

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | THURSDAY | 11 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 33.0°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 37%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 33/19 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES (+12,201)
DEATHS (+95)
1,08,70,501 1,55,375

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+157) (+1)
TS: 2,95,988 1,613
(+50) (+1)
AP: 8,88,605 7,161

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,76,17,237
DEATHS 23,57,328
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219
worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula Amavasya
till 12.37 pm
Star: Sravanam till 2.07 pm
Variyam: 6.10 pm to 7.47 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.36 am to
11.22 am; 3.10 pm to 3.55 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Akhir 28, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.48 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM
MOONSET 01.16 PM
MOONRISE 02.36 AM

COUNTER POINT



I sold my bag, books,
tiffin box... which I feel
are a burden to me, for
a good price, dad!

SHORT TAKES

Unmanned space mission in 2022-23

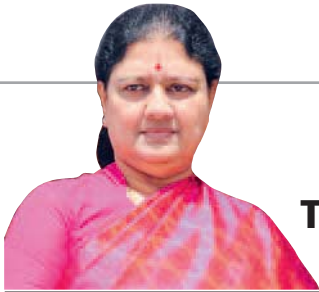
New Delhi: The human spaceflight module of Gaganyaan will be launched after the second unmanned mission planned in 2022-23, minister Jitendra Singh said on Wednesday. It was initially envisaged that the ₹10,000 crore Gaganyaan mission aims to send a three-member crew to space for five to seven days by 2022.

Tsunami warning for New Zealand

Wellington: A powerful undersea earthquake struck north of New Zealand on Wednesday, prompting tsunami warnings in parts of the region. The US Geological Agency said the magnitude 7.7 quake was centered at a depth of 10 km southeast of the Loyalty Islands. The shaking was not expected to cause significant damage or fatalities on land.

Priyanka calls Modi heartless

Saharanpur/Lucknow: Taking Prime Minister Narendra Modi on over the new farm legislation, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday said his heart beats only for his billionaire friends and promised that her party will scrap the laws if it comes to The Congress leader called the three agri-marketing laws demonic.



NATION | 4

TN CM says he is not afraid of Sasikala



WORLD | 5

EU nod for \$815 billion Covid-19 recovery

SPORTS | 8

Serena storms ahead at Oz Open



Search by night



A general view of the damaged Dhauliganga hydro power project in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand on Wednesday. At least 30 people have died so far and over hundred are still missing after part a of the Nanda Devi glacier broke off triggering massive floods in Rishi Ganga and Dhauri Ganga rivers on February 7.

— PTI

SC stays HC order on asset sale

Govt objected to the court casting aspersions without evidence

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed an order of the Andhra Pradesh High Court castigating the wisdom of the state government, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and that of the lawyers representing the government.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian stayed the December 30, 2020, order in an appeal by the Andhra Pradesh government.

Senior lawyer Sajan

Poovalya assisted by advocate Mahfooz Ahsan Nazaki appeared for the state government.

The High Court by its December 30 2020 order had questioned the wisdom of the government, the Chief Minister and advocates representing the state on different counts including the conduct of some lawyers representing the government.

The critical observations by the High Court had come on an application by the state government seeking the recusal of a judge on the grounds that the said judge had prejudged the issue without hearing

the state government.

The Jagan Mohan Reddy government was aggrieved with an observation in the course of an earlier hearing where the court had questioned the decision of the state government to auction certain state properties wondering whether the state had become bankrupt.

“How could the government auction the properties of the state? Had the government become bankrupt to auction government properties? We will declare there is a breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state and hand over administration

to the Central government.”

The assertion that this statement was made by one of the members of the bench has been disputed.

The petition by the AP government has said that a perusal of the contents of the “unprecedented” order, which is unrelated to the issue raised in the matter, would show that the HC has not stopped merely at castigating the government/its functionaries and the advocates but even goes on to cast aspersions on the top court collegiums on the mere an assertion without proof of the judge.

NOMINATIONS FOR 4TH PHASE OF POLLS BEGIN

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Filing of nominations for the election of sarpanchs and ward members to gram panchayat under phase-4 began in the state on Wednesday.

The State Election Commission issued a schedule for conduct of phase-4 polls and, accordingly, filing of nominations is being accepted from 10.30 am to 5 pm and the last date for receipt of nominations is February 12 up to 5 pm.

Scrutiny of nominations will be held on February 13 and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is February 16. Polling will be held on February 21 from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm and counting of votes will begin from 4 pm onwards the same day.

■ Page 2: 3,299 villages to vote in phase-4

Without team effort, we can't win matches: Jagan

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday stressed the need for team work for effective governance and secure the popular mandate once again in 2024.

He was participating in the meeting of departmental heads and secretaries convened by Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das to review the implementation of the welfare initiatives 'Navaratnalu'. Jagan Mohan Reddy sprang a surprise by not only exhibiting his cricket knowledge, perhaps for the first time in official meetings, but also exuding bonhomie. He had lunch with the bureaucrats after the meeting and spent a good amount of time talking to them informally, according to sources.

“It is not enough if cap-

tain alone plays and we can't win matches without team effort,” he said.

Referring to successful launching of all the poll promises within a year of coming to power, the Chief Minister said, “We played the opening overs extremely well and now into the middle overs when batsmen tend to relax a bit. It will be difficult to make up in the slog overs if we don't continue the spirit of opening overs all through the match.”

The Chief Minister asked the officials to continue to extend cooperation to his government and help it successfully secure the mandate in 2024. “The meeting went on more at an informal level though the Chief Minister drove home the point,” a senior official told Deccan Chronicle. The Chief Minister also appreciated Aditya Nath

Das for taking the initiative to call the secretaries meeting which he said should be a regular feature.

He asked officials to freely express their views and come up with suggestions for further improving the delivery mechanisms. He expressed satisfaction for success of the administration being taken to the village level unlike the previous government which stopped at the mandal level.

Officials were having doubts over implementing the poll promises with Rs 60,000 crore debt left behind by the TD government. “Not only did we launch Navaratnalu but have also successfully implementing them,” he said adding that Rs 90,000 crore was deposited to people's accounts under various Direct Benefit Transfer schemes.

HC LETS MANTRI SPEAK TO MEDIA, NOT AGAINST SEC

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Panchayat raj and rural development minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy got a relief on Wednesday as the high court has lifted a gag order on him, but with a rider.

A division bench of Chief Justice Aroop Kumar Goswami and justice Ch. Praveen Kumar held the hearing and issued the order lifting the curbs imposed by the state election commission on the minister. The SEC had barred him from speaking to the media.

The court, however, directed the minister not to speak anything adverse against the State Election Commission. “The minister must stick to the word he gave the court that he would not make any adverse remarks on the SEC and on the gram panchayat polls,” the court ruled.

The court allowed the minister to speak to the media on other subjects.

In a separate development, the High Court reserved its order on a government plea to allow the vehicles carrying essential commodities to go ahead with door delivery to the beneficiaries under the public distribution system.

The vehicles attracted action as they painted in colours that resemble the YSRC's officials.

YSRC wins in 81% of villages in ph-1 elections

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

The YSRC on Wednesday claimed it won 2,640 gram panchayats out of the total 3,249 in the first phase of panchayat polls.

The party in a press release refuted the claims of Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu that the TD won 38.74 per cent seats. The YSRC put out details of winning candidates on its party website.

The YSRC claimed that only 501 candidates supported by the TD won the elections out of 3,249 panchayats which is only 15.4 percent. The YSRC also stated that the TD got only 54 seats out of total 320 and YSRC got 262 in Srikakulam district. The YSRC won 273 panchayats and the TD 61 out of a total of 340 in Visakhapatnam, YSRC won 305 panchayats and TD only 47 out of total 366 in East Godavari district, YSRC bagged 171 and TD 32 out of total 239 in West Godavari district, YSRC 192 and TD 35 out of total 234 in Krishna district and YSRC 258 and TD 62 out of total 337 in Guntur district.

■ Page 2: TD wins only 70 in Naidu's home district

4-HOUR RAIL ROKO ON FEBRUARY 18 BY FARM UNIONS

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

Days after ‘Chakka Jam’, the protesting farmers’ unions on Wednesday announced a four-hour nationwide ‘rail roko’ (railway blockade) on February 18 to intensify their agitation against the three farm laws.

The unions also decided to make a toll free movement of vehicles on highways in Rajasthan from Friday.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha leader Darshan Pal said a series of events were planned to intensify the agitation which was going on for over two months at Delhi borders.

The SKM is an umbrella organisation of 41 farmers’ unions. Just a month ago, farmers had stopped toll collection at Hanumangarh, Ganganagar and Bikaner in the state.

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DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

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■ Page 2: TD wins only 70 in Naidu's home district

539 VILLAGES SKIP POLLS TO PICK SARPANCH

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

In the second phase gram panchayat polls, 539 positions of sarpanches and 12,605 ward members were elected unanimously. The State Election Commission in a statement issued here on Wednesday said that 167 mandals were notified for conduct of polls under phase-2, scheduled for February 13.

Among them, 3,328 offices of sarpanch were notified for election and of them, 539 were elected unanimously. This has resulted in the need to conduct elections to 2,786 offices and 7,510 contestants are in fray.

With regard to ward members, 33,570 positions were notified in 168 mandals for conduct of polls. Of them, 12,605 were elected unanimously. This means elections will be conducted for 20,796 ward members and 44,879 contestants are in the fray.

YSRC sweeps Nellore, PKM

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, FEB. 10

The ruling YSRC proved its upper hand in both SPSR Nellore and Prakasam districts in the first phase of gram panchayat elections held on Wednesday.

In Nellore district, YSRC Congress nominees for sarpanch posts bagged 132 out of 162 gram panchayats in the first phase of the election held in Kavali division consisting of Kavali and Udayagiri constituencies of the district. The Telugu Desam

ended up with 26 panchayats, BJP with one, while independents bagged four panchayats.

Among the 132 panchayats secured by the ruling party, there are 17 rebel candidates, sources in the YSRC Congress said.

In Prakasam district, the YSRC Congress secured 182 panchayats as against 37 by the Telugu Desam and independents bagged three gram panchayats in the first phase of elections.

■ Page 2: TD vows to better performance in next phases

SHORT TAKES

SRISAILAM
TEMPLE DECKS UP
FOR SHIVARATRIDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL FEB. 10

Srisaillam temple is gearing up for the Maha Shivaratri festival, an important event in the temple calendar.

Executive officer of Sri Brahmaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy temple of Srisaillam K.S. Rama Rao said that Maha Shivaratri Brahmotsavams are likely to be organised from March 4. In a press statement on Wednesday, he said that the 11-day Brahmotsavams will conclude on March 14.

The EO made it clear that festivities would be organised following Covid-19 norms. Devotees visiting the temple during the occasion have to wear masks and should maintain social distancing besides sanitising hands at regular interval, he stated.

'YSRC RUINING
PEOPLE'S FAITH
IN DEMOCRACY'DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Wednesday accused ruling YSR Congress Party of undermining constitutional institutions in the state, as it feared public will react against the state government if free and fair gram panchayat elections are held. In this regard, he pointed out that elections have finally been possible only after intervention of courts, that too after Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, his ministers and MLAs tried their best to stall polls.

Even now, when elections are finally being held, ruling YSRC leaders are "misusing" government machinery to indulge in election excesses. He alleged that opposition party candidates are being kidnapped or their nomination papers torn. Lokesh alleged that properties of rival candidates are being torched in an attempt to arm twist them.

The MLC described YSRC as an unprincipled party whose CM has no values or commitment to well being of people.

YSRC-BACKED
CANDIDATES BAG
2,637 VOTES: MINDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayana has claimed that people have overwhelmingly supported YSR Congress government in the first phase of gram panchayat elections by electing candidates owing allegiance to YSRC for the posts of sarpanch and ward members.

Refuting claims of Chandrababu Naidu about Telugu Desam winning majority seats in the first phase, the minister ridiculed that it is only Naidu who can utter such plain lies. Satyanarayana declared that they are ready to prove their claim of winning 82 percent seats in the first phase elections.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, he asserted that YSRC supporters won 2,637 out of 3,244 panchayats in the first phase elections, followed by Telugu Desam nominees winning 508 and independents bagging 99 seats. The percentage of elected TD nominees is less than 15 percent, he maintained.

The minister accused Chandrababu Naidu of distorting facts, observing that Naidu was fudging numbers as he was unable to digest his party's massive defeat. He asserted that people have reiterated their faith in Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's government, who has kept public welfare on top of his agenda.

Giving district-wise breakup of Phase 1 results, the minister said in Srikakulam, of the total 321 seats, YSRC supporters bagged 264, TD 53 and others won 4. Of 344 seats in Visakhapatnam, 269 went to YSRC, 55 to TD and 20 to others. Of 362 in East Godavari, the numbers are YSRC 311, TD 44, and 7 others. Of 239 in West Godavari, YSRC got 170, TD 34 and others 35. Of 225 seats in Krishna, YSRC got 185, TD 37 and others 3. Of 337 seats in Guntur, YSRC got 264, TD 62 and others 11. Of 227 in Prakasam, YSRC got 186, TD 35 and others 6. Of 164 in Nellore, YSRC got 133, TD 28 and others 3. Of 206 seats in Kadapa, YSRC got 179, TD 23 and others 4. Of 193 seats in Kurnool, YSRC got 159 and TD 34. Of total 169 seats in Anantapur, YSRC got 146, TD 21 and others 2 and of total 457 seats in Chittoor, YSRC got 371 seats, TD 82 and others 4.

YSRC says Jagan strongly
opposes RINL privatisation

Asks people to unite under single banner to protest against Centre's decision

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 10

Rajya Sabha member and in-charge for north Andhra affairs of ruling YSRC, V. Vijaysai Reddy, said on Wednesday that Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is strongly opposed to the central government move for total disinvestment of RINL, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Addressing a meet organised by national general secretary of INTUC Mantri Rajasekhara near the administrative building of RINL, Vijaysai Reddy said people of all shades should unite under a single banner to agitate against the central government decision.

Stating that Visakh Utku was Andhrula, he said the people should fight for its protection. In a bid to privatize the steel plant, the central government did not allocate captive mines, and this resulted in a cost escalation for steel production. The YSRC will fight this along with various trade unions till the government changed its stand, he said.

"If necessary, I will take trade union leaders to New Delhi, meet Prime Minister Modi and urge him to change the decision," Vijaysai Reddy said.

