

SHORT TAKES

COVID-19 MAY AFFECT CARDIAC HEALTH

FROM PAGE 1

"Blood vessels are inflamed in Covid-19 patients, which means vascular walls become thick and their inner diameter gets restricted. This is the reason why the resting pulse rate in almost every Covid-19 patient goes up post immediate recovery," a doctor explained.

What this means is that the heart begins to work harder than before exposure to Covid-19, resulting in increased pulse rate. It has been found that the heartbeat can swing wildly too, the doctor said, recommending that post survivors should ideally begin taking more interest in their cardiac health.

"We have seen vascular constriction more often than not in children who suffered from Covid-19," a doctor told *Deccan Chronicle*, adding what this means to the quality of life of the children is something he was worried to even speculate about.

"We are also seeing cases among Covid-19 infected women who are developing complications during pregnancies, as well as pregnant women losing their babies because of the vascular inflammation-related issues," the doctor said.

If the governments do not start educating people at least on these aspects, if not the other commonly lingering effects such as fatigue, bouts of breathlessness and sore throat among other Covid-19 symptoms, then we are looking at a health care time bomb that could well explode in the next couple of years when the yet-to-be-clearly-understood near- and mid-term impacts of Covid-19 on general health begin making themselves felt, doctors said.

KADAPA TO BE MADE HQ OF WALAMTARI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 24

AP government has decided to make Kadapa headquarter of state-level Water and Land Management Training and Research Institute (WALAMTARI). The institute will also have regional centres at Nellore, Amravati and Visakhapatnam. The state government has directed Department of Water Resources to issue orders in this regard. WALAMTARI was originally established at Hyderabad in 1982. After partition of Andhra Pradesh, the institute has gone to Telangana. This has led to non-availability of a proper training and research centre for water and land management.

Following this, the state government has decided to set up a state-level institute, apart from three regional WALAMTARI centres in Andhra Pradesh. The centre has also stepped in to provide necessary support required by the state government.

RAMBABU CHALLENGES PK TO FACE POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

YSR Congress MLA Anna Rambabu challenged Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan to face fresh election with him and wanted to know if he will wind up Jana Sena should the actor face electoral defeat.

He refuted allegations of Pawan Kalyan about him and his party being responsible for the death of JS activist Bandla Vengaiah Naidu and claimed that he is ready to face any investigation.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, the MLA challenged Pawan Kalyan to contest in Giddalur and stated that he would surrender in court if his involvement in Vengaiah's suicide was proved.

Rambabu wanted to know why Pawan Kalyan was not believing even after Vengaiah's family members had been saying that he did not commit suicide. If Pawan Kalyan does not trust the family, they can undergo narcotics tests, he said.

Rambabu stated that it was irresponsible of Pawan Kalyan to criticize him without knowing what was going on at the field level. He questioned Pawan Kalyan about his silence when atrocities were taking place during TD reign.

Marching in step



Policemen march during a rehearsal at the IGMC Stadium to practice for the Republic Day celebrations, in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

SEC not concerned for staff: Union

Says poll panel chief putting staff lives at risk by scheduling polls amid vaccination drive

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

AP Government Employees Federation chairman K. Venkatrami Reddy on Sunday clarified that he had only spoken about the rights enshrined in the Constitution during emergency conditions and had not made personal remarks against anyone.

He was reacting to State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar lodging a complaint with DGP Gautam Sawang about a threat to his life following the remarks of Venkatrami Reddy.

The employees leader had made the remarks while strongly opposing the scheduling of local body elections next month. Addressing a press meet here on Sunday, Venkatrami Reddy alleged that political leaders were distorting his comments although he had not mentioned anything against the SEC. He hit out at Ramesh Kumar for "not caring about the lives of employees."

Condemning the SEC's alleged "hypocrisy," he said, "The SEC addressed



AP Government Employees Federation chairman K. Venkatrami Reddy and others address the media in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— DC

a press conference which was attended by not more than 10-15 people. Despite there being a distance of at least 15 feet between press personnel and him, he chose to be surrounded by a glass shield to protect himself," Venkatrami Reddy said.

"On the other hand, without paying heed to what the government is saying, he has decided to call for the local body polls, thereby putting the lives of thousands of

employees in danger. Aren't our lives valuable," he asked.

Venkatrami Reddy recalled that government employees had joined the Nava Nirmana Deeksha when the TD government had let go of the demand for special category status and opted for the special package offered by the NDA government at the Centre.

Employees had joined the satyagraha deeksha when the TD government

had demanded the special category status. He said that the SEC can conduct the elections with the employees who are willing to work.

Questioning the timing of the notification, the employees' leader said "If the SEC was so committed to empowering the local bodies, why didn't he call for polls when they fell due in 2018? Even now, all we are asking is for him to delay the polls by 60 days so that all the employees are vaccinated before they are asked to interact with thousands of citizens as part of election duties. We aren't against the election. We just want to be safe."

Responding to the SEC referring to elections being held in other states, Reddy said, "That was done at a time when none had a clue about when the vaccine would be out. But now the process to vaccinate employees has already started. Therefore, we are requesting the SEC to delay the polls by two months but to no avail. The SEC is acting at the behest of forces behind him."

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

Yanamala Ramakrishnudu, Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council, on Sunday asserted that it is the constitutional responsibility of AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan to restore "rule of law" and prevent breakdown of administrative machinery.

Ramakrishnudu said it is unprecedented that government officials and employees are openly refusing to take up election duties. He observed that in no other state had employees publicly defied a decision taken by the State Election Commission (SEC) on holding of polls to local bodies.

Ramakrishnudu wanted the Governor to invoke Article 243K (3) and conduct elections towards ensuring "self-rule" in local bodies. He charged that there is constitutional breakdown caused by the

Desam wants Guv. to ensure polls are held

● **RAMAKRISHNUDU SAID** it is unprecedented that government officials and employees were refusing to take up election duties. He observed that in no other state had employees publicly defied a decision taken by the SEC.

"fascist" regime of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. "The YSRC government should govern by rule of law and not whims and fancies of one individual," he said.

Accusing the CM of having no respect for democracy, Ramakrishnudu said Jagan Mohan Reddy was undermining the Constitution, judiciary, legislature and even the media. He alleged that false cases are being filed against media personnel to terrify them. There is no "Grama Swaraj" in villages, which YSRC party workers are domineering, he stated.

TECH | THAT

New codes confuse parents during counselling

Few take new BTech courses, students opt for old favourites

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

Students and parents have preferred conventional engineering courses over emerging technologies. This is an aspect that has clearly emerged from the available trends of engineering seats being allotted in AP during the first phase of seat allotments.

The regular BTech CSE (computer science engineering) is in huge demand. New courses in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, data science, machine learning, internet of things and cyber security have not found many takers.

Ninety-four per cent of CSE seats have been filled. Lack of awareness about the benefits of new courses and no information with regard to available job opportunities are causes for the lukewarm response, observers say.

Of the total 22,672 BTech CSE seats, 21,312 seats have already gone in the first phase of allotments itself, which reflects the demand for this course.

In contrast, there are 2,178 seats in computer science, artificial intelli-

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● Ninety-four per cent of CSE seats have been filled in the first phase of admissions.

● In contrast, there are 2,178 seats in computer science, artificial intelligence and machine learning. But only 1,346 of them have been filled, according to the data on admissions after the first phase.

● CSE cyber security has 633 seats in which 401 have been filled.

137 seats are available in B.Tech artificial intelligence of which 76 have been filled.

With regard to BTech cyber security, 43 seats of total 115 seats have been filled.

Only CSE IOT, blockchain technology with cyber security have got a good response, as 253 of total of 275 seats have been already been taken in the first phase of admissions.

Educational experts feel parents and students are confused over the codes. For example, CSE Cyber Security is shown as CSEC, CSE Data Science as CSED and CSE Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning as CSM.

Experts point out that engineering streams are

changing. In the coming years, there will be a good demand for AI, data science, ITO, cyber security, machine learning and blockchain technology.

K.V.K. Rao, secretary, Federation of Self-Financing Technical Institutes, said the main cause is absence of knowledge among students and parents about emerging engineering streams. He said they had written a letter about changing of the codes into an easier form to highlight awareness about modern courses, which are future of the world.

Students S. Tharannum, P. Gayatri and others, who have opted for CSE, told *Deccan Chronicle* they can study all subjects thoroughly in CSE. They can then opt for specialised courses in their higher semesters during the third year through Choice-Based Credit Systems (CBCS). They said they can take emerging technology courses under CBCS.

The students also point out that presently, majority of corporate companies are choosing CSE students compared to students of emerging courses.

EX-PRINCIPAL, WIFE 'SACRIFICE' DAUGHTERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 24

In what was claimed to be a case of human sacrifice, a former college principal and his wife allegedly bludgeoned their two daughters, who had completed their post-graduation, to death with a blunt like object at their residence in Sivalayam street of Madanapalli town in Chittoor district late on Sunday night.

According to the police, the accused couple Padmaja and Purushottam Naidu, both in their 50s, killed their daughters Alaikhya, 27, and Sai Divya, 22, graduation. Naidu was a former principal of a women's degree college in the town.

On Sunday night, police raided the couple's house in Shivalayam street after a tip-off that some strange sounds were coming from there. When police forcefully entered the house, Alaikhya and Sai Divya were found lying dead one in the puja room and another just outside with their body covered with red-coloured cloth.

As per Madanapalli DSP Ravimanohara Chary, police learnt during their preliminary investigation that the family had superstitious beliefs and were allegedly involved in occult practices.

"During the course of preliminary investigation, the accused have confessed to have made human sacrifice. They narrated a story and requested us to leave their house in the night and come back on Monday morning to see their daughters alive. They asked us to give them some time to perform some occult puja to bring their daughters back to life," DSP Chary told this newspaper.

The DSP said, "The couple told us that miracles were occurring in their house for the past few years. They said they had received a divine message to sacrifice their daughters, as Kali Yuga was going to end on Sunday night and they will be reborn on Monday in the beginning of Satya Yuga. They asked us to leave our footwear outside as the house had been cleaned after 'evil' left the premises."

"We are taking the couple into custody and a case will be registered. The bodies were sent to the government hospital for autopsy and investigation is on," he said.

VEERRAJU AND PAWAN MEET FOR LS BY POLL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

BJP state president Somu Veerraju met Jana Sena chief K. Pawan Kalyan at the latter's home here on Sunday and discussed strategies to win the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection.

The two parties in the alliance have not finalised a candidate. During a recent meeting with JS leaders and activists in Tirupati, Kalyan sought to field his party's candidate. Pawan had expressed dissatisfaction over attitude of the BJP vis-a-vis candidate selection.

According to reports, Pawan had claimed his party had good support in the constituency and was ready to campaign if the BJP agreed to field a JS candidate.

At the meeting here, the two leaders touched on the idea of fielding a common candidate. They agreed to evolve a consensus through more meetings. Both stressed on the need for united efforts by BJP and JS to win power in AP by 2024.

Veerraju later said the talks were fruitful and a win would help the party confidently march ahead for the 2024 hustings.

Kalyan appealed to the youths to contest the panchayat elections and work for development of villages.

IN BRIEF

TTD PROPERTIES
IN TIRUPATI GET
PROTECTIONDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 24

The immovable assets of TTD located at various places in Tirupati got a foolproof protection cover with signboards and fencing arrangements having made by the TTD Engineering wing under the instructions of Sada Bhargavi, Joint Executive Officer of Health & Education of TTD, who also took charge of the estates wing.

During her recent inspections, the JEO observed that there is no proper fencing and signboards with TTD logo and details available at TTD properties and lands.

She directed the officials concerned to take immediate action of erecting the fencing and signboards at all TTD properties to protect them from encroachments. A task force team consisting staffs from Estates, Engineering and Vigilance & Security Departments visited the places on Sunday and erected proper fencing and signboards.

Among the 22 venues, eight properties are located at Bairagipattana and Kesavayanaagunta while the remaining 14 properties at Vaikuntapuram and M.R. Palli areas. The extent of the area of these immovable properties is 54, 728.87 sq.ft with a market value of around ₹14.8 crore.

CPI DEMANDS
R&R PACKAGE
FOR OUSTEESDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 24

The CPI East Godavari District Secretary T. Madhu demanded the state government should give a resettlement and Rehabilitation package to the youths who completed 18 years of age at the end of December, 2020 instead of 2012.

He told the reporters in Rampachodavaram on Sunday that the Polavaram Project is a major project in the country and the people of 34 villages in Devipatnam mandal are sacrificing their lands and houses for the project.

However, the state government has failed in providing R&R package to the Polavaram Project Victims and the government could not create infrastructure facilities so far. He said that now the officials are exhorting pressures on the Polavaram Project victims to vacate their villages without completing the Rehabilitation Colonies.

