

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VISAKHAPATNAM | MONDAY | 8 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 30.6°C
Min: 15.6°C
RH: 63%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Mist.
Max/Min temp.
30/15°C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+11,673)	(+86)
1,08,38,843	1,55,114
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+150)	(+2)
TS: 2,95,581	1,610
(+73)	(+0)
AP: 8,88,423	7,159

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,65,08,151
DEATHS 23,23,815
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219
worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula Dwadasi till 3.20 am (Tuesday)
Star: Mula till 3.21 pm
Variyam: 1.49 pm to 3.21 pm; 12.40 am to 2.14 am (Tuesday)
Durmuhurtam: 12.53 pm to 1.38 pm; 3.09 pm to 3.55 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
HURI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhri 25,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.50 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.45 pm
Maghrib: 6.15 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.27 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.55 PM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 03.21 AM
MOONSET TODAY 02.38 PM

COUNTER POINT



Not chakka jam, it is a regular traffic jam!

SHORT TAKES

Allu Arjun's van hit, no one hurt

Hyderabad: Telugu film star Allu Arjun's vanity van was hit by a container lorry in Khammam district and the driver and an attendant who were travelling in the vehicle escaped unhurt, police said on Sunday. The van suffered minor damage when the lorry coming from behind rammed into it at Satyanarayanaapuram on Saturday. Neither the actor nor his make-up team was in the van at that time, a police official said. The vehicle was returning from a film shoot. Based on the van driver's complaint, a case was registered against the container lorry's driver, he said. — PTI

FARM | STIR

Tikait credits khaps for protest

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

As thousands of people rallied behind the farmers protesting at Delhi's borders, a kisan mahapanchayat in Haryana's Charkhi Dadri, attended by Uttar Pradesh BKU leader Rakesh Tikait, on Sunday passed a resolution seeking repeal of the three agricultural reform laws, a legal guarantee on MSP, implementation of the Swaminathan Commission recommendations for profitable crop prices, waiver of farm

loans and the release of those arrested after the Republic Day violence in Delhi.

Asserting the agitation against the farm laws was a people's movement that will not fail, Mr Tikait said there will be no "ghar wapsi" till the farmers' demands are met. He lauded the role of the "khap panchayats" (caste councils) and their leaders in supporting the farmers' stir.

Mr Tikait said two government representatives had come to meet him on Saturday, but he refused to

meet them separately. "Every discussion will be held collectively in the presence of the Kisan Samyukth Morcha (an umbrella body of the protesting farmers' unions)."

In Madhya Pradesh, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar claimed the ongoing protests were limited to a certain area and hoped that the deadlock would end soon. "The farmers' agitation is limited to a certain area. The government is ready for talks with the farmers, and I hope we will

be able to break the deadlock very soon."

Railway minister Piyush Goyal said in New Delhi the Centre was ready to resume talks with the farmers' unions if they (farmers) have some new proposals.

As the protests against the new laws entered Day 74, a farmer from Jind who was supporting the agitation allegedly hanged himself from a tree just 2 km from the Tikrit protest site. In his note, the deceased blamed the Modi government for delaying the roll back of farm laws.



NATION | 4

Big return planned for Sasikala in TN

deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle

HC ends SEC's 'confinement' order for mantri

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Sunday set aside the State Election Commission's order confining panchayat raj minister P. Ramachandra Reddy to his home. But the court restrained the minister from interacting with the media till all phases of the gram panchayat polls are over on February 21.

The High court came up with the "via media solution" to remedy a surcharged ground situation, with differences between by the SEC and the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government between whom, the court pointed out, "there is no love lost."

Passing an interim order in a house motion, moved by the minister and state government, Justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu brought to the fore the overstepping of their respective jurisdictions by both the minister and the SEC.

"The language used leaves much to be desired. Freedom of speech is not an absolute and a reasonable restriction can be imposed," the judge pointed, out referring to the

SEC RESTRICTS TRANSFER OF POLL OFFICIALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 7

Invoking plenary powers, State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar has issued orders restricting transfer of officials engaged in election duties.

The SEC stated that he was invoking plenary powers vested under Article 243K and 2432A of the Constitution. The orders stated that some government servants working with the State Election Commission as observers are very senior officers and hold important positions in government.

■ Page 2: SEC suspects govt may curtail tenure

minister's warning to returning officers of severe action if they do not announce unanimous elections.

■ Page 2: HC faults poll body of overreach



WORLD | 5

Iran wants sanctions lifted before N-deal

SPORTS | 8

England bring out their Bess



150+ feared dead in glacier burst

7 bodies found, 16 rescued, 125 missing after floods in Uttarakhand

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

About 150 labourers working at a power project in Tapovan-Reni in Uttarakhand are feared dead while several people are missing after a glacier burst in Chamoli region triggered flash floods downstream.

Uttarakhand chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said the bodies of seven persons have been recovered while 125 are missing. The ITBP personnel have so far managed to rescue 16 persons trapped in a tunnel while efforts are on to rescue others trapped in another tunnel.

The flash floods have also caused damage to livestock and properties, the exact assessment of which is yet to be made. Uttarakhand DGP Ashok Kumar said the glacier burst took place at about 10.45 am on Sunday, causing flash floods in the upper regions. He said downstream areas were alerted immediately and villages along the river vacated in time to save life. He added the water has now reached Srinagar (in Uttarakhand) dam, where it is stable now. The state has in 2013 witnessed a similar disaster leading to the loss of several lives.

Expressing grief over the loss of life, Prime Minister



Avalanche after a glacier broke off in Joshimath in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district causing a massive flood in the Dhauliganga river on Sunday.

— PTI

Narendra Modi said the Centre had approved ex-gratia relief of Rs 2 lakhs each from PMNRF for the next of kin of those who lost their lives and Rs 50,000 would be given to those seriously injured. Earlier in the day, he tweeted: "(I) Am constantly monitoring the unfortunate situation in Uttarakhand. India stands with Uttarakhand and the nation prays for everyone's safety there. Have

been continuously speaking to senior authorities and getting updates on NDRF deployment, rescue work and relief operations."

The glacial burst led to the rise of water levels in river Rishiganga, which washed away the Rishiganga small hydro project of 13.2 MW near Raini village. The flash flood also affected the downstream hydro project of NTPC at Tapovan on the river

Dhauliganga, which is a tributary of the river Alaknanda.

Union home ministry officials said there was no danger of downstream flooding and the rise in water levels has been contained. "There is also no threat to the neighbouring villages. At the same time, the concerned agencies of the Centre and the state were asked to keep a strict vigil on the situation, and a team from DRDO, which

monitors avalanches, is being flown in for surveillance and reconnaissance. The MD of NTPC has been asked to reach the affected site immediately," officials said.

The home ministry has rushed five teams each of the ITBP and NDRF to Uttarakhand to assist in the relief and rescue operations. Till late Sunday evening, the ITBP had managed to rescue 16 people.

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SHORT TAKES

PEOPLE OFFERED
BUS TICKETS AND
₹5,000 FOR VOTE

From Page 1

These people recently came back to their native villages to celebrate three-day Sankranti and again returned to their places of work. These workers are reportedly showing a reluctance to come back to their native villages again, to cast their votes, saying it would cost them more money. Taking note, several candidates are promising such men attractive cash offers and transport allowance.

Private employees working in Telangana State, K Raju and D Trinath, said the main candidates in their village offered them to and fro bus tickets and money for other expenses if they went back home for voting. They said there were also cash offers of ₹500 to ₹5,000 per vote in the elections due to tight competitions in the villages.

They said that this was for the first time they were seeing gram panchayat elections as such a prestigious fight like an assembly or Parliament poll.

Senior political analysts say more of the election trends would be evident on Tuesday. Former minister and senior TD leader Alapati Rajendra Prasad alleged that ruling YSRC leaders are threatening TD-supported candidates to keep off polls to facilitate “unanimous” elections and also threatening voters that the government would cancel welfare schemes if they do not help the YSRC win the gram panchayat polls.

Refuting the allegations of TD, YSRC MLA Ambati Rambabu said their party legislators did not participate in the election campaigns. “People are supporting chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy for his dedication towards implementation of the welfare schemes without bias,” he said and expressed hope people would support the YSRC.

● **PRIVATE EMPLOYEES** working in Telangana State, K Raju and D Trinath, said the main candidates in their village offered them to and fro bus tickets and money for other expenses if they went back home for voting. They said there were also cash offers of ₹500 to ₹5,000 per vote in the elections due to tight competitions in the villages.

TD fails to win in Naidu's hometown

YSRC sarpanchs get elected unanimously in Chittoor dist; TD performs poorly in Guntur

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 7

The Telugu Desam has failed to restrain the YSR Congress from getting sarpanchs elected unanimously in Chittoor district which is the home district of TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu. Further, the TD performed poorly in Guntur district which was once a bastion to the party. The YSRC has performed better in most districts as far as unanimous elections go, except in Anantapur, Krishna, Srikakulam, East and West Godavari districts.

There are 169 gram panchayats scheduled for elections under the first phase in Anantapur district of which only six were elected unanimously.

In Srikakulam, 39 gram panchayats were unanimous out of total 309, in Krishna 21 out of 234, in East Godavari 28 out of 366 and in West Godavari 41 were unanimous out of a total 239.

The highest number of unanimous elections were registered in Chittoor district at 112 out of total 454, followed by 67 out of 337 in Guntur district, 50 out of 206 in Kadapa, 52 out of 193 in Kurnool district, 25 unanimous out of 163 in Nellore, 35 out of 227 in Prakasam district and 42 unanimous elections out of total 340 in Visakhapatnam.

Senior political analysts opined that this marked the continued weakening of the TD in Chittoor district. The TD won only one Assembly seat, that of Chandrababu Naidu, in Chittoor district in 2019. In Guntur, the TD won two Assembly seats but one of its MLAs, Maddali Giridhar, later left the party.

The analysts said the TD had put a lot of effort into regaining public support with its continuous agitations against the YSRC government on various issues but that has failed to attract the people. They said that the YSRC which banking on welfare schemes seems to continue to have the people's support due to the quick implementation of the schemes after achieving power.



District collector Vivek Yadav inspects polling and counting arrangements for the gram panchayat elections in Tenali MPDO office, Guntur district, on Sunday.

— E. TEJO RAO

Ban orders imposed in poll-bound villages

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 7

Ban orders under Section 144 and the AP Police Act are in force in all the villages going for Panchayat elections in the first phase on February 9, it was officially announced here on Sunday.

Prakasam district Superintendent of Police, Siddharth Kaushal has

advised villagers to avoid crowding on the day of polling. Follow the queue method at polling stations and keep away from victory rallies held without police permission, he said.

He called for cooperation from all for the smooth conduct of panchayat elections. “There will be strong surveillance at polling stations,” he said and added that no unethical

activity will be allowed. Cases will be registered against violators and stringent action would follow.

The SP visited various villages under Martur, Addanki and J Pungaluru police stations and issued directions to police officers and other staff involved in the first phase of the elections.

He appealed to the people

to vote freely for the candidate of their choice in normal course and without allowing themselves to be under pressure or provocation from any quarter.

The SP said that 1167 out of the 2455 polling stations in the district were identified as normal booths, 534 as sensitive booths and 534 as hyper-sensitive booths. Security has been arranged accordingly, he said.

TD seeks explanation from CM Jagan why farmers must vote for YSRC govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 7

Telugu Desam politburo member K. Kala Venkat Rao on Sunday demanded that Jagan Mohan Reddy government explain why farmers should vote for YSRC Congress-supported candidates in panchayat elections when they have faced many hurdles during the past 20 months.

In this regard, he pointed out that the fourth and fifth instalments under crop loan waiver scheme have not been paid, which has affected 32 lakh farmers. He said payment of over ₹2,000 crore in arrears are still pending. The much-publicised Sunna Vaddi (zero-interest) loans are not being extended by the YSRC government.

Crop investment support

of ₹12,500 each to over 1 crore farmers was also not being paid. Venkat Rao said the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime is paying just ₹7,500 to far less than 50 per cent of farmers. Further, Jagan Mohan Reddy had promised not to increase current charges, but has now imposed a ₹1,300 crore burden on people. A similar promise was made with regard to

RTC fares, but passengers ended up getting burdened by ₹800 crore.

The politburo member said with hike in fuel prices and property taxes, the government put an additional burden of over ₹2 lakh crore on people. He demanded that the CM explain why people must vote for his party when they have been burdened by all these issues.

POLITICAL | GAME

Minister Muttamsetti alleges that TD leaders are playing drama of resigning from Assembly

Naidu must write to PM on RINL, says tourism minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 7

Tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao (Avanti) has asked TDP national president and former chief minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu to write a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the RINL steel plant privatisation issue.

Addressing a press conference at the Vizag YSRC party office on Sunday, he said issuing mere statements and blaming Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is not sufficient.

Taking on the TD, Srinivasa Rao said opposition leaders are playing the drama of resigning from Assembly, making conflicting statements on disinvestment, and putting the blame on the YSRC government only to take political advantage.