The INTUC general secretary said his union would organise a dharna along with the steel plant employees on February 12 and a mass dharna with all the employees, their families and the public on February 18.

State president of the CITU Ch. Narsinga Rao said the response to the agitation from all corners of the state was overwhelming. He said the formation of the Visakh Utku Parirakshana Samithi would be announced along with its office-bearers on Thursday.

Meanwhile, former MLA of Gajuwaka, Palla Srinivas, has announced an indefinite relay hunger strike from Wednesday at the Gajuwaka TDP office. Senior leader and Visakhapatnam North MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao and several trade union leaders called on him and extended their support to the cause.

TD WINS 55 GPs
IN ATCHANNA
SEGMENT IN
TEKKALIDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 10

The Opposition Telugu Desam Party won 55 Gram Panchayats in Tekkali assembly segment represented by party president Kinjarapu Atchannaaidu.

The TDP defeated YSRC candidate Kinjarapu Appanna in Nimmada, the home village of Kinjarapu brothers. This village had landed Atchannaaidu in trouble and sent him to remand after he allegedly threatened Appanna, asking him to drop out of the contest.

Curiously, Appanna polled only 157 votes against TDP-backed Kinjarapu Suresh Kumar who polled 1857 votes. In all, YSRC won 236 panchayats in Tekkali assembly segment, TDP 55 and YSRC rebels 22. As per final results, 22 candidates won unanimously.

The TD-supported candidate won Nimmada panchayat by defeating YSRC-backed candidate by a huge margin. Nimmada, the home village of Kinjarapu family, drew attention in the state after Atchannaaidu was arrested for threatening the YSRC-backed candidate Kinjarapu Appanna against standing in the election.

The audio clip of the threat went viral, leading to Atchannaaidu's arrest. Appanna however polled only 157 votes against Kinjarapu Suresh Kumar's 1,857 votes.



Large number of employees from Visakhapatnam Steel Plant take part in a protest against the privatisation move on Steel Plant by the Central government in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

3,299 villages to vote in phase-4

From Page 1

The fourth phase of polling will be held in 13 districts in the state. Out of a total number of 3,389 gram panchayats, 3,299 are going to the polls. Similarly, out of a total number of 34,376 wards, 33,434 are going to the polls.

The State Election Commission has set up a call centre at its office (0866-2466877) to receive complaints from the people related to the conduct of polls. The SEC said that people must register genuine complaints and assured to resolve them expeditiously.

The call centre will function until completion of phase-4 polls on February 21. The SEC vowed to ensure zero tolerance for any poll-related violations.

● **THE SEC said that people must register genuine complaints and assured to resolve them expeditiously.**

TD says will perform
better in next phases

From Page 1

The election was held in 15 mandals including Ongole, Chimakurthy, Inakollu, Karamchedu, Kothapatnam, Parchur, Vetapalem, Yeddadanapudi and SN Padu among others.

Speaking about the results to media at Kovur segment on Wednesday, TD district general secretary

C. Venkateswar Reddy said the party managed to win seats despite hurdles created by the ruling YSRC.

He expressed confidence in improving the performance in the next three phases of the election. He alleged that the YSRC men ransacked TD office in Kavali out of anger and jealousy.

TD wins only 70 in
Naidu's home district

From Page 1

The YSRC won 177 panchayats and TD 44 out of 229 in Prakasam district, YSRC 141 and TD 20 out of total 162 in Nellore district, YSRC 177 and TD 24 out of 206 in Kadapa district,

YSRC 158 and TD 31 out of 193 in Kurnool district, YSRC 143 and TD 22 out of 169 in Anantapur and YSRC bagged 371 panchayats in Chittoor district and TD limited to only 70 out of 454 in Chittoor district.

TD makes gains in first phase
of GP polls in Nandyal divisionDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 10

Telugu Desam-backed supporters from Nandyal division made decent gains in the first phase of gram panchayat elections.

In the Allagadda area, former minister Bhumu Akhila Priya's supporters gave a tough fight and won respectable positions. Out of a total of 193 GPs, 51 were declared unanimous. In the remaining 142 that went to polls, TDP-backed candidates won 36 and results of seven are pending.

Akhila Priya supporters won six in Uyyalavada,

● **IN THE Allagadda area, former minister Bhumu Akhila Priya's supporters gave a tough fight and won respectable positions. Out of a total of 193 GPs, 51 were declared unanimous. In the remaining 142 that went to polls, TDP-backed candidates won 36 and results of seven are pending.**

five in Dornipadu, four in Chaglamarri, and three each in Sirivellala, and Allagadda mandals. Nandyal, Gopad, and Mahanadi mandals have returned one sarpanch each on TDP support as was the case with Atmakur and Bandi Atmakur.

District TDP President Somisetty Venkateswarlu

said the results were not a surprise as the party is strong at the grass-root level. He said TD activists and sympathizers were bullied into submission at the village-level and had to put up a brave fight. The results are a testimony to the fact that the party has a strong base and its traditional voters

TD MADE TO EAT
HUMBLE PIE IN
ITS BASTIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

The Telugu Desam faced unfathomable humiliation following dismal performance in its bastions in the first phase of gram panchayat elections.

Despite the propaganda, even senior leaders failed to secure even a decent number of panchayats in their respective constituencies. This includes even Nara Lokesh himself.

In Tekkali, which happens to be the constituency of state president, K. Atchannaaidu, the TD managed to win only 23 out of the 135 panchayats which went to polls in the first phase. The welfare initiatives implemented by the government saw YSRC-backed candidates winning 112 panchayats in Tekkali.

In Tuni, constituency of Leader of the Opposition in Legislative Council, Yanamala Ramakrishnudu, the party managed to secure just three of 58 panchayats which were up for grabs while the YSRC backed candidates pocketed 54. While the numbers stated above are enough to prove how irrelevant TD has become in AP, Lokesh managing to secure just two of 18 panchayats in his home constituency, Mangalagiri reflects the fact that the party has achieved absolute obscurity.

In Undi, the constituency of TD MLA K Siva, TD won just 14 out of 70 panchayats as compared to YSRC 50. In Mylavaram, the constituency of Devineni Umamaheswara Rao, TD won three of 48 panchayats as compared to YSRC's 44. In Kondepi, the constituency of TD MLA DB Viranjanya Swamy, YSRC pocketed 10 panchayats of 18 while the TD was limited to six. In Repalle, the constituency of TD MLA Anagani Satya Prasad, the party won just 14 while YSRC secured 70. In Paruchuru, the constituency of TD MLA Eluri Sambasiva Rao, the YSRC secured as many as 75 out of 95 panchayats while the TD had to rest content with 20.

are intact, he said, adding that Akhila Priya had taken it up as a challenge.

Meanwhile, Janardhan Reddy, a farmer in Nandyal, said although TDP-backed candidates won substantially, returning officers were not declaring the results while in some places, issuing certificates of wins was being delayed, he said.

In Pandurangapura village, the model village, YSRC supported Dolavathy won with 1800 votes. This village has traditionally been YSRC stronghold. But Gopad mandal headquarters went to TDP, said Reddy,

Naidu: Pro-Desam
wave sounds
YSRC death-knellDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Telugu Desam Chief N Chandrababu Naidu stated that the beginning of the end of Jagan rule had started in the State and alleged that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had backstabbed his sister Sharmila.

Meanwhile, Naidu has once again claimed that TD would win a majority of seats in the gram panchayat elections. In fact, this is not the first time that he has made such lofty claims.

Even during the 2004 election, he claimed that Telugu Desam would romp home with an overwhelming majority.

He repeated the assertion in 2019. However, the fact of the matter is that TD faced humiliating defeat.

Naidu is now claiming big wins by TD-supported candidates in the non-party gram panchayat first phase elections.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, the former chief minister claimed that their 'party' won 1,023 panchayats out of 2,723 in the first phase, and another 32 panchayats with alliance, which is 38.74 per cent of panchayats in the first phase.

He said that the people gave their mandate against the misrule and misdeeds of the 20-month Reddy regime. He stated that the verdict in the panchayat polls marks the 'beginning of the end' of YSRC rule in Andhra Pradesh.

He lamented that the State Election Commission and the DGP had failed to take action against violence, misuse of cash, liquor and muscle power resorted to by ruling party leaders.

Referring to Y.S. Sharmila's proposed new political party, Naidu said Sharmila was a victim of yet another Jagan Mohan Reddy treachery. He stated that this time, the Chief Minister has not hesitated to cheat his own sister for which act he has to answer the public.

Almost at every platform, Reddy lectures about credibility but when it came to his sibling, he has not practised the same.

The 'Jagananna vadilina banam' (arrow released by Jagan-Sharmila) was now going in a reverse mode, the TD chief said.

Naidu should accept
defeat, says YSRCDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Advisor to government (public affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy refuted assertions of TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu about Telugu Desam winning first phase of gram panchayat elections.

"Naidu must accept defeat with honesty. YSRC Congress government's welfare schemes have helped people. Hence, they have supported ruling party supporters in the first phase GP elections," Ramakrishna Reddy maintained.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, the advisor to government pointed out that YSRC-backed candidates have bagged 82 percent of seats in the first phase of gram panchayat elections. The same streak will continue in remaining phases of these elections, becoming a pointer to success of state government's welfare schemes, he stated.

Ramakrishna Reddy accused TD leaders for distorting facts using a section of media to confuse public and influence them, even though overwhelming results are in favour of YSRC. He said that it is quixotic on part of TD to go into celebrations with the tiny number of seats it gained. He blamed TD's friendly media of misleading people with hyperbolic reportage. He countered TD's remarks on YSRC and said it is the other way round.

He quoted the yawning gap between the near sweep in Tekkali and other constituencies by YSRC, where TD had slumped.

The government advisor said the ruling party has also withstood the biased nature of State Election Commissioner who, he alleged, went overboard in the name of constitutional powers and harassed officers, acting more like a politician.

3 from Anantapur
make it to ACADC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 10

In a significant achievement, three players from Anantapur District Cricket Association (ADCA) S. Shoiab Khan, P. Girinath Reddy and B. Santhosh have been selected by Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) for the ensuing Vijay Hazare Trophy cricket tournament to be held at Indore from February 20 to 28. The three will travel to Indore

from Vizianagaram on Friday and follow the Covid protocol, Association Secretary Madhu said.

Local boy and all-rounder S. Shoiab Khan has been a regular in the senior Andhra team for the past three years. He impressed in the recent Syed Mushtaq Ali tournament and in the Andhra T 20 event in Anantapur.

All-rounder from Kadiri Girinath Reddy, has been in the Andhra squad for the last two years.

TECH | INNOVATION

Amazon to make Alexa more accessible to customers, says expert

In 3 yrs, Alexa becomes most loved voice service

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 10

Three years may not be a long enough period to establish a product in the market. Consumer products typically take more time to establish themselves in the market, but not for Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa.

Within three years of its launch, Amazon India said "Alexa has grown to be the most loved voice service" in the country. Be it asking Alexa to play their favourite music or to controlling their smart homes, it has been an integral part of people's lives.

"Be it the Echo device in

the living room, 100+ Alexa built-in devices or your favourite smartphone, it is heart-warming to see users across the length and breadth of the country across age groups find value and adopt Alexa in their daily lives," said Puneesh Kumar, Country Leader for Alexa, Amazon India.

"For us, it's always Day 1 as we learn from our customers and continue to add new features, improving Alexa's understanding on topics that matter to users locally," Mr Kumar said, adding that his company would make Alexa affordable, more accessible for customers.



Representational image

Starting 12 midnight on February 15, Amazon India said sellers on Amazon.in will have blockbuster offers for the next 24 hours on best-selling Echo Devices, attractive smart home bundles and more. Customers can also shop from the curation of smart-home accessories

from some of India's biggest consumer electronic brands.

Contrary to the general practice of youth adapting newer technologies faster than the elderly across the world, Alexa won the heart of users across generations. "Many customers shared that their

● **CONTRARY TO the general practice of youth adapting newer technologies faster than the elderly across the world, Alexa won the heart of users across generations.**

Echo device at home is enjoyed by all family members, from senior citizens to children."

Customers spoke with Alexa throughout the day, from playing music, managing to-do lists, setting alarms, telling kids' stories, controlling smart lights and appliances, to playing their Kindle and Audible audiobooks to asking for the weather,

cricket scores, and other real-time information.

It particularly won many hearts by helping them to control their smart home gadgets such as smart lights, fans, ACs, security cameras, air purifiers, TVs and more with just voice commands. In 2020, customers asked Alexa to control a smart home gadget 8.6 lakh times every day.

And it's not all. Alexa has gotten smarter. In 2020, Alexa helped many people shop on the Amazon Shopping App and responded to over 5.8 lakh requests every day to search for products, best deals, and music.

SHORT TAKES

POSCO SIGNED MOU WITH RINL IN 2019: CENTRE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 10

Union Minister for Steel Dhamendra Pradhan stated on Wednesday that the South Korean steel giant POSCO has signed an MoU with Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL) in October 2019 for the setting up of a steel plant in Andhra Pradesh.

In a reply to a question from Rajya Sabha member V. Vijaya Sai Reddy, the minister said the non-binding MoU has been signed in October 2019 between RINL and POSCO. Pursuant to the MoU, a joint working group was formed for exchange of information. The share-holding pattern has not been determined at this stage.

However, as per the MoU, POSCO wished to have at least 50 per cent share-holding. The share-holding of RINL would be worked out on the basis of evaluation of RINL's contribution of land for the setting up of the plant, the minister said.

POSCO may probably skip the Kadapa venture and the second steel plant it proposed on the vacant steel plant site, for which it had signed an MoU with the RINL in 2019.

Several changes in the POSCO plans would be seen in the next few months after the cabinet committee on economic affairs recently announced strategic sale of RINL, the flagship company of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Initially, on a request from the AP government, the Korean company evinced an interest in developing a green-field steel plant with five million tonnes per annum capacity in Kadapa. Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy laid the foundation for the plant in Sunnapurallipalli village in Jammalamadugu mandal in Kadapa district on December 23, 2019. The government signed an MoU with NMDC for supply of ore.

"The state government is still looking for investors after POSCO did not evince interest. Only land acquisition process is going on now," a source from Kadapa said.

"When the company is getting 22,000 acres of land and India's only shore-based steel plant on a platter, why should it go all the way to Kadapa or build a new plant in the RINL premises," Ch. Narsinga Rao, state president of CITU, asked.