He said that the CPI would launch an agitation programme from February first week to sort out the issues of Polavaram Project victims. The Rights Forum President Balu Akkisa said that the officials are forcing the polavaram project victims to vacate their villages and sending them to Rehabilitation colonies which were not completed yet.

HOUSE SITES OF
CLASS IV STAFF
ENCROACHEDDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 24

House sites allotted to class IV employees in Pulivendula town of Kadapa district near the proposed new bus complex have been encroached. The house sites were distributed to these employees way back in 2009, when late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh.

While most house sites remained vacant, some of the beneficiaries laid foundations but could not build their houses. A few days ago, the state government proposed to build a large bus complex near these house sites. Following this, value of lands in the area increased enormously. The vacant house plots belonging to class IV employees caught the eye of some land grabbers. Since past two days, these lands have been flattened using excavators. The foundations laid by beneficiaries have also been removed.

This has caused concern among beneficiary class IV employees. MLC Mareddy Ravindranath Reddy (B. Tech Ravi) pointed out. He has accused YSR Congress party leaders of occupying the lands without being sensitive about late Rajasekhara Reddy, father of current Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, allotting the land to beneficiaries.

B.Tech Ravi, who belongs to Telugu Desam, maintained that none of these lands are private but government land.

Students march to support
farmers' stir over new laws

JNU Students' Union president Aishe Ghosh leads rally in Vizag

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 24

Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) president Aishe Ghosh has said the agitation against farm laws would continue and this was time to oppose the anti-people and privatisation policies of the Modi government.

Addressing a rally of students, Left activists and others at Gandhi Park on Sunday, Aishe Ghosh said a united fight would be waged against the 'anti-farmer' policies of the Union Government that was "aiming to promote the interests of the corporates at the cost of the farmers." Ghosh, a national executive member of the SFI, said the nation was going through turbulent times and called upon the people to continue their struggle against the Modi government till the farm laws were repealed.

She said there was growing unrest all over the country as the BJP-RSS was fanning communal

passions. "Those raising their voice against the draconian laws are being killed, women are assaulted as never before and the BJP leaders are supporting the perpetrators of such crimes." She recalled how a journalist from Kerala, who had gone to cover the Hathras incident, was jailed under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

She said the nation was witnessing an Emergency-like rule for the last six years. "All the policies of the Modi government are anti-people." The NDA government has been "conspiring to handover public sector undertakings like railways, ports, banks and insurance companies to the corporate sector. This would harm the employment sector and public service."

She asked how BJP and RSS, which were "supporters of the British Raj," were celebrating the centenary celebrations of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who had fought against the British.



Thousands of students from various schools and colleges hold the national flags as they take part in Students' March in support of farmers under the aegis of SFI near Asilmetta in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

Indian vaccines
safe: TAMILISAIDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 24

Telangana state Governor Tamilisai Soundarajan said vaccines made in India were safe and that people need not be afraid to take them.

The TS Governor was speaking to the media after she and her family members had darshan of Lord Venkateshwara at Tirumala on Sunday. She was presented with Srivari prasadam at Ranganayakula Mandapam by TTD additional executive officer A.V. Dharma Reddy.

The TS Governor appealed to frontline workers to take the vaccine without any hesitation because it was developed and cleared as per all international safety norms. She said, "We all must be proud because we are not dependent on any other country for the vaccine. Our vaccine is safe."

Later, she attended the golden jubilee celebrations of SV Medical College here. She offered prayers in the temple of Sri Padmavathi Devi at Tiruchanoor and Lord Sri Kalahasteeswara in Srikalahasti.

Man fatally hit
after dispute
over fish curryDC CORRESPONDENT
PATAPATNAM
(SRIKAKULAM), JAN. 24

A fight over sharing of fish curry led to the death of a 60-year-old man in Avaling village in this district. The incident took place on January 21 and information spread a while later.

Pathapatnam CI Ravi Prasad said Ganta Panduranga Rao from Kakinada came to Avaling three months ago to work as labourer for erecting a drinking water tank near Buditi in Saravakota mandal. He stayed in a rented house.

He went to his hometown for Sankranti and on return brought his acquaintance, Palamuri Prasad, 60, from Kattamuru village in East Godavari district.

At night, Prasad along with two other locals made fish curry for dinner and consumed alcohol. A dispute arose

● A CASE HAS been registered against Panduranga Rao and five others from Avaling village who helped him in the burial.

between Panduranga Rao and Prasad over the fish curry. Panduranga in an inebriated condition hit Prasad's head with a wooden log.

Fearing he was dead, the accused took the body in a garbage tricycle with the help of local friends and buried it near a lake. Villagers who got wind of the incident informed the police.

A complaint filed by VRO Appa Rao, after which Prasad's body was exhumed on Saturday in the presence of tahsildar Rajamohan and it was later taken to the Government Hospital in Pathapatnam for post mortem.

46-YEAR-OLD
MAN DIES IN
ROAD MISHAPDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 24

A 46-year-old person, S. Veeranna of Mallampudi village, in Rajanagar mandal of East Godavari District died as his bike hit a lorry which was stopped on the National Highway near Z. Ragampeta village in Gandepalli mandal. According to the Gandepalli police, Veeranna was coming to his relatives house in Jagampeta by bike, he hit the lorry and died on the spot.

IDENTITY | CRISIS

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM,
JAN. 24

Devanga Sankshema Sangham has urged central and state governments to recognise "Devala" as a separate religion. At its meeting held at Rajamahendravaram here on Sunday, it also wanted the state government to set up a Devanga Dharmika Parishad. The meeting was presided over by sangham East Godavari district president Tuthika Srinivasa Viswanath, who asserted

There is an ancient Peetham of Devangas in Hampi of Karnataka state

Devangas urge govt to recognise their religion

that Devala religion is more ancient than Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Mention of this religion can even be found in ancient Hindu scriptures. Manu Smruthi has an elaborate description of it and there are many evidences with regard to this religion.

Srinivasa Viswanath said Gurus of Devangas are Devala Maharshi and Devadatta. The Devanga caste used to stitch garments for celestials. This is the reason why they are known as "Devangas". There is an ancient

● Devala religion is more ancient than Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Mention of this religion can even be found in ancient Hindu scriptures. Manu Smruthi has an elaborate description of it and there are many evidences with regard to this religion.

Peetham of Devangas in Hampi of Karnataka state. Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Dayananda Puri Swamiji is the seer of this Peetham. Such Peethams are spread all across the country.

The Devanga proponent pointed out that customs and traditions of Devangas are quite different compared to other reli-

gions. Devangas wear "Linga Dharana" and worship Goddess Chowdeeswari Devi and Lord Sri Ramalingeswara Chowdeshwari. Their temples are located wherever weaving community lives in large numbers. Srinivasa Viswanath underlined that only weavers perform poojas in these temples and not

AP all set to deliver
PDS to doorstepsDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 24

The East Godavari Administration is gearing up to distribute ration at the doorsteps of cardholders from February 1 through newly introduced mobile vans. Ration dealers will collect the stocks from mandal-level supply points and deliver them to mobile vans.

In the mobile van, a helper will deliver the ration to homes of the PDS beneficiaries. The ward or village volunteer will take the fingerprints through E-PoS machines and then deliver the ration. If the lanes are too narrow for mobile vans to pass, there will be a fixed point in the neighbourhood where ration would be distributed.

If the beneficiary is not at home, there is alternative arrangement to deliver ration to him/her the next day. "All the ration cardholder numbers have been mapped with the E-PoS machines. As per the mapping, the mobile vans will go to respective door numbers and deliver the goods," said district civil supplies officer P. Prasada Rao.

He said if there is any inconvenience at implementation stage, it would be rectified. Ration dealers are not enthused, though. They say every ration shop is

● In the mobile van, a helper will deliver the ration to homes of the PDS beneficiaries. The ward or village volunteer will take the fingerprints through E-PoS machines and then deliver the ration.

located with a radius of one-km and the cardholders are getting the ration without hassles. So, why mobile vans, they ask. "Moreover, this would be an additional burden on the government. Even with the new system, the black-marketing in ration rice can't be curbed as the beneficiaries mostly want super-fine quality rice. "The relation of cardholder and the dealer would be disconnected from February 1," said a ration shop dealer.

These dealers also expressed concern over the order for giving gunny bags back to the government. "So far, the gunny bags were being used by dealers for ration distribution purpose. The government GO is not justified," they said and proposed that the government withdraw the GO. "This is an additional revenue to ration shop dealers for their survival," said Chakradhara Rao, the rationshop dealers association Rajamahendravaram division working president.

No new Corona
deaths in APDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

No new Coronavirus-related deaths have been reported in the state on Sunday. However, 158 new infections have been recorded during the past 24 hours, taking the total positive cases to 8,87,010.

The number of recoveries increased to 8,78,387, with 155 patients getting healed during the past 24 hours, taking the recovery rate to 99.03 percent. The number of active cases in the state is 1,476.

As many as 44,382 samples have been tested for Covid-19 during the past 24 hours. Only 0.36 percent of them turned positive. The overall positivity rate of 1.287 crore samples has come down to 6.89 percent.

West Godavari district reported 24 new infections,

the highest single-day tally among various districts of Andhra Pradesh, followed by Visakhapatnam 22, Krishna 20, Chittoor 16, Guntur 15, East Godavari 14 and Anantapur 10 new cases. The remaining six districts reported single-digit infections, with Prakasam reporting 9 cases, Nellore 8, Srikakulam 8, Kurnool 6, Kadapa 4 and Vizianagaram 2 new positive cases.

East Godavari is on top with a total 1,24,176 Corona cases, followed by West Godavari 94,184, Chittoor 86,944, Guntur 75,398, Anantapur 67,614, Nellore 62,289, Prakasam 62,159, Kurnool 60,776, Visakhapatnam 59,642, Kadapa 55,216, Krishna 48,490, Srikakulam 46,099 and Vizianagaram 41,128 positive cases in all.

Lighter creates
flutter in ArakuDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN 24

A cigarette lighter shaped as pistol created a flutter in Araku Valley on Sunday morning. The lighter was noticed by a shopkeeper during a clash and called in the police.

Police said four visitors from Visakhapatnam arrived in the valley in a car and went around for purchase of liquor, eatables and cigarettes. One of them who went to a pan shop to buy cigarettes engaged in a fight with the shopkeeper. The locals tried to pacify both but later beat up the youth. When the locals

twisted both his arms to control him, the shopkeeper saw him taking out what looked like a pistol and called the police. The locals ran away from the spot fearing the man in a drunken state might resort to firing.

Sub-inspector of the Araku Valley police station rushed to the spot and took all the four to the station. The man with the "pistol" told the police that it was just a lighter he had purchased online recently for ₹900. On inspection, police noticed that the lighter was not working properly.

Police filed a drunken-drive case against the man.

SHORT TAKES

RAM TEMPLE IN 3YRS; TO COST ₹1,100 CR: TRUST

Mumbai, Jan. 24: The Ram temple in Ayodhya will be built in around three years and the construction cost of the project will exceed ₹1,100 crore, a prominent functionary of the temple trust has said.

"The main temple will be built in three to three and a half years and will cost ₹300-400 crore. The expenditure on the development of the entire 70 acre land there will exceed ₹1,100 crore," said Swami Govind Dev Giri Maharaj, treasurer of Ram Janmabhoomi Tirath Kshetra Nyas.

He said he arrived at these figures after consulting experts involved in the Ram temple construction project. The Nyas (trust) has not come out with an official statement so far on the expenditure involved in the project, he said while talking to a TV channel.

"It was possible for us to raise funds (for the temple construction) from some corporate people. Some (corporate) families had approached us, requesting us to hand over the (temple) designs and assuring us they will complete the temple project, but I humbly declined that request," he said.

CENTRE OFFERS JABS TO ENVOYS POSTED IN INDIA

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 24

The Indian government on Sunday offered vaccination against Covid-19 to foreign diplomats posted in India. Embassies have been asked to give the names of diplomats and their family members who want to be vaccinated by Friday though no dates for their vaccination has been given so far.

Over 16.13 lakh healthcare and frontline workers have been vaccinated till date. On Sunday, the ninth day of the vaccination drive, 31,466 people were vaccinated in five states. Union health ministry officials said 10 cases of AEFI were reported on Sunday. India on Sunday reported 14,849 cases of Covid-19 and 155 deaths. In the coming week the government plans to intensify its immunisation coverage to complete its target of inoculating 3 crore healthcare and frontline workers well in time so that the vaccination drive for the rest of the population can be rolled out. It is expected that the diplomatic missions will be covered in the 2nd phase.

In a letter to all diplomatic missions, the MEA said that "as a gesture of goodwill and solidarity," the Government of India is considering to offer Covid-19 vaccination to "eligible foreign diplomats and their family members" accredited to all diplomatic missions, including consulates, United Nations and its specialised agencies, and other international organisations based in India.