The minister said the central government has taken a unilateral decision on the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant without consulting any stakeholders or political parties. “From the beginning, the NDA government has been giving step-motherly treatment to Andhra Pradesh. First, the government did not fulfil assurances made under the AP Reorganisation Act. Then, it has maintained a vindictive attitude towards AP government,” he alleged.

Avanti said the Congress disappeared from the scene in AP after dividing the state. BJP will also face the same fate if it went ahead with the privatisation proposal.

He suggested that Jana Sena under the leadership of Pawan Kalyan and AP BJP leaders take up the RINL issue with their central leadership.

The minister said YSRC leaders will join trade unions and intensify the agitation to save RIBL from being privatised.



BJP General Secretary Daggubati Purandeswari explains a point on the general budget 2021 during a meeting at City BJP Office in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

Vizag MP offers to resign over VSP privatisation

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 7

Lok Sabha member from Visakhapatnam M.V.V. Satyanarayana said he will resign from the parliament if the central government goes ahead with privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

Addressing a press conference along with senior trade union leader Mantri Rajashekar at his residence in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, the MP said it is unfortunate that opposition parties are blaming YSRC government in the state for a decision taken by the NDA government at the centre.

Displaying the letter written by Chief Minister Y. S.

VSP TRADE UNION LEADERS MEET TO
DISCUSS ON FUTURE PLAN OF ACTIONDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 7:

All the trade unions of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant on Sunday in the plant premises and held discussions on the future action plan. City secretary of CPI(M) and honorary president of the recognised union Vizag Steel Employees Union B. Ganga Rao said a round table meeting would be held on

February 8. Employees will organise a mass dharna at the Kurmannapalem junction near the main entrance of the steel plant.

Meanwhile, Steel Executive Association of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (SEA) took unanimous decision to oppose the Central Government policy decision of RINL/Visakhapatnam Steel's strategic sale plant.

Jagan Mohan Reddy to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Satyanarayana said he, Anakapalle MP K.

Satyavati and Gajuwaka MLA Tippala Nagi Reddy were among the first leaders who responded to the

steel plant privatisation issue by joining a dharna at the RTC Complex opposing the centre's decision.

The MP said a delegation will visit New Delhi soon and hold discussions with union finance minister Nirmala Sitaraman and other senior ministers for reconsideration of the decision.

He pointed out that he had written a letter to union steel minister and finance minister on January 30 asking them not to privatise the steel plant though it was running in losses.

Gajuwaka MLA Tippala Nagi Reddy said they will intensify their agitation against privatisation of VSP in the coming days in association with trade unions.

MLC Madhav says BJP will oppose blanket disinvestment

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 7

Senior BJP leader and MLC P.V.N. Madhav said on Sunday that the state unit of the party would strongly oppose any blanket privatisation of public sector units in Visakhapatnam.

Addressing the media here along with the BJP national general secretary Daggubati Purandeswari, Madhav said Visakhapatnam grew up with the PSUs and the “local people are emotionally attached to these industries.”

He reminded the people that it was the BJP that had prevented privatization of Hindustan Shipyard Ltd, which was then merged with the Defence department, the BHPV with BHEL and recently the Dredging Corporation of India with the Visakhapatnam Port Trust.

Madhav said the central leadership of the BJP has been making a review of performance of the loss-making and profit-recording PSUs and aiming to propose a strategic merger as was done with the loss-making banks.

“The state BJP is opposing the decision taken by the Union Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on the privatization move. We will rather suggest a strategic merger, preferably a PSU with the steel plant, to prevent losses and expand the operations further,” Madhav said.

He however said it was incorrect to say that the steel plant was being sold for Rs1,500 crore or that the 24,000 acres of its land was

Unions oppose privatisation

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 7

Employees unions and association of Andhra Pradesh government strongly opposed the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant and asked the Central Government to reconsider its decision.

Addressing a joint press conference in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, district president of AP NGO Association K. Eswara Rao, GVMC recognised union honorary president M Ananda Rao, APEPDCL Federation Front president Palaki Srinivasa Rao and APRTC union leader K. Srinivasa Rao warned the govern-

ment that if the decision was not reconsidered, they would not allow any NDA leader to step in Visakhapatnam city and intensify the agitation state-wide.

They also appealed the elected representatives from Visakhapatnam to resign immediately join the agitation.

Eswara Rao said by not allocating captive mines, the central leaders purposefully pushed the steel plant into losses so that it could be put in the private hands.

The union leaders also appreciated chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for taking up the issue with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

being given away to private entities on a platter.

The MLC has promised that not a single acre of land would be given away and the present status of the plant would remain the same.

He said a few state BJP leaders accompanied him to Delhi and they held discussions with the central leaders on the issue. “We explained to them the emotional attachment the people of Andhra Pradesh have with the steel plant,” he said.

Earlier, Puresdeswari had said she along with other

HIGH COURT
FAULTS SEC OF
OVERREACH

From Page 1

In the same breath, the court observed that the “SEC does not have power to direct that the petitioner (minister) be confined to his residential premises.”

Further, Justice Somayajulu categorically said, “The power of superintendence and control over elections and its process cannot extend to passing an order restraining the petitioner from leaving his house.”

Dealing with the delicate situation involving two constitutionally empowered bodies on an incessant collision course, the court said, “The petitioner before this court is a minister, who has taken oath on the Constitution of India. The first respondent (SEC) is another Constitutional authority, with certain powers which are given to it for the smooth conduct of the elections in the state. They are the contesting parties.”

On the minister's contention that he was only propagating the government's policy of encouraging unanimous polls, Justice Somayajulu said the former's “threat to officials is a clear interference in the election process.”

The court's observations that no person can be deprived of life and liberty, except as per the procedure established by law, also exposed the chinks in the armour of N. Ramesh Kumar, the State Election Commissioner, whose actions in certain instances have drawn widespread criticism.

The HC order, beyond any doubt, establishes that the SEC did not follow due process of law in the instant case.

● **ON THE minister's** contention that he was only propagating the government's policy of encouraging unanimous polls, Justice Somayajulu said the former's “threat to officials is a clear interference in the election process.”

SHORT TAKES

PLAYERS, COACHES FELICITATED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 7

The Krishna District Kabaddi Association asked students, teachers, and parents to inculcate sports habits from early childhood to fit healthy living and learn skills from senior players. KDKA organised a get-together in which more than 200 players, coaches, administrators and technical officials took part.

The organisations felicitated 40 members, who represented the country as Kabaddi players, coaches, managers and technical officials from Krishna district. KDKA founder secretary P.N. Sankara Rao said that the event of its kind in the history of Andhra.

MLA LAUNCHES DOOR TO DOOR EYE SCREENING

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 7

Sankar Foundation Super Speciality Eye Hospital on Saturday launched door to door eye screening, a project funded by Andhra Petrochemicals Ltd (APL) under their CSR, in Mindhi village in Visakhapatnam. The eye care project, first of its kind in the city, aimed at eradicating avoidable blindness in Mindhi and its adjoining colonies. The project was inaugurated by Gudivada Amarnath, MLA, Anakapalli recently in the presence of Narsappa, Vice President, APL and Sankar Foundation officials. A team of medical and paramedical staff of Sankar Foundation started door to door eye screening every day morning at 7 am. As on date, around 4,324 persons screened and provided with 1800 spectacles to the needy persons and performed 133 cataract and subspecialty surgeries (over 30) in Mindhi and its adjoining colonies.

During the screening, people suffering from refractive errors were provided with spectacles fitted in a frame of their choice free of cost. People identified with cataract were also operated in Sankar Foundation Hospital by providing transport, food, accommodation and post-operative surgery medicines.

MISSING GIRL TRACED IN HOWRAH

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 7

The Nawabpeta Police traced a 14-year-old girl, who went missing in November last year in Nellore, in Howrah in West Bengal and handed over to the father on Sunday.

The minor girl is the daughter of a rickshaw puller living at Settigunta Road in Nellore. His wife died 10 years back due to health reasons. The girl studying VIII standard in the government school.

FLIGHTS FROM RJY TO MUMBAI, NEW DELHI

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, FEB. 7

Passenger flights and air cargo services will soon start from Rajamahendravaram to Mumbai and New Delhi, announced Rajamahendravaram MP Margani Bharat.

Speaking as chief guest at the felicitation function for Telecom Adviser Committee and Airport Advisory Committee members here on Sunday, Mr Bharat said a detailed project report has been prepared for introducing Airbus services from Rajamahendravaram Airport at a cost of ₹135 crore. Once the cargo terminal comes, it can also become a hub for export of cargo, including flowers.

The MP said Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has promised to allocate ₹150 crore for development of Rajamahendravaram Lok Sabha Constituency owing to which Rajamahendravaram Urban and Rural assembly constituencies will develop vastly. Six flyover bridges have been sanctioned to ease traffic in East and West Godavari districts. The Godavari Bund in the city will be widened, he stated.

POLICE DEPLOYED AT POLLING CENTRES

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 7

The East Godavari district police deployed 2,100 of its personnel for polling duty in and around the first phase polling centres where voting for gram panchayat seats will be held on Tuesday.

The strong police presence is hoped to ensure peaceful and smooth polling. DSP Adnan Nayeem Asmi has said that besides the 2,100 police personnel, four APSP platoons, one octopus platoon would be deployed.

All set for Mary Matha festival



The three-day annual Mary Matha Thirunallu would be held from February 9 in Gunadala area. The organisers say they have made fool-proof arrangements for the smooth performance of devotional festival.

Catholic Bishop Rev T Joseph Raja Rao and Monsignor Muvvala Prasad released a poster of Mary Matha for the Thirunallu programme here on Sunday.

Addressing the media, Bishop

Joseph Raja Rao said the three-day annual Gunadala Mary Matha festival was being celebrated for the past 70 years. All the arrangements are made for the feast that will be held under strict Covid guidelines.

President lays stone for Madanapalle hospital

Kovind asserts importance of yoga, physical exercise

FROM PAGE 1

“When I heard about Sri M, I requested him to teach me Kriya Yoga and found that it was a comprehensive and holistic discipline for the elevation of the mind as well as to keep one physically fit,” he remarked.

Interacting with students of the first yoga teacher training program, the President asserted the

importance of yoga and physical exercise.

“The most important aspect of yoga is that it creates a healthy mind in a healthy body besides helping to explore the deeper aspects of consciousness. Students should inculcate the habit of meditation and yoga as they will improve their thinking capabilities and ensure all-round development,” he added.

After aarti and planting a peepal tree, he unveiled the foundation stone for Swaasthya Hospitals, an initiative of Satsang Foundation. The 38-bed hospital will provide affordable and quality health care to the semi-urban and rural population in Madanapalle.

The President also interacted with students and teachers of Satsang Vidyalaya, which is a free

school that has been concentrating on holistic development, quality education, nutrition, and health care services for children from marginalised communities since 1991.

The President also visited ‘The Peepal Grove School’, founded by Sri M and inaugurated by the then President, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in December 2006.

AP reports 73 Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 7

The spree of decrease in Covid-19 cases is continuing in AP as 73 new Covid-19 cases were registered in the past 24 hours on Sunday, and no new deaths were reported. The total tally increased to 8,88,423, and the toll remains at 7,159 with a death rate of 0.81 per cent.

The number of active cases came down to 1,003 as 82 patients were recovered in the past day. The

total number of recoveries stand at 8,80,261 with a recovery rate of 99.08 per cent.

The 33,980 samples tested in the past day registered 0.21 per cent positivity rate.

The Guntur district reported 15 new Covid-19 infections, the highest single-day tally among the districts followed by Chittoor 14 new Covid-19 cases, Krishna 12, Nellore 8, Visakhapatnam 8, Anantapur 3, East Godavari 3, Kurnool 3,

Srikakulam 3, Kadapa 2, Prakasam 1 and Vizianagaram registered one new Corona cases. No new Covid-19 infection was registered in West Godavari district.

The East Godavari is on top in total Covid-19 cases with 1,24,317 cases followed by West Godavari with total 94,259 Covid-19 cases, Chittoor 87,125, Guntur 75,572, Anantapur 67,676, Nellore 62,363, Prakasam 62,185, Kurnool 60,834, Visakhapatnam 59,857.

65-YEAR-OLD MURDERED

Kurnool: A 65-year old man was murdered by his neighbor over property at Brahmanapalle village in Orvakal mandal on Saturday night. The victim was identified as Shiva Shankar.

Beggars have it easy in Kurnool district

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, FEB. 7

Beggars have turned a menace in Kurnool district, particularly in temple towns like Srisailem, Ahobilam and Mahanandi. Begging, including by children; has become highly organised. Child begging at Srisailem has already been flagged by National Child Protection Committee, which has made ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) become proactive act. In Kurnool city, beggars have gone to the extent of nagging you in front of restaurants, eateries, temples and wherever else people congregate.

“There is a shift in begging strategies. In cities, they choose traffic signals, hotels, bus stops, or wherever they find people gathering,” said Veeranjanyulu, a retired professor of sociology. Panhandling has become a lucrative work. Even an aged retired private employee can be seen holding a begging bowl near Venkataramana colony, the professor said.

