


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SATURDAY | 23 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 32.0°C
Min: 20.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
32/20 °C

COVID-19

COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+11,354)

(+112)

1,06,36,056

1,53,140

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+214)

(+2)

TS: 2,92,835

1,586

(+137)

(+4)

AP: 8,86,694

7,146

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,83,53,744

DEATHS

21,06,818

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/

coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana

Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Dasami till 8.53 pm

Star: Kritika till 9.29 pm

Varjyam: 8.04 am to 9.51 am

Durmuhurtam: 6.53 am to 8.22 am

Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi- ul- Akhir 9,1442 AH

PRAYERS

(ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.40 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.30 pm

Maghrib: 5.48 pm

Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.35 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.53 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 13.21 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 2.34 AM

COUNTER POINT



Don't worry, our vaccine is not just 98% or 110% but 200% effective!

SHORT TAKES

Petrol crosses ₹92 per litre

New Delhi: Petrol price on Friday crossed ₹92 a litre mark in Mumbai, while diesel touched an all-time high after rates were raised for the third time this week. Fuel prices were hiked by 25 paise per litre each, according to a price notification from oil marketing firms. This took the petrol price in Delhi to ₹85.45 per litre and ₹92.04 in Mumbai.

Heroin worth ₹1,000 cr seized

New Delhi: Two Sri Lankan nationals have been arrested and about 100 kg of heroin worth an estimated ₹1,000 crore seized as part of a probe involving a trans-border drugs-trafficking racket, the NCB said on Friday.

MMM Nawas and Mohamed Afnas were nabbed from Chennai, where they were living by hiding their real identities.

No lost year for UPSC aspirants

New Delhi: The Centre Friday told the Supreme Court that it was not in favour of granting one extra opportunity to those civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in the exams conducted by the UPSC last year.

■ **Report on Page 4**

NATION | 4

Bihar to keep tabs on social media posts



WORLD | 5

US believes in WHO to lead Covid fight



SPORTS | 8

Satwik-Ashwini in Thai semis, Sindhu out



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

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Assam torch rally

Security personnel stop activists of All Assam Students Union (AASU) who were staging a torch rally to protest against Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, in Dibrugarh, Assam on Friday.

— PTI

Internet in all AP villages

CM issues instructions to officials for unlimited access

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

The state government is making all efforts to provide unlimited and uninterrupted internet connectivity across all villages. Towards this, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy directed officials to prepare an action plan for establishing such a network in villages and an internet library at network point to facilitate work-from-home. During a review meeting on internet connections in villages and providing laptops under the Amma Vodi scheme, held here on Friday, he instructed offi-

cials to aim at providing uninterrupted internet services at desired connection plans for rural areas. He told them to focus on developing an internet system with non-destructive cables, which can neither be cut nor disturbed. He said that from the village network points, they must ensure house to house internet even in YSR Jagananna colonies. Reddy said that the idea was to lay an underground cable from HT line to the substation and from the substation to village panchayats. He directed the authorities to provide any capacity connection for the customers by estab-

lishing a proper system at the panchayat level. The Chief Minister also reviewed the provision of laptops to the beneficiaries of Amma Vodi and Vasati Devana scheme that have been opted in lieu of financial assistance. He stated that those, who are studying in standard nine to 12, can opt for a laptop instead of financial assistance from next year. He directed the officials to think of giving laptops with more specifications to fully cater to the needs of students pursuing engineering and other technical courses. He said if the laptop is damaged, it should be

handed over to the ward and village secretariats. The pieces have to either be repaired within a week or replaced. For this, he directed the officials to keep the warranty for three years instead of one year. Industries, commerce & IT minister Mekapati Gautham Reddy, special chief secretary R. Karikal Valaven, housing principal secretary Ajay Jain, AP Transco CMD Nagulapalli Srikanth, AP Fibernet chairman P. Gautam Reddy, AP Fibernet MD M. Madhusudhan Reddy and other senior officials were present.

CENTRE TO TALK ONLY IF FARMERS OKAY LAW FREEZE

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The government's negotiations with the protesting farmers' unions hit a roadblock on Friday as the farmer leaders once again stuck to their demands for repeal of the three agriculture laws and a legal guarantee for MSP, even as the Centre asked them to reconsider its proposal for putting the laws on hold for 12 to 18 months.

Unlike the last 10 rounds of talks, at Friday's meeting the two sides could not even reach a decision on the next date as the government also hardened its position saying it is ready to meet once the unions agree to discuss the suspension proposal. On Thursday, the government offered to put on hold the three laws and set up a joint committee to find solutions. After internal consultations, the farmers' unions decided to reject the offer and stick to their two major demands.

■ **Full report on Page 4**

State appeals to SEC for rescheduling local polls

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

The state government on Friday made a fervent appeal to the State Election Commission (SEC) to reschedule panchayat polls at least till the first two phases of vaccination to health workers and police are over. Conveying the government's commitment to cooperate with the SEC for the smooth conduct of the polls, a clear deviation from its earlier approach of confrontation, Chief Secretary Adityanath Das wrote a letter to State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar to revise the election schedule in compliance with the High Court order to enable both of them to make all efforts to ensure conduct of polls and the Covid-19 vaccination drive.

Indirectly, though, the Chief Secretary reminded the SEC that both the government and SEC are responsible for the polls as well as the vaccination drive as per the HC's judgment and it would be prudent to schedule both activities in such a way that they are held successfully.

He expressed difficulty to vaccinate the polling personnel and to put them on the polling duty at the same time and added that as the Centre mandated vaccination for all frontline employees in the first round, conduct of polls would mean vaccination would

SEC tells chief secy to remove 7 officials

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

The State Election Commission has invoked its plenary powers under Article 243 (K) read with Article 324 to remove nine 'tainted' officers who had 'failed' to prevent aberrations in the form of election-related incidents or poll-related violence. State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar issued instructions here on Friday for removal of these officers so as to conduct polls in a free and fair manner. SEC said he acted as the state government did not respond to his repeated requests to remove the tainted officers.

The SEC said that continuance of such poll-tainted officers in the posts would send a wrong signal to the public. Their "partisan conduct" would be counterproductive for conduct of free and fair polls, he said, and the "affected public would be demoralised."

He stated that these officers should handover their charge and exit

have to be deferred.

He said that such a move would violate the guidelines of the Centre and asserted that the government would be ready to conduct polls after 60 days of comple-

forthwith. He asked collectors from Chittoor and Guntur districts to hand over their charges to joint collectors and asked Tirupati Urban SP to hand over his charge to SP, Chittoor.

The SEC said the Chief Secretary should send a panel of three names of suitable officers as replacements for the collectors of Chittoor and Guntur districts and the SP of Tirupati Urban. The names thus proposed should have vigilance clearance.

In case of subordinate police officers, the director general of police should send a panel of names and proposal to the SEC for replacement of those who are now transferred out.

The officers to be removed included, apart from the two district collectors and the SP, the Dy SP, Palamaneru who, since promoted as additional SP, shall be barred from poll related work; Deputy SP of Srikalahasti and circle inspectors of Macharla, Punganur, Rayadurgam and Tadiparti.

tion of the first round of vaccination to frontline personnel who were to be involved in conduct of the polls.

■ **Page 2: Poll personnel must take vaccine: CS**

CONGRESS TO ELECT NEW PREZ BY JUNE 2021

ASHHAR KHAN | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The Congress will have an elected president by June 2021, with the party's working committee on Friday approving holding the internal election after Assembly polls in five states. The Congress Working Committee (CWC), after a three-and-a-half hour meeting, authorised incumbent party chief Sonia Gandhi to schedule the internal election after the conclusion of Assembly polls.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said, "Congress Working Committee has decided that there will be an elected Congress president by June 2021."

The party elections will be held in May, after Assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry. Several Congress leaders were hoping to go to the Assembly elections under new leadership, however that failed to happen.

Senior leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Mukul Wasnik and P. Chidambaram reportedly asked for immediate organisational polls.

■ **Report on Page 4**

Ahead of Modi, Didi show, WB min quits

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 22

A day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brief Kolkata visit, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee received yet another blow as one more rebel Trinamul Congress minister, Rajib Banerjee, quit her government, fuelling speculations of his defection to the BJP.

Within hours of Rajib Banerjee's move, the TMC expelled his loyalist and the daughter of former ICC chief Jagmohan Dalmiya, Baishali Dalmiya from the party, accusing her of "anti-party activities".

He has become the third TMC heavyweight minister in a row to leave Mamata Banerjee's Cabinet in less than two months.

Modi and Banerjee are all set to share the stage here in what is supposed

● **THE TMC** expelled his loyalist and the daughter of former ICC chief Jagmohan Dalmiya, Baishali Dalmiya from the party, accusing her of "anti-party activities".

● **HE IS** the third TMC heavyweight to resign from the party

to be their last official public appearance before the Assembly elections are announced. They will celebrate Parakram Diwas marking freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's 125th birth anniversary. They have separate events for the day too.

The PM's visit has been dubbed by the Trinamul as a political stunt to reach out to the people of Bengal ahead of the polls.

■ **Full report on Page 4**

QUICK ACTION CM sends CS to affected area

Mystery illness strikes again, 22 unconscious

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

The mystery illness continued to raise its ugly head in the state with nearly 22 fresh cases being reported from Kumarapalli village in Dendulur mandal of West Godavari on Friday.

The affected persons became unconscious after turning giddy and had convulsions for a brief period. Among the affected, 13 were admitted to a government hospital for treatment while the remaining were discharged when they recovered.

The mystery illness seemed to be spreading with more than 600 persons being affected till

now and one death reported from Eluru. Recently, 29 persons were affected in Pulla village of Bhimadole mandal.

Following the development, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy directed chief secretary Aditya Nath Das, principal secretary for health Anil Kumar Singhal and commissioner for health and family welfare K. Bhaskar to rush to Kumarapalli village and take stock of the development.

Accordingly, the senior government officials arrived in the village and interacted with the affected persons and enquired with the local authorities about steps being taken up to treat the patients.

Meanwhile, the authorities collected samples of blood from patients. They also took food items and water and sent them for analysis to IICT and NIN in Hyderabad and also to a lab in Vijayawada.

Later, the chief secretary told media that the CM had directed them to provide all requisite medical intervention to help the affected persons recover.

He said that though the illness was reported earlier from Eluru and its surrounding areas, as the state government acted promptly, the illness was brought under control.

■ **Page 3: Healthy secy for testing water**

INDIAN OCEAN DEFENCE MINISTERS MEETING TO BE HELD IN BENGALURU

New Delhi, Jan. 22: India will host the defence ministers of the countries of the Indian Ocean Region at a conclave during the upcoming Aero India in Bengaluru, officials said on Friday.

India is organising the conclave in the backdrop of growing Chinese military assertiveness in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). "Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is hosting the IOR defence ministers' conclave on February 4. It

will be held during the Aero India 2021," said an official.

The conclave is being organised as part of an initiative to promote dialogue in an institutional and cooperative environment that can foster peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region, the official said. "The broad theme of the conclave will be 'Enhanced Peace, Security and Cooperation in the Indian Ocean'." — PTI

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SHORT TAKES

IAS RANK
CONFERRED ON
JC RAJAKUMARIDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 22

IAS rank was conferred on Joint Collector G.Rajakumari (Welfare) by the Central Government. She received conferring orders from the government on Friday. Ms.Rajakumari joined as DWMA project Director to East Godavari in the year 2017 and later, he was transferred to Revenue Divisional Officer in Kakinada. He was promoted as Joint Collector-2 (Welfare) in 2019. She succeeded in monitoring the officials to achieve the goals of their departments respectively. The East Godavari District Collector D.Muralidhar Reddy, Joint Collectors G.Lakshmisha and Keerthi Chekuri, the District Revenue Officer Ch.Sathibabu and other district officials greeted her.

OC JAC DEMANDS
EWS RESERVATIONS
IN AP TOODC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 22

With the Telangana State implementing EWS reservation for forward communities, the Reddy Association has stepped up the demand for its implementation in Andhra Pradesh also. OC JAC held a dharna near the collectorate here on Friday and performed a Milk Abhishek for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekara Rao.

Joint action committee for OC (OCJAC) state president Birru Pratap Reddy sought immediate implementation of the 10 per cent Economic Weaker Section (EWS) reservation in AP. After the protest dharna, the activists organised Palabhisekham at the flex of Prime Minister Modi, thanking him for having introduced this quota system in central government jobs.

TULASI REDDY
ASKS CM TO
IMPLEMENT EWSDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 22

The Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee Working President Dr. N. Tulasi Reddy requested the state government to implement EWS reservation. He wrote a letter to Chief Minister, stating that the unemployed youth belonging to castes whose reservation does not apply is said to be in trouble for jobs. He said that the central government had given 10 per cent reservation in central government schools and jobs to the upper caste poor with the 103rd amendment to the constitution.

He said several state governments were implementing it and the neighboring Telangana government was also prepared to implement it. He said the Andhra Pradesh state government was implementing EWS reservations in schools but not in job placements. Poor youth from the upper castes have recently lost 26,807 jobs in village or ward volunteers hired by the state government, 12,589 in secretariats, and 971 in the medical sector. He appealed to the state government to issue orders implementing the 10 per cent EWS reservation.

YADAVAS DEMAND
GOVT WITHDRAWAL
ON PHARMA UNITDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 22

The Yadava leaders demanded the state government should withdraw the permissions of the proposed pharma unit, set up by the Divis Labs in Thondangi mandal of East Godavari.

The All India Yadava Sangham President Mekala Ramulu Yadav, the State President Eesarapu Sekhar Yadav and others visited Pampadipeta and Tatipakalu area and expressed their resentment over the government stand on the proposed pharma unit.

Mr Ramulu Yadav said that though the people unanimously urged the government not to allow the proposed pharma unit by the Divis at Thondangi mandal, the government wants to go ahead for the project and it is totally wrong. He said that the All India Yadava Sangham will render its support to the agitators to cancel the permissions to the pharma unit permanently. He said that if the government withdraws the permissions to the Divis, the yadavas across the country would come to Thondangi to take up the agitations in favour of the village people.

Contentious farm bills



Farmers along with Left activists and leaders take part in 'Chalo Guntur' tractor rally against the Centre's newly proposed agriculture bills in Guntur city on Friday.

-DC

SEC notification today on
four-phase GP polls in AP

SEC maintains it will coordinate with state to hold GP elections

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

The State Election Commission (SEC) is all set to issue notification on Saturday at 10 a.m. for the first phase of gram panchayat (GP) elections.

