

SHORT TAKES

BIE EXTENDS
LAST DATES FOR
FEE PAYMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

The Board of Intermediate Education extended the due dates for payment of examination fee for second-year students. The BIE Secretary V. Ramakrishna in a release issued on Thursday stated that inter second year regular and previously failed students (general and vocational), attendance exempted candidates appearing for humanities (without college study) and those with change of group to avail such facility while appearing for intermediate public examinations in March 2021.

Accordingly, the last date for remittance of fee by the students/candidates in the office of principal is Feb. 18 and remittance to the BIE account by the principal through online transfer is Feb. 19 while submission of MNRs and fee paid data printout in the RIO office is Feb. 20.

It is informed that there will be no further extension of examination fee dates. There is also a provision to directly pay the examination fee by the candidate/parent through online at BIE official website 'bie.ap.gov.in.'

TD SLAMS YSRC
FOR NO ACTION
ON STEEL PLANT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

Telugu Desam national general secretary Nara Lokesh MLC on Thursday slammed the YSRC government in Andhra Pradesh for 'not piling pressure' on the Centre to desist it from privatizing the Vizag Steel Plant.

Lokesh stressed that the steel plant should remain in government control, considering how the people of AP waged prolonged agitations and the farmers sacrificed thousands of acres of their ancestral lands for the project. He alleged that the Jagan government was playing a dubious role in the whole privatisation plan.

Lokesh visited the Sri Lakshminarasimha Swamy Temple in Mangalagiri and also inaugurated a health camp organised by the Lakshminarasimha Goldsmiths Welfare Society. He announced a financial support of ₹5 lakh for the welfare activities of goldsmiths and promised more support from the TD.

Later, replying to the media questions, Lokesh said the people of Visakhapatnam would punish YSRC MP Vijay Sai Reddy for his alleged attempts to undermine the steel plant agitation. He recalled that when the employees and the people were rising in massive protests, Vijay Sai showed the boldness to say that he cannot give any assurance to the agitators but can only get an appointment to meet the Prime Minister.

YSRC DEMANDS
JANA SENA TO
PROTECT RINL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

The YSR Congress demanded that Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan pressurise the BJP-led government, its ally, to cancel privatisation of the Vizag Steel Plant.

YSRC MLA and party official spokesperson Ambati Rambabu refuted allegations Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and alleged that Vizag Steel Plant started incurring losses during the then Telugu Desam government. He alleged Naidu privatised more than 50 government companies.

Brushing aside the allegations of Opposition on the state's role in the privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), Mr Rambabu said the Chief Minister has made his view clear in the letter to Prime Minister. He stated that the allegations that the State is selling VSP to Korean Company Posco stands no ground as it is the Centre that governs the Steel Plant.

Addressing a press meet here on Thursday, Rambabu affirmed that the state government meeting with POSCO company is not regarding the steel plant but for investment options. He said the steel plant is a Central government organisation and there is no possibility for the state government to sell it to a private company. Turning down the allegations of state government having talks with POSCO to sell the steel plant, he said that the company people have also met Naidu.

Prayer service



Girls offer prayers to Bishop T. Joseph Rajarao at the concluding day of Mary Matha shrine celebrations at Gunadala in Vijayawada on Thursday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Parties woo every voter to
booths to win GP elections

Leaders say that saddest moment in polls is losing elections with close margin

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

As every vote counts for winning, candidates have decided not to "spare" any voter in their respective villages to win gram panchayat elections. As some candidates lost elections with only one vote in the first phase elections, the candidates and leaders are contacting every house treating each vote as most valuable.

The ruling YSR Congress and Telugu Desam appointed leaders to bring all voters to the booths to cast their votes without fail on polling day on February 13 to avoid loss of elections with one or few votes margin.

For instance, a candidate Karunasri won the Sarpanch election with only one vote in Pidaparthivariipalem gram panchayat in Guntur district, T Susila won Pamurupalli Sarpanch election with only one vote in Nellore district, Byreddy Nagaraju turned winner of Kandalampadu sarpanch in Krishna dis-

trict with only one vote margin, T Ranjani won Dibbapalem Sarpanch in Visakhapatnam district with only one vote margin, Appa Rao won Tagrampudi Sarpanch with two votes in Visakhapatnam district, Veera Raghavaiah won Totlapalem Sarpanch with 6 votes in Guntur district, Suresh grabbed Garlapadu Sarpanch in Guntur district with 14 votes margin and several other candidates won the election with single digit and few votes of the majority.

The leaders of ruling and opposition parties said that the saddest moment in the polls is losing elections with one or few countable vote's margin.

They said that the contesting candidates continuously in touch with every family in the villages and further they had appointed cadres to bring the voters to the booth to cast their votes without fail as every vote is going to count towards deciding of the winners.

Sarpanch candidates
forced to spend ₹5-₹30L

From Page 1

Similarly, TD turned active in majority Assembly constituencies hoping to increase the winning percentage in the second phase.

According to the sources, the TD and the YSRC are competing with each other towards luring voters with various sops in the villages during the second phase elections.

The candidates appointed representatives were identifying influential persons in the villages who can attract at least 50 votes and offering packages.

A candidate on the condition of anonymity said that a sarpanch would get an honorarium of ₹3,000 per month only but they are forced to spend ₹5 lakh to ₹30 lakh according to

● **YSRC MLA Ambati Rambabu said that TD and other opposition parties in every aspect tried to defame the government but people distrusted those allegations and put faith in YSRC government.**

the need to win the elections as these elections turned prestigious to both the YSRC and the TD.

He said that majority of candidates are offering at least ₹500 to ₹5,000 per vote according to competition level and said that the candidates who would lose elections despite the spending of huge money would turn aspirants bankrupt after the elections.

Meanwhile, the hopes of

the YSRC increased with the landslide win in the first phase and they are gearing up to increase the winning percentage in the second phase. The leaders already identified the influential groups and individual leaders in the villages and continuously in touch with them for registering a mammoth victory.

YSRC MLA Ambati Rambabu said that TD and other opposition parties in every aspect tried to defame the government but people distrusted those allegations and put faith in YSRC government.

He expressed confidence about the increase of winning percentage in the second phase and continuation of the same in the third and fourth phase elections.

SEC serves gag
order on MLA
Jogi till Feb. 17

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

Yet again, the State Election Commission issued a gag order on the ruling party MLA from Pedana Jogi Ramesh on charges of threatening voters to influence them till Feb. 17.

The SEC maintained that it received complaints from three major political parties against the MLA with the footage of electronic media threatening the contestants not to file their nominations with a further threat of their government benefits to be withheld.

The SEC said that the incident took place at Neelipudi village of Kruthivennu mandal of Krishna district at 7.15

pm on February 10. It said that the utterances of the legislator were meant to include threats against the prospective candidates and concluded that the utterances violated the free and fair polls.

Accordingly, the SEC passed an order stating that the legislator Jogi Ramesh was restrained to speak to the media till the elections were completed in the affected area on February 17 and also restrained him to peak to any group or groups of people or in meetings with immediate effect.

The SEC asked the Krishna Collector and SP to serve the proceedings on the legislator and implement its order. It further asked them to report compliance on its order.

Naidu demands
fresh GP elections

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

Telugu Desam Chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday strongly criticised the State Election Commission (SEC) for "failing" to prevent election offences, forced unanimous results and false police cases against the Opposition leaders in the ongoing panchayat elections. He stated that the TD filed a petition in the High Court against the election offences being committed by the polling staff in connivance with the ruling party.

He alleged that Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy continued to indulge in election offences even after the High Court order preventing him from speaking to the media against the SEC.

He alleged that Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy continued to indulge in election offences even after the High Court order preventing him from speaking to the media against the SEC.

Addressing a press meet here on Thursday, Naidu demanded that the SEC order a fresh notification for conducting repolling in all the panchayats in the three assembly segments of Punganur, Thamballapalle and Macherla. He alleged that panchayat raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and the YSRC leaders committed massive violations in these segments to force an unprecedented number of unanimous results in Sarpanch polls.

Naidu accused the SEC of failing to take required action though the ruling party leaders continued their offences and made a 'mockery of the elections'.

He said that there was no use to conduct the elections when the SEC could not create confidence in the people to contest or to cast their votes in a free and peaceful manner. He further stated that the TD has written a number of letters from time to time bringing to the notice of the SEC about the YSRC violations but there was no expected action.

Naidu expressed concern that the SEC could not also get the erring officials transferred for the sake of ensuring a fair poll.

He said that it was because of the Minister's violations that near-total panchayats in his Punganur segment were announced as unanimous. He demanded these results should be cancelled and fresh polls should be held by bringing the Central forces to ensure law and order.

Naidu said that the TD has filed a petition in the High Court against the election offences being committed by the polling staff in connivance with the ruling party.

He alleged that some returning officers wrongly declared the panchayats as won by the YSRC while actually, the TD supported candidates got majority votes.

EG, WG MLC seat
has 17,285 voters

From Page 1

According to the final electoral rolls for the East and West Godavari constituencies, there are 17,285 voters — 9,560 voters in East Godavari district and 7,725 voters in West Godavari district.

Muralidhar Reddy said there are 5,953 male voters and 3,607 female voters in East Godavari dis-

trict and 4,693 male voters and 3,032 female voters in West Godavari district.

He said 67 polling centres will be set up in East Godavari district and 49 in West Godavari.

The voters can get further information by calling toll free number 1950 (District Election Officer) or tahsildars, MPDO or municipal offices.

Jagan directs officials to focus on
improving state's revenue sources

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy directed the officials to better focus on bettering the state's revenue sources to implement Navaratnalu — and other welfare schemes promised in the manifesto.

During a review meeting held at the camp office

● **CM SAID to expedite mining works acquired by APMDC in Bramhadiha coal block in Jharkhand.**

here on Thursday, the Chief Minister said to expedite mining works acquired by APMDC in Bramhadiha coal block in Jharkhand, Suliari in Madhya Pradesh and Madanpur South Coal Mines in Chhattisgarh in

stipulated time.

He said to focus on high revenue mining activities and expedite the works related to silica sand by coordinating with APIIC.

CM Jagan directed the forest department officials to get permission from the central government to sell the state's red sanders stocks. He said to take steps on war footing to get the work is done with

transparency without giving room for corruption.

The Chief Minister said that the officials should focus on revenue-generating sources for the state, conduct regular reviews on these and prepare estimates from time to time. The officials should be ready with the necessary plans to increase revenue sources without burdening the people, he added.

MASSIVE | TURNOUT

Most of the voters favour the ruling party in first phase of GP elections

Jagan's welfare schemes yeild positive results

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 11

Several welfare schemes taken up by the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy have yielded results to the YSRC in the gram panchayat elections in the first phase as most of the voters were favouring the ruling party.