FIR FILED AGAINST TANDAV ACTORS IN MP, K'TAKA

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
with agency inputs
BHOPAL/BENGALURU JAN. 24

A case was registered against actors Saif Ali Khan and Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub in a police station in Datia in Madhya Pradesh late on Saturday evening for their roles in OTT web series *Tandav* which sparked a furor among Hindu bodies for "hurting religious sentiments".

A FIR was filed against the two actors in Kotwali police station in district headquarters of Datia following a complaint lodged by the local unit of Hindu Jagran Manch, police said on Sunday.

Earlier on January 21, a delegation of the outfit led by Ravi Sharma filed a complaint with local sub-divisional officer of police Sumit Agrawal saying that the two actors slighted Hindu deities in the film.

Meanwhile, a case has also been registered by the Bengaluru police against the cast and crew of *Tandav*.

Based on a complaint by one Kiran Aradhya, the case was registered on Friday against *Tandav* director Ali Abbas Zafar, producer Farhan Akhtar, actors Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub and Saif Ali Khan and the head of India Originals of Amazon Prime Video, Aparna Purohit.

Cases have been registered under section 295A, 298, 153A and 34 of the IPC for insulting religious belief and promoting religious enmity between groups.

Tractors converge on Delhi for rally

25,000 tractors from UP, U'khand; 12,000 from Amritsar, 10,000 from Doaba to take part

Chandigarh/Ghaziabad, Jan. 24: More batches of farmers from Punjab on Sunday set out for Delhi to participate in the proposed tractor parade on January 26.

Farmer unions protesting the Centre's three farm laws had said they would go ahead with their tractor parade in Delhi on Republic Day. They had announced to take out the tractor parade on the Outer Ring Road in Delhi. A batch of 500 tractor-trolleys left Amritsar and several groups of growers from Phagwara, Hoshiarpur and other places of Punjab moved towards the national capital to take part of the tractor parade, farmer leaders said.

Kisan Sangharsh Union leader Baldev Singh Verka in Amritsar said, "Today as many as 500 more tractor trolleys left for Delhi to join the tractor parade. Each tractor-trolley will carry 20 persons along with bedding and eating arrangement for fourteen hour-long journey to Delhi".

He said on Saturday, around seven hundred tractor trolleys had left for Delhi. Gurbachan Singh Chhaba, spokesperson of the Kisan Sangharsh Committee said so far, around 12,000 tractor and trolleys had already left Amritsar and Tarn districts. While most of the tractor convoys from Doaba region had left for Delhi on Friday and Saturday, many left on Sunday also to take part in



Tractors arrive for farmers at Singhu border in New Delhi on Sunday, during an ongoing protest against the new farm laws.

the tractor parade, said Satnam Singh Sahni, General Secretary Bharti Kisan Union (Doaba). Sahni, who returned here from Delhi's Singhu border on Saturday night to further mobilise farmers for the parade. He said a total of around 10,000 tractors from Doaba region would join the parade to highlight agitating farmers' demands and the "stubborn" attitude of the central government towards them.

Around 25,000 tractors from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand will participate in the 'kisan parade' on January 26, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said on Saturday.

Farmers moving towards UP Gate from the two states on their tractor trol-

leys were intercepted by police in different districts but farmers will arrive here at every cost, he said.

"Around 25,000 tractors would arrive here and a tractor rally would be brought out on Republic Day. Apart from the districts of western Uttar Pradesh, farmers would take out rallies in every district," Tikait said in a statement. "No political person will be allowed to participate," the BKU national spokesperson said. District administrations are sending notices to farmers and mounting pressure on them not to participate in the rallies citing Covid-19 norms and section 144 of the CrPC, he claimed.

Meanwhile, authorities in some Haryana districts close to the national capi-

tal have issued advisories against unnecessary travel towards Delhi over the next couple of days in view of a January 26 tractor parade by protesting farmer unions.

On Sunday, thousands of tractors were seen plying on the highways in the state heading towards Delhi, resulting in traffic congestion at several points on the GT Road, a police officer in Karnal said.

The Haryana Police issued an advisory stating that in view of the security and traffic arrangements for Republic Day and the proposed tractor parade, there would be disruptions in vehicular movement on the national highway from Karnal and Rohtak towards Delhi during January 25-27.

— PTI

Farmers tableaux to depict protest

New Delhi, Jan. 24: The Republic Day tractor parade by agitating farmers will feature a number of tableaux from across states depicting village life, the protest against the Centre's contentious farm laws, and hailing their courage, according to organisers.

A farmer leader said that directions were issued to all organisations participating in the protest to prepare tableaux for the parade. "Around one lakh

tractor-trolleys from across the country will participate in the parade. Around 30 per cent of these will have tableaux on different themes, including the history of the farmers' movement in India, the role of women farmers and farming practices followed in different states," he said.

A few children from Maharashtra's Vidarbha region have also planned a tableau on farmer suicides.

— PTI

Maha farmers to march to Capital

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 24

Protesting against the Centre's farm laws, thousands of farmers from various districts of Maharashtra reached Mumbai on Sunday via a vehicle march. They are expected to march towards Delhi to support the protesting farmers on Republic Day.

The Nashik to Mumbai rally is part of the call given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM),

which is leading the protests in Delhi. The farmers have started their statewide vehicle march from Nashik to Mumbai on Saturday.

Arriving in cars, jeeps, vans and trucks flying red flags, the farmers reached the city's iconic Azad Maidan, where they will hold a massive rally on January 25 to protest the controversial agriculture laws. The rally will then march to the Raj Bhawan and submit a memorandum to the Governor.

J&K ENCOUNTER: ARMY CAPTAIN NAMED IN CHARGESHEET

Shopian, Jan. 24: The Army captain involved in the fake encounter in Kashmir's Shopian district last July and two other civilian accused haven't provided any information about the source of weapons planted on the three slain youths and had also attempted to destroy the evidence, a police charge sheet said.

Captain Bhoopendra Singh had also provided wrong information to his superiors and the police about the recovery made during the staged encounter, the charge sheet filed by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Jammu and Kashmir Police before the chief judicial magistrate here said.

The case relates to the July 18, 2020 encounter in Shopian's Amshipura in which three youths were killed and dubbed as terrorists. Later, the Army ordered a Court of Inquiry after reports appeared on social media that the three youths were innocent.

"No leads regarding the source of illegal weapons as illegally arranged by accused" for planting on the bodies were provided, the charge sheet said.

"By staging the encounter," the three accused "have purposefully destroyed evidence or real crime that they have committed and also have (been) purposefully projecting false information as part of a criminal conspiracy hatched between them with the motive to grab a prize money of ₹20 lakh," it said.

— PTI



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during his election campaign at Poondurai in Erode district on Sunday, ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

Stalin deceiving people, says CM

Coimbatore, Jan. 24: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Sunday accused DMK president M.K. Stalin of deception for posing with Lord Muruga's spear like weapon, 'Vel' and said the divine symbol has come to leader of opposition's notice since Assembly elections were round the corner.

On the second day of his campaign here, the AIADMK leader referred to a photograph of the DMK chief holding the Vel alleging it was an act of deceit. The AIADMK respected all religions equally, but it was not the case with the DMK which involved in 'deception,' in such matters, he alleged.

Accusing Stalin of 'deceit,' the Chief Minister claimed Stalin spoke one thing for the outside world but in his

MODIJI HAS BROUGHT GROWTH IN GDP (GAS, DIESEL, PETROL): RAHUL

Chennai, Jan. 24: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday attacked the Centre over rise in fuel prices, saying people are suffering due to inflation, while the Modi government is busy in tax collection," he alleged.

The increase in prices took the petrol price in Delhi to ₹85.70 per litre and in Mumbai to ₹92.28. Diesel rate climbed to ₹75.88 a litre in the Delhi and to ₹82.66 per litre in Mumbai, the price data showed.

— PTI

heart of hearts he knew it was not his conviction. "The God will not grant you boon if you only

receive Lord Muruga's Vel. The boon will be only for the AIADMK."

The DMK has for a long

time been accused of offending Hindu beliefs and sentiments by the BJP and 'Hindu Munnani,' a noted Sangh Parivar outfit in Tamil Nadu.

Recently, Stalin had slammed the BJP and Munnani for trying to build a 'perception' that his party was against the Hindus. "It is not the truth," the DMK chief had said. Palaniswami alleged, "Since elections are round the corner, the Vel is visible to his (Stalin's) eyes only now and till now it was not visible to him."

"The God will give you (DMK) appropriate punishment through the elections," he said.

On Saturday, DMK workers had presented a glittering Vel made of silver to Stalin at a party's rural outreach programme in Tiruvallur district.

— PTI

TMC vows to take revenge

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 24

A day after "Jai Shree Ram" chants prompted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to refuse to address the Centre's Parakram Diwas celebration as a mark of protest in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's presence at Victoria Memorial, her nephew and Diamond Harbour Trinamul Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee vowed to take "revenge" against the BJP "in every inch" as the ruling party demonstrated across the districts, crying of an "insult" to its supremacy at the official event, to swing the public mood in the poll-bound state.

Advising the BJP workers to chant 'Jai Shree Ram' at their homes and on religious occasions Banerjee on Sunday told a party rally at Kultali in South 24 Parganas, "They polluted the environment when our elected CM was about to address the official event on the solemn occasion. When they did not allow her to speak,

she protested and did not deliver her address to make the PM feel that no insult to iconic freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose is tolerated here. They did not learn a lesson even after demolishing the bust of another legend: Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar in 2019."

In a threatening mood he added, "It was Mamata Banerjee's magnanimity that she gave the slogan: *Bodla Noy, Bodol Chai* (We want change, not revenge). That is why they are now making tall talks. After coming to power again, revenge will be meted out to them in every inch. Be ready for that. You will be paid back in full. I will see then how much power you have."

The TMC MP also declared to quit politics if he can not wipe out the saffron party in the coming Assembly election. Apart from him, TMC ministers like Firhad Hakim and Bratya Basu also tore into the BJP for raising religious slogans in political overtones at a government event to "insult" the CM.

States to look for malnourished kids

New Delhi, Jan. 24: Identifying severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in children and their referral to hospitals, using AYUSH concepts and monitoring through 'Poshan Tracker' are among highlights of the government's new guidelines which aim to improve nutritional status of children and women in the country.

In a letter to all states and UTs, the women and child development ministry asked all chief secretaries to launch a drive for identification of severe acute malnutrition in children for referral to hospitals, if required, and AYUSH centres and complete this exercise by January 31.

"The states shall launch a drive for identification of SAM children for referral to hospitals (if required) and AYUSH centres in accordance with the detailed action plan approved by the district nutrition committee to be finalised in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer. This exercise shall be completed by January 31, 2021,"

● GOVT'S NEW guidelines aim to improve nutritional status of children and women.

The ministry said. The ministry shared the guidelines and stressed on the need to ensure that entitlements of Supplementary Nutrition Programme reach the intended beneficiaries in a time-bound manner as per quantity and nutritional standards.

The ministry said it has streamlined guidelines on quality assurance, roles and responsibilities of duty holders, procedure for procurement, integrating AYUSH concepts and data management and monitoring through 'Poshan Tracker' for transparency, efficiency and accountability in delivery of supplementary nutrition.

The ministry has asked all states to mandatorily implement Poshan Tracker that uses centralised data architecture to align with digital technology systems of other ministries and programmes.

— PTI

WATER | WOES Families say no household is connected to piped water supply

J&K: Villagers pool funds for pipelines

Bhaderwah (J&K), Jan. 24: Claiming neglect over the past seven decades, the villagers in remote Thanhala Panchayat in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district have set out on a mission this winter to bring potable water to their homes.

To fulfill their objective, the mostly below poverty line (BPL) families of the snow-bound village in the lap of mighty Ashapati Glacier got into a hurdle recently and decided to contribute ₹40,000 to pur-

chase the required water pipes to get connected to the nearest water source. "We are living by the example of the proverb 'God helps those who help themselves' as the government had miserably failed to ensure tap water in our homes over the years. In the absence of the facility, we have to fetch water round-the-year from a nearby source even during this harsh winter and the lurking threat of avalanches," a local resident Aijaz Ahmad said.

● BPL FAMILIES decided to contribute ₹40,000 to purchase required water pipes to get connected to the nearest water source.

About 30 families live in the village bordering Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh, just 1.5 km from the interstate Bhaderwah-Chamba road. The villagers depend on the labour work in Bhaderwah town for a living. Despite 'Har Ghar Nal Yojna' under 'Jal

Jeevan Mission', villagers claim that none of the households are connected with the piped water supply. When contacted, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Bhaderwah, Rakesh Kumar said that providing potable water to every household is the priority of the government.