He said the whole state has been waiting to know who could be the final bidder for the RINL. If it succeeds in taking over RINL, the Korean steel maker will emerge the market leader and have access to the South East Asian markets besides catering to the domestic needs of special steel through rail and road, Rao said. This is the second time POSCO is making a bid to build a steel plant in India. In 2005, it signed an MoU with the Odisha government but it had to abandon this due to a delay.

PROCESS FOR SECOND PHASE POLLS BEGINS

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 10

Election process began for second phase of gram panchayat elections in the district. Sensitive areas including Hindupur where film star Nandamuri Balakrishna is representing from Assembly segment, and Penukonda, decades old faction political centre among second phase of gram panchayat polls. Nomination process was started for 184 gram panchayats along with 2,042 wards in the second phase of polling and 4,99,361 voters will cast their votes in Penukonda revenue division area. However, two gram panchayats closer to Penukonda had no polls because they merged into the municipality of Penukonda. In addition, nominations were called for 379 gram panchayats and also 3,768 ward members in 19 mandals.

Official sources said 2,160 sarpanch and 7,808 ward member candidates were in fray from Penukonda division during 4th phase of polls. Even as Anantapur district claims strong hold for Telugu Desam, majority of sarpanch seats were bagged by YSRC in the first phase held in Kadiri division. Official sources said polls held for 163 gram panchayats and also 976 gram anchayat wards in the district. Collector Gandham Chandrudu said, polls were not conducted for a ward member post where candidate died due to illness.

Penukonda sub division police beefed up security at all sensitive gram panchayatss in the district.

Blessed ones



Nellore Bishop Moses Doraboina Prakasam, Vijayawada Bishop T. Joseph Rajarao offer prayers on the second day of the Mary Matha festival at Gunadala in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Sanitation worker dies day after Covid-19 vaccination

Health experts ascertaining the exact cause of one death each in AP, TS

DC CORRESPONDENTS
TIRUPATI, HYDEABAD, FEB. 10

Two persons – one each from AP and Telangana – died of suspected health complications after they went in for the Covid-19 vaccination, reports said on Wednesday.

A report from Kothagudem said anganwadi teacher Padam Chinni from Nandipadu village under Aswaraopet mandal died on Wednesday, 20 days after she took the Covid-19 vaccination. In the other instance, it was reported from Tirupati that a 50-year-old male sanitation worker died on Wednesday, a day after he was administered a Covid-19 vaccine there.

The authorities ordered an autopsy to ascertain the exact cause of his death, the report said.

The 27-year-old Padam Chinni was administered the vaccine on January 21. She developed health problems on Tuesday and was rushed to a hospital in Khammam but could not recover. Chinni's husband Padam Srinivas said she developed fever and started vomiting three days ago.

Aswaraopet medical officer Rambabu said Chinni suffered from acute blood pressure and diabetes. "She had viral fever along with liver

State keeping close tab on effect of vaccination

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

State health authorities are keeping a close tab on adverse effects that Covid-19 vaccination is having on certain people. The information is being passed on to the Centre, so that it could issue necessary directions to vaccine manufacturers for minimising or avoiding the negative effects.

Authorities point out that so far, nearly four lakh healthcare workers and frontline warriors have been administered the vaccine. About 100 of them developed adverse reaction, with two of them, including an Asha worker of Guntur and a volunteer at Palasa in Srikakulam district, dying. Three others developed health complications like convulsions. But following medical treatment, their condition is alright at present.

Sources said preliminary post-mortem report of the two deceased revealed the vaccine to be

infection," he said.

According to officials in Tirupati, Krishnaiah, 50,

the cause of death. But a series of tests, including pathology and chemical analysis, are now being conducted to confirm whether the vaccine could have caused the deaths.

Health authorities say they are uploading details of all adverse events following Covid-19 immunisation on the national web portal COVIN SAFE-VAC (Surveillance and Action for Events following Vaccination), along with reports of analysis, treatment protocols and other data, for perusal by experts at the centre. Centre, in turn, is sharing its analyses from throughout the country with manufacturers of the two Covid vaccines – Covishield and Covaxin – for follow up.

State authorities have pointed out that for every adverse effect, a treatment protocol has been set up. Accordingly, doctors are treating patients and sharing their details of symptoms, duration and response to treatment with the state-level committee on Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI). The committee, in turn, is updating such information on the national web portal.

Authorities say they have so far noticed adverse events like convulsions, body pains, fever, headache, weakness, giddiness and other health complications. Once the prescribed treatment is started, patients have turned normal.

Director of health and AEFI state committee chairperson Dr T. Geetha Prasadini said, "Except for two deaths following vaccination, we have not received major adverse events. We are sharing details of such events and reports of their analysis with the national committee of AEFI for follow up. The national panel recommends to manufacturers the changes required in production of further batches of vaccine to help minimise such adverse events."

He said, "So far, more than 30,000 beneficiaries have been administered the Covid vaccine in Chittoor district. However, till date, nobody has complained of any adverse side-effect. There. Though, were a few cases of mild side-effects, but everyone is normal now."

He said, "Krishnaiah's family said they suspected the vaccination was the reason for his sudden death. Health department officials said it was also likely he died of a normal heart attack. He had a history of heart disease, hypertension and diabetes."

He said, "Krishnaiah was administered the Covid-19 vaccine on Tuesday morning. His condition was monitored for half an hour at the booth. There were no sign of any adverse side-effect," DM&HO Dr M. Penchalaiah told *Deccan Chronicle*.

"He had a history of cardiac problems. However, we will conduct an autopsy to ascertain the cause of the death. A group of specialist doctors would meet on Thursday to discuss such eventualities following the immunisation," the DMHO said.

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Drop in smuggling of prohibited items to Tirumala

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 10

In the midst of all the depressing headlines last year due to the Covid-19 impact, there is some good news for the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which manages the affairs of the world-renowned temple of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala. While the Covid-19 lockdown was at its peak last year, there was a significant drop in cases related to the smuggling of prohibited items such as non-vegetarian food (raw or cooked), liquor, cigarettes, beedis and smokeless tobacco (SLT) products to the hill town of Tirumala. The quantity of seizure of prohibited substances to Tirumala has come down drastically last year when compared to past years.

Though these products are strictly prohibited, some miscreants, however, used to smuggle them to the hill town either to sell or for their own consumption. And, it has become a routine for the TTD's vigilance and security wing to check and seize the prohibited items from the miscreants – most of the time at Alipiri checking point, sometimes at Tirumala.

The seized items will be destroyed and cases will be booked against the miscreants.

According to official reports, in the year 2018, the vigilance and security forces had seized 2,969 liquor bottles, 2,150 cigarette packets, 2,800 beedi bundles and 8,555 packets SLT products.

After the vigilance wing stepped up vigil at the Alipiri checking point, the volume of seized prohibited items were decreased. In

● In the year 2018, the vigilance and security forces had seized 2,969 liquor bottles, 2,150 cigarette packets, 2,800 beedi bundles and 8,555 packets SLT products

● No case has been registered between March 20-June 8

2019, around 2,088 liquor bottles, 2,536 cigarette packets, 3,650 beedi bundles and 8,366 SLT products were seized.

Before the imposition of lockdown, i.e., between January and March last year, the vigilance wing had managed to seize over 125 liquor bottles, 471 cigarette packets, 602 beedi bundles and 1,328 SLT products. However, no case has been registered between March 20-June 08 when the temple was closed down for pilgrim worship, as the ghat roads leading to Tirumala were also sealed. Also, even after the temple was reopened for pilgrim worship, not a single case was reported till August.

"There was a huge dip in smuggling of prohibited items last year. The decline in seizures can be attributed to the awareness created in devotees, enhancing the vigil and frisking at all the security checkpoints and efforts put in by the vigilance and security wing. The Covid-19 induced lockdown also helped for the drastic cut in the number of seizures and cases," TTD CVSO Gopinath Jatti said.

In all, only 125 liquor bottles, 515 cigarette packets, 703 beedi bundles and 1,500 packets of SLT products were seized throughout last year. This is a way below than what was seized in the last two years – 2018 and 2019.

STATE REPORTS 50 COVID CASES, 1 DEATH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 10

Andhra Pradesh registered 50 new cases of Covid-19 and one death in the last 24 hours. The state health authorities here on Wednesday reported that out of 28,418 samples tested, 50 persons were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,34,22,878 samples tested so far in the state, 8,88,605 persons were found infected with Coronavirus and of them, 8,80,599 were recovered after treatment while 845 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus, Chittoor topped the state with 13 followed by eight each in Krishna and Visakhapatnam, five in Nellore, four each in East Godavari and Guntur, two each in Anantapur, Kadapa and Srikakulam, one each in Prakasam and Vizianagaram.

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COUNTER POINT

Narayana maintains no one believes in these tears

‘PM’s tearful farewell to Azad a drama’

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 10

CPI national secretary K. Narayana has said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tearful farewell to Rajya Sabha member Ghulam Nabi Azad is a drama intended to split the Congress party. He maintained that no one believes in these tears shed in Parliament.

Narayana accused Modi of uttering lies after lies. PM said GST will benefit states but it did not. He

asserted he would bring back black money into mainstream and then spoke no more about it.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday in Kadapa, the CPI leader said the Centre is trying to enforce new farm laws to benefit corporate entities. It is ridiculous on part of Prime Minister to ask farmers to trust him when they are all demanding repeal of the farm three laws.

He alleged that Steel



K. Narayana

Plant is actually being handed over to Posco, which has withdrawn

● Centre is trying to enforce new farm laws to benefit corporate entities. It is ridiculous on part of Prime Minister to ask farmers to trust him when they are all demanding repeal of the farm three laws

from Odisha after the Communist Party of India raised its concerns and agitated. Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's letter to

Prime Minister on VSP is a farce, he stated.

Narayana said Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu could have put in a word to PM not to sell Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

He observed that announcing incentives for unanimous panchayat elections amounts to killing democracy. CPI district leaders Eswarayya and Gali Chandra were among those present at the press conference.

SHORT TAKES

IJU FLAYS ED RAIDS ON NEWSCLICK

Hyderabad/Chandigarh, Feb. 10: The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has condemned the Enforcement Directorate raids on the digital news platform NewsClick and described them as continuation of the government's ongoing efforts to silence the media critical of its policies.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, K. Sreenivas Reddy and Balwinder Singh Jammu President and Secretary General of IJU respectively said that five journalists have been arrested in the country in the first month of 2021 creating a record of sorts. They also recalled the recent sedition charges against senior journalists who were covering developments on the Republic Day.

The news portal NewsClick has been closely covering the ongoing farmers agitation against the farm laws. The raids by ED on a small news portal and the immediate allegation of ₹30 crore money laundering betray the designs of the government, the IJU leaders commented.

Raids by obliging central agencies and FIRs by puppet police in various states against journalists are a clear and brazen effort to silence the critical media by creating fear psychosis, the IJU leaders said. They demanded the government to desist from this kind of tactics and help foster a media friendly environment crucial to the sustenance of democracy.

96 ARRESTS IN 93 SEDITION CASES IN 2019: GOVT

New Delhi, Feb. 10: As many as 93 cases of sedition were registered in different parts of the country in 2019 in which 96 people were arrested, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy said chargesheets were filed against 76 people while 29 were acquitted by the courts in 2019. The highest number of 22 sedition cases in 2019 was registered in Karnataka where 18 people were arrested, he said in a written reply to a question.

Reddy said 17 sedition cases were registered in Assam where 23 people were arrested.

A total of 11 sedition cases were registered in Jammu and Kashmir where 16 people were arrested. As many as 10 sedition cases were filed in Uttar Pradesh in which nine people were arrested, he said.

Replying to another question on whether any step has been taken to strengthen the sedition law (Section 124A of the IPC), the minister said the "amendment of laws is an ongoing process".

WILSON MOVES HC AGAINST 'PLANTED EVIDENCE'

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 10

Activist Rona Wilson on Wednesday filed a petition in the Bombay High Court seeking dismissal of the case against him in connection with the 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence. His lawyer submitted a digital forensic report from a Massachusetts-based forensic firm Arsenal Digital which mentioned that a hacker hacked Rona Wilson's laptop and planted 10 letters right before Wilson's arrest.

Advocate Sudeep Pasbola on behalf of Rona filed the petition and also attached a digital forensic report from a Massachusetts based forensic firm Arsenal Digital that mentioned that a hacker hacked Rona Wilson's laptop and planted 10 letters right before Wilson's arrest.

Advocate Pasbola had approached the Arsenal Digital to examine the electronic copy of his client's laptop.

These are the same letters which were first used by the Pune police and later by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as evidence to show Rona's complicity in Bhima Koregaon case.

Relying on these letters the Pune police in the past had claimed that the arrested accused were planning to assassinate the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On January 1, 2018, the violence at Bhima Koregaon village in Pune district left one dead and injured several others, including 10 policemen.

Violence erupted after some people, reportedly with saffron flags, pelted stones at cars heading towards the village for the commemoration of the 200 years of Bhima-Koregaon war on New Year's Day.



Women and children ride a tractor on their way to take part in farmers protest against farm reform laws near Singhu border in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

Man wanted in Red Fort violence arrested

Iqbal Singh was nabbed from Hoshiarpur in Punjab

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

The Special Cell of Delhi Police on Tuesday night nabbed a man wanted in connection with the violence at the Red Fort on Republic Day. The accused identified as, Iqbal Singh, was also carrying a reward of ₹50,000 on information leading to his arrest.

According to Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, Iqbal was nabbed from Hoshiarpur in Punjab on Tuesday night by the northern range of Special Cell.

Earlier on Monday, the Special Cell had arrested actor-activist Deep Sidhu, a "prominent player" behind the violence at the Red Fort from Haryana's Karnal bypass.

The Delhi police had announced a cash reward of ₹1 lakh for information that can lead to the arrest of actor Sidhu, Jugraj Singh, Gurjot Singh and Gurjant Singh who hoisted flags at the Red Fort or were involved in the act.

A cash reward of ₹50,000 each was also announced

DIDI: BJP USING RATH YATRA TO DIVIDE SOCIETY

Raiganj/Malda, Feb. 10: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday mocked BJP leaders for travelling on raths "as if they are gods", and alleged saffron party's rath yatra is meant to create division in the society on the basis of religion.