The voters say that they are getting at least two or three welfare schemes in their family. According to sources, the voters in Panchayat elections considered the elections as party based, though these elections are being held without party sym-

bols. Generally, the local body elections, in particular Grama Panchayat elections are depending upon the candidates of the individual reputation and the strength of the people. But, the present elections, the voters are preferring the welfare schemes, introduced and implemented by the ruling party.

In the first phase elections in East Godavari District, 288 (including 29 unanimous) for YSRC, 50 (including one unanimous) for Telugu Desam, 3 Jana Sena, one CPM and Jana Sena at Vontimamidi where Anti-Divis agitation is being

gone on) and 23 independents won in the elections out of 366 Grama Sarpanch posts. In the wards, 2371 wards won YSRC supported candidates, 366 Telugu Desam supported candidates, 80 Jana Sena Supported candidates, one BJP supported candidate and 182 independent candidates.

According to a Telugu Desam leader in Thondangi mandal said that though they were in favour of TD, they could not get benefits during the TD regime.

But, now, he got a house site and other benefits and his son got Rs.15,000 under Vahana Mitra

Scheme and his wife got benefit as a self group member.

S. Krishna Murthy of Rajanagaram Assembly Constituency where the second phase elections will be held on February 13, said that he shifted his loyalty to YSRC in this elections. ₹1 believed strongly Mr Chandrababu's loan waiver scheme as he had Rs 1 lakh loan. But, the then government waived Rs 50,000 in a phased manner."

Meanwhile, he could clear the loans with penal interests and lost his credibility at the bankers, he said and

added at the present government, he got pension, his wife got benefit from self help group as some amount was credited to their accounts and his daughter-in-law got Rs.₹30,000 for two years under ₹₹ Amma Vodi" scheme. He also said that many of the people irrespective of people are getting ready to house sites and their house dream is going to be fulfilled.

According to many, though they will choose ward members as per their individual relations or reputation of the candidate, they would exercise their vote for

Sarpanch post to the ruling party candidate.

However, the opposition Telugu Desam is also giving a stiff fight to the ruling party candidates and they said that the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was distributing only the people's money, but not his own money.

They said that though the government was implementing welfare schemes, on the other side, it will increase many taxes and burden the people. In many places, the TD and Jana Sena candidates are contesting with an understanding mode.

SHORT TAKES

FLIGHTS FROM
MAHA TOWNS
TO TIRUPATIDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 11

Minister of state (in-charge) in the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Hardeep Singh Puri said they are operating flights to Tirupati from Kolhapur, Hubli, Belgaum and Kalaburgi under Udan (ude desh ka aam nagrik) scheme.

Replying to a question from Nellore MP Adala Prabhakar Reddy in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, the minister said routes connecting unserved Kurnool airport to Visakhapatnam, Bengaluru and Chennai have been awarded recently.

200 KG OF GANJA
WORTH ₹10 LAKH
SEIZEDDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 11

Yaddanapudi police in Prakasam district have seized 200 kg of ganja worth about ₹10 lakh from eight people after arresting them during vehicular checks in Anantavaram village in Yaddanapudi mandal on Thursday.

All the accused belong to Kerala, and police also seized two cars bearing Kerala registration numbers used to transport the banned substance from Visakhapatnam to Cochin.

A police team led by G.V. Chowdary, Sub-Inspector of Police, Yaddanapudi and his staff held the accused following credible information about the illegal transport of ganja.

COUPLE DIE OF
ELECTROCUTION
IN PAKALADC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 11

A 32-year-old man and his wife, 27, were found dead under mysterious circumstances in their house, located on the fourth street of Bharatam Mitta area in Pakala of Chittoor district on Thursday. As per the preliminary investigation, the police are surmising that the couple died of electrocution.

According to Sub-Inspector K. Raja Sekhar, the deceased Altaf Hussain and Samiya got married six months ago. Samiya was working as a Mahila police in K. Vaddepalli village secretariat and Altaf is a software engineer in Bangalore and was working from home.

When Samiya did not attend her duty on Thursday, her colleagues called her on the phone to check with her absence. After calls to her were unanswered, they went to her house only to see the couple lying motionless in the bathroom.

"As of now, no foul play is suspected in the case," SI Raja Sekhar said.

Float festival



Women perform Kolatam dance during the annual Float festival, Teppotsavam of Lord Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy at Puskarini of Simhachalam Devasthanam temple in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

Decks cleared for opening
of sea mouth into Pulicat

It's responsibility of fisheries department of AP to prepare a scheme

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 11

Decks have been cleared to address the decades-long demand from the environmentalists to open the sea mouth of Pulicat lake at Rayadoruvu near Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Shar, Sriharikota, to protect the ecosystem of this second largest brackish water lake, next to Chilka lake, in India.

The lake is situated in the East Coast of India bordering the Bay of Bengal with an extent of 600 sq. km out of which 400 sq. km is in Andhra Pradesh and remaining 200 sq. km in Tamil Nadu. Less rainfall and closure of sea mouths resulted in heavy siltation which made the Northern portion (Andhra area) of the lake shallow and gets dried up thus affecting the livelihood of thousands of fishermen families as well as feed for the winter migratory birds.

In this backdrop, the technical committee of Pulicat lake constituted by the ministry of environment, forests and climate change (MoEFCC) recommended for opening the closed sea mouth

Dredging a boon to fishermen
and winter migratory birdsDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 11

Going by the final report, Sailm Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, dredging of Rayadoruvu inlet will be beneficial for the Pulicat lake ecosystem, socio-economic conditions of people depending on the lake and it will be a boon to the thousands of migratory birds during their sojourn in winter every year.

into the lake at Rayadoruvu through dredging operations on Wednesday.

The committee consists of MoEF officials, Delhi, fisheries departments of AP and Tamil Nadu and The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History Coimbatore.

Sources in the forest department said that Shar officials expressed concern over dredging operation pointing to the possible increase of

The report states that the exchange of water between sea and lake will stabilise the salinity levels, thereby increasing the diversity and abundance of planktons and fish availability in the lake.

This, in turn, can help in sustaining the larger wetland bird population in Pulicat Bird Sanctuary which lies in the Central Asian Flyway Region supporting several important migratory species including high altitude migrants such as the Bar-headed Goose Anser indicus.

The proposed dredging area and its immediate environs do not include core flamingo habitats.

Larger flocks of Greater flamingos Pheonicopterus roseus were recorded nearly 10 km away from the inlet, and minimal changes are only expected in the water level and salinity in this area.

Commission in 2015, a detailed project report prepared by the National Institute of Ocean Technology after a study on bathymetry, topography, Hydrodynamics (waves, tides & currents), and water quality (salinity & turbidity) in 2017.

This is in addition to a study on ecosystem and impact on flora and fauna and wildlife carried out by SACON in 2019. Officials of both AP and Tamil Nadu gave their

nod for the dredging operations.

Now it is the responsibility of fisheries department of AP to prepare a comprehensive scheme for dredging to obtain clearances of National Board of Wildlife, MoEFCC and the Central government, sources in the forest department said. The meet also decided to constitute 'Pulicat Lake Development Authority' with all stakeholders as members for the holistic development of lake and also to ensure the ecological balance of the huge water body.

According to Divisional Forest Officer (Wildlife) D. Ravindranath Reddy, the lake has three openings into the sea, one is on the northern side at Kondurupalem, another at Rayadoruvu which is at its middle point (Northern part of SHAR Island) and 3rd is Phazaverkadu which is southern side in Tamil Nadu.

The sea mouth at Raydoruvu was closed since the lakeside, as well as beachside land elevations, are lying above sea level. Due to the closure of the sea mouth, there is no tidal excursion in the channel.

AMBULANCE
OPERATORS
SLAMMED FOR
HEAVY CHARGESDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 11

Operators of private ambulance vehicles came under fire for charging heavily from the patients.

District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said they would take stringent action against ambulance vehicles owners if they are found charging heavily from the patients.

During a review with transport, police and medical and health departments and operators of ambulance vehicles, he told the transport wing to fix rates for each destination and prevail upon ambulance operators to follow them strictly.

3 girls drown in
SagileruvaguDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 11

In a tragic incident, three girls drowned in Sagileruvagu (stream) following an accidental fall near Vittamusurupalli village in Gadikota Panchayat of Giddalur mandal on Thursday.

The girls have been identified as Supriya, 8, in her fifth standard and Venkata Deepthi, 13, studying seventh standard and Susmitha, 13, studying the eighth standard of Vittamusurupalli village and were studying in Bengaluru.

They are children of three brothers, who are running a mess in Bengaluru. According to the police, one

of the girls slipped and fell in the water. The other two also drowned when they rushed to help her to come out of the water.

A few farmworkers in the nearby fields jumped into the stream after a boy alerted them when he noticed the girls drowning in the stream. They rushed the children to the government hospital in Giddalur. However, the girls breathed their last during the treatment.

The entire village's residents mourned the untimely death of the three girls who returned to the village from Bengaluru only a month.

The Giddalur police have registered a case and are investigating.

Accidents claim
3 lives in NelloreDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 11

Three people died in three road accidents at different parts of SPSR Nellore district on Thursday.

In the first incident, Venkateswar Reddy, 28, of Giddalur village in Sydapuram mandal was killed, and two others travelling with him were injured critically when a speeding bus hit their motorcycle on NH-16 near Gudur on Thursday.

The police alleged that the

mishap took place when the duo involved in supplying paddy harvesting machines were driving on the wrong side of the highway.

In another incident, a digital assistant of Tummala-penta Grama Sachivalayam, Kalapati Sireesha, 34, was crushed to death under a truck's wheels after the vehicle hit her scooter at Thumma-lapenta road.

In the third incident, Pagireddy Seenaiah of Atmakur was killed on the spot when a truck hit his bullock cart in Atmakur.

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State govt may further dilute
development of AmaravatiDC CORRESPONDENT
VUJAYAWADA, FEB. 11

The state government may further dilute its assurance of developing Amaravati even after shifting the executive capital to Visakhapatnam if the mandate given to a nine-member high-level committee headed by Chief Secretary Adityanath Das is any indication.

The municipal administration and urban development (MAUD) department on Thursday issued orders constituting the nine-member committee with senior officials of AP Legislative Assembly, MAUD, finance, general administration department, planning and law.

The move appears intriguing because of the mandate given to the committee — to decide whether to fully execute pending works and complete all structures or explore the means of reducing the burden on

the exchequer.

The committee will also examine buildings/housing units which are essentially required for the legislative capital and suggest the future course of action regarding other unfinished apartment units/bungalows. In the order, the government further said that the committee should explore the means of reducing the burden on the exchequer.

The committee will also look into the construction of the permanent High Court structure as envisaged in the Amaravati master plan in the backdrop of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's decision to locate judicial capital in Kurnool. Secretariat and heads of departments towers planned earlier will also become redundant once the executive capital is shifted to Visakhapatnam.

