biggest consumer — would come out in support of the economy. The country needs a path-breaking Budget to bring back the tottering economy on the growth track and revive investor confidence in the country.

While the Covid pandemic offers a great opportunity for the finance minister to reset the economy and administer bitter medicine for its health, it also increases expectations that could be difficult to fulfil. For example, people belonging to the middle class want lower income-tax outgo, companies want tax concessions, and farmers want freebies. In a nutshell, everybody wants to pay less or nothing. Therefore, instead of opting for a welfare budget, the finance minister should support sectors such as infrastructure and construction that could have a greater and faster positive effect on reviving the economy. She could also try to put more money in the hands of the people who could use it for consumption. A few thousands of rupees more in the pockets of a middle-class family would invariably boost retail sales.

The next issue is how does the minister raise money for boosting the economy. As tax collection could be a tad lower than normal, the government appears to be ready to go easy on borrowing more money. The minister, however, should exhaust all options before going on a borrowing spree. The Central government owns hundreds of companies, which have been undervalued because of their poor performance and bureaucratic interference. Navratna companies like Coal India, NMDC, Sail and Bhel among others could see a great appreciation in value if the government followed the model of the joint venture between Maruti Udyog Limited and Suzuki Motors by letting private partners run the company. The government could also consider exiting all public sector banks, which will unburden taxpayers and bring in new capital and employment. The State Bank of India and Postal Bank with a vast pan-India network could be used for government schemes and welfare purposes.

In history, very few people get an opportunity to prove their mettle. This Budget could become a Mannohan Singh moment for Ms Sitharaman to script the second turnaround story for India. If the opportunity is lost, it would be a tragedy for her as well as the country.

Subhani



Vaccine diplomacy is India's finest hour



Sreeram Chaulia

Foreign Pulse

Operation "Vaccine Maitri", which was launched earlier this month, is a milestone in the history of India's assistance to fellow developing countries. As millions of India-made Covid-19 vaccines, packed in boxes labelled with the uplifting Sanskrit verse *Save Santu Niramaya* (we all be free from disease), reach countries across South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America, India's stature as a Good Samaritan and a responsible power in the world is rising.

The most remarkable feature of India's mission to supply the much-sought-after doses to a pandemic-plagued world is its timing. Within days of approval from India's regulatory authorities and their foreign counterparts, the export of vaccines began in earnest. India's domestic vaccine rollout, which is a humungous task in itself due to the vast size of its territory and population, did not in any way delay its health rescue diplomacy towards countries near and far such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, the Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, South Africa, Bahrain, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Brazil.

A friend acting speedily in a time of need is the best. Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering articulated how important India's support at the present critical juncture was by saying: "It is of unimaginable value when precious commodities are shared even before meeting your own needs." Unlike some countries that imposed export bans on essential medicines, protective equipment and vaccines in order to attend solely to their own citizens' pressing needs, India has threaded the needle right since the coronavirus pan-

demic broke out to share whatever it could with less endowed nations.

The ethos driving "Vaccine Maitri" and the earlier export of Covid-19 treatment drugs and medical gear is summed up by external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's formulation that "we are more nationalistic, but at the same time we don't see a tension between being nationalistic and being international".

Guided by the holistic philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family), India is extending a helping hand to others with the conviction that if sickness prevails in any corner of the world, then Indians themselves remain vulnerable. In today's interconnected world, the well-being of 1.3 billion Indians cannot be isolated from that of the remaining 6.3 billion inhabitants of the planet.

With many recipient countries getting Indian vaccines either free of cost or minimally priced at actual production cost, and India also training medical personnel in some nations to administer the vaccines, the global public goods India is supplying are truly invaluable. "Vaccine Maitri" is India's reputation-enhancing initiative, not a money-making enterprise or a bargaining chip to extract concessions and impose conditions. Unlike China, which has explicitly demanded diplomatic, geopolitical and economic quid pro quos for its masks, gowns and vaccines, India is not expecting anything material in return.

That is why the gushing gratitude from the recipients towards India is so genuine and quoteworthy. Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro tweeted an image captioned "*Dhanyavaad Bharat*" and "*Obrigado India*", depicting the epic hero Hanuman carrying

vaccines by air, all the way from India. The analogy was to Hanuman bringing the lifesaving Sanjeevani medicinal herb by lifting an entire mountain with his superhuman power and flying from the Himalayas to the battlefield in what is considered to be present-day Sri Lanka.

For Brazil, one of the worst sufferers from Covid-19, the Indian vaccines mean a lot because of its tortuous experience with Chinese vaccines. Mr Bolsonaro's political rival, João Doria, governor of São Paulo state, had bypassed the federal government and banked heavily on Chinese vaccines. In the end, for all the propaganda and hype whipped up by China about its Covid-19 vaccines, clinical trials in Brazil found their efficacy to be barely 50 per cent. India-made vaccines, both indigenously researched ones as well as foreign-contracted ones, are more reliable.

India has a huge comparative advantage in terms of credibility and capability of development and manufacturing of vaccines. Like space exploration, commercial satellite launches and information technology-enabled services, this is a niche scientific area where India is way ahead of many countries, even richer ones. Extensive manufacturing contracts and partnerships with Western pharmaceutical companies, such as Britain's AstraZeneca, give India firms a distinct edge over their Chinese and Russian competitors.