Accusing the saffron party of resorting to "lies" about Hinduism, Banerjee said the desperation to defeat her has stemmed from the BJP's ambition to wipe out the last opposition bastion in the country.

Addressing two back-to-back rallies in the minority Muslims dominated Uttar Dinajpur and Malda districts, Banerjee appealed to the voters to ensure victory of the TMC candidate and not waste their votes by casting them in favour of "stooge of BJP from Hyderabad", in a swipe at Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM. After impressive showing in the neighbouring Bihar, AIMIM is preparing to fight Assembly elections in Bengal where Muslim voters form a sizeable section of the electorate.

"Rath yatra is a religious festival. All of us have participated in this festival. We know Lord Jagannath, Balaram and Goddess Subhadra travel in those chariots.

"But, the BJP leaders are using this rath yatra for their own political purposes to divide the society and pit one against the other. BJP leaders are travelling on raths as if they are gods," she said.

Tikait: Not aiming for change in power

New Delhi, Feb. 10: BKU leader Rakesh Tikait on Wednesday asserted that the agitating farmers were not aiming at any change in power at the Centre but a solution to their problems as he said many of their leaders will tour different parts of the country to spread the movement.

Tikait, who had earlier said that police should have shot those who unfurled flags at Red Fort during the tractor rally on Republic Day, defended the act saying it was not treason and youths were being framed.

Addressing the protesting farmers at Singhu border, he said that the agitation against the farm laws will stretch till the Centre addresses their issues. "We do not aim change in power (at the Centre). The government should do its work. We want it to repeal the farm laws and ensure law on MSP," he said.

Tikait said that the agitation will be long drawn and continue till government starts talks with farmer leaders. "The government should hold the talks. Our committee is ready to talk," he said. — PTI

for Buta Singh, Sukhdev Singh, Jajbir Singh and Iqbal Singh for allegedly instigating protesters.

Of them, Sidhu, Iqbal Singh and Sukhdev Singh have been arrested. Police said raids are being conducted to nab the rest of them. Sidhu has been sent to seven-day police cus-

tody by a city court. On January 26, thousands of protesting farmers who reached ITO from the Ghazipur border clashed with the police. Many of them driving tractors reached the Red Fort and entered the monument, where a religious flag was also hoisted.

CONG WILL SCRAP LAWS IF VOTED TO POWER: PRIYANKA

Lucknow, Feb. 10: Attacking the Centre over the new farm laws, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra told a rally in western Uttar Pradesh that if voted to power her party would scrap them.

At a kisan panchayat organised by the party in Saharanpur, the Congress general secretary accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders of insulting farmers who are protesting against the laws.

"The three laws are demonic. If voted to power, the Congress will scrap these laws," she said.

She said the party's fight will continue till the laws are scrapped.

The rally is the first in a series of such farmers' meetings planned the party in western Uttar Pradesh, a year before the assembly elections in the state.

— PTI

PLA, Indian troops start disengagement: China

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

In an apparent breakthrough in nine-month tense military standoff in eastern Ladakh, the Indian and Chinese armies have reportedly started the process of disengagement from the contentious Pangong Tso sector on Wednesday. This was announced by the Chinese defence ministry in Beijing, but there was no response so far from the Indian government.

"The Chinese and Indian frontline troops at the southern and northern banks of the Pangong Tso Lake start synchronised and organised disengagement from February 10," said Senior Colonel Wu Qian, the spokesperson of the Chinese defence ministry, in a written statement on Wednesday. This move is in accordance with the consensus reached by both sides at the ninth round of the China-India corps commander-level meeting, the statement said.

There has been no formal statement from India so far Wednesday since Parliament is in session, but sources said tanks and armoured vehicles are being moved back from the southern banks of Pangong Tso. There are also reports of small troop disengagement moves from the northern banks of the lake. The disengagement will happen cautiously in a phased manner and each move will be verified.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh is expected to make a statement in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday on the "Present Situation in Eastern Ladakh", according to a tweet from the defence minister's office.

The tanks of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Indian Army are placed in close proximity to each other on the southern banks of Pangong Tso in the Chushul sector. This is the area where the Indian Army, in a pre-emptive move in August last year to the surprise of the Chinese side, had occupied the strategic heights which allowed it to dominate the area. The sector also saw the first incident of firing in 45 years at the Line of Actual Control, as tensions soared in early September last year.

US says will stand with its friends

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

Signalling a consistency in American foreign policy, the new Joe Biden Administration said on Wednesday that it is "concerned by Beijing's pattern of ongoing attempts to intimidate its neighbours" such as India, adding that the United States "would stand with (its) friends".

The US state department also described India as "one of the most important partners in the Indo-Pacific region" of the US, adding that it "welcomes India's emergence as a leading global power and its role as a net security provider in the region".

Describing its Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership with India as "both broad as well as multifaceted", the US expressed "confidence that the strong and upward trajectory of our partnership will, in fact, continue".

Asked about human rights issues, the US state department said that "this applies not only to India but to every partner of ours across the board" and that the US is "com-

mitted to supporting democratic values, including a free and open civil society and the strong rule of law".

Pointing out that it "regularly engages with the Government of India", the US said the "shared commitment to democratic value is the bedrock for the U.S.-India relationship" which is "in keeping with India's own democratic values, its pluralistic values, and its history of tolerance".

Asked about the phone conversation late on Tuesday between US secretary of state Antony J. Blinken and Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, the US State Department on Wednesday said that "Blinken expressed concern over the military coup and the importance of rule of law and the democratic process in Burma (Myanmar), adding that both foreign ministers "also discussed regional developments, including the value of U.S.-India cooperation across the Indo-Pacific" and "looked forward to expanded regional cooperation, including through the Quad, and to address the challenges of Covid and climate change".

It is learnt Indian troops have not been moved back from these strategic heights on Wednesday.

"If India cedes its sole bargaining chip — Kailash Range heights — before China begins to roll back all its land grabs, it will prove a big mistake," tweeted strategic analyst Brahma Chellaney.

As per reports, the Chinese soldiers will also move beyond the Finger 8 area on the northern bank of Pangong Tso and Indian troops will be placed between Finger 2 and Finger 3. Indian and Chinese troops had brutally clashed in the area in May 2020, with many soldiers suffering serious injuries.

The Indian and Chinese corps commanders had held the ninth round of talks on January 24, where both sides had

"agreed to push for an early disengagement of the frontline troops" in the eastern Ladakh.

Earlier in June, and then again in July, India and China had agreed to mutually move back from the Galwan Valley, Gogra Post, Hot Springs and Pangong Tso. However, it was only in the Galwan Valley that both troops had moved back to some extent. In Pangong Tso, the Chinese Army had then refused to move back from the ridgelines of Finger 4 and the whole of Finger 5 to 8 area, which it had illegally occupied in May. In the Gogra Post and Hot Springs areas too, there was no clarity on China's disengagement. Besides, in the Depsang plains, Chinese troops had been preventing the Indian Army from conducting its patrolling.

TN CM NOT RATTLED BY ROADSHOW HELD TO WELCOME SASIKALA

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 10

The grandiose roadshow that marked the return of expelled AIADMK general secretary V.K. Sasikala from jail on Monday and her clarion call for unity would not have any impact on the party leadership, who remain firm on not reinstating her or any of her family members without heading to her call.

Sasikala, on her part, is also silent though she has been meeting functionaries of the AMMK, the party launched by her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran after he was thrown out of the AIADMK, and others at the house of her niece Krishana Priya in T Nagar, where she is now put up.

But Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, speaking at a campaign meeting in Krishnagiri on Wednesday, categorically stated that there was no scope for any one

expelled from the party to rejoin it. In an indirect reference to Sasikala, he said that they would not allow the domination of any family in the party.

Only a party worker could become Chief Minister and a single family's control on the party would not be tolerated, said Palaniswami, who had openly hit out at Dhinakaran on Tuesday night, pointing out that he was thrown out of the party by J Jayalalithaa.

There was a conspiracy to capture the AIADMK and whatever Dhinakaran did he would not be able to pull it off, he said and called upon the party cadre to help realise the dreams of MGR and Jaya.

Reacting to rumours that Palaniswami and Sasikala were planning to meet, fisheries minister D. Jayakumar clearly said that there was no scope for it in this lifetime. He was speaking to media persons at Saidapet on Wednesday morning.

Navy's largest war game



Ships take part in Indian Navy's largest war game — the biennial Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX 21) — which commenced in early January, in the Indian Ocean Region. The exercise will culminate by the third week of February. The exercise is taking place at a time China has been making increasing forays into the Indian Ocean region as part of its offensive military manoeuvre.

— PTI

MOVIE | BONANZA

French filmmaker Jean Luc Godard receives Lifetime Achievement award

Kerala film festival adjusts to the new normal

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 10

The 25th edition of the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) opened on Wednesday all masked up, with strict adherence to social distancing and to a note of warning.

The IFFK, whose fumigated and sanitised auditoriums are running at just 50 per cent capacity and all delegates have to undergo rigorous antigen tests — 70

out of 800 tested on Tuesday turned out to be "positive" and are in quarantine — has adjusted well to the Coronavirus-induced new normal, but it continues to strike a note of dissent through the films it picks.

The festival's opening film, Bosnia's Oscar entry *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, which had its India premiere on Wednesday evening after chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated the film festival, is a cautionary tale about "what happens

when we fail to react on time to warning signs".

Directed by Jasmila banic, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* is based on recorded facts and recalls in shocking detail the Srebrenica massacre of July 1995.

After the traditional inauguration with the lighting of the lamp, legendary French filmmaker Jean Luc Godard received the Lifetime Achievement award. Greeting the audience from his home through videoconferenc-

ing, Godard said, "I am sorry for speaking in the tongue of the dominators (English). Thank you very much Kerala. Thank you to the Kerala festival for screening good and sensible films. It is great that five of my films are being screened there," and in his quintessential style, lit a cigar.

Quo Voids, Aida? (Where are you going, Aida?) leads a long list of foreign and Indian films at IFFK that have dissent as their central theme. *This Is Not A Burial, It's A Resurrection*, which is part of the festival's International Competition section, tells the story of an 80-year-old widow in Lesotho who is making arrangements to die when the forced resettlement of her village brings her to the forefront of a movement to stand for land rights.

Another "subversive" film in the International competition this year is *There Is No Evil* by Iranian

director Mohammad Rasoulof. It tells the story of a nation that enforces the death penalty through four men whose destinies are loosely connected by their willingness or refusal to assist in state-ordered assassinations.

The IFFK is scheduled to run between Feb. 10 and 14 in Thiruvananthapuram, and after that all films will travel to Ernakulam (from Feb. 17-21), Thalassery (Feb. 23-27) and Palakkad (March 1-5).

SHORT TAKES

TIANWEN-1 PROBE ENTERS MARS ORBIT

Beijing, Feb. 10: China says its Tianwen-1 spacecraft has entered orbit around Mars on a mission to land a rover and collect data on underground water and possible signs of ancient life.

The arrival of the orbiter-rover combo in orbit on Wednesday evening Beijing time makes it the second spacecraft in two days to reach the red planet. An orbiter from the United Arab Emirates led the way on Tuesday.

Next week, the US will try to land its Perseverance rover on the Martian surface. Only the U.S. has successfully touched down on Mars — eight times beginning with two Viking missions.

KPMG BOSS SORRY FOR ‘MOANING’ JIBE

London, Feb. 10: The UK chairman of global accountancy firm KPMG has apologised for telling staff to stop moaning about working conditions during the Coronavirus pandemic.

“I am sorry for the words I used, which did not reflect what I believe in, and I have apologised to my colleagues,” UK chair Bill Michael said in a statement.

“Looking after the wellbeing of our people and creating a culture where everyone can thrive is of critical importance to me and is at the heart of everything we do as a firm,” he added.

The *Financial Times* reported that during a virtual meeting on Monday, members of KPMG’s financial services consulting team told Michael about their concerns over potential cuts to pay and the ranking of individuals’ performance. Michael told staff to “stop moaning” and to stop “playing the victim card,” according to the FT which cited employees.

KPMG, along with Deloitte, EY and PWC, form Britain’s so-called Big Four accountants that are set for a shake up.

UN PRESSES EU OVER RISING MIGRANT CASES

Brussels, Feb. 10: UN agencies are pressing the European Union to end the growing practices of denying migrants their right to apply for asylum, collectively expelling them and using violence against people trying to enter the bloc without authorisation.

Border pushbacks and collective expulsions are illegal under international refugee treaties, which allow people fearing for their safety to apply for protection.

Greece and even the EU’s border and coast guard agency Frontex are among those accused of pushbacks or complicity in them. They deny using such methods.

The International Organisation for Migration said Wednesday that it continues to receive documented reports of human rights violations against migrants and refugees, including children, involving countries that are part of the 27-nation bloc.

POLICE BUST GANG HIJACKING CELEB PHONES

London, Feb. 10: Police have arrested 10 people in the UK, Belgium and Malta for allegedly hijacking mobile phones belonging to US celebrities including internet influencers, sports stars and musicians to steal personal information and millions in cryptocurrency, authorities said.

The European Union police agency Europol said Wednesday that the gang is believed to have stolen more than \$100 million in cryptocurrencies by using so-called SIM swap attacks.

These attacks involve deactivating a victim’s mobile phone SIM card, either by tricking the phone company or using a corrupt insider, so that the number can be transferred to another card under the gang’s control.

The arrests were the result of a joint investigation by UK, US, Canadian, Belgian and Maltese police, Europol said. Europol didn’t specify the nationalities of those caught in the sweep, but the UK’s National Crime Agency said a day earlier that eight men were arrested in England and Scotland.

Two others were arrested previously in Belgium and Malta, Europol said.

Plane set ablaze in Huthi attack on Saudi airport

Riyadh, Feb. 10: A civilian plane was engulfed in flames Wednesday after Yemen’s Huthi rebels launched a drone strike on an airport in southern Saudi Arabia, days after the US moved to delist the insurgents as terrorists.

Saudi authorities did not immediately report any casualties from the attack, claimed by the Huthis, the latest in a series of rebel assaults on the kingdom despite a renewed American push to de-escalate the six-year conflict.

“A cowardly criminal terrorist attack launched against

Abha International Airport in Saudi Arabia by the Huthi militia,” state-run Al-Ekhhariya television quoted the Riyadh-led military coalition battling the rebels as saying.