Gone are the days when they sought food as alms. Now they just want hard cash, not even coins, as free food is being made available by Kasinayana temples at several places

● Begging, including by children; has become highly organised. Child begging at Srisailem has already been flagged by National Child Protection Committee, which has made ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) become proactive act. In Kurnool city, beggars have gone to the extent of nagging you in front of restaurants, eateries, temples and wherever else people congregate.

in Kurnool district, he pointed out.

At any time of the day, beggars – old people to children and women to infants, apart from eunuchs; can be found occupying roads in the city seeking money. “Sometimes, it becomes irritating as beggars do not allow you to eat or drink. Even as you start eating, the beggars surround you in hordes seeking mercy. Once you pay one, many others come to you as the successful one informs his or her comrades,” said Seshamma, a housewife near Saibaba temple.

Begging has turned into a profession not only for poor, disabled, or injured. It has been picked up as a choice by many because there are no restrictions in the city. B. Gokari, a private employee, said, “It is quite unfortunate that begging is fast turning into a thriving business in the city. But those in power are least bothered about it, despite the pre-

vailing precarious situation in the society.”

G. Venkatesh, a government teacher, said begging has turned a booming business as police and municipal authorities seem reluctant in taking action against them. Beggars have even made life of people miserable by knocking on their doors in the morning itself, he pointed out.

When contacted, traffic DSP Mahaboob Basha said obstructing free flow of traffic near traffic signals is a cause of concern. A cleanup operation will be taken up in coordination with other stakeholders, he stated.

Srisailem temple executive officer K.S. Rama Rao said a drive has been undertaken by the temple administration to free Srisailem from the menace of beggars, particularly children. “We are constantly driving away alms seekers from the front of the temple and junctions in the temple town,” he underlined.

Woman FBO caught red-handed by ACB

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 7

A woman forest beat officer caught red-handed by ACB while accepting a bribe to conduct a forest land survey for issuing Recognition of Forest Rights (ROFR) patta. The ACB officials caught FBO K. Sesha Kumari when she was taking ₹50,000 bribe from a complainant.

The complainant J. Yesu Naik from Rudravaram village, Reddy Gudem mandal in Krishna District lodged a complaint with the ACB, Vijayawada stating that K. Sesha Kumari, forest beat officer, A. Kondur Forest Section, Mylavaram Forest Range, Krishna District has demanded ₹50,000 as initial part payment out of total demand of ₹1 lakh for GPS reading measurement to provide right for the cultivation of forest land for getting ROFR patta to the complainant and his brother-in-law for the land about four acres.

● A forest beat officer was caught red-handed by the ACB sleuths while accepting a bribe on Sunday. The forest beat officer, K. Sesha Kumari of Mylavaram forest range in Krishna district, was caught red-handed by the ACB officials while demanding and accepting a bribe of ₹50,000 as part of the payment for official favour.

In this connection, a trap was laid, and the accused officer-1, K. Sesha Kumari and her husband Sudhakar were caught red-handed at their residence in A. Konduru.

The chemical test conducted on the right-hand fingers of the accused and both hand fingers of her husband yielded a positive result. The bribe amount was recovered from underneath of diwan cot in their residence.

Doctors protest over mixopathy

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 7

Expressing solidarity with the on-going protests by Indian Medical Association (IMA) AP, women doctors in large numbers sat on relay hunger-strike here on Sunday against mixopathy that allows practitioners of ayurveda and other forms to practice allopathy.

IMA women wing chairperson Dr Padmavathi Devi demanded cancellation of mixopathy orders, issued by the Union Government, in order to save precious lives. She stated that allopathic doctors started the 14-day relay hunger fast but there has been no response from the Centre, which is very sad.

Dr Padmavathi said that allowing ayurveda doctors to practice allopathy and giving them an opportunity for PG (allopathic) courses is unethical and unscientific as ayurvedic procedures were not as modern as allopathy.

She made it clear that they were not against ayurveda but were opposed to allowing them to conduct surgeries because they lack basic training. She expressed fear that the lives of patients could be at risk if non-allo-

● Dr Padmavathi said that allowing ayurveda doctors to practice allopathy and giving them an opportunity for PG (allopathic) courses is unethical and unscientific as ayurvedic procedures were not as modern as allopathy.

pathic doctors start performing surgeries as they were devoid of appropriate knowledge, training and studies.

She said that the protests across the State will continue till the government withdraws the order.

Dr Padmavathi condemned the predatory poaching of modern medicine and its surgical disciplines by the Central Council of Indian Medicine.

IMA Vijayawada city president Dr Madhusudhna Sarma stated that the CCIM notification allowing the legal practice of surgeries by ayurveda practitioners and the formation of four committees by Niti Aayog to integrate all systems of medicine will only lead to “mixopathy”, which would harm people in all aspects.

IMA Vijayawada women wing chairperson Dr Durga Vani also participated in the protest.

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All that site measuring mentioned 42 Sq.yds or 35,117 Sq.mts being an undivided and unspecified share out of block area 542 Sq.yds out of total extent 862 Sq.yds being Plot No.924 and 925, vide R.C.No.87/2009(SA)/06-02-2009 under regularized Act vide No.383/0086, 383/0084, issued by proceedings of the Tahsildar Gajuwaka, being D. No.13-14-32/18, Old Assessment No.520100/1088120788. New Assessment No.1086292769 having Flat No.501 with a plinth area of 1010.81 in 4th Floor and Car Parking measuring 100 Slt. in Silt floor of "GAJUWAKA HIGHTS" covered by Survey No.86 of Gajuwaka Village, Gajuwaka Mandal, GVMC, Sub-Registrar Office in Gajuwaka, Visakhapatnam District an total property bounded as:

Boundaries:

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SHORT TAKES

HAVE FULL FAITH
IN JUDICIARY,
SAYS FARUQUI

Indore, Feb. 7: Stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui, who has been released from jail after 35 days in a case of allegedly hurting religious sentiments, has said he has full faith in the judiciary and hopes to get justice.

Faruqui was released from the Indore Central Jail late on Saturday night after prison authorities checked Friday's bail order of the Supreme Court on its website, a jail official earlier said.

In a brief video message after he was set free, the 32-year-old comedian said, "I don't want to comment (on the case against him) now. But, I have full faith in the judiciary and I am hopeful of getting justice."

Arrested for allegedly hurting religious sentiments, Faruqui was in the jail since January 1.

On Friday, the Supreme Court granted him interim bail after the Madhya Pradesh High Court rejected his bail plea on January 28.

NEARLY 100
PAK RETURNEES
MISSING IN VALLEY

Srinagar, Feb. 7: Nearly 100 Kashmiri youths, who travelled to Pakistan on valid visas for short durations, have either not come back or have disappeared after their return in last three years, raising an alarm within security agencies which fear that they could be possible sleeper cells of terror groups operating from across the border.

Alarm bells rang in April last year when a group of five terrorists were killed in jungles of the border area of Handwara in North Kashmir. One of them was a local who went to Pakistan in 2018 and had not returned since, various officials from security agencies said.

Between April 1-6 of last year, youths hailing from Shopian, Kulgam and Anantnag districts of South Kashmir were seen as part of the infiltrating groups of terrorists and all of them had travelled to Pakistan on valid documents and never returned thereafter, they said.

MoU FOR 1ST-EVER
GEOTHERMAL FIELD
SIGNED IN LEH

Leh, Feb. 7: A historic tripartite agreement for establishing India's first-ever geothermal field development project here has been signed, with Ladakh Lieutenant Governor R.K. Mathur terming it a step towards achieving the goal of carbon-neutral Ladakh.

The pact was signed between Union Territory Administration Ladakh, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Leh and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Energy Centre in presence of Mathur and MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal on the sidelines of the first developmental conclave here on Saturday, an official spokesperson said.

Ladakh Power Development Department Administrative Secretary Ravinder Kumar and LAHDC Chief Executive Officer Sachin Kumar Vaishya signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with ONGC Energy Centre.



ITBP personnel carry out search and rescue operation at Tapovan Tunnel on Sunday.



Locals inspect site near damaged Dhauliganga hydropower project at Reni village on Sunday.

Tranquil morning turns tragic for villagers
Horrific memories of 2013 Kedarnath deluge that killed thousands returns to haunt locals

Raini (U'khand), Feb. 7: It was a tranquil winter morning in Raini village until the residents were jolted at around 10 am on Sunday by a loud sound and the sight of huge torrents of water and sludge in the Rishi Ganga river hurtling towards them.

"Before we could make out what was happening, the raging muddy waters of Rishi Ganga had devastated the landscape," says 50-year-old Dharam Singh, a resident of the village.

The scenes brought back to the people horrifying memories of the 2013 Kedarnath deluge that killed thousands.

Many were feared swept away in the sudden floods on Sunday including those who were working near the river.

Three residents of the village including a 75-year-old woman identified as Amrita Devi who had gone out to work in her field close to the bridge on Rishi Ganga are missing since the avalanche struck after the Nanda Devi glacier burst. Others missing include Yashpal Singh of Valli Raini who had gone to the fields to graze his livestock and disappeared along with them.

Ranjit Singh, 25, of the village who worked in the Rishi Ganga hydel project is also missing after the avalanche.

The avalanche destroyed the project commissioned in 2020. A major motorable bridge on the main border road was also washed away.

Pradeep Rana of Juwa Gwan village said Sanjay Singh, a resident of the



Rescue operations underway near Dhauliganga hydropower project on Sunday.

same village who had gone out to the fields to graze his goats, is also missing.

Some ancient temples built about 20 metres above the confluence of Rishi Ganga and Dhauliganga rivers have also been swept away by the violent avalanche.

Umeli Devi, 34, who had come from Nepal to work in the Rishi Ganga hydel project said ten of her colleagues had been swept away in the avalanche.

She said male members of her family who worked as labourers in the power project are all missing. Dharam Singh of Raini said as the deluge came gurgling loudly it sent a chill down the spine of people living in the area who find it hard to forget the 2013 tragedy.

The forest area of Nanda Devi National Park has

also suffered great devastation due to the avalanche, he said.

Meanwhile, the MeT department on Sunday said no adverse weather events are expected over Chamoli, Tapovan and Joshimath in Uttarakhand on February 7 and 8, in a relief for the area hit by a major glacier burst.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) Additional Director General Anand Sharma said Chamoli, Tapovan and Joshimath are likely to witness dry weather during the two days.

"No snowfall/rainfall is likely on February 7-8," the IMD said in its special weather advisory for the state. However, light rain/fall/snowfall is likely in the northern parts of the Chamoli district on February 9-10, the advisory added.

Himalayan glaciers melting
twice as fast, finds 2019 study

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Melting of Himalayan glaciers has doubled since the start of the 21st century due to rising temperatures, losing over a vertical foot and half of ice each year and potentially threatening water supply for hundreds of millions of people in countries, including India, according to a study published in 2019.

The analysis, spanning 40 years of satellite observations across India, China, Nepal and Bhutan, indicates that climate change is eating the Himalayan glaciers, researchers said.

The study, published in the journal Science Advances in June 2019, shows that glaciers have been losing the equivalent of more than a vertical foot and half of ice each year since 2000 — double the amount of melting that took place from 1975 to 2000.

"This is the clearest picture yet of how fast Himalayan glaciers are melting over this time interval, and why," said Joshua Maurer, a PhD candidate at Columbia University in the US.

While not specifically calculated in the study, the glaciers may have lost as

much as a quarter of their enormous mass over the last four decades, said Maurer, lead author of the study. The study synthesised data from across the region, stretching from early satellite observations to the present.

The data indicates that the melting is consistent in time and space, and that rising temperatures are to blame, the researchers said. Temperatures vary from place to place, but from 2000 to 2016 they have averaged one degree Celsius higher than those from 1975 to 2000, they said.

NTPC: TAPOVAN
HYDRO PROJECT
DAMAGED

New Delhi, Feb. 7: State-run power giant NTPC on Sunday said that an avalanche near Tapovan in Uttarakhand has damaged its under-construction hydropower project.

NTPC tweeted, "An avalanche near Tapovan in Uttarakhand has damaged a part of our under-construction hydropower project in the region. While rescue operation is on, situation is being monitored continuously with the help of district administration and police."

ITBP RESCUES
WORKERS STUCK
IN TUNNEL

Dehradun, Feb. 7: Covered in mud, several men were safely pulled out one after the other from a slush-covered tunnel by ITBP personnel in the Tapovan power project area on Sunday.

In a video of the operation shared by the border force, the rescuers can be seen raising slogans of 'dum lagakey haisha' while retrieving a couple of men through the vertical and narrow snout of the tunnel with the help of a rope line.

UP MONITORS
WATER LEVEL OF
RIVER GANGA

Lucknow, Feb. 7: The UP on Sunday asked authorities in all districts on the banks of river Ganga to be on high alert and continuously monitor the water level. In the disaster alert issued on Sunday, the Relief Commissioner said, "Report of breaking of a part of Nandadevi Glacier in Uttarakhand has been received. The districts on the Ganga river (banks) need to be on a high alert."