India's vaccine diplomacy rests on this qualitative and quantitative leverage. It does not take a lot of persuasion or salesmanship by New Delhi for countries to ask for Indian vaccines because their track record is proven, given the multi-

To argue that India rose to the occasion and is winning the hearts and minds of the world is not a public relations claim but an internationally recognised reality

ple dozens of Indian vaccines which have previously been pre-approved by the WHO. While China beats India overall in manufacturing, in this particular sector, one must place on record that China's top vaccine maker Shenzhen Kangtai can't hold a candle to India's Serum Institute in Pune in churning out billions of doses per annum.

With China ending 2020 as the only major economy eking out a positive economic growth rate, some have adjudged it as the big winner riding out the storm of a global pandemic that China itself had spawned. But given its plummeting soft power resulting from hegemonic overreach, as evident from public opinion surveys, and the cloud hanging over Chinese vaccines owing to their safety and debt trap risks, it is obvious that others have to step up and show leadership in a world reeling from the pandemic.

To argue that India rose to the occasion and is winning the hearts and minds of the world is not a public relations claim but an internationally recognised reality. It bears reiteration here that India's altruism does have concrete goals and objectives. The goodwill being accumulated from India's vaccine diplomacy is expected to yield longer-term benefits of increased bilateral and regional trust and faith, which is why New Delhi prioritised neighbouring nations to be the initial beneficiaries.

Vaccine Maitri's scale, speed and positive reception in country after country mark India's finest hour as a net provider of international security. Playing to one's strengths and maximising potential gains from them in the global arena have been cardinal principles of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy. Critics who instinctively pounce on him for all acts of omission and commission should tip their hats for a job well done and well planned.

The writer is a professor and dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs

LETTERS

FARMERS PROTEST

Recently, we saw videos of policemen being attacked by protesters. Some of them even stepped back and jumped from huge walls. The restraint shown by them is highly commendable. Even after being attacked vehemently, no bullets were fired. If they did protests may have got violent. Police carry pistols but did not use them. It takes great courage. 'With great power comes great responsibility'.

Teja Deenamsetty
Visakhapatnam

In desperation, the ruling dispensation at the Centre is trying hard to rope in the megastar to join his younger brother Pawan Kalyan in politics in AP (Chiru To Return To Politics Through JS, DC, Jan. 28). The gram panchayat polls are giving another chance for the JS to show its mettle. It remains to be seen where it stands.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

FUEL TAXES

Excess taxes of petrol and diesel cannot be justified. It only points to the insensitivity of the government towards people. It is also indicative of taking the people for granted because of their nonchalance and absorbing the hikes in their stride. Best thing to do is to bring fuels under the GST and earn people's gratitude and votes before the situation turns volatile in future.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Scientists' call to banish malnutrition

HYDERABAD, January. 28 The first Asian Congress of Nutrition, which represents a determined attempt to eradicate malnutrition from Asian countries, was inaugurated here today by Governor Khandubhai Desai.

The speakers stressed on the importance of treating nutrition programmes as an integral part of the overall economic development of a nation and marked the commencement of the six-day Congress. About 500 nutrition scientists, administrators and policy-makers, — including 100 delegates from 23 countries — are attending the Congress being held at the Jubilee Hall.

Anand K. Sahay
Far & Near



Can Rahul or anyone salvage Congress, or will it break?

Sonia Gandhi is in frail health. She had to leave New Delhi for a while on medical advice in order to escape the winter pollution. Is there a vacancy at the top that can be filled in orderly fashion and even routine party functioning restored, or will the old firm break? India's founding party may just be at that sort of moment.

Should the Congress break, it is unlikely to become two as in 1969, and then again become one under a decisive leader. There is no such leader on the horizon. It will therefore likely become several regional entities, and then probably scatter like the Janata Party, which had some big names in it but no stalwart with mass, nationwide appeal.

Mrs Gandhi had pulled a rabbit out of the hat when she produced two UPA governments at the Centre on the trot through sheer political sagacity, coalition-building prowess, and light-touch political management. This reprieve for the Congress was gained in 2004 in the face of sheer adversity and was the more remarkable for that.

The circumstances then were not propitious. The BJP had come into its own and formed governments at

the Centre under a well-liked figure. In contrast, the Congress had haemorrhaged. Key party leaders — Sharad Pawar and Mamata Banerjee — had split away in the late 1990s, with Ms Banerjee even joining the BJP-led NDA alliance for a while and Mr Pawar doing tactical manoeuvres with the BJP as per his convenience, although he would later join the UPA government.

While Mrs Gandhi's shepherding of her party in such circumstances is the stuff of folklore, it is now equally plain that in those years of wielding power (2004-14) the Congress leadership did little to ground the party organisation and nurture it, although it was clear that a cadre and ideology-based national party — so far on the fringes — had already emerged as an alternative.

The Congress had little to offer to counter the ideological propaganda of the RSS-BJP. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government had delivered a sustained average rate of economic growth of nearly eight per cent per annum over a 10-year period. The Congress gullibly thought this would be enough to see it through in the elections.

This was a gross underestimation

of the power of industrial-scale communal propaganda, aided by a hostile media which, effectively, acted as a force-multiplier. The media's stance was an indication that India's big business was far from pleased with the Manmohan-Sonia government. The reason was that the government had gone well outside the prism of a hundred-per-cent-market focus to extend benefits to poorer communities. This was too much for the corrupt, self-serving, elite.