The SEC's resolve on conduct of polls received a boost after a division bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court headed by Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami allowed holding of GP elections in its verdict delivered on Thursday. The notification is scheduled to be issued on Saturday morning even as the Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday, January 25, the special leave petition (SLP) filed by the AP government seeking setting aside of the HC order. State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar has, however, decided to go ahead with the notification for organising the polls in four phases on February 5, 9, 13 and 17.

The SEC maintained that both the State Election Commission and state government will

GOVT EMPLOYEES SOUGHT POSTPONE
OF LOCAL BODY ELECTIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

The government employees sought postponing of local body election process till completion of Corona vaccination process for the safety of the employees' lives. The leaders of various employees associations led by AP JAC Amaravati chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu and secretary Y. V. Rao met Chief Secretary Das on Friday and submitted a memorandum seeking post-

ponement of local body elections. Responding to the concerns of government employees, Chief Secretary Das assured that their demands would be considered sympathetically. AP State Panchayat Raj Engineers Association state president V.V. Muralikrishna Naidu, Teachers Association JAC G.V. Narayana Reddy, AP State Police Officers Association president Janukula Srinivas Rao and others were present in the meeting.

personnel of both public and private sectors for their dedication in ensuring that Coronavirus is on the retreat. The election commissioner maintained that the State Election Commission has the same powers as Election Commission of India (ECI) when it comes to conduct of elections for local bodies. He asserted that all concerned offi-

cers, departments and district collectors are subordinate to the commission when it comes to poll-related issues. State Election Commission has the final and decisive say when it comes to holding of elections, he underlined.

Earlier, the commissioner called on Governor B i s w a b h u s a n Harichandan and apprised the latter about the measures being taken for conduct of gram panchayat polls in the Andhra Pradesh. The Governor, in turn, is learnt to have expressed support in holding the elections. Pointing out that the State Election Commission's decision on polls has been widely welcomed by various principal stakeholders, the election commissioner warned that any attempts to physically derail the election process by targeting contestants will be dealt with firmly. He directed the police department to keep a close watch on potential troublemakers and deal stringently with any attempts to disturb the polls.

Poll personnel must take vaccine: CS

FROM PAGE 1

The CS also said that health and well-being of the polling personnel would be ensured only if they took the two doses of the vaccine and acquired immunity so that they could be deputed on poll duty. He made it clear that if any activity is taken up against the Covid-19 guidelines of the Centre, it would imperil the health of the polling personnel.

On the other hand, the state government filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court seeking to set aside the Andhra Pradesh High Court order allowing conduct of gram panchayat polls on Friday. It was admitted and the hearing is to be held on Monday before a three-judge division bench comprising Justice Lalit, Justice S. Abdul Naseer and Justice Indu Malhotra.

The AP government employees also filed an SLP in the apex court with a prayer to provide relief from the High Court order and issue directions to defer conduct of polls by three months under Article 136 of the Constitution. The SEC also field a caveat in the apex court not to give an ex-parte order and hear it before pronouncing any order on the conduct of gram panchayat polls in AP.

The state government's top legal source said that though initially the SLP was not admitted by the Supreme Court registry following some technical issues during filing of it online, subsequently, the issues were resolved and the SLP was admitted.

Meanwhile, the AP is witnessing an unprecedented development in the last few days, with the state government unwilling

to allow conduct of gram panchayat polls on the reason that it was pre-occupied with Covid-19 management and vaccination programme and any move to hold elections would keep the health of the people at stake. So is the case with SEC which is bent upon conduct of gram panchayat polls as per schedule claiming that it was its constitutional responsibility to do so.

The SEC is busy preparing for the issue of election notification and also to make arrangements for conduct of polls and even moved the Supreme Court to go ahead with the polls while the state government too was making efforts to stall the election by moving the apex court.

On the other hand, the SEC has decided to adopt electoral rolls already published with reference to 01-01-2019 as qualifying date and updated upto the

date of issue of notification for MPTCs/ZPTCs on 07-03-2020. It turned critical on the department of panchayat raj for failing to obtain the electoral rolls published by the Election Commission of India on 16-11-2020 or even the final rolls published on 15-01-2021 as it wanted to adopt the latest final electoral rolls for the polls.

On the other hand, the Chief Secretary in response to SEC's order to remove nine officers, stated that the SEC failed to follow any due procedure on the issue and added that the state government was considering a follow up action on the arbitrary action taken by the SEC. He further said that the so-called tainted officers were actively involved in the pandemic situation of Covid-19 and were engaged in implementation of vaccination programme at present.

Scared of BJP, Naidu adopted
Hindutva agenda: MLA VamsiDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

Gannavaram MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi alleged that Chandrababu Naidu fearing the BJP has adopted Hindu agenda to safeguard Telugu Desam from disappearance. The MLA who was elected on TDP ticket later was distancing from the party and supporting YSR Congress government. He alleged that despite having 40 years of experience, Naidu is engaging in immoral politics in the name of religions and creating divisions in society. He severely alleged that Chandrababu Naidu suspecting about the

● “Despite having 40 years of experience, Naidu is engaging in immoral politics in the name of religions and creating divisions in society”: Vamshi

strengthening of BJP in APZ and hijacked Hindutva agenda of the saffron party. He severely alleged that Chandrababu who already an expert in creating differences in the name of castes now started a new conspiracy in the name of Hindutva to create communal disputes among various faiths in the society. He suggested Chandrababu Naidu to work honestly for the

developing of all communities in society and further for keeping communal harmony in the State. MLA Vamsi felt that there is no need of conducting local body elections in a hurried manner and said that there would no loss in conducting local body elections with one or two months delay. He claimed that Chandrababu Naidu fears to the election in Telangana and did not field party candidate in the recent the Dubbaka byelection and further he did not dare to conduct the campaign in Hyderabad corporation elections in favour of TDP candidates which show his cowardness.

AP playing with
students: LokeshDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh has advised the Jagan Mohan Reddy's government to avoid “playing with the lives and hurting the future of students” by “denying them” the benefits of the fee reimbursement scheme.

Addressing the media here, Lokesh demanded that the government immediately cancel GO 77, saying this order would hurt thousands of students doing PG courses in private colleges. The ruling YSRC was depriving the weaker sections and the backward classes of opportunities for higher studies, he alleged.

He demanded that the YSRC government extend fee reimbursement facility to all deserving PG stu-

dents in private colleges. Else, the TD would hold a state-wide agitation. He said the young generation was hurt by the “adamant” attitude of the Jagan government. “They would teach a lesson to the YSRC.”

He also alleged that there was no safety to women in the CM's own district. Ruling party leaders were playing “dramas” in the name of the Disha Act, but not a single woman victim got justice since Jagan took charge as Chief Minister of the State.

Lokesh also condemned the knife attack on girl Lavanya in Kadapa district just because she rejected the accused's advances.

The former minister urged the government to ensure the best medical care to the seriously-injured girl.

HC STRIKES DOWN
TWO GOs ON
MEDICAL COLLEGE FEEDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

The AP High Court has struck down the GOs issued during the Telugu Desam government allowing Private Unaided Medical and Dental Colleges to steeply increase annual fees. It said they are against the judgments pronounced by Supreme Court. The Court found fault with the government for fixing fees based on agreements with private medical colleges. The High court struck down two impugned GO Nos 72, and 77 issued by the TD government in 2017. It also directed AP Higher Education Regulatory and Management Commission (APHERMC) to fix the fee based on the expenditures incurred by respective colleges. It directed the government to notify the fee fixed by the Commission. The Bench comprising Justices Chagari Praveen Kumar and Rao Raghunandan passed the judgment.

CONTEMPT OF COURT
NOTICES SERVED ON
COURT OFFICIALSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

In an unprecedented move, AP High Court served notices on its own officers for contempt of court as they failed to act on its directions and posted the next hearing to Feb. 5. Single judge bench headed by justice B. Devanand held hearing on Friday and took up the case on suo moto basis and served notices of contempt of court to registrar (judicial) Alapati Giridhar, another registrar N. Muralidhar Rao, some section officers and their assistants, deputy section officer, examiner and assistants. A contempt of court petition was filed on commissioner of survey, settlements and land records as the official failed to implement the court order to promote an employee as the inspector of survey. The judge issued an order to serve notice to the respondent Siddarth Jain on Nov. 30, 2020.

He lamented that it was clear the government was taking back “all their benefits and much more” from the people in the form of increased VAT, excise duty, licence fee etc. Petrol, current, sand, drainage and water charges as also property tax were already hiked, he noted. The MLC said that out of the ₹17,500 liquor revenue, the people were paying ₹11,000 crore towards VAT and excise duty. The remaining ₹6,500 crore came in from the cost of liquor. Of this, ₹5,000 crore worth of liquor was sold by just three companies. These included SPY Distilleries and some other brands, which were given patronage by the government.

All these companies were paying nearly ₹350 crore of J-tax to the chief minister every month, he said.

Ashok Babu said that in order to cover up this corruption, the Chief Minister was allowing his party leaders to loot nearly ₹500 crore by way of collecting huge rents from the government retail liquor shops. He said the state-wide liquor transportation contract was given to a YSRC leader who gained from this by ₹25 crore. “He is collecting ₹30 per carton for transportation”.

POLITICS | TEMPLES

Political interference in temples and their trust boards has been causing disturbances

Sena ‘shadows’ to keep tab on 12 temples: PK

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 22

Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan said that his party would soon form shadow committees to keep an eye on the functioning of temple committees and boards of 12 major temples in the state, including Tirumala, and also check if there were any violations in the implementation of ‘dharma’ in them.

“Despite the spate of attacks on places of worship in the state, the government's indifference in this matter would give impetus to those indulging in such unholy things”, Pawan Kalyan felt while addressing the media here on Friday along with the party's political affairs committee chairman Nadendla Manohar, before winding up his two-day

● “Would the YSRC government show the same attitude if the same kind of attacks happened in places of worship of other faiths?”, Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan questioned the state government.

tour to Tirupati and Tirumala.

The government has immediately arrested those who posted about temples on social media. But why was it so late in arresting a man who admitted to vandalizing idols in temples? It raises many doubts as to why the government took all those days to arrest the man, he said.

He alleged that political interference in temples and their trust boards has been causing disturbances for the past several years. He said political interferences and appointing politicians as members on

temple trust boards, including Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, should be stopped.

Pawan Kalyan slammed the decision of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam trust board to keep open the ‘Vaikunta Dwaram’ at the sacred abode of Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala for 10 days from Vaikunta Ekadasi. It was not fair to break centuries-old practices, he said, while recalling that the holy passage used to be kept open for devotees only on Vaikunta Ekadasi and Dwadasi days for several centuries. Condemning the series

of incidents of vandalism at temples in the state, he accused the state government of inaction in identifying and nabbing the perpetrators.

“Would the YSRC government show the same attitude if the same kind of attacks happened in places of worship of other faiths?” he questioned.

He also alleged that the law and order situation in the state has been deteriorating with the ruling party targeting and harassing common people and opposition parties when they post their views on various issues on social media platforms.

Replying to a question, the Jana Sena chief said that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was a responsible and committed organisation.

JANA SENA CHIEF DONATES ₹30 L
TO AYODHYA’S RAM MANDIR TRUSTDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 22

Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan donated ₹30 lakh for the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The Jana Sena Chief handed over the cheque to the RSS state chief Bharatiji. He also gave a cheque for ₹11,000 arranged by his personal staff.

He said “Lord Sri Ramachandra embodies dharma and tolerance,

sacrifice and bravery. They are an inspiration to all. It is everyone's responsibility to support construction of the temple in Ayodhya”.

“After knowing that I am donating, my personal staff members, including Muslims and Christians, have also raised ₹11,000 for the purpose,” he added. Former minister and BJP leader Dr Kamineni Srinivas and RSS representatives participated in the programme.

“Is there still an organization anywhere in the world that is so committed to leave everything for the country even after all

these decades?, Pawan Kalyan asked, while saying that he had never seen such a strong organisation in the world.

SHORT TAKES

Special train to Rayagada

Visakhapatnam: Railways has decided to run daily special express trains between Guntur-Rayagada from January 27. The train will leave Guntur daily at 11.20 pm, reach Visakhapatnam on the next day at 8.45 am and depart at 9.05 am to arrive Rayagada at 1.40 pm. In return direction, the train will leave Rayagada daily at 2.50 pm with effect from January 28, reach Visakhapatnam at 7.15 pm.

VI AUM TO BE HELD TODAY IN ANANTAPUR

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 22:

The VI Anantapur Ultra Marathon (AUM) with 50 runners from Anantapur will run a stretch of 20 km in relays of four in the Bukkarayasamudram region on January 23.

The event has been a symbol of solidarity among runners from across the globe. This year, although not physically present, but bound by the same passion for running and social change, and a total of 450 runners from 20 cities of India, Spain, Germany, Australia, Ireland, Italy, Turkey, USA, among others, will be taking part and will be co-ordinated virtually, the organisers said.

Generally, this event includes two categories, a 170-km relay ultramarathon and 10K event over a period of two days seeing the participation of runners from India and various countries. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this edition has been organised differently.

The funds raised in the present year will be used to mitigate the consequences of Covid-19 and for the education and healthcare of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Anantapur district.

In the last edition, funds were raised and utilised to construct 39 houses, roads and water facilities in two villages, Daddanala and Bilagondipenta in Nallamala forest of Srisaillam region.

"This year, we are expecting the highest participation since this event has started. The runners are bound by Covid-19 restrictions but their passion has fueled this event differently, which will make it truly a global event. We are thrilled to have them support our cause of alleviating the harsh effects of Covid-19," Moncho Ferrer, RDT Programme Director said.

SPL TEAM VISITS ABANDONED VESSEL AT VIZAG

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 22

A special team, comprising of architects, bankers and marine engineers visited the merchant ship that was abandoned by Bangladesh recently to study its stability in the waters, financial viability and other related issues. The APTDC officials said they are exploring all possibility to take over the ship to convert into an entertainment centre which might include a floating restaurant. The vessel, which ran aground due to a cyclonic storm, was a major attraction during the last Sankranti vacation.

Representatives of Gill Marine, the company which drained out the fuel and furnace oil and subsequently took over the management of the vessel, told *DC* that the APTDC officials were evincing interest in buying off the ship and suggested them not to make any deal.