"The area being rich in natural water resources, I will take up the issue with the concerned department of 'Jal Shakti Vibhag' Bhaderwah to make temporary arrangements to

provide piped water to the village in view of extreme cold wave conditions unless permanent gravity line is laid under Jal Jeevan Mission," he said.

Talib Hussain, another resident, said they literally ran from pillar to post to get piped water supply but no one listened to their woes.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

11 IRAQI FIGHTERS DIE IN IS AMBUSH

Samarra, Iraq, Jan. 24: At least 11 fighters from Iraq's state-sponsored Hashed al-Shaabi force were killed in an ambush by the Islamic State group north of the capital on Saturday, Hashed security sources said.

The jihadists used light weapons and the cover of darkness to target the Hashed east of Tikrit, the capital of Iraq's Salahaddin province, two days after a twin suicide attack claimed by the group killed 32 people in Baghdad.

"IS launched an attack on the Hashed's Brigade 22," said one of the unit's officers Abu Ali al-Maliki.

Maliki said the brigade commander was among those killed before reinforcements from the federal police came to the unit's aid.

Hashed security sources said the total toll was 11 dead and 10 wounded.

'STEALING' FILES: TESLA SUES EX-EMPLOYEE

San Francisco, Jan. 24: Tesla has sued a former employee for allegedly stealing about 26,000 confidential files in his first week of working at the company, according to a court filing seen by AFP.

The company said on Friday that within three days of being hired, software engineer Alex Khatilov "brazenly stole thousands of trade computer scripts that took Tesla years to develop" and transferred them to his personal Dropbox, a cloud storage service.

Tesla said that when confronted by Tesla's security team, Khatilov claimed he had only transferred "a couple of personal administrative documents", whilst trying to delete the evidence.

Khatilov told the New York Post the software files ended up in his Dropbox by mistake when he had been trying to make a backup copy of a folder on his computer.

SCOTLAND WILL HOLD VOTE REFERENDUM

London, Jan. 24: Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on Sunday said she planned to hold a legal referendum on independence from Britain despite Westminster's opposition, as an opinion poll showed a majority would vote yes.

If her Scottish National Party (SNP) wins a strong showing in regional elections in May, Sturgeon said she would seek a fresh referendum even though Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said such a vote should only be held once in a generation.

"I want to have a legal referendum, that is what I am going to seek the authority of the Scottish people for in May and if they give me that authority, that's what I intend to do," she told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

Johnson "will flatly refuse the demand," The Sunday Times quoted senior government sources as saying.

PM OLI EXPELLED FROM NCP'S MEMBERSHIP

Kathmandu, Jan. 24: The ruling Nepal Communist Party's splinter faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda' on Sunday expelled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli from the party's general membership.

The decision to remove Oli from the party's general membership was taken at the Standing Committee meeting of the faction led by former prime ministers Prachanda and Madhav Kumar Nepal after Oli failed to produce explanation to his recent moves as sought by party leadership, sources said.

Earlier in December, the splinter group had removed Oli, one of the two chairmen of the ruling party, as the party chair. Madhav Nepal was named as the party's second chairman. Prachanda is the first chairman of the party. The Prachanda-led faction on January 15 sought clarification from Oli alleging that he was carrying out activities that go against the party's policies. The faction decided to strip Oli off even from the ordinary membership of the party after he chose not to furnish any clarification, party sources said.

Oli had been accused of violating party statute by the splinter group.

Russian cops go on the rampage

3,500 protesters arrested at rally in support of jailed Putin critic Navalny, says monitor

Moscow, Jan. 24: Nearly 3,500 protesters were arrested at demonstrations in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, a monitor reported on Sunday, as authorities probed violence on the part of both protesters and police.

Police clashed with demonstrators in Moscow as tens of thousands took to the streets across the country on Saturday following Navalny's call to demonstrate against President Vladimir Putin's 20-year rule.

A number of protesters were injured, including a woman in Saint Petersburg who was hospitalised with a head injury and was in intensive care Sunday.

The West condemned the arrests and "harsh tactics" used against demonstrators, with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell saying the bloc would discuss "next steps" on Monday.

Late Saturday the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it launched criminal inquiries in Moscow over the use of violence against law enforcement, hooliganism and property damage.

"Investigators are continuing to study and analyse a large amount of photo and video materials," the Committee said.

In a separate statement, investigators said Sunday a 36-year-old man hit two policemen at the Saint Petersburg protest and was detained.

But Saint Petersburg prosecutors also said they were probing violations "on the part of law enforcement" and the use of force against a woman.

The statement was released after local media published a video showing a middle-aged woman falling to the ground after being kicked by riot police.

In the video, a woman — identified as Margarita Yudinina — is seen asking three policemen in full riot gear why they are detaining a young protester. One of the policemen then kicks her in the

Washington, Jan. 24: Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, in his first directive since taking office, has given his senior leaders two weeks to send him reports on sexual assault prevention programmes in the military, and an assessment of what has worked and what hasn't.

Austin's memo, which went out Saturday, fulfills a commitment he made to senators last week during confirmation hearings. He had vowed to immediately address the problems of sexual assault and harassment in the ranks.

This is a leadership issue, Austin said in his two-page memo. We will lead. Senator after senator demanded to know what Austin planned to do about the problem, which defense and military leaders have grappled with for years. Reports of sexual assaults have steadily gone up since 2006. — PTI

11 TRAPPED MINERS SAVED

Beijing, Jan. 24: Eleven miners, trapped underground for two weeks following a blast in a gold mine in east China's Shandong Province, have been rescued, the state media reported on Sunday. Authorities have been racing to dig out 22 miners trapped underground in the partially built gold mine in the city of Qixia in Shandong Province, since the explosion blocked their exit on January 10. The rescuers set free two workers on Sunday, bringing the number of rescued miners to 11. — PTI

US condemns 'harsh tactics'

Washington, Jan. 24: Washington on Saturday rebuked Moscow over its use of "harsh tactics" against protesters demanding the release of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

"The United States strongly condemns the use of harsh tactics against protesters and journalists this weekend in cities throughout Russia," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

Navalny being taken into custody and the arrests of his supporters were "troubling indications of further restrictions on civil society and fundamental freedoms," he added.

"We call on Russian authorities to release all

those detained for exercising their universal rights and for the immediate and unconditional release of Aleksey Navalny," Price said, using an alternative spelling.

"We urge Russia to fully cooperate with the international community's investigation into the poisoning of Aleksey Navalny and credibly explain the use of a chemical weapon on its soil."

In Russia tens of thousands nationwide answered Navalny's call to rally, which he issued after he was detained at a Moscow airport on arrival from Germany, where he had been recovering from a near-fatal poisoning with a nerve agent.

— AFP

US INTERFERING IN 'DOMESTIC AFFAIRS': KREMLIN

Moscow, Jan. 24: The Kremlin on Sunday accused the US embassy of interfering in Russia's domestic affairs after the mission distributed a "demonstration alert" to US citizens in Russia recommending they avoid protests.

Ahead of the demonstrations, the US embassy issued a safety warning to Americans based in Russia.

"Of course, these publications are inappropriate," President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a state TV channel.

"And of course indirectly, they are absolutely an interference in our domestic affairs," he added. He accused the US embassy of "indirectly" supporting the violation of Russian legislation and backing "unauthorised protests". — AFP

Review military sex assault programmes: Defence secy

AUSTIN CALLS COUNTERPARTS FROM JAPAN, S. KOREA, UNITED KINGDOM

Washington, Jan. 24: US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke to his counterparts from Japan, Britain, and South Korea, the Pentagon has said. During his interaction with Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi, Austin reiterated America's commitment to the US-Japan alliance and emphasised on the importance of maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said.

"Austin and Kishi discussed a range of security issues in the Indo-Pacific and exchanged views on ensuring the readiness of the alliance despite the challenges posed by Covid-19," Kirby said. They also discussed the need to continue implementing

US force realignment initiatives including continued efforts regarding the construction of the Futenma Replacement Facility in Henoko, he said. Austin affirmed that the Senkaku islands are covered by Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty, and that the US remains opposed to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea.

"Austin thanked Kishi for Japan's continued leadership in implementing UNSC Resolutions regarding North Korea and encouraged minister Kishi to strengthen Japan's contribution to the role that the alliance continues to play in providing security in the Indo-Pacific region," Kirby said. — PTI

Snowing in London



Snow settles on one of the Trafalgar Square lions in central London on Sunday.

— AFP

Vaccine immunity will take 3 weeks: UK medical officer

London, Jan. 24: One of England's leading medical officers on Sunday urged the public to continue to follow the strict lockdown rules because any vaccine-related immunity from Covid-19 takes at least three weeks to kick in.

Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, England's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, also warned that there is no clear evidence yet to show that vaccinated people cannot transmit the deadly virus on to others.

"Regardless of whether someone has had their vaccination or not, it is vital that everyone follows the restrictions and public health advice, as protection takes up to three weeks to kick in and we don't yet know the impact of vaccines on transmission," said Van-Tam. His warning comes as the UK registered another high daily death toll from the virus of 1,348 this weekend.

He pointed to an additional 32 vaccination sites coming on stream to add to the thousands of venues where the National Health Service (NHS) has been delivering 140 jabs a minute, taking the vaccinated total to over 5.8 million. "The vaccine is rightly something to celebrate — let's stay patient, stay at home and support the NHS as it continues to roll out the vaccine," he said. A Living Museum where the BBC filmed a hit drama series 'Peaky Blinders' based on the notorious Birmingham gang in the 1920s is among the new vaccine sites. — AFP

Hindu priests charge more for SA funerals

Johannesburg, Jan. 24: Cashing in on the fearful atmosphere prevailing in South Africa amidst a second wave and a new variant of the Covid-19 virus, some Hindu priests in the country are allegedly charging exorbitant rates for conducting funerals of coronavirus victims.

The priests are under fire for charging between 1,200 rand (\$79) and 2,000 rand (\$131) to conduct a funeral, according to Pradeep Ramlall, a member of the Hindu Dharma Association of South Africa and Manager of the Clare Estate Crematorium in Durban.

This is not right. As per our scriptures, this is our seva (service) to the community. If a family wants to give a priest a donation, then that is acceptable but priests should not be charging people, he told the Weekly Post newspaper as he slammed the priests who are overcharging. Ramlall said the organisation has received a number of complaints from people whose relatives succumbed.

In view of a second wave and a new variant of the virus, the crematorium has had to introduce double shifts amid daily deaths. — PTI

A NASAL SPRAY THAT BLOCKS OUT COVID-19

London, Jan. 24: A nasal spray which can prevent a coronavirus infection for up to two days is being prepped for mass production by scientists at the University of Birmingham with the hope of having them available over-the-counter in pharmacies in a few months, a UK newspaper report said on Sunday. Dr Richard Moakes, the study's lead researcher, told 'The Sunday Telegraph' that he is confident in the spray's formula to help unlock society from social distancing restrictions. — PTI

Oman limits jobs for expats

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 24

Gulf nation Oman's reported move on Sunday to bar certain jobs for foreigners such as finance, commercial and administrative positions in insurance companies, shops and car dealerships as well as nationalise some jobs in the private sector is set to impact Indian workers there. Although there was no official reaction from New Delhi till late on Sunday evening, it

is expected that India will examine the matter to ascertain what impact the move will have on Indian workers in the Gulf nation. A huge number of Indian workers stay and work in the entire Gulf region spanning several countries.

According to media reports, the Omani Labour Ministry was quoted as saying, "A number of jobs in the private sector will be nationalised," adding that certain jobs in insurance

companies, shops and car dealerships, including finance, commercial and administrative positions, will be "limited to Omanis only". Oman also reportedly announced that work permits of foreigners in those professions will not be renewed after their expiry date.

According to media reports, Oman has undertaken the move in an effort to create more employment opportunities for its citizens amid an economic downturn.

Biden talks to Boris, Obrador

Washington, Jan. 24: US President Joe Biden spoke to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson over phone and conveyed his intention to strengthen the "special relationship" between the two countries and revitalise transatlantic ties, the White House said.

During the call on Saturday, Biden noted his readiness to work closely with Johnson as the United Kingdom hosts the G-7 and United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this year.

"The president conveyed his intention to strengthen the special relationship between our countries and revitalise transatlantic ties, underscoring the crit-

● **BIDEN AND** Obrador agreed to work closely to stem the flow of irregular migration to Mexico and the United States, as well as to promote development in the Northern Triangle of Central America.

ical role of NATO to our collective defense and shared values," the White House said in a readout of the call.

Biden also noted the importance of cooperation, including through multilateral organisations, on shared challenges such as combatting climate change, containing

deadly Covid-19, and ensuring global health security, it said.