At the same time, the small and medium companies and the urban middle classes and the rural communities — the very sections for whom Congress rule had been benign — became hostage to the continuous stream of a vicious, communal, mind-bending, propaganda onslaught. These in fact participated, happily, in preparing the ground for the mythical hero to arrive — one who will slay every demon.

The Congress comprehensively failed to meet the challenge of majoritarian right-wing elements because it had frittered away the thought-and-action system nurtured by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, Maulana

Azad and countless fearless men and women who gave their lives for an ideal that would necessarily unify India, rather than divide it, or cater only to particular sections of it.

Rajiv Gandhi downwards, the Congress projected itself merely as a party of governance — and not one that united the people on the basis of effective policies, effectively communicated.

This is fundamentally why it permitted itself, in slow stages, to overlook the importance of having a worthwhile party organisation. Even when a party has an active ideological ingredient, it is of no use when there is no organisation to back it, and to disseminate it. And the Congress, for long, has become a party which, in the main, has left its ideology on a museum shelf. It also lacks an organisation.

Ideology and organisation are indeed inextricably bound. There is some irony in the fact that prominent Congress dissidents — who go under the rubric of G-23 — rightly underline a democratically elected organisation but do not even mention ideology. That is a fool's errand.

Once the Congress' demise is guaranteed, how long many of the so-

called secular regional parties, or those on the Left, survive is also a matter of conjecture. Historically, these are — in the main — a derivative of the wider "Congress system" that Rajni Kothari spoke of, although each emphasised specific concerns (some caste, some class) and arose in opposition to the Congress.

This question needs to be considered in the face of entrenchment in power of a far-right, chauvinist, cadre-based, party whose priority is to mobilise the resources, agencies, departments and all institutions of the State — including the uniformed forces and the judiciary — to obliterate other political parties, big or small. The Constitution of India can then simply be dispatched to a dusty corner of the archives.

Rahul Gandhi, an honourable and intelligent man, had resigned as party president on a point of principle. He supports democratic elections from top to bottom. He must be permitted to have his way. Among the contemporary generation, he alone displays an ideological will. Let him provide that ballast to his party and not be distracted by the burden of dynasty.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46874.36	-1.13
Nifty 50	13817.50	-1.07
S&P 500*	3,817.04	1.77
Dollar (₹)	73.04	-0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.82	0.32
Euro (₹)	88.42	-0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,183▼109	0.22
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.70	-0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.933	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.048	0.034

* As of 8:30 PM IST

US economy shrinks 3.5% in 2020

The US economy grew at a 4 per cent annual rate in the final three months of 2020 and shrank last year by the largest amount in 74 years. For 2020 as a whole, the economy contracted 3.5 per cent and clouded the outlook for the coming year. The Commerce Department estimated that the US GDP slowed sharply in the October-December quarter from a record 33.4 per cent surge in the July-September quarter.

Swaminathan, Tewari take over as SBI MDs



State Bank of India said Swaminathan J. and Ashwini Kumar Tewari have taken charge as managing directors. They would be holding this position for up to three years, the lender said in a release. Before this, Swaminathan was the deputy managing director (finance) at the bank. Tewari served SBI Card as MD&CEO before he was appointed as an MD of the bank. SBI chairman Dinesh Khara is assisted by four MDs.

IDBI Bank posts Q3 net of ₹378 cr as NII grows

LIC-owned IDBI Bank reported a standalone net profit of Rs 378 crore for December quarter 2020-21 on the back of healthy growth in interest income. The lender, which is under the RBI's prompt corrective action (PCA) since May 2017, had reported a standalone net loss of Rs 5,763 crore in the year-ago quarter. On a consolidated basis, its PAT stood at Rs 393.15 crore versus a loss of Rs 5,728.70 crore last year.

Laurus Labs Q3 net jumps nearly 4-fold to ₹273 cr

Drug firm Laurus Labs reported a nearly 4-fold jump in its consolidated net profit to Rs 272.85 crore for the December quarter against Rs 73.47 crore in the year-ago quarter. Consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 1,288.42 crore against Rs 729.59 crore. "Our consolidated revenue for the quarter increased by 76 per cent driven by growth in all the divisions," founder and CEO Satyanarayana Chava said.



■ Demand contracts 35 per cent in 2020 Gold demand dips to lowest in 25 yrs

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 28

Despite the recovery made in the December quarter, gold demand contracted 35 per cent in 2020 to the lowest level in 25 years.

The gold demand for the full-year 2020 was 446.4 tonnes compared to 690.4 tonnes in 2019—a decline of 35 per cent, according to data from the World Gold Council. This was the lowest demand since 1995.

The year 1995 had seen one of the lowest yearly demand of 462 tonnes since the World Gold Council has been recording annual gold demand.

"India's gold demand dropped by over a third in 2020, settling at 446.4 tonnes, on the back of Covid-induced lockdowns and lifetime high prices. However, the drop was significantly lower when viewed in value terms, 14 per cent lower than 2019 as prices were up 34 per cent, hovering around Rs 50,000 per 10 gm for most part of the year," said Somasundaram PR., managing director, India, World Gold Council.

Jewellery demand fell 42 per cent to 315.9 tonnes and investment demand fell by 11 per cent to 130.4 tonnes in 2020.