AP RECORDS 137 COVID CASES, FOUR DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 22

Andhra Pradesh registered 137 fresh cases of Covid-19 and four deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities issued Covid-19 bulletin on Friday reporting that out of 48,313 samples tested for Covid-19, 137 persons were found infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,27,87,961 samples tested, 8,86,694 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,78,060 were recovered while 1,488 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily cases of confirmed Covid-19, East Godavari, Krishna and Visakhapatnam registered 17 each followed by 16 in Guntur, 15 in Anantapur, 12 in Chittoor, each each in Kurnool and West Godavari, seven in Prakasam, six in Nellore.

MAN ATTACKS MINOR GIRL WITH KNIFE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 22

A man attacked a minor girl with a knife in Proddatur. According to the information from N. Nagaraju, the Inspector of Police, Proddatur One Town, Sunil the accused has been following the victim, 17-year-old, for the past one and half years.

Finally, she rejected his love proposal, he was completely disappointed and committed this crime. The young man, who was waiting for the time, was found the girl alone in her house on Friday. He stabbed her indiscriminately for refusing his love. The accused fled after attacking the girl.

Neighbours noticed her with serious injuries and rushed her to the hospital. He said that her condition was stable at the moment, but the doctors said that they would give her full resolution after 24 hours. The accused was arrested by the police around 7 pm. The police are registering and investigating the case.

Fire mishap



A fishing boat caught fire at the Fishing Harbour in Kakinada on Friday. Four fishermen suffered burn injuries, one of them is critical. Fire broke out due to leakage of oil at Kakinada.

FIRE BREAKS OUT IN FISHING BOAT, 4 INJURED

DC CORRESPONDENT

A fishing boat caught fire in the fishing harbour here on Friday and four fishermen met with burn injuries out of which one of the fishermen is critical.

According to the Port Police Station Circle Inspector P. Srinivasa Rao, four fishermen got into the boat. Meanwhile, an oil leakage occurred in the boat. Unaware of the oil leak, one of the crew members Boddu Nooka Raju of Yetimoga in Kakinada, started the boat, sparks broke out from the engine due to oil leak and broke out. All four fishermen met with burn injuries and the condition of Nookaraju is critical.

The other fishermen Malli Yerrayya, Mugi Dhanayya and Dydupalli Suribabu belonging to Visakhapatnam were injured and admitted in government general hospital here.

The fire vehicles rushed to the spot and put out the fire. Port Police registered a case.

The BC Welfare Minister Ch. Srinivasa Venugopala Krishna visited the Government General Hospital and consoled the injured fishermen. He instructed the medical officials in the hospital to render better treatment to the fishermen.

RS smuggling rampant in AP

Smugglers open new routes into forests

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 22

Though the Andhra Pradesh Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) tightened the vigil and claimed to have curbed the smuggling of red sanders to some extent, smuggling activities had once again become rampant with smugglers having opened new routes to venture into the Seshachalam forests, this time through areas under Yerpedu.

In Chittoor (west) and some parts in Anantapur divisions, more than 165 entry/exit points and over 198 loading points were identified by the RSASTF in the past. These points are being monitored on a daily basis by the forest staffers and the task-force personnel, who also take up combing operations inside the forest almost every day.

With forces blocking almost all the entry/exit and loading points along the western side (Tirupati-Piler areas), the smugglers have changed their entry/exit points and passage of smuggled material

● In Chittoor (west) and some parts in Anantapur divisions, more than 165 entry/exit points and over 198 loading points were identified by the RSASTF in the past.

team have traced out the routes and sent out a strong message to the smugglers that the forces can find them the minute they achieve the forest periphery.

According to RSASTF DSP Venkataiah, acting on a specific information that smugglers are now using routes under the Yerpedu corridor more freely than before, the taskforce has put focus on these porous routes. On Friday early morning, a team sent out on a combing operation under the leadership of RSI Lingadhar have found the new passages in Yerpedu area and thwarted six smugglers attempting to venture into the woods.

A senior officer said that the taskforce has advanced its surveillance system and also improved the informer network at the roots of villages in Tamil Nadu, from where the smugglers and woodcutters are coming. Though smugglers found new strategies and applied tactics to smuggle red sanders logs, the taskforce is confident that their plans will be foiled, he added.

However, it has now become difficult for the smugglers and woodcutters to use these routes under the Yerpedu mandal because the forces have blocked the porous passages now. During a combing operation, kickstarted on Thursday, the taskforce

Health secy for testing water

From Page 1

He said that as the samples were sent for analysis, they would come to know about the reason for the illness once the reports were out and promised to take all necessary steps to avoid recurrence of such a health issue in future.

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal said that the cases related to mystery illness were reported from Pulla and Kumarapalli villages and added that they were making efforts to find out the

reason. He underlined the need to test water samples in and around the affected villages and assured to take the help of Central agencies if needed to find out the cause for such an illness.

On Thursday, a farmer identified as B. Bullabbai, 40, died while working in the field when he accidentally slipped into an irrigation canal at Kummurikunta village in West Godavari.

It caused tension among the villagers as they feared that he died due to the mystery illness.

JNTU-Anantapur V-C appointed

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 22

Prof. Ginka Ranga Janardhana, professor and APPSC member has been appointed as vice-chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Anantapur (JNTUA). Mr Ranga Janardhana will assume charge as vice-chancellor at his office on Saturday.

The newly appointed vice chancellor from Tadipatri town and his high school and Intermediate Education was at the Government Junior College, New Town, Anantapur and did B.Tech in Mechanical Engineering branch from JNTU College



of Engineering, Anantapur. He pursued his Master of Engineering at PSG College of Technology, Coimbatore, PhD from JNTU Hyderabad and Post Doctoral Fellowship from Hoseo University, South Korea. Ranga Janardhana joined JNTU College of Engineering Anantapur as lecturer in November 1992. He was promoted as Associate Professor and Professor.

30% fee sop sought in private colleges

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 22

AP Parents Association members appealed to the Regional Inspection Officer (RIO) for Intermediate Education to implement the 30 per cent fee concession policy for the academic year 2020-21 in the private aided and unaided educational institutions.

The association members, on Friday, handed over a representation to the RIO, Nellore. President of the association, S. Narahari said that the APHERMC and the Board of

Intermediate Education (BIE) has directed the private, aided and unaided institutions in the state to follow the GO. No. 57, providing 30 per cent concession to the students this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"As per the directions of the Secretary of the BIE, colleges must display the details of students, groups and the fee they are collecting from the parents on the notice boards. But they are not implementing the rule," he said.

He also demanded the RIO to convene a meeting.

4 ARRESTED IN ₹30 LAKHS SUBSIDY SCAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 22

The Eluru One Town police of West Godavari arrested four persons, Tamada Lakshmi Narasimha Rao, Tamada Lakshmana Rao, Vempati Teja and Tamada Saraswati, of Fathebadra area of Eluru City, on the charges of robbing ₹30 lakh subsidy amount from a bank.

Eluru DSP O. Dilipkiran said that the accused claimed themselves as elders of a community and gathered the information from the Self Help Group members and promised them to give loans from the banks with subsidies, given by the government. Later, the accused got the subsidy amounts of ₹30 lakh from the bank without the knowledge of the beneficiaries. Meanwhile, the bank officials issued notices to the beneficiaries to clear the debts. A group member Kalingsapatnam Kanaka of Chanakypuri colony of Eluru lodged a complaint with the Eluru One Town police who arrested the accused.

Dilip Kiran said that investigation is going on other accused who were involved in such crimes. The Eluru One Town police registered a case.

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Collector provides bus for students

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 22

A social media post by students of Gonchireddypalli in Brahmasamudram mandal in the district got immediate solution after the collector responded on Friday and started the RTC bus towards High School, about 10 km from the village. Gonchireddypalli, an interior in Brahmasamudram mandal is located in Karnataka borders and more than 15 students from Gonchireddypalli and Nagireddypalli were studying at government high school at Brahmasamudram mandal head quarters. While there was no mode of transport, the students including girls have to walk for more than 20 km everyday to school and back to the village. Even as the students repre-



sented local officials and leaders, no solution was found for the past few years. A group of students represented the collector Gandham Chandrudu through social media and the collector immediately responded towards it. Collector Chandrudu spoke to RTC regional manager A. Sumanth and sanctioned a new RTC service in between Gonchireddypalli to Brahmasamudram.

Collector visited Gonchireddypalli on Friday morning and inaugurated the bus service and travelled along with students towards Government High School in Brahmasamudram mandal head quarters. During interaction, students expressed gratitude towards the collector for immediate response and sanctioned new bus service. Chandrudu said the bus will be oper-

ated to be convenient for students during school timings. Meanwhile, the collector observed at least 29,402 students from private schools joined government upper primary schools and high schools during the present academic year in the district. "About eight per cent of students improved at government schools following developmental activities and improvement of quality at government schools. About 3.95 lakh students joined during the 2020-21 academic year", Gandham Chandrudu said and added government schools successfully built confidence among students and parents through online classes and competed with corporate schools. About 17.85 per cent were admissions recorded in Kadiri mandal and 16.93 percent in Gandlapenta mandal in the district.



An ambulance hit a tree on deep gorge near Valumuru village in Maredumilli mandal of East Godavari district on Friday.

Providential escape for Ambulance

DC CORRESPONDENT

A108 ambulance going from Chinturu to Rampachodavaram had a providential escape on Friday, when it hit a tree, in an attempt to avoid collision with a car coming from the opposite direction near Valumuru village in Maredumilli mandal of East Godavari District. According to sources, the ambulance was taking a patient

to Rampachodavaram Area Hospital from Chinturu in the agency area. In the ghat road, there was a deep gorge at the spot.

Luckily, the ambulance did not fall into it and it stopped after hitting a tree. Meanwhile, another ambulance came to the spot and rescued the driver, an employee in the ambulance and carried the patient to R a m p a c h o d a v a r a m hospital.

Gang offering home guard posts in AP nabbed

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 22

In a major breakthrough, Itikalapalli police on Friday busted a three-member gang that cheated many unemployed youth by offering them jobs as home guards in Andhra Pradesh. The gang thus collected lakhs of rupees from jobless youth in Anantapur, Kurnool and other parts of the state.

Incidentally, the gang members claimed to be police officers. They had even forged signatures of officers to produce fake appointment orders. Police have seized a CPU and a 500 GB hard disk, apart from

fake appointment orders. Anantapur superintendent of police Satya Esubabu said Derangula Venkatesh of Ankireddypalli in Kolimigundla mandal, Thokkala Saikiran of Nossam village in Sanjamala mandal, and Chakkera Venkata Subbaiah of Nossam in Sanjamala mandal in Kurnool district have been arrested after complaints were made against them by youth who had been cheated. A hunt has been launched for a few others in connection with the crime.

The SP explained that one Saikiran was running a photo studio at Nossam vil-

● The SP explained that one Saikiran was running a photo studio at Nossam village. He and his friends got cheated of ₹2.5 lakh by Ravi belonging to Kurnool area with the offer of home guard posts. Saikiran paid ₹30,000 and his friends the remaining money

lage. He and his friends got cheated of ₹2.5 lakh by Ravi belonging to Kurnool area with the offer of home guard posts. Saikiran paid ₹30,000 and his friends the remaining money as advance for securing the posts of home guards. When Saikiran realised

that he had got cheated by Ravi, he planned to launch a similar operation to recover his money.

During the past two years, Saikiran collected at least ₹12 lakh from 40 unemployed youth at the rate of ₹30,000 each offering home guard posts in Kurnool district. Saikiran's close friend Sheikh Shah Vali supported Saikiran in collecting the money. Similarly, Saikiran asked another friend Derangula Venkatesh to collect money for home guard posts in Anantapur district. The duo lured unemployed youth from Narpala and other parts of district and collected at least ₹22.67 lakh.

Subsequently, they distributed fake appointment letters through WhatsApp.

Victims, who realised that they have been cheated, brought the issue to the notice of Itikalapalli police.

The case was investigated by circle inspector Vijayabhaskar Gowd and his team. They gathered proof and thereafter arrested Saikiran, Derangula Venkatesh and their friend Chakkera Venkata Subbaiah, who posed as a police officer.

SP Esubabu warned unemployed youth to be aware about such cheaters and approach the nearest police if they come across any such offers.

SHORT TAKES

6 GUEST WORKERS
DIE AFTER FALLING
INTO A PITMANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, JAN. 22

In what has raised serious questions over the unchecked illegal coal mining in Meghalaya, at least six guest workers from Assam died after they fell into a 150-foot pit in the forest of Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills on Friday.

The tragic incident took place in the same district where 15 men had disappeared inside an illegal rat-hole mine after it collapsed in December 2018. Locals alleged the guest workers whose bodies were found inside the pit this morning were digging an illegal coal mine.

However, state government sources claimed that they have found no evidence of an active coal mine. Deputy commissioner of East Jaintia Hills E. Kharmalki told reporters, "No coal stock has been found at the accident site, so we cannot ascertain that they were trying to open up an abandoned coal mine, but there was some earth-cutting work happening there."

Police, however, said that bodies of the six people have been recovered from the abandoned mine. "The Police have registered a case in this regard," Meghalaya DGP R. Chandranathan told reporters.

Among those killed four have been identified as Moqbul Hussain (45), Ali Hussain (40), Dilwar Hussain (35) and Jalal Uddin (28).

Such accidents in coal mines are not new to Meghalaya. One of the biggest tragedies in the state in recent times occurred on December 13, 2018 when 15 miners were trapped inside an illegal coal mine in East Jaintia Hills. The miners were trapped as rainwater from adjoining areas gushed into the open mines. Despite several days of rescue operations, they could not be saved.

The rescue team included personnel from the Indian Navy and the Army, besides NDRF and local police. The search and rescue operation was abandoned after 60 days of searching for the 15 miners trapped in a 370 feet-deep illegal coal mine.

NCB ARRESTS
DAWOOD AIDE
IN DRUGS CASESHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 22

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Friday arrested another gang member of Chin-ku Pathan, a close aide of fugitive underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, in connection to a drug-related case in Mumbai. This is the fourth arrest in this case and he has been arrested from Dongri during a raid.

Pathan was the first arrest in Navi Mumbai on Wednesday and since then the NCB is on a crackdown of this gang. The fourth arrested accused, who is also Pathan's cousin, is said to be one of the major suppliers of mephedrone also known as 'MCat' and 'Meow Meow' in Mumbai. According to police, NCB's Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede raided the accused drug suppliers' hide-out in Dongri locality of South Mumbai and took him in custody after the seizure of mephedrone from his residence.