Significantly, municipal minister Botsa Satyanarayana had said that the government had

prepared a development plan for Amaravati according to which all the unfinished structures would be completed and the layouts in which framers were allotted plots would be developed. The minister had made this announcement after the Legislature had replaced the AP Capital Regional Development Authority with the AP Metropolitan Region Development Authority.

Sources said the government would need at least ₹25,000 crore to clear old bills and complete the unfinished structures. "We can even consider inviting the private parties to take up the unfinished projects and complete them," a senior MAUD official pointed out.

But, the catch is that the readiness of the private agencies to take up the unfinished structures in the absence of viability after the relocation of the executive capital.

month.

According to GRP DSP S.M. Ramesh Babu, the GRP sleuths led by circle inspector P. Rama Krishna have arrested the accused A. Dharma Lingam, 48, and S. Sampath, 35.

Tirupati: On Thursday, the Government railway police (GRP), Tirupati arrested two persons in connection with a murder case reported on the railway tracks near Kuppam town in Chittoor district on 27th of last

GRP CRACKS
MURDER CASE,
TWO ARRESTED

DECCAN Chronicle

12 FEBRUARY 2021

Twitter's snub of Centre's selective outrage timely

The fundamental issue with freedom of expression is either you have it or you don't. While there is no arguing against the fact that such freedom may be subject to reasonable restrictions, particularly with reference to communal harmony and public safety being threatened by inciters of violence and disorder, government action cannot be selective in acting only on the basis of its sensitivities being outraged by criticism. The spat with social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp may have been caused by suspicions over their neutrality when it comes to issues cropping up in India. But the government is seen to be acting like a bully in its plaintive calls for action to be taken against all critics in a blanket manner that is reminiscent of a totalitarian approach that had led to democratic disasters in India.

The government's fear of its image abroad being hammered by celebrities with a large following on the social media has led to it calling for Twitter to take down nearly 1,200 accounts following tweets on farmer protests. Some of those accounts may be backed by Pakistan or Khalistan sympathisers, and sported ridiculously

To insist on a virtual blanket ban on one side of the arguments in support of the farmers is what makes government action suspicious

hateful hashtags like "farmers' genocide". Orders to take them down are legitimate and may have already been acted upon. To insist on a virtual blanket ban on one side of the arguments in support of the farmers, which might be more universal among Indians than the government may imagine, is what makes government action suspicious in the eyes of the votaries of free speech and expression. In a free world, Indian developers are free, too, to set up microblogging platforms like Koo.

There was widespread praise for Twitter when it chose to act against Donald Trump for actively encouraging his acolytes to attempt an armed insurrection on Capitol Hill. It must also do so when inspired actions of vicious users and automated bots aimed at disruption are brought to its attention. Behind Twitter's espousal of the foundational principle of free expression may lie social media's monetisation of hate but free expressions of hate are a sign of the times which have armed individuals with handles and megaphones on media platforms to rant on. India is beset by the same phenomenon and may have no extraordinary case for protection or idealistic treatment. It has chosen the Internet as a right of the people even if it has been known to act selectively as on the borders of Delhi hosting the farmers' protests and in Kashmir, which went without 4G connectivity for more than a year.

It is in the modern war between perception and reality that issues like differential treatment of violence on Capitol Hill and the storming of the Red Fort crop up. Again, these are part of the perils of living in an interconnected age in which opinion is free and, perhaps, even overrated as billions enjoy the freedom of presenting their personal thoughts to the world. The threat to jail Twitter's Indian employees is, however, part of a worrisome pattern of the current regime, which has contemplated similar repressive action against a politician and several journalists with only the top court standing between them and arrests. It is in this context that Twitter's disinclination to take down handles of politicians and journalists must be viewed and praised as supporting essential freedom of expression.

PM's red herring

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's criticism in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday of those who "abuse the private sector" sounded more like being in a dark room and looking for a black cat that isn't there than raising a point for the nation to discuss. His advice of caution against "returning the nation to the babus" was equally intriguing.

This country has long scrapped the licence-permit-babu raj and ushered in an era where the private sector has been viewed as creators of employment and wealth. No government in the last three decades has chosen to ignore them; they did everything possible to promote them instead in the form of policy frameworks and easing of regulatory mechanisms. Even state governments run by political thoughts of all hues vied with one another offering freebies and sops to "unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth". Mr Modi took special care to ensure that India made a quantum jump in its position on the Index of Ease of Doing Business within a couple of years of his assuming power even when the country's positions in terms of indices on hunger or freedom of thought suffered.

The public sector units were hardly a choice of any government during the liberalisation period. Even brilliant performers were put on the auction block while several others were bled dry by the governments; many have been put on their deathbed by governmental interventions that stopped them from competing with the private sector. Mr Modi's fears of the nation going back to the babus, thus, sound rather misplaced.

The Prime Minister has spoken in the backdrop of the farming community agitating against new laws which, it fears, would make them captive players of the private corporates with deep pockets. The government should rather address their fears than demonising those who raise them.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

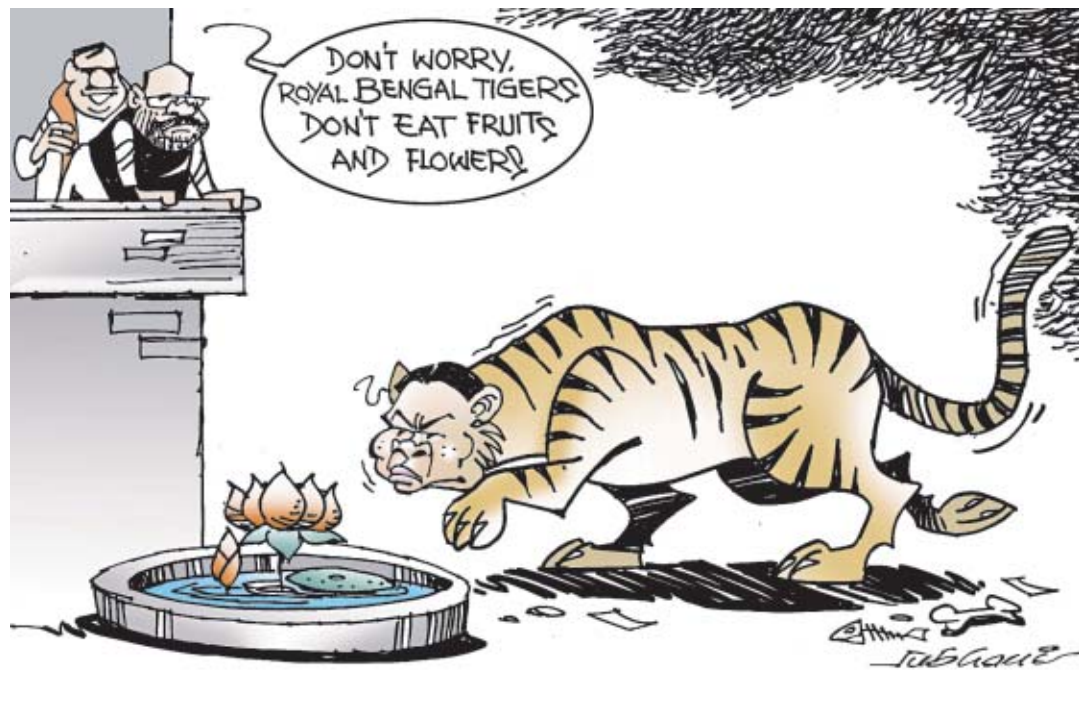
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Rannagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Simultaneous polls to be a blow to smaller parties

Sanjay Kumar

A few months ago, in a meeting with returning officers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi once again advocated the holding of simultaneous elections both for the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies in India. He had expressed the desire for holding simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha and state Assemblies even in his first term as the Prime Minister. It is important to note that this time he not only reiterated his view but also made a more aggressive advocacy for holding simultaneous elections. He stated "this is not an issue of debate; this is a necessity for India". It is important to recall that when this was advocated a few years ago, there were lots of debates on this issue amongst journalists, analysts and stake holders. The arguments put forward both for and against this proposal were on grounds of feasibility, legality and polity related to the large issue of possible impact on Party system in India.

The arguments put forward in favour of holding simultaneous election are minimising expenses for holding elections and expediting the developmental work of the government. There is merit in these two arguments, and hardly any disagreement — but should these be the only considerations for pushing for a case of holding simultaneous elections? Is there a need for careful thinking about its impact on the larger issue of the party system in India? There is also the question of feasibility, how this can even be implemented in a federal country like India with

states having elected governments and enjoying constitutional powers. There is also issue about what would happen if there is a premature fall of the government in any state; will the state be put under governor's rule and elections held only when the next cycle of elections is due? At the moment every state is under its own cycle of election, what happens to state governments elected by popular vote only a couple of years ago when the simultaneous election system is being implemented? Will putting a state under the governor's rule for a very long time by making provisions for that after amending the Constitution not be against democratic principles?

But beyond those issues, there is the larger issue of its impact on the nature of the party system; there is a possibility of a few political parties, especially the national parties, dominating both the national as well as state politics. Some stronger regional parties may still be able to survive in the state, but slowly and gradually, many smaller parties would disappear from the political map of India. Simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies will be of great disadvantage to the regional parties.

Evidences suggest that a very large number of voters tend to vote for the same party when elections to both the state Assembly and the Lok Sabha are held simultaneously or within a gap with six months of holding the latter election. Voters tend to vote for the same party in the Assembly election for which they had voted during the Lok Sabha

election, though there are a few exceptions. The national parties are in an advantageous position. The dominant regional parties also enjoy this advantage but smaller regional parties are at the receiving end. If simultaneous elections are held, Indian politics will come to be dominated by the national parties. A few regional parties and many smaller regional parties will disappear, as the people's voting choices would largely be influenced by how parties are likely to play a role in national politics. Holding simultaneous elections would mean the expansion of the dominance of national parties and slow and gradual shrinking of the political space for regional parties.

Evidence suggests that till now there have been 111 instances of the state Assembly election in various states being held along with the Lok Sabha election. In these elections held in different years, a total of 387 national parties contested elections. Of these, in the case of 263 national parties (69 per cent), the difference in their vote share for the Lok Sabha and Assembly election was less than three per cent, in case of another 19 per cent national parties, the vote share difference for the two elections was between three and six per cent. Evidences also suggest, even when the state Assembly elections were held within six months of holding the Lok Sabha election, voters overwhelmingly tended to vote for the same party both for the Lok Sabha and state Assembly elections. Of

the 501 national parties for which data was compiled which fit the case of the state Assembly elections being held within a gap of six months, in 68 per cent of the cases the national parties polled a more or less similar percentage of votes, the variation in vote-share being less than three per cent. The situation does not change much with regard to the people's choice for the dominant regional parties when elections were either held simultaneously or if the state Assembly elections were held within a gap of six months from holding the Lok Sabha elections. When the state Assembly and Lok Sabha elections were held simultaneously, 79 per cent of the dominant regional parties polled a more or less similar vote percentage, within a less than three per cent variation in vote share. Similarly, when state Assembly elections were held within a gap of less than six months, the variation in vote share of 75 per cent of the dominant regional parties, which contested both these elections, was less than three per cent in both these elections.

