

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | MONDAY | 8 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 30°C
Min: 16.2°C
RH: 30%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 30/15 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+11,673)	(+86)
1,08,38,843	1,55,114

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+150)	(+2)
TS: 2,95,581	1,610
(+73)	(+0)
AP: 8,88,423	7,159

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,65,08,151

DEATHS
23,23,815

COUNTRIES,
AREAS WITH
CASES
219

worldometers.info/
coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula Dwadasi till
3.20 am (Tuesday)

Star: Mula till 3.21 pm

Varjyam: 1.49 pm to 3.21 pm;
12.40 am to 2.14 am (Tuesday)

Durmuhurtam: 12.53 pm to
1.38 pm; 3.09 pm to 3.55 pm

Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

HJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhir 25, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.44 am

Zohar: 12.40 pm

Asar: 4.38 pm

Maghrib: 6.20 pm

Isha: 7.29 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.14 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.45 AM

MOONRISE TOMORROW 3.39 AM

MOONSET TODAY 2.59 PM

COUNTER POINT



Not chakka jam, it is
a regular traffic jam!

SHORT TAKES

Meghalaya cuts tax on petrol

Shillong: The Meghalaya government has decided to reduce the tax on petrol and diesel in the state by Rs 2 per litre from Monday midnight, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma. "In view of the recent price hike in petrol and diesel in #Meghalaya, Govt. has decided that the rate for both petrol and diesel will be reduced by 2 rupees per litre, effective from midnight of 8th February 2021," the chief minister tweeted on Sunday. The state government's decision to reduce rates comes days after local taxi operators in the state capital here protested against the high taxes in petrol in the state.

STF jawan killed in IED explosion

Raipur: A jawan of the Special Task Force (STF) was on Sunday killed when a pressure improvised explosive device (IED), planted by Naxals, went off in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said. The incident occurred around 4.30 pm near Peddagellur village under Tarrem police station area when a joint team of security forces was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar range) Sundarraj P. said. The personnel belonging to STF, CoBRA - an elite unit of the CRPF, and the District Force were involved in the operation, he said.

NATION | 4

Sasikala returns, AIADMK panics



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WORLD | 5

Biden refuses to lift sanctions on Iran



SPORTS | 8

England bring out their Bess



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Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao talks to senior TRS leader K. Keshava Rao in Hyderabad on Sunday.

I am fit to be CM for next 10 years, KCR tells TRS

L. VENKAT RAM
REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

Chief Minister and TRS supremo K. Chandrashekar Rao on Sunday finally put to rest months of speculation about him stepping down from the Chief Minister's post to pave for his son, minister and party working president K.T. Rama Rao to rise to the chair. Rao made it clear that he had no plans to quit the Chief Minister's post, reiterating that he was in the pink of health to "continue as CM, for at least the next 10 years."

Rao warned party leaders not to talk or debate about the "CM change issue" either in public or in private, else they have to "face severe consequences".

He asked them not to indulge in such speculations, which are totally unwarranted and harm the interests of the party.

Rao, however, maintained complete silence on the relations of TRS with the BJP in the backdrop of heated debate in political circles that the TRS boss had suddenly turned soft towards the BJP after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah, soon after the

I have no health or age-related issues. I am perfectly fine. I can serve as CM for 10 more years. Why would I quit now? Why are you talking about CM change constantly in public and creating confusion?

— K. CHANDRASHEKAR RAO
Chief Minister

GHMC elections in December last. Rao had, during his public address during the GHMC polls thundered that he would organise a public meeting of all anti-BJP parties of the country in Hyderabad, but has subsequently taken a U-turn on the issue.

Rao, while addressing leaders at the party state executive on Sunday, repeatedly warned of "severe action" against leaders, including MLAs and MPs, if they "openly air views" and "irresponsibly deviating from party line," apparently referring to the recent controversies relating to MLAs Challa Dharma Reddy, Rasamayi Balakishna and others, who created a flutter with remarks against reservations for Dalits, the Ayodhya Ram temple and describing the TRS as a "limited company".

■ Page 2: Major initiative
for SCs soon, says CM

AP HC lifts SEC's restraining order

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Sunday set aside the State Election Commission's order confining panchayat raj minister P. Ramachandra Reddy to his home.

But the court restrained the minister from interacting with the media till all phases of the gram panchayat polls are over on February 21.

The High court came up with the "via media solution" to remedy a surcharged ground situation,

with differences between and mutual accusations by the SEC and the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government between whom, the court pointed out, "there is no love lost."

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

■ Page 2: Judge points to
minister's language

HEALTH | HOPES

4 districts also reported zero cases on Saturday No Covid in N'pet for a week

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

Narayanpet in Telangana state became the first district to report zero Coronavirus cases for a week.

The state health department reported that the district had no new cases on Saturday, February 6, for a seventh day in a row.

Of the remaining 32 districts in the state, four - Wanaparthy, Kamareddy, Jangaon and Jayshankar-Bhupalpally - also reported zero Covid cases on Saturday.

● Of the remaining 32 districts in the state, four - Wanaparthy, Kamareddy, Jangaon and Jayshankar-Bhupalpally - also reported zero Covid cases on Saturday.
● Two districts reported cases in double digits

ed zero Covid-19 cases on Saturday.

Only two districts have recorded new Covid-19

cases in double digits on Saturday.

While Hyderabad district, clubbed together with the rest of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation area, reported 25 fresh cases, the neighbouring Ranga Reddy district, a part of which also falls under the GHMC limits, had 10 cases.

Overall, the state recorded 150 fresh cases of Covid-19, along with two more deaths from the disease, taking the total cases as on

Saturday to 2,95,581 and fatalities to 1,610 from the disease.

According to the state health department, the state, as on Saturday, had 1,939 active Covid-19 cases. Of these, 808 patients were either in home or institutional isolation.

A total of 34,805 tests were conducted on Saturday and the results of 1,061 tests were awaited, it said adding that of all samples tested, a bulk of 30,939 were done in government labs.

MODI: BENGAL IS VICTIM OF NIRMAMATA

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 7

Kickstarting the BJP's poll campaign in for the forthcoming West Bengal Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lashed out at the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. He argued that the people have been the victim of "Nirmamata" though the TMC supremo has "Mamata" in her name.

■ Report on Page 4

TIKAIT: NO GHAR WAPSI TILL LAWS ARE REPEALED

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

A kisan mahapanchayat in Haryana's Charkhi Dadri, attended by UP BKU leader Rakesh Tikait, on Sunday passed a resolution seeking repeal of the three farm laws.

Asserting the agitation against the farm laws was a people's movement that will not fail, Mr Tikait said there will be no "ghar wapsi" till the farmers' demands are met.

Revanth hits out at Modi, KCR over new farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

State Congress working president A. Revanth Reddy on Friday converted his ongoing Rythu Bharosa Deeksha into a padayatra from Achampet to Hyderabad.

Revanth Reddy said that the region gave him power to fight for the welfare of four crore people in Telangana state.

Addressing a public meeting, he said that farmers neither strive to earn crores nor fill their cupboards with the gold. Their pride is in irrigating on at least one acre of their own land.

The Congress leader said that prices of produce are fixed by the seller in any market but farmers depend on middlemen to fix the price for their crop.