The diaries recovered from Arif Bhujwala, an absconding accused, residence reveal that drugs worth ₹80-90 lakh were being sold and circulated by them. The ₹2.18 crore-cash seizure was a collection of over 2-3 days' sales at the local markets. It is suspected that the money being made through drugs by syndicate could be around ₹500-1,000 crore.

COMPLAINT
AGAINST MUNDE
WITHDRAWNSONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 22

A day after a woman withdrew her complaint of sexual exploitation against Maharashtra social justice minister Dhananjay Munde, NCP chief Sharad Pawar said their decision stands vindicated as the party had said there needed to be an investigation before taking any action against the minister. BJP, which was demanding Munde's scalp, has now sought action against the complainant for making false allegations.

Ten days ago, the woman had alleged that Munde had sexually harassed her in 2006 on the pretext of marriage. Following the allegations, the BJP had demanded the resignation of Munde.

Dalmiya's daughter expelled
from TMC for anti-party moves

Expulsion comes after Rajib Banerjee resigned from the Mamata Banerjee cabinet

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 22

A day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brief Kolkata visit, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee received yet another blow as one more rebel Trinamul Congress minister Rajib Banerjee quit her government, fuelling speculations of his defection to the BJP.

Within hours of Rajib Banerjee's move, the TMC expelled his loyalist and the daughter of former ICC chief Jagmohan Dalmiya Baishali Dalmiya from the party, accusing her of "anti-party activities" after she supported him and slammed the leadership. Incidentally Rajib Banerjee and Dalmiya are MLAs from Howrah district.

Banerjee is a two-time legislator from Domjur with a clean image. He has become the third TMC heavyweight minister in a row to leave Mamata Banerjee's cabinet in less than two months after he visited the Trinamul Congress supremo's residence in Kalighat and Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at Raj Bhawan respectively on Friday and submitted his resignation letter which stated "I



TMC MLA Rajib Banerjee talks to the media after resigning as West Bengal forest minister, outside Raj Bhawan in Kolkata on Friday. — PTI

regret to inform you that I hereby tender my resignation from my Office as Cabinet Minister being in charge of Forest Department on today, ie. On 22nd of January, 2021. It has been a great honour and privilege to serve the people of West Bengal. I heartily convey my gratitude for getting

this opportunity."

Rajib Banerjee has neither quit as an MLA nor deserted his party however. After meeting the Governor, he said in tears, "I never imagined I have to take such a tough decision. If I have hurt anyone, I apologise with folded hands. Please do not mis-

understand me. I was hurt within and staying like that for a long time. That is why I had to take this decision with a lot of pain and pent up anger."

Lashing out at the CM, Rajib Banerjee added, "I had almost taken this decision two and half years ago when I was removed as

the state irrigation minister. Though portfolio allocation is the CM's prerogative, I had expected minimum courtesy from her as a cabinet colleague. But I did not get that even. I got to know about my removal as the irrigation minister from the breaking news on TV when I was sitting with

party workers at an office in North Bengal. I had wished to resign then but was stopped by the CM."

Hit by his outburst, the CM, who was already furious at him for submitting his resignation letter to the Governor also, recommended Dhankhar to remove the state forest minister from the cabinet rather than accepting his resignation.

Rajib Banerjee was later excluded from the cabinet by Dhankhar while the CM took over his portfolio.

The TMC mocked Rajib Banerjee for his step. But Dalmiya, who is an MLA of Bally, however, stood by him like she did when Laxmi Ratan Shukla, another MLA in Howrah, resigned as a minister and quit the party recently.

She said, "Rajib Banerjee's resignation will affect the party and public. Anyone who loves a party have self respect. They can not accept insult. We are insulted in Howrah always. There are some who are silent killers and backstab us and common people. If leaves, like Rajib Banerjee, start coming off a tree one after another, it is harmful for the tree." Stung by her allegations, the TMC disciplinary committee expelled her at a meeting.

CENTRE NOT IN
FAVOUR OF EXTRA
CHANCE TO UPSC
ASPIRANTS

New Delhi, Jan. 22: The Centre on Friday told the Supreme Court that it was not in favour of granting one extra opportunity to those civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in the exams conducted by the UPSC last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar took note of the submissions of Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, appearing on behalf of the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

"We are not ready to give one more chance. Give me the time to file an affidavit... last night I received instruction that we are not agreeable," Raju told the bench, which also comprised justices B.R. Gawai and Krishna Murai.

The bench has now posted the plea of a civil services aspirant Rachna Singh for hearing on January 25 and asked the Centre to file an affidavit during the period and serve it to the parties.

Earlier, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta had told the bench that the government was considering the issue of granting one more opportunity to those civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt to crack the UPSC exam.

The top court, on September 30 last year, had refused to postpone the UPSC civil services preliminary exam, which was held on October 4, because of pandemic and floods in several parts of the country.

However, it had directed the central government and the Union Public Service Commission to consider granting an extra chance to candidates who otherwise have their last attempt in 2020, with corresponding extension of the upper age-limit.

The bench was then told that a formal decision can be taken by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) only.

— PTI

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Govt-farmers talks hit roadblock

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The government's negotiations with the protesting farmers' unions hit a roadblock on Friday as the farmer leaders once again stuck to their demands for repeal of the three agriculture laws and a legal guarantee for MSP, even as the Centre asked them to reconsider its proposal for putting the laws on hold for 12 to 18 months.

Unlike the last 10 rounds of talks, at Friday's meeting the two sides could not even reach a decision on the next date as the government also hardened its position saying it is ready to meet once the unions agree to discuss the suspension proposal.

On Thursday, the government offered to put on hold the three laws and set up a joint committee to find solutions. After internal consultations, the farmers' unions decided to reject the offer and stick to their two major demands.

Even though the 11th round of talks lasted for nearly five hours, the two sides sat face to face for less than 25 minutes. The talks were held in two sessions — the morning session lasted for about 15 minutes, after which the Central ministers left the meeting room. After about four hours, the ministers again came and held discussions for less than 10 minutes.

"This is an insult to farmers. When agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar came, he asked us to consider the government's proposal and said that he is ending the process of meetings," said S.S. Pandher of Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, adding that their agitation will continue peacefully. Tomar told kisan unions that the government is ready for another



Farmers take out a rally as part of the preparations for their planned tractor parade in the national capital on the Republic day, during a protest against the new farm laws, in Amritsar on Friday. — PTI

meeting if farmers want to discuss the proposal on suspending agriculture laws for a while. He told the unions that "the government was grateful for their cooperation."

The minister reiterated that there was nothing wrong in the three laws. "We gave the best proposal but you could not arrive at any decision. If you arrive at any conclusion please let us know, we will discuss again," he said.

After the meeting, Tomar said: "We should remain hopeful. Let's wait till tomorrow to hear farmer unions' final decision." Asked whether he expects the farmers to agree to the government offer, he said, "I don't want to speculate, but we are hopeful that farmer unions will consider positively our proposal."

The minister also said some external forces were definitely trying to ensure that the agitation contin-

ues and that was obviously against the interests of farmers. "No resolution is possible when the sanctity of an agitation is lost," he added.

Bhartiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said that the farmers have decided to once again deliberate upon the government's proposal to postpone the implementation of the new farm laws. However, he said, the farmers are firm on their demand of complete repeal of the new laws. "If the stalemate continues, the protest will be scaled up, starting with the tractor rally on Republic Day," he added.

Farmer leader Shiv Kumar Kakka, who was the first to leave the talks, said there was no headway in the discussions and the government had asked the unions to once again deliberate upon its proposal.

After the meeting, Bharatiya Kisan Union

(Ugrahan) leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan said the discussions have broken down as the unions have outrightly rejected the government's proposal.

Farmers' leaders told the Centre that they are firm on their stated stance and have already decided that they would not settle for anything less than the repeal of the three laws.

Some leaders had apprehensions that their agitation would lose momentum once the farmers leave Delhi borders — where protests have been going on for about two months.

Harpal Singh, president, Bhartiya Kisan Union (Asli Arajantik), said "Even if we accept the government's offer, our fellow brothers sitting at Delhi borders will not accept anything other than a repeal of the laws. They will not spare us. What achievement will we show to them?... We will

die here but we will not return without getting the laws repealed."

Farmer leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said the unions will now concentrate on the Republic Day tractor march. "It will be a unique event. We have told the government and the Delhi police that we will march peacefully on the Outer Ring Road on January 26. If there is violence, the government will be responsible," he added.

During the meeting, the unions also alleged that Delhi Police was trying to harass their leaders. One of the union leaders alleged that the rear windshield of his car was smashed by the police. Another alleged that he had received a threatening call. Farmer leader Hannan Mollah alleged he was mishandled by the police. The government assured these leaders that their complaints would be investigated.

NEW CONGRESS
CHIEF TO BE
ELECTED BY JUNEASHHAR KHAN | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The Congress Party will have an elected president by June 2021, with the party's working committee on Friday approving holding the internal election after Assembly polls in five states. The Congress Working Committee (CWC), after a three-and-a-half hour meeting, authorised incumbent party chief Sonia Gandhi to schedule the internal election after the conclusion of Assembly polls.

General secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said, "Congress Working Committee has decided that there will be an elected Congress president by June 2021."

The party elections will be held in May, after elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry. Several Congress leaders were hoping to go to the elections under new leadership, however that failed to happen.

Senior leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Mukul Wasnik and P. Chidambaram reportedly asked for immediate organisational polls. While leaders like Ashok Gehlot, Amarinder Singh, A.K. Antony, Tariq Anwar and Oommen Chandy said the Congress president's election should be held after state polls.

The CWC also passed resolutions on three issues of national importance, including farmers' protest, Covid-19 vaccine and WhatsApp chat leaks of Republic TV chief Arnab Goswami.

BIHAR GOVT
TO KEEP WATCH
ON SOCIAL
MEDIA POSTSNAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, JAN. 22

The Bihar government has decided to keep a close watch on social media and penalise all those who post offensive and derogatory comments against ministers, MLAs, MPs and officials.

The state's Economic Offences Unit (EOU), which is also responsible for cybercrime, has informed all state government departments about the decision and asked them to report any individuals or organisations who have been making such posts on social media.

"It has come to light that some individuals and organisations have been making derogatory and offensive posts on social media against the government, ministers, MLAs, MPs and officials. This is against the law and comes under cybercrime laws," inspector general of police, EOU, Nayyar Husnain Khan, wrote in a letter to principal secretaries and secretaries of state government departments.

"You are requested to report to the Economic Offences Unit regarding any such post so that matter is investigated and action could be taken against such individuals and organisations," Khan said.

HEINOUS CRIME Kin allege that rape victim was treated as criminal; Shivraj orders SIT probe

Hathras replay in MP: Kin denied victim's body

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUHDURI | DC
BHOPAL, JAN. 22

In a 'replay' of Hathras incident, body of a minor 'rape victim' who died in a suspicious circumstance here, was not handed over to her kin and was cremated with presence of police on Thursday.

The incident triggered an outcry forcing Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to order a probe by a special investigation team (SIT) of Madhya Pradesh police on Friday. "We could not save the

girl. This is not a minor incident. It is most unfortunate", Chouhan said while taking stock of the situation at an official meeting here.

Earlier, the family members of the deceased cried injustice saying that the alleged rape victim was treated like a criminal by the system till her death, even though she was a victim.

"She had been put in a government shelter home since last 6 months (after the incident relating to sexual exploitation of five girls including the

deceased was among five girls who were allegedly sexually exploited by Pyare Miyan (68).

deceased by the accused Pyare Miyan came to light in July, 2020). No member of the family had been allowed to visit her in the shelter home. She died in a suspicious circumstances. We wanted her body to be brought home for the last time before her last rites. But, police refused to hand over the body to us and took the body to the cremation ground for last

rites straight from the hospital", the deceased's mother said.

She demanded a CBI probe into her death. The deceased was among five girls who were allegedly sexually exploited by Pyare Miyan (68), who runs a local Hindi daily here. Pyare was arrested by police when he was accompanying a group of girls in a car in July 2020. He was booked for running sex racket. Police said the five alleged victims of sexual exploitation were kept in a shelter home for security reasons.

On Wednesday, the deceased had allegedly consumed overdose of sleeping pills. She was rushed to government-run Hamidia hospital where she died during treatment.

Police took her body to the cremation ground from the hospital on Thursday for her last rites after postmortem. The deceased's brother performed the last rites.

"My father and uncle were in the hospital to accept the body. But, police refused to hand over the body to them. A bus was sent to my home to carry

women members of the family to the cremation ground to be present during her last rites", the deceased's mother said.

Bhopal deputy inspector general of police Irshad Wali said everything was done with the consent of the family members of the deceased. Police did not allow the body to be taken to her home fearing a law and order situation.

Senior Congress leader and former chief minister Kamal Nath on Thursday decried the incident, describing it "inhuman and shameful".

SHORT TAKES

SWISS FAVOUR
'BURQA BAN',
POLL SHOWS

Geneva, Jan. 22: A clear majority of Swiss voters favour introducing a nationwide prohibition against wearing face-covering garments in public spaces, known as a "burqa ban", a poll showed on Friday.

According to the Tamedia poll of 15,000 eligible voters, a full 63 percent of those questioned said they would vote yes or were considering voting yes in an upcoming popular vote on the ban, the *Tages Anzeiger* daily reported.

The Swiss are set to vote on whether they want to ban face coverings in public on March 7, when they will also vote on a range of other issues as part of the country's famous direct democratic system.

The text does not mention Muslim veils explicitly, stating only that "no one shall cover their face in public, nor in areas accessible to the public or in areas where services are ordinarily accessible to all."

RUSSIA VOWS
CRACKDOWN ON
NAVALNY RALLY

Moscow, Jan. 22: Aides of jailed Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny faced possible fines and prison time on Friday as police vowed to crack down on opposition protests this weekend.

His allies are planning to hold demonstrations on Saturday in dozens of cities in support of the Kremlin critic, who was arrested and jailed on his return to Russia following a near-fatal poisoning with a nerve agent.

"Attempts to hold unsanctioned public events, as well as any provocative actions on the part of their participants, will be regarded as a threat to public order and immediately suppressed," Moscow police said on Friday.

Navalny's associates urged Russians to take to the streets despite official pressure and promised financial help to protesters given fines on Saturday.

GERMANY MOVES
TO ERADICATE
NAZI-ERA LAWS

Berlin, Jan. 22: Germany is moving to rid itself of a cluster of laws introduced by the Nazis, still lingering on its books 75 years after World War II. There are 29 German legal or regulatory texts that still use wording introduced when Hitler was in power, according to Felix Klein, the government's point man for fighting anti-Semitism.