“A fire that engulfed a passenger plane due to the Huthi attack on Abha Airport is under control,” it added.

The coalition did not say how the attack was carried out, but earlier in the day reported that it

had intercepted two “booby trapped” drones in the south.

The Iran-backed Huthis, who control much of northern Yemen, said they had struck Abha airport with four drones. Yahya Sarie, spokesman for the Huthis’ armed wing, claimed the airport was used to launch attacks on Yemen.

But the coalition insisted that targeting the airport constituted “a war crime” and “put the lives of civilian passengers in danger”, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

The rebels appear to be stepping up attacks on the kingdom and on Riyadh-backed Yemeni forces after the United States moved last week to lift a short-lived designation of the Huthis as a terrorist group.

The Huthis have resumed an offensive to seize the Yemeni government’s last northern stronghold of Marib, according to a government source, with dozens of casualties on both sides.

— AFP

Military raids Suu Kyi’s party offices

Yangon, Feb. 10: Myanmar’s military raided the Yangon headquarters of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s party late Tuesday, officials said, as the United States joined the UN in “strongly” condemning violence against protesters demanding a return to democracy.

The latest assault on Myanmar’s civilian leadership came as anger at last week’s coup and the detention of Suu Kyi by the generals has driven hundreds of thousands of people into the streets, defying a junta ban on rallies. “The military dictator raided and destroyed NLD headquarters at around 9:30 pm,” the National League for Democracy announced on its Facebook page.

The party’s short statement gave no further details.

The raid came after demonstrations erupted for a fourth straight day Tuesday, with police using water cannon in several cities, firing rubber bullets at protesters in the capital Naypyidaw and deploying tear gas in Mandalay.

The rallies came despite a warning from the junta

● THE UNITED STATES, which has led global censure of the coup, on Tuesday renewed its call for freedom of expression in Myanmar — and for the generals to step down.

that it would take action against demonstrations that threatened “stability”, and a new ban on gatherings of more than five people.

The United States, which has led global censure of the coup, on Tuesday renewed its call for freedom of expression in Myanmar — and for the generals to step down.

“We strongly condemn violence against demonstrators,” US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters, adding that people in Myanmar “have rights to peaceful assembly.” “We repeat our calls for the military to relinquish power, restore democratically elected government, release those detained and lift all telecommunications restrictions and to refrain from violence,” he said.

Price has previously said US requests to speak to Suu Kyi had been denied.

— AFP

US shows military muscle in Norway

Oslo, Feb. 10: The United States is deploying long-range B-1 bombers to Norway to train in the strategically important High North in a new show of force unseen in the region since the Cold War.

“High North, low tensions” goes an old saying, describing the relatively calm security situation and diplomatic relations in the Arctic for decades.

But mounting tensions between the West and Russia, particularly since the 2014 Crimea crisis, has led both sides to beef up their militaries even in the remote High North, an area believed to be rich in natural resources and where the ice melt

has opened up new shipping routes.

This month, long-range B-1 bombers capable of carrying large amounts of air-to-ground weaponry will arrive at Norway’s Orland air base for several weeks of training missions with the Scandinavian country’s air force, which guards NATO’s northern border.

“This deployment comes in the context of global military activities in the High North, which have increased significantly in recent years, both from the West and Russia,” noted Kristian Atland, a researcher at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment.

— AFP

US keen to learn Covid origin to stop future catastrophes

Worst affected by pandemic, America wants China, WHO to be transparent

Washington, Feb. 10: It is imperative that the world learns as much as possible about the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic so that the world can understand its origins and prevent future biological catastrophes, the US has said after international experts investigating the origins of the disease have dismissed as unlikely a theory that the virus came from a laboratory in China.

The US, which is the worst affected country from the pandemic, is looking forward to receiving the report and the data from the investigation by the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) team of experts into the origins of the Covid-19 in China’s Wuhan city.

The WHO experts arrived in China last month for the long-awaited probe into the origins of the deadly coronavirus pandemic. On Tuesday, the team dismissed that the virus could have leaked from a Chinese lab, a theory strongly supported by former US president Donald Trump.

The team members said that the deadly virus was most likely to have transmitted from an animal to humans. “Broadly speaking, we have expressed our concerns regarding the need for full transparency and access from China and the WHO to all information regarding the earliest days of the pandemic,” State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Tuesday at his daily news conference.

“It’s imperative that the world learns as much as possible about the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic so that we can understand its origins and so, importantly, we can prevent future biological catastrophes,” Price said. “I think the jury is still out. Clearly, the Chinese, at least heretofore, had not offered the requisite transparency that we need and that just as importantly, again, the international community needs so that we can prevent these sorts of pandemics from ever happening again.

This goes back to one of the very first actions that President Joe Biden took as president when he re-engaged with the WHO,” Price said. China reported the first Covid-19 case in the central Chinese city of



People wear face masks to help curb the spread of the Coronavirus and go shopping for the upcoming Chinese New Year celebrations at the Dihua Street market in Taipei, Taiwan, on Wednesday.

— AP

WHO slams US Covid intel as curbs tightened in Europe

Wuhan, Feb. 10: A WHO expert sent to China to probe the coronavirus hit out at US intelligence on Covid-19 as his team headed home with few answers about the origin of a pandemic that was forcing more clampdowns in some of the hardest-hit parts of the world.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was set to seek an extension of strict virus curbs, as the European Commission chief addressed the stumbling vaccination rollout on the continent — which accounts for a third of the 2.3 million Covid-19 deaths worldwide.

The Coronavirus has infected close to 107 mil-

lion people, devastating the global economy, and questions over the handling of the initial outbreak in central China have sparked an intense diplomatic row between Washington and Beijing.

The WHO mission to the ground zero city of Wuhan wrapped up on Tuesday without any concrete answers, with Washington again expressing scepticism about China’s transparency and cooperation.

But WHO team member Peter Daszak tweeted: “Please don’t rely too much on US intel: increasingly disengaged under Trump & frankly wrong on many aspects.” He said they worked “flat out

under the most politically charged environment possible”.

China had repeatedly delayed the WHO trip, and bristled at accusations of a lack of transparency.

Beijing warned Washington not to “politicise” the mission after the White House demanded a “robust” probe.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Tuesday that the United States supports the investigation. But when asked if China had fully cooperated with the WHO, he said: “The jury’s still out.” The WHO team did not identify which animal transferred the Coronavirus to humans.

— AFP

However, China has refuted the allegations. While denying that Coronavirus originated in Wuhan, China points to reports from Italy, Spain and the US about its prevalence to pre-dating its emergence in Wuhan.

— PTI

EU LAWMAKERS OK \$815 BILLION RECOVERY PLAN

Brussels, Feb. 10: European lawmakers on Wednesday approved a 672.5 billion euro (\$815 billion) recovery package of loans and grants to help member states recover faster from the coronavirus pandemic.

The regulation for the Recovery and Resilience Facility was adopted with 582 votes in favour, 40 against and 69 abstentions. The RRF is the central pillar of the bloc’s 750 billion euro (\$910 billion) recovery plan that was adopted by EU leaders last year.

“In the long-term, this money is going to bring about change and progress to meet our digital and climate goals,” said Eider Gardiazabal Rubial, a lawmaker closely involved in the negotiations.

“We will ensure that the measures will alleviate poverty and unemployment, and will take into account the gender dimension of this crisis. Our health systems will also become more resilient.”

— AP

UN: N. KOREA STOLE \$300M TO FUND NUKES

Seoul, Feb. 10: North Korea has stolen more than \$300 million worth of cryptocurrencies through cyberattacks in recent months to support its banned nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, a confidential UN report said.

Compiled by a panel of experts monitoring sanctions on Pyongyang, the report said the country’s “total theft of virtual assets from 2019 to November 2020 is valued at approximately \$316.4 million”, citing a UN member state.

Financial institutions and exchanges were hacked to generate revenue for Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile development, said the report, which was seen by AFP.

The North is known to operate an army of thousands of well-trained hackers who have attacked firms, institutions and researchers in South Korea and elsewhere.

It has also been accused of exploiting its cyber capabilities for financial gain.

The North is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, which have made rapid progress under leader Kim Jong Un.

A summit between Kim and then-US president Donald Trump in Hanoi in February 2019 broke down over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return.

— AFP

Democrats set to detail case at Trump 2nd impeachment trial

Washington, Feb. 10: Democratic lawmakers prosecuting Donald Trump are set to detail their case against him Wednesday at his impeachment trial, in a longshot bid to convince skeptical Republican senators they should convict the former president.

Trump’s second impeachment trial opened on Tuesday with Democrats showing harrowing video footage of his supporters’ January 6 assault on the US Capitol, where they smashed down doors, broke into the Senate chamber and led riots that left five people dead.

Trump faces a single charge of inciting the insurrection after he told enraged Republican supporters near the White House to “fight like hell.” Securing a conviction is highly unlikely, as



US Senator Josh Hawley talks with reporters as he leaves the Capitol after the first day of former US President Donald Trump’s second impeachment trial in Washington, DC.

— AFP

the Democrats would need 17 Republican senators to vote with them to make a two-thirds majority.

So far, only six Republicans have agreed that the trial is even constitutional in the first place.

Following Tuesday’s opening statements from

Democratic “impeachment managers” and Trump’s lawyers, both sides will flesh out their cases starting Wednesday, with the Democrats going first.

Under impeachment rules, each side is allowed up to 16 hours over two

rainfall with even small variations in the timing of its arrival potentially having a huge impact on agriculture.

“Accurately predicting these year-to-year variations is challenging, but could be the difference between prosperity or poverty for many families,” said study co-author Amulya Chevuturi from the University of Reading

in the UK.

“The forecasting accuracy we identified in India’s main agricultural regions provides a clear opportunity for this system to make a positive difference to people’s lives,” Chevuturi said in a statement.

He believes a month’s warning of a drought or deluge is a valuable time to understand the likely

impact on water availability and for the farmers to make provisions to reduce the threat to food supplies.

“Better forecasts save lives, and this kind of in-depth global analysis is only possible when the best scientists and leading research institutes work together for the benefit of the whole planet,” Chevuturi added.

— PTI

ADVANCED TECH

Scientists believe this could help farmers to prepare earlier for unexpected events

New model to predict Indian monsoon

London, Feb. 10: Scientists, including those of Indian-origin, have developed a new system which they say can provide farmers in India early forecasts of expected variations in the monsoon season, an advance which may help reduce crop losses.

The researchers, including those from the European Centre for Medium-range Weather

Forecasts (ECMWF) in the UK, used their long-term global weather forecasting system to predict when the summer monsoon will start, and how much rainfall it will bring.

In the study, published in the journal *Climate Dynamics*, they noted that the model provided accurate forecasts a month in advance for the timing of the monsoon in India’s

major agricultural regions.

The scientists believe providing this information to farmers could help them prepare earlier for unexpected heavy rainfall or extended dry periods, both of which regularly destroy crops in India.

According to the researchers, the Indian monsoon brings around 80 per cent of India’s annual

DECCAN Chronicle

11 FEBRUARY 2021

To save public money, start to disinvest fast

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement to privatise two public sector banks and a general insurance company marks a clear departure from a cautious approach adopted by the Narendra Modi government since 2014 over the disinvestment policy. This move reaffirms the government's intent, announced last year, to exit all non-strategic sectors.

Despite his stated belief in the concept of "less government and more governance", Prime Minister Narendra Modi had done very little in terms of reducing the government's ownership of companies. In fact, the Department of Public Enterprise's data shows that there are 339 CPSEs (excluding insurance companies) as on March 31, 2018, compared to 290 CPSEs on March 31, 2014.

Several attempts to sell state-owned companies that have become a burden on exchequer were skillfully scuttled by conditions framed by bureaucrats. If the political leadership becomes successful in implementing its plan, it could prevent taxpayer's money from being invested in running inefficient companies, and that money could be fruitfully used elsewhere.

It is time for the government to move on and exit all sectors where private companies are strong. If there are no buyers, the government should give handsome compensation to employees and shut industries.

The core issue at the heart of the demand for privatisation is not so much about the propriety of the government's role in businesses as it is about the uselessness of such presence. When the Jawaharlal Nehru government decided to set up large state-owned industries, it was more a need of the hour than an ideological statement because private industrialists had no financial muscle to bankroll such massive projects. This approach was also in tune with the recommendations made by the country's eight top industrialists of the day, which was referred to as the 1945 Bombay Plan.

Though Indira Gandhi's decision to nationalise banks was dictated by her political agenda, it brought about confidence among people in the safety of their money deposited in banks. From the year 1934, when the Reserve Bank of India was established to the time of bank nationalisation in 1969, over 1,500 banks had failed in the country, eroding people's faith in the banking sector. An implied sovereign guarantee to people's money in banks resulted in the greater formalisation of public savings which helped in creating capital for entrepreneurs.

While the earlier government's intervention in critical sectors had helped the country in creating a strong industrial base, whereupon a new India was built, it is time for the government to move on and exit all sectors where private companies are strong. If there are no buyers, the government should give handsome compensation to employees and shut industries.

To protect itself from allegations of selling family silver and also to create the base for future high-tech industries, the government should chip in to create the ecosystem required for semiconductor fab factories or high-tech medical equipment companies or aircraft manufacturing using the Maruti model, where the government invests money and the private partner brings in the technology. If the government succumbs to pressure to continue with the status quo to please a few lakhs of PSU employees, it would be a great disservice to crores of Indians of the present and future generations.

Modi & Azad: Civility back

Not often in the recent past has Parliament been invaded by an outbreak of civility. But when it did, as in extremely emotional speeches by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Rajya Sabha Opposition Leader Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress, it augured well for a sense of dignity and decorum to be ushered back into India's increasingly polarised polity. Before a Prime Ministerial image makeover, Modi was stateliness personified, as in his opening speech as PM to both Houses of Parliament. Since then, in a fractured political scene, he has been seen more in confrontational mode, attacking opponents in India and when he goes abroad and in the House too when he mocked Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul.

The spirit of give and take seemed to have evaporated in Parliament with many sessions lost to the "in the Well" attitude of the Opposition ranged against the intransigence of the Treasury benches when it came to lending an ear to diverse points of view. Civil debates on national issues have been few and far between but the ruling BJP is not the only party guilty of reducing Parliament into a non-functional laggard. This could change, much as it should, during the debate on the farmers' stir and into the future when political parties on sharply divergent ideological paths can be expected to only drift further apart thanks to the compulsions of poll politics and the seeming need for harsh language at the hustings.