The leaders also discussed the need for coordination on shared foreign policy priorities, including China, Iran, and Russia, the White House said.

Biden also spoke to Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Friday to review bilateral cooperation on a range of issues, particularly regional migration, according to a readout of the call issued on Saturday. "The president outlined his plan to reduce migration by addressing its root causes, increasing resettlement capacity and lawful alternative immigration pathways, improving processing at the bor-

der to adjudicate requests for asylum, and reversing the previous administration's draconian immigration policies," it said.

Biden and Obrador agreed to work closely to stem the flow of irregular migration to Mexico and the United States, as well as to promote development in the Northern Triangle of Central America.

They also recognised the importance of coordination to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, the White House said. After his swearing in on January 20, Biden has so far spoken with three world leaders. His first call was to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. — PTI

WATER | DANGER

Over 1,000 large dams in India will be roughly 50 years old in 2025

Ageing dams in India, US pose threat: UN

New York, Jan. 24: Over a 1,000 large dams in India will be roughly 50 years old in 2025 and such aging structures across the world pose a growing threat, according to a UN report which notes that by 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of dams built in the 20th century.

The report, titled 'Ageing water infrastructure: An emerging global risk' and compiled by United University's Canadian-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health, says

most of the 58,700 large dams worldwide were constructed between 1930 and 1970 with a design life of 50 to 100 years.

It said at 50 years, a large concrete dam "would most probably begin to express signs of ageing." Ageing signs include increasing cases of dam failures, progressively increasing costs of dam repair and maintenance, increasing reservoir sedimentation, and loss of a dam's functionality and effectiveness, "strongly interconnected" manifestations, the report

said. "By 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of large dams built in the 20th century, many of them already operating at or beyond their design life," according to the UN University analysis.

The analysis includes dam decommissioning or ageing case studies from the USA, France, Canada, India, Japan, and Zambia and Zimbabwe. According to the report, the world is unlikely to witness another large dam-building revolution as in the mid-20th

century, but dams constructed then will inevitably be showing their age.

The report said that 32,716 large dams (55 per cent of the world's total) are found in just four Asian countries: China, India, Japan, and South Korea — a majority of which will reach the 50-year threshold relatively soon. The same is true of many large dams in Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe, it said.

In India, there are over 1,115 large dams that will be roughly 50 years old in

2025, more than 4,250 large dams in the country will be over 50 years old in 2050 and 64 large dams will be more than 150 years old in 2050, it said. The report said that approximately 3.5 million people are at risk if India's Mullaperiyar dam in Kerala, built over 100 years ago, "were to fail".

"The dam, in a seismically active area, shows significant structural flaws and its management is a contentious issue between Kerala and Tamil Nadu States," it said. The report

added that dams that are well designed, constructed and maintained can "easily" reach 100 years of service but predicts an increase in "decommissioning" — a phenomenon gaining pace in the USA and Europe — as economic and practical limitations prevent ageing dams from being upgraded or if their original use is now obsolete.

In the US, the average age of 90,580 dams is 56 years. More than 85 per cent of US dams in 2020 were operating at or beyond their life expectancy. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

25 JANUARY 2021

Is power only language in which to talk farm laws?

Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar's statement to the farmers' unions during the 11th round of talks that there are no problems with the farm laws and that the government offered to suspend them for up to 18 months as a sign of respect for farmers is unhelpful, to say the least, in ending the stalemate. Instead, it casts a shadow over the sincerity the government displays in the talks.

It has been almost three months now that the farmers are in Delhi, agitating, demanding the repeal of the three laws that seek to rework the way agriculture in this country is conducted. They also want a legal assurance that the minimum support price (MSP) regime is retained. The government has been non-committal on all these demands.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the umbrella union of the 40 agitating farmers unions, cannot be faulted for rejecting the government's offer to suspend the laws and discuss them "clause by clause" for many reasons. First, such an offer has no legal backing. A bill, passed by Parliament and signed into law by the President, cannot be kept in abeyance by the government.

Talks are unlikely to reach a conclusion if the government goes into them with the stand that all is well with the laws

There has been no legal mechanism to ensure the laws are not acted upon, except that the government may delay the framing of the rules, but that cannot be a legitimate route a government can take while negotiating on critical laws that have serious ramifications for the future.

The government, as Mr Tomar has stated, has been insisting that the laws are for the good of the farmers and the agriculture sector. The farmers, on the other hand, fear that it's a bogey the government advances

and that it would, ultimately, want to withdraw from the sector and throw them at the mercy of the corporates. The government can either say the laws are good or they are bad; and it has said they are good. It is up to the government to explain what it seeks to gain by sticking to its stand and then offering negotiation, at a juncture when the Supreme Court has stayed the operation of the laws. Second, the farmers cannot be faulted for not taking the bait of clause-by-clause discussions as the government had failed to follow the regular, democratic law-making process in this case. It was in an unholy haste to rush them through the legislature.

The government agreed to the discussion only after the farmers showed their grit at the gates of the national capital. If the government understands only the language of power, then the farmers need to continue to talk that. The government may be concerned about the elderly farmers suffering in the extremely cold weather of Delhi; but for them, it's a do-or-die struggle, and they may be willing to pay the price for it.

The government has of late allowed the proposed tractor rally by the farmers' unions on Republic Day. The government must show the same spirit of accommodation and seriousness of purpose while sitting with the farmers next time. It's unlikely to reach a conclusion if the government goes into the talks with the stand that all is well with the laws.

Heed General on arms buys

Last week, Army chief Gen. M.M. Naravane did well to highlight in the public sphere the hidebound, time-consuming, procedures for defence acquisitions that impact our military capabilities and preparedness, especially in relation to potential adversaries who are able to absorb innovations in military technologies more speedily.

If our armed forces are working for a revolution in military affairs (RMA), it is inescapable that we also bring about a revolution in bureaucratic affairs (RBA), General Naravane aptly pointed out. It seems plain common sense to us that RMA — which the major powers have already brought about, and is an area in which India lags behind — cannot be achieved without RBA taking place. It is a rude awakening to hear from the country's military leader that while the Defence Procurement Procedure 2016 was 450 pages, the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 is 681 pages. It's got worse, rather than better. This is surely a travesty.

The Army chief quotes the late defence minister Manohar Parrikar as saying that the system and procedures of military procurement is built on "distrust" — or, should we say, mistrust. The premium is on the detailed crafting of bureaucratic rules that attempt to take in every future infraction of procedure, and not on the quick availability of a much-needed equipment or defence system. In a word, the idea is to catch the thief, as it were. This is pathetic.

The whole system still appears to be paying the price for the then Opposition crying foul over the procurement of Bofors artillery guns with the purpose of bringing down the Rajiv Gandhi government. As we know since then the successive governments have not been able to establish corruption on the part of the then PM.

We must move on if we are to grow as a credible regional power, leave alone international power. The way things are, any mid-way course-correction in acquisition or introducing of a newly available useful technology requires the whole Quality Requirement procedures to start all over again. Sometimes more than a decade passes. By then what has been got at great cost is already antiquated.

Gen. Naravane is right. There must be built-in flexibility clauses for the end user (our armed forces) as well as the manufacturer. Similarly, overhaul of procurement procedures are needed in the civilian domain to gain efficiency and cut delays.

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Chandrajit Banerjee



Reviving growth: Govt needs to do a fine balance in Budget on Feb. 1

With economic activity resuming and the vaccine becoming a reality, the challenge of lives versus livelihoods is largely addressed. The next big challenge facing the government is getting growth back.

The government has been fiscally prudent in its Covid interventions, with support to industry coming in the form of loan guarantees and reform measures. However, as private consumption, investments and exports remain sluggish, the burden to nurture the unexpected but buoyant recovery falls primarily on public expenditure, at least in the immediate term.

Government spending in areas with high multipliers is important for demand creation, employment generation and catalysing private investments. The RBI estimates the Central government capex has a multiplier effect of 2.45 in the year the expenditure is incurred and 3.14 next year. This shows a hike in capital expenditure by the government crowds in higher private investments benefitting the economy in the next few years. Private investments have been slow even before the pandemic, and this boost can get them back on track. Higher investments, public and private, will lead to

employment generation, boosting consumer demand and savings.

The virtuous cycle of public expenditure, demand generation, private investment and employment generation can put the economy back onto a high growth trajectory.

However, the fiscal situation is now under stress driven by a shortfall in revenue collections due to a fall in GDP induced by the Covid-19 crisis, constraining higher public spending.

Supporting economic recovery and growth via greater public expenditure as well as ensuring prudent fiscal management to safeguard macro-economic stability is an immediate concern the Budget must address.

CII suggests a seven-point agenda.

One, prioritise public investment in infrastructure and health. Infrastructure has one of the highest multiplier effects on the economy and boosts long-term competitiveness. Therefore, the government must hike its infrastructure spend by one per cent of GDP, including higher allocations for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

The pandemic highlighted the importance and need for a robust public health infrastructure. India should look at increasing its public health

expenditure to three per cent of GDP by 2025.

Two, the government should look at fiscal deficit management from a three-year perspective. The deficit target for next year should be realistic.

Three, the government should ensure greater transparency in the deficit numbers, inspiring confidence in markets, rating agencies and investors. This implies realistic revenue projections, avoiding off-Budget borrowings, realistic estimation of costs of schemes and accounting fully for borrowing for food subsidy. Last year's Budget listed off-Budget expenditures and their financing as an annexure. This year it should build on this positive step.

Four, given the uncertainties set a range-bound deficit target, instead of pursuing a single number, as was recommended by the economic advisory panel of the 15th Finance Commission.

Five, adopt a suitable Fiscal Performance Index framework to capture both the quantum and quality of the deficit. Higher expenditure on areas like infrastructure, healthcare, education and sustainability boosts the economy's productivity and efficiency, leading to higher growth, which helps pay for itself in the long run.

CII wants a composite Fiscal Perfor-

mance Index with six components: (i) Quality of revenue expenditure: measured by the share of revenue expenditure other than interest payments, subsidies, pensions and defence in GDP; (ii) Quality of capital expenditure: measured by share of capital expenditure (other than defence) in GDP; (iii) Quality of revenue: ratio of net tax revenue to GDP (own tax revenue in case of states); (iv) Degree of fiscal prudence I: ratio of fiscal deficit to GDP; (v) Degree of fiscal prudence II: ratio of revenue deficit to GDP; and (vi) Debt index: Change in debt and guarantees to GDP.

Six, the government should look at raising revenues through non-tax measures. It should look at aggressive disinvestment, taking advantage of booming capital markets. The disinvestment plan should include both loss-making and profit-making PSUs. To get better valuations, that is often a concern, the government could announce a list of PSUs where it plans to bring down its holdings below 51 per cent. The positive market sentiment this creates may lead to higher interest and valuations.

Monetisation of assets of the government and public sector enterprises, like surplus land and buildings, profitable brownfield assets like roads, transmission lines, airports, power

plants, etc, could be another source of significant revenue. State governments should also be encouraged to do so.

The proceeds should be ring-fenced for creating health infrastructure and other physical infrastructure in both urban and rural areas.

Seven, further rationalise subsidies and non-productive expenditure. Some of the measures that can help achieve this objective include: pursue Aadhaar-enabled direct benefit transfer (DBT) for food and agri-input subsidy. A policy of giving subsidised kerosene and LPG through DBT only to BPL families should also be explored.

The term for extension of the urea subsidy, given by the CCEA, will come to an end in 2020. The government should use this opportunity to carry out urea price decontrol and rationalise the fertiliser subsidy based on soil health card scheme data.

Savings can accrue from rationalisation of power subsidies. For the deserving, the subsidy could be provided through direct benefit transfer. This will also reduce the cost of power for industrial users, helping Indian manufacturing become more competitive.

The writer is the director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry

Subhani



Trump to Biden: Modi's US ties in need of reset



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Ending his much-acclaimed address to a joint session of both Houses of the American Congress in July 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, to rapturous applause: "Partnerships can be of two kinds. There are partnerships based on principle and there are partnerships based on pragmatism. I believe we are at a juncture where we can embark on a partnership that can draw both on principle as well as pragmatism. We must build on this opportunity."

The India-US relationship has waxed and waned depending on how this mix between values, defined by principles, and interests, based on pragmatism, has worked out. As a new administration with a very different and well-defined ideological orientation takes charge in Washington D.C., diplomats and observers in both countries will wait to see what kind of a balance would be struck between the two considerations in taking the India-US relationship forward.

For a long time, when leaders of both countries met, they could only speak about their shared democratic values because their interests were so wide apart. The simultaneous occurrence in 1991 of India's economic opening up and the end of the Cold War added the ballast of shared interests to the relationship. India's desire to secure new markets, new technologies and foreign investment as well as its need to diversify the country's sourcing of defence equipment and bolster its national security, at a time when China was rising and jihadi terrorism had come closer home, created a powerful and potent mix of values and interests.

