

WEATHER

Max: 30.7°C  
Min: 21.5°C  
RH: 59%  
Rainfall: Nil  
Forecast: clear.  
Max/Min temp. 30/21 9C

COVID-19  
COUNT

CASES

(+11,636)

1,08,91,462

DEATHS

(+93)

1,55,569

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+143)

(+1)

TS: 2,96,277

1,614

(+68)

(+1)

AP: 8,88,760

7,162

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,84,74,469

DEATHS 23,83,558

219

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Vidiya till 12.58 am  
Star: Shatabhisha till 3.14 pm  
Varjyam: 10 pm to 11.41 pm  
Durmuhurtam: 6.47 am to 8.18 am  
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

HJRI CALENDAR  
Jamadi- ul- Akhir 30,1442 AH  
PRAYERS (SHAHI MASJID)  
Fajar: 5.23 am  
Zohar: 12.24 pm  
Asar: 4.36 pm  
Maghrib: 6.13 pm  
Isha: 7.25 pm  
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM  
MOONRISE TODAY 7.02 AM  
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.42 PM

INSIDE

STATE... PAGE 2  
No Jagan link in POSCO deals: Min.

STATE... PAGE 3  
Naidu misleading on poll results, says Sajjala

NATION | 4

TMC MP Dinesh Trivedi quits Rajya Sabha

WORLD | 5

Myanmar protests swell amid US curbs

SPORTS | 7

India take on England in second Test from today

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Vol. 18 No. 218 Established 1938 | 16 pages | ₹6.00

## Quota in pvt varsities: Jagan Directs officials to convert colleges into private universities

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12**

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said that the government has decided to amend the AP Private University Act, 2006 by which 35 per cent seats in private universities would be filled by the government quota. The amendment Bill will be introduced in the Budget session. He said that the govern-

ment had decided to introduce English medium in Intermediate and degree colleges, including professional colleges, to improve the employability of the students. CM Reddy was speaking at a review meeting on higher education in the CM camp office at Tadepalli on Friday where he enquired about the reopening of colleges and conducting of classes.

He directed the officials to set highest standards for new private universities and convert the existing colleges into private universities. He said there should be joint certification with 200 best educational institutions of the world and it should last for five years and this should be considered as criteria for recognising a college as a private university. Discussing aided col-

leges, it was opined that they should be handed over to the government or private totally if they cannot be run independently. With regard to introducing English medium at the degree level, the Chief Minister directed the officials to come up with appropriate courses so that students face trouble.

■ Page 2: CM wants practical knowledge

## Poll body gags Kodali for lowering its stature

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12**

The State Election Commission on Friday imposed a gag order on civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkeshwara Rao until the completion of gram panchayat polls on February 21.

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar in the order issued stated that the SEC was not satisfied with the explanation given by the minister. Accordingly, the SEC issued an order restraining the minister from speak to the media, to any group or groups of people or in meetings until the completion of the elections. The SEC said that the order would come into effect immediately and directed the Krishna district collector and the superintendent of police Krishna (Rural) district and the Vijayawada police commissioner to ensure enforcement of the order. Earlier, the SEC had served a showcase

## Don't talk against SEC, HC tells Jogi

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12**

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on directed the ruling YSR Congress MLA from Pedana, Jogi Ramesh not to speak against the State Election Commission or about the conduct of gram panchayat polls and also not to speak with the contestants. As the SEC issued a gag order on the legislator on Thursday on the charges of threatening the voters to influence them until February 17, he moved a

lunch motion petition in the High Court on Friday. Single-judge bench headed by justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu heard the petition and imposed curbs on the legislator on speaking against the SEC and the ongoing polls. However, the court permitted him to speak to the media persons about government schemes. The court also directed the SEC to serve notice on the legislator and seek an explanation for making such comments. The case was posted for the next hearing on February 15.

notice on the minister for making allegedly derogatory remarks against Kumar during his press meet earlier in the day. The utterances were lowering the stature of the SEC and the public stand-

ing of the election commissioner, it said, adding that the minister's comments were made with a malicious intent.

■ Page 2: Minister denies making derogatory remarks

## CM okays more polls under SEC

### To complete political activity within 2 months and focus on attracting investments to state

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12**

The state will soon witness a paradigm shift in governance with Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy deciding to prioritise development and attracting investments after successfully launching and stabilising welfare schemes in the first two years of his tenure. As part of this multi-pronged strategy, the Chief Minister, sources close to him told *Deccan Chronicle*, decided to not object to holding of even mandal, zilla parishad and municipal polls before the end of State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar's stint in March.

"He wants to finish the political activity by facilitating all polls in the next one or two months and focus fully on propelling growth by taking advantage of the post-Covid economic initiatives of the Centre," sources said. The government is said to have conveyed its decision to cooperate with the SEC on conduct of elec-

## AP to vote in phase 2 of village polls today

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12**

The second phase of gram panchayat elections in the state will be held on Saturday to elect 2,786 sarpanches and 20,817 ward members. There are 7,507 sarpanch candidates and 44,876 ward members in fray, as 539 sarpanches and 12,604 ward members have been elected unanimously. The State Election Commission has set up 29,304 polling stations for voters to exercise their

franchise. Of them, 5,480 are considered sensitive and 4,181 hyper sensitive. Authorities have arranged 18,387 big, 8,351 medium and 24,034 small ballot boxes at the various polling booths. As part of anti-Covid-19 measures, authorities have arranged for face masks, hand sanitisers, thermal scanners and hand gloves at all polling stations.

■ Page 3: Polls will end at 1.30 pm in Maoist areas

tions in the last two meetings held between the SEC and Chief Secretary Adityanath Das and Director General of Police Gautham Sawang. Sources said the government had earlier chalked out a plan to attempt to prevent the SEC from going ahead with the polls to zilla parishad and

urban bodies but the Chief Minister negated it. Overwhelming support from people as reflected in YSR Congress-backed candidates sweeping the gram panchayat polls also came in handy for changing the strategy, sources added.

■ Page 2: Construction to resume in Amaravati

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KAKINDA CIVIC REPRESENTATIVE KILLED BY FRIEND

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, FEB. 12

Kampara Ramesh, corporator of ninth division in Kakinada Municipal Corporation, was brutally killed, allegedly by his friend Gurajana Chinna. It is stated Chinna ran the corporator over with his car multiple time in drunken rage at a car washing centre in Valasapakala village of Kakinada Rural Mandal. The incident occurred at 2 am on Friday.

■ Page 2: Corporator was brought dead, say doctors

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Full report on Page 2

cm y k



## COUNTER POINT



## SHORT TAKES

## GANTA, AVANTI SHARE DAIS AT HUNGER STRIKE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 12

Tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao (Avanti) on Friday shared the same dais with his political guru Ganta Srinivasa Rao, Telugu Desam MLA, at the relay hunger strike protesting against privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

The hunger strike, started at the main gate of VSP, has been launched by Utku Parirakshana Committee. The hunger strike camp was inaugurated by Kolla Rajamohan Rao, who had participated for getting the steel plant for Visakhapatnam in 1970s.

Soon after the inauguration, Ganta Srinivasa Rao displayed to people his new resignation letter written as per format required by the assembly speaker for acceptance. Announcing that he was resigning from the assembly in interests of the people, Ganta appealed to Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy that he convene a meeting of his cabinet immediately and pass a resolution against privatisation of the steel plant.

The tourism minister, suggested to Ganta Srinivasa Rao that resignation should be used as the last resort against the central government and not now. "Right now, it is time to unite political parties, trade unions and people to launch a state-wide agitation, till the centre revokes its decision," Muttamsetti remarked.

CPI national general secretary said the state government should enact a new law to prevent PSUs from selling off lands allotted by the state government. He later called on those sitting on hunger strike.

## TWO RETURNING OFFICERS SUSPENDED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 12

Srikakulam collector and election officer J. Niwas suspended two returning officers of LN Peta in the district for dereliction of duties. One of the officials, L. Govardhana Rao, school assistant of Kuntibhadra Zilla Parishad High School under Kothuru mandal, was appointed returning officer for LN Peta gram panchayat (stage-2). The other was reserve returning officer V. Mallesu, teacher at the Temburu Zilla Parishad High School of Patapatnam mandal.

They were suspended under Section 134 of Peoples Representation Act, 1951 and AP Service Rules. They were asked not to leave the headquarters until further orders.

On February 9, Govardhana Rao was allegedly negligent in securing the ballot papers and handing them over to proper authority, as per a preliminary inquiry. It may be recalled that the students of LN Peta Zilla High School found ballot papers in the school campus which were later burnt by the sweepers.

## CENTRE HAS DECEIVED STATE, SAYS CONG CHIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, FEB. 12

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee working president Tulasi Reddy on Friday said the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the centre has succeeded in deceiving AP due to incompetence of the present YSR Congress government and the earlier TDP government in the state.

Otherwise, he wondered how the centre could neglect granting special status to Andhra Pradesh when such an assurance had been given at the time of state's bifurcation itself.

## No Jagan link in POSCO deals: Min.

## Peddireddi alleges that Chandrababu Naidu was suffering from a "Jagan phobia"

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

Minister for Panchayat Raj Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy said on Friday that no connection existed between Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and the POSCO steel company. Instead, Reddy urged Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu to comment on the issue of Vizag Steel Plant privatisation.

The minister refuted an allegation of TD leader Chandrababu Naidu that the CM planned to purchase the Vizag Steel. He admitted that POSCO representatives met CM Jagan, but this was a courtesy call. Recalling that Venkaiah Naidu had, as a student leader, agitated for the setting up of the Vizag Steel Plant, he said the VP should now intervene and stop the Centre from privatising this prestigious entity.

Minister Reddy told the media that Chandrababu Naidu was suffering from a "Jagan phobia".

"Naidu is envious of Jagan," he said and added that Jagan as CM has implemented over 90 per cent of the promises the YSRC made in its election manifesto. "Jagan did this in just 18 months and took his governance to the doorsteps of the people through village and ward secretariats."

He said the YSRC will win the present gram panchayat elections with a thumping majority as the people were largely benefited by the welfare initiatives of the state government.