Clever interpretations of acronyms appear to be the current fad as politicians attack each other, which is why such fulsome praise of opponents, which Mr Modi and Mr Azad showered on each other on the eve of the former Kashmir CM retiring from Parliament, is to be seen as a breakthrough. Brushing aside cynical views of the use of words of praise being opportunistic and rare, we must wish that civility stays in Parliament where government and Opposition members meet most often and in debates that make the legislature one of the pillars of democracy. Politicians of all hues would do well to remember that cordiality costs nothing and that the nation and the Constitution always come first.

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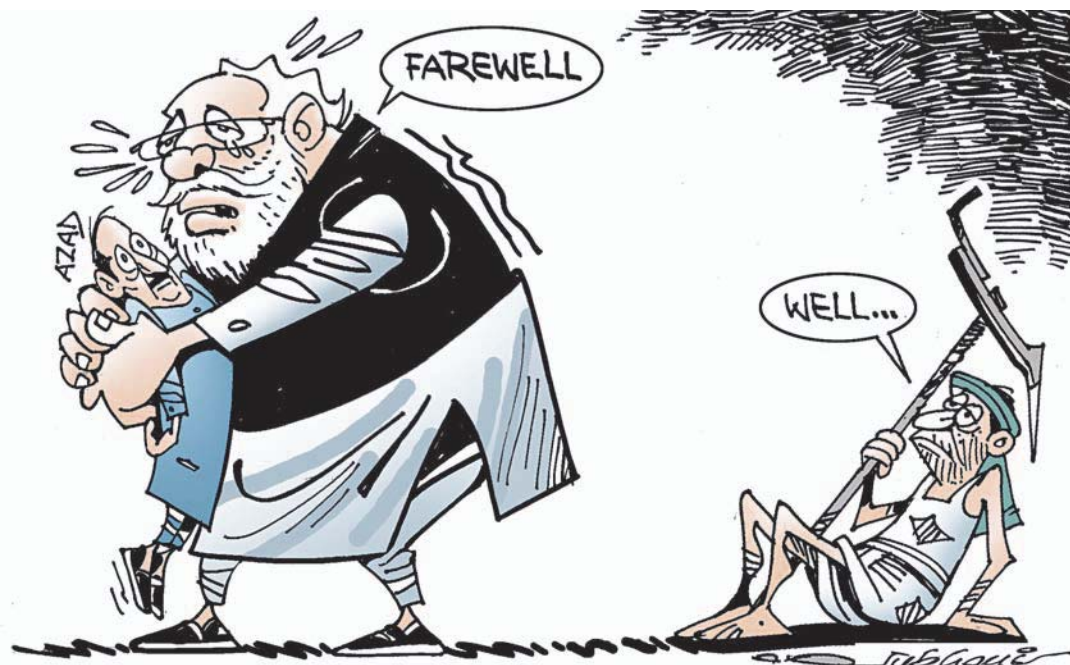
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Subhani



The siege within: India and the 'foreign hand'



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

Can tweets by international pop star Rihanna, teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg and other global celebrities in support of India's protesting farmers destabilise this country of over 1.3 billion people?

Or should we look within? Is foreign meddling the real threat facing us or is India's real challenge the deepening domestic polarisation on just about every front?

Successive governments in India have pointed at the "foreign hand" in times of crisis. I entered journalism in the 1980s when one regularly heard of the invisible "foreign hand" that was out to dismember our country. In many of her public speeches, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi spoke of the dark spectre of foreign forces out to destabilise India.

Rajiv Gandhi, who came to power in 1984 with a huge majority after his mother's assassination, also talked of the "invisible" foreign hand trying to derail India's development.

Back then, there was no Twitter or social media or troll armies, and no virtual slugfests. But on government-run Doordarshan and All India Radio and in sections of the print media, there was no escaping allusions to these dark, powerful and invisible forces out to get us.

Cut to the New India. The "foreign hand" is back. The ruling BJP sees comments from global celebrities in support of the ongoing farmers' protests as part of a deep conspiracy against the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi says India has been seeing increased FDI but there is a new FDI that has emerged — "Foreign Destructive Ideology". Mr Modi says India needs to be protected against it.

Is the world really out to get us? Or should we get used to the fact that in a networked glob-

alised world, nothing is local anymore? As protests erupted across the United States following George Floyd's death at the hands of the police on the streets of Minneapolis, the Black Lives Matter movement resonated around the world. Support for BLM led to demonstrations in a number of countries. In a more recent example, the coup in Myanmar has been denounced by individuals around the world, including in India.

There is really no way we can prevent the rest of the world from taking interest in our domestic affairs, especially if we wish to be at the high table of the international community. If we so eagerly lap up foreign praise, can we afford to be so prickly about the foreign gaze when the comments are adverse? If Indians rejoice at going up the World Bank's ease of doing business 2020 survey, they can't totally shrug off slipping in the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2020 Democracy Index's global rankings.

The problems will not go away simply if foreigners stop talking about it. And as for us, stopping and reversing the current trend of polarisation is vital, for the simple reason that no country or society can make real progress if social cohesion starts eroding.

Leaving aside the foreign gaze for a moment and looking within, we cannot but help notice a deeply polarised and fractured nation, with deepening domestic political divisions. That is the real challenge, and that challenge cannot be surmounted by simply choking protests or forcibly shutting up views that clash with those of the government of the day. There must be a dialogue. The government must stop its storm troopers — from ministers to those on the streets — from statements and actions that polarise further. Else,

social cohesion will become even more fragile.

The Global Risks Report 2021 brought out by the World Economic Forum lists "social cohesion erosion" among the highest-likelihood and highest-impact long-term risks facing our pandemic-battered world. "As public health gaps, digital inequality, educational disparities and unemployment — risks that result from a complex combination of existing inequalities and the impact of the pandemic — affect vulnerable groups the most, they may further fray social cohesion," it says.

Too many people have little left to lose. The global recession, the report notes, is now expected to force as many as 150 million more people into extreme poverty, increasing the total to 9.4 per cent of the world's population. This setback in the global development agenda will heighten vulnerability to future shocks and threaten the erosion or collapse of states, it warns.

Our government also admits that the economic shock caused by the ongoing pandemic is severe. It is now hoping for a V-shaped economic recovery. No such recovery will be possible without the vibrant pluralistic democracy that is key to India's power. If democracy is our calling card, we must also listen to critical views and voices without feeling the need to link them with ulterior motives. Getting prickly about criticism will only worry the whole world even more.

"There is a debate about the potential impact of American concerns about the state of democracy and liberal-

ism in India on the US-India relationship," pointed out Tanvi Madan, director of the India Project and senior fellow at globally renowned think tank Brookings, in a January 2021 essay titled "Democracy and the US-India relationship".

"Often commentators argue there will either be no effect because of India's utility for the US or major impact because of the incoming Biden administration's emphasis on values," Madan added. "The answer is likely to lie somewhere in between. A pragmatic Biden team will likely recognise that India will be key to their objectives vis-a-vis issues like the Indo-Pacific and China, climate change and global health security."

"However, questions about India's trajectory as a pluralistic democracy could directly or indirectly affect the pace and tone of the relationship — especially if they are accompanied by doubts about India's capabilities, economic growth and policies, and willingness to play a balancing role versus China."

India's handling of the ongoing farmers' protests has taken a lot of sheen off the country's image, coming as it does on the back of many other illiberal measures. This is unfortunate for many reasons, including the fact that India is getting a few things right even in these fraught, polarised times. Take India's vaccine diplomacy. India has supplied low-cost coronavirus vaccines to many countries across the world. "With the US and Europe preoccupied with Covid-19 and many nations looking to India for a Covid-19 antidote, Delhi can score valuable points," as G. Parthasarathy, a former diplomat, noted in a recent commentary.

The bottom line: we must get our act together. At the end, a country does not rise or fall because of the foreigner's gaze but because of what its insiders do or fail to do.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

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LETTERS

LIVING BY FAITH

Lives of people visiting Tirumala is more valuable than the hundi collections (Long queues crawl back to Tirumala temple, DC, Feb. 10). Temple authorities should understand the situation and not allow devotees. In view of Covid scare, the Kumbh Mela should also be cancelled this time as physical distancing cannot be maintained.

K.L. Rao

Visakhapatnam

TN ELECTIONS

The return of V.K. Sasikala ahead of Tamil Nadu elections is creating shock waves among AIADMK and DMK (Sasikala the 'X' factor in TN's soap opera politics, DC, Feb. 10). However, the ruling party has handled the Covid crisis and cyclone Nivar very well and has come a long way since the departure of Sasikala four years ago to serve jail sentence due to the Prevention of Corruption Act. Nevertheless, the timing of her release and her role is intriguing and generating widespread speculations in the impending elections.

Dr C. Ghanshyam

Visakhapatnam

GOOD FAREWELL

The PM emotional farewell with tearful eyes to outgoing Rajya Sabha member, Ghulam Nabi Azad is heart touching. Such camaraderie between two leaders of opposing camps has become a rarity. There should be mutual respect between Treasury benches and Opposition parties and one should win the debates through healthy and constructive arguments only. But nowadays the name calling and personal attacks are becoming routine, leaving the central purpose of the debates and the decorum of the House to the winds.

Dr D.V.G.Sankarao

Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

AP affiliated college teachers on strike

VIJAYAWADA, FEBRUARY. 10 Teachers of affiliated colleges in Andhra commenced a stay-in strike today in support of their demand for direct payment of salaries by Government, according to Mr. J. Manikya Rao, General Secretary of the Affiliated College Teachers' Association.

In a statement he said that a delegation of teachers met Chief Minister but there was no scope for detailed discussion and the Chief Minister only said casually that he would look into the matter.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



NGT hauls up Kerala govt for ignoring 'legacy waste' directive

Kerala's chief secretary Vishwas Mehta came under fire from the National Green Tribunal (NGT) over the continued ineffective solid waste management in Kochi.

According to sources, the tribunal made scathing remarks against the state government while criticising the affidavit filed by Mr Mehta and threatened to prosecute officers responsible for ensuring that parameters of environmental safety are met. The tribunal lamented that the chief secretary's affidavit did not show any effective action being taken on the ground, despite several directives issued in the past two years.

The tribunal, quoting a report by the State Pollution Control Board, noted that the municipal authorities in Kochi were continuing unauthorised operations and were

yet to start work for bio-mining.

The directive came while the tribunal was hearing a case seeking direction to take effective steps for infrastructure development for collection, storage, segregation and disposal of tonnes of waste, termed legacy waste, that has accumulated over the years in Kochi's Brahmapuram area.

Ironically, the adverse comments came at a time when the state government claims that it is strictly following the "green protocol" and chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan declared more than 11,000 government offices and public sector undertakings as "green" on Republic Day!

NITISH TO WEED OUT HOME DEADWOOD

The Nitish Kumar government in Bihar is moving ahead with its announcement last year of retiring

identified "inefficient" employees. The state home department headed by the chief minister has set up high-level committees to implement the order.

According to sources, a committee headed by additional chief secretary of the home department Amir Subhani will deal with Group A employees of the department. The panel also includes special secretary Vikash Vaibhav, among others. The other committee will be headed by secretary of the home department, K. Senthil Kumar, and include joint secretary Bimlesh Kumar Jha, among other senior officials. It has been tasked with identifying the deadwood from among Group B, C and D employees. Both committees will meet every year in June and December to consider the proposals to retire identified officers. Further, the department has instructed all

offices and directorates under it to set up such panels at their level.

Previously, in 2017, the state government had announced to compulsorily retire non-performing education department officials, school headmasters and teachers after disappointing Matric and intermediate exams. But the decision was not followed through, say sources. Will it be any different this time?

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL?

Is Shah Faesal, the former IAS officer from Jammu and Kashmir, contemplating a return to the civil service that he had quit in protest against "unabated killings" in Kashmir? A tweet by the ex-babu, who was the first Kashmiri to top the civil service exam, in response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Mann Ki Baat" program seems to hint at a change of mind, say some observers. In his tweet,

Mr Faesal praised the PM's radio programme and wrote that "communication can build solidarities..."

The buzz around Mr Faesal's plans has only grown, especially when he quit Jammu and Kashmir People's Movement, the political party he had set up barely a few months later.

Interestingly, his resignation as an IAS officer in January 2019 has been kept in abeyance all this while. The government has not accepted it, pending the investigation into some of his social media posts.

That it was never accepted means that the door is still open for him to rejoin the IAS. Watch this space for updates!

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

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,309.39	-0.04
Nifty 50	15,106.50	-0.02
S&P 500*	3,904.56	-0.17
Dollar (₹)	72.83	0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.67	-0.24
Euro (₹)	88.31	-0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,576*38	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.47	0.62
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.010	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.145	-0.012

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bol net up 412% to ₹540 cr on low provisioning

Bank of India (BoI) reported a 412 per cent jump in standalone profit after tax at Rs 541 crore in December quarter against Rs 106 crore a year ago on improvement in asset quality and lower provisions. Consolidated net profit came to Rs 610.37 crore against Rs 138.20 crore. Net interest income declined 9 per cent to Rs 3,740 crore from Rs 4,118 crore. Domestic net interest margins declined to 2.81 per cent from 3.45 per cent.

Non-basmati rice exports more than double



Exports of non-basmati rice more than doubled to Rs 22,856 crore during April-December 2020-21 against Rs 10,268 crore in the year-ago period. "The exports of non-basmati witnessed a growth of 122.61 per cent in rupee term and 111.81 per cent dollar terms," the commerce ministry said in a statement. India exports non-basmati rice to Nepal, Benin, UAE, Somalia, Guinea, US, among others.

SBI crosses ₹5-L cr mark in home loan biz

State Bank of India said it has crossed the Rs 5 lakh crore-mark in its home loan business. The real estate and housing business (REHBU) unit of the bank has grown five times in the last 10 years with an asset under management (AUM) of Rs 89,000 crore in 2011 to Rs 5 lakh crore in 2021. "This extraordinary feat is a testament to customers' continuous trust in the bank," the bank's chairman Dinesh Khara said.