Taking a dig at the new farm laws and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Reddy said the existing farm laws did not accommodate purchase centres, market yards and minimum support price. However, he said that Modi has waived loans worth ₹15 lakh crore to corporate companies.

"Modi will sell farmers' lives to Adani and Ambani for which Chief Minister



TPCC working president and MP A. Revanth Reddy addresses Congress workers on Sunday.

● ADDRESSING A public meeting, he said that farmers neither strive to earn crores nor fill their cupboards with the gold. Their pride is in irrigating on at least one acre of their own land.

● He said prices of produce are fixed by the seller in any market but farmers depend on middlemen to fix the price for their crop.

K. Chandrashekar Rao is extending support," Reddy said.

The Congress leader wondered how Rao was holding on to his post when his government is not purchasing agricultural produce.

"The Congress government by constituting the Swaminathan Committee provided MSP for farmers and the current BJP government's Shanta Kumar committee recommendation will result in the destruction of the farming community. In the current situation, instead of going home, I would rather fight till justice is rendered to farmers", he said.

Mom kills 6-yr-old son to 'please' god

Palakkad (Kerala), Feb. 7: In a shocking incident, a 30-year-old madrasa teacher allegedly killed her six year-old son by slitting his throat early on Sunday at her house in Poolakkad here, to appease god through a sacrificial offering, police said.

The woman, who is pregnant, told the police that she had sacrificed her son to 'please Allah'.

She was taken into custody, they said. After the gruesome act,

the woman herself informed the police about the crime, shocking relatives and neighbours.

The incident took place at 4 am.

The victim, the youngest of the woman's three sons, was sleeping with her.

She woke him up and took him to the washroom and tied up his legs before killing the boy.

Her husband, a gulf returnee, was asleep in another room with their two other sons.

— PTI



ALLU ARJUN'S VANITY VAN HIT BY LORRY

Hyderabad, Feb. 7: Telugu film star Allu Arjun's vanity van was hit by a container lorry in Khammam district and the driver and an attendant who were travelling in the vehicle escaped unhurt, police said on Sunday. The van suffered minor damage when the lorry coming from behind rammed into it at Satyanarayanaapuram on Saturday. Neither the actor nor his make-up team was in the van at that time, a police official said. The vehicle was returning from a film shoot. Based on the van driver's complaint, a case was registered against the container lorry's driver, the official added. Arjun was recently in Andhra Pradesh in connection with shooting of his upcoming film *Pushpa*. — PTI

OPERATION SMILE: 615 CHILD WORKERS FREED

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB 7

As many as 615 child labourers were identified as part of Operation Smile-7 in the erstwhile Warangal district. It is an initiative to ensure a secure childhood for children saved from child labour and bonded labour in the northern districts of Telangana state. As part of Operation Smile-7, the child labourers were identified and picked up from bus stands and railway stations, other public places.

■ Report on Page 3

SHORT TAKES

BJP LEADER
OPPOSES VIZAG
PSU SELL-OFFDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 7

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

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

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

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

OWAISI STARTS
CAMPAIGN FOR
GUJARAT POLL

Bharuch, Feb. 7: AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Sunday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to invite the farmers who are protesting outside Delhi to his residence like he had hosted then US President Barack Obama, and repeal the new farm laws.

Addressing a rally for the upcoming polls to local bodies in Gujarat, the MIM chief also asked the Prime Minister to be "large-hearted" and "understand pains" of the farmers, who have been protesting over the last two months.

The MIM is contesting its first elections in Gujarat in Ahmedabad and Bharuch in alliance with the Bhartiya Tribal Party (BTP).

"The way the farmers are being treated is not right. It is wrong. The Prime Minister should invite the farmers to his residence like he had offered tea to Barack Obama with his own hand (in 2015), which is fine as he was our guest. We expect the PM to invite the farmers, offer them tea and biscuits and tell them the laws are being repealed, and that they should be happy," Owaisi said.

Owaisi said the PM should understand the plight of agriculturists who feed the country, if he claims to have risen from poverty.

"When a poor person weeps out of helplessness, then nature tells us to help the poor, but those who have no sympathy for the poor, they remain unaffected by tears of the poor. We are with farmers, they are our 'annadatas', they work hard to get us food," he said.

Owaisi said the massive protest by farmers had "disturbed the sleep" of the PM. "They came out in thousands, shouted slogans, and took out a tractor rally in Delhi (on January 26). The BJP with 300 MPs, is worried about how to tackle farmers," he said.

With BTP leader Chhotu Vasava by his side, Owaisi made a strong pitch for the unity among tribals, Muslims, Dalits and OBCs in Gujarat.

— PTI

Mayor's name sealed

KCR to place Mayor, Deputy's name in sealed cover

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao on Sunday said that the names of the TRS nominees for the upcoming GHMC Mayor and Deputy Mayor election will be written in a sealed cover that will be opened at the time of their election on February 11.

The State Election Commission has issued the notification on January 22 stating that the elections to the posts of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor will be held on February 11



Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao addresses the TRS executive meeting in Hyderabad on Sunday.

after the swearing-in of the newly elected corporators in the GHMC Council.

The GHMC elections were held on December 1, 2020, and the results were declared on

December 4. The TRS emerged as the single largest party by winning 56 divisions out of 150, while the BJP secured 48 divisions and the MIM 44. The Congress won two divi-

sions.

The TRS can bag both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor posts as the single largest party besides its strength of ex officio members comprising party MPs, MLAs and MLCs.

Addressing the party's executive meeting at Telangana Bhavan here, Rao said that the party will finalise the names for Mayor and Deputy Mayor posts in a day or two.

He directed the TRS corporators-elect and ex-officio members to support the candidates announced by the party leadership during the elections.



Actress Malvika Sharma and oncologist Dr Vijay Anand Reddy flag off super car cancer awareness rally at Necklace road on Sunday.

— R. PAVAN

Lockdown saw surge in power theft cases in Telangana state

L. VENKAT RAM
REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

There has been a significant increase in the power theft cases across the state, especially in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits and surrounding districts. Instances of power theft witnessed a sharp increase during the Coronavirus lockdown period.

The vigilance wing of the electricity department conducts regular raids to check power pilferage. These were sus-

POWER THIEVES

The GHMC area and surroundings have seen the most power thefts in the southern discom (TSSPDCL) region while Nalgonda topped among the districts.

pendent during the lockdown, and have still not resumed to previous levels.

An official said the increased thefts prove that vested interests had exploited the lockdown to their advantage. Most power thefts were witnessed in the city were in the Hyderabad southern region, which is part of TSSPDCL (TS

Southern Power Distribution Company Limited) which covers southern districts. Nalgonda tops the list among districts. Eighty persons were arrested by the vigilance wing since the lockdown in March 2020 till December. Over half of them were from GHMC limits. All these cases are under investigation.

In 2020, about 27,501 cases were booked for power theft. Officials estimated that ₹19.87 crore worth power was pilfered.

An official of the Southern Discom said, "We have stepped up raids against power theft for the last three months due to which the cases are now coming down. We are imposing penalty on offenders if caught for the first time. If they are caught for the second time, they are arrested and sent to remand. Repeated offenders have to face court cases."