Long-term and durable bilateral relations between

nations do require a balance between values and interests. The principles by which nations define themselves constitute their values, but a purely values-defined relationship cannot endure unless it also addresses the individual needs of both partners. While political and intellectual leaders define values, it is left to diplomats to identify and secure the pragmatic foundations of a relationship.

Several developments at home and around the world over the three decades, from 1990 to 2020, ensured that the bilateral relationship grew from strength to strength. However, even as global developments continued to favour closer India-US relations, domestic political and economic developments during the tenures of President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi did emerge as potential problems for the durability of the relationship.

Mr Trump's "America First" policies created new uncertainties for India's "interests", in areas such as trade and immigration policy, while Prime Minister Modi's "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" trade and industrial policies and India's desire to maintain its good equations with Russia and Iran, raised concerns in Washington. However, the weakening of the "interests" side of the equation was balanced by greater emphasis on the "values" side, with Mr Trump hailing India's democracy while turning a blind eye to Mr Modi's majoritarian communal politics, in his campaign against non-democratic China. If Mr Trump had been re-elected it remains to be seen how this equation would have worked out. President Trump may well have continued to ignore the BJP's politics, but would perhaps have demanded his pound of

flesh on the trade and market access side.

What now with the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris duo? Clearly, their values are very different from Mr Trump's, and in a world where domestic politics increasingly influences foreign policy no country can ignore the influence of these "new values" at home on US foreign policy. At the same time, given the domestic economic pressures and promises made, Mr Biden may well not be able to ease up on the demands being made on India on the trade and economic side.

Consider then the emerging balance between principles and pragmatism — the "principles" dear to the new Democratic administration in the US may favour Mr Modi's India less than the principles that defined Mr Trump's attitude; and domestic policy pragmatism may require Mr Biden to stay the course on the economic demands the United States has been making on India.

On the Indian side, Mr Modi has weakened India's global standing as a multicultural, pluralistic, liberal and secular democracy, especially in his second term in office, while at the same time pursuing insular trade policies that raise hackles in Washington D.C. How Mr Modi intends to redefine and rework his approach to the new America of Mr Biden and Ms Harris remains to be seen.

The fact that vice-president Kamala Devi Harris is partly of Indian origin and that several Indian Americans have been nominated to serve the

Biden administration is no guarantee of a smooth ride for India in the US capital. While the interest groups that lobby for good relations between India and the US may have better access to the Biden-Harris team, the team itself may have many whose values clash with the BJP's majoritarianism. Listen carefully to Mr Biden's speech.

In the past it used to be assumed all too easily that Indian Americans are India's diplomatic asset. Indeed, they were. Their role in ensuring congressional support for the India-US civil nuclear agreement cannot be underestimated. Prime Minister Modi's rallies in New York and Houston, attended by enthusiastic Indian Americans, also helped Indian diplomats build bridges with Mr Trump's people. However, those Indian Americans lost out in this election. The Indian Americans now in office are the ones who may well have disliked external affairs minister S. Jaishankar refusing to meet US Congresswoman Premila Jayapal and her delegation, or his quoting Donald Trump approvingly in his book.

Among senior Biden administration officials there are many from the Obama administration who know India and Indians well, including the new CIA director William Burns and the pointman for Asia, Kurt Campbell. They may well wish to strengthen relations with India. It remains to be seen if their diplomatic "pragmatism" in the pursuit of "interests", is able to score over the assertion of "principle" by those who seek to defend the liberal, democratic "values" of the Democratic Party. Clearly, Prime Minister Modi will have to undertake some reset in his domestic politics and policies to ensure that he gets as warm a reception in Joe Biden's America as he did in Donald Trump's.

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

LETTERS

PETROL PRICES

Petrol and diesel prices are hiked every now and then in spite of public protests. Now, it has reached all-time high. As most commodities are transported, the impact of price hike will reflect on commodities. The Centre does not care.

K.L. Rao

Visakhapatnam

GP ELECTIONS

With regard to gram panchayat polls, it is a bizarre situation in AP (*SEC notifies GP polls, phase-1 on Feb. 5, DC, Jan. 24*). Since the ruling party and SEC are at loggerheads, the situation has exacerbated. However, it calls for coordination and a 'give-and-take' policy to make the election possible. Ironically, both are affirming that they are doing this for the governance and in the interest of people.

Dr C. Ghanshyam

Visakhapatnam

The gamut of GP polls is getting murkier in spite of a pending SC verdict. The state government's contention of postponing them on the grounds of safety of staff and voters as well as the ongoing vaccination since 16/1, seems valid.

K. Nehru Patnaik

Visakhapatnam

STRANGE DEMAND

The eve of elections brings out the maverick in our politicians without an exception (*India should have 4 capitals: Mamata, DC, Jan. 24*). The free spirits in them come out alive as they make strange statements. Unfortunately, our people are also sentimentally 'attuned' to this kind of electioneering, which should change for good.

Govardhana Myneedu

Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

UGC may set up 'open varsity'

HYDERABAD, January. 24 Dr. D.S. Kothari, chairman of the UGC today called for "linking education to the community" and disclosed that the Commission was giving "loud thinking" to the establishment of an "open university" as in the United Kingdom.

Such an "open University", Dr. Kothari said, would admit persons above the age of 25 without any rigid formal education so that an individual with motivation and desire for higher education would have the opportunity to enter a university.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,878.54	-1.50
Nifty 50	14,371.90	-1.50
S&P 500*	3,841.47	-0.30
Dollar (₹)	72.97	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.67	0.57
Euro (₹)	88.79	-0.16
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,861*263	0.53
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.64	-0.82
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.939	-0.29
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.094	-0.013

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Reliance spins off O2C business into new unit

Reliance Industries Ltd has completed spin-off of the firm's oil-to-chemical (O2C) business into a new unit that will help it pursue growth opportunities with strategic partnerships, RIL has said. The O2C business unit holds Reliance's oil refinery and petrochemical assets and retail fuel business but not upstream oil and gas producing fields such as KG-D6 and textiles business.

FPIs invest over ₹24,400 crore in stocks this month



Foreign portfolio investors (FPI) remained net buyers to the tune of Rs 18,456 crore so far in January as global liquidity led to continued investment in emerging markets. According to depositories data, overseas investors pumped in Rs 24,469 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 6,013 crore from the bonds market during January 1-22. The total net investment during the period stood at Rs 18,456 crore.

NCLT admits Devas Multimedia, names liquidator

The National Company Law Tribunal has admitted the petition filed by Antrix Corporation, the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation, for winding up Devas Multimedia and has appointed a provisional liquidator for the firm. A two-member NCLT Bengaluru bench of the NCLT has directed the provisional liquidator to take control of the management, properties and actionable claims of Devas Multimedia.

NIIF invest less than ₹5,000 crore in five years

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) in its five years of existence has made equity investments of less than Rs 5,000 crore in infra projects, sources said. The Rs 40,000-crore NIIF was set up in Dec. 2015 for investing in greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects. NIIF has made an equity investment of Rs 4,689 crore while the co-investment by its partners stood at about Rs 7,053 crore by Sept.



Lockdown reverses trends in space demand Apartment size expands as office space shrinks

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 24

Bucking a four-year declining trend, average apartment sizes grew by 10 per cent in Covid-hit 2020 while office spaces have started shrinking. A major contributor to this trend reversal is the new work from home (WFH) culture. The average apartment sizes in the top seven cities rose by 10 per cent to 1150 sq. ft. in 2020 from 1050 sq. ft. in 2019.

Last year, space-starved Mumbai saw the highest, 21 per cent, increase in apartment sizes to 932 sq ft from 773 sq ft in the previous year.

Among the big seven cities, Hyderabad has the largest average apartment size of 1750 sq ft, says an update from Anarock Property Consultants.

The average apartment sizes have been reducing since 2016. In 2016 it was 1440 sq ft and by 2017 it had declined 13 per cent to 1260 sq ft.

"The two main reasons



for apartment sizes reducing in previous years were affordability and millennials' preference for low-maintenance homes. Keen to generate more buyer interest with smaller price-tags, developers whittled down their flat sizes. But 2020 saw an almost immediate reversal of buyer preferences. With the accent suddenly being on accommodating the WFH and learn-from-home culture, flat sizes began increasing for the first time in four years,"

said Anuj Puri, chairman, Anarock Property Consultants.

The same work from home (WFH) culture saw the average size of office space shrinking in 2020. According to Nobroker.com, companies are choosing smaller office spaces now compared to pre-Covid times as many of them have adopted WFH as an option for at least a part of their employees.

Start-ups, IT companies and financial services

have freed up office space during the lockdown and are looking to work out a hybrid model in the future where work-from-office would be on a rotational basis for the employees. About 30-40 per cent of the companies, mainly driven by start-ups, IT and financial services companies, have let go of their leased office spaces either partially or completely post-lock-down.

This led to a drastic fall in demand for office space, especially larger sapce.

"While we have witnessed the overall office demand fall by about 50 per cent during the November-January period compared to the same period a year ago, the demand for office spaces which are lesser than 5000 sq ft is witnessing a less severe decline in demand," said Amit Agarwal, co-founder and CEO of NoBroker.com.

Demand for small office space has fallen only by about 25 per cent during the same months.

Separate cheques for vehicle, insurance likely

New Delhi, Jan. 24: Buyer of a new vehicle may have to pay the cost of vehicle and insurance premium through separate cheques, if the recommendations of a committee to review MISP guidelines are accepted by the Irda.

The insurance regulator had issued Motor Insurance Service Provider (MISP) guidelines in 2017

with the intention of streamlining the process and bringing the practices of vehicle insurance, being sold by automotive dealers.

MISP refers to an automobile dealer appointed by the insurer or the insurance intermediary to distribute and/or service motor insurance policies of vehicles sold through it.

In June 2019, the Irda

had set up a committee to review the MISP guidelines. The panel examined the current practice of collecting the premium payment from the customer. It observed a lack of transparency in the cost of insurance premium when the customer buys the vehicle through the dealer and makes the payment via a single cheque.

As the MISP makes payment to the insurance company from his own account, "the customer does not know the insurance premium being paid as it is subsumed in the cost of the vehicle", the committee said.

The panel recommended the customer should make payment to the insurance company directly. —PTI

Q3 SEES 19 IPOs WORTH \$1.84 BN, SAYS EY REPORT

New Delhi, Jan. 24: Reflecting strong momentum, India witnessed 19 initial public offerings (IPOs) worth \$1.84 billion in the December quarter of 2020 and the market sentiment remains positive in what could be a stellar 2021, according to a report.

There were 10 IPOs in the main market and nine in the small and medium enterprises (SME) segment during this period.

There were 19 IPOs valued at \$1.836 billion and the largest was that of Gland Pharma's with an issue size of \$869 million. There were just 11 IPOs in the year-ago quarter.

India ranks ninth globally in terms of the number of IPOs in 2020 with 43 IPOs raising \$4.09 billion, as per the report by EY.

Real estate, hospitality and construction and diversified industrial products were the most active sectors in terms of the number of IPOs, with three IPOs launched in each sector (including main and SME markets), the report said.

It said in 2020, global IPO volumes continued to accelerate, increasing by 19 per cent to 1,363 while proceeds rose 29 per cent YoY to \$268 billion. —PTI

Diamond trade roaring back from WFH shoppers

THOMAS BIESHEUVEL &
YULIYA FEDORINOVA
JAN. 24

The global diamond trade spent years in the doldrums, only to be crippled by the pandemic just as things started looking up. Now, at last, business is booming again.

Factories in the industry's "engine room"—the Indian city of Surat—are so desperate to boost production that the most-skilled cutters and polishers are being headhunted with offers of 50 per cent pay hikes and perks like free food and housing. Miner De Beers is poised for its biggest rough-diamond sale in three years, even after raising prices, and rival Alrosa PJSC said last week it expects the recovery will keep going for some time.

The boom is being driven by bumper holiday jewellery sales, particularly in the vital US and Chinese markets. For years, diamonds faced growing competition from travel as a form of luxury spending. Now, with vacations on hold due to lockdowns and other restrictions, consumers are putting their disposable income into online purchases.

"People have not only learned to work remotely, but also buy online, including diamonds," Alrosa chief of sales Evgeny Agureev said in an interview. "Money was previously spent on trips or on dinners at expensive restaurants, but now part of this demand has gone to diamonds. Online sales almost doubled last year to about 20 per cent of the total."

The sales boost is feeding

through to surging demand for polished diamonds, at a time when stocks held by factories and traders had shrunk dramatically following the initial Covid-19 lockdowns.