Maersk profit soars nearly six-fold for 2020

Danish shipping giant AP Moller-Maersk posted a near six-fold increase in net profit for 2020, as demand during the pandemic rebounded strongly from an initial slump, sending freight rates soaring. A shortage of containers in Asia during the pandemic has led to a surge in freight rates. For the full-year 2020, Maersk recorded a net profit of \$2.9 billion (2.4 billion euros) in its ongoing operations.



Over 27.86 tonnes of metal purchased Gold bond demand rises 4-fold in FY21

SANGEETHA G with agency inputs CHENNAI, FEB. 10

Despite rising prices of the yellow metal, sovereign gold bonds issued in FY21 till January, investors purchased a total of 27.86 tonnes. This marks a more than four-fold increase in purchases against 6.13 tonnes bought by investors in FY20. This fiscal has accounted for close to half of the total purchases made since the launch of gold bonds in 2015.

In these six years, investors have purchased a total of 58.8 tonnes of gold through the primary market in the form of bonds. Each of the 10 issues of gold bonds in FY21 saw investors purchasing more than one tonne of gold. In the fourth series, investors bought more than four tonnes and in the fifth series, more than six tonnes.

Prior to FY21, only once had the aggregate purchases moved up beyond one tonne in a series.

The issue price of gold bonds remained above Rs 4,500 per gm for all the series in FY21. The issue price was the highest in the fifth series at Rs 5,334 per gm and the same series saw the largest purchase at 6.3 tonnes. This shows that higher prices were not a deterrent for gold bond buyers. In fact, the demand was higher when prices



went up.

According to Somasundaram P. R., managing director, India, World Gold Council, several investors bet on the bullish trend in gold during the pandemic. "While there are pockets of distress due to Covid-19, there are pockets of surplus as well. People who have uninterrupted income have not spent much during the lockdown time on vacations and luxuries and they are left with investible surplus," he pointed out. This surplus found its way into select investment instruments, including gold, he added.

Increased investor appetite for gold had reflected in the demand for gold ETFs as well. Gold ETFs largely saw inflows during most of the months in FY21. Despite the lockdown in the June quarter, investment demand managed to stay just 11 per cent lower in 2020 compared with a 42 per cent drop in jewellery demand.

Last month, investors put in Rs 625 crore in gold

exchange traded funds (ETFs), which was 45 per cent higher than the preceding month. The inflow pushed the asset base of gold funds by 22 per cent to Rs 14,481 crore at the end of January from Rs 14,174 crore at the end of December; data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India showed.

Himanshu Srivastava, associate director manager research, Morningstar India said the gold prices have come-off its all-time highs touched in August last year. The month of January also saw fair bit of correction in its prices.

"This, along with expectation that gold may do well going ahead provided a good buying opportunity to investors, which resulted in net inflows for the category in January."

According to him, gold functions as a strategic asset in an investor's portfolio, given its ability to act as an effective diversifier and alleviate losses during tough market conditions.

NITI AAYOG STUDY TO ASSESS IMPACT OF SUPREME COURT, NGT DECISIONS

New Delhi, Feb. 10: Government think-tank Niti Aayog has commissioned a study to assess the "unintended" economic impact of select decisions of the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal and to review if the stated objective behind the judicial pronouncements was met, according to a project brief document.

Jaipur-based CUTS International has been asked to examine the apex court rulings in halting consultation of Mopa Airport in Goa, stopping iron ore mining in Goa, and shutting Sterlite Copper's Tuticorin plant in Tamil Nadu.

CUTS International director Amol Kulkarni confirmed receiving the mandate.

"This study will ex-post examine the unintended economic consequences of key judicial/ quasi judicial decisions and review if the objective of the judicial decision was met," according to the CUTS International project brief document.

To highlight the economic impact, five cases have been selected, of which three were decided by the Supreme Court and two by the NGT.

"Judicial decisions have far-reaching economic impacts which are often not taken into account at the time of decision making. Some of the recent judgments/orders... indicate that the economic impact analysis of judicial decisions is yet to gain broader acceptance." —PTI

Sebi fines NSE, former chiefs in co-location case

New Delhi, Feb. 10: In the high profile co-location case, markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday imposed a penalty of Rs 1 crore on the NSE for failing to provide a level-playing field for trading members subscribing to its tick-by-tick (TBT) data feed system.

In addition, the regulator levied a fine of Rs 25 lakh each on NSE's former managing directors and chief executive officers Chitra Ramakrishna and Ravi Narain.

Alleged lapses in high-frequency trading offered through NSE's co-location facility came under the scanner of the watchdog after a complaint was filed in 2015.

The National Stock Exchange of India co-location facility allows stock brokers to take on rent specific racks and co-locate their servers and systems within the exchange premises.

The primary objective



Chitra Ramakrishna

of co-location services of the NSE is to reduce latency for connectivity to the exchange's trading systems for Direct Market Access, algo trading and Smart Order Routing.

In its 96-page order, the Sebi said unequal access was apparent at different stages of the technology process and the NSE as a stock exchange failed to ensure a level-playing field for trading members subscribing to its TBT data feed system.

TBT data feed provides



Ravi Narain

information about every change in the order book.

According to the regulator, many trading members had repeatedly resorted to accessing the secondary server without any checks and balances and actions on the part of the first-level regulator except for certain emails or advisories.

The NSE flouted the principles underlying the conduct of business of a stock exchange, pertaining to fair and equitable access to information, it said. —PTI

Hyderabad to get 1.5 GW solar plant

S. UMAMAHESHWAR HYDERABAD, FEB. 10

Secunderabad-based solar equipment maker Premier Energies said it would set up a new manufacturing facility at E-City on the outskirts of Hyderabad.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Chiranjeev Saluja, the managing director of Premier Energies, said the green-field factory would be built with an investment of Rs 483 crore

and would produce 1.5 gigawatt of solar photovoltaic cells and modules.

The plant would be spread across 25 acres and is expected to be commissioned in the next two months. The current manufacturing capacity of the company is 500 megawatt.

"The new manufacturing unit will produce MCCE textured multi-crystalline cells as well as Mono PERC cells. The new plant facilities are designed to pro-

duce the latest generation products by incorporating Monocrystalline PERC technology. This technological change, along with the increase of wafer size to 182 mm and 210 mm, will drive the industry towards a greener society.

"With the increased adoption of automation and robotics, our new factory will be on par with some of the leading companies in Asia, Europe, and the US," Mr Saluja said.

AMUNDI CEO STEPS DOWN AT HEIGHT OF SUCCESS



Yves Perrier

LUCCA DE PAOLI FEB. 10

Amundi SA chief executive officer Yves Perrier is stepping down after more than a decade atop the firm he helped build into the largest asset manager in Europe.

Perrier, 67, will become chairman of the French firm he has led since its creation in a 2010 merger of the asset-management arms of banking giants Credit Agricole SA and Societe Generale SA, according to an earnings statement on Wednesday. He'll be succeeded as CEO by his deputy Valerie Baudson, who heads Amundi's exchange-traded fund business as well as its thematic investing unit.

Amundi has more than doubled its assets under management on Perrier's watch to 1.73 trillion euros (\$2.1 trillion). —Bloomberg

Ikea aims to triple jobs via social entrepreneurship

HANNA HOIKKALA FEB. 10

Sweden's Ikea wants to triple the number of jobs created in vulnerable communities by 2025 by scaling up its social entrepreneurship business.

Having collaborated with social entrepreneurs since 2012, the furniture giant has provided work for about 30,000 people, impacting almost 150,000 family members. It now wants to reach 95,000 jobs by working with existing and new partners.

The initiative supports marginalised groups and women in vulnerable communities, helping them make products such as hand-woven cushion covers, baskets and carpets. Ikea supplies them with materials including cotton and banana fibre, and provides expertise ranging from design and production to improving working conditions. The aim is to promote financial independence and life-changing opportunities.

The handcrafted products, which also include plant pots and tool bags, are then sold in Ikea ware-



SOCIAL STARTUP NETWORK LAUNCHED

Hyderabad, Feb. 10: Telangana chief secretary Suresh Kumar on Wednesday launched Telangana Social Startup Network (TSSN), an initiative with a notion to build a solid ecosystem for social startups as an all-inclusive and cohesive body. The goal of the body is to create 5,000 startups in the state in the next five years, a release said.

The network was launched at the Social Impact Confluence organised by the Telangana State Innovation Cell and AIC-IIT Hyderabad.

One major activity, as a part of the ecosystem, would be devising a Social Innovation Policy to streamline the process social startups' establishment, public procurement and the like. —PTI

houses and online. Its partners include social entrepreneur Rangasutra in India and the Jordan River Foundation, which employs female refugees. Both make cushion covers.

"I'm very proud of what we've accomplished, but I know that we can do much more," said Vaishali Misra, who runs the Ikea Social Entrepreneurs Initiative. —Bloomberg

NEW CEO TO CUT 8,000 JOBS AS HEINEKEN FEELS PANDEMIC EFFECT



PHILIP BLINKINSOP BRUSSELS, FEB. 10

Heineken NV plans to cut about 8,000 jobs, the Dutch beer group said on Wednesday, seeking to restore operating margins to pre-pandemic levels after a sharp decline in profit because of coronavirus restrictions.

The world's second-largest brewer, which makes Europe's top selling lager Heineken as well as Tiger and Sol, said it would save 2 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) over the three years to 2023 under CEO Dolf van den Brink's "EverGreen" plan.

Savings will be achieved by redesigning its organisation, reducing the complexity and number of its products and identifying its least effective spending, Heineken said.

The review of its operations will result in about 8,000 job losses—equating to 9 per cent of its workforce at the end of 2019—and a related 420 million euro charge. Personnel expenses will be cut by about 350 million euros, it added.

The brewer said ongoing restrictions on social gatherings and hospitality venues meant 2021 revenue, operating profit and operating profit margin would be below levels in 2019.

It expects market conditions to improve gradually in 2021 and more into 2022, with a slow recovery in European bars and restaurants, less than 30 per cent of which were open at the end of January.

The operating profit margin before one-offs should rise to 17 per cent by 2023, the company said, versus 12.3 per cent last year and 16.8 per cent in 2019.

—Reuters

IN OVERDRIVE

Made-in-India tyres get a fillip from import restrictions

Bridgestone running 3 shifts to meet demand

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 10

Bridgestone, the world's second largest tyre maker, which reached the pre-Covid sales level last year, is running on full three shifts at its two factories in Indore and Pune.

The Indian arm of the Japanese tyre manufacturer said in the October-December 2020 quarter it had clocked a sales growth of 15 per cent.

Bridgestone, which is among the top three passenger car tyre makers in India, competes with market leader MRF, Apollo, JK and Ceat, among others.

"The worst is behind us and we are betting big growth for our brand as

well as the tyre industry in the country," Parag Satpute, managing director at Bridgestone India told *Financial Chronicle*. The company produces 41,000 passenger vehicle tyres and 2,000 tyres for medium and heavy trucks and buses daily. It has invested Rs 2,000 crore over the five year between 2017 and 2021.

He said even during the Covid pandemic its off-the-road, or OTR, business of supplying tyres for the mining and construction business remained steady.

"This momentum of growth is continued in January and February of the first quarter of this calendar year," Satpute pointed out, adding that

Parag Satpute



both replacement market and retail were growing.

He said both its factories in Pune and Indore, employing more than 3,000, were running on three shifts to cater to growing demands.

He said since all tyres were placed in restricted category by the central government since June

2020, banning import of any tyres from China and other countries, it had given fillip to made-in-India tyres.

"Our passenger vehicle tyre business is growing fastest as the replacement tyre market is seeing strong growth after imports were banned," Satpute said. "In fact, normally returned in our business last September."

Satpute said as agriculture was least affected during Covid pandemic, rural economy grew faster, fuelling vehicle growth in tier-II and III towns and cities. "Now there is more growth here which is higher than the Metros," he said, adding that it would likely grow faster than the

urban market.

Bridgestone has launched its first concept store, Bridgestone Select+. With these concept stores, the firm aims to create higher engagement with consumers at tyre services.

Starting with Pune, Bridgestone plans to introduce these stores in multiple cities by the end of this year.

The process is enabled through an interactive digital kiosk where customers can pick between Bridgestone's array of choices. The store also offers customer demonstrations to understand the impact that each of the tyre services provides and helps customers get the best out of their tyres, he added.

SHORT TAKES



Agsara Nandini (right) of Telangana receives the Best Athlete award at the conclusion of the National Junior Athletics Championships in Guwahati on Wednesday.

Nandini is best, TS 12th, AP 15th

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 10

The promising Agsara Nandini won the Best Athlete award as Telangana returned from the 36th National Junior Athletics Championships in Guwahati, Assam, with eight medals. The three golds, three silvers and two bronzes placed the state at 12th on the medals table which was led by Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Maharashtra in that order. Andhra Pradesh was 15th with one gold, two silvers and two bronzes. Nandini was awarded the Best Athlete in the Girls U-18 category for her timing of 13.83 seconds in the 100 metres hurdles that got her gold. She earned 1040 points in the championship.

Andhra Pradesh's L. Yashwanth Kumar was adjudged the Best Athlete in the Boys U-20 thanks to his 13.92 seconds effort in the 100m hurdles event. He logged 1081 points.

On the concluding day on Wednesday, Jeevanji Deepthi of Telangana clocked 0:24.67 to take silver in the Girls U-18 200 metres race.

Aniket Choudhary added another silver for Telangana, in the Boys U-18 200m, by clocking 0:21.71.

Nalubothu Shanumaga Srinivas of Andhra Pradesh bagged a bronze, in the Boys U-20 200m race in 0:21.60.

Dedeepya makes singles quarters

Hyderabad: Y. Sai Dedeepya of Hyderabad has entered the quarterfinals of the AITA Women's Tennis Tournament being played in Chennai. In the pre-quarters, she beat Sharanya Shetty of Maharashtra 6-3, 6-1. Dedeepya had defeated Ananya of Tamil Nadu 6-4, 6-4 in the first round. However, Dedeepya lost the doubles quarterfinal. She and her partner Pooja Ingale of Maharashtra went down 2-6, 4-6 to the Tamil Nadu team of Sai Samhita-Tentu.

Handball tourney from Feb. 26

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad District Handball Association is conducting a tournament from February 26 to 28 at Lal Bahadur Stadium in memory of Ibrahim Khan, who was the founder and general secretary of the State association as well as national federation for handball. Interested teams should register their entries on or before February 24, with S. R. Sanjeev Kumar (9848086188) or S. Siva Kumar (9848336484).