In the first three quarters of 2020, gold demand stood at 252 tonnes, which was 49 per cent down from 496 tonnes in the same period last year. In the fourth quarter of festivals, however, demand



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—Somasundaram P.R. MD, India, World Gold Council

was just 4 per cent down at 186.2 tonnes compared to 194.3 tonnes in the same quarter of 2019.

While jewellery demand was down by just 8 per cent at 137.3 tonnes, investment demand was up by 8 per cent at 48.9 tonnes against 45.3 tonnes in Q4 of 2019.

"The demand for bars and coins had gone up not just during the auspicious occasions but even otherwise," said Somasundaram.

Import of official gold was down 46 per cent in 2020 and the restrictions on international travel due to the pandemic also saw the grey market sup-

ply shrinking by one-fourth of last year's 115 tonnes.

Closure of stores and retail establishments also saw the quantum of recycled gold coming down to 95.5 tonnes compared to 119.5 tonnes in 2019.

Globally, annual demand was 14 per cent down to 3,759.6 tonnes and 2020 saw the demand falling below 4000 tonnes for the first time since 2009.

The largest gold consumer, China, saw the demand shrinking by 28 per cent. However, Germany's investment demand grew in 2020, replacing India from the second slot.

India's small investors rush to join GameStop

ABHIRUP ROY MUMBAI, JAN. 28

India's small investors are snapping up shares of US retail investor favourite GameStop Corp, making the video game retailer the most traded stock on some Indian brokerages after anonymous social media posts fuelled a frenzied rally.

Shares of GameStop have surged 1,700 per cent since January 12 as amateur US investors, monitoring social media comments, have piled in and forced professional short-sellers to abandon their positions with heavy losses.

This week, GameStop accounted for 19% of the trades on Vested Finance, an Indian investment firm that helps Indians buy or sell U.S. stocks, and 15% of the trades on its rival Stockal, making it the most traded stock on both platforms.

"It's quite surprising to see Indian investors jumping on the GameStop bandwagon," Stockal co-founder Sitashwa Srivastava told Reuters.

"This shows a marked shift in investor behaviour from just using U.S.



stocks to diversify their portfolios to rushing after a rally based on social media discussions. It could be reckless but it works for some."

Despite India's highly restrictive cross-border investment rules, Indians have been placing big bets on U.S. equities this year as American stocks recovered quicker than markets in India from a crash sparked by the coronavirus pandemic.

Indian investors venturing into U.S. stocks usually prefer top global companies such as Apple, Amazon, Facebook and Tesla as they look to diversify their holdings in India. —Reuters

TIM COOK: INDIA BIZ DOUBLED, FEEL GOOD ABOUT TRAJECTORY

YOSHITA SINGH NEW YORK/NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

Apple has doubled its business in India in the December quarter on the back of strong performance of its online store, and the tech giant sees a good growth trajectory going ahead, its CEO Tim Cook said.

The Cupertino-based tech giant posted an all-time record revenue of \$111.4 billion globally for the first quarter ended December 26, 2020, up 21 per cent year-on-year.

International sales accounted for 64 per cent of the quarter's revenue.

"... If you take India as an example, we doubled our business last quarter compared to the year-ago quarter. But our absolute level of business there is still quite low relative to the size of the opportunity," Cook said during an analyst call.

The company, which competes with players like Samsung and OnePlus in the premium smartphone segment, has been aggressively ramping up its presence in the Indian market. —PTI

NEW | STREAM Walmart Connect eyes top 10 ranking in 5 years Walmart aims to be advertising titan

THOMAS BUCKLEY JAN. 28

Walmart Inc plans to ramp up growth in its digital media business as the world's largest retailer seeks to become a top-ten advertising platform in the US within five years.

The media group, which will be renamed Walmart Connect, will offer targeted ads on e-commerce platforms such as Walmart.com and the Walmart app to shoppers as they're purchasing in real time, the company said on Thursday in a statement. Walmart will also allow brands to advertise on almost 170,000 digital screens at



self-checkout kiosks and on TV walls in more than 4,500 stores.

With a major brick-and-mortar footprint tied to a growing e-commerce business, Walmart is trying to position itself as a premier destination for companies to advertise

wherever—and however—a customer chooses to shop. "We've built a substantial business that can serve clients in a way no one else can," chief customer officer Janey Whiteside said in the statement.

Walmart Connect is

Sundaram AMC buys Principal AMC

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 28

Sundaram Asset Management Company, a 100 per cent subsidiary of Sundaram Finance, announced the purchase of the asset management businesses of Principal Asset Management.

Sundaram will acquire the schemes managed by Principal Asset Management, besides buying 100 per cent share capital of Principal Asset Management, Principal Trustee Company, and Principal Retirement Advisors, said a release issued by Sundaram AMC.

"The transaction is subject to the receipt of necessary regulatory approvals and Sebi prescribed processes, and Principal will continue to operate the businesses until the deal is closed," the release added.

Sundaram is a significant player in the fund management space with a 25-year track record.

Principal Asset Management has assets under management of Rs 7,447 crores as on December 31, 2020, with about 90 per cent of this in equity-oriented schemes.

Commenting on the acquisition, Sunil Subramaniam, managing director, Sundaram AMC said, "This transaction will strengthen our presence in the marketplace with the addition of a range of schemes with a good long-term performance track record."

Realtors seek tax sops, industry & infra status

New Delhi, Jan. 28: Real estate developers expect the government to provide industry as well as infrastructure status for the sector, increase the corpus of Rs 25,000-crore stress fund, and more tax sops for both homebuyers and builders in the upcoming Budget to boost property demand.