But for an industry long familiar with dramatic booms and busts, it's unclear whether the rebound will take hold, or represents only a temporary respite. Some industry participants are also concerned that the market is running too hot, risking a slump later in the year.

Annual diamond jewellery demand had been stagnant at about \$80 billion for the past five years and the sector's middlemen were struggling to turn a profit. As global vaccines roll out and other luxury purchases become viable again, there's a risk that the industry finds itself facing the same old challenges as before.

For now, money is pouring in. Signet Jewellers Ltd reported a 7.8 per cent jump in holiday sales in North America, by far the industry's biggest market. The jeweller's online sales surged in the period. It was a similar story in China, the second-biggest market, where Chow Tai Fook reported an 18 per cent rise in quarterly sales.

India, where about 90 per cent of diamonds are cut or polished, imported almost \$2 billion in rough diamonds last month as cutters and polishers raced to meet the increased demand and restock their inventories.

De Beers and Alrosa have both responded by raising prices, seeking to recover some of the ground they lost last year when demand



collapsed.

But while De Beers implemented an increase of about 5 per cent in its first sale of the year last week, customers are still buying. The sale hasn't yet been finalised, but the miner was on course for its biggest rough-diamond auction in three years—at about \$600 million—according to people familiar with the situation.

Still, the first sales of the year are the traditionally the busiest, when the industry's middlemen rush to restock. If sales slow later in the year, prices could come

under pressure again.

The risks of a short-lived revival are compounded by the billions of dollars of rough diamond stocks held by the two big miners. So far, they've resisted the temptation to start offloading the inventories.

"There's a dilemma for the miners. If they choose not to sell, they lose out on monetising stock, but if they sell too much they risk over-saturating the market," said Anish Aggarwal, a partner at specialist diamond advisory firm Gemdax. "If they get this right, there will be support for prices."

At the moment, the middlemen who cut, polish and trade the world's diamonds are making money. In the so-called secondary market—where buyers sell to gem manufacturers who don't have direct access to De Beers or Alrosa—boxes have been changing hands at premiums above 5 per cent, and some in double digits, even after the price rise. That suggests manufacturers believe they can make a profit at current prices.

Rough diamond prices generally have recovered back to pre-pandemic levels, while polished prices are slightly higher. That's good news for mostly small and private family-run businesses that cut, polish and trade the stones.

"So long as midstream stocks don't get saturated, margins can be defended," said Aggarwal. "All industry stakeholders—miners, midstream and retailers—will need to work in a measured way to enable this to continue."

—Bloomberg

Chip shortage: VW may claim damages from supplier Bosch



Berlin, Jan. 24: German car manufacturer Volkswagen is looking into possible claims for damages against its suppliers Bosch and Continental due to a lack of semiconductors, Automobilwoche magazine reported on Sunday.

Automakers around the world are shutting assembly lines due to problems in the delivery of semiconductors, which in some cases have been exacerbated by the former Trump administration's actions against key Chinese chip factories.

The shortage has affected Volkswagen, Ford Motor Co, Subaru Corp, Toyota Motor Corp, Nissan Motor Co Ltd, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and other car makers.

Citing people familiar with the matter, Automobilwoche reported that Volkswagen was in talks with alternative suppliers of semiconductors but there were concerns this could lead to higher prices.

Volkswagen wants to make sure that both Bosch and Continental share the burden and partly compensate the company for the resulting additional costs, the magazine reported.

Contacted by Reuters, a Volkswagen spokesman declined to comment, and Bosch and Continental did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The magazine cited Bosch company sources which said the car supplier was ready to discuss the matter directly with its customers and suppliers in due course.

German economy minister Peter Altmaier has asked his Taiwanese counterpart Wang Meihua to persuade Taiwanese manufacturers to help ease the shortage of semiconductor chips, which is hampering its fledgling economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Altmaier asked Wang to address the issue in talks with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd (TSMC), the world's largest contract chipmaker and one of Germany's main suppliers.

—Reuters

Cancelled Keystone XL pipeline may yield 48,000 tonnes of scrap



JOE DEAUX
JAN. 24

The scrapping of Keystone XL not only means the end of multi-billion-dollar pipe dream for TC Energy Corp—it also leaves behind 48,000 tonnes of steel.

US President Joe Biden revoked permits for the oil pipeline on his first day in office, killing a cross-border project that had won a four-year reprieve under his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump. The pipeline would have spanned almost 1,900 kilometres. TC Energy anticipated needing about 660,000 tonnes of steel just for the US portion.

About 150 km of pipe had been installed and an additional 2.2 km had been completed at the Canada-US border as of the end of 2020, the Canada Energy Regulator said in a January 22 email. That would amount to nearly 48,000 tonnes of steel, assuming standard dimensions of line pipe, according to Bloomberg calculations based on industry criteria.

The benchmark steel price is about \$1,060 a tonne, which would value the haul at almost \$51 million—though as scrap it would be sold for less. Once sold, the scrap metal is remelted by the buyer and formed into new steel products.

TC Energy may have to sell already delivered metal to secondary markets. —Bloomberg

DESTINY'S | DESIGNS

Police found that nearly 90 DC Avantis were used for fraudulent financing

Dilip Chhabria: From high-flying auto designer to jailbird

K.J. BENNYCHAN
MUMBAI, JAN. 24

It's an irony that what was supposed to be a big leap 'forward' for Dilip Chhabria, the only supercar-maker who built the country's first real sports car DC Avanti, has turned out to be his nemesis.

Chhabria, the founder of DC Designs, was arrested by the Mumbai police on December 28, 2020 allegedly for cheating and defrauding car buyers and financiers, and the man who changed the face of automobile design in this part of the world since the early 1990s is now lan-

guishing in a city jail.

But the final blow to what was his biggest, boldest dream was when a DC Avanti customer from Tamil Nadu claimed to have found his prized possession already registered in someone else's name in Haryana and was also hypotheated twice.

This happened soon after the comedian Kapil Sharma moved the economic offences wing of the city police complaining that despite paying full amount for a vanity van long ago, Chhabria had not deliver the van.

According to the joint police commissioner

(crime) Milind Bharambe, the police have found that nearly 90 DC Avantis were used for fraudulent financing by availing multiple loans on the same car and they peg the scam at around Rs 100 crore. The police have also found that most of these 90 vehicles were registered with two or at times three RTOs in various states.

Avanti in Italian means 'forward' and launching DC Avanti was meant to be his fast forward move. But fate had it differently.

The car, billed as the first Indian sports car, was unveiled by Amitabh Bachchan at the 2012 Auto



Dilip Chhabria

Expo in New Delhi and it hit the road in 2015 after being in the making from 2008.

Though the car had adequate ground clearance compared to the Italian namesake and had a killer pricing at just about Rs 42 lakh, it failed on many grounds in performance

and this had sales not picking up as expected. All he could manage was to sell 120-odd cars.

Chhabria set up DC Designs way back in 1993, bringing a whiff of fresh air after securing a degree from the Art Centre College of Design in Pasadena in California, the Mecca of auto design, to offer design and prototyping services to auto firms and customers. His timing was so perfect as he launched himself into what was then an unknown territory called automobile designing in a market that had no choice except a Maruti, Premier

Padmini and Ambassador.

One of his initial successes was his modification on a Maruti Gypsy which he christened as BTS (Better than Sex), earning him wide publicity and making him the go-to guy for auto design.

Soon Chhabria was going places and he made personal history—in January 2003, the stunning prototype of the V8 Vantage he developed for the British supercar maker Aston Martin was on display at the Detroit Motor Show!

But all that is history and a new history is being made in the jail today. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Nets hold on to beat Miami Heat

Los Angeles: Kevin Durant scored a team-high 31 points as the new-look Brooklyn Nets solved some of their defensive woes on Saturday to hold on and beat the shorthanded Miami Heat 128-124.

Since putting together the dynamic trio of Durant, Kyrie Irving and James Harden, the Nets have had no trouble showcasing their offence but have struggled at the other end of the court. Irving finished with 28 points, and Harden was held to just 12 but dished out 11 assists, as Brooklyn halted a modest two-game losing streak. "It's not every day you see this collection of guys playing together in NBA history, so we want to take full advantage of that," Irving said.

Brooklyn has now allowed 396 points in their last three games including back-to-back losses to the Cavaliers, including an 147-135 double overtime defeat on Wednesday. — *AFP*

Hockey jr girls pip Chile seniors

Santiago, Chile: The Indian women's junior hockey team extended their unbeaten run by notching up a 2-0 victory over the Chile senior side here.

Playing their fifth match of the tour of Chile, goals from Sangita Kumari (48th minute) and Sushma Kumari (56th minute) in the last quarter gave India the win.

It was India who drew first blood as they orchestrated a beautiful team move to open the scoring through Sangita.

The young forward took her chance confidently, and maintained her goal-scoring form. Minutes later, Chile had a glorious chance to equalise through a penalty corner, but India's rushers performed their task decently enough.

In the 56th minute, it was the visiting team's turn to get a penalty corner, which proved to be the decisive moment in the match. — *PTI*

Hyderabad split points with JFC

Vasco: Jamshedpur FC and Hyderabad FC earned a point each after playing a goal-less draw in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

While Hyderabad ended up drawing their third game on the trot, Jamshedpur grabbed their first point, after a treble of losses.

The opening half was an intriguing, open-ended contest with both sides hitting the post but failing to find the net. Hyderabad had better chances but Jamshedpur keeper T.P. Rehenesh produced two fine saves to keep the scoreline goal-less heading into the break. — *PTI*

Poirier knocks out McGregor

Abu Dhabi: American underdog Dustin Poirier shook up the world of mixed martial arts on Sunday, beating up the legs of Irish superstar Conor McGregor before knocking him out at UFC 257 in Abu Dhabi. "I'm happy but I'm not surprised. I put in the work," Poirier after the referee stepped in after 2min 32sec of the second round to save McGregor from further damage. Poirier was ranked second in the flyweight division going into the fight, but still rated a heavy underdog by bookmakers to beat his fourth-ranked opponent, arguably the most famous fighter the sport has seen. The controversial McGregor was returning to the octagon for the first time in a year and hoping for a repeat of the pair's first contest in 2014 which he won by TKO after just 109 seconds. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET
Big Bash League: Adelaide Strikers vs Sydney Thunder from 1.45 pm; Brisbane Heat vs Perth Scorchers from 7.35 am (Tuesday) on Sony Six, HD
FOOTBALL
English FA Cup: Wycombe Wanderers vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.15 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD
WWE
RAW: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Rising from Ash-es

Constantly put under microscope, Ashwin says it's a start over, again & again

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 24

R. Ashwin would not have featured in the first Test against Australia at Adelaide if Ravindra Jadeja had been available. Ashwin himself knew that. And that's why it felt like starting all over again for the off-spinner who has been constantly put under the microscope despite proving his worth time and again.

Apart from taking 12 wickets — he dismissed big fish Steve Smith thrice — in three Tests, Ashwin scored a gritty unbeaten 39 to save the Sydney Test. In a chat on Sunday, Ashwin spoke about the importance of his Sydney knock and how he has been subjected to unfair comparisons with other spinners. **Excerpts:**

Is this the best that you have bowled in Australia? Looking back, you can say that but I think this is just another dimension of cricket that I'm seeing myself in. It didn't look like I was going to start the series in all honesty but Jadeja damaged his hamstring and that is how I got an opportunity in the first Test. Yes, 2018-19 was good, but I think 2020-21 was one of the best if you compare the last three years.

Before each Test, I sat and watched match videos for eight hours on the bounce. I made my own plans about where the fielders should be. For example, how Tim Paine got out in Melbourne came from what happened in Adelaide with the short-leg fielder and where the ball might go. So these are orchestrated moves and thanks to the freedom the team management gave me in how I should be working it.

On his back injury: It (back injury) was looking good for the fourth Test and looked like I would play. But there was some unfortunate turn of events. Even the swimming pool access was cut. The pool is an important activity in the recovery process. Then we had to do a plunge pool activity but it is not the same. The physio also felt if the recovery process was in place, there was a good chance I could play. It was a freakish injury. By day three or four, I was alright to bowl. After that 1-1 draw, things took a U-turn. The way things happened in Sydney and Brisbane, we had to quarantine. Sometimes it was



Ravichandran Ashwin

questionable. There was insensitivity around people commenting on why we were complaining. The rules were not such. It was off the beat. But, we buckled down and put on a good show.

On the importance of his Sydney knock: There have been questions raised over my batting since that West Indies tour. But another thing that needs to go into consideration is I was an all-format player and sometimes the roles of people playing Test cricket alone don't really sit down well or people don't quite make an effort to understand how it works. I feel ever since that particular thing where I've just been playing Test cricket, it's pretty much a one game here or there and I'm constantly fighting with someone else for the lone spinner spot. And if I have to be judged purely on my batting skills and batting averages, then I think a decision based on an innings or two alone to drop me out of a particular series wasn't quite justified. I am looking to fight for my place and when I'm doing that I need to emphasise on my primary skill which is to pick up wickets, which I think over the last two years in South Africa, England or Australia, I have done justice to.