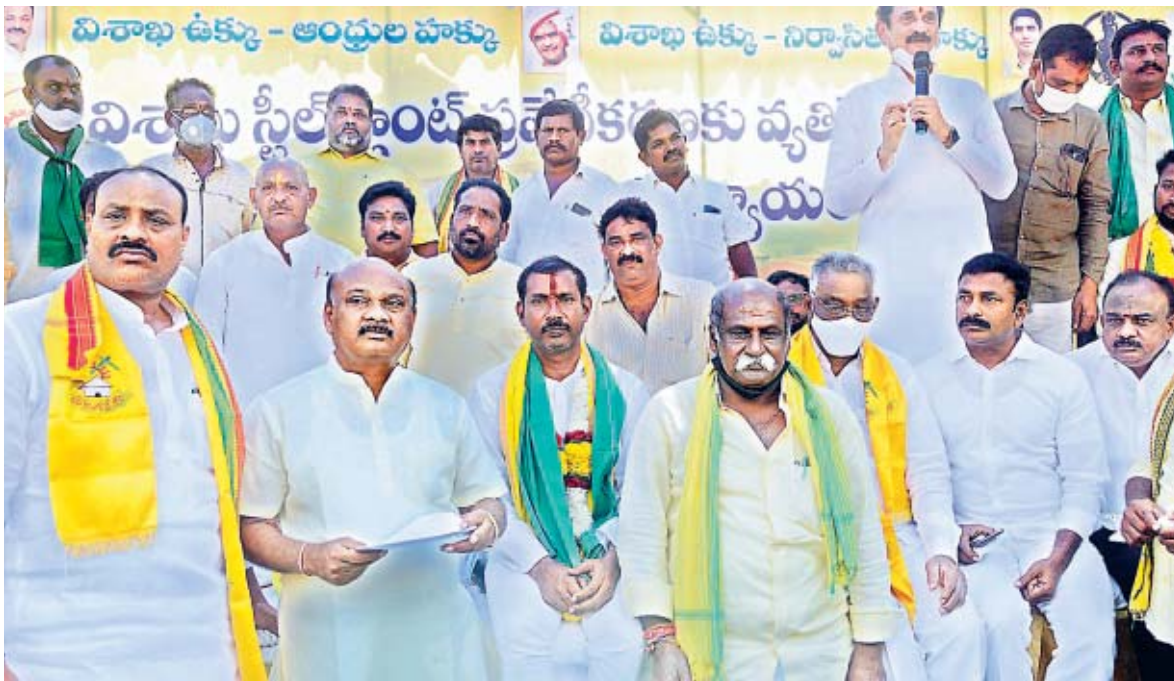
The minister said Chandrababu was still unable to reconcile to his party's defeat in the assembly polls in 2019. "Thus, the TDP has been raking up issues to create chaos in AP." He slammed the TD leader for his "attempts at misinterpreting the election results" and stated that the public had rejected the TDP, which got less than 10 per cent seats in the assembly.

Brushing aside the allegations of the YSRC using force to effect unanimous polls for grama panchayats, the minister said

Chandrababu was protecting Atchannaidu and Kollu Ravindra, who had "terrorised the contestants".

Minister Reddy said, "There is overwhelming response from the people of Chittoor to the good governance provided by the Chief Minister and me. The government is implementing a lot of welfare schemes. Due to this, Chandrababu's men will be defeated even in his own constituency and in the whole of Chittoor district."

On the Visakhapatnam steel plant, the minister noted that this was a central government institution. If POSCO company wanted to have a deal, they would talk to the Prime Minister of the Union Government. "POSCO is a multinational. Its representatives met the chief minister by way of a courtesy call. The meeting had nothing to do with the Vizag steel plant."



TD State Chief Kinjarapu Atchannaidu joins former Gajuwaka MLA Palla Srinivas, who sat on a hunger strike against the Centre's move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, at Gajuwaka in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— K. MURALI KRISHNA

## Properties of VSP valued at over ₹3 lakh cr: Atchannaidu

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 12

AP TD president and former minister and Kinjarapu Atchannaidu asserted that the shifting of the executive capital to the port city was not aimed at the development of the city but was part of a bigger conspiracy to "loot" industries including Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) and public assets.

Addressing the TD hunger strike camp at the party office in Gajuwaka on Friday, Atchannaidu said the properties of the VSP were valued at over ₹3 lakh crore in the open market. The Chief Minister expected that locating the capital in Vizag would further jack up the prices of the lands, after which he could take over the plant after its privatisation.

"Mere writing a letter to the Prime Minister is not

● **CHIEF MINISTER** expected that locating the capital in Vizag would further jack up the prices of the lands, after which he could take over the plant after its privatisation, he said.

enough. The Chief Minister should clarify to the public whether or not he had met and held discussions with the representatives of POSCO (a South Korean company)," Atchannaidu said.

He reminded that it was then Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy who prevented the allotment of Obulapuram mines to the steel plant in 2004. The mines could have prevented the losses that VSP is facing, he added.

Another former minister and TD politburo member, Ch. Ayanna Patrudu, alleged that the Chief Minister and Rajya Sabha member V. Vijaysai Reddy were aware of the POSCO

move and it was former chief secretary Neelam Sahney who led a delegation to New Delhi to meet central leaders on the privatisation.

He said the YSRC government has been eying maritime cities and was planning to take over Krishnapatnam and Kakinada ports as well as the Vizag Steel Plant.

Yanamala Ramakrishnu, Leader of the House in the Legislative Council, said no new industry had come to the state during the last 21 months. He said that the YCRC's failures had made it necessary for the people to start another agitation for protecting the VSP. Other leaders said the people's representatives, employees and the general public should fight a united struggle. The workers should not fall in the trap of the ministers and YSRC MLAs as they were the ones responsible for the present plight of VSP.

## Construction to resume in Amaravati, says CM

From Page 1

The Chief Minister, according to sources, strongly believes that the state would go to the polls only in 2024 as the combined election proposal of the Centre may not materialise in the immediate future.

The CM also directed the officials to relaunch construction activity in Amaravati as per the recommendations of the nine-member committee at the earliest and create civic infrastructure to attract investments into the region. "We will approach the court with a clear plan on

protecting the interests of farmers who gave their lands for the capital and urge it to vacate the status quo on the crucial three capitals Bill that would facilitate the shifting of executive capital to Visakhapatnam," said sources.

Jagan Mohan Reddy is said to have expressed his resolve to focus on attracting investments to the state and make use of the financial assistance promised by the Centre for capital-intensive projects. The government will propose pharma, marine, IT and industrial clusters to attract investors.

## Minister denies making derogatory remarks

From Page 1

Earlier, Venkateshwara Rao on Friday denied making any derogatory remarks against the State Election Commission and

requested it to withdraw the show-cause notice served on him. He said he had high regard for and respect towards constitutional bodies and in particular the SEC.

## Rice exports begin from Kakinada deep water port

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, FEB. 12

In a significant development, rice exports from the deep water port began here on Friday.

The shipment of 32,250 metric tonnes of broken rice, bound for a West African port, was formally flagged-off by chairman of Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) M. Angamuthu.

Present on the occasion were East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy, Joint Collector G. Lakshmisha and commerce and industries export department director G.V.S. Subrahmanyam. Angamuthu said that it was a historic moment for Kakinada port and the state. He expressed hope that rice exports from the port would grow by leaps and bounds.

He said that an action plan has been drawn to promote Indian non-basmati rice abroad. He said that the focus should be

on the quality of rice exports in order to earn the confidence of importing nations. He said that APEDA was introducing new measures so that farmers' revenue for their agricultural products would increase up to three times. During an interaction with rice exporters, he said that rice exporters from the district are sending quality rice.

APEDA would bring a global-level brand status to AP rice soon he said.

Lakshmisha said that traditionally rice is being exported through the anchorage port, but the port has a limited capacity and therefore, the state's potential could not be tapped.

But, now, there is a possibility of trebling rice exports annually from the current level of two million tonnes through anchorage and deep water port. He said that steps were being taken to ensure that employment of port workers would not be affected.

## 4 die as bus falls in Araku gorge

DC CORRESPONDENTS  
VISAKHAPATNAM/  
HYDERABAD, FEB. 12

Four persons, including a few months old baby were killed and 19 others sustained injuries when a mini-bus in which they were travelling plunged into a 100-feet deep gorge in Anantagiri mandal in Visakhapatnam district on Friday evening.

All the passengers in the bus belonged to the families of five brothers and were residents of Shaikpet in Hyderabad. They had hired the bus for a trip to Araku valley in Visakhapatnam district. They left in the bus hired from Dinesh Travels, also based in Shaikpet, on February 10 and were expected back on February 14.

According to officials involved in the relief and rescue operations at the accident site, among the dead were two men, a woman and a baby.

Officials said that the family left Borra Caves around 5.30 pm on Friday.

The driver, as he was not familiar with the road, or possibly because of brake failure, overshot a sharp bend and the bus went



Accident victims being taken to hospital on Friday.

down the gorge. Among the injured, along with several adults, were children.

As per Swamy Goud, who responded to a phone call to Dinesh Travels, three persons had booked the vehicle for a family trip to Araku. There were 26 persons in all in the bus, he said.

Meanwhile, the Hyderabad district collector was instructed to visit Shaikpet and inquire and assist in relief operations.

According to the Anantagiri district police, the bus fell into the gorge

while negotiating a hairpin bend on the hilly road between Dumuku and Tyda villages. The bus was on its way to Visakhapatnam from Araku valley and was about 100 km from its immediate destination.

Anantagiri sub-inspector K. Sudhakar said the bodies of the victims were being shifted to S. Kota community health centre, where the injured persons were taken for immediate care and treatment.

Some of those who received serious injuries were to be taken to

Visakhapatnam for better treatment.

As the police scrambled to mount relief efforts, officials reached out to any available vehicle and roped in taxi cabs to rush to the accident spot and to carry the injured to hospitals.

"The incident might have taken place around 7.30 pm and we got a call 10 minutes later. We mobilised all available vehicles including 108 ambulances and rushed to the accident spot 30 km away," said taxi driver Ramesh, from Borra Caves.

## CORPORATOR WAS BROUGHT DEAD: DOCTORS

From Page 1

The killing of Ramesh has sent shock waves in political circles of Kakinada city. Agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu, Kakinada city MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy and Kakinada mayor S. Pavan are among those who have expressed their condolences over the death of Ramesh.

Sarpavaram circle inspector Nunna Raju said Kampara Ramesh came to the car wash centre last night and started drinking there along with his friends. The matter of Gurajana Chinna came up at the time. Following this, Ramesh phone Chinna, who reached the car wash centre along with his brother Kumar. The duo too started drinking with Ramesh and his friends.

While they were heavily drunk, Ramesh found that his car keys were missing. He then asked everybody at the place not to move until his car keys are found. This led to an altercation between Chinna and Ramesh. Following this, the inspector said, Chinna started his car and hit Ramesh repeatedly before running him over.

Chinna then fled from the spot while other friends rushed Ramesh to a private hospital at Sarpavaram, where doctors declared him brought dead. Soon after receiving information, Kakinada DSP V. Bhima Rao rushed to the spot with Kakinada rural and city inspectors. Sarpavaram police have registered a case. Security has been beefed up to check any untoward incidents in the city. The DSP said Clues and technical teams are gathering evidence and collecting CCTV footage.