There are arguments put forward against regional parties; some even argue for restricting the number of political parties in India. In my view, regional parties provide a platform to many Indians who have felt marginalised in the social and political sphere for decades. It provides an opportunity to such people to play a role in politics, no matter if these smaller regional parties succeed or not. Simultaneous elections would put smaller regional parties in a disadvantageous position, ultimately leading to overwhelming dominance of the political parties that are already predominant.

The writer is a professor at Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political analyst. Views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

GP ELECTIONS

It is a big worry that just after the polling in the first phase of Gram Panchayat elections, the leaders of various parties are issuing statements claiming their candidates have bagged majority of votes (YSRC wins in 81% of villages in ph-1 elections, DC, Feb. 11). Similarly. These claims are going to affect fair polling.

N.S. Sharma
Visakhapatnam

PM'S GESTURE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi set an entirely new but extremely healthy norm towards the Opposition while speaking in the Rajya Sabha to bid farewell to the retiring MP Ghulam Nabi Azad. It's a laudable approach that can be emulated by all politicians.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

BORDER CRISIS

It's good to hear that India and China have come to an understanding to dismantle all structures erected after April 2020 at the disputed Pangong Tso lake area along LAC and resume disengagement from the ongoing stand-off. It has damaged bilateral relations and took several rounds of talks. Both countries with crippled economy and health emergency cannot afford further tensions.

N.S. Sharma
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

More industries alone can solve unemployment

HDYERABAD, February. 11 Setting up of a number of small units was the only answer to solve the unemployment problem, Chief Minister Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi, said here today.

Inaugurating the Hyderabad Packaging Company at Moula Ali, a unit engaged in the production of corrugated fibre board containers, he said that such units would also help rapid industrialisation.

It has been the endeavour of the State to encourage small entrepreneurs and personally he said that he would render all help for small and young industrialists in setting up new units.

Tarun Chugh



A Budget of aspirations, self-reliance

The first Union Budget of this decade comes at a time that our nation is commemorating the 75th year of Indian Independence, 60 years of Goa's accession to India, 50 years of the 1971 India-Pakistan War, eight censuses of Independent India (and also the first digital census), India's turn at the BRICS presidency, the Chandrayaan-3 mission and the celebration of Haridwar Maha Kumbh. Under this scenario, India has a vital role to play as a major Asian economic power in the new world order in the post-Covid era.

The Union Budget 2021-22, along with the myriad mini-budgets, including the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana and the Atma Nirbhar Bharat packages, presented by the finance minister to stabilise the economy during a critical pandemic period, has prepared our country to move in the right direction. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Budget addresses the imperative of resetting priorities and identifies the emergence of opportunities by devoting an "all-inclusive Budget" as a guide to a "self-reliant India".

The development of any nation depends on transportation networks

and the way in which they are maintained. One of the most crucial announcements in the Budget was with regard to infrastructure development projects, across various states and Union territories.

For connecting the areas and maintaining smooth flow of traffic, the construction of new roads is a must. The infrastructure projects are not just connectivity specific, like the proposed highway works and upgrade of the existing 675 km Kolkata-Siliguri highway bisecting the state of West Bengal, but also employment-generating opportunities.

Further, as Union territories receive 100 per cent of their funding from the central government, long-stalled projects are being revived and new welfare projects implemented.

The budget has provisioned ₹30,757 crore for Jammu and Kashmir, the highest among UTs. The announcement of a maiden gas pipeline in J&K has further rekindled hopes for the revival of the project that, due to a paucity of funds and the lack of an administrative push, showed no progress for a decade. This gas pipeline project will create a base for increased beneficiary coverage under the Ujjwala

Yojana as well as decrease carbon footprint by increasing utilisation of clean fuel for cooking purposes.

This connectivity upgrade also envisions the development of modern fishing harbours and fish landing centres along the banks of rivers and waterways. The government has provisioned for developing five major fishing harbours — Kochi, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Petuaghat — as hubs of economic activity. The development of fishing harbours would help in exploitation of rich fishing grounds, create adequate infrastructure for operation of mechanised fishing vessels, mitigate navigation hazards, save fishermen's lives and fishing vessels from the rough seas, make for the handling of fish and crustaceans in hygienic conditions, and, thereby, enhance export earnings.

The first-ever paperless Budget also gave a major boost to the start-up ecosystem in India, with the objective of encouraging entrepreneurship and fostering growth. Recently, 11 Indian start-ups managed to bag a unicorn tag in a pandemic year when they crossed the US \$1 billion valuation mark.

Prime Minister Modi has averred that start-ups are changing the demo-

graphic characteristics of today's businesses. Further, start-ups played a major role in ensuring availability of sanitizers, PPE kits and related supply chains, and fulfilled a sterling role in meeting local needs like grocery, medicine delivery at doorstep, transportation of frontline workers and online study material. The Budget provided a boost to start-up investments by extending the eligibility for claiming tax holidays for start-ups along with a capital gains exemption for investment in start-ups till March 31, 2022.

Mr Modi has ushered in a wave of behavioural change among people with the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*. The pandemic made *swachhta* an integral lifestyle and a practice that has seen increased community participation.

For further *swachhta* of urban India, the government raised the focus on complete faecal sludge management and waste water treatment, source segregation of garbage, reduction in single-use plastic, reduction in air pollution by effectively managing waste from construction and demolition activities and bioremediation of all legacy dump sites. The Urban Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 is being implemented with a total financial allocation of

₹1,41,678 crores over a period of five years.

Amidst a global pandemic, India's overall allocation for health and well-being increased by 137 per cent in the financial year 2021-22, thus boosting the capacity of the healthcare system to detect and cure new diseases.

Underscoring the importance of strengthening healthcare infrastructure, the government launched the PM Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, with an outlay of about ₹64,180 crore over six years. The scheme will concentrate on bridging the health infrastructure gap at the village, block and panchayat levels and integrate them with centralised healthcare facilities.

Today, India has indigenously manufactured a vaccine and has begun medically safeguarding not only its own citizens against Covid-19, but also those of 100 or more countries under its Vaccine Maitri outreach. Our nation has strengthened its ethos of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* while turning a crisis into an opportunity for developing "self-reliance" and presented a budget with an eye on future growth.

The writer is national general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party

SHORT TAKES

**1-YEAR-OLD DIES
AFTER FALLING
INTO BOREWELL PIT****AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANSWAR, FEB. 11**

A one-year-old girl died after falling into a borewell pit at Goapala village in Balasore district on Thursday morning. The victim was identified as Sarojini Naik, daughter of one Saniya Naik of the village.

As per reports, Sarojini's mother had come to visit her relative's house at Goapala a few days ago.

On Thursday morning, while the digging of the borewell was underway near the house, Sarojini who was playing nearby, fell into the well accidentally.

Some people present at the spot noticed her slipping into the borewell pit and immediately called for help. Neighbours and her family members rushed to the spot and rescued her from the well.

Though she was later taken to Khaira Hospital, the doctors declared her dead on arrival, added reports. The body was sent for post-mortem.

**26,121 INDIAN
WEBSITES
HACKED IN 2020**

New Delhi, Feb. 11: Over 26,100 Indian websites were hacked during 2020, compared to 24,768 websites attacked in the previous year, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

As per the information reported to and tracked by Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), a total number of 17,560; 24,768 and 26,121 Indian websites were hacked during the year 2018, 2019 and 2020, respectively, minister of state for communications and IT Sanjay Dhotre said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

"There have been attempts from time to time to launch cyber attacks on Indian cyberspace," he added.

Dhotre said it has been observed that attackers are compromising computer systems located in different parts of the world and use masquerading techniques and hidden servers to hide the identity of actual systems from which the attacks are being launched.

"According to the logs analysed and made available to CERT-In, the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses of the computers from where the attacks appear to be originated belong to various countries including Algeria, Brazil, China, France, Indonesia, Netherlands, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, USA, Vietnam etc," the minister said.

Dhotre noted that CERT-In devises response measures in coordination with its counterpart agencies in foreign countries for resolution of incidents involving systems outside the country.

**ODISHA MAN GETS
LIFE TERM FOR
ESPIONAGE****AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANSWAR, FEB. 11**

The Court of Additional District Judge in Odisha's Balasore district on Thursday convicted a youth named Ishwara Behera on espionage charge and sentenced him to life imprisonment.

Behera, a contractual cameraman at Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) was convicted for passing confidential and sensitive information of Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur to Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI.

He was convicted under Sections 121A (treason) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and 3, 4 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act.

Behera was found guilty for the offences of spying and wrongful communication of information protected under the law with the court saying that his actions caused severe security threat to the nation.

Behera, a resident of Kantipur village of Mayurbhanj district, was arrested on January 22, 2015 for allegedly supplying secret information on various missiles test-fired by DRDO from Wheeler Island to his ISI conduit in Kolkata.

Ishwar was employed as a cameraperson at the ITR on contractual basis in 2007. He had been spying for ISI for the last 8-10 months prior to his arrest. A hard disk, two mobile phones and a bank passbook had been seized from his possession at the time of arrest.

CAA to be implemented after vaccination: Shah

Shah tell Mamata Banerjee she won't be CM after April**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, FEB. 11**

Determined to fulfill the BJP's key poll promise to the refugees about their citizenship, Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday declared that the Citizenship Amendment Act implementation would get underway as soon as the Covid-19 pandemic and its vaccination drive ends.

Using CAA as the BJP's trump card against the ruling Trinamul Congress in poll-bound West Bengal, Shah, who was on a day's state visit after cancelling his two tours last month, made the announcement with full confidence before the Matua community, a sizeable votebank of the Hindu migrants now with the BJP, at their bastion in Thakurnagar of North 24 Parganas, to placate their discontent over the long delay in the CAA implementation.

"In 2018, we promised that we, if elected again in 2019, would amend the citizenship laws to give Indian citizenship to our Matua brothers. The Matuas voted us to power. Modi government was formed again. Without wasting time, we introduced CAA which now exists. In between corona spread," Shah told the rally before he lambasted Banerjee for her fierce opposition to CAA.

"Mamatadi started alleging it was a false promise which would never be fulfilled. Betting her life, she vowed to stop it so that it would not happen even if we would have tried. Mamatadi, we are those who fulfill what they promise. We have initiated the CAA. Today I am making a promise on this holy land. As soon as the vaccination drive ends and there is relief from Corona, the BJP government will undertake the task of giving you citizenship," he said showing his resolve.