Some of them have "a very clear anti-Semitic background", Klein said.

Now, with the support of several parties in the Bundestag lower house of parliament as well as Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, Klein wants to wipe the slate clean — preferably before the end of the current term in September.

But the question remains whether to introduce a single law to reform all the texts at once, or to approach them one by one.

Germany has already reformed several Nazi-era laws over the years, including the infamous Paragraph 175 that criminalised sex between men and was repealed in 1994.

LANKA TO PROBE
INTO WAR CRIME
ALLEGATIONS

Colombo, Jan. 22: Sri Lanka will conduct an investigation into allegations its troops committed war crimes during a conflict with Tamil separatists, it said on Friday, a month before the UN Human Rights Council is due to discuss the island's rights record.

At least 1,00,000 people were killed in the decades-long civil war, and there were allegations that 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the final onslaught.

The government denies the toll.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was defence chief when the rebels were crushed in 2009, named a commission of enquiry Friday to look into investigations held by previous governments.

The panel was given six months to look into allegations of "human rights violations, serious violations of international humanitarian law," his office said.

It would also be tasked with investigating previous "inconclusive investigations" instigated by Colombo following international pressure.

Indian bags prestigious Math honour

Washington, Jan. 22: Nikhil Srivastava, a young Indian mathematician, has been named winner of the prestigious 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize along with two others for solving long-standing questions on the Kadison-Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs.

Srivastava from the University of California, Berkeley, Adam Marcus, the Ecole polytechnique

federale de Lausanne (EPFL) and Daniel Alan Spielman from Yale University will receive the 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize, the National Academy of Sciences said in the statement.

The prize consists of a medal and \$1,00,000. Srivastava, Marcus and Spielman solved long-standing questions on the Kadison-Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs,



Nikhil Srivastava

and in the process uncovered a deep new connec-

tion between linear algebra, geometry of polynomials, and graph theory that has inspired the next generation of theoretical computer scientists, it said.

They published new constructions of Ramanujan graphs, that describe sparse, but highly-connected networks, and a solution to what is known as the Kadison-Singer problem, a decades-old problem

that asks whether unique information can be gleaned from a system in which only some of the features can be observed or measured, according to the *Yale* news.

Srivastava is currently Associate Professor of Mathematics at the University of California. Their groundbreaking papers on the questions, both published in 2015, solved problems that

mathematicians had been working on for several decades, the National Academy of Sciences said.

"Their proofs provided new tools to address numerous other problems, which have been embraced by other computer scientists seeking to apply the geometry of polynomials to solve discrete optimisation problems," the academy said.

The Michael and Sheila

Held Prize is presented annually and honours outstanding, innovative, creative, and influential research in the areas of combinatorial and discrete optimisation, or related parts of computer science, such as the design and analysis of algorithms and complexity theory. The prize was established in 2017 by the bequest of Michael And Sheila Held.

—PTI

RUSSIA AGREES
TO EXTEND

Moscow, Jan. 22: Russia and the United States drew closer on Friday to extending a nuclear pact ahead of the fast approaching expiry date of the last arms control accord between the former Cold War rivals.

The New START treaty, which is due to expire on February 5, is seen as a rare opportunity for compromise between Moscow and Washington, whose ties have further deteriorated over recent cyber hacking and election meddling allegations.

The accord restricts Washington and Moscow to a maximum of 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads each, a cut of about 30 percent from a limit set in 2002, and 800 launchers and bombers — enough to blow up the world many times over.

The Kremlin on Friday welcomed a US proposal to prolong the pact by five years, but cautioned that any extension would depend on the specifics of the offer.

"We can only welcome the political will to extend this document," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, but warned that "everything depends on the details of this proposal". The comments from President Vladimir Putin's spokesman came a day after the White House said Washington would work towards a five-year extension.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said efforts to find an agreement were all the more pertinent when "the relationship with Russia is adversarial as it is".

The cautiously optimistic rhetoric emerging from Moscow and Washington comes against the backdrop of deeply strained ties and Biden's campaign promise to take a tougher stance on Russia than the previous White House administration.

Lawmakers in the US demanded punishment for Russia last year after concluding that Kremlin-backed hackers were behind a sweeping cyber intrusion into government institutions.

The most recent claims added to US intelligence conclusions that Russia meddled in the 2016 election to back Biden's predecessor Donald Trump, including through social media manipulation.

Despite his promise to take a harder line on Putin compared to Trump, Biden's aides voiced support for reaching an accord with Moscow before his inauguration. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Friday welcomed Biden's proposal, saying: "We should not end up in a situation where we have no limitation whatsoever on nuclear warheads". —AFP

We believe in WHO, says Harris

VP Kamala says WHO vital to control Covid pandemic, building back better global health

Washington, Jan. 22: The Biden administration believes that the WHO is vital to controlling the spread of Covid-19 and building back better global health and pandemic preparedness, Vice President Kamala Harris has told WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, a day after the US rejoined the UN health agency.

The US rejoined the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Wednesday in one of the first official orders of the Joe Biden presidency, reversing a key foreign policy decision his predecessor Donald Trump took last year after accusing the UN health agency of incompetence and bowing to Chinese pressure over the Coronavirus pandemic.

In April last year, as the Coronavirus pandemic was spreading across the globe, Trump cut off US funding to the WHO, saying it was "virtually controlled by China." He then went further, triggering the process to pull the US completely out of the organisation.

The withdrawal was due to go into effect in July this year, but Biden's order will cancel it. During her phone call on Thursday, Harris discussed the decision by the Biden administration to rejoin the WHO with the health agency's Director-General Dr. Ghebreyesus.

Harris emphasised that she and Biden believe that the WHO is vital to controlling the spread of Covid-19 and building back better global health and pandemic preparedness, according to a read-out of the call issued by the White House.

"The vice president and the director-general also discussed the resumption of the United States' role in the global public health and humanitarian response to the Covid-19 pandemic," it said.

Harris also stressed on the Biden-Harris administration's strong support for efforts to strengthen the global Covid-19 response, mitigate its secondary impacts, including



Snow-covered the ski lifts of the shut-down slopes of the Faraya-Mzaar ski resort, during a lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the Coronavirus, in Faraya, northeast of Beirut, Lebanon, on Friday. Lebanese authorities have extended a nationwide lockdown to Feb. 8 amid a steep rise in Covid-19 death and infection rates.

— AFP

● **IN APRIL** last year, as the Coronavirus pandemic was spreading across the globe, Trump cut off US funding to the WHO, saying it was "virtually controlled by China."

on women and girls, and advance global health security to prevent the next outbreak from becoming an epidemic or pandemic.

She emphasised the importance of making the US safer through global cooperation, the White House said. Ghebreyesus thanked Harris for the call and congratulated her and Biden on their inauguration.

Both the director-general and the vice president reiterated that they look forward to meeting in person. Earlier in the day, Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-disease expert, while addressing the WHO executive board meeting said the US will cease the drawdown of its staff seconded to the agency.

—PTI

EU agrees to keep borders
open but restrict travels

Brussels, Jan. 22: European Union leaders agreed that borders should remain open and assessed more measures to counter the spread of Coronavirus variants during a video summit as the bloc's top disease control official said urgent action was needed to stave off a new wave of hospitalisations and deaths.

Expressing great concern about the virus' mutations, the 27 leaders looked at further border restrictions like limits on all non-essential travel, better tracking of mutations and improving coordination of lockdowns.

Though worried that another surge of deaths across the EU was imminent, they could not immediately agree on whether or not to halt non-

essential travel.

"It is of great importance not to travel, but you cannot immediately enforce this legally," Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said after the conference call. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen insisted on the importance of keeping borders open to ensure that goods continue to move smoothly while introducing measures "that keep us all safe."

She said leaders discussed a proposal to introduce new trans-border "dark red zones" where infection rates are particularly high and where all non-essential travel should be discouraged.

Travellers from these areas could be required to undergo tests before their

departure and be placed in isolation upon arrival in another location. Von der Leyen said the commission will make precise recommendations to member states in the coming days.

Some 4,00,000 EU citizens have died from Covid-19-related causes since the start of the pandemic, and the head of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Andrea Ammon, said that "an increasing number of infections will lead to higher hospitalisation and death rates across all age groups, particularly for those in older age groups."

In a study published just before the summit, the ECDC warned of the high dangers of the new variants, like those initiating in Britain, Brazil and South Africa.

—AP

CLUBBERS HIT
DANCE FLOOR
IN WUHAN

Wuhan, Jan. 22: Glow-in-the-dark rabbit ears, pulsating beats, and a flexible attitude to masks: nightlife in China's Wuhan is back with a vengeance almost a year after a lockdown brought life to a standstill in the city of 11 million.

As the rest of the world continues to grapple with lockdowns and soaring infections, young people in the city, once the epicentre of the novel Coronavirus, are enjoying their hard-earned freedom.

In Super Monkey — a huge nightclub in the city centre — there is no dress code or VIP list. What is obligatory, at least to get through the door, is a mask and a temperature check any higher than 37.3 degrees Celsius and bouncers can turn prospective partygoers away.

Inside, where clubbers let loose on the dancefloor amid the deafening sound of techno and a blinding laser show, the rules are not always so strictly followed.

While masks are obligatory at the door, DJs and partygoers take them off to chat with friends, dance, or smoke. Many are just happy to find themselves out on the town after last year's gruelling quarantine, imposed to battle what was then a mysterious new virus.

"I was stuck inside for two or three months... the country fought the virus very well, and now I can go out in complete tranquility," a man in his thirties, who identified himself as Xu, said.

The hedonistic vibes and champagne on ice are far from the austerity preached by authorities in Beijing. But Chen Qiang, a man in his 20s, praised the Communist Party for having practically eliminated the epidemic, despite a recent surge in cases in other parts of the country in the past few days.

—AFP

Beijing to test 2 million in 48hrs for Covid

Beijing, Jan. 22: Beijing on Friday kicked off a drive to test two million people in 48 hours as the city rushed to snuff out a new local cluster of cases believed to be linked to a more contagious virus variant.

Long queues snaked through the Chinese capital — which reported 19 Coronavirus cases in the past week — as the mass testing campaign got under way in Dongcheng

and Xicheng districts.

The two downtown districts include Tiananmen Square and several government ministry offices, and are home to around two million residents.

AFP saw one testing line stretch over 400 metres (1,300 feet), with around a thousand people waiting to be tested.

"I received the notification this morning and thought I'd come during lunch hour; but there are

so many people here in line," one Dongcheng resident said.

Officials plan to complete the testing by Saturday, and with the Lunar New Year holiday looming — typically a time when hundreds of millions travel across the country to visit families — they are keen to avoid a fully fledged outbreak in Beijing.

Locals have complained about long wait times in freezing temperatures, with social media users on Friday saying queues for tests were "unending" as residents braved the winter chill to get swabbed.

"I queued for three hours and finally got tested," one user said on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform.

The Xicheng district government said in a social media notice Friday that some of the confirmed cases had been into the area and there was an

"increased risk" of infections.

Dongcheng district also put out a notice to say tests would be organised in batches over Friday and Saturday for both residents and workers.

A partial lockdown is already in place in the city's southern Daxing district, where five neighbourhoods have been ordered to remain indoors and all 1.6 million residents have been told not to

leave the city.

Beijing's rush to test comes as China faces its highest number of cases in nearly a year, after Coronavirus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Officials have said that some of the cases detected in Beijing are linked to a variant of the deadly pathogen that was first found in the UK and is believed to be more transmissible.

—AFP

NEW PROJECT

Floridians skeptical of digging in swampy terrain prone to floods

Musk offers to build tunnels in Miami

Miami, Jan. 22: As the world waited with baited breath for the US presidential inauguration, Tesla CEO Elon Musk had more pressing issues at hand — exchanging tweets with Miami's mayor about building a tunnel system under the Florida city.

Other mayors seemed enthusiastic about the potential project by Musk's Boring Company, but many Floridians were quick to point out how shallow the water table is in the state's swampy south.

"Cars & trucks stuck in traffic generate megatons of toxic gases & particu-

late, but @boringcompany road tunnels under Miami would solve traffic & be an example to the world," the tech tycoon tweeted Monday, adding he had discussed the project with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis last week.

Musk was responding to a tweet from Miami Mayor Francis Suarez inviting him to the city to discuss "potential solutions for the benefit of our future." "If Governor & Mayor want this done, we will do it," Musk tweeted.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine-Cava chimed in, tweeting, "Let's talk," and Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean



Elon Musk

Trantalis said his city also "would love to be apart of this discussion." The exchange comes amid Suarez's push to lure

Silicon Valley investors and tech developers to Miami.

But many were skeptical of digging tunnels in swampy terrain prone to flooding due to rising sea levels.

"It doesn't seem very smart and it is certainly going to be expensive," Kurtis Gurley, a professor of structural engineering at the University of Florida, told CBS Miami.

There's a reason that Floridians haven't built basements to shelter from hurricanes, despite the storms' prevalence in the region.

"Aquaman must be the project manager," joked

Wilkie Brutus, an NPR affiliate reporter, on Twitter.

"This is probably the most important and innovative human being alive today but somebody ought to explain the geology of Florida to him before some incredibly stupid shit happens," tweeted Michael Grunwald, a reporter in Florida for Politico.

Florida sits on a porous limestone plateau with plenty of open or subterranean canals, and is prone to flooding and sinkholes — cavities that appear suddenly due to groundwater erosion.

—AFP

Fauci says he feels
liberated with Biden

Washington, Jan. 22: In his first White House briefing as President Joe Biden's top advisor on Covid-19, Anthony Fauci said it was "liberating" that he could focus on science without fear of repercussions now that Donald Trump had left office.

The top infectious disease scientist was briefing reporters on Thursday on the state of the US outbreak that has claimed more than 4,08,000 lives.

Asked to compare his experience under the previous administration to the new one, the 80-year-old responded a little coyly at first, saying he wasn't sure he could

"extrapolate" based on first impressions. "But one of the things that was very clear as recently as about 15 minutes ago, when I was with the president, is that one of the things that we're going to do is to be completely transparent, open and honest."

"If things go wrong, not point fingers but to correct them and to make everything we do be based on science and evidence."

Toward the end of Thursday's briefing, Fauci was asked by another reporter to expand on his "jokes" about the differences in the management styles between the two leaders.

—AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

23 JANUARY 2021

Put politics, profit aside; level with all on vaccine

India is at present in the midst of one of the largest public health campaigns the world has ever seen: Vaccination against Covid-19 pandemic. Its first phase, which started on January 16, seeks to inoculate three crore Covid warriors including medical professionals and frontline workers. Initial reports suggest that the response to the programme has not been all that encouraging and there exists some reluctance, if not resistance, in taking the jab.

Addressing a public health issue is as much the job of the public as that of the government, and the programme should have received a wholehearted welcome since the target group is very much part of the system that fights the pandemic. That has not happened, and the government needs to assess its reasons. While doing so, it must bear in mind two things: one; lack of transparency in the whole exercise, and two, technical glitches in the CoWIN app that monitors it.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi misses no opportunity to stress that the two vaccines that are being used for the programme are made in India. However, there have been doubts even among health professionals about the suitability of introducing Covaxin, the indigenously developed and manufactured vaccine, in the programme since it has been cleared only for phase III of the clinical trial. Now, days after the programme has started, and after lakhs of people have taken their vaccines, the two companies that manufacture the vaccines have come out with advisories to the people. They contain certain precautions those who go for them must take, including an advice that people with certain medical conditions should avoid taking them.

This late realisation, if one may call it so, is grossly unacceptable. The government and the companies should have been upfront about the products from the beginning, instead of resorting to chest-thumping about their being made-in-India. Nobody has a doubt about the capabilities of Indian scientists or Indian manufacturers: the latest *Lancet* reports

underscores the efficacy of the vaccine, and says all adverse events were mild and moderate and were more frequent after the first dose. But the fact remains that the scientific process should be allowed to be completed in its entirety; political and commercial considerations should wait for their turn. The government must at least now do a rethink on the campaign and be true and honest with the people on its components. It must win people's confidence by placing all the facts before them, to start with; piecemeal and ad hoc release of critical information is not the right way to do it.

Technical glitches hampering the vaccination programme equally defy logic. The government had ample time to develop a proper, fool-proof mechanism for it but its performance on this front has been dismal. Similar was the case with Aarogya Setu, the app that helps people follow Covid-appropriate protocol. The government must ensure that such mass programmes are designed with little technical interface, realising the fact that a great share of the Indian population has little access to technology products. And when used, they should come without glitches and in an easy-to-use form. The government must realise that this is a fight India can ill-afford to lose.

Don't censor OTT content

An assault on creativity in cinema is being carried out by the political class. The grounds that the stereotypical Indian neta is being lampooned or projected in negative shades are not sufficient to allow censorship to stifle the medium of free cinema. Indian content on OTT platforms has also been seen to flourish during the pandemic when people have been forced to mostly stay indoors and their wide search for sources of entertainment has seen them embrace Internet-based media.

The serial *Tandav*, of a distinctly political thriller genre with startling resemblance to recent events in the country, has been under attack from many States and its makers have been forced to issue apologies and pull scenes just to please those who have been beating the drum of protest on their taking offence at content. The denigration of gods is a smoke screen under which many of these objectors operate. This is deeply disappointing because India is not a country that prosecutes people under blasphemy laws.

Censorship of OTT content is a grave offence against cinematic art. International platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hotstar have explored uncharted territory in front of Indian audiences too because they are free of governmental controls like rigid censorship of content as in films for theatrical release. They serve a very mature audience who have been able to absorb art without boundaries from international sources. Playing spoilsport are the usual suspects from the illiberal spectrum of politics, spurred on by political leaders who think nothing of Orwellian state controls of thought processes and social engineering.

It is risible that the objection to the serial *Mirzapur* comes on the ground that it besmirches the image of UP in projecting it as a lawless state ruled by mafias. The top court had only recently emphasised that viewers had a choice and they could switch off channels if they felt offended by particular content. The less official India intercedes in all this the better because State control of lives in India has proved inhibiting enough in various facets of life, including art.

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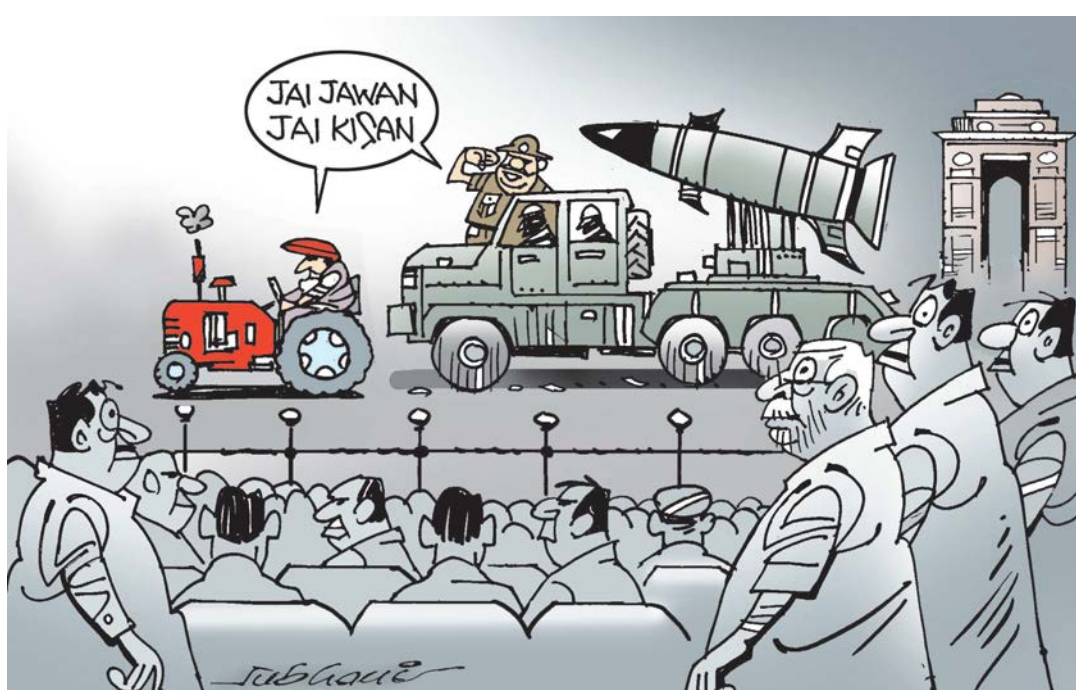
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Subhani



Vaccine hai to hum hai: Get ready for the vaxxie!



Shobhaa's Take

I am all set for "the jab". Hoping I will get it soonest. Admission: I am severely needle phobic, to the extent that I cannot watch someone else getting a prick even if it is on the screen. Despite that and several other reservations, I am consoling myself on many levels. I am all set to shoot my "vaxxie" — for those asking, "*wat dat*"? — a "vaxxie" is a selfie shot with the arm that is not going under the vaccinator's needle. Right now, despite a slight tremor in my voice as I write these words, I am thanking my stars that I am not Norwegian. And that I am not yet 80. Chances are pretty high that I'll survive the jab and live to tell the tale.

Besides... and here's my biggest trump card — I am 100 per cent Indian! Fully-fully *desi*, inside out! This is my biggest shield. Not being a scientist, my wonky reasoning does not have to make sense to anybody but myself, and a few crazies like me. Never before has being born an Indian and having lived my entire life in India been such a boon!

Poochho kyon? Go on, ask, *na?* Look at our comparatively low numbers with Covid-19 deaths (approximately 165K). There has to be some explanation for this phenomenon. I seriously believe it is India's dirt. I grew up in Mumbai, surrounded by germs and bacteria of every known description. I have happily eaten street food since my childhood. I played in and with mud, consuming some of it too. I did not wash my hands twenty times a day. But I did bathe regularly, okay? My home was scrupulously clean (my

mother ensured that), but even she could not stop me from devouring roadside *bhulpuri*, *paani puri*, college canteen cutlets and exposed greasy snacks peddled by favourite vendors outside local train stations. This was true about all my friends back then — we ate the most unhygienic food ever, and none of us fell seriously sick. Our stomachs, we joked, were "zinc lined" and our systems bug-proof.

Let's loosely call this a vital "immunity building" exercise, for want of a better medical term. We ate and drank rubbish 00 who knows? These bad habits may have spared us from picking up the deadly coronavirus today. Nothing unique about our youthful experiences — most of India conforms to this pattern. We are called filthy by the Western world. Our "unsanitary" existence is widely mocked — but hey — please explain how come we have not dropped like flies, like people in other, more "developed" countries? Is it our unique DNA structure that's helping Indians combat the global scourge better than most nations still reeling under fresh cases and strange variants of the virus?

January 16, 2021 will

India is well and truly on its way to recovery from the deadly Covid-19 virus. As for me, I will time my blowdry with the jab. I can't afford to ruin my historic 'vaxxie'! Come on Bollywood... pull out a few cool 'vaxxie' looks.

January 16, 2021 will always remain a red letter in India's calendar. It was the one Saturday citizens had been impatiently waiting for ever since the world went into lockdown mode and life came to a standstill.

always remain a red letter in India's calendar. It was the one Saturday citizens had been impatiently waiting for ever since the world went into lockdown mode and everyday life came to a standstill. It's the day we kicked off the most challenging immunisation exercise in the history of the world. According to available data, over two lakh citizens were vaccinated on Day 1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was justifiably proud when he addressed the nation at 10.30 am and said: "We are launching the world's biggest vaccination drive and it shows the world our capability." All our chests suddenly grew to 56 inches! It is an ambitious plan, involving thousands, as 300 million people hope to receive their jab in this phase, by the end of summer. These include 30 million doctors, nurses, police personnel and firefighters. The next lot, of 270 million, will reach all those over the age of 50 (me!), and those with other vulnerabilities. This impressive rollout is nothing short of a feat — and must be acknowledged as such.

For now, I am studiously ignoring the cynics and doomsday prophets who are pointing out all kinds of loopholes and deficiencies. Sanjiv Agarwal of Good Governance India Foundation is asking tough questions like: "Does all of India need a vaccine?" He believes that India has already achieved a high level of immunity and perhaps only the truly vulnerable need the jab. We are

waiting for the ultimate photo-op that shows Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushing up his *kurta* sleeve and baring his upper arm for the shot. Yes, there are going to be hiccups and setbacks. Yes, we need more data, more time... but can we afford to wait? In Mumbai, the drive was suspended for two days. Frankly, I'm fine with the chief minister's decision to do so. There was talk of a server being down, and messages not going out on time. Apparently, the turnout was lower than expected, with genuine concerns about the vaccine getting "wasted". But given the rumour factories at work, this is hardly surprising. Each vial can vaccinate 10 people. Once a vial is opened, it cannot be preserved for more than eight hours. Despite these early roadblocks, citizens are filled with confidence and hope that the timely delivery of the shots is definitely going to halt the coronavirus — and hopefully, any mutant/variant as well.

Being sentimental, superstitious and God-fearing, I loved the *aartis*, pujas and prayers that were conducted when the vaccines left the Serum Institute of India in Pune. Or later, when hospital employees greeted the health workers carrying the precious boxes to the designated venues with mithai and flowers. This is so endearing and such an Indian thing to do! Why not? I am prepared to pray to an icebox filled with life-saving vaccine vials without any self-consciousness! *Vaccine hai, to hum hai!* India is well and truly on its way to recovery from the deadly Covid-19 virus. As for me, I will time my blowdry with the jab. I can't afford to ruin my historic "vaxxie"! Come on Bollywood... pull out a few cool "vaxxie" looks. Airport looks are so 2020!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

LOCAL POLLS

The SEC of AP had the local polls postponed mid-way in March 2020 when Covid was not severe. At that time the SEC opposed the election even though the State wanted to go ahead. And now under very serious pandemic, it is not an issue for the SEC. It is unfortunate that a single judge of AP HC found reason to postpone local polls but a two judge bench of the same HC allowed the local polls to be held. Hats off to our judiciary.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

VACCINE FEARS

Transparency and communication are vital and crucial when crores of people are to be inoculated (*Transparency needed to remove all vaccine fears, DC, Jan. 22*). The author is unequivocal and unrestrained in his analysis about the vaccine fears. Further, the fear of being treated like guinea pigs is perhaps making people shy away from the vaccine.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

FARM LAWS

Now that the farmers have rejected the Centre's proposal to suspend Farm Laws for 1.5 years, the only recourse left is to make the implementation optional for States as agriculture is after all a state subject. The Catch-22 situation can only be solved by satisfying both the factions of farmers. Unless of course the PM, as is his wont, comes out with some sort of out of the box solution.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Cong-R to contest 32 Lok Sabha seats

HYDERABAD, JANUARY. 22 The Ruling Congress had set up its candidates in 32 constituencies out of 41 to contest the mid-term elections for Lok Sabha scheduled to be held in the first week of March.

Making the announcement the Chief Minister, Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi told newsmen that the party would support Independents in Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Visakhapatnam constituencies.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"If any young person with attitude Refuses to express their gratitude For the love they are shown — Just leave them alone With no single degree of latitude"

— From *Ghazals of Gulligoochi* by Bachchoo

Friends from India informed me that the talented and A-list presenter of the nation's most honest TV channel NDTV, Ms Nidhi Razdan, was approached through email to take up a post as a visiting professor of journalism at Harvard University.

Ms Razdan, who in all fairness deserves invitations from universities with greater reputations and more rigorous standards than Harvard (Cambridge UK, for instance, comes to mind) fell for the hoax. Perhaps she, in an act of altruism, wanted to do some charitable service to herds of benighted American students.

She may have thought, in accepting the offer of a professorship, that she could bring the great Indian standards of fearlessness before government, religious authority or bigotry

followed by Indian newspapers, TV, radio and even film and web series, to the Americans who have fallen for Donald Trump's tweets and the fake news of his media sycophants over these last few years.

Having made her plans to depart for New England, Ms Razdan, as a good journalist would, checked on the authenticity of the invitation and found that there was no such invitation and the correspondence she had got on the Internet was some purposeless, elaborate joke. The humour escapes me, though!

What it does confirm, gentle reader, is that the greatest instrument of public discourse, of the dissemination of information, of the connectivity of the human race, can be as malevolent as it is benevolent. Not only has it put tremendous power (we are not talking about wealth) in the hands of those who control these devices of the ether, it has also facilitated evil.

Twitter, Facebook, Amazon and the rest decided last week, after Donald Trump's urging his supporters through these platforms to overturn American democracy, to ban his "free speech". A decent gesture, but one

that came years after they allowed any and all manner of hate speech, terrorist and even openly fascist propaganda to go uncensored on their platforms. Crooks and perverts seemed welcome.