According to sources, Kampara Ramesh was once the city Congress president and later became a close associate of YSRC leaders and ministers. He had also been the floor leader of Congress in Kakinada Municipal Corporation. Ramesh was involved in land settlements and reportedly settled a land dispute involving Chinna. The corporator's death is the third murder in Kakinada during the past two decades. Previously, Lorry Transport Owners Association president Abbu Chowdary and Vegulla Siva Babu, a leader of Truck Operators' Union, had been murdered.

## CM WANTS PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE TAUGHT

From Page 1

Textbooks must be printed in Telugu and English for the convenience of students. He directed officials to draft the curriculum to create employment opportunities for the students. He said awareness on basic financial activities such as stock markets should be created among B Com students which will create scope for self-employment. He said good courses are available online and directed the officials to add those courses in the curriculum.

The CM said the introduction of unlimited internet in every village and providing laptops to all students through schemes like Amma Vodi and Vasati Devana would bring revolutionary changes in the education and skill sectors.

The CM has approved the Wi-Fi protocol project in which Wi-Fi without internet can be provided for up to 500 users simultaneously through a remote device. The range of each remote device is 100 metre. The connection can be made through laptop, tab and TV. Devices can use that facility even after the internet facility is available.

Higher education principal secretary Satish Chandra, AP higher education regulatory and monitoring commission chairperson Justice V. Eshwaraiah, APHERMC Chairman K. Hemachandra Reddy and other officials were present.



## SHORT TAKES

ARRANGEMENTS  
IN PLACE FOR  
PHASE-II POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

Chittoor district collector M. Hari Narayanan on Friday informed that all arrangements have been for the peaceful conduct of second phase of polls in 215 gram panchayats in Madanapalli division on Saturday.

In a release, the Collector said that the around 17 mandals under Madanapalle division, which has 1,072 wards and 215 panchayats, are going to polls in the division under the second phase. In all, only one gram panchayat was exempted from the polling due to various reasons.

“Notification was released for 276 gram panchayats and 2,842 wards in the division. However, 61 panchayats, 1,734 wards were declared unanimous, while 36 wards haven't received nominations. In all, around 2,44,989 men voters, 2,46,677 women voters and 5 other voters were going to cast their vote,” he said.

TIRUPATI'S BIRRD  
HOSPITAL TO  
HAVE BONE BANKDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

A national level 'bone bank' is to be set up in the Balaji Institute of Surgery, Research and Rehabilitation for the Disabled (BIRRD) here in order to take up all bone-related treatments, said Dr Madanmohan Reddy, director of BIRRD.

Addressing a media conference on Friday, Dr Madanmohan informed that all works and patient treatment services that were paused due to Covid-19 have since been revived at the BIRRD hospital.

He said that the bone bank was to help provide more specialised services to cancer patients and the hospital would perform the surgery twice a month.

He said that unlike the six to 12 months waiting for a kneecap surgery or replacement, patients can now get them done within 48 hours, he said.

He said because of Covid protocol, the number of surgeries has come down to 20-25 per day, which will now increase.

He pointed out that as their laboratory has been upgraded and specialist doctors have been appointed, there will be no need to send patients to other hospitals for a pre-anaesthesia test (BP-check).

Workers leaving to  
towns despite polls

Some aspirants offered money and other benefits

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, FEB. 12

Amid the gram panchayat elections, a majority of villages in Adoni and Kurnool divisions are seeing people migrating to the cities. Though poll candidates are requesting them to stay on till the completion of the polls, the workers are not showing any interest.

At least 15,000 families from the district have left to Guntur, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai and other cities. Some of the aspirants even offered money and other benefits to the workers to keep them back but in vain.

Veeramma, a worker from Nelakosigi, said that their livelihood was more important than the elections.

“Even though the entire family goes for work locally, they cannot earn even ₹400 in a day,” she stated.

“In cities like Guntur, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and other places, each person gets more than ₹800 per head.”

Her family including her husband and two children go to Guntur in every season. If the government provides ample employment, there is no need to go to any other place, Veeramma said.

Sai Prasad, a sarpanch candidate at Kowthalam mandal, said that in small villages with less than 1,000 population migrant workers form a big force.

“If they don't stay here, there will be no election atmosphere,” he said.

“So we are requesting them to stay here still the elections are over but many of them are not listening to us,” he added.

The number of people moving out of villages would double in the next

Polls will end at 1.30  
pm in Maoist areas

FROM PAGE 1

PPE kits have also been arranged for voters infected with Coronavirus to wear before exercising their franchise. Virus-affected people will be allowed to vote just one hour before closure of polling for the day.

Police are keeping a close tab for avoiding any untoward incidents during the second phase of polling, which will be held from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm. In agency areas under influence of Maoists, polling will close by 1.30 pm.

Counting of votes will start on the same day from 4 pm and results will be out by late night.

The state government has requested all voters to express their democratic spirit by participating in the second phase of gram panchayat polls in large numbers.

Polling will be held in all 13 districts of the state. In Srikakulam, it will be in 10 mandals of Tekkali and Palakonda revenue divisions, at Vizianagaram, it will be in 15 mandals of Parvathipuram; 10 mandals in Narsipatnam of Visakhapatnam district. 14 mandals in Rajamahendravaram and Ramachandrapuram of East Godavari; 12 mandals in Kovvur of West Godavari, nine mandals in Gudiwada of Krishna; 11 mandals in Narasaraopeta of Guntur; 17 mandals in Markapur and Kandukur of Prakasam, 10 mandals of Atmakur in Nellore, 13 mandals in Nandyal and Kurnool of Kurnool district, 19 mandals of Dharmavaram and Kalya-andurg in Ananta-pur; 12 mandals of Kadapa, and 17 mandals of Madanapalle in Chittoor district.

past, from Kosigi, Nandavaram, Aspari, Holagunda, Alur, Pathikonda, Devanakonda, Dhone, Yemmiganur, Kodumuru, Adoni, Krishnagiri and Mantlalayam mandals.

A total 970 sarpanchs and 9,984 ward members will be elected in the elections which will end on February 21. With the poll dates for the last two phases approaching, aspirants are busy striking deals to ensure that elections are avoided.

Some candidates were said to be using political and caste equations and

ADDITIONAL  
FORCES FOR  
SENSITIVE AREASDC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 12

Since many villages up for gram panchayat polls are faced with problems of factional feud, additional forces have been posted in such areas.

Only 15 gram panchayat sarpanch posts saw unanimous elections as against a total of 308 gram panchayats in the district.

Candidates backed by the YSRC and the TD are in the fray in hyper sensitive parts of Kanaganipalli, Ramagiri, Rapthadu and CK Palli of Rapthadu assembly segment, where the decades-old faction fights between the Paritala and Maddalacheruvu groups had claimed more than 300 lives -- through three generations of big families set against each other.

At least six former MLAs had been killed in faction feud and the assailants had used advanced technologies such as car bombs, ice cream bomb, TV bombs and land mines.

The second phase of polls is being held in 19 mandals where there are 756 candidates for 293 gram panchayat sarpanch posts.

financial clout to get their rivals to withdraw. Polling will be conducted on February 13 for second phase, February 17 for third phase and February 21 for the final phase.

3 SMUGGLERS  
ARRESTED, 24  
LOGS SEIZEDDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

The Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) on Friday arrested three smugglers for illegally transporting red sanders logs in a goods carrier vehicle on Karakambadi road in Tirupati and seized 24 logs from their possession.

According to Task Force DSP K.C. Venkataiah, acting on a tip-off the task force team led by CI Chandra Sekhar and FRO Prasad conducted a combing operation in the forest area close to Karakambadi road here in the city.

During the operation, the team encountered three persons loading the red sanders logs.

158 PANCHAYATS  
GOING TO POLLS  
IN NELLOREDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

Around 1,499 polling stations were set up and all necessary arrangements have been done for the conduction of elections in 158 panchayats under the Atmakur revenue division on Saturday, said Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu.

Interacting with the media persons, the collector said that the first phase of Panchayat raj elections held in the district had witnessed about 80.62 per cent of polling and they are expecting the same poll percentage in the second phase too.

“Webcasting has been arranged in 75 polling stations. The second phase polling will start as usual at 6.30 am,” he said.

Naidu misleading  
on results: SajjalaDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

Government adviser and YSR Congress general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said on Friday that Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu is misinterpreting the results of the panchayat elections. The TD has won only 510 seats while the YSRC-supported candidates won over 2,640 seats, he said.

Addressing the media here, Ramakrishna Reddy said Naidu was habituated to putting the blame for his flaws on others and “there is nothing new in his recent allegations against SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh in the conduct of the gram panchayat elections.”

“Chandrababu claims TD supporters won over 38 per cent of the seats in the first phase and also says the SEC had failed to conduct the elections in a fair manner. He has even written a letter seeking central observers to conduct the polls,” Sajjala said and questioned Naidu as to what he would gain from making such baseless allegations.

Ramakrishna Reddy said the YSRC proved its claim by displaying the candi-

dates' pictures on 'ysrcpolls.in' website.

All the 2,640 candidates who won in the first phase, the pictures of 2616 candidates and details of 24 rebel candidates were uploaded on the site, he said.

He said about 90 per cent of the YSRC-supported candidates will win the panchayat elections in the next phases, as Chief Minister Jagan fulfilled every poll promise and won massive praise through launch of various welfare schemes.

Reddy said no one would believe in Naidu's allegations against the SEC, who indeed went against the state government by misusing his constitutional powers and putting the government officials under psychological stress.

The YSRC general secretary alleged that the TD platform was getting vacant as “the candidates are leaving and there is no use listening to Naidu's monologues and zoom meetings.”

AUTORICKSHAW DRIVER ARRESTED  
FOR ROBBING A SANITATION WORKERDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

The sleuths of Balaji Nagar Police Station on Friday arrested a person on charges of robbing and assaulting a sanitation worker in Nellore city limits on 4th of this month. The accused has been identified as Alla Nagendra, 25, an autorickshaw driver hailing from Nazir Thota in the city.

According to DSP J. Srinivasulu Reddy, the victim boarded an autorick-

shaw at Atmakur bus stand centre when she was going to her work. The accused has diverted the vehicle into an isolated place near to Lakshmi Prasanna Honda showroom on the mini bypass road and stole away money, purse and mobile phone from the victim.

The sanitation worker later lodged a complaint with Balaji Nagar Police, who registered a case with Cr.No.21/2021 u/s 356, 382 IPC and launched an investigation into the matter.

## Nani confident of good show in GP polls

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

YSR Congress will win 11,000 sarpanch seats in the ongoing gram panchayat elections, claimed minister for civil supplies Kodali Venkateswara Rao (Nani) here on Friday.

Exuding confidence, he said that this was despite

the false propaganda being carried by Telugu Desam to divert public attention for their political gains.

He said that N. Chandrababu Naidu was never concerned about villages or public welfare, which was reflected in the first phase results.

Addressing a press conference, he said that it is

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's governance that is driving the YSRC win-spree in all local body elections. He said that the TD cadre will abandon Naidu after the results.