They also hope for single-window clearance for projects, measures to boost liquidity, reduction in the GST rates and availability of input tax credit on the GST paid in the Budget 2021-22, which will be presented on February 1.

"We sincerely hope that Budget 2021 brings some much-needed relief to homebuyers as well as developers," Tata Realty and Infrastructure MD & CEO Sanjay Dutt said.

As the sector's growth relies heavily on the upcoming financial amendments, he said the government should grant industry status to the real estate sector and a single-window clearance mechanism for faster completion of projects.

"One GST, one or no

Maruti Suzuki net rises 24% on higher sales

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 28

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker, on Thursday posted a 24.1 per cent year-on-year rise in the December quarter standalone net profit at Rs 1,941.4 crore, thanks to higher festive sales and preference for personal mobility amid the pandemic that raised the demand for its small cars.

In the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year, Maruti Suzuki's net profit stood at Rs 1,564.8 crore.

The maker of popular models like Swift and Vitara Brezza reported a 13.3 per cent YoY rise in revenue at Rs 23,457.8 crore against Rs 20,706.8 crore in Q3FY20.

The revenue numbers



were slightly below the market expectations. A CNBC-TV18 poll had estimated the revenue numbers to the tune of Rs 23,655 crore.

The company's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation, or Ebitda, grew 5.9 per cent YoY to Rs 2,226 crore against Rs 2,102 crore in the correspon-

ding quarter last year.

The Ebitda margin for the quarter stood at 9.5 per cent against 10.1 per cent a year ago.

Maruti Suzuki said its operating income rose on higher sales volume, cost cuts and lower sales promotion. But the increase was partially offset by an increase in commodity prices and adverse foreign exchange movement.

The company sold a total of 4.95 lakh vehicles during the December quarter, higher by 13.4 per cent compared to the same period in the previous year.

Sales in the domestic market stood at 4.67 lakh units, growing by 13 per cent. Exports stood at 28,528 units, higher by 20.6 per cent.

Airtel says it has 5G ready network

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

Bharti Airtel on Thursday said its telecom network is now 5G ready after it has demonstrated live fifth-generation (5G) service over an existing commercial network in Hyderabad.

"Today, we have conclusively demonstrated that as far as Airtel is concerned, we are 5G ready," Bharti Airtel MD and CEO Gopal Vittal said at a virtual conference.

He said the company had seamlessly operated 5G and 4G concurrently within 1800 MHz spectrum



using dynamic spectrum sharing in Hyderabad.

"Every single part of our network is now fully 5G ready...and can use any spectrum band to click on 5G experience in a matter of months," Vittal said.

The 5G service offers ultra high-speed internet, which allowed users during a demo run in

Hyderabad to download a movie in a few seconds.

The latest demonstration underscores the company's technology capabilities for the 5G roll-out whenever adequate spectrum is made available.

"Even on existing bands of spectrum, 5G can be turned on but the full power of the experience will be felt only when the adequate spectrum is available from the government... The moment we receive government approvals and we have the right spectrum bands in adequate quantities, we will be able to roll this out, immediately," he said.

INDIGO REPORTS FOURTH STRAIGHT QUARTERLY LOSS, REVENUE HALVES



Bengaluru, Jan. 28: Interglobe Aviation Ltd, which runs India's biggest airline IndiGo, reported its fourth straight quarterly loss on Thursday, as the Covid-19 pandemic kept air travel well below normal levels.

Its loss in the December quarter was smaller than in the previous two quarters, when the health crisis had brought global air travel to a halt, but the company's revenue halved from a year earlier, signalling that a full recovery was still far away.

The festive season in October and November saw more air travel, and domestic traffic has now recovered to about 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels, mitigating some of Interglobe's losses during the quarter.

IndiGo also benefited from lower fuel costs, which plunged nearly 66 per cent year-over-year.

"The low level of international capacity continues to remain a major concern for us and continues to hurt our financials," CEO Ronojoy Dutta said on a conference call with analysts.

IndiGo expects to reach 50 per cent of its pre-pandemic international capacity only by mid-2022, and 100 per cent by end-2022, Dutta said.

"We'd like to hit the seasonally strong first quarter next year with all cylinders running, and at full capacity, at least domestically," he added.

IndiGo said it expects current-quarter average seat kilometers—a measure of passenger-carrying capacity—to be 75-80 per cent of the capacity of the same period last year.

The New Delhi-based airline's daily average cash burn had halved to Rs 15 crore in the quarter from June-quarter levels. —Reuters



RENAULT UNVEILS KIGER SUV, LAUNCH IN Q1

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 28

French car giant Renault on Thursday made a global unveil of its much-awaited Renault Kiger, a subcompact SUV, in India in the production form, ahead of its launch in the Q1 this year when its price would be revealed.

Auto experts said it could be aggressively priced at Rs 5.5 lakh to Rs 9.5 lakh to take on competition.

The sporty Renault Kiger will be first sold in India followed by other global markets.

The car maker, which sells Duster and Kwid models, revealed its SUV's specifications, the features available in top-spec form, the design, its interiors and the engine and gearbox options on offer.

The Kiger is powered by the 72HP, naturally aspirated petrol and 100HP, 1.0-litre turbo-petrol engine.