Shah also asked Mamatadi, "It is an enactment of the parliament. How can you stop it? Anyway, you will not be in a position to stop it because after April you will no longer be the CM, Mamatadi!"



Union home minister Amit Shah at a public meeting at Thakurnagar in Thakurnagar, on Thursday.

— PTI

YOU WILL ALSO START CHANTING 'JAI SHREE RAM': SHAH TELLS MAMATA**DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 11**

Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday asserted that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has been planning to contest the Assembly election from more than one seat, would start chanting 'Jai Shree Ram' before the end of the polls.

"The environment in Bengal has been made such that *Jai Shree Ram* slogan is an offence! If *Jai Shree Ram* can not be chanted in Bengal then

where will it be, in Pakistan? Why does Mamatadi feel insulted hearing this? The entire country and crores of people across the world feel proud remembering our icon. But she finds its problematic because she needs votes of a particular community through appeasement. Don't their (read: Hindus) votes matter? I can promise you, Mamatadi will also chant *Jai Shree Ram* while the polls getting over," Shah told a rally in Coochbehar in North Bengal.

Rescue ops resume at Tapovan

**DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/JOSHIMATH,
FEB. 11**

After a brief pause in rescue operation due to rising water levels in river Rishi Ganga, the security forces and disaster management teams resumed search to save people stuck inside the Tapovan tunnel and those buried under landslides and silt. Uttarakhand government said bodies of 35 persons have been recovered so far from the 204 missing and out of these 10 have been identified.

Rescuers from multiple agencies like the ITBP, NDRF and Army are trying to penetrate deeper through tonnes of silt to reach out to workers trapped inside the

Tapovan tunnel. Apart from drones and canines, the relief teams are also using sonar system to find survivors or bodies in the areas that are having high water level.

The ITBP troops have been carrying rations to villages cut off from main routes. On Thursday they helped in the construction of the Jhula bridge across Dhaulti Ganga to connect village Bhangyul. Chinook helicopters were utilised to transport men, material and heavy loads towards rescue operations, and 14 passengers. 1,400 kg load was carried for NDRF and SDRF. In addition 3T load and five personnel of BRO were also transported to forward locations by the Indian Air Force.

Search operations are

going on from Raini village in Chamoli till Srinagar. However, the centre of operations, post the Sunday disaster in the border district of Chamoli, remains the large tunnel where an estimated 30-35 workers are believed to have been trapped after the Alaknanda river hurtled down in spate as a result of a possible glacier burst or avalanche in the Himalayas.

The rescuers are "hoping against hope" to find the workers of the Tapovan power project who have gone missing for over four days now. With every minute passing by, the concern about the safety of these men is mounting. Officials on the ground said that continuous accumulation of slush and silt inside the tunnel is the biggest

hurdle for the rescuers.

"Heavy machines have removed more slush from the tunnel the whole night. A joint team of ITBP, NDRF, SDRF and sister agencies entered into the tunnel this morning. The tunnel is approachable till about 120 meters but more slush and water coming from inside the tunnel is making the way ahead difficult," Indo-Tibetan Border Police spokesperson Vivek Kumar Pandey said.

Measures like drilling to take oxygen to those trapped inside the tunnel are being contemplated. The over 1,500 metre tunnel has become the focal point of rescue operations even as family members of those trapped spend hours outside with a bated breath to hear some good news about their kin.



Rescue operations continue at Tapovan Tunnel in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on Thursday, following the Sunday's glacier burst in Joshimath causing a massive flood in the Dhaulti Ganga river.

— PTI

FAKE | NEWS

We respect social media but if it is misused to spread violence, then action will be taken: Minister

Govt warns social media apps to abide by Indian laws

**YOJNA GUSAI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11**

In a stern message to social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, the Narendra Modi government on Thursday told them from the floor of Parliament that it respects their work but they will have to abide by the Indian Constitution and follow Indian laws.

Amid ongoing row with the Twitter, which erupted over the ongoing farmer

unions protests and Red Fort violence, information and technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, while replying to queries in the Rajya Sabha made it clear that the government has immense respect for the social media as it has empowered the common man and plays an important role in the government's Digital India mission but if it is misused to spread violence, fake news or hatred, then strict action will be taken.

The minister said while

social media platforms have their own self-regulatory mechanism to check and evaluate inflammatory content, it does not mean that they will not follow the Indian rules.

The Upper House also saw Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu disallowing AAP's Sushil Gupta to quote from a Sweden based institute's report on Indian democracy, such reports are political and these institutes and countries, who are commenting on India should "look

inward and then comment." Naidu's comments came at a time when India has strongly objected to foreign celebrities and politicians using social media platforms to support the farmer unions protests and criticise the Modi government.

"We respect social media, it has empowered common man and plays an important role in the Digital India campaign. We respect criticism, you can criticise the PM or the government which are

part of the Constitution. But if social media is misused to spread violence, fake news or hatred, then action will be taken...Even the EC has said in this regarding misuse of social media for influencing elections...You (social media) work in India, you have millions of followers, we respect that. Earn money but you will have to abide by the Indian Constitution and follow Indian laws," said Prasad while replying to supplementaries on social media manipulation of

public opinion and media manipulative survey.

Prasad's statement from the floor of the House came a day after his ministry rebuked Twitter for not complying with its orders to take down inflammatory content post Republic Day violence and farmer unions protests.

The government, he said, was committed to freedom of media and rights of individuals but it was equally concerned about safety, security, and law and order in the country.

Equating the Red Fort violence with US's Capitol Hill riots, Prasad said while the social media companies took immediate action when riots broke out at Capitol Hill in Washington but ignored similar action when farm bill protestors ran riot at Red Fort on Republic Day. "This double standard would not work here," he said as he pointed out to the inflammatory content, especially those with the hashtag alleging Modi of planning farmers' genocide.

CBSE issues guidelines for class 9, 11 examinations

New Delhi, Feb. 11: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has directed schools under it to take steps to identify and resolve learning gaps, and then conduct examinations for Classes 9 and 11 by following Covid-19 safety protocols.

The board has also recommended that the new academic session begin from April 1.

"For Classes 9 and 11, schools should take steps to identify and remedy the learning gaps and thereafter, conduct examinations by strictly following Covid-19 safety protocols as per the Examination By-Laws," the Central Board of Secondary Education Controller of Examination Sanyam Bhardwaj said in a letter to school principals.

"This exam will also help in identifying learning gaps which could be addressed by schools in the new academic session, at the beginning of classes, by having a bridge course specially designed to address learning gaps,"

● **IT WOULD** be appropriate to start the academic session 2021-2022 from April 1 to the extent feasible subject to the instructions of state governments, CBSE suggested.

he said.

Schools were shut in March last year as a precautionary measure following the outbreak of the Coronavirus. During the subsequent nationwide lockdown, students moved to online classes. But as restrictions were gradually eased from June last year, schools reopened partially in a few states from October 2020 onwards.

In the letter, Bhardwaj said, "While holding examinations/classes, Covid-19 safety protocols should be followed strictly. It would be appropriate to start the academic session 2021-2022 from April 1 to the extent feasible subject to the instructions of state governments."

Schools are requested to follow the suggestions to make the next session

more streamlined and ensure that learning gaps, if any, are addressed, he added.

"Schools have opened in a majority of states and with the improvement of Covid-19 pandemic situation, it is expected that schools will be opened in other states and Union Territories. Schools should be fully geared up and prepared to welcome the students for face to face classes. This will help students attend schools for completing their practicals," Bhardwaj said.

The CBSE had earlier this month announced the schedule for board exams for classes 10 and 12.

"The board has taken decision to reschedule the class 10 and 12 exams from May-June, because of the unprecedented situation arising due to Covid-19 pandemic. As a result a number of schools have been seeking advice from CBSE regarding examinations for classes 9 and 11 and about the commencement of new academic session, Bhardwaj said.

— PTI

Holy dip

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra takes a holy dip in Sangam on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya during the ongoing Magh Mela in Prayagraj on Thursday.

— PTI

Maha disallows use of VVIP aircraft for Gov.

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 11**

The Maharashtra government on Thursday denied the permission to use the aircraft for Koshiyari's official visit to Uttarakhand. Koshiyari was informed about the lack of government clearance after he boarded the aircraft. Later, he travelled in a private aircraft. The incident sparked political controversy as the move was seen as the government's reaction to the Governor's indecision on 12 MLC candidates recommended by the government.

However, the government held officials of the Governor's office responsible for the incident and said that the action will be taken against erring officials who failed to inform

the Governor about the state's non-clearance.

Meanwhile, the sources in Raj Bhavan said that the permission to use the aircraft for Koshiyari was sought nine days in advance, but there was no response from the government. "Is it not the duty of the government to respond to the Governor's proposal?" he asked.

An official statement issued by Raj Bhavan said, "Governor of Maharashtra and Goa Bhagat Singh Koshiyari is scheduled to preside over the official programme of the Valedictory Function of the 122nd Induction Training Programme of IAS officers at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie, Uttarakhand at 10.00 am on Friday, 12 February 2021. In this con-

nection, the Governor was scheduled to depart from CSIM Airport Mumbai for Dehradun at 10.00 am on Thursday 11th February 2021."

It also said that in preparation of the visit, the Governor's Secretariat had written to the government of Maharashtra authorities seeking permission for the use of Government Aircraft on 2nd February 2021. The office of the Chief Minister was also informed.

"Today, on 11th February 2021, the Governor reached the CSIM Airport at 10.00 am and boarded the government plane. However, the Governor was informed that the permission for the use of government Aircraft had not been received," the statement said.

SHORT TAKES

7.7-MAGNITUDE QUAKE LEADS TO SMALL TSUNAMI

Noumea, Feb. 11: A 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck in the South Pacific on Thursday, generating a small tsunami that caused no damage to island nations in the region before authorities gave the all clear.

The quake struck at just after midnight on Thursday local time (1320 GMT Wednesday) about 415 kilometres east of Vao in New Caledonia at a depth of 10 kilometres, according to the US Geological Survey. The US government's NWS Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said "hazardous tsunami waves" were forecast for some coasts. It said waves reaching between 0.3 and one metre above the tide level were possible for Fiji, New Zealand and Vanuatu. A wave of 0.3 metres struck Fiji, according to the Twitter feed of the island nation's seismology department.

PAK TEST-FIRES CRUISE MISSILE, 3RD IN 3 WEEKS

Islamabad, Feb. 11: Pakistan on Thursday conducted a successful training launch of a surface-to-surface cruise missile which can strike targets up to 450 kilometres, the Army said, the country's third missile test in three weeks. The Babar missile "is capable of engaging targets at land and sea with high precision," the Army said in a statement, adding that the missile was launched from a state-of-the-art multi-tube launch vehicle.