On the door-delivery of ration supplies, Nani stated that Andhra Pradesh is the only state to have achieved that dis-

inction besides being the only one to distribute sor-text rice.

The minister pointed out that although the Chief Minister had brought the initiative with 9,260 vehicles and had created employment for thousands of people from backward communities, TD leaders were deliberately politicising

it by holding back its implementation in villages.

He claimed that the scheme was rolled out on February 1, but citing the election code, a few political parties with the support of SEC Ramesh Kumar and partisan media have stopped its implementation in rural areas.

Vexed volunteers ready to  
dump Tirupati civic bodyDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

Like many other civic bodies in the state, the Municipal Corporation of Tirupati (MCT) is also finding it difficult to fill up ward volunteer posts that are lying vacant for more than a year now.

Despite releasing noti-

cations four times in the last one year, the recruitment drive is evoking a lukewarm response.

Meanwhile, many volunteers working on the ground are also disillusioned with the authorities, who are allegedly ignoring the difficulties faced by them.

When the government

launched a recruitment drive for the post of village/ward volunteers, youth from across the state stormed the registration portal to submit their applications and crack the job.

Each appointed volunteer was given the responsibility of handling at least 50 households.

SEC surrendered  
to YSRC, says TDDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

Telugu Desam on Friday accused the State Election Commission (SEC) of surrendering to YSRC in the first phase of gram panchayat elections held in Andhra Pradesh.

Making the accusation, TD politburo member Varla Ramaiah asked SEC to act independently and take stringent measures to conduct the remaining three phases of panchayat polls in a free and fair manner.

Addressing a press conference here, Mr Varla Ramaiah explained that in the first phase, the SEC had succumbed to psychological blackmail and mind games being played by YSRC Congress leaders.

Even Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy himself intimidated the State Election Commissioner in the name of caste and tar-

geted his efficiency. As a result, the SEC could not effectively carry out its constitutional duties, he stated.

The TD politburo member further demanded that SEC disqualify MLA Jogi Ramesh for openly threatening people that all pensions and benefits being made available to them by the state government will be cancelled if YSRC candidates do not win in their areas.

He said the TD is also dissatisfied with how the commission let go minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy even though he threatened to blacklist IAS and IPS officers if they cooperated with the SEC. He regretted that the commission did not bother to appeal against the High Court order that provided relief to the minister. He pointed out that because of this, YSRC was able to ensure unanimous polls.

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SHORT TAKES

MP COPS PROVIDE SECURITY TO KANGANA

**Bhopal, Feb. 12:** Madhya Pradesh police have put in place thick security cover around Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut in the wake of a threat by some state Congress leaders that they would not allow her shoot for a film if she did not apologise to farmers over her tweets, an official said on Friday.

Shooting for *Dhaadak*, Ranaut's new film, is going on in Sarni area of Betul district. Sarni City Superintendent of Police (CSP) Abhay Ram Choudhary said, "Security has been tightened for the actress after MP home minister Narottam Mishra directed Betul Superintendent of Police Simala Prasad to do so."

Police personnel equipped with batons and firearms are deployed around the coal handling plant (CHL) near a power project, where the shooting is on, he added.

"Police will man gate numbers two and four of the CHL, from where actors usually enter the shooting venue," Choudhary said.

An inspector has been assigned to oversee Ranaut's safety at the resort, located around 45 kms from Sarni town, where she is during for the shoot, he said.

"We will ensure that she does not face any disturbance during the shoot," the CSP added.

ASSAM CUTS FUEL PRICES BY ₹5, DUTY ON LIQUOR BY 25%

**MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, FEB. 12**

Assam government on Friday announced to cut petrol and diesel prices by ₹5 and reduced the duty on liquor by 25 per cent. The new rates will come into effect from Friday midnight.

The announcement has come months before the Assembly election and especially at a time when fuel prices have been touching new highs across the country.

While presenting a vote-on-account for six months, finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told the Assembly that the move will result in losses of nearly ₹80 crore revenue per month.

"When the Covid-19 was at its peak, we had increased taxes on petrol and diesel. With the Covid-19 situation improving and the additional burden on the health sector reducing, the state cabinet has decided to withdraw the additional taxes on these fuels," Sarma said.

"Effective from Friday midnight, prices of petrol and diesel will decrease by ₹5 per litre. As a result, Assam will have the record of providing cheapest petrol in the country after Gujarat. Even prices of diesel would be the lowest after Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh," he stated. Sarma further announced that additional taxes of 25 per cent imposed on liquor products at the peak of Covid-19 has also been withdrawn.

INDIA RECORDS STEEP DECLINE IN COVID-19 CASES

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 12**

India on Friday recorded 9,309 fresh cases and 87 deaths due to Covid-19 as the country's total active caseload saw a sharp decline, falling to 1.35 lakh.

The positive cases now comprise only 1.25% of the total cases and the day to day change of active cases in the last few weeks is showing a consistent decline, said Union health ministry officials.

The distribution of new cases in India in the last 24 hours shows a positive picture with only one state reporting over 1,000 cases while the rest of the states and UTs reporting less than 1,000 new cases. Four states and union territories have not reported any new cases in the last 24 hours. These are Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Ladakh, Tripura and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

A significant decline in the daily deaths too has been noticed as 18 states/UTs have not reported any new deaths in the last 24 hours while 13 states/UTs have reported between 1-5 new deaths.

National Recovery Rate is 97.32 per cent, which is one of the highest globally. Officials said the continued high rise in the recoveries has led to progressively improving national Recovery Rate.



TMC Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi after resigning as MP during the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

TMC MP Trivedi resigns, says party no longer in Didi's hands

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 12**

In yet another major blow to West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi dramatically announced his resignation on the floor of the House on Friday, saying he felt "helpless" over the political violence in his state. He added, "The kind of violence that is happening in Bengal, it is a threat to democracy. I feel very strange sitting here. I think of what I should do. I think of Rabindranath Tagore. Obey party discipline? Of course, but I feel stifled. My soul is saying I sit here and say nothing, what is the point? I resign."

KHARGE ALL SET TO BE LEADER OF OPPOSITION IN RAJYA SABHA

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 12**

Senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge is all set to replace retiring member Ghulam Nabi Azad as the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha. There were several frontrunners to the post of LOP but the scales were loaded in favour of Kharge as he is a loyalist and has the experience of leading the Congress from 2014-2019 in Lok Sabha.

He was sent to Rajya Sabha after he lost the 2019 Lok Sabha election. He was also handling the affairs of Maharashtra till recently as the General Secretary of the AICC. Others who were in reckoning included Anand Sharma, P. Chidambaram and Digvijaya Singh. In the end it was loyalty and seniority of Kharge that ensured his selection.

He is a nine-time Karnataka MLA and two-time Lok Sabha MP. He has also held the important portfolios at the center of Railways and Labour.

Ghulam Nabi Azad was given an emotional farewell by the House and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who broke into tears while heaping praises on the Congress leader.

In his speech, Prime Minister said it would be difficult for anyone to fill the shoes of Ghulam Nabi Azad as he cared not only about his political affiliation but also about the country and Rajya Sabha.

Azad was a member of the Upper House from Jammu and Kashmir, which does not have an Assembly currently after it was made a Union Territory with the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution.

Hence, it was difficult to repeat him and at present there is no vacancy. He officially retires on February 15.

He said he was feeling "suffocated" in the TMC which he said was "no longer in the hands" of Mamata Banerjee. Trivedi's resignation came two days after he endorsed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech in the Lok Sabha in which he had called for a key role for the private sector.

Trivedi, a former railway minister, announced his resignation in the Upper House during a debate on the Budget, saying he can't speak about the violence in his state. He handed over his resignation to Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and it has been accepted. He explained to Naidu that he had resigned of his own will and there was no pressure on him to quit.

Minutes after his resignation, BJP general secretary and West Bengal in-charge Kailash Vijayvargiya said Trivedi was welcome in the party.

Trivedi said, "If you sit here quietly and cannot do anything, then it is better that you resign from here and go to the land of Bengal and be with the people. The way violence is taking place in our state, sitting here, I am feeling perplexed as to what I should do."

Talking to reporters after submitting his resignation, he said, the TMC is no longer in Mamata Banerjee's hands. It has been taken over by a corporate professional who doesn't understand politics. And there is no forum within the party to air our views."

Trivedi had endorsed

Modi's Lok Sabha speech on Twitter, saying, "I am personally in agreement with this. The way forward is to let our young talented minds innovate, create and distribute wealth. Pay Govt levies, create jobs. For that, our Govt officers (babus) too, need to encourage the youth." He was trolled for his tweet with many saying he may switch from the party.

TMC Rajya Sabha deputy leader Sukhendu Sekhar Ray said that Trivedi was "ungrateful" and had betrayed the trust of the masses. "For the last so many years he (Trivedi) did not say anything. Now all of a sudden, just months before the Assembly polls, he has complaints. This shows his true colours," Ray said.

12 workers killed, 36 hurt in fire mishap in TN factory

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIRUDHUNAGAR, FEB. 12**

As many as 12 workers were killed and around 36 injured in a fire accident in a cracker manufacturing unit near Sivakasi in Virudhunagar district on Friday.

The accident occurred at around 11 am when more than 120 persons were working in Mariammal Fire Works at Achankulam village near Satur. The accident is suspected to have been caused by mishandling of the chemical mixture in the process of manufacturing fancy type crackers. It damaged 20 work sheds fully, killing five persons including a woman on the spot while seven more succumbed to burns at the hospital. Around 36 injured persons were undergoing treatment at the government hospitals in Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, Satur, Kovilpatti.

Fire and rescue personnel from the fire stations at Sivakasi, Virudhuagar and Satur had to struggle for four hours to contain the spread of the fire further and to put it out by 3 pm, according to the district fire officer Ganesan.

District collector R. Kannan said after inspecting the accident spot that those workers who suffered more than 50 per cent burns were referred to Madurai Rajaji government hospital for further treatment. A detailed enquiry would be conducted, which will help



Police personnel inspect after an explosion ripped through a fireworks factory near Sattur in Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu on Friday. — PTI

identify the exact cause of the fire that sparked the explosion.

The local villagers, who first rushed to the rescue of the workers on hearing the deafening sound of the blast, however, complained that eight workers were made to work in a shed against the permitted four.

This caused congestion that prevented workers from running out when the accident occurred, said a villager.

ITBP command unit in Leh likely

Spl unit will operate independently, will focus exclusively on Ladakh sector

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 12**

In view of the increasing incidents of border disputes with China in the Ladakh region, the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which is the Indo-China border guarding force is likely to set up a special command unit in Leh.

The move is significant as this unit will operate independently of the ITBP's western command based at Chandigarh and will focus exclusively on the security situation in the entire Ladakh sector.