MAJOR NATURAL DISASTERS IN UTTARAKHAND

1991 UTTARKASHI EARTHQUAKE: An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit the undivided state of Uttar Pradesh in October 1991 in which at least 768 people were killed and thousands of homes destroyed.

1998 MALPA LANDSLIDE: The small village of Malpa in Pithoragarh district was wiped in the landslide in which about 255 people, including 55 Kailash Mansarovar pilgrims, were killed. The resulting debris partially blocked the Sharda river.

1999 CHAMOLI EARTHQUAKE: An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit Chamoli district killing over 100 people. The adjoining Rudraprayag district was also heavily affected. Several ground deformations were reported as a result of the earthquake, and landslides and changes in water flow were also recorded. Cracks were observed in roads and on the ground.

2013 NORTH INDIA FLOODS: In June 2013, a multi-day cloud-burst centered on U'khand caused devastating floods and landslides. According to state government, more than 5,700 people were presumed dead in the disaster. As bridges and roads were destroyed more than 3 lakh people were trapped in the valleys leading to the Char Dham pilgrimage sites.

Am constantly monitoring the unfortunate situation in Uttarakhand. India stands with Uttarakhand and the nation prays for everyone's safety there. Have been continuously speaking to senior authorities and getting updates on NDRF deployment, rescue work and relief operations,

— NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister



TN | POLITICS

Ex-leader to come in motorcade of 500-1,000 cars from B'luru

AIADMK panics as Sasikala returns

R. MOHAN | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Vivekanandan Krishnaveni Sasikala's return to her home state after four years in a Bengaluru jail has created a sense of anticipation in many and even fear in the minds of the mandarins of Tamil Nadu's ruling party. If Monday looms like some kind of D-Day for the AIADMK in state politics, it is a reflection of how the party had become the personal fiefdom of former CM J. Jayalalithaa and even more so that of her confidante, who was the virtual regent operating from her residence in Poes Garden until convicted in a case under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

"To give her a warm welcome is our only aim. I trust the police will remain neutral," said T.T.V.

Dhinakaran, Sasikala's nephew and AMMK party's honcho, on Sunday. His comments about the kind of welcome planned for Sasikala, who sources say is likely to come in a motorcade of 500-1,000 cars from a resort in Bengaluru to her niece's residence in T. Nagar in Chennai, come in the wake of complaints to the state's DGP by AIADMK ministers and other leaders about her posing a "threat" to law and order.

The government's anxiety was apparent as a strange parade of ministers dropped in at the DGP's Marina Beach office, preferring oral complaints about Sasikala's use of the AIADMK party flag on her car as she emerged from the Victoria Hospital in Bengaluru, where she was admitted for a touch of Covid-19. A point of inter-

est about her return will be whether that flag will continue to flutter on the bonnet in one of Jayalalithaa's Toyota MUVs which may carry Sasikala on her journey home.

The symbolism of the car and flag was high on her agenda when she came out of hospital. That pushed Tamil Nadu minister D. Jayakumar to threaten action against Sasikala if she continues to use the party flag. The chances are that she will enter Tamil Nadu with the flag as this is the challenge she can throw at her former party now. When she departed for Bengaluru, she was general secretary of the party, and was subsequently removed by the EPS-OPS combine, but without any notice being served on her. Legal challenges may be planned on these aspects in the future.

Sources say trouble is anticipated if she travels with the party flag on the car when she enters Hosur in Tamil Nadu from Attibelle in Karnataka. Dhinakaran's AMMK party has prepared a big reception there. In Chennai, Sasikala may skip the AIADMK headquarters and the (closed) Jaya Memorial on Marina Beach and head straight to Ramavaram Gardens to pay homage to AIADMK founder MGR at his old home to convey a political message and try to pin relevance to her coming back to Chennai.

Jayakumar has threatened action if Sasikala tries to enter the party HQ on Lloyds Road, where security has been beefed up, so too at the old Jaya residence in Poes Garden, which is now a museum and memorial. What the AIADMK fears is

unknown. Their biggest threat would not be lengthy legal challenges in court but a rebellion within the ranks with Jaya-Sasi loyalists walking off on being tempted by the old Poes Garden path of allegiance.

Sources say a challenge could be mounted for the party headquarters on Lloyds Road that could be in the names of old trustees and complications could arise if legal questions are raised now. Right now, Sasikala is not a legal entity in the party and her fight would have to begin from zero in terms of occupation. An AIADMK minister was quoted as saying that AMMK and Sasikala are "DMK's B Team" in current political scene as her role could be disruptive of the parent party AIADMK now fighting for re-election after two terms.

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, FEB. 7

Kickstarting the BJP's poll campaign in grand style for the forthcoming West Bengal Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday tore into the dynasty politics of ruling Trinamul Congress with a pitch for Hindutva to bring "parivartan" (change).

He declared the people of the state would soon remove "Bua-Bhatijabad" and show the "Ram card" to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's party for scoring many "fouls" during its two straight terms in power.

"Bengal is a state that loves football. So, in the language of football, I want to say that the TMC scored fouls one after another. From misgovernance to attacks on the Opposition to looting people's money, there are plenty of

FORCES ABROAD CONSPIRING TO DESTROY
INDIAN TEA, WILL NOT LET IT HAPPEN: PM

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, FEB. 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that some forces abroad have been conspiring to defame and tarnish the image of Indian tea at global level.

Addressing a massive public rally in central Assam's Dhekiajuli, a tea growing belt, Modi said, "I want to tell you about a conspiracy

fouls. People are watching everything. That is why Bengal is going to show the 'Ram Card' to the TMC soon," Modi told a BJP rally at Haldia in East Midnapore. He also attacked the CM for blocking Central schemes

while patronising corruption.

Lashing out at Banerjee, he argued that the people of the state have been the victim of "Nirmamata" though the TMC supremo has "Mamata" in her name.

SHORT TAKES

2ND SNOWSTORM BLANKETS NORTHEAST

New York, Feb. 7: The Northeastern United States braced for a major snowstorm on Sunday, less than a week after a storm dumped as much as 2 feet on the region.

The National Weather Service predicted around up to 8 inches of snow New York City and 2 to 4 inches in Washington, D.C. Forecasters predicted several inches of snow would fall along the New England coast, saying the precise amount would depend on how quickly the storm moved through the region.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said Sunday's snowfall, which started at around 9 a.m. in the city, would not close Covid-19 vaccination sites. The massive snowstorm that hit the region on Feb. 1 forced the postponement of hundreds of vaccination appointments in New York and elsewhere.

FOUR SKIERS KILLED IN U.S. AVALANCHE

Washington, Feb. 7: Four skiers were killed and four others wounded after an avalanche struck in a canyon in the US state of Utah, local authorities and media said Friday.

The Utah Avalanche Center, which documents avalanches in the region, said it was the highest toll since 1992.

"We are overwhelmed with sadness to report four skiers killed today in an avalanche near Wilson Peak in upper Mill Creek Canyon," the Center tweeted.

Local TV station KSTU reported police first received a faint distress call around 11.40 am (1840 GMT).

Four other skiers were also caught in the avalanche but managed to dig themselves out and were rescued, the station reported. The extent of their injuries was unknown.

"This is a terrible tragedy and our prayers go out to the victims and families involved," tweeted Utah Governor Spencer Cox.

6.0-MAGNITUDE QUAKE HITS PHILIPPINES

Manila, Feb. 7: A strong earthquake hit the southern Philippines on Sunday, though there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, the US Geological Survey and local officials said.

The 6.0-magnitude quake struck the town of Bansalan on Mindanao island at 12:22 pm (0422 GMT), the USGS said in a bulletin.

The quake was recorded at a depth of 15.6 kilometres (9.7 miles), it said, slightly shallower than at first reported by the agency.

"It was strong, but things did not topple or fall off," Major Peter Glenn Ipong, the police chief of Bansalan, said by telephone from the epicentre.

Ipong and civil defence officials in the region reported strong shaking but said there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The USGS in an earlier bulletin put the epicentre two kilometres east of the neighbouring town of Magsaysay before revising the location to Bansalan.

INTERCEPTED HUTHI-LAUNCHED DRONE: S ARABIA

Riyadh, Feb. 7: Saudi Arabia intercepted an armed drone launched towards the kingdom by Yemen's Huthis, state media said Sunday, a day after the US moved to delist the rebels as a terrorist group.

The Saudi-led military coalition "intercepted and destroyed an armed drone," said spokesman Turki al-Maliki in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

"It was launched systematically and deliberately by the terrorist Huthi militia to target civilians and civilian objects in the south of the region."

The incident was not immediately claimed by the Iran-backed Huthis. The US State Department on Friday said it had formally notified Congress of its intention to revoke a terrorist designation against the rebels, which had been announced at the end of the administration of former president Donald Trump.

The delisting move came a day after US President Joe Biden announced an end to US support for Saudi-led offensive operations in Yemen.

Humanitarian groups were deeply opposed to the designation.

Biden: Won't lift Tehran sanctions

These to be in force till Iran does not adhere to its N-deal commitments, says US Prez

Washington/Tehran, Feb. 7: US President Joe Biden said he won't lift sanctions against Iran as long as the Islamic republic is not adhering to its nuclear deal commitments. Asked whether he would halt sanctions to convince Iran to return to the bargaining table, Biden offered a clear reply in a CBS interview aired Sunday: "No."

The journalist then asked if the Iranians would first have to stop enriching uranium, which drew an affirmative nod from Biden.

The 2015 landmark deal has been hanging by a thread since Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from it in 2018 and reimpose sanctions on Tehran. Tehran a year later suspended its compliance with most key nuclear commitments to the deal.

The Biden administration has expressed willingness to return to the deal, but insisted that Tehran first resume full compliance.

On January 4, Iran announced it has stepped up its uranium enrichment process to 20 percent purity, far above the 3.67 percent level permitted by the deal, but far below the amount required for an atomic bomb.

Earlier, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Sunday the US must "completely lift" sanctions first, followed by verification by Tehran, before the Islamic republic returns to its nuclear deal commitments.

"If they want Iran to

● THE 2015 landmark deal has been hanging by a thread since US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from it in 2018 and reimpose sanctions on Tehran. Tehran a year later suspended its compliance with most key nuclear commitments to the deal.

return to its commitments ... America must completely lift sanctions, and not just in words or on paper," Khamenei said in a televised speech to air force commanders.

"They must be lifted in action, and then we will verify and see if they have been properly lifted, and then return," he added.

The 2015 landmark deal has been hanging by a thread since US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from it in 2018 and reimpose sanctions on Tehran.

Tehran a year later suspended its compliance with most key nuclear commitments to the deal. The new administration of US President Joe Biden has expressed willingness to return to the deal, but insisted that Tehran first resume full compliance.

On January 4, Iran announced it has stepped up its uranium enrichment process to 20 percent purity, far above the 3.67 percent level permitted by the deal. — AFP

UN's YEMEN ENVOY MAKES 1ST VISIT TO IRAN

Tehran, Feb. 7: The United Nations special envoy for Yemen arrived on his first visit to Iran Sunday for talks on the grinding war in the Arab world's poorest country, Iranian state TV reported.

Martin Griffiths was set to meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and other officials during his two-day visit, his office said. The sessions are part of a broader effort to negotiate a political solution to the nearly six-year conflict pitting Iran-allied Houthi rebels against Yemeni government forces supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.

The trip comes just days after President Joe Biden announced that the US will end its support, including some arms sales, of the Saudi-led coalition's war against the Houthis.

The long-awaited move refocused a spotlight on the world's worst humanitarian crisis and was welcomed by many Yemenis and aid groups that hope the policy change might add to momentum for peace talks. Griffiths' immediate priority in Tehran is to push a nationwide ceasefire, urgent humanitarian measures and the resumption of the political process, his office added. — AP

PLA gives Covid vax to Pak Army

Beijing, Feb. 7: Chinese military delivered a batch of Covid-19 vaccines to the Pakistan Army on Sunday, days after Islamabad received 500,000 doses of the Coronavirus vaccine from its all-weather ally Beijing.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) said in a statement that the Pakistan Army has become the first foreign military to receive the Covid-19 vaccine aid from the Chinese military.

The statement, however, did not mention the number of vaccines supplied to the Pakistan Army. The PLA also delivered a batch of Covid-19 vaccines to the Cambodian military after receiving a request for it.

The Cambodian Army was among the first batch of the foreign military to receive Covid-19 vaccine aid from the Chinese military, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The vaccines delivered to the Pakistan Army are reportedly in addition to the five lakh doses provided by China to Pakistan. Pakistan on Monday received the first batch of 500,000 doses of the Coronavirus vaccine from China, as the country was gearing up to kick start its immunisation drive.