It said that the Babar cruise missile has a range of 450 kilometres. Senior scientists and defence officials witnessed the training launch and acknowledged the standards of training and operational preparedness of the Army Strategic Forces. Raza Samar, chief of National Engineering and Science Commission, said that the launch showed the "proficient handling of the weapon system in the field and fulfilment of all laid down training parameters".

Biden talks tough in first call to Jinping

Slams China's unfair trade practices, crackdown in HK

Washington/Beijing, Feb. 11: US President Joe Biden has expressed his "fundamental concerns" about China's coercive and unfair economic practices, its crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang and increasingly assertive actions in the region, as he spoke with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for the first time since taking office.

The phone call between the two leaders came hours after the Pentagon announced a task force on China. This was the first phone call between Biden was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on January 20. During the phone call, Biden shared his greetings and well wishes with the Chinese people on the occasion of Lunar New Year on Friday. Biden affirmed his priorities of protecting the American

● **BIDEN AFFIRMED** his priorities of protecting the American people's security, prosperity, health, and way of life, and preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific, the White House said in a readout of the call.

people's security, prosperity, health, and way of life, and preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific, the White House said in a readout of the call.

China claims almost all of the 1.3 million square-mile South China Sea as its sovereign territory. China has been building military bases on artificial islands in the region also claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. "President Biden underscored his fundamental concerns about Beijing's coercive and unfair economic

practices, the crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan," the White House said. The militaries of China and India have been engaged in a tense standoff in eastern Ladakh since early May last year. Biden had earlier said he would not immediately cancel the trade agreement that former president Donald Trump struck with China nor take steps to remove tariffs on Chinese exports.

His administration is planning a sweeping review of the previous Trump administration's posture toward China, including its crackdown on unfair trade practices and antagonistic military activities in Asia.

China has faced severe criticism from Western countries, including the

US, over persistent reports of the mass detention of Uighurs and other minorities in Xinjiang.

Biden administration officials have also condemned China's attacks on pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong. China has ramped up a crackdown in Hong Kong after imposing a new law against subversion following major protests in the city.

The two countries also have differences over Taiwan. China resents US support for Taiwan, which Beijing views as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland, even by force. During the phone call, Biden and Xi also exchanged views on countering the Covid-19 pandemic, and the shared challenges of global health security, climate change, and preventing weapons proliferation. —PTI

Nations curb Myanmar ties, increase economic pressure

Seoul, Feb. 11: A growing number of governments are curbing diplomatic ties with Myanmar and increasing economic pressure on its military over the coup last week that erased the fragile democratic progress in the long-oppressed Southeast Asian nation. President Joe Biden said Wednesday he was issuing an executive order that will prevent Myanmar's generals from accessing \$1 billion in assets in the United States, and promised

more measures. The US was among many Western governments that lifted most sanctions in the past decade to encourage democratic transition as Myanmar's military rulers were taking gradual steps toward civilian rule — changes that proved temporary with the ousting of the elected government and detentions of Nobel Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and others.

One of the strongest reactions came from New Zealand, which has

suspended all military and high-level political contact with the country and pledged to block any aid that could go to its military government or benefit its leaders. It also placed a travel ban on Myanmar's new military rulers. "We do not recognise the legitimacy of the military-led government and we call on the military to immediately release all detained political leaders and restore civilian rule," Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said Tuesday. —AP

FRENCH NUN, TURNS 117 AFTER SURVIVING COVID

Toulon, France, Feb. 11: Europe's oldest person, French nun Sister Andre, turns 117 on Thursday after surviving Covid-19 last month and living through two world wars, with a special birthday feast including her favourite dessert — baked Alaska. Born Lucile Randon on February 11, 1904, Sister Andre said she didn't realise she had caught the Coronavirus, which infected 81 residents of her retirement home in Toulon, killing 10 of them. —AFP

LUKASHENKO VOWS TO DEFEAT REBELLION IN BELARUS

Kyiv, Feb. 11: Belarus' authoritarian leader on Thursday denounced six months of protests against his rule as a foreign-directed "rebellion" and vowed to

resist the pressure. Speaking to 2,700 participants of the All-Belarus People's Assembly, President Alexander Lukashenko charged that "very powerful forces"

abroad were behind the protests. He didn't elaborate, but over the past several months he has repeatedly accused the West of fomenting the protests. —AP

PRODUCER K L DAMODAR PRASAD
STORY/SCREENPLAY/CHOREOGRAPHY/DIRECTOR VIDYASAGAR RAJU
 CAST: SHIVA.G, BHEEM CECIROLO, KISHORE MADDALI, JK MURTHY, ADITHYA, KARUNAKAR ADIGARLA, STUNTS JASHUVA, LAKSHMI VENUGOPAL, CO-PRODUCER YALAMANCHILI RAMA KOTESWARA RAO, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SRIKANTH REDDY PATHURI, LINE PRODUCER VASU PARIMI, DESIGNER VIVAREDDY

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PRODUCED BY VISHAL

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,531.52	0.43
Nifty 50	15,173.30	0.44
S&P 500*	3,914.48	0.12
Dollar (₹)	72.86	-0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.79	-0.01
Euro (₹)	88.29	0.005
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,509.36	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.35	-0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.962	-0.80
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.145	-0.007

Average salary to increase 6.4% in 2021: Survey

Salaries in India are projected to rise by an average of 6.4 per cent in 2021 against the actual increase of 5.9 per cent in 2020, says a Willis Towers Watson survey. It said average salary increase of 6.4 per cent in 2021 translates to a median increase of 7 per cent. "There is an increased optimism on business recovery, but it is yet to translate into the salary increment budget," said Rajul Mathur, India consulting head talent & rewards.

Sun Pharma, Shanghvi settle case with Sebi



Sun Pharma settled with the Sebi a case of alleged violation of listing obligation and disclosure requirements. Sun Pharma paid over Rs 56.11 lakh towards settlement charges and Dilip Shanghvi paid Rs 62.35 lakh. Directors Sudhir V. Valia and Sailesh T. Desai paid Rs 37.41 lakh each and K. Subramanian had to remit a settlement amount of Rs 36.97 lakh. CFO Uday Baldota and compliance officers Sunil Ajmera also paid.

Indians spend highest time on smartphones

The average time spent by Indians on smartphones is the highest in the world and the duration for watching short videos is likely to rise four-fold by 2025, Nokia said in a report. It found that India ranked second in the world after Finland in terms of broadband usage on mobile phones and the data traffic in the country has increased 63 times over the last five years. India consumed close to 10,000 petabytes in December 2020.

ACC profit up 73% at ₹472 cr in Dec. quarter

Cement maker ACC Ltd reported a 72.88 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 472.44 crore for the fourth quarter ended December 31. ACC, which follows the January-December financial year cycle, had posted a profit of Rs 273.28 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total revenue from operations rose 2.08 per cent to Rs 4,144.72 crore from Rs 4,060.31 crore. Revenue from cement was up 4.63 per cent.



■ Gross delinquencies also increase substantially MFI loan portfolio sees double-digit rise in Q3

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

The gross loan portfolio of micro lenders has grown in double-digits in the December quarter over the previous quarter, but gross delinquencies have also moved up.

The gross loan portfolio (GLP) of all lenders recorded a growth of 16 per cent during the December quarter to Rs 2,27,893 crore compared with Rs 1,96,820 crore in the year-ago quarter. The GLP of all lenders in the previous quarter, September 2020, was marginally higher at Rs 2,27,843 crore.

However, delinquencies during the October-December period reached disturbing levels of 13 per cent, higher than the post-



demonetisation levels.

As per data from Sa Dhan, portfolio at risk for more than 30 days, or PAR-30, has deteriorated to 13.23 per cent from 4.48 per cent in September 2020 and 1.89 per cent in June 2020. PAR-30 was just 1.78 per cent in March 2020.

PAR-60 has moved up 8

per cent and PAR-90 to 4.9 per cent in the December 2020 quarter. Even during the post-demonetisation quarters, delinquencies were much lower. In the quarter ended March 2017, PAR-30 was 10.56 per cent. PAR-180, which technically is a non-performing asset, had moved up from

1.23 per cent in March 2017 to 6.7 per cent in the September quarter and 6.14 per cent in December quarter of 2017.

In 2017, in the aftermath of the demonetisation, liquidity of the borrowers was badly affected. Further, the rumours about loan waivers had affected the collections, which eventually led to large-scale write-offs of micro loans then.

However, Sa Dhan believes that things might not move to such a level this time. "The economic recovery has started happening and the collections have improved. Further, the micro finance industry had put up better checks and balances to avoid such a situation," said Somesh Dayal, associate director, Sa-Dhan.

Grofers mulls US listing via merger

BAIJU KALESH &
ANTO ANTONY
FEB. 11

Grofers, an online grocer, is weighing a plan to go public in the US through a merger with a special purpose acquisition company (Spac), people familiar with the matter said.

The SoftBank Vision Fund-backed company is working with an adviser, one of the people said, asking not to be named as the information is not public. The grocer is seeking a deal that would value the



firm at about \$1 billion, another person said.

Deliberations are at an early stage and the company could decide not to proceed with the plan, the people said. A representative for Grofers declined to comment.

The Spacs trend is rapid-

ly spreading beyond the US, with blank-cheque companies springing up in recent months to focus on targets in Asia, or with ties to the region. James Murdoch and former president of Walt Disney Asia Pacific Uday Shankar are seeking a blank-cheque vehicle to acquire Asian companies, Bloomberg News reported this week.

Grofers sells grocery and daily household products from cooking oil to Indian spices to shoppers in more than 27 cities, according to its website. Its eight in-

house brands make up the majority of the products it sells to the roughly three million people who have downloaded its app.

SoftBank's Vision Fund led an investment round of more than \$200 million into the company in 2019, along with Tiger Global, Sequoia Capital and KTB.

In a post-earnings presentation on Tuesday, SoftBank Group Corp founder Masayoshi Son said the company may see 10 to 20 public listings a year from its portfolio of 164 startups.

—Bloomberg

ADITYA MITTAL NAMED CEO OF ARCELORMITTAL

New Delhi/
London, Feb. 11:

Global steel giant ArcelorMittal on Thursday announced the appointment of Aditya Mittal as its CEO.

Aditya Mittal, son of steel baron Lakshmi N. Mittal, is the chief financial officer of the company, and will succeed his father in the new role.

In a statement, the Luxembourg-based steel maker said Lakshmi Mittal, who is currently chairman and CEO, will become the company's executive chairman and Aditya Mittal will become the CEO.

In this position, Lakshmi Mittal will continue to lead the board of directors and work together with the CEO and management team, it said.

The company added that Genuino Christino will now become its CFO. Christino joined the company in 2003 and has held the position of head of finance since 2016.