At present the ITBP's Western Command based at Chandigarh, is largely responsible for border areas of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

But following recent incidents of incursions by Chinese Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) in some parts of the Ladakh sector there is a growing view within the home ministry that a separate specula command unit should be set up exclusively for the Ladakh region for ITBP as this had now become an "extremely sensitive sector."

"The special command unit based in Leh will ensure quick and timely action as a team of senior officers will be permanent stationed who can take decisions seeing the ground situation. They will not have to wait for decisions from the Chandigarh based Western command. Since the security situation in Ladakh is constantly evolving we need to take decisions according to the increasing Chinese activities in the region," a senior home ministry official said.

The 90,000 strong ITBP, with 56 service battalions and several other technical and specialised units, is responsible for the peacetime management of the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, with some of its posts being located at heights of 20,000 feet. During the ongoing stand-off with China, the forces bolstered its presence along the LAC, particularly in the Ladakh sector where the deployment of ITBP has been substantial enhanced.

In addition, latest surveillance equipments and weapons have also been provided to the ITBP unit deployed in the entire Ladakh region.

US welcomes India, China move

**Washington, Feb. 12:** The US has welcomed the ongoing efforts by India and China to de-escalate the situation in eastern Ladakh and said it would continue to monitor the situation closely as both sides work toward a peaceful resolution.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday announced in Parliament that India and China have reached an agreement on disengagement in the North and South banks of Pangong lake in eastern Ladakh that mandates both

WAR OF WORDS



**Why has he asked the Defence Minister to make the statement, the Prime Minister should say – I have given Indian land to China, this is the truth. Finger-4 is our territory, that is where our post used to be. So, now we have moved from finger-4 to finger-3. Why has the Prime Minister Modi given up Indian Territory to the Chinese? This is the question that needs to be answered by him and by the Defence Minister**

— **Rahul Gandhi**, Congress leader

**A new edition of Congress circus today, again due to @ Rahul Gandhi. Why is he bent upon falsely claiming that disengagement is a loss for India? Is it a part of INC-China MoU? With the armed forces leading the disengagement strategy, isn't this an insult of our brave forces? No Indian land has been given up by the government as part of the current disengagement process. If anyone committed the sin of giving up thousands of sq km, it is one corrupt, cowardly dynasty that has broken the country to keep their power intact**

— **J. P. NADDA**, BJP president



Army chief: China's move led to distrust

**PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 12**

Indian army chief General M.M. Naravane said on Friday that the rising footprints of China in India's neighbourhood and its attempts to unilaterally alter the status-quo along "our disputed borders" have created an environment of "confrontation and mutual distrust." "The Regional Security Environment is characterised by Chinese belligerence in the Indo-Pacific, its hostility towards weaker nations and relentless drive to create regional dependencies through initiatives like the BRI," said Army chief during a seminar on 'Evolving Security Challenges in the North East and Way Forward.' Gen Naravane said that the resultant Sino-US rivalry has created regional imbalances and instability.

Army Chief noted that Nepal, India's traditional long term partner, which has witnessed heavy

Chinese investment, is going through a period of political volatility.

"While Bhutan has been cautious in its approach, we have seen an upswing in our relations with Bangladesh. India is celebrating Swarnim Vijay Varsh to commemorate its splendid victory over Pakistan in the 1971 War for Liberation of Bangladesh. The sight of the Tri-Service Contingent from Bangladesh marching down Rajpath on Republic Day bodes well for our future relations, although growing radicalisation in society remains a serious concern," said the Army chief.

He pointed out that the ongoing dynamics in these neighbouring countries directly impacts the security environment in India's North East.

"A large number of initiatives are already underway to leverage military diplomacy with our Eastern Command playing the spring-board for fostering stronger bilateral relations," he said.

HARMFUL | CONTENT On Feb 4, Twitter was asked to take down 1,178 a/cs with links to Pak Twitter: Won't block a/cs of journalists, leaders

**New Delhi, Feb. 12:** Twitter has blocked over 97 per cent of the accounts and posts flagged by the IT ministry for provocative content and misinformation around farmers' protest, sources said.

This followed a meeting between Twitter representatives and the information technology secretary on Wednesday evening where the US-based microblogging platform was issued a stern warning to comply with local laws or be prepared for action.

The ministry had questioned Twitter's delay in taking action on its order to block provocative content that could impact public law and order, whereas the American company had been quick to crack down when a similar instance occurred at US Capitol Hill.

According to the sources, Twitter has now complied with the orders and over 97 per cent of the accounts flagged have been blocked.

Twitter did not respond to queries on the matter. On February 4, Twitter was asked to take down 1,178 accounts with links to Pakistan and Khalistan supporters that were spreading misinformation and provocative content related to farmers' protest.

Prior to that, the government had sought blocking of 257 tweets and handles in connection with the agitation by farmers over the new agricultural laws. Twitter had complied with

● **THE MINISTRY** had questioned Twitter's delay in taking action on its order to block provocative content that could impact public law and order, whereas the American company had been quick to crack down when a similar instance occurred at US Capitol Hill.

● **THE GOVERNMENT** had made it clear that it will not negotiate with the platforms while insisting on compliance with its orders.

the orders only to restore the accounts hours later.

Twitter on Wednesday morning had said it has suspended over 500 accounts and blocked access to several others within India, but maintained that it would not block accounts of "news media entities, journalists, activists and politicians" as doing so "would violate their fundamental right to free expression" guaranteed under the

country's law. It, however, yielded to the orders later after the crucial meeting on Wednesday evening.

In a statement after the meeting, IT ministry had stated that the microblogging platform had been asked to take strong action against "well-coordinated" campaigns "designed to create disharmony and unrest" in the country.

Monique Meche, Twitter Vice President Global

Public Policy and Jim Baker, Deputy General Counsel and Vice President Legal, had affirmed Twitter's commitment towards following Indian laws and rules.

The executives had also requested for better engagement between the Indian government and the company's global team. Sources said Twitter's latest move to block the flagged accounts is itself a validation that the government's orders were backed by sound reasoning and logic.

The government had made it clear that it will not negotiate with the platforms while insisting on compliance with its orders as it believed that a private commercial entity in India

cannot unilaterally decide on public law and order, ignoring the democratic values of the country.

IT ministry was of the view that Twitter, being an intermediary, was required to take immediate action after receiving the government's notice to block handles, but did not move with haste to take down "atrocious" hashtags and "incendiary" content even amid a volatile situation.

IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had recently emphasised that the government is all for freedom of speech and expression and that it remains investor-friendly, but disrespecting democratic values is not acceptable. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

DANISH INTEL  
ARRESTS 14 FOR  
TERROR PLOT

**Copenhagen, Feb. 12:** Fourteen people arrested in Denmark and Germany suspected of planning an attack with explosives had “militant Islamist” motives, Danish intelligence services said on Friday.

Thirteen people were arrested at the weekend in a suburb outside Copenhagen. Denmark’s PET intelligence service said Thursday, confirming another arrest had been made in Germany.

“The operation took place due to suspicions that a terror attack motivated by militant Islamism was being prepared,” PET said in a statement.

The 13 arrested in Denmark were remanded in custody suspected of “planning one or more terrorist attacks or being accessory to attempted terrorism,” PET said.

TIANWEN-1  
PROBE SENDS  
VIDEO OF MARS

**Beijing, Feb. 12:** China’s space agency released video footage from its spacecraft circling Mars on Friday, two days after it successfully entered the planet’s orbit in Beijing’s latest ambitious space mission.

In the video, published by state broadcaster CCTV, the surface of the planet is seen coming into view out of a pitch black sky against the outside of the Tianwen-1, which entered the orbit of the Red Planet on Wednesday.

White craters are visible on the planet’s surface, which fades from white to black through the video as the probe flies over the course of one Martian day, said official news agency Xinhua.

The five-tonne Tianwen-1 — which translates as “Questions to Heaven” — includes a Mars orbiter, a lander and a solar-powered rover and launched from southern China last July.

UK DEVELOPS  
TEST TO DETECT  
WOMB CANCER

**London, Feb. 12:** British scientists announced on Friday they had developed a test to detect womb cancer using urine samples, explaining the method could replace a painful and invasive procedure currently in use.

At present, clinicians diagnose the cancer by taking a biopsy, a process which requires a narrow telescope called a hysteroscope, to examine inside of the uterus and remove cells. Nearly a third of women who undergo the procedure have the process repeated because of technical difficulties or intolerable pain, the research showed.

Thousands of women in Britain who do not have womb cancer also undergo the procedure, with huge financial implications for the country’s state-run National Health Service (NHS).

The study from Manchester University has developed a new detection tool which examines urine or vaginal samples that can be collected by women on their own at home.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Communications, showed analysis of the samples correctly diagnosed 91.7 percent of women with womb cancer.

18 BAGS OF  
HACKED-UP BODY  
PARTS FOUND

**Mexico City, Feb. 12:** Prosecutors in the western Mexico state of Jalisco say that police have found 18 plastic bags full of hacked-up body parts on the outskirts of the city of Guadalajara. Police found one human limb near a highway overpass, which led them to the heap of taped-up bags in a gully nearby, the agency said late Thursday. The severed limbs are being examined to determine how many corpses the parts belonged to.

In November, authorities recovered 113 bodies and additional human remains from a secret grave in the town of El Salto, just outside Guadalajara. A total of 189 corpses were discovered in the town throughout 2020.

The state is home to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico’s most violent and powerful. More bodies have been found in secret graves there than in any other state in recent years. The cartel has been fighting a breakaway faction in and around Guadalajara for years.

Myanmar protests swell as  
US sanctions coup leaders

Over 23,000 prisoners released as part of prison amnesty, no word on Suu Kyi

**Yangon, Feb. 12:** Huge crowds thronged cities around Myanmar to demand the return of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Friday for a seventh straight day of protests, after Washington announced sanctions on the generals behind last week’s coup.

A torrent of anger and defiance has brought hundreds of thousands of people out in nationwide rallies demanding the country’s generals relinquish power.

Demonstrations have so far largely been peaceful, but police fired rubber bullets on students while dispersing a sit-down protest in the city of Mawlamyine, arresting at least five.

With teachers, bureaucrats and air traffic controllers among the government employees walking off the job to demand an end to junta rule, the country’s new military leader Min Aung Hlaing told striking workers to return to their offices.

“Those who are away from their duties are requested to return to their duties immediately for the interests of the country and people without focusing on the emotion,” he said, in a speech reported by state media.

The new US sanctions target Min Aung Hlaing and other top generals, after President Joe Biden



Protesters holding signs with the image of detained Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi take part in a demonstration against the military coup in front of the Chinese embassy in Yangon on Friday.

— AFP

announced his administration was cutting off the military’s access to \$1 billion in funds.

Ahead of another day of mass rallies, state media announced the release of more than 23,000 inmates as part of a prison amnesty. Friday was a public holiday in Myanmar and mass pardons to empty the coun-

try’s overcrowded prison system are common on significant local dates.