Fellowship for cancer researcher

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

A researcher specialising in study of cancer pathways in humans, Dr Yeluri Rama Chandra Reddy, has been selected as a post-doctoral fellow to work at the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), here in the city.

He was selected for the position by South University, Columbia,

and his research will be a collaborative effort between the university and IICT, Hyderabad.

Dr Reddy's work deals with finding new chemical entities for screening against various cancer cells and the primary focus of his work is on a chemical signalling pathway that is considered to be one of the most important intracellular pathways

● Dr Reddy's work deals with finding new chemical entities for screening against various cancer cells and the primary focus of his work is on a chemical signalling pathway that is considered to be one of the most important intracellular pathways

ered as a master regulator for cancer, accord-



Dr Yeluri Rama Chandra Reddy

ing to an IICT news release.

Major initiative for SCs welfare soon, says CM

From Page 1

In an apparent attempt to placate and woo Dalits, against the backdrop of the resurfacing of the demand to make a Dalit the CM, Chandrashekar Rao is said to have announced that he would "soon come up with a major initiative for Scheduled Castes." He asked officials to make at least ₹10,000 crore available for his initiative.

"It will be better than the current sub-plan spending", he said, admitting that the TRS government lagged behind in providing welfare for Dalits and he would focus on bringing it to par with the OBCs.

The government will give equal importance for the wellbeing of economically weaker sections (EWS) among forward castes and implementation of 10 per cent reservation for EWS is part of it, he said.

Interestingly, Chief Minister Rao was totally silent on the issue of "unemployment allowance", on which his son Rama Rao had made an announcement recently, saying the "CM will announce it soon."

Over 300 party leaders, including ministers, MPs, MLAs and MLCs, state committee members, state-level corporation chairpersons, zilla parishad chairpersons, mayors, municipal chairpersons, DCCB chairpersons and DCMS presidents attended the meeting at Telangana Bhavan, the party's headquarters.

All eyes were on the meeting as it was held amid a

● RAO, IT was learnt, also expressed ire at few party leaders who were constantly raking up the CM change issue in media and public.

growing clamour within TRS that Rama Rao would be elevated as CM soon. The timing of the meeting further fuelled speculations, as it was called by the CM suddenly, with a short notice of two days. Several political watchers were hoping that since about 300 important leaders were called for the meeting, a "major announcement" on CM change would be hinted at. All these factors led party leaders and cadre to strongly believe that Chandrashekar Rao would make a "key announcement" or at least drop hints on "when KTR will be made CM".

Instead, Chandrashekar Rao utilised the occasion to send a loud and clear message that he will not step down as chief minister in this term, or even in future governments if TRS went on to win the next elections. It was made crystal clear to the party that he had no plans to make his son or anyone else the CM.

"I have no health or age-related issues. I am perfectly alright. I can serve as CM for ten more years. Why would I quit now? Why are you talking about CM change constantly in public and creating confusion in the party and the people? It is sending wrong signals to people. Whenever my health doesn't permit me to work as CM, I would definitely discuss with everyone in the party and

take a decision on what to do and who should be appointed as CM. Until then, restrain yourselves from talking or debating on this issue in public or in private. Those violating this would be dealt with severely," Mr Rao reportedly warned.

Rao, it was learnt, also expressed ire at few party leaders who were constantly raking up the CM change issue in media and public. He said that "such statements were providing ammunition to Opposition parties to attack him, his family members and the party."

"Opposition parties are trying to create confusion by making demands that Etela Rajender be made CM because of irresponsible statements given by our leaders. It is high time to put an end to this issue in the interest of the party," Rao purportedly declared.

Despite the TRS supremo making it clear in no uncertain terms that there would be no change of CM, it failed to douse speculations, especially amongst the KTR group within the party. The supporters of Rama Rao still strongly believe that the CM tried to downplay this issue only to ensure the party focuses on upcoming crucial Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll, graduate MLC polls for two seats and the Warangal and Khammam municipal corporation polls over the next three months.

"KTR would be elevated as CM in May, after these elections," some of them said, oblivious to the sternness and emphasis of the CM's speech.

JUDGE POINTS
TO MINISTER'S
LANGUAGE

From Page 1

"The language used leaves much to be desired. Freedom of speech is not an absolute and a reasonable restriction can be imposed," the judge pointed, referring to the minister's warning to returning officers of severe action if they do not announce unanimous elections.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Experts: Snowfall, vibrations led to glacier burst

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

Sunday's devastating Nanda Devi glacier burst in Uttarakhand could have been triggered by intense snowfall along with vibrations from nearby construction site, opine experts from the city.

"A glacier burst in Joshimath. Then sheets of ice from the glacier came down the slope and led to the deluge in the Alaknanda river system," S. Srinagesh from the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) told *Deccan Chronicle*.

After going through the images of the incident, along with scientific readings, he said that there was heavy snowfall in the area during winter.

"The snowfall coupled with the inclined position of the mountain broke the glacier and it landed in the river beneath," he said.

Experts from Skymet, a private weather forecasting outfit said: "Several districts, including Pauri, Tehri, Rudrapur, Haridwar and Dehradun, are likely to be affected and have been put on high alert."

In the wake of the glacier burst, officials have sounded an alert across the 10 districts the river flows. As part of the rescue operations, teams from Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), State Disaster Response Force and National Disaster Response Force plied their forces besides those by Indian Air Force and army.

BEAT 60L MARK IN MEMBERS, KCR TELLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

TRS chief and Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao has set an enrollment target of 50,000 members in each Assembly constituency for party leaders in the upcoming party membership drive that is slated to begin on February 12. He asked party leaders and cadre to strive to surpass the previous record of 60 lakh overall

membership.

He was addressing the party's state executive committee meeting at Telangana Bhavan here. The 150-minute meeting elaborated on issues pertaining to party membership, constitution of committees from village to the state-level, election of party president and the plenary scheduled for April 27.

He asked party leaders to make arrangements.

BOILING | ANGER

3 cops hurt in stone pelting

Violence after BJP meet on TRS MLA land row

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar has accused Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao of neglecting tribal people, whose problems have remained unresolved since decades.

Sanjay, along with MLAs Raja Singh and Raghunandan Rao, apart from former MP Vijayashanti and several leaders, reached Gurrampodu village in Mattampally mandal of Suryapet district in support of tribals that are fighting against their lands allegedly being occupied.

The state BJP chief

charged Rao with supporting his MLAs who are grabbing lands belonging to the tribal people. In this regard, he pointed to allegations against Huzurnagar MLA S. Saidi Reddy. Sanjay warned ruling party MLAs and ministers that they will have to face consequences in the coming days with BJP making inroads into tribal constituencies of Huzurnagar and Nagarjunasagar.

Sanjay demanded that the Chief Minister take immediate action against the Huzurnagar MLA and district ministers who are involved in grabbing lands. He announced that if BJP

comes to power, it will restore lands snatched from tribals.

Former MP Vijayashanti said she regretted working in TRS under the leadership of Rao. She stated that people of Telangana have made a mistake in handing over power to TRS for the second time.

Several activists damaged a shed that was built on disputed land and damaged the fencing and furniture. Tension prevailed for some time, with activists pelting stones and the police carrying out a lathicharge. Three police officers including DSP Raghu sustained minor injuries, sources said

No danger of downstream flooding, officials say; keep vigil on situation

From Page 1

The flash flood also affected the downstream hydro project of NTPC at Tapovan on the river Dhauliganga, which is a tributary of the river Alaknanda.