The move comes as the number of Covid-19 cases in Pakistan reached 554,474. With 53 new deaths, the number of fatalities has gone up to 11,967, according to the

PROTEST IN DENMARK OVER COVID CURBS

Copenhagen, Feb. 7: Hundreds of people took to the streets of Copenhagen on Saturday night to protest Denmark's Covid-19 restrictions and the country's plans for a digital vaccination certificate. Organised by a group calling itself "Men in Black Denmark," some 600 people gathered in the bitter cold in front of the parliament building to protest the "dictatorship" of Denmark's partial lockdown.

Plans for a digital vaccine "passport" were a main target of their anger. Like other European countries, Denmark intends to develop a digital certificate for Covid-19 vaccination for travel.

It could also potentially be used for sports and cultural events as well as restaurants. — AFP

Ministry of National Health Services. China has granted conditional approval for its second Covid-19 vaccine, ahead of the expected emergency approval from the World Health Organisation for two of its jobs that would enable the country to step-up global supplies of the shots. — PTI

TURNING UP | THE HEAT

Prez Alexander Lukashenko doesn't have a clear strategy to overcome the unrest

In winter's quiet, Belarus Oppn prepares new protests

Kyiv, Feb. 7: Winter's cold and harsh police actions in Belarus have put a chill on the protests against President Alexander Lukashenko that gripped the Eastern European nation for months. But opposition forces are preparing to turn up the heat in the spring and observers say Lukashenko doesn't have a clear strategy to overcome new unrest.

Here's a look at the country's situation six months after the start of an unprecedented wave of protests that attracted world atten-

tion. Protests broke out after the Aug. 9 presidential election, the official results of which gave Lukashenko a sixth term in office. Opposition figures and some poll workers, however, said those results were fraudulent.

The nationwide demonstrations, some of which attracted up to 200,000 people, were the largest and most sustained challenge to Lukashenko in his 26 years of repressive rule. The protests withered away as severe cold set in and Belarusians became

wearied by police repression that were often violent. Some relatively small and scattered protests took place in late January and about 250 people were arrested. Human rights activists say, more than 30,000 people have been arrested in the monthslong wave of protests, and many of them were beaten. While opposition leaders chose peaceful tactics, police intensified their repression and began to use water cannons, gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrations.



Protesters hold up the three finger salute as they demonstrate against the Myanmar military coup outside the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok on Sunday. — AFP

Thousands protest Myanmar coup on the streets of Yangon

Yangon, Feb. 7: Tens of thousands of protesters poured on to the streets of Yangon Sunday in the biggest rally yet against the Myanmar coup, as an internet blackout failed to stifle growing outrage at the military's ouster of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Some estimates put the number of protesters in Yangon at 100,000 and there were reports of large demonstrations in other cities, with rallies condemning the coup that ousted elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"Partial restoration of internet connectivity confirmed in #Myanmar from 2PM local time on multiple providers following information blocko-

Internet access partially restored

ut," the internet monitoring service said on Twitter. Myanmar was plunged into cyber darkness on Saturday at the military's orders. Netblocks said social media platforms remained off limits on Sunday afternoon. But mobile phone customers using services with MPT, Ooredoo, Telenor and Mytel are now able to access mobile internet data and Wi-Fi. — AFP

presence there, while tens of thousands rallied against the coup in Mandalay, Myanmar's second-biggest city. Both those protests included people on armadas of motorcycles, waving flags and banners as they rode through the cities.

There were also demonstrations in Mawlamyine city and the Magway region. The surge in popular dissent over the weekend overcame a nationwide internet blockade, similar in magnitude to an earlier shutdown that coincided with the arrest of Suu Kyi and other senior leaders on Monday.

Online calls to protest have prompted bold displays of defiance, including the nightly deafening clamour of people banging pots and pans -- a practice traditionally associated with driving out evil spirits. Monitoring service NetBlocks said internet access was partially restored on some mobile networks in Myanmar Sunday afternoon, but social media platforms remained blocked and it was unclear how long the connectivity would last. — AFP

Move Pearl killer to rest house: Sindh govt

Karachi, Feb. 7: Pakistani authorities have issued a notification to shift British-born al-Qaeda terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, the main accused in the sensational kidnapping and murder of US journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002, from jail to a newly-built facility within the boundaries of the Central Prison in Karachi.

The notification on Saturday came days after a three-member bench of the Supreme Court headed by Justice Umar Ata Bandial ordered to shift 46-year-old Sheikh from the death row cell to a rest house run by the government. All suspects "are to be shifted to the newly constricted Rooms for meeting of spouses with Prisoners situated outside of main prison and within boundary of Central Prison Karachi, the Express Tribune newspaper repor-

ted, citing the notification issued by the Sindh Home Department on February 6. However, "NO internet, telephone and for that matter any device/ means of communicating with outside world is to be provided," the notification read.

It allowed only suspects' families access to them from 8am to 5pm everyday but restricted them from bringing anything from outside of the prison, the paper said.

To maintain maximum security, however, a list of family members is to be provided by the counsel of detainees to the advocate general Sindh, secretary home or IG prison, Sindh and only the ones mentioned in the list will be allowed access to the detainees during permitted hours.

The families of the suspects will also be offered space in Qasr-e-Naz, a fed-

eral government owned building in the city along with transport to and from the place of detention, the notification said.

The apex court had rejected the government's appeal to suspend the Sindh High Court's verdict on the acquittal of the accused and asked it to file an appeal against the high court's decision.

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

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

POPE APPOINTS 1ST WOMAN TO SR. SYNOD POST

Vatican City, Feb. 7: Pope Francis has broken with Catholic tradition to appoint a woman as an undersecretary of the synod of bishops, the first to hold the post with voting rights in a body that studies major questions of doctrine.

Frenchwoman Nathalie Beccuaret is one of the two new undersecretaries named to the synod, where she has been a consultant since 2019. The appointment signals the pontiff's desire "for a greater participation of women in the process of discernment and decision-making in the church", said Cardinal Mario Grech, the secretary-general of the synod.

"During previous synods, the number of women participating as experts and listeners has increased," he said. "With the nomination and her possibility of participating in voting, a door has opened." — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

8 FEBRUARY 2021

Delay in Faruqui release exposes rot in executive

The delay in the release of comedian Munawar Faruqui from a jail in Indore following an order granting him bail by the Supreme Court of India betrays the rot that has spread in the executive wing of the government that has taken aim at personal liberty in this country. The whole episode, which started with the arrest of the comedian based on “vague charges”, as the apex court mentioned, smacks of vengeance by the rightist forces against the idea of freedom.

Mr Faruqui was arrested on New Year’s Day for his alleged remarks that “hurt the sentiments of Hindus” in a stand-up comedy show. The police wasted no time in arresting him based on a complaint lodged by the chief of Hindu Rakshak Sangatan, a Hindutva group, even though later they said there is no electronic evidence that he had indeed made those remarks; in fact he show had not started when they arrested him. That such an allegation with no proof whatsoever has resulted in the incarceration of a citizen for more than a month during the Covid period shows that the government in Madhya Pradesh has little or no idea about the rule of law. The Madhya Pradesh high court, too, showed an equally disdainful disregard for personal liberty when it denied him bail saying there are limits to freedom of speech and expression. It took the Supreme Court to discover that not only were the charges vague but also that the police had not followed the norms the court had laid out while arresting a person and order his release on bail. It also stayed the operation of a production warrant issued by the Uttar Pradesh police in a similar case.

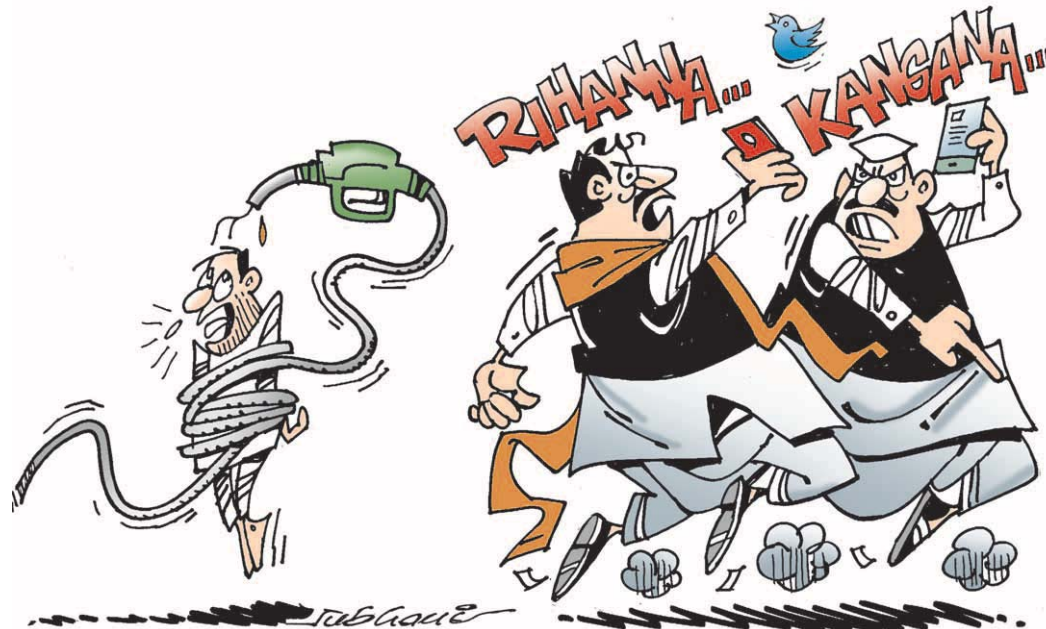
The government machinery and even the judiciary in Madhya Pradesh are on a mission to hound an individual; they have no qualms citing ‘technical issues’ to stop justice in its course

The Supreme Court order was not enough for the jail authorities to release him; they cited the production warrant, feigning ignorance about the order. Reports say it took a call by a Supreme Court judge to the local magistrate to get its order enforced and release him. The picture is clear: the government machinery and even the judiciary in Madhya Pradesh are on a mission to hound an individual; they have no qualms citing “technical issues” to stop justice in its course.

The rot must be stemmed, and the Supreme Court must take the lead in getting it done. It should not brook the temerity of the executive to defy its orders whatever may be the pretext. It must hold the officials who stand in the way of justice personally accountable. It is silly and outright nonsense in this day and age for the jail authorities to wait for the postman to deliver the copy of a Supreme Court order; there are lighting fast methods to do that. The court must also look into the rules, archaic as they may be, and make changes wherever necessary.

The judiciary is the weakest of the pillars of democratic governance when it comes to physical force; its authority comes from its moral force. It cannot be allowed to be trampled by vested interests. Its writs on citizens’ liberty must run, whatever it takes.

Subhani



Nirmala’s Budget made a virtue out of necessity



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had promised a “once in a century” Budget and raised hopes sky high. It is a commentary on the state of expectations in the country that few took her at her word. Despite her hype, the expectations were generally low mainly because it was widely known that the government’s revenues had collapsed due to the Covid-19 pandemic economic lockdown, leaving the finance minister with little fiscal margin for policy manoeuvre. Rather, some people were worried that she would be tempted to raise revenues to be able to redistribute to the victims of the lockdown and enhance support for healthcare. Few were prepared for the fiscal rabbit that Ms Sitharaman pulled out of her Budget folder.

To begin with, having fired a salvo at the foreign credit rating agencies for being out of date and out of step, putting them on the defensive on their fiscal conservatism, the finance minister took a leap of faith and reneged on the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act 2003. Ms Sitharaman was able to dump FRBM with elan thanks to the moral support she got from two other women — Kristalina Georgieva, the Bulgarian managing director of the International Monetary Fund, and Gita Gopinath, the IMF’s liberal-minded chief economist who was briefly an adviser to Kerala’s Communist chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

The IMF has gone through an ideological somersault after the 2008-09 trans-Atlantic financial crisis, when it looked the

other way as Western governments chose to spend their way out of crisis. In the post-Covid season the Fund has actively supported growth-promoting fiscal easing by governments. This change in global fashion would have given Ms Sitharaman additional courage to come out of the fiscal closet, so to speak. Declaring boldly to Parliament a fiscal deficit ratio to national income (gross domestic product) of 9.5 per cent, the finance minister made a virtue out of necessity.

This was the one real departure from past practice, apart from the decision to recreate a new development financial institution and an asset reconstruction company. On most other fronts she has done more than her predecessors but walked a well-laid out path — be it increasing the share of foreign direct investment in insurance or planning for a larger disinvestment package. Even outright privatisation has been done before. Ms Sitharaman just wants to do more of it.

The other departure from the past which the middle and business class welcomed was her decision not to levy any new taxes. If the government had raised tax rates after a year like the one gone by it would have been rubbing salt into salary-earners’ wounds. Indeed, the higher fiscal deficit ratio is a direct consequence of both the decision to come clean on facts as well as the decision not to raise revenues through new taxes. The only real impost on consumers this past year has been the increase in fuel prices. That would have raked in some revenue.

A critical assumption of this Budget is that its programme for disinvestment and privatisation would

proceed apace with no difficulty. This is easier said than done. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi may not yield to the trade unions’ protests, just as he has refused to yield to the farmers’ protests, the disinvestment-privatisation drive will critically depend on investors’ interest. The inability to sell Air India despite years of trying is a reminder.