SHORT TAKES

Ronaldo violates Covid-19 code

Rome: Cristiano Ronaldo broke coronavirus travel restrictions with a trip to a mountain resort, according to media reports Thursday. Juventus striker Ronaldo allegedly travelled to Courmayeur, 150 kilometres north-west of the Serie A club's Turin headquarters, for his girlfriend Georgina Rodriguez' birthday. Rodriguez, who turned 27 on Wednesday, apparently posted a video of the couple on a snowmobile on Instagram. She later removed it, but it was picked up by several Italian news sites. The *Gazzetta dello Sport* newspaper said Ronaldo and Rodriguez spent Tuesday night in a hotel and took a ride in the snow the next morning, before returning to Turin. Under current Italian coronavirus rules, the couple should not have left the town of Turin. They each risk a fine of \$485. — *AFP*

Virus hits Olympic test competition

Tokyo: The first Tokyo Olympics test event of 2021 has been postponed because of travel restrictions under Japan's coronavirus state of emergency, organisers confirmed on Thursday. The artistic swimming event will double as the sport's final qualifier for the virus-postponed Games. It was due to be held on March 4-7 in Tokyo but will now take place two months later. Tokyo 2020 organisers said a decision to delay it had been taken for reasons including "ensuring the fairest possible conditions for athletes to participate" and ongoing entry restrictions in Japan. The qualifier has now been rescheduled for May 1-4 at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre. — *AFP*

Yasir strikes late, Pak in charge

Karachi: Pakistan's spinners Yasir Shah and Nauman Ali grabbed three wickets in the space of ten runs to halt South Africa's fightback on the third day of the first Test here. When it looked like South Africa would end the day at parity after wiping out Pakistan's big 158-run first innings lead, Yasir struck twice and Nauman once to leave the tourists on 187 for 4 at close. Nightwatchman Keshav Maharaj was unbeaten on two and skipper Quinton de Kock was yet to score, as South Africa now lead by 29 runs with six second innings wickets in hand. Earlier, hosts scored 378 to take a crucial lead over South Africa's total of 220. — *AFP*
Brief scores: South Africa 220 & 187/4 (Markram 74, van der Dussen 64, Yasir 3/53) vs Pakistan 378 (Fawad 109, Rabada 3/70, Maharaj 3/90).

Man United's title hopes suffer blow

London: Manchester United's Premier League title hopes suffered a huge blow on Wednesday with a 2-1 defeat by bottom side Sheffield United as Chelsea started the Thomas Tuchel era with a goalless draw against Wolves. The shock result at Old Trafford leaves Pep Guardiola's Manchester City a point clear at the top with a game in hand and looking increasingly hot favourites to win a third title in four years. Elsewhere on a busy night of midweek action, Leicester drew 1-1 with Everton, Burnley beat Aston Villa 3-2 and Brighton drew 0-0 with Fulham. Earlier, former Paris Saint-Germain boss Tuchel took charge at Stamford Bridge against misfiring Wolves less than 24 hours after replacing the sacked Frank Lampard. — *AFP*

Live on TV

BADMINTON

BWF World Tour Finals: Group matches from 9.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3

CRICKET

Pakistan vs South Africa: First Test, Day 4 from 10.30 am on Sony Ten 2

Big Bash League: Eliminator from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 Tournament: Semifinal — Tamil Nadu vs Rajasthan from 11.55 am; Punjab vs Baroda from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Italian League: Torino vs Fiorentina from 1.15 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Burns eyes Rory return
England opener joins team after paternity break

C. SANTOSH KUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, JAN. 28

When England's Test cricketers were preparing for their subcontinental tour by training on worn surfaces at ECB's high performance centre in Loughborough, opener Rory Burns had other thoughts. Burns, who had spoken candidly about the effect of the bio-bubble environment in the summer, knew his most important preparation would be for the mental side of the game. Burns, who has returned to the England Test squad after skipping the Sri Lanka tour for the birth of his first child, admitted that it was tough leaving his newborn daughter and wife back at home. "But, I'm ready to get back to work," said Burns who has scored 1,233 runs in 21 Tests.