Union home ministry officials said there was no danger of downstream flooding and the rise in water levels has been contained. "There is also no threat to the neighbouring villages. At the same time, the concerned agencies of the Centre and the state were asked to keep a strict vigil on the situation, and a team from DRDO, which monitors avalanches, is being flown in for surveillance and reconnaissance. NTPC MD has been asked to reach the affected site immediately," officials said.

The home ministry has rushed five teams each of the

● Home minister Amit Shah spoke to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirvendra Singh Rawat and relief teams of the ITBP, NDRF and the Indian Army were immediately rushed to the affected areas. Navy divers were also flown in and aircraft and all resources of the Indian Air Force and Indian Army have been pressed in for rescue and relief.

ITBP and NDRF to Uttarakhand to assist in the relief and rescue operations. Till late Sunday evening, the ITBP had managed to rescue 16 people. According to ITBP sources, more than 150 people, most of them labourers working at the site of a power project, are said to be missing.

Home minister Amit Shah spoke to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirvendra Singh Rawat and relief teams of the ITBP, NDRF and the Indian Army were immediately rushed to the affected areas. Navy divers were also flown in and aircraft and all resources of the Indian Air

Force and Indian Army have been pressed in for rescue and relief.

Field hospitals have also been set up to receive casualties. According to the IMD, no rainfall is expected in the region for the next two days.

He also assured full support to the state government, and said that if required, additional reinforcements will also be sent.

The home ministry is coordinating closely with the Indian Air Force so that emergency equipment and personnel can be airlifted, following which helicopters will be used to search for missing persons.

"A special control room was set up at the home ministry to coordinate relief and rescue operations with the Uttarakhand government, the Air Force, ITBP and NDRF. So far the relief work is going on smoothly and the exact extent of damage and loss of life and property would be known," a source said.

The Home Minister said the Narendra Modi government was standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Uttarakhand. Speaking to the media in Maharashtra, Mr Shah said rescue and relief operations by the Centre and the state government were on in full swing. Efforts were being made to restore normal life at the earliest.

Mr Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had personally called up the NDRF team and guided them.

OTHER STORIES

THREE KILLED IN DIFFERENT ROAD ACCIDENTS

Hyderabad: Three persons died in different road accidents on Sunday in Nalgonda district. Two vegetable sellers died on the spot in one accident when a lorry overturned on Sunday morning at Cherukupally of Dindimandal in the Nalgonda district. The victims were identified as Narsimha Rao and Venkateshwar Rao of Keesara of Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.

They had come from Devarakonda to Dindi in a lorry filled with cement to sell their vegetables. In a hit-and-run case, near Indira Gandhi statue on the Narketpally-Addanki bypass road on the outskirts of Nalgonda, an unidentified individual was run over by an unidentified car. — INN

CONGRESS MEET TO BOOST CIVIC POLLS CAMPAIGN

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 7

The Congress meeting held here on Sunday has improved the mood of party leaders ahead of the elections to the Khammam Municipal Corporation, and boosted their morale.

Vaddeboina Narasimha Rao, Congress corporator, called the party meeting a 'mega show' and said all the DCC presidents and important leaders had attended the meeting.

"Partymen from Khammam too discussed the election scenario with senior party leaders and expressed their feelings about the party's prospects," he said adding that party activists were happy with the strong show of support at the meeting. All the arrangements were made by the DCC presidents in quick time.

Another corporator Balagangadhar Tilak said, "We are proud to host such a big meeting in Khammam. All leaders worked hard for the success of the programme".

KTR HELPS GUEST WORKER'S BODY REACH FROM UAE

DC CORRESPONDENT
SIRCILLA, FEB. 7

A migrant labourer from Telangana had died of heart attack in Dubai on January 31. With the initiative taken by IT minister K. T. Rama Rao, his body could reach his native village in Rajanna Sircilla district for the last rites.

Maothu Harilal of Maddimalla Loddithanda of Veernapally mandal went to Dubai a few years back. On January 31, he complained of severe pain in his chest and died of heart attack even before being taken to the hospital.

When Harilal's friends in Dubai started facing problems in sending the body to his native place, local ruling party leaders took the issue to the notice of KTR. The minister responded immediately by speaking to officials of the Indian Embassy in Dubai, and making arrangements for bringing the body to his village in Veernapally mandal.

When Harilal's dead body reached Shamshabad airport on Saturday, Rama Rao also arranged for its transport from the airport to Loddithanda village. The body reached his native village during the late hours of Saturday.

Family members of Harilal have thanked the IT Minister for taking the initiative in getting back the body to his native place from Dubai.



TPCC president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy along with other DCC presidents and important leaders address Congress workers party meeting and discuss election scenario at Khammam on Sunday.

Why no probes on KCR: Cong

Alleges that CM had earned crores of rupees from various contracts

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 7

AICC in-charge for Telangana Manickam Tagore, launching a scathing attack against Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, on Sunday said that the Congress will order a full-fledged inquiry into his "corrupt deals" after it comes to power in the state. He alleged that the Chief Minister had earned crores of rupees from various contracts.

"The TRS and the BJP that are pretending to be fighting against each other are making friendship in Delhi. While Rao fears that his illegal income would be exposed, the BJP leaders are not talking about his corrupt administration," Tagore said. He wanted to know why the Centre was not ordering investigations by the Enforcement Directorate, income-tax department and the CBI into Rao's irregularities.

Referring to defections by Congress MLAs, he said that all those who joined the ruling party will pay a heavy price in the days ahead.

"I swear on the name of Lord Sitaramachandra Swamy that the MLAs who were elected on the Congress symbol and left the party should not be taken into the party under any circumstance. It is sad that the leaders won on the party symbol but ditched the Congress and joining the TRS", he said. Booth-level committees will be constituted in all districts to take forward the decision taken at Khammam, he said.

"Each and every leader and cadre should adopt a 'winning in our booth is a respect' slogan. Congress

Uttam slams KCR, Modi for insulting unemployed youth

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 7

TPCC president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy feels the TRS government has insulted employees by recommending only 7.5 per cent fitment in pay. He maintained that employees should be given no less than 43 per cent fitment.

The state Congress chief said TRS has no right to seek votes of graduates, as 1.91 lakh posts are lying vacant in the government sector. He said both TRS and BJP are cheating graduates in Telangana. "Modi cheated unemployed youth by not fulfilling his promise of providing two crore jobs a year. Not just

REDDY MAINTAINED that there are 30 lakh jobless unemployed youth in Telangana, including 19 lakh graduates, who have registered themselves with the public service commission. In this regard, he declared that Congress will win all graduate MLC seats in the state.

that, the PM's wrong policies led to crores of employed losing their existing jobs," he pointed out.

Reddy maintained that there are 30 lakh jobless unemployed youth in Telangana, including 19 lakh graduates, who have

registered themselves with the public service commission. In this regard, he declared that Congress will win all graduate MLC seats in the state.