—PTI

BLUE STAR EYES GOVT'S VACCINE, ATMA NIRBHAR DRIVE, TO EXPAND CAPACITY

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 11

Sensing a spike in demand for refrigeration products in the wake of the government's vaccination and Atma Nirbhar Bharat initiatives, air-conditioning major Blue Star on Thursday said it is doubling its capacity for commercial refrigeration products by setting up a new manufacturing plant in Maharashtra with an investment of Rs 130 crore.

The new factory at its existing facility at Wada in Thane district of Maharashtra will have an annual capacity to produce two lakh deep freezers and one lakh storage water coolers. The factory could be commissioned by the year-end.

"We have invested Rs 130 crore in setting up a new plant in Thane district as

the need for commercial refrigeration in India is increasingly becoming vital across industries—be it for pharmaceutical, healthcare, agriculture, hospitality, food processing and dairy, among others," B. Thiagarajan, MD, Blue Star, told *Financial Chronicle*.

Compared to the developed countries, commercial refrigeration adoption in India is only at a sub-5 per cent level, which translates into huge opportunities for Blue Star, he said.

Blue Star has launched "specifically designed, temperature-controlled refrigerators and transporters." This combined with the Aatmanirbhar Bharat push will unfold enormous opportunities for Blue Star, he pointed out.

(With inputs from Ravi Ranjan Prasad)

Life without Google: Oz facing the unthinkable

ANGUS WHITLEY &
GEORGINA MCKAY
FEB. 11

Imagine a world without Google, the search engine so pervasive it's the starting point for more than five billion queries a day. That's the reality facing Australia, where the tech giant is threatening to unplug its homepage in a standoff with the government.

Google opposes a planned law that would force the company and Facebook Inc. to pay Australian publishers for news content. The Internet juggernaut's ultimatum to local lawmakers—change the legislation, or else—has left a digital vacuum hanging over a nation that essentially knows just one way to navigate the web. Google runs 95 per cent of Internet searches in Australia.

Potential fallout from the spat goes far beyond Australia for Alphabet Inc.-owned Google, whose dominance of global

advertising has made it a target for watchdogs worldwide. If the company backs down in Australia, the pay-for-news law risks becoming a template for jurisdictions, including Canada and the European Union that are following the quarrel and keen to shorten Google's lead.

But disabling what is arguably the world's most famous website would hand all of Australia to rivals, including Microsoft Corp's Bing and DuckDuckGo, which have failed to dislodge Google as the gateway to the web. These search-engine competitors would suddenly have a playground for development and a foothold to advance on the global stage.

Software-engineering student Patrick Smith exemplifies Australia's Google dependency. The 24-year-old from Canberra said he sometimes racks up 400 Google searches a day to help with his studies, catch up on news and look up

recipes. Smith said his browser from the previous day shows 150 searches—in the space of just five hours.

"The prospect of Google search disappearing is frightening at best," Smith said. "It's quite reflexive of me to Google something, anything, that I'm even mildly not sure of."

Searching for 'best beach Sydney' shows the variance in performance among Google's competitors. DuckDuckGo's first result was an ad for a hotel more than 1,000 kilometres away in Queensland. Search Encrypt, which touts its data-protection capability, said: "It looks like there aren't any great matches." Bing suggested Bondi Beach Post Office. Only Google returned a real beach, Bondi, first up.

The world-first legislation is still being debated in Australia's parliament and a report on the law from a key senate committee is due Friday.

—Bloomberg

RAILTEL SETS ₹93-₹94 PRICE BAND FOR IPO

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 11

RailTel Corporation Of India, a telecom infrastructure provider under the Ministry of Railways, has announced a public issue of shares by the Government of India in the price range of Rs 93-Rs 94 per share of Rs 10 face value. The issue aims to raise Rs 819.24 crore at the upper price band.

The initial public offering opens on February 16 and closes on February 18.

A company release said RailTel is one of the largest neutral telecom infrastructure providers in the country having a 59,098 route kilometres of optical fibre cable network that connects 5,929 railway stations as of January 31, 2021.

RailTel offers a diversified portfolio of telecom services and solutions, including leased lines services, e-office services and data centre services, large network hardware system integration, software and digital services to enterprises, public sector banks, defence organisations and educational institutions, operated through data centres located in Gurugram, Haryana and Secunderabad and Telangana. RailTel is also appointed by the Ministry of Railways for implementing the Hospital Management Information System.

The issue will comprise an offer for sale of up to 87.15 million equity shares by the Gol.

World is going electric and MNCs are upbeat

RUDY RUITENBERG
FEB. 11

Schneider Electric SE forecast higher profit for this year after a better-than-expected annual result and joined European rivals in predicting growth linked to the world going electric.

Adjusted operating profit before amortisation slipped to 3.93 billion euros (\$4.77 billion) last year, ahead of analysts' estimates, as demand for gear to power data centres and buildings helped blunt the impact of the coronavirus. The French company predicted earnings will jump as much as 15 per cent this year.

Schneider and rivals Siemens AG and ABB Ltd. have been among the best performers on their benchmark indexes during the pandemic. From rising data usage to connected buildings and electric vehicles, demand is surging for the companies' switches and automated controls. Electricity demand is expected to outpace all other fuels in the next 10 years, according to the International Energy Agency's main outlook.

"There's going to be a massive shift on the side of electricity," Schneider chief executive officer Jean-Pascal Tricoire said in an interview with BFM Business TV on Thursday. "The future will be electric, because all new technologies -- be it electric vehicles, electronics, IT and buildings -- will be electric."

Schneider forecast organic sales growth of 5 to 8 per cent in 2021. Its



shares rose as much as 2.8 per cent and advanced 29 per cent last year.

Siemens last week raised its earnings outlook, while ABB reported better-than-expected revenue thanks to a rebound in Germany and China and rising orders linked to data centres, EV chargers and renewable energy.

Smaller rival Legrand SA reported results on Thursday that were in line with expectations, with the fourth quarter "not matching the general trend in the sector for big profit beats," RBC analyst Wasi Rizvi said. Legrand predicted organic sales growth of 1 to 6 per cent, trailing Schneider's outlook.

Spending to modernise, expand and digitise grids will reach \$460 billion in 2030, the IEA forecasts. The agency expects network expansion to rise 80 per cent from the previous decade. Tricoire said electricity's share of energy consumption will double to 40 per cent in the next 20 years.

Rexel SA, which distributes electrical supplies, including Schneider and Legrand products, said full-year adjusted earnings fell by about a fifth to 526 million euros.

—Bloomberg

Passenger vehicle sales up 11% in Jan: Siam

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 11

The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers or Siam said on Thursday that the wholesales of passenger vehicles from factories to dealerships in India in January rose for the sixth straight month, helped by robust demand for utility vehicles.

Domestic wholesales of passenger vehicles rose 11.14 per cent year-on-year to 2.77 lakh units last month, according to the Siam.

While car sales fell 1.16 per cent over the year earlier to 1.53 lakh units, utility vehicles jumped 37.26 per cent to 1.12 lakh units—also the sixth straight month of pick-up for the segment.

Total two-wheeler sales, too, rose 6.63 per cent at 14.29 lakh units for the sixth month in a row.

Motorcycle sales increased 5.1 per cent to 9.16 lakh units while scooter sales were also up 9.06 per cent at 4.54 lakh units.

Three-wheeler sales, however, declined by 56.76



per cent to 26,335 units as compared with 60,903 units in January last year.

Vehicle sales across categories rose by 4.97 per cent to 17.32 lakh units last month as against 16,50,812 units in the year ago period.

Siam releases sales data for commercial vehicles on a quarterly basis.

"Supply chain challenges, including rising price of steel, unavailability of semi-conductors, and higher container charges continue to be obstacles in smooth functioning of the industry," Rajesh Menon, director general, Siam, said.

The pandemic has fuelled demand for personal mobility. But automakers, battling several quarters of slowing sales, have not been able to keep up with supply.

FUTURE-RELIANCE DEAL: AMAZON MOVES APEX COURT

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

After suffering a setback at the Delhi High Court's division bench, Amazon has approached the Supreme Court against the contested Rs 24,713-crore deal between Future Group and Reliance.

Amazon appealed against February 8 order of the division bench, which stayed the status quo order passed by a single judge of the court on February 2 asking Future Group and concerned authorities to maintain status quo in the Reliance-Future deal till it pronounces the final order.

The staying of the order of the single judge even temporarily and permitting further violation of the operative directions in the Emergency Arbitrator order would be difficult to reverse, Amazon said in its appeal. Amazon has been seeking enforcement of the arbitrator award.

HALDIRAM'S FIGHTS LOOK-ALIKE SITES

Hyderabad, Feb. 11: The Senior Division Civil Court of Nagpur has issued notices to Godaddy.com, Network Solutions and Nixi on a petition filed by Haldiram's Foods International Pvt Ltd against the domain registrars hosting various websites by the name Haldiram.

Haldiram's operates its website as www.haldirams.com. Many look-alike websites such as www.haldirams.in, www.haldiram.com, www.haldiramfranchise.com etc. are created by fraudsters and are taking money from various people on the pretext of giving dealership/distributorship of Haldiram's. The firm had also filed police complaints in this respect.

Business NOTE

SHORT TAKES



Telangana mountaineer Amgotha Tukaram (left) called on National Police Academy Director Atul Karwal, a 1988 batch IPS officer, also a mountaineer and one who has scaled Mount Everest in 2008 from the South Col route, the same route Tukaram had taken to scale the Everest in 2019. During Thursday's meet in Hyderabad, they discovered that both scaled the summit on the same day — May 22.

Soumya in Natl football team

Hyderabad: Telangana's G. Soumya has been included in the Indian senior women's football team which will participate in the international friendly matches from February 14 to 24 in Alanya, Turkey. The friendlies are being held to prepare the side for the forthcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup 2022 to be held in India.



Vihari to lead Andhra team

Hyderabad: G. H. Vihari will lead the Andhra cricket team in the Vijay Hazare Trophy to be held from February 20. Ricky Bhui will be the vice-captain. Andhra is placed in Elite 'B' group along with Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha, whose matches are scheduled at Indore.

The Team: Hanuma Vihari (captain), Ricky Bhui (vice captain), Ch Kranti Kumar, K. Aswin Hebbar, C. R. Gnaneswar, Maheep Kumar, K. Karan Shinde, UMS Girinath (WK), P. Girinath Reddy, Shoaib Md Khan, S. Ashish, K. V. Sasikanth, Ch Stephen, I. Karthik Raman, S. Dhruv Kumar Reddy, G. Manish, D. Naren Reddy, K. Nitish Kumar Reddy, M. Harishankar Reddy, S. Charan Saiteja, S. Tarun (wk), B. Santosh. **Support Staff:** CD Thompson (head coach), L. N. Prasad Reddy (mentor), Jugal Kishore Ghiya (team manager), M. N. Vikram Varma (coach), P. Madhusudhan Reddy (coach), N. Nirmal Kumar (coach), K. Ashok (physio), K. Ratan Kumar (trainer), K. Nava Jeevan (video analyst), Pydi Raju (masseur).