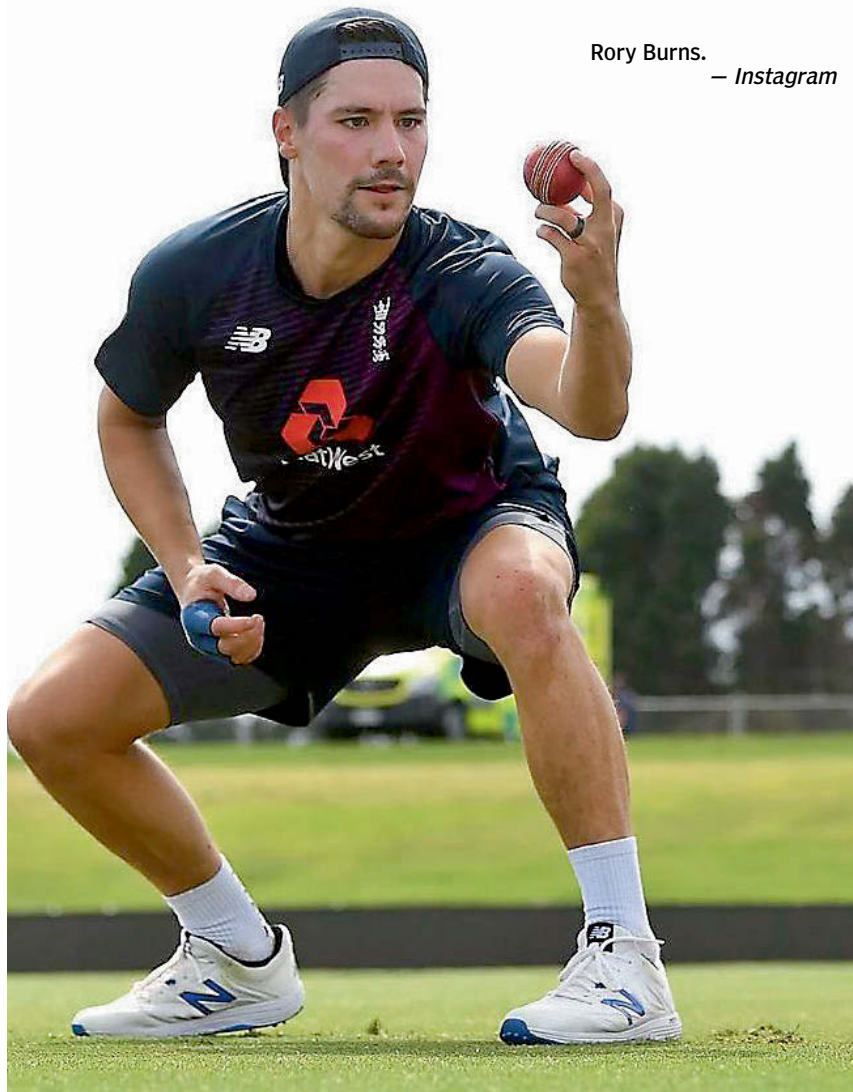
The 30-year-old Epsom-born is also taking a short course in Psychology to fill the long hours in the bio-bubble.

"It's going to take quite a bit of my off-time. If I maintain a healthy head-space, I can focus well on my cricket. The break (paternity) helped me freshen up.

"The time that my child was giving me, I saw more of the India-Australia series than our series against Sri Lanka. Because I was getting up and doing my own training back home," he said.

On his maiden India tour, Burns is hoping to train with his teammates Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes for the first time in Chennai on Sunday. The rest of the squad who arrived on Wednesday from Colombo will commence their training only on Tuesday.

"It is obviously a challenge, we can't do much about the schedule. If you waste time thinking about that, it won't be any good to you. We have three days to put in the



Rory Burns. — *Instagram*

work and try to get used to the conditions here. Then it's a mental switch. I guess that's the challenge and I have been around for a while now so I have some experience to draw from," said Burns.

The Surrey cricketer, however, doesn't expect the wickets in India to turn straight away.

"I think we will get good cricket wickets that will spin as the game goes on. I have drawn on various people's experience who I have worked with, they tend to suggest about India as opposed to Sri

Lanka which is slightly fast forward from the start with regards to spin. We are preparing in that respect," he said.

Burns said India's Jasprit Bumrah is a hard bowler to prepare for.

"He is obviously unique in terms of how he comes and bowls. It would just be about working those angles. I saw the recent series between India and Australia and they are in a pretty handy form, not necessarily their first playing XI at different points, but still, they managed to get over the

line, it is just going to be a big challenge in their own conditions, looking forward to it," added Burns.

India would be fielding their full-strength side with Virat Kohli back to bolster the batting lineup. Burns knows India are in pretty handy form. "India could not necessarily play their first eleven, but they still managed to get past Australia, which is testament to the side. They will be a big challenge in their conditions and they are No. 1 in the world," further added the 30-year-old.

Allrounder Kapil now drives on golf courses

MOSES KONDETY | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

India's greatest fast-bowling all-rounder Kapil Dev has a word of caution for new speed sensation Mohammed Siraj: Slow and steady wins the long race.

India's 1983 World Cup winning captain, who has never missed a match because of injury in his 131-Test career spanning 16 years between 1978 and 1994, is impressed by the exploits of the Hyderabad quick in the recent Test series in Australia but says the onus is now on the pacer to keep performing. "Siraj is a good bowler who has done extremely well but he has to go a long way," Kapil told this newspaper during his visit to Hyderabad on Thursday.

"He needs to carry on for at least five seasons. I get scared about the fast bowlers because they get injured very fast," Kapil quipped.

"So many of them have come up in the last 10 years but have got injured — Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Ishant Sharma, Ashish Nehra are examples. It's tough yes, but you can overcome the difficulties if you are passionate about playing for the country," he added.

The 62-year-old lauded Team India that emerged on top Down Under. "They have done wonderfully well. I never ever expected a performance like that when more than half the side was injured... hats off!"

"Your captain, the most important player, is not there, and there are so many on the injury list and then you come back and play so well... I haven't seen better cricket than that in the 40 years that I have played and watched the game. The series win in Australia was definitely the cherry on the cake," Kapil continued to heap praise.

"After such a high in Australia, I hope and pray that they maintain the momentum in the upcoming home series against England," Kapil added.

Asked if it was time for India to have separate captains for Tests,



It's the beautiful, serene surroundings that draw me to golf. Just imagine strolling and playing your strokes in a 150-acre garden. It's green all around. You feel the breeze, smell the grass and simply love nature. I wish my house was in the middle of a golf course. As long as the sun is up I can be out there.