The TPCC chief demanded that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao fulfil his promise of providing ₹3,016 as unemployment allowance to each unemployed with retrospective effect from 2018, which was when he made the promise. He said that people of all sectors have come to conclusion that KCR has cheated all sections of people. "They are all waiting to teach a lesson to the Chief Minister," he underlined.

structure in the state.

He said that all mandal, town and district-level committees would be constituted within 15 days and the 15-member booth-level committees within 30 days. Booth-level committees will comprise a president, social media coordinator and booth-level assistant (BLA) who will deal with the voter list.

KHAMMAM CADRE CONFIDENT OF WIN IN KMC POLLS

A. RAVINDRA
SESHU | DC
KHAMMAM, FEB. 7

It seems that the Congress meeting on Sunday showed an effect on the ensuing Khammam Municipal Corporation elections.

The leaders, who were in distress with the party situation, did get the confidence of winning more divisions in Khammam. Vaddeboina Narasimha Rao, Congress corporator, said that it is a mega programme in Khammam and all the DCC presidents and important leaders attended the meeting.

"The people of Khammam too discussed the meeting and expressed their feelings on it. Particularly, the party activists are most happy with it", he said. All arrangements were made to the DCC presidents and other dignitaries within no time.

Another corporator Balagangadhar Tilak said, "We are proud to host such a big meeting in Khammam. All leaders worked hard for the success of the programme".

STATE NOT PAYING FUNDS FOR RAILWAY PROJECTS: MP

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, FEB. 7

Adilabad MP from BJP, Soyam Bapurao, on Sunday blamed the state government for not giving its due share of funds for railway projects.

He said if informed earlier, the Centre would have allocated more funds for such projects in the state.

Speaking to media persons, along with the district president Payal Shankar, he said the Union Government will allocate funds for any developmental project in the erstwhile Adilabad district if the state government chips in with its share of funding.

TS Cong to press for Rahul as party president

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 7

A high-level meeting of the state Congress on Sunday resolved to urge the AICC to reappoint Rahul Gandhi as party president. This was one of the three resolutions passed during a meeting attended by over 3,000 delegates, including the who's who of the state Congress.

In attendance were AICC Telangana in-charge Manickam Tagore, AICC secretaries Bose Raju and R. Srinivasan, TPCC president Uttam Kumar Reddy, CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka, former union minister Renuka Chowdary, DCC presidents and general secretaries of 33 districts, and town and city presidents.

First on the day's agenda was an internal meeting that passed three resolutions unanimously. The other two pertained to constituting booth-level committees (BLC) in all districts by the end of this month. It is proposed that each BLC should have a 15-member committee, including a convenor and social media convenor.

The meeting resolved to go all out to win the ensuing graduate constituency elections and Khammam and



Rahul Gandhi

Warangal municipal corporation elections.

Uttam Kumar Reddy said, "Names of candidates for graduate constituencies will be declared in a day or two. The party will win in all graduate constituencies and corporations in the state."

CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka, who organised the meeting, said "There is no freedom for expression in Telangana state and cases are being booked against those questioning the policies of the TRS government."

He said transport minister P. Ajay Kumar and other TRS leaders from Khammam were looting the natural resources in the district.

More Cong leaders set to join Saffron

PILLALAMARRI SRINIVAS
| DC
ADILABAD, FEB. 7

The Congress is fast losing its leaders and base to the BJP with many leaders inclined towards the party as "they were going by the political wave and as wished by their supporters and associates."

An earlier trend was for Congress leaders, including MLAs, to join the TRS.

The latest is that the Congress in-charge of Sirpur (T) constituency Palvai Harish Babu and former MP Rathod Ramesh are likely to switch over to the BJP.

Incidentally, many are those were taken into the Congress without cross-checking their are now eyeing the BJP.

Atram Sakku of Asifabad,

who was elected as Congress MLA in 2018, joined the TRS later. Senior leaders who had played a key role in deciding the party tickets and selection of candidates in 2018 have remained inactive.

Taking cue from the precedent set by former Nirmal municipal chairman Appala Ganesh, Harish Babu and Rathod are set to join BJP in the presence of party president J.P. Nadda, according to sources.

On the other hand, Adilabad MP Soyam Bapurao said that the BJP national leadership will welcome any senior leader irrespective of whether the individual is from TRS or Congress in order to strengthen the party base and help it come to power in 2024.

Deeksha Divas pylon unveiled at GWMC

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB. 7

Warangal will be developed in a manner that will go down in history, panchayat raj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao said on Sunday.

Inaugurating the Deeksha Divas pylon, was constructed by the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) at a cost of ₹10 lakh, here on Sunday, he said statues of great personalities like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar stood on the premises of GWMC office.

"We are lucky to unveil the Deeksha Divas pylon to mark the fast unto death taken up by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao for the cause of separate

Telangana state on November 29, 2009," he said.

"Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, KCR achieved Telangana state through peace and non-violence and is running the state administration as per the ambitions of Dr Ambedkar," he said.

The minister said Government Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar, MP Banda Prakash, MLC Baswaraju Saraiyah and Mayor Gunda Prakash Rao had all worked as corporators in the GWMC.

"If you provide good services for the people, you will surely get opportunities. Corporators need to keep this in mind. We can only stand on the foundations of sacrifice," he said.

Karimnagar ZP meeting gets postponed due to lack of quorum

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, FEB. 7

Karimnagar ZP chairperson Kanumalla Vijaya announced postponement of zilla parishad's general body meeting due to lack of quorum when it convened at the parishad's conference hall on Sunday at 11 a.m.

In fact, for the past few years, ZP meetings have been namesake without any serious discussions on issues involving the public.

Sunday's meeting was expected to discuss functioning of as many as 40 departments, including linking of Aadhaar card with ration card, as people are facing considerable problems in availing rations from ration shops. Other important



ZP Chairperson K. Vijaya who chaired the ZP general body meeting proposed to be held at 11 am at ZP conference hall in Karimnagar on Sunday.

issues are re-opening of schools after a gap of 10 months following Coronavirus pandemic, suggestions to farmers on cultivation of crops during the ongoing Rabi season, apart from implementation of

employment guarantee scheme with laying of roads, construction of Vyakuntadhamams and maintenance of cleanliness in respective mandals and villages.

But absence of ZPTCs and MPPs, apart from

officials of key departments, has lead to no serious discussions on public issues. Members remained absent even for Sunday's meeting, though information had been passed on to all of them beforehand.

ZP chairperson Vijaya, along with some officials and few members of opposition parties, did arrive for the meeting. But as there was no quorum, Vijaya decided to postpone the meeting.

Opposition members, meanwhile, have alleged that Sunday's meeting was convened intentionally only to be postponed. "When key leaders of ruling TRS party are meeting in Hyderabad on Sunday, how party MLAs, ZPTCS and MPPs can attend the meeting on the same day, they asked.

SPECIAL MISSION

Child labourers were identified and picked up from bus-stands and railway stations

615 child workers rescued under Operation smile

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB 7

As many as 615 child labourers were identified as part of Operation Smile-7 in the erstwhile Warangal district. It is an initiative to ensure a secure childhood for children saved from child labour and bonded labour in the northern districts of Telangana state.

As part of Operation Smile-7 conducted in collaboration with the departments of women and child welfare, child protection,

cabour, Childline 1098 and police, the child labourers were identified and picked up from bus-stands and railway stations, other public places, construction sites and hazardous industries.