16 teams for 7H media cricket

Hyderabad: As many as 16 teams will participate in the 7H Media Premier League T20 cricket tournament at various grounds in Hyderabad from February 22 to March 15. On Thursday, Minister of State for Excise, Sports, Tourism and Culture V. Srinivas Goud released the brochure for the tournament in which print and electronic media sides will participate. The jerseys for teams were drawn and presented by tournament organisers 7H Sports to the captains of all the teams. Matches will be played on a league-cum-knockout basis with the opener at Lal Bahadur Stadium.

Rashmikaa in Chennai semis

Hyderabad: Shrivalli Rashmikaa defeated Statemate Y. Sai Dedeeppa 6-1, 6-0 to move into the semifinals of the MPTA AITA Open Women's Tennis Tournament being played in Chennai.

Earlier in the pre-quarters, Rashmikaa beat Priyanshi Bhandari of Gujarat 6-3, 6-4. She had made a strong start by beating P. Amula of Tamil Nadu 6-0, 6-0 in the first round.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL
Indian Super League: East Bengal vs Hyderabad FC from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3
WWE
SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Printed and Published from Nellore by **K.Sudhakar** on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Plot No.527, Chemudugunta (Village), Venkatachalasatram (Mandal), Nellore. RNI Registration No.APENG/2003/11048
Phones: 2348581, 82 & 83, Fax:2348580, Grams: CHRONICLE, Editor: **Kaushik Mitter**

SWEET VICTORY

Svitolina thrashes Gauff; Nadal makes 3rd round

Melbourne, Feb. 11: Defending champion Sofia Kenin exited the Australian Open in tears on Thursday as world number one Ashleigh Barty negotiated a sticky moment to reach the third round.

Meanwhile, Elina Svitolina lifted in the pivotal moments of the free-wheeling contest to move into the third round with a 6-4, 6-3 victory against teenage sensation Coco Gauff in one hour and 17 minutes at Rod Laver Arena.

Fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas also survived a five-set marathon with Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis, a close friend of showman Nick Kyrgios, to maintain his hopes of a first major win.

With Rafael Nadal crushing the American Michael Mmoh 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 in his quest for the all-time Grand Slam titles record, Kenin and Barty topped the day-time bill — but their matches had very different outcomes.

Self-imposed pressure has weighed heavily on Kenin, 22, the world number four who was defending a Grand Slam title for the first time.

And after an emotional first-round win over wildcard Maddison Inglis, Kenin met her match in



Elina Svitolina of Ukraine hits a return to Coco Gauff of the US during their women's singles match on the fourth day of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on Thursday. — AFP

the in-form Estonian Kaia Kanepi, who ousted the American 6-3, 6-2.

While Kenin became just the third defending champion since 1970 to fail to reach the third round, Barty further lifted hopes of a first Australian winner since 1978.

Playing with her left thigh heavily strapped, the top seed Barty twice

failed to serve out the win before ousting her 387th-ranked compatriot Daria Gavrilova 6-1, 7-6 (9/7).

Barty, who is unbeaten in seven matches after sitting out nearly all of last year, blamed the lapse on ring-rust.

Elsewhere, Medvedev, who turned 25 on Thursday, powered past the Spaniard Roberto

Carballes Baena 6-2, 7-5, 6-1.

Meanwhile, the volatile Australian Nick Kyrgios had a raucous crowd willing him to a stirring 5-7, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 victory over impressive young Frenchman Ugo Humbert at his favourite John Cain Arena in a Wednesday night match.

— Agencies

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles second round: Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Michael Mmoh (USA) 6-1, 6-4, 6-2; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) bt Thanasi Kokkinakis (AUS) 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Roberto Carballes (ESP) 6-2, 7-5, 6-1; Andrey Rublev (RUS x7) bt Thiago Monteiro (BRA) 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8); Nick Kyrgios (AUS) 5-7, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Ugo Humbert (FRA); Feliciano Lopez (ESP) bt Lorenzo Sonego (ITA x3) 5-7, 3-6, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4; Casper Ruud (NOR x24) bt Tommy Paul (USA) 3-6, 6-2, 6-4, 7-5; Matteo Berrettini (ITA x9) bt Tomas Machac (CZE) 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 6-3; Fabio Fognini (ITA x16) bt Salvatore Caruso (ITA) 4-6, 6-2, 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (14/12); Alex De Minaur (AUS x2) bt Pablo Cuevas (URU) 6-3, 6-3, 7-5; Cameron Norrie (GBR) bt Roman Safiullin (RUS) 3-6, 7-5, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3).

Women's singles second round: Elina Svitolina (UKR x5) bt Coco Gauff (USA) 6-4, 6-3; Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Daria Gavrilova (AUS) 6-1, 7-6 (9/7); Kaia Kanepi (EST) bt Sofia Kenin (USA x4) 6-3, 6-2; Ekaterina Alexandrova (RUS x29) bt Barbora Krejickova (CZE) 6-3, 7-6 (7/4); Anett Kontaveit (EST x2) bt Heather Watson (GBR) 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-2; Shelby Rogers (USA) bt Olga Danilovic (SRB) 6-2, 6-3; Belinda Bencic (SUI x1) bt Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS) 7-5, 2-6, 6-4; Elise Mertens (BEL x18) bt Lin Zhu (CHN) 7-6 (10/8), 6-1; Karolina Pliskova (CZE x6) bt Danielle Collins (USA) 7-5, 6-2; Donna Vekic (CRO x28) bt Nadia Podoroska (ARG) 6-2, 6-2; Jennifer Brady (USA x22) bt Madison Brengle (USA) 6-1, 6-2; Kaja Juvan (SLO) bt Mayar Sherif (EGY) 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3.

Team India revs up for Le Mans

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 11

Racing Team India will take its first step on the road to the 24 Hours of Le Mans this weekend when it makes its debut at the season-opening round of the Asian Le Mans Series in Dubai.

The all-Indian squad of Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao will compete in the LMP2 category over two, four-hour-long races at the Dubai Autodrome on Saturday and Sunday before the series moves to Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina circuit for another round of two, four-hour races on February 19 and 20.

Racing Team India's Dubai debut will make it



The car in which Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao will compete in the Asian Le Mans Series at the Dubai Autodrome over the weekend.

the first outfit with an all-Indian driver line-up to compete in international endurance racing. If it secures an invitation to the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June, it will become the first Indian team to take part in the iconic endurance classic at the Circuit de la Sarthe in

France. "Le Mans is like the whole Formula One championship in 24 hours. It's all about endurance, preserving the car and getting a great set up and race as a team. The pitstops need to be right, the driver changes, et al. The challenges are so many including driv-

ing at night at the speed of 300km every lap. It is the toughest race in the world," Karthikeyan said on Thursday.

"We are all experienced but nothing prepares you for Le Mans, anything can happen but it's a great challenge and we're up to it. To represent India is a proud moment for all of us," he added.

"This is a phenomenal step ahead," said Sanjay Sharma, Head-Motor-sport, JK Tyre, which is one of the team partners.

"We are confident Racing Team India has what it takes to be successful and race at Le Mans which would deliver the breakthrough that Indian motorsport needs," he added.

C. SANTOSH KUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

England suffered a major setback on Thursday as their fast bowler Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the second Test with an injury. The second match begins at the M. A. Chidambaram Stadium here on Saturday.

"Archer will miss the Test after having an injection in his right elbow. The injection follows discomfort the fast bowler experienced during the first Test," said an ECB release.

England, however, are hoping that Archer would be available for the third Test in Ahmedabad. "The issue is not related to any

Outpour of anger over Hazare side

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 11

A day after the selection of the Vijay Hazare Trophy team, anger continued to seethe in the Hyderabad Cricket Association circles with the administrators being castigated for disregarding merit.

It turns out that only two 'selectors' — Arvind Shetty and Anwar Ahmed — were involved in picking the side that reeked of favouritism. President Mohammed Azharuddin, who is away, had nominated Arvind Shetty, Habib Ahmed and Abhinav Kumar as selectors but the last two backed out.

Former HCA secretary T. Sheshnarayan hit the nail on the head. "This is a complete farce. I challenge both the selectors to identify the players they have selected," he said.

Speaking about the performers who were ignored, he cautioned the HCA administrators: "If any of these boys suffer depression and resort to extreme measures, who will be responsible? All the HCA members will be guilty for the rest of their lives."

On Thursday, the All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations submitted a memorandum to the Telangana State Human Rights Commission, highlighting the anomalies. The letter addressed to chairman Justice Gunda Chandraiah was titled

'Murder of Indian Talent — Grave violations of human rights by HCA in selection of team for Vijay Hazare Trophy' and talked about the raw deal meted to performing players. They also appended a list of players selected/ ignored and their performances.

M. Abhirath Reddy, Rohit Rayudu, N. Anirudh Reddy, Md Junaid Ali, Varun Goud, G. Arjun, B. Chandrasekhar are among those who have lost out on places despite consistent performances.

"It's also strange to note that there's not a single soul from the Districts. If you can accommodate them in a squad of 22, then what is the use?" Shesh questioned.

Cricket Association of Telangana secretary Sunil Babu Kolankapa echoed the sentiment. "Where is the district representation? All the while HCA was catering only to the Hyderabad district, now that has also collapsed. They are playing with the lives of cricketers. Where is the president while all this is going on?" he asked.

"Just like they have a match observer among the 11-member support staff, the BCCI should appoint an observer to monitor the game in Hyderabad," Sunil added.

Shesh concluded: "About ₹350 crore was spent on Lodha Reforms to clean up cricket. Looks like we are back to square one."

ENGLAND SUFFER SETBACK AS ARCHER IS OUT; FOAKES HOPES FOR SPINNING STRIP

previous injury and it is hoped the treatment will allow the condition to settle down quickly, allowing the player to return to action in time for the third Test in Ahmedabad," the release added.

In Archer's absence, Stuart Broad is likely to share the new ball with James Anderson.

Meanwhile, Ben Foakes' two-year wait will finally end when England take on India in the second Test. It's an enforced change as England's No.1 keeper Jos Buttler has flown home as part of their rotation policy.

Foakes said he would love to have the same kind of impact he had in his debut

series. "Of course, it was frustrating to sit out for a while. Over the last two years, I haven't played as much as I would have liked to. So, I am just trying to put myself in a good position. Hopefully, I will be able to contribute," he said.

Foakes expects a spinning track for the second Test. "Obviously, it's an avenue that India would like to go down. Actually, I found it quite tricky to read the wicket. The pitch looks different to the last one — a darker soil. I think it might play a bit low and slow. The previous pitch played really well for about three days. I think there is a potential that it will spin earlier," said Foakes.

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