So, was the generally positive response of the markets, investors and households a consequence of a “no tax-more spending” Budget? Some of it, yes. But a large part of the positive response had to do with the feeling that finally the Narendra Modi government is coming to grips with the economic reality. The bottom line is that this government’s management of economic policy has been below par. If Prime Minister Modi had not whipped up nationalist and communal sentiment in the run-up to the 2019 general election and if the Opposition parties had a better strategy for keeping the government’s shortcomings in focus, the Bharatiya Janata Party would not have got the numbers it did purely on the basis of its economic performance during its first term.

In 2014 many hoped that Mr Modi would turn India into a Gujarat, in terms of development, but by 2019 the worry was that the nation was going in the direction of Uttar Pradesh. On top of its poor record of economic management in its first term, Mr Modi began his second

term with budgetary policy initiatives from which he had to quickly withdraw. In the process the Union finance secretary, who was picked by him, had to go, following an earlier exit by a Reserve Bank governor who was also his choice, and a Gujarati to boot. Ms Sitharaman’s second Budget too did not help to lift the economy or her reputation, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown.

So, given the low expectations, the Budget speech came as a pleasant surprise for investors and the markets. Whether it would leave them, the middle classes and the working classes, happier at the end of the year depends crucially on two parameters — employment and inflation. If the positive reaction of businesses and investors translates into new employment opportunities and the inflationary consequences of the liberal fiscal policy are contained, Ms Sitharaman would have left the economy in better shape than what she inherited.

When Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had invited me to write his speeches, he had just two words of caution and advice for me. No hyperbole, he warned, and reminded me of his dictum: “Promise less and deliver more.” Dr Singh gained in stature as a consequence. In the past six years, Prime Minister Modi has promised more and delivered less, in terms of economic growth. He risks losing in stature as a consequence. If the Indian economy has to grow to become a \$5 trillion economy, sooner than later, Mr Modi needs to remain focused on the policies that promote growth, and not allow the base instincts of his core constituency to distract the country.

The writer is an economist, a former newspaper editor, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

LETTERS

VIZAG STEEL PLANT

Vizag Steel Plant is not just a PSU. It is a grand symbol of the city (CM urges PM to spare VSP, DC, Feb. 7). The number of families who worked and are working for it are innumerable. If a finger doesn’t work properly we don’t cut it off but try to find a solution. The Centre’s approach to sell PSUs which are symbols of Indian identity the world over is deeply saddening.

Teja Deenamsetty
Visakhapatnam

A simple request from the CM may not work out at all. If he is so serious he should have given some valuable financial proposals to the Centre in writing. Now, the issue has become a political game between different parties and the plant will be finally privatised. The parties are only calculating their gains and losses.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

SEC BEHAVIOUR

SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar perhaps considers himself as all-pervasive with powers beyond his brief. His orders to confine PR minister to his house without access to media is dictatorial. It appears that his legal team too is misguiding him. Probably he is more loyal than the king in discharging his duties as SEC. The tug-of-war between AP and the SEC makes one sick as both sides are fighting to finish each other.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

197 trains cancelled by W. Railway

BOMBAY, FEBRUARY. 7 As many as 197 passenger services have been cancelled by the Western Railway with effect from February 8, owing to serious coal shortage created by the lightning strike in the Bengal and Bihar coalfields.

Important among the trains cancelled according to the press note are 129 Down/130 Up Parcel passenger between Baroda, 9 Down/Ten Up “Gujarat Queen” would run only between Ahmedabad and Baroda instead of Ahmedabad and Bulsar, it added.

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Leher Sethi



A non-partisan nationalism is the new glue of farmers’ stir

Up until recently, the farmers’ protests were predominantly perceived as a Sikh-led phenomenon, owing to the agitators being largely from Punjab. Their leadership was a standout feature in the media reports of the protest, as was a certain projection of it as being a rising of a particular regional cluster. In a sense, it was true. For, langars are the trademark public kitchens of the Sikh community, which fed not just protesters, but also locals and labourers.

Though, with a series of talks that had yielded no results, a larger collective frustration was building, it wasn’t generally palpable. All that changed on Republic Day.

What started out as a peaceful protest took a violent turn, as the “tractor rally” went rogue. A shocked nation saw images beamed on TV and viralled on social media of a youth going up a flagpole with the *Nishan Sahib*. Even people initially supporting the protests suddenly became wary.

As someone who has visited the protest site before and after the episode, the mood change around me was striking. While it is commendable that Delhi police did not using brute force and showed uncharacteristic calm on a day of great national significance, protesters freely entered the Red Fort and indulged in condemnable vandalism. Within a few hours, public

sympathy shifted from the protesters to the police.

In the next few days, farmer union leaders were booked for various cases and FIRs were registered. The mood at protest sites turned sombre and despondence marked the air. The high spirits of protesters and supporters were dampened. Theories and counters floated in the air. Conspiracies were cooked up. The protesters had let themselves down, and the ball was back in the government’s court.

The action shifted towards the Yogi Adityanath-ruled Uttar Pradesh. Police cleared smaller protest sites with alacrity. The next target was Ghazipur. Electricity and water supply to the demonstration site were cut. The district magistrate issued a notice to protesters to clear out. Many people began returning home. It looked like the movement was over.

But no one could have predicted what happened next.

With a handful of protesters left in Ghazipur, Rakesh Tikait, a 51-year-old police-constable-turned-farmer-leader, broke down in full view of TV cameras. I could be wrong, but it felt like a large section of media covered his tearful speech just to show how farmers had to eat humble pie. It would mark the TV closure to all protests.

“I will drink water only when someone from my village brings it to me,”

claimed Tikait. His willingness to court arrest and resolution of not to vacate the site went viral.

Mr Tikait’s tears struck a chord with farmers. The issue for them changed from being one pertaining to livelihoods to that of honour. Mr Tikait’s humiliation stirred reactions from across north India. Thousands of farmers started moving towards Ghazipur, not just from western UP, but also Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Delhi.

The scenario was transformed quickly. Officials at Ghazipur met Mr Tikait, electricity was restored and additional police forces that had gathered there retreated.

Interestingly, Mr Tikait admits to have voted for the BJP in the last Lok Sabha elections, as did most people from his Jat community-dominated village of Sisauli in Uttar Pradesh’s Muzaffarnagar district. The BJP candidate and Union minister, Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, belongs to the same Balian *khap* (clan) headed by Rakesh’s elder brother, Naresh Tikait. For a Jat, it is no small matter.

As farmers started pouring in at Ghazipur, there was a call for a Mahapanchayat in Muzaffarnagar. Led by Jats, lakhs of peasants of all castes and communities, including Muslims, took a Namak-Gangajal oath, also called the Nun-Lota Kasam, marked by the blowing of a traditional war trumpet.

It is a pledge to fulfil a task, and it includes the social boycott (*hukka-paani band*) of those who do not participate in this common war.

Jayant Chaudhary, son of Ajit Singh, poured *gangajal* from a bottle into a *lota* (pitcher) of *namak* (salt). A *khap* is a traditional social council representing a community in parts of north India with a *chaudhary* as its titular head. *Khaps*, not limited to Jats’, constitute a front of 36 *biradaris*, including Muslim, Jats, Gujjars and other OBCs.

In 1857, India’s first revolt or mutiny began with the Namak-Gangajal pledge, taken by the Sarvakhap panchayat of Haryana and the Upper Doab (present-day west UP), against the rule of the British East India Company.

The peasant protest has turned into a movement and its control has shifted from the traditional secular-Left to conservative caste heads invested deeply in *bhaichara*. People are no longer rallying around economic issues, but for honour against a cultural insult, handed out in their thinking by the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah “regime” to all peasant castes. It seems the *kisan* movement has trumped the BJP’s cultural-emotional hypernationalism with its own card of peasant cultural-emotional nationalism.

The *khap* unity between Jats and Muslims, divided during the Muzaffarnagar riots, is significant

because such cultural bonding could never be achieved by the secular ideologies of the Congress, Left or the AAP. It is an invocation of the indigenous cultural ethos of north Indian peasantry. In an amazing spectacle, thousands continue to assemble for Mahapanchayats, despite Internet bans. Post-Muzaffarnagar, there have been Mahapanchayats at Mathura, Bhagpat, Palwal and Bijnore, even as the movement continues to gather momentum.

The BJP has thus far successfully managed to “other-ise” the anti-farm law protesters. But it will be very difficult for them to deal with dissent from a traditional vote bank. The “Khalistani” angle will no longer work either, with protesters here not being predominantly from the religious minority groups, like Muslims and Sikhs, but Hindus from the Hindi heartland.

Prime Minister Modi has reiterated that the government’s offer to suspend the contentious farm laws for 18 months and conduct negotiations. Yet, it seems that the Centre has landed itself in a veritable Catch-22. The sons are not leaving the soil.

With inputs from Amaresh Misra, author, War of Civilizations
Leher Sethi is an entrepreneur and social activist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,731.63	0.23
Nifty 50	14,924.30	0.19
S&P 500*	3,886.83	0.39
Dollar (₹)	72.92	0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.84	0.72
Euro (₹)	87.35	0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,738▼163	0.34
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	59.57	1.24
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.071	-0.05
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.153	0.014

* As of Friday/Saturday

Defence, railways among largest buyers on GeM

Ministries of defence and railways and central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) are among the largest buyer organisations on the public procurement portal, GeM. Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal was launched in August 2016 for online purchases of goods and services by all central government ministries, states and departments. GeM CEO Talleen Kumar said they are introducing a range of new functions.

FPIs purchase net equities worth ₹10,793 cr in Feb.



Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) remained net buyers to the tune of Rs 12,266 crore in the Indian market in the first five trading sessions of February, as positive sentiment post-Union Budget 2021 sparked a rally in investment. As per depositories data, overseas investors pumped in a net Rs 10,793 crore into equities and Rs 1,473 crore in the debt segment between February 1 and February 5.

Sun recalls over 36K cartons of injection in US

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries is recalling 36,275 cartons of a drug used to treat low testosterone levels in the US market for incorrect labelling. The US arm of the domestic pharma major is recalling Testosterone Cypionate Injection in the American market. The affected lot of the intramuscular injections was manufactured by the drug maker in India and distributed in the US by Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Inc, FDA said.

BHEL reports ₹217-crore loss in Dec. quarter

BHEL reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 217.86 crore for the December quarter due to lower revenues. The consolidated net profit of the firm was Rs 161.81 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income dipped to Rs 4,532.39 crore from Rs 5,827.74 crore. The company said, "During the quarter, the group operations recovered as compared to Q2/20-21 but pre-Covid level of operations are yet to be achieved," it said.



■ Sharp asset quality slide now less likely Banks' earnings on recovery path

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, FEB. 7

Both state-owned and private lenders reported a good set of numbers for the December quarter. The banking sector's asset quality came out better than what was anticipated six months ago in terms of both slippages and restructuring of loans. Almost every bank has taken provisioning to a very high level.

Analysts expect one more quarter of elevated provisioning after which the FY22 earnings growth is expected to be very strong for the banking sector. Strong deposit growth further enhances liquidity and helps reduce funding costs. Deposit growth outpaced loans at most banks through the third quarter of fiscal 2021 as consumers and businesses cut spending amid economic uncertainty, bolstering robust liquidity at these banks.

While most private sector lenders have raised good amounts of capital, the public sector banks too will see an infusion of Rs 20,000 crore from the government, which would take care of stress and support growth. With the RBI deferring the deadline for meeting the last tranche of capital conservation buffer (CCB) by another six months till October 2021 due to continuing stress on account of the pandemic, analysts have a positive outlook on the sector.

Anil Gupta, vice-president financial sector rat-



ings at Ica Ltd said: "Most banks reported a sharp rise in retail slippages, most of which came from unsecured loans but these were lower than anticipated. The RBI's loan moratorium ended in August as a result the December quarter numbers show the bad loans for those borrowers who paid less than one instalment between September to December. For Q4 2021, there will be seven EMIs and the borrower has to pay four EMIs out of seven EMIs. But we rule out further rise in slippages in retail as the collection numbers are upwards of 95 per cent for lenders. So, while system wide overdue will be there and there could be some pain in Q4FY21, we expect it to be relatively lower than what we saw in Q3."

Asutosh Mishra, head of research, institutional equity at Ashika Stock Broking, said, "Both public and private sector banks did extremely well with the asset quality not being as bad as what we had anticipated in the light

of the RBI's recent Financial Stability Report. Almost every bank has taken provisioning to a very high level and so the profit and loss impact of asset quality is mostly behind us. With the government expected to spend around \$400 billion in four-five years, the economy will get a major push and the banking system will be a key beneficiary. We expect one more quarter of elevated provisions post that the FY22 earnings growth is expected to be very strong for the banking sector."

A case in point was State Bank of India (SBI) with asset quality holding up well in 3Q with 97 per cent collection efficiency. Reported proforma slippages of 0.4 per cent of loans in 3QFY21 was below analyst expectations and even adjusted for high proforma bad loans in 2Q it would be 0.8 per cent which is lower than private banks' 1.1-1.2 per cent. This reflected its lower share of retail and unsecured lending.