Child welfare officials say the children engaged for begging and works in the erstwhile Warangal district were found to have been brought in from Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Maharashtra.

OPERATION SMILE-7	
Warangal Urban	178
Warangal Rural	38
Jangaon	100
Mulugu	190
Jayashankar Bhupalpally	58
Mahbubabad	51
Total	615

Mandala Parashuramulu, child welfare committee, chairperson of the district said, "The Union ministry

CHILD WELFARE officials say the children engaged for begging and works in the erstwhile Warangal district were found to have been brought in from Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Maharashtra.

of labour will set up vocational training centres under the supervision of

district collector in each of the district centres for the educated children in the age group of 15 -18 in Telangana state. These children are given training in the subjects of their choice."

He said Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is implementing several welfare schemes with special focus on making Telangana a state free of child labour. "We urge KCR to set up vocational training centres for those in the age-group of 15 and 18 in each district," he said.

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SHORT TAKES

HAVE FULL FAITH IN JUDICIARY, SAYS FARUQUI

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

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

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

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

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

NEARLY 100 PAK RETURNEES MISSING IN VALLEY

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

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

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

MoU FOR 1ST-EVER GEOTHERMAL FIELD SIGNED IN LEH

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

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

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

TN | POLITICS

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

AIADMK panics as Sasikala returns

R. MOHAN | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 7

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

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

Dhinakaran, Sasikala's nephew and AMMK party's honcho, on Sunday. His comments about the kind of welcome planned for Sasikala, who sources say is likely to come in a motorcade of 500-1,000 cars from a resort in Bengaluru to her niece's residence in T. Nagar in Chennai, come in the wake of complaints to the state's DGP by AIADMK ministers and other leaders about her posing a "threat" to law and order. The government's anxiety was apparent as a strange parade of ministers dropped in at the DGP's Marina Beach office, preferring oral complaints about Sasikala's use of the AIADMK party flag on her car as she emerged from the Victoria Hospital in Bengaluru, where she was admitted for a touch of Covid-19. A point of inter-

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

Sources say trouble is anticipated if she travels with the party flag on the car when she enters Hosur in Tamil Nadu from Attibelle in Karnataka. Dhinakaran's AMMK party has prepared a big reception there. In Chennai, Sasikala may skip the AIADMK headquarters and the (closed) Jaya Memorial on Marina Beach and head straight to Ramavaram Gardens to pay homage to AIADMK founder MGR at his old home to convey a political message and try to pin relevance to her coming back to Chennai. Jayakumar has threatened action if Sasikala tries to enter the party HQ on Lloyds Road, where security has been beefed up, so too at the old Jaya residence in Poes Garden, which is now a museum and memorial. What the AIADMK fears is

unknown. Their biggest threat would not be lengthy legal challenges in court but a rebellion from within the ranks with Jaya-Sasi loyalists walking off on being tempted by the old Poes Garden path of allegiance. Sources say a challenge could be mounted for the party headquarters on Lloyds Road that could be in the names of old trustees and complications could arise if legal questions are raised now. Right now, Sasikala is not a legal entity in the party and her fight would have to begin from zero in terms of occupation. An AIADMK minister was quoted as saying that AMMK and Sasikala are "DMK's B Team" in current political scene as her role could be disruptive of the parent party AIADMK now fighting for re-election after two terms.



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



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

Tranquil morning turns tragic for villagers

Horrifying memories of 2013 Kedarnath deluge that killed thousands returns to haunt locals

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Rescue operations underway near Dhauliganga hydropower project on Sunday.



Damaged dam of the Rishi Ganga Power Project, after a glacier broke off in Joshimath in Chamoli district.

NTPC: TAPOVAN HYDRO PROJECT DAMAGED

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

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

ITBP RESCUES WORKERS STUCK IN TUNNEL

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

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

UP MONITORS WATER LEVEL OF RIVER GANGA

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

Himalayan glaciers melting twice as fast, finds 2019 study

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Melting of Himalayan glaciers has doubled since the start of the 21st century due to rising temperatures, losing over a vertical foot and half of ice each year since 2000 — double the amount of melting that took place from 1975 to 2000.

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

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

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

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

— PTI

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

— NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister



People of Bengal victims of 'Nirmamata', says PM

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, FEB. 7

Kickstarting the BJP's poll campaign in grand style for the forthcoming West Bengal Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday tore into the dynasty politics of ruling Trinamul Congress with a pitch for Hindutva to bring "parivartan" (change). He declared the people of the state would soon remove "Bua-Bhatijabad" and show the "Ram card" to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's party for scoring many "fouls" during its two straight terms in power.

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

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

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, FEB. 7

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

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

hatched to defame the country. The conspirators have not even spared Indian tea. They are trying to defame the image of Indian tea worldwide, systematically."

The Prime Minister further said, "The evidence that we have suggests that the forces are seated abroad, ready to launch an attack on India's tea-based identity." He however asserted, "We will not let this happen."

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

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

SHORT TAKES

2ND SNOWSTORM
BLANKETS
NORTHEAST

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

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

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

FOUR SKIERS
KILLED IN U.S.
AVALANCHE

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.0-MAGNITUDE
QUAKE HITS
PHILIPPINES

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTERCEPTED
HUTHI-LAUNCHED
DRONE: S ARABIA

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

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

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

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

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

Humanitarian groups were deeply opposed to the designation.

Biden: Won't lift
Tehran sanctions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If they want Iran to

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

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

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

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

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

UN's YEMEN
ENVOY MAKES
1ST VISIT TO IRAN

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

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

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

The long-awaited move refocused a spotlight on the world's worst humanitarian crisis and was welcomed by many Yemenis and aid groups that hope the policy change might add to momentum for peace talks.

Griffiths' immediate priority in Tehran is to push a nationwide ceasefire, urgent humanitarian measures and the resumption of the political process, his office added. — AP

PLA gives Covid
vax to Pak Army

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

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

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

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

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

PROTEST IN
DENMARK OVER
COVID CURBS

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

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

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

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



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

— AFP

Thousands protest Myanmar
coup on the streets of Yangon

Yangon, Feb. 7: Tens of thousands of protesters poured on to the streets of Yangon Sunday in the biggest rally yet against the Myanmar coup, as an internet blackout failed to stifle growing outrage at the military's ouster of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Some estimates put the number of protesters in Yangon at 100,000 and there were reports of large demonstrations in other cities, with rallies condemning the coup that brought Myanmar's 10-year experiment with democracy to a crashing halt.

Backed by a din of car horns, chanting protesters in Yangon held up banners saying "Justice for Myanmar", while others waved the signature red flags of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party as they marched to City Hall. "I completely despise the military coup and I am not afraid of a crack-down," said Kyi Phyu Kyaw, a 20-year-old university student.

"I will join every day until Amay Suu (Mother Suu) is freed," Protesters announced that they would return to the streets at

Internet access
partially restored

Yangon, Feb. 7: Internet access was partially restored in Myanmar on Sunday, Netblocks reported, as a nationwide web blockade failed to curb public outrage and protests against the coup that ousted elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

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

ut," the internet monitoring service said on Twitter. Myanmar was plunged into cyber darkness on Saturday at the military's orders. Netblocks said social media platforms remained off limits on Sunday afternoon.