Because, gentle reader, Ms Razdan is not the only one to have fallen for fake offers which arrive through the Internet. Must I now admit that I have been, on several occasions contacted through email to inform me that I am the lucky winner of millions of pounds on the Nigerian Lottery?

It seemed the first time like very welcome news. I wonder how many others in our world, this vale of tears, didn't stop to consider that they couldn't have won the Nigerian Lottery as they hadn't bought a ticket to enter it. Of course, the emails persuaded me that a fan and admirer, who insisted on remaining anonymous, had bought a hundred tickets in my name and one of them had proved the lucky one. All the paymaster of the lottery now wanted was my bank details, passwords, etc, and the money would be deposited, making me an instant millionaire, in the following twenty-four hours.

How could I resist? I sent my details post haste to the designated email address, expecting a phone call any minute from my bank's branch asking me to attend and shift my millions into safer and more profitable investments.

And then, two hours later, when the banks opened, a call did come. The lady banker at the other end asked me to identify myself. Yes, the necessary checks and usual questions — my birth date, the name of my first dog, my best friend's favourite food, the bra size of my first girlfriend — I rattled all the details off. Then came the news. The lady banker at the other end said that since my account had been overdrawn for three months by several hundred pounds, they were suspending all activity on it.

I was of course aware that my account was in the red, but surely all that would change when my lottery win came in. Holding the phone some distance from my mouth, I let out a contemptuous laugh, saying words to the effect of "you just wait, young lady, your branch is going to be flooded with a bigger deposit than what elephants leave in the jungle". She politely

ly asked what I meant. I told her about my triumph at the Nigerian Lottery.

There was a long pause and she said I was the hundredth customer to fall for what was a confidence trick and if I had had any money in my account it would have disappeared.

Disappointed and downcast, I buttoned the call off.

Hanh, merey yaaron, I knew that the Internet and the social media are the vehicles of fraud as never before. In imitation of a famous Indian scam, some crooks have taken to sending posts to the unwary to say that they are guilty of tax fraud and they ought to deposit X amount immediately or be arrested that very day. Those with a guilty conscience will be inclined to fall for it.

Myself? Having been made a fool of once, I've resolved to train myself to be a cyber detective with the help of my distant cousin, Hutoxic Feromonereplacementwalla (abbreviated mostly to Eiffeewalla), the first Parsi woman to be appointed to the post of detective sergeant at the Bottomlea police station. Okay, not quite Kamala Harris, but still something?

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,878.54	-1.50
Nifty 50	14,371.90	-1.50
S&P 500*	3,841.19	-0.31
Dollar (₹)	72.97	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.67	0.57
Euro (₹)	88.79	-0.16
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,861*263	0.53
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.64	-0.82
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.939	-0.29
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.094	-0.013

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Indian Bank Q3 profit more than doubles to ₹514 cr

Indian Bank more than doubled its profit at Rs 514.28 crore in the third quarter against Rs 247.16 crore in the year-ago period. Total income was Rs 11,421.34 crore, up from Rs 6,505.62 crore. The bank's gross NPAs as a percentage of assets rose to 9.04 per cent from 7.20 per cent. The percentage of net NPA was lower at 2.35 per cent as against 3.50 per cent. The bank had made provision of Rs 2,314.35 crore.

Tata Motors raises prices by up to ₹20,000



Tata Motors said it has raised prices of its passenger vehicle (PV) range by up to Rs 20,000 to offset rising input costs and semiconductor shortages. The company joins others like Maruti Suzuki and Mahindra & Mahindra, which have also hiked their vehicles' prices. "Rising input costs and material costs of steel, precious metals and semiconductors have compelled the company to pass on the part of the cost to customers," it said.

GMR Philippines JV executes terminal contract

A joint venture of GMR Airports handed over new terminal building at Clark international airport to the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA), Philippines. The 40,000-square metre terminal building at the airport, which is situated between Angeles and Mabalacat cities, was constructed within 24 months by the joint venture of GMR Airports and Megawide Construction Corporation, GMR said.

Ducati launches Scrambler bike range at ₹7.99 L

Italian luxury motorcycle brand Ducati launched the all-new Scrambler bikes in India with the range starting at Rs 7.99 lakh for the Scrambler Icon Dark and going all the way up to Rs 10.99 lakh for the new 1100 Dark Pro at pan-India showroom. With this update all three models, namely, Ducati Scrambler Icon, Ducati Scrambler Icon Dark, and the Ducati Scrambler 1100 Dark Pro are now BS6 norms compliant.



■ Telecom & retail bring 51% earnings Reliance's Q3 net rises 12%

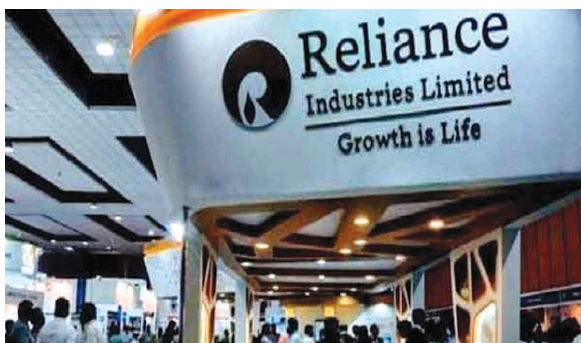
New Delhi, Jan. 22: Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Ltd on Friday reported a better-than-expected 12 per cent rise in December quarter net profit on improving oil-to-chemical business, strong continued momentum in retail and a steady telecom unit Jio. Consolidated net profit in October-December stood at Rs 13,101 crore, compared to Rs 11,640 crore net earning in the same period a year back, the company said in a statement.

While oil-to-chemical, or O2C, business improved quarter-on-quarter, it was lower than year-ago earnings but this was more than made good by a spurt in consumer-facing businesses of telecom and retail, which now contribute to 51 per cent of earnings as compared to 37 per cent a year back.

About 56 per cent of the pre-tax profit (Ebitda) of Rs 8,483 comes from Jio and Reliance Retail.

Net income was further aided by a 20 per cent year-on-year decline in finance expenses due to cash coming in the digital unit, Jio Platforms and Reliance Retail from Google/financial investors, respectively. Revenue was down 18.6 per cent at Rs 137,829 crore.

Jio, the telecom arm, posted a 15.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter rise in net profit to Rs 3,489 crore as it added over 25 million subscribers and per user income rose to Rs 151 per month. It had 410.8 million



subscribers at the end of December.

The average revenue per user (ARPU) compared with Rs 145 per month in the previous quarter.

A sharp recovery in fashion and lifestyle businesses helping retail get back to pre-Covid level saw the segment's cash profit rise 76.3 per cent to Rs 2,482 crore.

Overall retail revenue was dragged down by transfer of fuel retailing business to a separate unit where UK's BP Plc has a 49 per cent stake, and one-off factors impacting grocery. The firm added 327 new stores to take the total number to 12,201.

The traditional O2C business Ebitda was down 28.1 per cent at Rs 8,756 crore on lower prices and pandemic impacting fuel demand. It, however, was up quarter-on-quarter.

Finance cost at Rs 4,326 crore was 29 per cent lower on a quarterly basis.

Reliance said it has completed fundraising from selling minority stakes in

Jio Platforms Ltd—the unit that holds telecom and digital businesses, and Reliance Retail to global investors.

It raised Rs 152,056 crore in Jio and Rs 47,265 cr in retail. A cumulative cash inflow of Rs 220,231 crore helped it turn into a net cash surplus company.

Gross debt fell to Rs 257,413 crore as of December-end when compared to Rs 336,294 crore as of March 2020, while cash at hand rose to Rs 220,524 crore from Rs 175,259 crore. Net debt stood at a negative (-) Rs 2,954 crore.

Commenting on the results, Mukesh Ambani, chairman and managing director, said: "We have delivered strong operational results during the quarter with a robust revival in O2C and retail segments, and a steady growth in our digital services business."

Reliance said it along with its partner BP has started production from the R Cluster, an ultra-deep-water gas field in block KG D6. —PTI

HDFC Bank shares slip after Sebi slaps ₹1 cr fine

New Delhi, Jan. 22: Shares of HDFC Bank on Friday fell over 2 per cent after Sebi imposed a penalty of Rs 1 crore for invoking securities pledged by stock broker BRH Wealth Kreamtors in violation of the regulator's interim directions. On the BSE, shares of the private lender ended at Rs 1,443.65 apiece, falling 2.05 per cent over the previous close. Intraday, it had hit a low of Rs 1,440.7.

On Thursday, Sebi imposed a penalty of Rs 1 crore on HDFC Bank for invoking securities pledged by BRH Wealth Kreamtors in violation of the regulator's interim directions.

The bank has also been directed to transfer Rs 158.68 crore along with 7 per cent interest per annum into an escrow account till the issue of settlement of clients' securities is reconciled.

The Sebi had found that HDFC Bank on October 14, 2019 invoked the pledge of securities to the extent of Rs 158.68 crore and thereafter, sold most of the securities and appropriated the sale proceeds towards the outstanding under the various credit facilities advanced by the bank to BRH.

The private sector lender had granted credit facilities to BRH and BRH Commodities aggregating to Rs 191.16 crore and Rs 26.61 crore, respectively. —PTI

No let up seen in iron ore exports

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 22



JSW STEEL NET JUMPS MANIFOLD

New Delhi, Jan. 22: JSW Steel on Friday reported a manifold jump in its consolidated net profit to Rs 2,669 crore for the December 2020 quarter.

The steel-maker had clocked a net profit of Rs 187 crore in the year-ago quarter.

Its total consolidated income during October-December 2020 rose to Rs 22,006 crore, compared

with Rs 18,182 crore in the year-ago period.

The company's total consolidated expenses stood at Rs 18,120 crore, higher as against Rs 17,719 crore a year ago.

On a standalone basis, the firm registered a net profit of Rs 2,829 crore, against Rs 691 crore in the year-ago quarter. Its standalone income was at Rs 19,408 crore, compared with Rs 15,902

44.8 million tonnes in calendar year 2020.

At the same time India has been facing a production shortage. Icrs estimates domestic iron ore deficit to be 55 million tonnes in FY21. Of the 18 auctioned blocks, which had contributed 53 per cent to Odisha's overall iron ore production in FY20, only seven have started production, leading to the shortage. Ore supply shortage is likely to persist in the near term until new miners ramp-up production.

The shortage of ore has seen prices rallying by 140 per cent in Odisha since June-end and the prices have rallied 100 per cent in Chhattisgarh as well. The rising iron ore prices combined with shortage saw steel prices going up by 55 per cent to Rs 58,000 a tonne in January against the year-ago month. This has affected the downstream industries. The rising steel prices coupled with the pandemic impact on global trade saw engineering exports fall 13.24 per cent for the April-November period.

Sensex drops below 49K on profit taking

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 22

The market continued to be volatile ahead of the Union Budget with investors taking profit home after the benchmark indices surged earlier this week to new all-time high. The Sensex closed 746 points, or 1.5 per cent down, at 48,878, a day after it hit the 50,000 mark.

The Nifty-50 closed at 14,371.90, down by 218.45 points, or 1.5 per cent. The BSE Mid-cap Index fell 1.19 per cent and the BSE Small-cap, 1.04 per cent.

Foreign portfolio investors turned net sellers by Rs 635.59 crore while the domestic institutions were net sellers by Rs 1,290.35 crore.

"We are seeing some kind of profit booking at higher levels as the Sensex touched the psychological mark of 50,000 this week. The persisting rise in (Covid-19) cases has intensified restrictions in parts of Europe, UK and Hong Kong which is impacting global markets," said Rusmik Oza, head of Fundamental Research, Kotak Securities.

IL&FS ADDRESSES ₹32,000-CRORE GROUP DEBT

Mumbai, Jan. 22: Debt-laden Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services group's (IL&FS) board on Friday said it has addressed Rs 32,000 crore of the group's overall debt so far.

The board, led by veteran banker Uday Kotak, retained its target of addressing a debt of over Rs 56,000 crore by 2021-22, of an overall debt of over Rs 99,000 crore (as of October 2018).

"The aggregate debt of Rs 32,000 addressed comprises about Rs 21,600 crore of debt addressed basis cash balances," the group said in a release.

It said nearly Rs 10,300 crore more of net recovery is expected from other resolution and restructuring applications. —PTI

INDIGO PAINTS IPO SUBSCRIBED OVER 117 TIMES



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 22

Indigo Paints IPO subscription stood at more than 117 times on the final day of the public bidding process.

As per the last update, the public offer was subscribed 189.57 times by the qualified institutional buyers, 263.05 times by non-institutional or high net worth investors and 15.93 times by retail individual investors.

Indigo Paints' Rs 1,170 crore public issue was priced at Rs 1,488 to Rs 1,490 per equity share of Rs 10 face value.

Sequoia Capital backed Indigo Paints raised Rs 348 crore from 25 anchor investors on January 19.

The Pune-based firm manufactures a range of decorative paints and has an extensive distribution network across India.

CSR rules now allow firms to take up multi-year projects

New Delhi, Jan. 22: The government on Friday amended various rules pertaining to the CSR regime, including allowing corporates to undertake multi-year projects and making registration compulsory for agencies implementing CSR activities on companies' behalf.

Besides, companies have been permitted to set off the excess amount spent under CSR up to three succeeding financial years. They have also been allowed to create or acquire capital assets through CSR in the name of beneficiaries or a public authority or registered trust, among others.

Non-compliance with CSR provisions has been decriminalised by shifting such offences to penal regime, while companies having CSR obligation below Rs 50 lakhs have been exempted from constituting a CSR Committee, according to the corporate affairs ministry.

Under the Companies Act, 2013—being implemented by the corporate

MAKING IT EASY

- Registration compulsory for agencies implementing CSR activities
- Firms can set off excess amount spent under CSR up to three years
- They can also create or acquire capital assets in beneficiaries/trusts name
- CSR offences decriminalised

affairs ministry—certain class of profitable companies are required to shell out at least two per cent of their three-year annual net profit towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in a financial year.

The amendments are aimed at further improving the ease of doing business, decriminalising non-compliance with CSR provisions as well as to make the CSR framework

more transparent, an official told PTI.

Further, the idea is to move from just looking at expenditure to focusing on impact of CSR projects implemented under the companies law, the official added.

In a significant move to boost transparency, agencies implementing CSR projects for companies should get registered with the ministry's MCA 21 portal and the system will automatically generate a unique CSR registration number.

The registration requirement will be effective from April 1, 2021.

Also, international organisations have been permitted to carry out designing, monitoring and evaluation of the CSR projects or programmes. However, they cannot act as implementing agencies.