Online chess on Feb. 13, 14

Hyderabad: The Brilliant Chess Academy is conducting the 177th Brilliant Trophy Open Chess Tournament online on February 13 and 14. A total of ₹10,000 prize money will be given to Top 20 places in the Open category. Special prizes will be given to top two places in Under 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 age groups for boys and girls separately. For further details contact J. Subrahmanyam on phone number 9247399717.

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

Pakistan vs South Africa: First T20 from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

Serena shimmers

Advances to Oz Open 3rd round; Djoker on a roll

Melbourne, Feb. 10: Serena Williams strolled into the third round of the Australian Open on Wednesday but former US Open champion Bianca Andreescu's emotional comeback from 15 months out ended at the hands of Taiwanese veteran Hsieh Su-wei.

Williams, 39, continued her quest to equal Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slams with a 6-3, 6-0 romp past 99th-ranked Serbian Nina Stojanovic in just 69 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

But eighth seed Andreescu, playing her first tournament since October 2019 after a serious knee injury, could never cope with Hsieh's quirky range of shots and lost 6-3, 6-2 in one hour 23 minutes.

Kvitova, the former Wimbledon champion and Melbourne runner-up in 2019, committed 44 unforced errors in her 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 defeat to Romania's Sorana Cirstea.

But seventh seed Aryna Sabalenka was little troubled in going through 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 against Russia's Daria Kasatkina.

In the men's draw, eighth seed Diego Schwartzmann of Argentina wasted little time in reaching the last 32, brushing aside Frenchman Alexandre Muller 6-2, 6-0, 6-3 in an hour and 32 minutes on 1573 Arena.

Djokovic demolished young American Frances Tiafoe 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-3.

US Open champion Naomi Osaka, who is seeking her second Australian Open title in three years, got better of France's former world number four Caroline Garcia 6-2, 6-3.

Germany's volatile US Open finalist Alexander Zverev will close out the night session against America's Maxime Cressy.

The fifth seed is known for a short fuse and it showed on Monday as he smashed a racquet during a 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 6-2 win against another Marcos Giron.

The tantrum-prone Nick Kyrgios could also provide fireworks out on his favourite John Cain Arena against France's



Above: Serena Williams of United States makes a forehand return to Serbia's Nina Stojanovic during their second round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne on Wednesday. Serena won 6-3, 6-0.
Below: Poland's Iga Swiatek reacts after winning second round match against Italy's Camila Giorgi at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne on Wednesday. Swiatek won in straight sets 6-2, 6-4.



29th seed Ugo Humbert.

Austrian third seed Dominic Thiem, last year's runner-up to Djokovic, is the highlight in the afternoon session on Margaret Court Arena against Germany's 70th-ranked Dominik Koepfer.

Women's second seed Simona Halep appeared to have overcome a lower

back injury in 6-2, 6-1 romp past wildcard Lizette Cabrera on Monday and faces another Australian, Ajla Tomljanovic, in the night session.

BOPANNA-BEN LOSE IN FIRST ROUND

India endured a second successive disappointing

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles second round: Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA) 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-3; Dominic Thiem (AUT x3) bt Dominik Koepfer (GER) 6-4, 6-0, 6-2; Nick Kyrgios (AUS) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA x29) 5-7, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Alexander Zverev (GER x6) bt Maxime Cressy (USA) 7-5, 6-4, 6-3; Diego Schwartzman (ARG x8) bt Alexandre Muller (FRA) 6-2, 6-0, 6-3; Taylor Fritz (USA x27) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 4-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Stanislas Wawrinka (SUI x17) 7-5, 6-1, 4-6, 2-6, 7-6 (11/9); Milos Raonic (CAN x14) bt Corentin Moutet (FRA) 6-7 (1/7), 6-1, 6-1, 6-4; Pedro Martinez (ESP) bt Emil Ruusuvuori (FIN) 1-6, 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5); Dusan Lajovic (SRB x23) bt Alexander Bublik (KAZ) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-3; Adrian Mannarino (FRA x32) bt Miomir Kecmanovic (SRB) 6-1, 6-2, 6-4; Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x18) bt Alex Bolt (AUS) 7-6 (7/1), 6-1, 6-2; Pablo Carreno-Busta (ESP x15) bt Jiri Vesely (CZE) 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 6-4; Denis Shapovalov (CAN x11) bt Bernard Tomic (AUS) 6-1, 6-3, 6-2; Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x20) bt James Duckworth (AUS) 6-4, 6-1, 6-2.

Women's singles second round: Serena Williams (USA x10) bt Nina Stojanovic (SRB) 6-3, 6-0; Simona Halep (ROM x2) bt Ajla Tomljanovic (AUS) 4-6, 6-4, 7-5; Hsieh Su-wei (TPE) bt Bianca Andreescu (CAN x8) 6-3, 6-2; Garbine Muguruza (ESP x14) bt Liudmila Samsonova (RUS) 6-3, 6-1; Naomi Osaka (JPN x3) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA) 6-2, 6-3; Sara Errani (ITA) bt Venus Williams (USA) 6-1, 6-0; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x19) bt Rebecca Marino (CAN) 6-1, 7-5; Iga Swiatek (POL x15) bt Camila Giorgi (ITA) 6-2, 6-4; Sorana Cirstea (ROM) bt Petra Kvitova (CZE x9) 6-4, 1-6, 6-1; Zarina Diyas (KAZ) bt Bernarda Pera (USA) 6-4, 3-6, 6-3; Ons Jabeur (TUN x27) bt Anna Karolina Schmiedlova (SVK) 6-3, 6-2; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x7) bt Darya Kasatkina (RUS) 7-6 (7/5), 6-3; Ann Li (USA) bt Alize Cornet (FRA) 6-2, 7-6 (8/6); Fiona Ferro (FRA) bt Elena Rybakina (KAZ x17) 6-4, 6-4;

result at the Australian Open with Rohan Bopanna and Ben McLachlan bowing out after a close opening-round defeat to Ji Sung Nam and Min-Kyu Song in the men's doubles event. Bopanna and his Japanese partner lost 4-6 6-7(0) to the Korean wild card pair in one hour and 17 minutes. Not having enough court time due to hard quarantine seemed to have an effect on Bopanna's sharpness. He had spent 14 days in his room and came out only on January 30, jumping into the tune-up event, only to lose his opening round with Frederik Nielsen. — Agencies



M. Anusha Reddy (centre), Mahi Baldev (right) and B. Srimukha (left) pose at the Girls U-16 Individual Time Trial 12km presentation ceremony along with chief guest and Telangana Finance Minister T. Harish Rao.

Bhavya, Anusha pedal to golds

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 10

Hyderabad cyclists, especially the ones from Maxwell Trevor Cycling Welfare Association, walked away with top honours in the 5th Inter-district Road Cycling Championship held at Ranganayaka Sagar in Siddipet.

Local cyclists too punched above their weight and came up with impressive shows in the championship.

M. Bhavya Reddy and M. Anusha Reddy bagged two golds each, in the Individual Time Trial and Mass Start events in the Girls U-14 and U-16 categories respectively. S. Rathnika and N. Srinidhi of Hyderabad were second and third in the U-14 ITT 6km while the second and third places were reversed in the Mass Start event.

In the U-16 category, Mahi Baldev of Hyderabad took silver while B. Srimukha of Nizamabad got bronze, in ITT (12km) as well as Mass Start (24km) events.

Siddipet girls V. Swetha, Sindhuja and B. Harika swept the U-18 Mass Start (24km) event. Swetha and Sindhuja also made it 1-2 in the Individual Time Trial 18km as P. Shruthi of Karimnagar came third.

Cyclists from Maxwell Trevor Cycling Welfare Association won 16 medals.

THE RESULTS

Girls U-14 Individual Time Trial 6km: 1. M. Bhavya Reddy (Hyderabad) 12:56:02, 2. S. Rathnika (Hyderabad) 13:48:02, 3. N. Srinidhi (Hyderabad) 15:08:57.
Girls U-14 Mass Start 6km: 1. M. Bhavya Reddy (Hyderabad) 11:49:26, 2. N. Srinidhi (Hyderabad) 12:01:50, 3.

S. Rathnika (Hyderabad) 12:02:900.

Girls U-16 Individual Time Trial 12km: 1. M. Anusha Reddy (Hyderabad) 23:38:706, 2. Mahi Baldev (Hyderabad, AMF) 25:12:266, 3. B. Srimukha (Nizamabad) 27:44:625.

Girls U-16 Mass Start 24km: 1. M. Anusha Reddy (Hyderabad) 47:35:121, 2. Mahi Baldev (Hyderabad, AMF) 53:05:145, 3. B. Srimukha (Nizamabad) 53:47:450.

Girls U-18 Individual Time Trial 18km: 1. V. Swetha (Siddipet) 28:33:265, 2. Sindhuja (Siddipet) 32:34:541, 3. P. Shruthi (Karimnagar) 33:41:006.

Girls U-18 Mass Start 24km: 1. V. Swetha (Siddipet) 1:05:22:375, 2. Sindhuja (Siddipet) 1:12:46:741.

Boys U-18 Mass Start 60km: 1. Yashwanth K. (Nizamabad, MTCWA) 2:14:36:001, 2. Pranay Goud (Ranga Reddy, MTCWA) 2:16:35:140, 3. Arnav Chourasia (Hyderabad, MTCWA) 2:14:36:620.

Boys U-14 Individual Time Trial 12km: 1. Sai Charan (Medchal, MTCWA) 2:16:35:661, 2. S. Koushik (Medchal, MTCWA) 2:31:42:214, 3. H. Arshid (Siddipet) 25:12:218.

Boys U-16 Individual Time Trial 12km: 1. Aashirvaad Saxena (Hyderabad, MTCWA) 18:10:011, 2. Chirayash Patwardhan (Medchal, MTCWA) 19:52:335, 3. Raghavendra (Nizamabad) 22:31:224.

Boys U-18 Individual Time Trial 24km: 1. Utsav Battineni (Hyderabad, MTCWA) 38:29:734, 3. Pranaav Vipin (Hyderabad, MTCWA) 38:32:453.

Men's U-23 Mass Start 84km: 1. Raj Kumar Aljmeera (Hyderabad, MTCWA) 2:26:33:261, 2. Shiva Thammada (Hyderabad, MTCWA) 2:26:36:432, 3. Lee Thomas (Ranga Reddy, MTCWA) 2:30:16:240.

Men's Indian male cycle 24km: 1. Sri Ram Nayak (Warangal) 59:18:529, 2. P. Sampath (Siddipet) 59:18:900, 3. Jangam (Siddipet) 59:19:624.

Men's Elite Individual Time Trial 36km: 1. Sallendranath (Medchal, MTCWA) 1:00:36:0, 2. Gautam Sriram (Ranga Reddy, MTCWA) 1:13:24:0.

Men's Elite Mass Start 84km: 1. Parashuram Chenji (Hyderabad), 2:24:23:861, 2. Sam Solomon Naik (Ranga Reddy) 2:24:24:555, 3. Bachilo (Hyderabad) 2:25:02:533.

Women's Elite Individual Time Trial: 1. P. Hemalatha (Siddipet) 58:01:211.

Women's Elite Mass Start 24km: 1. P. Hemalatha (Siddipet) 58:01:232.

Kohli free falls to No. 5 as Root rises to No.3 in Tests

Dubai, Feb. 10: India skipper Virat Kohli was on Wednesday pushed to the fifth spot by his English counterpart Joe Root, who rose two rungs to third in the latest ICC Test rankings for batsmen, even as Jasprit Bumrah and R. Ashwin moved up in the bowlers' chart.

Kohli, who had had scores of 11 and 72 in the opening Test against England, has 852 points and down one spot in the latest chart issued on Wednesday.

Ashwin and pacer Bumrah have jumped a rung each to be seventh and eighth respectively.

Root has reached 883 rating points. It is his highest position since September 2017 after a fabulous run in the sub-continent saw him accumulate 684 runs in three Tests, two of which were in Sri Lanka.

Ahead of Kohli for the first time since November 2017, Root is now 36 points behind Kane Williamson and trails Steve Smith by only eight points. With Marnus Labuschagne also in the mix, competition for the top five slots is intense with all of them above 850 rating points.

For India, Rishabh Pant's knock of 91 in the first innings has helped him become the first full-time wicketkeeper from his country to reach 700 rating points as he retained the 13th position among batsmen.

— PTI



India captain Virat Kohli in this file photo.

STAR SPRINTER BLAKE ALL PRAISE FOR VIRAT

Kingston, Feb. 10: Star Jamaican sprinter Yohan Blake admires India captain Virat Kohli for not offering excuses when his team does not perform well and taking the blame on himself.

India suffered a 227-run defeat after England set them a target of world record 420 in the opening Test in Chennai on Tuesday. After the match, skipper Kohli admitted that his side put up an underwhelming performance.

"What I really love about Team India is that Virat Kohli doesn't find any excuses. That's what I really love about his captaincy, he took the blame for everything," Blake said.

"He said the bowlers didn't find the right areas and that the batsmen were not as consistent. He said 'we got to go back to the drawing board and come back'. And that's what I love about Virat Kohli and his captaincy. Test cricket is absolutely the best," the star sprinter said.

Second Test should be interesting, India was 1-0 down in Australia, they are 1-0 down at their home ground now. The second Test, I'm looking forward to it," Blake further added.

— PTI

NASSER SAYS ROOT ONE OF ENG GREATS

London, Feb. 10: Former England captain Nasser Hussain feels incumbent Joe Root is "arguably" the country's best ever player of spin and can break all the Test batting records accumulated by the nation's batsmen.

Root struck 218 in England's first innings to lead his side to a 227-run win over India in the first Test in Chennai on Tuesday.

"Root sure is one of England's greats. He will probably end up breaking all records, he will probably go past Sir Alastair Cook's 161 Test matches and probably tally of runs as well," Hussain wrote in his column for *Sky Sports*.

"He is in great nick, only 30 years old, and if you did a list of all-time England batting greats — the ones I have seen anyway — you'd have to have Root with Cook, Graham Gooch and Kevin Pietersen.

"I would say he is arguably England's best-ever player of spin, the way he sweeps spin away is outstanding to watch. People were writing England off, saying this series could be 4-0 to India. No one really gave this side much of a chance. India had won in Australia, Kohli was back and India is a very difficult place to go and win in Test match cricket," the column added. — PTI