But mobile phone customers using services with MPT, Ooredoo, Telcel and Mytel are now able to access mobile internet data and Wi-Fi. — AFP

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

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

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

Move Pearl killer to
rest house: Sindh govt

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

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

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

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

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

The families of the suspects will also be offered space in Qasr-e-Naz, a federal government owned building in the city along with transport to and from the place of detention, the notification said.

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

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

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

POPE APPOINTS
1ST WOMAN TO
SR. SYNOD POST

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

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

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

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

In winter's quiet, Belarus Oppn prepares new protests

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

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

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

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

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

● HUMAN RIGHTS activists say, more than 30,000 people have been arrested in the monthslong wave of protests, and many of them were beaten. While opposition leaders chose peaceful tactics, police in Belarus intensified their repression and began to use water cannons, gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrations.

"The protests ceased to be an existential threat to Lukashenko's power when

it became clear that people were not ready for violent resistance," said Artem Shraibman, an independent analyst. "Lukashenko opened a new portal to violence — we were shocked and not ready," said Svatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Lukashenko's main challenger on the presidential ballot who fled to Lithuania under pressure just after the election. At one point, as protesters demanding his resignation massed outside the presidential palace, Lukashenko strode the grounds carrying an

automatic rifle. That moment "exposed the tragedy of the situation — he is ready to shoot back, but not to leave," Tsikhanouskaya said. Barbed wire, water cannons, soldiers on the streets, and internet shutdowns have become common in Minsk over the past six months.

Thousands of Belarusians were forced to flee the country. But harsh actions by security forces have only temporarily muted the protests, Shraibman said. "Lukashenko does not have a clear vision of a

future strategy. He doesn't know what to do with the majority of the urban population who have turned their backs on him," he said. A \$1.5 billion loan from the Kremlin and a promise to send in Russian security forces if Lukashenko requests them helped Lukashenko maintain control over the security forces and officials. In return, Lukashenko promised to reform the constitution and transfer a significant part of his powers to parliament and the government, and then leave. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

8 FEBRUARY 2021

Delay in Faruqui release exposes rot in executive

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

Mr Faruqui was arrested on New Year's Day for his alleged remarks that “hurt the sentiments of Hindus” in a stand-up comedy show. The police wasted no time in arresting him based on a complaint lodged by the chief of Hindu Rakshak Sangatan, a Hindutva group, even though later they said there is no electronic evidence that he had indeed made those remarks; in fact he show had not started when they arrested him. That such an allegation with no proof whatsoever has resulted in the incarceration of a citizen for more than a month during the Covid period shows that the government in Madhya Pradesh has little or no idea about

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

the rule of law. The Madhya Pradesh high court, too, showed an equally disdainful disregard for personal liberty when it denied him bail saying there are limits to freedom of speech and expression. It took the Supreme Court to discover that not only were the charges vague but also that the police had not followed the norms the court had laid out while arresting a person and order his release on bail. It also stayed the operation of a production warrant issued by the Uttar Pradesh police in a similar case.

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

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

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

4G in J&K: Long overdue

In a long overdue decision, the authorities in Jammu and Kashmir last Friday revoked their earlier order to cut 4G Internet in the Union territory taken on August 4, 2020, as the government prepared to overturn history and end J&K's constitutional autonomy. Indeed, the decision to cut Net speed should not have been taken in the first place.

It served no purpose. It brought India a bad name in quarters around the world that value democracy. Since Kashmir has been in the eye of the storm for long, international attention was especially drawn to denial of 4G speed and other harsh measures taken after the ending of its constitutional autonomy.

To deprive J&K of 4G speed was unconscionable in the extreme. It constituted a clear violation of the basic rights of the people. Education, health, business, tourism and apple trade (Kashmir's twin lifeline) suffered incalculable harm, leading to rampant loss of employment and other miseries which have been extensively recorded by the Forum for Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir, and others.

The work of the media to bring out the facts on the ground came to a grinding halt since technological change has ensured that low-speed Net connectivity makes news production a near impossibility. Free speech remains a casualty in Kashmir.

The intent of the decision to cut Net speed over 18 long months appeared calculated to punish ordinary people for the sins of the few — the minuscule section of the population influenced by Pakistani and jihadist propaganda. It will be recalled for long that the Supreme Court, from the tone of its pronouncements, appeared all too ready to swallow the government line on harsh measures, including cutting Net speed, being necessitated by security imperatives.

Security in the Valley was pretty normal when Kashmir's autonomy was snatched. Mocking official justifications, it appears to have slipped somewhat. With a Democratic President taking office in the US, in its dealings with Kashmir it would seem that New Delhi would hardly desire to be placed alongside Myanmar's military junta or the Chinese autocracy, especially since its handling of the farmers' agitation is also raising concerns. These offer real clues to the sudden restoration of 4G in J&K, which is correcting a wrong.

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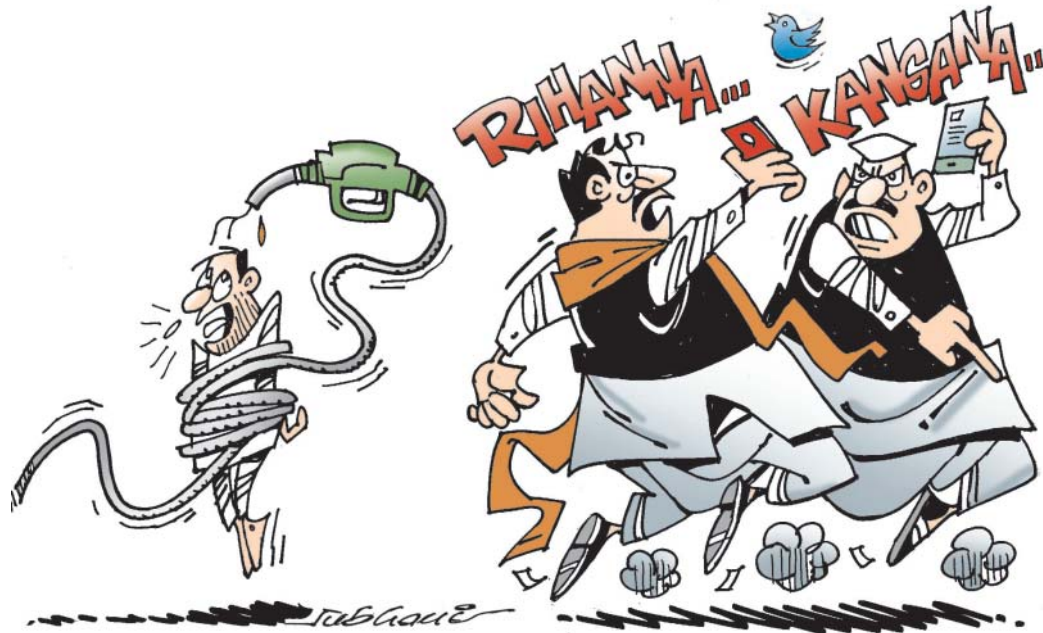
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Subhani



Nirmala's Budget made a virtue out of necessity



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

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

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

The IMF has gone through an ideological somersault after the 2008-09 trans-Atlantic financial crisis, when it looked the other way as Western governments chose to spend their way out of crisis. In the post-Covid season the Fund has actively supported growth-promoting fiscal easing by governments. This change in global fashion would have given Ms Sitharaman additional courage to come out of the fiscal closet, so to speak. Declaring boldly to Parliament a fiscal deficit ratio to national income (gross domestic product) of 9.5 per cent, the finance minister made a virtue out of necessity.