BIZ CONFIDENCE IMPROVES WITH ROLLOUT OF VACCINES: NCAER

New Delhi, Feb. 7: The Business Confidence Index (BCI) developed by the Delhi-based think-tank NCAER rose 29.6 per cent between second and third quarter of the current financial year on the back of rollout of Covid-19 vaccines in different countries, including India.

The proportion of respondents expecting that 'overall economic conditions will improve in the next six months' increased by 4.8 percentage points, from 29.8 per cent in 2020 21:Q2 to 34.6 per cent in 2020 21:Q3, said the NCAER's Business Expectations Survey (BES).

The proportion of respondents expecting that the 'financial position of firms will improve in the next six months' increased by 3.1 percentage points, from 27.7 per cent in 2020 21:Q2 to 30.8 per cent in 2020 21:Q3.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said the BES findings are based on responses from 500 firms. It said the 115th round of BES was carried out in December 2020, during a period of "both hope and despair".

The Indian economy continued its recovery and was forecast to show positive growth in 2020 21:Q3.

"Business sentiments have shown the same V-shaped pattern of a sharp drop followed by a rise in Q1 and Q2, and then a flattening out in Q3 of 2020 21," NCAER said.

—PTI

Effective tax devolution to states could be 32%

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

States estimate that the effective tax devolution to them would be around 32 per cent now against the share of 41 per cent promised by the Centre and the Finance Commission. This is because the divisible pool has been shrinking over the years, with the share of cesses and surcharges increasing steeply in recent years in central revenues.

"While the Finance Commission as well as the government has agreed upon 41 per cent devolution of taxes to the states, effectively states will be receiving around 32 per cent. A large part of the excise duties in the form of cesses and surcharges are outside the divisible pool. In the recent Budget also the Centre has introduced Agriculture and Infrastructure Development Cess (AIDC) by lowering the basic excise duty. This will further shrink the divisible pool," said T. M. Thomas Issac, finance minister of Kerala.

While the basic duties are shared between the states and the Centre, cesses and surcharges are excluded from the divi-



Thomas Issac

ble pool and those revenues directly go to the Centre.

According to Rahul Bajoria, chief economist-India, Barclays, the effective tax devolution has been around 34 to 35 per cent in the past few years despite the states' share being 42 per cent. The 14th Finance Commission had raised the share of states from 32 per cent to 42 per cent.

In the recent Budget, the government has reduced the basic excise duty on petrol and diesel and levied AIDC of Rs 2.5 per litre on petrol and Rs 4 per litre on diesel. The AIDC cess will also be levied on imports of items, including alcoholic beverages, gold and silver dore bars, crude palm oil, crude soybean oil, peas, kabuli chana, apples and Bengal gram by lowering the

basic customs duty. But, the major chunk of the cess revenue will come from petrol and diesel.

At a press meet in Mumbai on Sunday, Sitharaman said the government stands to get up to Rs 30,000 crore from the agricultural infrastructure development cess.

The 15th Finance Commission in its final report released recently also had raised concerns about the increasing share of cesses and surcharges. As per the report, total cess and surcharge as a percentage of the gross tax revenue was 10.4 per cent in 2011-12 and this has gone up to 19.5 per cent as of FY21.

"FC-XIV had highlighted the somewhat problematic growing share of cesses and surcharges in Union revenues. Article 270 of the Constitution enables the Union Government to levy and retain any cess levied for a specific purpose. Hence, the Union Government merely acts as a custodian of funds so collected in the Public Account till these are appropriated for the mandated purpose. Similarly, surcharges are meant to be levied only for short periods," the Commission pointed out.

MFs withdraw ₹12,980 cr from equities in Jan.

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Continuing the selling spree for the eighth consecutive month, mutual funds pulled out Rs 12,980 crore from equities in January as surge in markets provided an opportunity to

book profits.

MyWealthGrowth.com co-founder Harshad Chetanwala said investors may prefer to book profits for some more time.

Mutual funds withdrew a net of over Rs 56,400 crore

in 2020, Sebi data showed. But the markets have continued to rise as flows from FPIs have been robust, with Rs 19,472 crore net inflow in January after investing Rs 1.7 lakh crore in 2020.

—PTI

FM for scaling up well-run PSUs

Mumbai, Feb. 7: Refuting charges of 'selling family silver', finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said the government has devised a clear strategy on divestment for the first time so that taxpayers' money is spent wisely.

She said the government wants a few public sector enterprises in the specified sectors to do well, so that "we can ensure that taxpayer money is spent wisely".

Addressing a meeting of business people here, she said, "Family silver should be strengthened, it should be our takat (strength)... Because you've spread it so thinly, there are many of them (PSUs) that are not able to survive; and the few that can perform do not get the due attention."

She also said the government's aim is to prime them through this policy. "You need them, you need them to scale up so that they meet the aspirations of growing India."

Speaking to reporters, she said the government will work with the Reserve Bank for execution of the bank privatisation plan announced in the budget.



Nirmala Sitharaman

MAJOR PORT TRUSTS, AAI NOT PART OF STRATEGIC SALES PLAN

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Certain classes of entities, like major port trusts, Airport Authority of India, those undertaking security printing and minting, will not fall within the purview of the new PSE policy for strategic disinvestment. The new public sector enterprise (PSE) policy for Aatmanirbhar Bharat, which classifies public sector commercial enterprises as strategic and non-strategic sector,

would be limited to CPSEs, public sector banks and public sector insurance companies.

"The policy, however, does not apply to certain classes of public sector entities," according to the scope of the PSE policy announced in the Budget.

The Budget unveiled the Disinvestment/Strategic Disinvestment Policy, which had four strategic sectors in which "bare minimum" number of CPSEs will be retained.

Sitharaman also said that the government has no plan to form any bank investment company to house the government stakes in banks.

In the Union Budget presented last week, Sitharaman had announced the privatisation of two banks as part of its disinvestment plan.

"The details are being worked out. I have made the announcement but we are working together with the RBI," she said, when asked about the proposal.

She, however, declined to name the candidate chosen for privatisation.

On the bad bank, Sitharaman said the government may have to give some guarantee for the National Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC), but stressed that this is a solution which has come from the banks itself and will also be led by them.

Sitharaman alleged that the banks' non-performing assets, which are to be transferred into the National ARC, are a legacy of the mismanagement in the past.

There is no phone banking happening now, with favours being sought for anyone from New Delhi.

On the Bank Investment Company (BIC), she said no such proposal is on the table and wondered what resulted in the discussion.

"There is no such discussion. I don't know where it is coming from. At least it is not before me. I am not discussing that, she said.

—PTI

KJ BENNYCHAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
FEB. 7

The Union finance ministry has finally approved the revised debt-fund raising plan for the Rs 64,000-crore semi-high speed rail project connecting Kerala capital Thiruvananthapuram with its northern tip Kasaragod, a top state official has said.

The Japanese development agency Jica had earlier committed to provide Rs 33,700 crore, which was approved by the Union finance ministry as well in 2019, but later Jica massively curtailed its exposure, following which the Union finance ministry asked the state to submit a revised debt raising plan.

In a Jan. 5 letter to chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman asked Kerala Rail Development Corporation (K-Rail), the nodal implementation agency to expedite land acquisition for the most ambitious project of the state till date, the official said.

The Centre has also directed K-Rail to re-engage with Japan International Cooperative Agency (Jica) to finalise the funding for the Rs 63,941 crore semi-high-speed rail Silver Line as it is named, connecting Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod and covering the 529.45-km ride in four hours against over 12 hours now. The line will cover Thiruvananthapuram-Ernakulam/Kochi stretch in flat 90 minutes, against over four hours now.

Under the revised debt funding plan submitted and approved by the Centre, Kerala has nearly halved the Jica loan to \$2.5 billion from \$4.6 billion earlier. K-Rail is also seeking \$1 billion from the Asian Development Bank, \$500 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and \$460 million from the German development agency KfW. K-Rail managing director V. Ajith Kumar told PTI over the weekend.

—PTI

MALAYSIA TO HOUSE MIGRANT WORKERS IN HOTELS



CHAN TIEN HIN
FEB. 7

Malaysia's government has kicked off a plan to temporarily house migrant workers in near-empty hotels across the nation to tackle the worsening spread of Covid-19 cases due to workplace clusters.

Malaysia's Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry said in a statement that the programme will help curb the virus outbreak and indirectly assist hotel operators hurt by the pandemic.

"The initiative is the best alternative at the moment," the ministry said.

Overcrowded conditions in employee dormitories have been a key source of infections, spurring record cases and pressuring Malaysia's health system. The nation has more than 1.5 million documented migrant workers, 91 per cent of whom live in accommodation that doesn't meet minimum housing standards, according to the Ministry of Human Resources.

The government's plan also provides a lifeline for the tourism industry. More than 100 hotels have closed since the outbreak began almost a year ago, according to a February 5 statement by the Malaysian Association of Hotels.

A recent video of a hotel manager selling the hotel's food by the roadside in a popular hawker area is an example of many who have resorted to scaling down to cover expenses and employees' payroll, the association said.

—Bloomberg

GROWING | SCALE

More than \$60 bn invested in India's internet start-ups in 5 years

Internet start-ups on cusp of listing: HSBC

New Delhi, Feb. 7: India's internet start-up leaders that operate businesses ranging from food delivery, e-commerce to online insurance are now on the cusp of listing, a report said, putting their combined value at \$180 billion by 2025.

"The growing scale and maturity of India's internet economy is starting to create more value and investment opportunities. More than \$60 billion has been invested in India's internet start-ups in the past five years, with around \$12 billion in 2020 alone," HSBC Global Research said in a report of India's internet.

It put the total sector value (ex-Fintech) to reach \$180 billion by 2025.



"Many of these leaders, which operate businesses ranging from food delivery, e-commerce to online insurance, are now on the cusp of listing," the report said.

India has 42 Unicorns and over 45 soonicorns, HSBC said.

E-commerce is the largest opportunity, worth

an estimated \$67 billion by 2025, it said adding this was worth \$31 billion 2019 after expanding at an impressive five-year CAGR of 39 per cent.

Amazon and Flipkart control over 80 per cent of the industry today but the contours of the competitive landscape are still evolving.

"For example, Reliance Jio is set to emerge as a significant competitive threat, along with multiple vertical e-commerce players and hundreds of brands that are now delivering direct to consumers," it said. "We see e-commerce logistics companies such as Delhivery as a lucrative opportunity."

In India, 48 per cent of retail spending is on grocery, compared to 15 per cent in China and 10 per cent in the US.

Ed-tech is the second-largest opportunity with a market size of \$48 billion by 2025. Although still quite fragmented, it is one of the most profitable segments and has one of the largest total

addressable markets.

Food delivery is getting back on track, with gross merchandise value almost back to pre-pandemic levels.

"We expect 6 million online food orders a day by 2025. This is well behind China where 40 million orders are delivered every day," the report said.

The online insurance market remains lucrative, with PolicyBazaar likely to maintain its lead for the foreseeable future.

But ride-sharing faces significant challenges, travel is the most penetrated market and hotels are an untapped opportunity, the report said adding ride sharing has fallen 40 per cent from pre-pandemic levels.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Boxing champ
Leon Spinks dead

Las Vegas: Leon Spinks, who won Olympic gold and then shocked the boxing world by beating Muhammad Ali to win the heavyweight title in only his eighth pro fight, has died. He was 67.

Spinks, who lived his later years in Las Vegas, died Friday night, according to a release from a public relations firm. He had been battling prostate and other cancers. His wife, Brenda Glur Spinks, and a few close friends and other family members were by his side when he passed away. A lovable heavyweight with a drinking problem, Spinks beat Ali by decision in a 15-round fight in 1978 to win the title. He was unranked at the time, and picked as an opponent because Ali was looking for an easy fight. — *AP*

Moseley killed
in road accident

Kingston: Former West Indies pacer Ezra Moseley has died after his bicycle was hit by a car in a tragic road accident. He was 63 years old.

According to a report in *Nationnews*, “Moseley was riding a bicycle along the ABC Highway when he was in a collision with an SUV driven by a teenager at the Balls, Christ Church junction.”

Moseley featured in two Tests against England in 1990 and also played nine ODIs between 1990 and 1991. He went to the rebel tour of South Africa back in 1982-83 and was banned. However he later made a comeback and had a late international debut after playing his trade for Glamorgan in English county cricket.

He was the assistant coach when the West Indies women's team won the T20 World Cup in India in 2016. — *PTI*

Hyd, North-East
play stalemate

Vasco: Hyderabad FC and NorthEast United remained in the reckoning for the play-off spots of the Indian Super League after the match between the two sides ended in a goal-less draw at the Tilak Maidan Stadium here on Sunday.

While Hyderabad moved to third on goal difference, NEUFC climbed above FC Goa to fourth. FC Goa, however, have a game in hand and will face leaders Mumbai City FC on Monday.