According to the official, such a move will help in bringing in the best international practices in the field of CSR and capacity building. —PTI

CRYPTOS WON'T WORK AS ACTUAL CURRENCIES: UBS



MARK CRANFIELD JAN. 22

Cryptocurrencies may never be able to work as actual currencies, according to UBS Global Wealth Management.

The "fundamental flaw" inherent in cryptocurrencies is that supply can't be reduced when demand is slumping in most cases, Paul Donovan, chief economist at UBS GWM, said in a video this week. That means they can't be considered currencies, he said.

A "proper currency," as Donovan termed it, can be a stable store of value, providing certainty that it will be able to buy the same basket of goods tomorrow as it buys today. That confidence is derived from central banks' ability to reduce supply when demand is falling. There is no such mechanism for switching off supply on most cryptocurrencies, and therefore their value can slide - leading to a collapse in spending power.

"People are unlikely to want to use something as a currency if they've got absolutely no certainty about what they can buy with that tomorrow," Donovan said in the video.

Bitcoin futures are listed on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange alongside contracts for most major currencies, but the difference in daily trading volumes suggest that some investors haven't yet embraced the crypto as a fully fledged currency. Amid the 11 per cent price plunge for Bitcoin on Thursday transactions for the January futures were just above 13,000, while there were around six times as many for Japanese yen futures. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Vaccination may jeopardise Oly

Tokyo: Japan is publicly adamant that it will stage its postponed Olympics this summer. But to pull it off, many believe the vaccination of its 127 million citizens for the coronavirus is key. It's an immense undertaking in the best of circumstances and complicated now by an overly cautious decision-making process, bureaucratic roadblocks and a public that has long been deeply wary of vaccines. Japan hopes to start Covid-19 vaccinations in late February, but uncertainty is growing that a nation ranked among the world's lowest in vaccine confidence can pull off the massive, \$14 billion project in time for the games in July, casting doubt on whether the Tokyo Olympics can happen. Japan has secured vaccines for all its citizens, and then some, after striking deals with three foreign pharmaceutical makers Pfizer Inc., AstraZeneca and Moderna Inc. — *AP*

Spanish player tests +ve in Oz

Melbourne: A Spanish tennis player ranked in the top 70 who was forced to quarantine in her hotel room after potentially being exposed to the coronavirus on an Australian Open charter flight says she tested positive for Covid-19. Paula Badosa, a 23-year-old who reached the fourth round at last year's French Open, wrote on Thursday on Twitter that she received her test result for the illness caused by the coronavirus on the seventh day of her hard quarantine. "I have some bad news," Badosa said in a post written in Spanish and English. "Today I received a positive Covid-19 test result. I'm feeling unwell and have some symptoms, but I'll try to recover as soon as possible listening to the doctors. I've been taken to a health hotel to self isolate and be monitored." — *AP*

Hockey girls hold Chile senior side

Santiago: A resilient Indian junior women's hockey team came from behind twice to hold Chile senior side to a 2-2 draw in their fourth match of the tour here. Deepika (40th minute) and Gagandeep Kaur (55th) led India's fight back after Chile had taken the lead twice through goals from Mariana del Jesus Lagos (21st) and Fernanda Villagran (51st). With three wins from as many games in the tour, the Indian team started the match brightly as they tried to penetrate Chile's defence, but could not find a clear opportunity inside the first 15 minutes. Chile, on the other hand, relied on counter attacks with their tactic paying off in the second quarter. The Indian juniors will again play Chile senior side in back-to-back matches on Saturday and Sunday. — *PTI*

Lakers win eighth game on the road

Los Angeles: LeBron James scored a season-high 34 points as the Los Angeles Lakers won their eighth straight road game with a 113-106 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Thursday. The victory opened a seven-game road trip for the NBA champion Lakers, who are hoping this is the beginning of another run of victories. They had a five-game winning streak snapped in their most recent outing, a 115-113 loss to Golden State. "Our motivation was not losing two in a row tonight. We were able to get that accomplished," said forward Anthony Davis. James made a key three pointer and capped his night with an emphatic double clutch slam dunk as the Lakers improved to a NBA best 12-4 on the season after Thursday's gritty performance at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee. — *AFP*

Live on TV

BADMINTON

Thailand Open: Semifinal matches from 9.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Melbourne Renegades vs Brisbane Heat from 10.35 am; Melbourne Stars vs Perth Scorchers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Kerala Blasters vs Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Roma vs Spezia from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

English Premier League: Aston Villa vs Newcastle from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1

MIXED FEELING

Big gun Sindhu exits but mixed pair Satwik-Ashwin enters semis

Bangkok, Jan. 22: Error-prone P. V. Sindhu suffered a demoralising defeat in the quarterfinals while Sameer Verma's gallant fight too ended in agony at the Thailand Open here on Friday.

However, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy claimed twin wins in mixed and men's doubles quarterfinals along with Ashwini Ponnappa and Chirag Shetty to keep India's flag fluttering at the badminton World Tour Super 1000 tournament here.

Sindhu looked a pale shadow of the player who had won the world championship gold in 2019 as she committed too many unforced errors to go down 13-21, 9-21 against home favourite Ratchanok Intanon.

"I made a lot of unforced errors and I think that I gave away easy points. I didn't play my best today. It wasn't my day," a crestfallen Sindhu said.

In men's singles, Sameer's giant-killing run also came to an end after he squandered a match point to go down 13-21, 21-19, 20-22 to world no. 3 Anders Antonsen of Denmark in a quarterfinal contest.

With the defeat of Sindhu and Sameer, Indian challenge in singles competition ended in the tournament.

The doubles players, however, gave fans something to cheer as Satwik and Ashwini upstaged world no. 6 pair of Peng Soon Chan and Liu Ying Goh of Malaysia 18-21, 24-22, 22-20 after toiling hard for one hour and 15 minutes.

"We have played them three times. We have won twice and lost once. We were confident. We knew our main strength would be our attack. They were under pressure. We kept



India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (right) goes for a shot next to teammate Ashwini Ponnappa during their mixed doubles quarterfinal match against Indonesia's Chan Peng Soon and Goh Liu Ying at the Thailand Open badminton tournament in Bangkok on Friday.

● **Olympic silver medallist P. V. Sindhu was a pale shadow of herself and was outclassed by Malaysia's World No. 92 Kisona Selva-duray 21-10, 21-12 in the women's singles second round of the Thailand Open.**

● **The Indian men's doubles and mixed doubles pairs are in the semifinal of a Super Series. The mixed doubles pair has gone into the last 4 for the first time. The men's pair are on course to defend their win from last year.**

fighting. We had our chances and never messed up," Satwik said.

Later in the day, Satwik and Chirag saw off another Malaysian pair of Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi 21-18, 24-22 in 37 minutes.

The Indian men's doubles and mixed doubles pairs are in the semifinal of a Super Series. The mixed doubles pair has gone into the last 4 for the very first time and the men's doubles are on

course to defend their sensational win from last year.

Earlier, Sindhu looked awfully out of form as she was all at sea against Ratchanok, a former world champion.

"Some of my lifts were going out and going out of control. I was hitting with so much power sometimes. I should have controlled things a lot more. If I had won the first game, I think things would have

been comparatively different," she said.

MARIN BREEZES INTO SEMIFINALS

Spanish fifth seed and former world number one Carolina Marin sailed through to the semi-finals, beating Turkey's Neslihan Yigit 21-6, 21-15.

Marin is aiming for back-to-back titles in this week's tournament — the second of three consecutive events in Bangkok

that culminate in next week's World Tour Finals. She came out on top last week against top-seeded Tai Tzu-ying, and continued her winning streak on Friday — despite Yigit holding a brief lead in the second set.

"I wanted to keep going, keep fighting and keep the focus on what I needed to do, even when Yigit was leading," said Marin.

World no. 6 Marin will be facing off in the semifinals against South Korean An Se-young, a formidable teenager who was awarded "Most Promising Player" in 2019.

They already duelled in last week's tournament, with the more experienced Marin winning 21-18, 21-16. — *Agencies*

Deepak storms out, suspended

Vadodara, Jan. 22: The Baroda Cricket Association (BCA) has suspended senior player Deepak Hooda, who had stormed out of the camp before the start of Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, for this domestic season for "indiscipline" and "bringing disrespect to the game."

Hooda had walked out of the team on the eve of domestic T20 tournament after a spat with captain Krunal Pandya. He had alleged "misbehaviour" on the part of Pandya.

"He (Hooda) has been suspended for this season for indiscipline and bringing disrespect to the BCA and the game. Without informing the team and the BCA, he left the team and the (bio) bubble," BCA secretary Ajit Lele told PTI on Friday.

The decision to suspend Hooda was taken during the Apex Council meeting of the BCA which was held on Thursday evening.

Hooda, who was initially appointed as Baroda's vice-captain for Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, had stormed out of the bio-bubble on January 9. He had alleged "misbehaviour" on the part of Pandya in an e-mail sent to BCA.

"At this moment, I am demoralised, depressed and under pressure," Hooda, who has played 46 first-class matches, wrote



From last some days, my team captain Mr Krunal Pandya is using abusing language to me (sic) in front of my teammates and also other State teams.

— **DEEPAK HOODA** justifies leaving Baroda camp at the T20 tourney

in the e-mail.

"As from last some days, my team captain Mr Krunal Pandya is using abusing language to me in front of my teammates and also other state teams who have come for participation at Reliance Stadium Vadodara."

Following Hooda's letter, the BCA had sought the manager's report. — *PTI*

ROYALS TRADE BATSMAN UTHAPPA TO SUPER KINGS

New Delhi, Jan. 22: Veteran India batsman Robin Uthappa has been traded to Chennai Super Kings in an all-cash deal, IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals said on Thursday. The 35-year-old right-hander from Karnataka had scored just 196 runs in 12 matches in the last IPL in UAE after being picked up by Rajasthan Royals at the last IPL auctions.

"I really enjoyed my year at the Royals and had a great time being part of this franchise. I am now excited for the next part of my cricketing journey joining CSK for IPL 2021," Uthappa said in a release.

CAREY, COULTER-NILE NOT SURPRISED AT IPL FRANCHISES RELEASING THEM

Australian players Alex Carey and Nathan Coulter-Nile said they were not surprised at their IPL franchises releasing them and they are hoping to find a team in next month's Players Auction for the upcoming edition of the cash-rich league. While wicket-keeper batsman Carey was released by last edition's runners-up side Delhi Capitals on Thursday, Coulter-Nile was de-listed by champions Mumbai Indians.

"It wasn't a surprise. I didn't play a lot of cricket, just sat on the sidelines, so it probably makes sense to open that spot up for someone else," Carey was quoted as saying by *cricket.com.au*. — *PTI*

Siraj is find of Oz series: Shastri

New Delhi, Jan. 22: India head coach Ravi Shastri on Friday described rookie pacer Mohammed Siraj as the find of the Australia tour, hailing him for playing a key role in the historic Test series win despite personal loss and racial abuse from spectators Down Under.

Siraj could not return to India after his father died barely a week after he landed in Australia with the Indian team in November last year. He also faced racial abuse from a section of the crowd in Sydney during the third Test.

Despite all this, Siraj finished the series with 13 wickets — the most by any Indian bowler — as the team came from behind to script a memorable 2-1 win.

"Find of the tour for shoring up the bowling attack the way he did — Mohd Siraj. He fought through personal loss, racial remarks and channelised them to find home in the team huddle," Shastri tweeted in appreciation of the 26-year-old pacer.

Siraj turned out to be one of the architects of India's success and successfully stepped into the shoes of his senior pace colleagues after making his debut in the series-turning second Test.

In the fourth Test in Brisbane, Siraj led a young Indian bowling attack, picking up his maiden five-wicket haul in the longest format of the game. He returned with match figures of 7/150 as India beat Australia by three wickets at the Gabba.

Siraj revealed that on-field umpires had offered his team the option of leaving the third Test against Australia midway after he was subjected to racial abuse by the crowd in Sydney, a proposal that was turned down by skipper Ajinkya Rahane.

After his arrival in the country, the youngster had driven straight to his father's grave in Hyderabad to pay his respects. He had dedicated each of his wickets in Australia to the departed soul. — *PTI*



Pacer Mohammed Siraj gestures during a press conference at his residence in Hyderabad on Thursday.

Saha bats for Pant

Kolkata, Jan. 22: Rishabh Pant the batsman redeemed himself spectacularly in Australia and his much-criticised wicket-keeping skills are also on the mend, feels senior India stumper Wriddhiman Saha who wants the youngster to be given some breathing space as "no one learns algebra in class I".

Saha, who is considered India's number one Test wicketkeeper, said in an interview that he does not believe that Pant's heroic show in Australia would close the door for him in the Indian team.

"You can ask him (Pant), we have a friendly relationship and help each other whoever gets into the XI. Personally, there's no conflict with him," Saha said.

"I don't see who is No.1 or 2... Team will give a chance to those who do better. I will continue to do my job. Selection is not in my hands, it's up

THAKUR HAPPY TO BE CALLED BOWLING ALLROUNDER NOW

Mumbai, Jan. 22: It was a debut over two years after his actual debut and Shardul Thakur says he took a quantum leap from being just a fast bowler to a bowling all-rounder with his impactful show in India's epoch-making Brisbane Test win over Australia. Thakur snared seven wickets and was India's top scorer in the first innings, striking 67 while batting at No.8. He, along with Washington Sundar, pulled the team out of trouble by conjuring a crucial 123-run stand. The partnership eventually played a key role in the team's three-wicket win.

His Test debut was back in 2018 which last just 10 balls thanks to injury.

"Yes, I can be called a bowling allrounder, I have that ability to bat and even in future, whenever I get my opportunity to bat, I am going to contribute useful runs to the team's total," Thakur said. — *PTI*

to the management."

"No one learns algebra in class I. You always go step by step. He is giving his best and will definitely improve. He has matured and proved himself. In the long run, it augurs well for the

Indian team."

"The way he has shown his intent after being sidelined from his favourite T20 and ODI formats was really exceptional," Wriddhiman further added. — *PTI*

AK ENTERTAINMENTS

TODAY RELEASE

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Rama Brahman Sunkara

గిరి పలికా

Giri Palika

కিশోర గారికిపాటి

Kishore Garikipati

అజయ్ సుంకరా

Ajay Sunkara

Sai Kartheek Satish Mutyala MR Varma Velugonda srinivas Gandhi Nadikudikar Naga Prasad Dasam Vamsi - Sekhar