This was the one real departure from past practice, apart from the decision to recreate a new development financial institution and an asset reconstruction company.

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

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

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

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

Declaring boldly a fiscal deficit ratio to national income of 9.5 per cent was the one real departure from past practice, apart from the decision to recreate a new development financial institution and an asset reconstruction company

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

LETTERS

SHAPE OF ECONOMY

The economy of ordinary and salaried class people is in very bad shape (*Economy witnessing V shape recovery: Anurag, DC, Feb. 7*). The price of petrol has crossed ₹90 and other essentials are also expensive. Ministers and their cronies who blindly endorse their views rarely go out to buy household goods. Many firms have cut salaries and only they know what their purse holds.

N. Nagarajan
Hyderabad

FARMERS' RESPONSE

The photograph of farmers putting flowers near spikes fixed by police was touching. It was an excellent response after being lathi-charged and tear-gassed. This is the reason they are gaining sympathy not only in India but globally.

Dr Mohammed Abdul Mujeeb Siddiqui
Hyderabad

VIZAG STEEL PLANT

It is a fact that many PSUs have become white elephants due to defective policies of the governments, lack of work culture among workers and political attitude of trade unions. Therefore, the move to privatise Vizag Steel Plant is logical even though it is painful. Amusingly, political parties maintain double standards whenever it comes to privatisation.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

197 trains cancelled by W. Railway

BOMBAY, FEBRUARY. 7

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

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

Leher Sethi



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

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

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

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

sympathy shifted from the protesters to the police.

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

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

But no one could have predicted what happened next.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

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

* As of Friday/Saturday

Defence, railways among largest buyers on GeM

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

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



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

Sun recalls over 36K cartons of injection in US

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

BHEL reports ₹217-crore loss in Dec. quarter

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



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

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, FEB. 7

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

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

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

Anil Gupta, vice-president financial sector rat-



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

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

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

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

BIZ CONFIDENCE IMPROVES WITH ROLLOUT OF VACCINES: NCAER

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

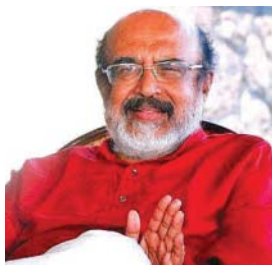
Effective tax devolution to states could be 32%

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

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

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

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



Thomas Issac

ble pool and those revenues directly go to the Centre.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

book profits.

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

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

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

—PTI

FM for scaling up well-run PSUs

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

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

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

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

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



Nirmala Sitharaman

MAJOR PORT TRUSTS, AAI NOT PART OF STRATEGIC SALES PLAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

Kerala asked to start getting land for ₹64K-cr speed rail project

KJ BENNYCHAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 7

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

MALAYSIA TO HOUSE MIGRANT WORKERS IN HOTELS

CHAN TIEN HIN
FEB. 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

GROWING | SCALE

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

Internet start-ups on cusp of listing: HSBC

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

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

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



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

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

E-commerce is the largest opportunity, worth

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

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

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

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

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

addressable markets.

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

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

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

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

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Boxing champ
Leon Spinks dead

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

Spinks, who lived his later years in Las Vegas, died Friday night, according to a release from a public relations firm. He had been battling prostate and other cancers.

His wife, Brenda Glur Spinks, and a few close friends and other family members were by his side when he passed away. A lovable heavyweight with a drinking problem, Spinks beat Ali by decision in a 15-round fight in 1978 to win the title. He was unranked at the time, and picked as an opponent because Ali was looking for an easy fight. — AP

Moseley killed
in road accident

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

He was 63 years old.

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

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

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

Hyd, North-East
play stalemate

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

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

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

Ankita fifth India
girl in Slam field

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

The year's first Grand Slam starts here on Monday.

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

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

Live on TV

TENNIS

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

CRICKET

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

WWE

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

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Eng bring out Bess

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

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 7

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

It was a calculated assault from Pant.

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

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

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

Dismissing Kohli
was special for Bess

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Off-spinner Dom Bess' four-wicket haul helped England tighten the screws on India after pacer Jofra Archer removed both openers. Bess, who broke India's backbone by taking the wickets of Virat Kohli, Ajinkya

Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara and Rishabh Pant, said dismissing the Indian captain was special.

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

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings (overnight 555/8): Rory Burns c Pant b Ashwin 33, Dominic Sibley lbw Bumrah 87, Daniel Lawrence lbw Bumrah 0, Joe Root lbw Nadeem 218, Ben Stokes c Pujara b Nadeem 82, Ollie Pope lbw Ashwin 34, Jos Buttler b Ishant 30, Dominic Bess lbw Bumrah 34, Jofra Archer b Ishant 0, Jack Leach not out 14, James Anderson b Ashwin 1. Extras (b-7, lb-17, w-1, nb-20) 45. **Total (all out in 190.1 over) 578.**

FOW: 1-63, 2-63, 3-263, 4-387, 5-473, 6-477, 7-525, 8-525, 9-567.

Bowling: Ishant Sharma 27-7-52-2, Jasprit Bumrah 36-7-84-3, Ravichandran Ashwin 55.1-5-146-3, Shahbaz Nadeem 44-4-167-2, Washington Sundar 26-2-98-0, Rohit Sharma 2-0-7-0.

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

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

Djokovic targets
ninth Oz crown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OSAKA, BARTY STAND IN
SERENA'S SLAM PATH

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

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

CHARISMATIC RONALDO
LIFTS JUVE TO 3RD SPOT

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

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

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

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

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

EVERTON STRIKE LATE TO DENY MAN UTD

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

MAJESTIC MAYERS
LEADS WINDIES
TO SHOCK WIN

Chittagong (Bangladesh), Feb. 7: Kyle Mayers scored a stunning double hundred on his debut as West Indies shocked Bangladesh by three wickets in the first Test on Sunday.

Mayers hit an unbeaten 210 from 310 balls — with 20 fours and seven sixes — to guide his side to 395-7 with just nine balls left on the final day.

West Indies, who are on tour without most of their first choice players, beat the best run chase in Asia, set by Sri Lanka who hit 388 to beat Zimbabwe by four wickets in Colombo in 2017.

Mayers, the second West Indies player to get a double hundred on his debut after Laurence Rowe and sixth overall, was brilliantly aided by fellow debutant Nkrumah Bonner, who hit 86.

— AFP

Brief scores: Bangladesh 430 & 223/8 decl lost to West Indies 259 & 395/7 (Mayers 210 not out, Bonner 86, Miraz 4-113).

Pujara confident of India
putting up a decent total

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 7

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

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

In the recent past,

NUMBERS GAME

ENGLAND'S SECOND HIGHEST TOTAL ON INDIAN SOIL

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

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

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

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

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

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

ble of that."

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

Deepthi dashes to bag silver

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 7

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

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

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

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



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

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

In an interesting development,

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

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

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