The two teams weren't able to find the breakthrough in the first half with defences of both the sides standing tall. Despite hogging possession, Hyderabad registered just one shot on target against NEUFC in the first half. NEUFC eventually grew in confidence in the game and fashioned better opportunities in the first half. — *PTI*

Ankita fifth India
girl in Slam field

Melbourne: Ankita Raina on Sunday became only the fifth Indian woman tennis player in Open era to secure a place in the main draw of a Grand Slam as she made the cut for the women's doubles event of the Australian Open.

The year's first Grand Slam starts here on Monday. After missing out on the women's singles main draw, she still had a chance to qualify as a 'lucky loser' till the completion of the first round, but the 28-year-old realised her long-time dream when she signed up with Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu and earned a direct entry.

Nirupama Mankad (1971), Nirupama Vaidyanathan (1998), Sania Mirza and Indian-American Shikha Uberoi (2004) have competed in the Grand Slam main draws for the country. Ankita is only the second Indian after Sania to compete in the women's doubles of a tennis major. — *PTI*

Live on TV

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

CRICKET
India vs England: First Test, Day 4 from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1, HD

WWE
Raw: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Eng bring out Bess

Off-spinner Dom takes 4/55 as visitors maintain stranglehold

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

It's difficult to keep Rishabh Pant quiet. The chirpy wicket-keeper-batsman is a bundle of energy and likes to smile in the face of adversity. If not for the left-hander's exuberant knock, India would have ended day three of their first Test against England in further embarrassment.

Pant's counter-attacking 91 off 88 balls and his century stand with Cheteshwar Pujara (73) helped India recover from a precarious position of 73 for four, before ending the day at 257 for six in 74 overs. India still have a mountain to climb as they trail by 321 runs and require 122 to avoid follow on.

After ending their first innings at 578 — adding 23 runs to their overnight total, England consolidated their stranglehold on the match with disciplined bowling and brilliant fielding. Off-spinner Dom Bess (4/55) showed great control to rattle the fancied batting line-up.

With a new ball in hand, Jofra Archer steamed in and spit fire. Consistently clocking 140kmp/h, Archer extracted bounce on a slow surface and accounted for both of India's openers. He induced an edge off short of length ball to remove Rohit Sharma.

Two stunning catches — James Anderson's diving effort at mid-off and skipper Joe Root's one-handed grab at short-cover — saw the backs of Shubman Gill and Ajinkya Rahane, respectively. Rahane was outfoxed by Bess shortly after he scalped Virat Kohli with a peach of a delivery. With a dipping ball, Bess drew Kohli forward and found the inside edge. Ollie Pope took a sharp catch at short-leg.



England's Dom Bess celebrates the wicket of India captain Virat Kohli on Day Three of the first Test in Chennai on Sunday. — *ECB*

From 44 for one, India slumped to 73 for four. There were no real demons in the wicket, except for a few odd deliveries that were pitched on the footmark. But Indian batsmen seemed to be in a rush to score and handed over control to England bowlers in the process.

Post-lunch was the most absorbing session where England pinned India down before Pant came and broke the shackles. The way Pujara and Pant went about their job was a study in contrasts. While Pant brought in his half-century in just 40 balls, Pujara, in his element as always, held the other end.

It was a calculated assault from Pant.

Taking a particular liking to Jack Leach, Pant clobbered the left-arm spinner for five sixes. Root had to take Leach off the attack. Against Anderson, Pant stood tall to cut and punch off his back foot.

Pujara was unlucky. His pull shot ricocheted off short-leg fielder and fell straight into the hands of Rory Burns at mid-wicket. Pant fell nine short of what would have been a well-deserved hundred. It was the fourth time he got out in the 90s in his blossoming Test career.

An unbroken 32-run stand between two Chennai boys, Washington Sundar (33 not out) and R. Ashwin (8), steered India safely through to the close.

Dismissing Kohli
was special for Bess

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Off-spinner Dom Bess' four-wicket haul helped England tighten the screws on India after pacer Jofra Archer removed both openers. Bess, who broke India's backbone by taking the wickets of Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara and Rishabh Pant, said dismissing the Indian captain was special.

It had some planning going into it, explained Bess. “It was a special

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings (overnight 555/8): Rory Burns c Pant b Ashwin 33, Dominic Sibley lbw Bumrah 37, Daniel Lawrence lbw Bumrah 0, Joe Root lbw Nadeem 218, Ben Stokes c Pujara b Nadeem 82, Ollie Pope lbw Ashwin 34, Jos Buttler b Ishant 30, Dominic Bess lbw Bumrah 34, Jofra Archer b Ishant 0, Jack Leach not out 14, James Anderson b Ashwin. Extras (b-7, lb-17, w-1, nb-20) 45. **Total (all out in 190.1 over) 578.**

FoW: 1-63, 2-63, 3-263, 4-387, 5-473, 6-477, 7-525, 8-525, 9-567. **Bowling:** Ishant Sharma 27-7-52-2, Jasprit Bumrah 36-7-84-3, Ravichandran Ashwin 55.1-5-146-3, Shahbaz Nadeem 44-4-167-2, Washington Sundar 26-2-98-0, Rohit Sharma 2-0-7-0.

India 1st Innings: Rohit Sharma c Buttler b Archer 6, Shubman Gill c Anderson b Archer 29, Cheteshwar Pujara c Rory Burns b Dom Bess 73, Virat Kohli c Ollie Pope b Dom Bess 11, Ajinkya Rahane c Root b Dom Bess 1, Rishabh Pant c Jack Leach b Dom Bess 91, Washington Sundar (not out) 33, Ravichandran Ashwin (not out) 8, Extras (b-4, lb-1) 5. **Total (for 6 wks, in 74 overs) 257.**

FoW: 19-1, 44-2, 71-3, 73-4, 192-5, 225-6. James Anderson 11-3-34-0, Jofra Archer 16-3-52-2, Ben Stokes 6-1-16-0, Jack Leach 17-2-94-0, Dominic Bess 23-5-55-4, Joe Root 1-0-1-0.

Djokovic targets
ninth Oz crown

Melbourne, Feb. 7: Novak Djokovic has not endeared himself to fans over the past year, but the Australian Open's undisputed king will take some stopping as he targets a record-extending ninth title at Melbourne Park.

Djokovic claimed his 17th Grand Slam crown in last year's gripping final, when he came back from 2-1 down to edge Austria's Dominic Thiem in five sets.

The Serbian's eighth victory in 16 visits reinforced his dominance in Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena, where he claimed his first Grand Slam title in 2008 and has won seven of the last 10 editions.

Rafael Nadal and Thiem look to be his biggest rivals at this year's tournament, with six-time Australian Open champion Roger Federer sidelined as he recovers from double knee surgery.

The Australian Open was the highlight of a mesmerising early 2020 season for Djokovic, who won his first four tournaments of the year.

Nadal will undoubtedly figure prominently in the tournament but it is now 12 years since he won his

lone title in Melbourne, despite four more trips to the final.

The Spaniard also has fitness concerns after he pulled out of the ATP Cup during warm-up week with a sore back.

Thiem came agonisingly close to victory last year and, buoyed by his first Grand Slam title at the US Open, will be confident against anyone in the draw — including Djokovic, against whom he has won five of their last seven meetings.

OSAKA, BARTY STAND IN
SERENA'S SLAM PATH

Serena Williams continues her long quest for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam when the coronavirus-delayed 2021 Australian Open begins on Monday, four years since her last major triumph in Melbourne.

It may be this season or never for Serena, who turns 40 in September and will have to conquer a field bursting with young talent headed by US Open champion Naomi Osaka, home favourite and world number one Ashleigh Barty and defending champion Sofia Kenin. — *AFP*

CHARISMATIC RONALDO
LIFTS JUVE TO 3RD SPOT

Rome, Feb. 7: Evergreen striker Cristiano Ronaldo scored the day after turning 36 as Juventus overtook Roma to go third in Serie A' on Saturday with a 2-0 win over the capital side as Napoli slumped in Genoa.

Juventus move five points behind leaders Inter Milan, who beat Fiorentina 2-0 on Friday, with a game in hand.

Second-placed AC Milan are one point off top spot before hosting struggling Crotone on Sunday.

Napoli missed the chance to pull level on points with Roma, falling to their second defeat in three league games, 2-1 against resurgent Genoa.

Ronaldo put Juventus ahead on 13 minutes with his 16th league goal of the campaign to extend his lead as Serie A's top scorer this term ahead of Inter's Romelu Lukaku.

EVERTON STRIKE LATE TO DENY MAN UTD

Manchester United missed the chance to move level on points with Manchester City at the top of the Premier League after Calvert-Lewin's 95th-minute equaliser salvaged a 3-3 draw for Everton at Old Trafford. — *AFP*

MARKRAM, DUSSEN PROP UP PROTEAS ON DAY FOUR vs PAK

Rawalpindi (Pakistan), Feb. 7: Aiden Markram hit a solid half century and Rassie van der Dussen gave him able company to give South Africa hope of an improbable and intriguing win in the second Test. Set a daunting 370-run target,

South Africa finished the fourth day on 127-1. The tourists will need another 243 runs to level the series with Pakistan on Monday.

Brief scores: Pakistan 272 & 298 (Rizwan 115*, Linde 5/54) **vs SA 201 & 127/1** (Markram 59*, Dussen 48*). — *AFP*

Pujara confident of India
putting up a decent total

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

NUMBERS GAME

ENGLAND'S SECOND HIGHEST TOTAL ON INDIAN SOIL

● England recorded their second highest total against India on Indian soil by making 578 in 190.1 overs on the third day of the first Test.

● Overall, it was England's ninth highest total against India in Tests. England's highest against Indian on Indian soil is 652/7 declared in 175 overs at Chennai in 1984-85.

● Rishabh Pant became the first Indian batsman to hit five sixes in an innings against England in Tests. It was the first time when this Indian wicket-keeper smashed five sixes in an innings.

● Pant and Cheteshwar Pujara put on 119 runs for the fifth wicket in the first innings. It was India's 13th century stand for this position against England at home and 19th overall.

— *S. PERVEZ KAISER*

Cheteshwar Pujara couldn't believe how he got out. He scored his fourth half-century in five innings on Sunday, but rued the missed opportunity to convert it into a big knock. It was an unfortunate dismissal.

The Saurashtra batsman looked on course for a well-deserved century, but his pull shot clipped the shoulder of the short-leg fielder before being caught at mid-wicket. Pujara said he was batting really well. “I was seeing the ball really well and thought I was scoring fluently. I was really disappointed with the dismissal. But as a batsman, I can't do much about it. It was the most unfortunate way to get out,” said the 33-year-old.

In the recent past,

Pujara and left-handed batsman Rishabh Pant have put on quite a few impressive partnerships in Test matches. Pujara said he loves batting with Pant. “I am happy with the way he is playing. However, he has to learn a few things. He still has to put the team into a commanding position because he is capa-

ble of that.”

With Washington Sundar and R. Ashwin in the middle, Pujara believes India can still make a decent total. “We are still confident. Both Sundar and Ashwin are batting well, so we will just have to move on from here. Tomorrow will be a most crucial day for us,” he said.

Deepthi dashes to bag silver

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

Jeevanji Deepthi secured the third medal for Telangana at the 36th National Junior Athletics Championships being held in Guwahati on Sunday.

Deepthi won a silver in the Girls Under 18 100 metres sprint with a time of 12.07 seconds at the Sarusajai Stadium. Avantika Santosh Narali of Maharashtra took gold in 11.98 seconds while Sudeshna Hanmant Shiva, also of Maharashtra finished third with a timing of 12.11 seconds.

Meanwhile, Haryana race walker Paramdeep Mor was on Sunday stripped off his silver medal after he was found to be overage in the National Junior Athletics Championships.

Mor won silver medal in the 10km race walk event in the boys' under-20 category with a time of 41:19.87 but was later found to be overage in the medical test.



Jeevanji Deepthi poses with her silver medal at the Sarusajai Stadium in Guwahati on Sunday.

After the revision of the results, Manipur's Ningthoukhongja (44:04.11) was given the silver medal while Assam's Bikram Das (44:07.61) was elevated to third place. Uttarakhand's Suraj Panwar won the gold in a time of 41:17.40.

In an interesting development,

the Under-18 quartermilers produced better times than the Under-20 runners in both the men and women's finals.

Tamil Nadu's S Barath and Haryana's Kapil both clocked sub-48 second times in the boys under-18 final while Priya Habbathanahally Mohan (Karnataka) and Summy (Haryana) dipped in under-56 seconds in Girls U-18.

Delhi sprinters Ritik Malik and Taranjeet Kaur won the Under-20 men and women 100m races respectively while the title of the corresponding fastest Under-18 athletes were captured by Anshul (Delhi) and Avantika Santosh Narale (Maharashtra). Dheeraj Kumar Pahadi (Jharkhand) won the boys Under-16 100m crown. Saniya Mahendra Sawant (Maharashtra) won the 100m race in Under-16 category, edging out her state-mate Siya Abhijit Sawant and Soumita Paul (West Bengal) by one-hundredth of a second.