— **KAPIL DEV**
India's World Cup winning cricket captain says he can play golf all day

ODIs and T20s, Kapil was non-committal. "Let's leave that to the selectors and their collective wisdom. If one captain is overburdened, try and lessen his workload so that he is more relaxed. It's nice to see Ajinkya Rahane doing so unbelievably well in the absence of Virat Kohli. Then there were Rohit and Ashwin too as a back-up. So I would say we have enough players and experience to lead the side, thanks to IPL and domestic cricket," he said.

Who are his favourite cricketers?

TEST SERIES TV RIGHTS STILL UNDECIDED

London, Jan. 28: The television rights in the UK for England's tour of India remain undecided with just a week left for the series-opener in Chennai from February 5.

Telegraph Sport reported that *Star India*, the host broadcaster of the series, was considering showing the tour via its streaming app Hotstar instead of selling it to a conventional broadcaster like *Sky*.

"But India's win in Australia and good audience figures on *Sky* for England's recent series in Sri Lanka, has increased the market for the rights with even *Channel 4* showing an interest," claimed the report.

The rights, worth around £20 million, are expected to be awarded soon for the four-Test series, which is part of the World Test Championship. *Sky* remains the front-runner to secure them, having shown most of England's tours over the past three decades, the report stated.

The England squad flew into Chennai on Wednesday from Sri Lanka, where they trounced the hosts 2-0. — *PTI*

WORLD TOUR | FINALS

Sindhu, Srikanth out of reckoning

Bangkok, Jan. 28: Indian shuttlers P. V. Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth were virtually out of contention for the knockout stage after losing their respective second round matches in the BWF World Tour Finals here on Thursday.

A week ago Sindhu had suffered a demoralising defeat to Ratchanok Intanon and there was no change of fate for the World Champion this time too as she went down 18-21, 13-21 to the third seeded Thai.

"It wasn't my day. Losing the first game made the difference. My timing was a bit off, so a bit disappointed," Sindhu said.

Srikanth enjoyed a 3-0 head-to-head count against Wang Tzu Wei ahead of his match but it mattered little as the Taiwanese world no 12 claimed a come-from-behind 19-21, 21-9, 21-19 win over the Indian.

"I have to figure out a way to pull out these close matches. I was dominating him for most part of third game," Srikanth said after losing yet another three-game contest.

With only the top two players from each group making it to the semifinals, the twin defeat almost sealed the fate of the Indian duo in the tournament.

Earlier, Srikanth and Wang fought tooth and nail right from the start, moving together 5-5 to 9-9 before Srikanth managed to grab a slender 11-10 lead

with a smash. Srikanth opened up a significant 15-11 lead with Wang sending the shuttle wide twice.

Srikanth continued to dominate the rallies with his angled returns to reach 17-12. Wang, however, narrowed it down to 18-19 with Srikanth committing few errors but the Indian managed to grab two game points with a smash. He lost one before converting the next with Wang making a poor judgement at the backline.

Both the shuttlers engaged in some energy-sapping rallies but Wang played some superb shots to open up a 9-5 lead as Srikanth made a poor judgement. The Indian made successive errors at the net to allow Wang grab a healthy 11-5 advantage at the interval.

Wang simply ran away with the game as he led 16-6 and eventually sealed it.

The decider started with attacking rallies with Srikanth leading 4-1 but Wang produced a rear-guard action to make it 8-4 with seven straight points.

Srikanth bounced back to make it 10-10 but Wang again grabbed a lead at 17-13. Srikanth then made Wang run around the court, leaving him flat on the ground in the end. He made it 16-17 before finding the net and going wide. Srikanth again missed the line as Wang grabbed four match points. The Indian could save three. — *PTI*

GANGULY UNDERGOES ANOTHER ANGIOPLASTY

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JAN. 28

Board of Control for Cricket in India president Sourav Ganguly, admitted at Apollo Gleneagles Hospital, underwent another angioplasty, on Thursday afternoon, in which two more stents were implanted for the removal of blockages in the two other arteries of his heart.

The 48-year-old former Indian cricket team captain had received the first one in one of his three affected arteries at Woodlands Hospital after suffering a 'mild' heart attack on January 2.

The second angioplasty, which was then deferred by

the doctors by two-three weeks, was planned after Sourav was examined by eminent cardiac surgeons — Dr Devi Shetty and Dr Ashwin Mehta — during the day.

The private hospital stated, "Dr Aftab Khan and the team comprising Dr Ashwin Mehta, Dr Devi Shetty, Dr Ajit Desai, Dr Saroj Mondal and Dr Saptarshi Basu successfully performed angioplasty on Mr Sourav Ganguly."

It added, "Two stents were placed. The procedure was uneventful. Mr Ganguly is stable and under close observation."

One of the doctors said the angioplasty took an hour. West Bengal chief

minister Mamata Banerjee visited Sourav in the evening.

"Sourav received two stent implantation. The operation was successful. He is stable and doing well. He also spoke to me. I wish him all the best and congratulate the doctors also," she said later.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar tweeted, "Got an update on health of @SGanguly99 Sourav Ganguly, President Board of Control for Cricket in India @BCCI under treatment in Kolkata. As per doctors and family members his condition is fine."

Sourav is likely to be released from the hospital after some days.

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Regd. No. H/SD/509/2021-23

Printed and Published by **K. Sudhakar** on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208.

RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: **Kaushik Mitter**