More than 260 people have been detained in the days since the coup and about 20 released, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group.

But there was no indication that Suu Kyi or any of

her allies were among those set to be freed.

“There is a serious concern that the sudden release... is to clear space for the detention of political prisoners,” the AAPP said. Massive rallies were back underway in the commercial hub of Yangon on Friday, including a contingent of Premier League fans who

put aside their club rivalries to protest the coup.

“I hate the military coup more than Manchester United!” read one sign.

But further east in the port city of Mawlamyine, police moved quickly to clear a sit-in protest by university students, and footage showed officers hauling away several demonstrators.

— AFP

Trump impeachment trial  
lawyers to urge his acquittal

**Washington, Feb. 12:** Lawyers for Donald Trump take the Senate floor on Friday to rebut the Democratic-led impeachment of the former president for inciting insurrection, with Republican lawmakers then widely expected to vote to acquit.

Democratic impeachment managers rested their case on Thursday after two days of often emotional presentations.

Now the Republican property tycoon’s lawyers will get a chance to respond. They are expected to make arguments brief, hastening the Senate verdict.

“There’s no reason for us to be out there a long time. As I said from the start of this thing, this trial never should have happened,” one of the lawyers, David Schoen, told Fox News.

The impeachment team charged Trump with stoking an insurrection after losing re-election to Joe Biden on November 3.

According to the case against him, the former president began to lay the groundwork for the riot within weeks of refusing to concede with claims

Twitter suspends pro-Trump  
activist group for violations

**San Francisco, Feb. 12:** A conservative activist group notorious for its use of undercover footage and publicity stunts was permanently suspended from Twitter on Thursday, after the group reportedly violated the platform’s policies on sharing private information.

Project Veritas, a brash team of right-wing activists which has long been one of former US President Donald Trump’s most fervent backers, was banned for “repeated vio-

lations of the companies anti-doxxing policies”, the group’s founder James O’Keefe said in a tweet.

The suspension came a day after the group posted a video in which its journalists confronted Guy Rosen, Facebook’s head of integrity and security, outside his home.

In a statement shared to multiple US outlets, Twitter said the group had been “permanently suspended for repeated violations of Twitter’s private information policy”, but

did not specify which tweets had broken those rules. The group had over 7,00,000 followers on Twitter at the time of its suspension.

O’Keefe’s account was also removed from the platform, though it returned after only a few hours. Project Veritas and O’Keefe came to prominence for their provocative sting efforts aimed at exposing “corruption” among progressive activists or liberal elected officials.

— AFP

that he’d only lost because of mass voter fraud.

On January 6 he staged a fiery rally near the White House, calling on the crowd to march on Congress, which was in the process of certifying Biden’s victory.

The mob then invaded the Capitol building. Five people, including a police

officer and a woman shot during the unrest, died as a result of the mayhem.

Impeachment managers insist that Trump, who has never expressed remorse for his encouragement of the violent crowd, is so dangerous he should be barred from holding office again.

But the former presi-

dent’s lawyers are set to argue that his speech was rhetorical and that he cannot be held responsible for the actions of the mob.

They also argue that the trial itself is unconstitutional because Trump is now out of office, although the Senate rejected this claim earlier this week.

— AFP

## Biden in ‘dilemma’ on Afghan pullout

**Kabul, Feb. 12:** US President Joe Biden faces “serious dilemmas” in Afghanistan as a deadline to withdraw troops nears and the Taliban show no sign of ending their bloodshed, a top US official warned.

The new US leader has ordered a review of the deal Washington cut with the Taliban last year,

which promised the withdrawal of all foreign forces by May 1 in return for security guarantees from the militants and a commitment to peace talks with the Afghan government.

The talks are progressing painfully slowly, but scarcely a day goes by without a bomb blast, attack on government

forces, or a targeted assassination somewhere in the country.

“Violence level remains very, very high... which is shocking and deeply disappointing,” a senior US State Department official told AFP this week on condition of anonymity.

“It is unquestionably damaging the atmosphere for any kind of a settle-

ment of Afghanistan’s conflict.” The Taliban routinely deny responsibility for the attacks — and many are claimed by the rival jihadist group Islamic State — but Washington has no doubt who is to blame.

“In our view, the Taliban are responsible for the vast majority of the targeted killings that we have

seen,” the official said, adding they had created “an ecosystem of violence”.

“It is clearly intended, I think, to demoralise citizens... to add to doubts that people have about their government and to add to the aura of inevitability of (a Taliban) victory,” he added.

— AFP

Americans to be  
vaccinated with  
200 mn doses

**Washington, Feb. 12:** US President Joe Biden announced plans to vaccinate most Americans by the end of July with the help of 200 million newly acquired doses, as the country’s inoculation campaign kicked off a new phase in drugstores and supermarket pharmacies, some of which will offer shots as of Friday.

Even as the Biden administration inked deals to acquire “100 million more Moderna and 100 million more Pfizer vaccines” and Covid-19 cases fall in Europe, the World Health Organisation warned against rash reopenings, in a sobering reminder of the long global battle ahead in taming the pandemic.

“The decline in cases conceals increasing numbers of outbreaks and community spread involving variants of concern,” said WHO Europe director Hans Kluge.

“At this point, the overwhelming majority of European countries remain vulnerable,” he added, pointing out the “thin line between the hope of a vaccine and a false sense of security.”

More than a million cases are still registered every week across the 53 member states in the UN agency’s European region, which includes several Central Asian countries.

With the latest vaccine purchases, the United States — the world’s hardest-hit country with more than 4,70,000 deaths — is on track “to have enough supply for 300 million Americans by the end of July,” Biden said, meaning enough inoculations for all eligible people.

The US immunisation

OZ ORDERS CITY  
WITH 6 MILLION  
INTO EMERGENCY  
LOCKDOWN

**Melbourne, Feb. 12:** Australia ordered more than six million people into an emergency Coronavirus lockdown on Friday, throwing a showpiece tennis tournament into disarray as the pandemic’s economic cost was laid bare in badly hit Britain.

The decision to confine the people of Melbourne and surrounding areas to their homes for five days illustrates the tough choices faced by many nations as they struggle to balance reopening and keeping infections under control.

“It’s rough. It’s going to be a rough few days for everyone,” said tennis star Serena Williams, reacting to the lockdown news moments after her latest victory.

The move comes as the Covid-19 death toll heads towards 2.4 million, with 107 million people sickened since the virus emerged in China a little over a year ago.

— AFP

campaign got off to a shaky start in December, and even as recently as Thursday, Los Angeles moved to temporarily close five major inoculation centers including its giant Dodger Stadium site, due to vaccine shortage.

Mass Covid-19 vaccination programs are being ramped up in many countries in the race against more contagious variants, and governments are urging populations to continue to cope with closures as the inoculation campaigns move forward.

Worldwide deaths now stand at nearly 2.4 million, with the Middle East surpassing 1,00,000 fatalities on Thursday.

— AFP

Ex-EU banker to  
be Italy’s new PM

**Rome, Feb. 12:** With almost all the political parties behind him, Mario Draghi on Friday entered the final straight in his bid to form a new government to lead Italy through the Coronavirus pandemic.

The former European Central Bank chief, called in after the outgoing centre-left coalition collapsed, could visit President Sergio Mattarella as early as Friday evening to be officially named prime minister.

Draghi has spent the last nine days assembling a government of national unity to manage the deadly pandemic that hit Italy almost exactly one year ago, triggering a deep recession.

After securing the support late Thursday of the final key player, the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), Draghi has almost all the main parties on board, from leftists to the far-right League.

“The Draghi government is born,” headlined Rome-based daily Il Messaggero, while Milan’s Corriere Della Sera added: “Draghi in

the home stretch.” The 73-year-old economist must present a list of ministers when he visits Mattarella, but he has kept extremely coy, speaking in public only once since being asked to form a government.

With the outgoing government due to hold one last cabinet meeting on Friday, there was speculation that Draghi might wait until Saturday before heading to the presidential palace.

Italy has high hopes for its new leader, dubbed Super Mario after vowing to do “whatever it takes” to save the euro single currency in the 2010s debt crisis.

Mattarella asked him to step in on February 3 after outgoing premier Giuseppe Conte resigned following weeks of political turmoil in his M5S-led coalition.

The president emphasised the urgency of moving quickly to fill the political vacuum as Italy’s Covid-19 death toll approaches 1,00,000 and the country battles its worst recession since World War II.

— AFP

## COVID | IMPACT

Match, the group says it added more than a million users in the last quarter of 2020

## Online dating apps on front line of loneliness

**Paris, Feb. 12:** Dating apps are booming in lockdown — no longer just a way of hooking up but also of simple interaction at a time when the Coronavirus inflicts loneliness on millions.

Rodrigo, 18, had never considered joining a dating app until the months of lockdown boredom finally forced his hand.

“At the start, we told ourselves the crisis will pass, that we just have to have a

bit patience. But when temporary becomes permanent, you have to try new things,” he said.

With school mostly online and limited options for going out with friends, “I had the feeling I was spending my entire life with my parents.” Rodrigo now visits dating apps every day. More than just chasing the thrill of a hook-up, they have become a place to simply hang out. He has made friends with

four people his age through the apps and chats with them daily — a way of “relieving the stress and frustration” of the pandemic, he says.

“It’s all we have left,” he sighs, especially since Portugal was plunged back into lockdown last month. Match, the group that includes several leading apps such as Tinder, Hinge and Meetic, says it added more than a million users in the last quarter of

2020, up some 12 percent to around 11 million worldwide.

“It sounds like a cliché, but the apps have really kept me from sinking,” said Sebastian, a 19-year-old student in France.

“When we can’t go to college, and the bars, restaurants, and cinemas are all closed, we spend entire days on our own, stewing. It’s horrific,” he said.

Exchanges start by text before moving on to video

chats — a function that dating apps have increasingly focused on since the pandemic ruled out the usual next step of a physical date. Martha, a 41-year-old Londoner, has found Zoom dating a bit of a slog, even if it saves her having to bother with perfume.

“The biggest challenge I found with Zoom dating... was how strange it is to watch yourself talking and laughing,” she said.

— AFP



A Valentine’s Day decoration, signed by first lady Jill Biden, sits on the North Lawn of the White House, on Friday, in Washington.

— AP







## SHORT TAKES



Amritha (left) and Srihitha Mandava pose with their trophies at the Boulder Hills Golf and Country Club in Hyderabad.

## Mandava sisters bag golf titles

**Hyderabad:** Hyderabad girls Srihitha and Amritha Mandava won the age group titles at the Young Master Southern India Classic golf tournament played at the Boulder Hills Golf and Country Club in Hyderabad. Srihitha tallied 231 over 36 holes with round scores of 78, 73 and 80 to take the top spot in the Girls 12-13 years category ahead of Anvithi Gangisetty (271) and Riya Jadon (281). Amritha got a total score of 242 over 36 holes in three rounds (79, 81, 82) to emerge winner in the Girls 14-15 section. Lavanya Jadon (249) and Amishi Jain (300) were second and third respectively. Drishti Karumbaya was the best in Girls 16+ with a score of 220 (73, 72, 75) ahead of Jasmine Sachdev (234 — 77, 78, 79) and Vidushi Keni (236 — 77, 78, 81). Aarya Goyal and Sanjana took the first and second spots in the Girls 7-9 category.

## State cue sports from Feb. 22

**Hyderabad:** The Telangana Cue Sports Association is organising the Telangana State Ranking Snooker & Billiards Championship (junior and senior) from February 22 to March 7. The top five players in senior snooker and finalists in junior snooker, senior and junior billiards will represent Telangana at the Nationals. Himanshu Jain, Nabil Lakdawala, Md Ghouse, Khizar Raof, D. Arvind Kumar (senior snooker); Mushtaq Hussain, Vishwanath and Vibhas (junior snooker & billiards) are among the top players participating in the championship.

## Rashmika in singles final

**Hyderabad:** Hyderabad girl Shrivalli Rashmika entered the final of the singles event at the MPTA AITA Open Women's Tennis tournament being played at Chennai. In the semifinals played on Friday, Rashmika defeated Pooja Ingle of Maharashtra in straight sets at 6-4, 6-1.

## Hyderabad FC hold East Bengal 1-1

**Vasco:** Aridane Santana scored a last-gasp equaliser to help Hyderabad FC hold SC East Bengal to a 1-1 draw and dent the Kolkata side's hopes of making it to the playoffs of the Indian Super League here on Friday. Bright Enobakhare scored in the 59th minute for SC East Bengal, who seemed to be cruising towards the win until the stoppage-time leveller from Santana. The result extended the Nizams' unbeaten run to nine games. With the draw, Hyderabad are at third spot with 24 points from 17 matches. — PTI

## Live on TV

## TENNIS

**Australian Open:** First round matches from 5.30 am on Sony Six, from 1.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

## CRICKET

**India vs England:** Second Test, Day One, from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1

**Pakistan vs South Africa:** Second T20 from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 1

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Leicester City vs Liverpool from 6 pm; Crystal Palace vs Burnley from 8.30 pm; Manchester City vs Tottenham Hotspur from 11 pm; Brighton vs Aston Villa from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

**Italian League:** Napoli vs Juventus from 10.30 pm; Spezia vs AC Milan from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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



Indian captain Virat Kohli during a practice session at the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Thursday.

— BCCI

## PITCHED BATTLE

## Chepauk surface in focus again as India look to hit back

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 12

The wound hasn't healed. And the dust is yet to settle. Four days after being battered by the visiting England team in their own den, India have the unenviable task of lifting themselves for yet another 'pitched' battle at the same venue. Round two starting here at the M.A. Chidambaram stadium on Saturday will be a test of character for Virat Kohli & Co.

India find themselves in an unexpected situation. It's only the second time this decade that India have started a bilateral series (minimum three Tests) at home on a disappointing note. When it happened last time, against Australia in February 2017, they roared back with vengeance to clinch the series 2-1 eventually.

Much like in the opening game, the focus will once again be on the pitch. A different strip with black clay on the top layer will be used this time around. With just a three-day gap, the groundsmen didn't have much time. Both teams know what to expect — the track will turn from day one.

England skipper Joe Root has already shown the ideal way for countering spin in subcontinental conditions. But this pitch is expected to pose a bigger challenge to Root.

Annoyed with the flat surface, Kohli had blamed his supporting spinners Shabbaz Nadeem and Washington Sundar for leaking runs. But he backed Ajinkya Rahane despite his poor run of form. Rohit Sharma, who has just one half-century



Rohit Sharma plays a shot during a practice session at the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Thursday.

— BCCI

in his last eight innings, hasn't faced much scrutiny either. Kohli still felt "all was well" in his batting unit. If not for the brilliant first innings knocks from Rishabh Pant and Washington, India would have slumped to further embarrassment.

With allrounder Axar Patel deemed fit and set for his Test debut, Shahbaz is back in the standby players' pool. If the team management decides to retain Washington for his batting ability, Kuldeep Yadav will continue cooling his heels. He hasn't played a Test since he took

a five-for at Sydney in January 2019.

England, on the other hand, have made four changes in their team. James Anderson who used reverse swing to rattle the Indian top-order has been rested. With Jofra Archer too being ruled out with an elbow injury and off-spinner Dom Bess to be replaced by Moeen Ali, England's bowling attack will sport a new look. In Anderson's absence, another experienced campaigner, Stuart Broad, will spearhead the attack. Fast bowlers Olly Stone and Chris Woakes will fight for the final spot.

## It will turn from Day One: Rahane

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 12

"I am sure it will turn from day one," India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane said it loud and clear. The flat pitch that offered no assistance to bowlers was one of the talking points after India's eight-match winning streak at home came to a halt in the opening Test against England earlier this week.

As India prepare to bounce back in the series, it's no surprise that "the wicket looks completely different."

"However, we have to wait and see how it behaves in the first session. We have to forget what happened in the first Test and focus on the job at hand. We know these conditions really well, so we have to put our best foot forward and move on," said Rahane.

Rahane's average of 37.35 in 28 Tests at home is not as impressive as his away numbers — 44.44 in 42 Tests. His last two innings of 1 and 0 have put him under the scanner. However, the Mumbai batsman doesn't want to read too much into the stats.

"We are playing at home after two years. The last big home Test series was against South Africa. If you take the records out, I'm sure you will find something there. And, it's not about individuals, it's always about the team. My focus is always on con-

tributing to the team's success. If you take out the last 10-15 Tests, you will see my performance. I don't worry about what happened in the first Test. I only worry about what the team wants from me," said Rahane.

England batsmen not only looked comfortable, but also played efficiently by employing sweep shots against the Indian spinners, but the same cannot be said of the hosts.

"It (shots that we play) depends on how they bowl. We play according to their line and length. England have come up with a plan to play sweep and reverse sweep. It's not necessary we have to copy them," further added Rahane.

When queried about the team's negative body language in the first Test, Rahane said: "There are moments when you don't have that energy but that doesn't mean it has happened because of a change in captaincy. As I have said earlier, Virat is our captain and will remain our captain. If you are trying to dig and find some masala, unfortunately you will not get it." The second Test will allow 50 per cent spectators in the 45,000 capacity stadium. Rahane is excited to have the crowds back.

"We know how much that means for us. I hope people will come enjoy the cricket," added the seasoned Test batsman.

## Hazare selection turns hazardous

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 12

Muck at the Hyderabad Cricket Association continues to fly after the flawed selection of State squad for the upcoming Vijay Hazare Trophy triggered tempers that have boiled over beyond cricket corridors.

After a memorandum was submitted to the Telangana State Human Rights Commission on Thursday, urging chairman Justice Gunda Chandraiah to look into the 'Murder of talent and grave violations of human rights by HCA' the secretaries of affiliated clubs whose players have been ignored despite consistent performances, are organising a protest at the Gymkhana grounds — Hyderabad's cricket cradle — at 11.30 am on Saturday.

The protest is "against the illegalities and autocratic decisions of select office bearers in selecting the team by violating all norms and constitutional obligations and in utter violation of Supreme Court approved registered Constitution," a note being circulated, read.

For the record, only one batsman from the Top 10 scorers in the League matches that were conduct-

ed to select State sides, has made Hyderabad's Vijay Hazare squad.

Mir Jaweed Ali of Budding Star, No.6 on the list, is the odd man out.

The bowling selection is even more baffling. Leg-spinner G. Arjun of Balaaji Colts leads the list with 45 wickets in 5 matches but has been surpassed by No.2 Ashish Srivastava who has 36 wickets against his name in 6 matches. Both are leg-spinners.

Arjun has also conceded fewer runs, has a better strike rate and has been more economical... he didn't see a googly coming.

All this leaves a bad taste in the mouth and drags the Gentleman's Game through muddled streets. It's time the HCA administrators played with a straight bat.

Aspiring players had risked contracting Covid to turn up for the local league matches after they, along with their parents, had to sign declarations stating they would not hold the HCA responsible should they catch the dreaded virus.

Turns out that there were no first aid facilities at the grounds to treat players who got injured during the course of play.

Now, this selection snub has hurt them even more.

## HYDERABAD'S TOP 10 BATSMEN

Player	M	Inn	Runs	Best	Ave
1. A. Varun Goud	7	11	788	227	87.56
2. Rohit Rayudu	8	13	741	165	61.75
3. P. Akshath Reddy	7	13	726	176	60.50
4. Yash Kapadia	7	12	706	194	70.60
5. Md Junaid Ali	7	12	704	170	58.67
6. Mir Jaweed Ali	6	10	697	237	77.44
7. M. Abhirath Reddy	5	8	694	222	115.67
8. M. Pratyush Kumar	8	16	673	119	44.87
9. A. Takshit Rao	6	11	631	151	63.10
10. Sarthak Bharadwaj	5	9	625	159	78.13

(Tabulated as matches played, innings batted, total runs scored, highest score, average)

## Hurt Djoker hints at exit from Open

**Melbourne, Feb. 12:** Defending champion Novak Djokovic admitted his Australian Open might be over after an injury-hit win on Friday as fans were kicked out ahead of a state-wide Coronavirus lockdown.

In the now-empty stadium, a grimacing Djokovic, who needed repeated treatment on an abdominal injury, recovered from losing the third and fourth sets to beat Fritz 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-2. "I know it's a tear, definitely, of the muscle so I don't know if I'll manage to recover from that in less than two days. I don't know if I'm going to step out on the court or not, I'm just very proud of this achievement tonight," said the Serb.

Meanwhile, Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev pulled off the biggest shock when the world number 114 blitzed eighth seed Diego Schwartzmann into submission 6-3, 6-3, 6-3. Karatsev is making his Grand Slam debut at Melbourne Park and is incredibly yet to drop a set. Meanwhile, ice-cold Dominic Thiem rallied from two sets down to tame flamboyant Nick Kyrgios 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4. In women's singles, Naomi Osaka had to deal with a butterfly landing on her nose but was otherwise little bothered as she breezed into the last 16. The third seed clinched an easy 6-3, 6-2 victory over Tunisian 27th seed Ons Jabeur in 1hr 18min. In another match, Serena Williams she wore down Anastasia Potapova 7-6 (7/5), 6-2. — Agencies

## Tanay, Mickil, Karthikeya, Ritwik, Vamshi on top

## Mujaheed, Raheem, Gunawith, Haji, Ayub and Sachith lead performers in A-2 division league

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 12

Tanay Thyagarajan scored his second successive century to lift Budding Star to a four-wicket victory over R. Dayanand in the Hyderabad Cricket Association's A-1 Division one-day knockout tournament.

Tanay scored 118 in 101 balls with the help of 12 fours and four sixes as Star replied to Dayanand's 209 with 213 for 6 in 38.1 overs.

Mickil Jaiswal also continued his run scoring spree. The MP Colts batsman cracked 170 in 151 balls smashing a dozen boundaries and an equal number of sixes to set up his side's 29-run win over Sporting XI, for whom speedster Karthikeya Kak took 5 for 49. Tanmay Agarwal was unfortunate to miss the century mark by two runs — the Sporting batsman fell on 98.

In the A-2 Division, G. Ritwik and Vamshi Ramavath topped the performers' list. Ritwik took 8 for 42 as SK Blues beat Saint Sai while Vamshi's



Mickil



Karthikeya



G. Ritwik



Vamshi



Mujaheed



Raheem



Ayub Khan



Rahman



Khalid



Varun Tej



Vasistha

238 boosted Noble to 551 for 8, a total Mayura found just too hard to overcome.

Mujaheed Khan (7 for 32) of Azad CC, Md Abdul Raheem (7/75) of Team Speed, Hyderabad Cricket Academy's Gaddam Gunawith (6/17), Syed Haji (6/38) of Sri Shyam, Md Ayub Khan (166) of Vijaypur Willowmen and Sachith Naidu (145) of Abhinav Colts were the other top performers in the two-day league matches.

## Brief scores:

## A-1 DIVISION ONE-DAY KNOCK-OUT TOURNAMENT

■ MP Colts 279 in 50 overs (Mickil Jaiswal 170 — 151b, 12x4, 12x6, G. Rahul Radesh 55, Karthikeya Kak 5/49 — 10-149-5) bt Sporting XI 250 in 48.3 overs (Tanmay Agarwal 98, G. Sadhan 53, Karthikeya Kak 34, G. Gireesh Goud 4/45).

■ R Dayanand 209 in 47.3 overs (K. Nitesh Reddy 68, Nishanth Yadav

42, Manish Rai 3/29) lost to Budding Star 213/6 in 38.1 overs (Tanay Thyagarajan 118 — 101b, 12x4, 4x6, Bhavesh Seth 57, C. Hitesh Yadav 4/53).

■ Gemini Friends 265 in 49.3 overs (M. Anurag Reddy 46, Tilak Varma 66, Maruthi Reddy 58, Yash Gupta 63) bt SCRSA 222 in 45.5 overs (Shyam Sunder 37, Suresh M 46, Sudhakar 35 n.o., Tilak Varma 4/50).

## A-2 DIVISION (TWO-DAY) LEAGUE

■ Saint Sai 160 in 55.2 overs (Arjun 50, G. Ritwik 6/42 — 17-2-3-42-8) lost to SK Blues 164/5 in 39 overs (Ibrahim Khan 84). Points: SK Blues 5, Saint Sai 0.

■ Noble 551/8 in 90 overs (Vamshi Ramavath 238 — 142b, 35x4, 8x6, Y. Akash 57, Krishna Kant T 53 n.o., B. Ambarish 52, Shabaz 3/109) bt Mayura 90/7 (all out) 36.5 overs (Adeeb 53, Rahul Reddy 4/7). Points: Noble 5, Mayura 0.

■ Anu CC 87 in 31.5 overs (Mujaheed Khan 7/32 — 14-2-32-7) lost to Azad CC 90/3 in 25.1 overs (K. Ganesh Kumar 44 n.o.). Points: Azad CC 5, Anu CC 0.

■ Team Speed 340 in 62.2 overs (M. A. Jayanthi 91, Deepanshu Chowhan 85, Md Abdul Raheem

7/75) bt Elegant 187 in 66.5 overs (Shaik Abdul Razzaq 86 n.o., Rohan Prem 5/54). Points: Team Speed 5, Elegant 0.

■ Hyderabad Cricket Academy 295 in 77.4 overs (K. Pranav 77, Sahil Parikh 57, Shaik Zaher Abbas 39, Ch. Anvith Reddy 37) bt Shanti XI 182 in 54.2 overs (S. Venkatesh 39, Prateek Raj 44, Gaddam Gunawith 6/17 — 8-2-37-6). Points: Hyderabad CA 5, Shanti 0.

■ Sri Shyam 145 in 63 overs (Mujeeb Ur Rehman 35, Thakur Uttarkish Singh 47, Md. Babillal 3/44) lost to Deccan Wanderers 146/9 in 40.2 overs (Jawad Khan 42, Syed Haji 6/38 — 16-2-38-6). Points: Deccan Wanderers 5, Sri Shyam 0.

■ Vijaypur Willowmen 559 in 88 overs (Karun Yadav 64, B. Balaji 73, Md Ayub Khan 166 — 126b, 27x4, 2x6, Saketh Reddy 32, Md Nayeemuddin 42, Williams 55, Dhanush 48, Abhinav Kumar 3/112) bt Hyderabad Panthers 173 in 49.5 overs (M. Wilson 54, C. B. Suresh 56, M. M. Williams 4/45). Points: Willowmen 5, Panthers 0.

■ Abhinav Colts 424 in 67.1 overs (Varun Tej 52, Harish Reddy 48, Sachith Naidu 145 — 131b, 21x4, 4x6, Varun Reddy 53, Sunder Naxa

59, Preetham Reddy 3/105, Satya Narayana 3/29) bt Bharath CC 289 in 67.1 overs (Preetham Reddy 35, Sai Revanth Rahul 102 — 122b, 16x4, Varun Tej 5/36 — 18-3-36-5, Harish Reddy 3/49). Points: Abhinav Colts 5, Bharath 0.

■ Kishorens CC 124 in 39.1 overs (Surya Prakash 36, Mihir Dange 5/32 — 11-1-32-5) lost to Rushiraj CC 127/4 in 42.5 overs (P. Sunil S 38, A. Nikshit 30, B. Sai Chandra 35 n.o.). Points: Kishorens 0, Rushiraj 0.

■ Secunderabad Gymkhana 285 in 89 overs (Md Adil 103 — 161b, 14x4, 1x6, A. Sai Prachotan 30, Anuj Singh 55, N. Saketh Reddy 3/60) bt Warangal District 213 in 49.2 overs (Banoth Kumar 115 — 116b, 17x4, 2x6, Bandari Suresh 36, P. Ravi 5/27 — 8-0-27-5). Points: Hyderabad 5, Warangal 0.

■ Ours 310 in 87.3 overs (Kaushik Chevendra 58, B. Pranav Reddy 123 — 181b, 16x4, Sai Kiran 41, Arham Kothari 3/40, P. T. Sai Krishna Murthy 3/30) bt Crown 268/7 in 90 overs (P. T. Sai Krishna Murthy 65, Siddharth Jain 62 n.o., Arham Kothari 54). Points: CCOB 5, Crown 0.

■ Lords 183 in 52.2 overs (Md Azheruddin 62, Jasper 42, Shrunlith Reddy 5/52 — 15-2-0-52-5) lost to RUCC 185/5 in 43.1

overs (Akshay E 121 — 124b, 18x4, 2x6). Points: RUCC 5, Lords 0.

■ Sunshine CC 178 in 59.2 overs (Syed Ali 51, Vasistha Karthikeya 5/41 — 16-3-41-5) lost to International CC 182/1 in 39.4 overs (Vasisth Karthikeya 69 n.o., Ankit Kumar 91 n.o.). Points: International 5, Sunshine 0.

■ Vijayanand 360/9 in 90 overs (Abhinav 69, Ravi Teja 117 — 109b, 17x4, 1x6, Akshar 41, Chakravarthi 39 n.o., Praveen 4/61) bt Manikumar 91 in 35.5 overs (Charan 42/0). Points: Vijayanand 5, Manikuma 0.

■ HBCC 295 in 58.5 overs (Md Khalid 110 — 90b, 13x4, 6x6, Kaushik 46, Aparinithi Tiwari 32 n.o., B. Sujun 3/53) bt PKMCC 268 in 73.2 overs (S. Raj Navaneeth 39, Aditya Singhal 94, K. Harsha Vardhan 38, N. Shashank Yadav 33). Points: HBCC 5, PKMCC 0.

■ CCOB 316 in (Abdul Rahman 109 — 181b, 16x4, Sai Kiran 41, Arham Kothari 3/40, P. T. Sai Krishna Murthy 3/30) bt Crown 268/7 in 90 overs (P. T. Sai Krishna Murthy 65, Siddharth Jain 62 n.o., Arham Kothari 54). Points: CCOB 5, Crown 0.

■ Adams XI 145 in 36.1 overs (Shashank Reddy 40, Imam Shareef 4, S. Prajwal Rao 4/48,

Gautam 3/4) lost to XI Masters 149/2 in 15.3 overs (S. Prajwal Rao 106 n.o. — 53b, 21x4, 2x6. Points: XI Master 5, Adams 0).

■ WMCC 196 in 38.5 overs (SV Aditya Varma 58, Vilash Reddy 37, Karthik Kumar 3/40, Vikram Reddy 3/43) lost to HUCC 199/5 in 39.3 overs (Laxmi Sree Madhan 102 n.o. — 113b, 16x4, 1x6, Nikunj Patel 40, Anish Reddy 4/27). Points: HUCC 5, WMCC 0.

■ Shalimar CC 135 in 36.2 overs (Abhid Ali 4/40) lost to Adilabad District 138/2 in 19.1 overs (L. Mahesh 62, D. Venkatesh 5 n.o.). Points: Adilabad 5, Shalimar 0.

■ Mega City 101/9 (all out) in 37 overs (Jai Kiran 35 n.o.) lost to Nizamabad District 132/3 in 28.3 overs (Dama Ajith 56 n.o.). Points: Nizamabad 5, Mega City 0.

■ Venus Cybertech 147 in 57.5 overs (Divesh Bajaj 45) lost to Rakesh XI 148/6 in 56.2 overs. Points: Rakesh XI 5, Venus Cybertech 0.

■ Pasha Beedi 198 in 72.2 overs (Kush Jog 37, Faiz Ahmed 34 n.o., Raghava Pattapu 4/48) vs Deccan Wanderers 200/3 in 46.5 overs (Jawad Khan 68, Aawez Ahmed 40, Raghava Pattapu 55 n.o.). Points: Deccan Wanderers 5, Pasha Beedi 0.

■ Acrylic CC 128 in 43 overs (Arvind G 46, V. Sai Teja 4/16) lost to Karimnagar District 132/3 in 14.2 overs (P. Rishwanth 50, A. Rujly 53). Points: Karimnagar 5, Acrylic CC 0.

■ Tirumala 182 in 73 overs (Vishal K 62, Jayant Reddy 56, R. Rohit 4/55) lost to Swastik Union 183/3 in 61.5 overs (D. Abhiram 54, R. Alankrith 74). Points: Swastik Union 5, Tirumala 0.





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