Joe Root

Despite being on the international stage for more than a decade, why do you feel that you have to prove yourself in every game? I have had some wonderful interactions with batting coach Vikram Rathour (a former selector) throughout this series. He told me that they were looking to leave me out after the England series in 2011-12. He said, "We didn't quite think that you were bowling well". But I made close to 400 runs in that series and picked up 14-15 wickets. It's a battle that I have always fought. It's not new territory for me.

Whenever I was pitted against another off-spinner, the series has turned out well for me. From 2013 to 2015, I was competing with Harbhajan who had made a comeback. In 2015-16, it was Jayant Yadav. For me, competition has always got the best out of me. I feel whatever I have left ahead of me will also be along these lines. So I have decided to play every Test like it's my first. If I can't be excellent, I should just move on.

On comparisons with Nathan Lyon and the duel with Smith: There has been a lot of noise about how I am bowling, and constant references to

someone like Nathan Lyon. During the previous tour in Adelaide, I picked up six wickets and kept on bowling despite a tear in the abdomen. After the match, there were comparisons between us. I felt it was extremely insensitive after a good performance. That was the lowest I ever felt in my life. I feel I have been constantly put under the microscope. I did take it personally. So rather than me competing against Lyon, I thought I must be competing against Smith. Lyon is a lovely bowler and I have respect for him. But my focus was on something else. There were records that Smith had never got out to spinners in Australia. I wanted to turn that around. I am entitled to think I am, probably, the best in the world. I wanted to think along those lines. I thought 'who is the best in the series?' I can't compete with Virat Kohli so I decided to compete against Smith. A lot of people were talking about who will dismiss Smith. But, nobody even gave me a chance. Then, I made sure that people spoke about me at the end of the series.

Now, there will be comparisons with Washington Sundar... Honestly, I have always

said it is irrelevant who walks alongside me into the ground. When I walk into the next Test, I will be looking at Burns, Sibley, Crawley, Root. Why would I worry about someone who is going to stand beside me because for all you know I'm walking with a guy who is going to help me over the next five days and he has to do his job and I have to do mine. These are insignificant things and sometimes people tend to talk about it to such an extent because of their mindset.

Did the Aussies underestimate India's bench strength? I am not too sure. They were bowled out for 190 in Adelaide. With another hundred runs on the board, even that pink ball Test could have gone either way. I think they knew our bowling was going to challenge them throughout the series. I think it is just that the team found ways to bounce back from 36 all out. I think people rallied around really well, they realised how tough the tour could get. One piece of good fortune is that there were new people and fresh legs especially in the bowling department. Sometimes when you're playing a long series, fresh legs and mind can do the trick.

Is there a tinge of disappointment that you were not considered for the vice-captaincy role when Rahane took over from Kohli? I am not disappointed and it's irrelevant to me. I go out there and make my own plans and get the fields that I want. The captains and vice-captains that I have played with have been very supportive of whatever I have wanted. Leadership is just leading yourself and keeping your space upbeat for any situation that arises. If you can help another teammate, that's also leadership, so it really doesn't matter.

On the impending 400-wicket milestone and the England series: I am not thinking about milestones! Once I crossed 200 wickets, I stopped looking at milestones. It just happened over a course of time. The England series is going to be good. They are coming with an amazing preparation in Sri Lanka where the wicket has spun over the last two Tests. Joe Root has been batting beautifully. England are one of the teams who come well-prepared. A hard-fought Test series is on the cards.

ROOT HELPS ENG CLOSE IN ON LANKA

Galle (Sri Lanka), Jan. 24: Skipper Joe Root was run out shy of a second successive double century Sunday as England scored 339 for nine in reply to Sri Lanka's 381 on Day Three of the second Test in Galle.

Root was out to a direct throw from Oshada Fernando on 186 in the final over of the day as stumps were called with England trailing by 42 runs.

Sri Lanka's Lasith Embuldeniya claimed seven wickets and broke a

key seventh-wicket stand of 81 between Root and Dom Bess, who fell to the left-arm spinner for 32.

Root, who completed his 19th Test ton in 99 matches before lunch, kept pushing in the marathon knock of 309 balls.

The captain, who hit a match-winning 228 in his team's opening win, was helped along by wicket-keeper-batsman Jos Buttler in a partnership of 97 runs.

Embuldeniya, who registered his third five-wicket haul, struck twice early in

the day with his left-arm spin, including the key wicket of Jonny Bairstow, to break a 111-run third-wicket stand with Root.

Bairstow, who added just four more to his overnight 24, was given not out by the umpire but Sri Lanka successfully reviewed the call as replays suggested the ball had grazed the bat before hitting the pad and being caught second slip.

— *AFP*

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 381 vs England 339/9 (Root 186, Buttler 55, Embuldeniya 7/132).

Saints dump Gunners out, Blues cruise

London, Jan. 24: Manchester City were given a huge FA Cup scare by fourth-tier Cheltenham before a late blitz gave them a 3-1 win on Saturday after Southampton dumped holders Arsenal out of the competition.

Six-time winners City were minutes away from exiting at the fourth-round stage before goals from Phil Foden, Gabriel Jesus and Ferran Torres broke the hearts of the brave League Two side.

City boss Pep Guardiola made 10 changes for the trip to the southwest of England but his side was still packed with internationals.

The home team — 72 places below City in the football pyramid — produced a stirring defensive

display but also sporadically threatened at the other end of the pitch.

Jesus hit the post shortly after the restart as City upped the tempo following a goalless first half but it was the home team who broke the deadlock.

The visitors failed to deal with the outstanding Ben Tozer's long throw and Alfie May fired in from close range just before the hour mark.

Guardiola threw on Ilkay Gundogan and Joao Cancelo in a desperate bid to find a way back into the game and was rewarded in the 81st minute when Foden volleyed in Cancelo's cross.

Three minutes later Jesus made amends for his earlier miss and Torres made it 3-1 with the final kick of the game,

FA CUP 4TH RD
THE RESULTS
Chelsea (Abraham 11, 74) 3
Luton (Clark 30) 1
Brighton (Bissouma 27, Alzate 58) 2
Blackpool (Madine 45) 1
Cheltenham (May 59) 1
Manchester City (Foden 81, Jesus 84, Torres 90+4) 3
Southampton (Gabriel 24-og) 1
Arsenal 0
West Ham (Formals 2, Yarmolenko 32, Butler 54-og, Afolayan 78) 4
Doncaster 0

turning in Gundogan's low cross.

Earlier, Arsenal, who have won the competition a record 14 times, went down 1-0 at Southampton courtesy of a Gabriel own goal.

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta made seven changes from his team's 3-0 league win against Newcastle on Monday, with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and midfielder Emile Smith Rowe both absent.

Southampton, FA Cup winners in 1976, earned a well-deserved lead in the 24th minute when Kyle Walker-Peters' ball across the six-yard area was inadvertently turned in by Gabriel.

The visitors went close to an equaliser through Eddie Nketiah's deflected

shot but were forced to leave empty-handed.

ABRAHAM TAKES HEAT OFF LAMPARD

Tammy Abraham eased the pressure on under-fire Frank Lampard as the Chelsea striker's hat-trick sealed a 3-1 win against Luton on Sunday.

In just his second season in charge at Chelsea, Lampard is fighting to avoid the sack after a wretched run in the Premier League.

An embarrassing FA Cup exit against Championship opposition would have pushed Lampard closer to the axe, but Abraham's clinical display gave his manager some much-needed breathing space.

Abraham scored twice in the first half. — *AFP*

Natarajan owes it to his teammates

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JAN. 24

It was a dream international debut for T. Natarajan who had travelled to Australia only as a net bowler. He grabbed his opportunities in all three formats and emerged as one of the unlikely heroes of India's historic triumph. Natarajan, who is enjoying a new found cult status in Tamil Nadu, credited Team India's support staff, skipper Virat Kohli and stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane for backing him.

"They supported and motivated me a lot. I was able to perform well only because of their backing. I enjoyed playing under the captaincy of Kohli as well as Rahane. They had a lot of positive things to say and encouraged me a lot," said the 29-year-old who took three wickets on debut at the Gabba.

"I didn't expect to get an opportunity in the ODIs, but I was keen to do my job. When I was told that I would be playing, I could feel the pressure. But, I wanted to make use of the opportunity," he added.

Natarajan feels being a left-arm pacer and the new angle he brings in add to his advantage. "The main reason for me playing all the formats has to go towards my training and all my coaches. They would have known about my



T. Natarajan

strength in the formats so they gave me a chance to play in all formats. I am a left-armers so that works as an advantage for me," said Natarajan.

Natarajan who runs a cricket academy for players in his village said he would strive hard to help more people achieve their dreams. "I will try to support the Salem Cricket Association as much as I can. It is because of people's support that I am here. People know how I came here, if one does hard work he can achieve anything," he added.

Sundar now wants to open batting in Tests

New Delhi, Jan. 24: Coach Ravi Shastri's dressing room stories of grit and determination work as a tonic for young Washington Sundar, who is ready for any challenge even if it means opening the batting for India in Test matches.

The 21-year-old Washington was a specialist top-order batsman during his India U-19 days but then honed his off-spin to such an extent that he is now an automatic choice in India's T20 team.

One of the heroes of India's epic triumph in Brisbane, which gave them the four-match Test series against Australia, Washington spoke about the head coach's influence on him.

"I think it will be a blessing for me if I ever get an opportunity to open the batting for India in Tests. I think I will accept the challenge just like our coach Ravi sir did during his

playing days," Washington said during an interaction from his Chennai residence.

He scored 62 in the first innings at Gabba to keep India in the match and then a quick 22, including a hooked six off Pat Cummins, to play a part in the finishing act, apart from a match-haul of four wickets.

"Ravi sir tells us very inspiring stories from his playing days. Like how he made his debut as a specialist spinner, got four wickets and batted at number 10 against New Zealand on debut.

"And how from there, he became a Test opener and played all those great fast bowlers. I would love to open batting in Tests like him," said Washington, who enjoys a decent first-class batting average of 32 plus, which can only improve from hereon as he gets to play more games for India. — *PTI*



Action from the final day of the 23rd JK Tyre FMSCI National Racing Championship in Coimbatore on Sunday.

Sandeep, Amir clinch top spots in JK Racing

Coimbatore, Jan. 24: Chennai's Sandeep Kumar and Amir Sayed from Kottayam emerged champions in the Formula LGB 4 and Novice Cup category respectively in the 23rd JK Tyre-FMSCI National Racing Championship here on Sunday.

At the Kari Motor Speedway, the final day provided plenty of sparks as the Formula LGB 4 championship went down to the wire till the last lap of the last race.

It was heartbreak for Ashwin Datta, who led overnight in the Formula LGB 4 category with 63 points.

Sandeep's experience and ice cool nerves stood him in good stead as he finished fifth in the last race. He totalled 66 points to seal the Formula LGB 4 championship.

Ashwin finished with 63 points, as per provisional standings. Vishnu Prasad was third with 54 points. Teen sensation Amir

Sayed crowned himself in glory in the Novice Cup category.

RESULTS

Formula LGB 4

Race 4 (14 laps): 1. Mohamed Ryan (MSport) 20:21:329, 2. Vishnu Prasad (MSport) 20:23:545, 3. Arya Singh (Dark Don Racing) 20:25:170.

Race 5 (15 laps): 1. Diljith TS (Dark Don Racing) 23:58:426, 2. Sandeep Kumar A. (Dark Don Racing) 23:58:890, 3. Sarosh Hataria (Ahura Racing) 23:59:793.

Race 6 (15 laps): 1. Vishnu Prasad (MSport) 21:01:907, 2. Mohamed Ryan (MSport) 21:07:490, 3. Sarish Hatarai (Ahura Racing) 21:14:292.

JK Tyre Novice Cup

Race 5 (10 laps): 1. Amir Sayed (MSport) 14:17:157, 2. Chetan Surineni (Momentum Motorsports) 14:31:672, 3. Aman Chaudhary (DTS Racing) 14:32:509.

Race 6 (10 laps): 1. Amir Sayed (MSport) 16:34:084, 2. Chetan Surineni (Momentum Motorsports) 16:56:452, 3. Neym Rizvi (MSport) 17:01:933.

OVERALL CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS

LGB Formula 4

Champion: Sandeep Kumar (Dark Don Racing) 66 points

First Runner-Up: Ashwin Datta (Dark Don Racing) 63 points

Second Runner-Up: Vishnu Prasad (MSport) 54 points

Novice Cup

Champion: Amir Sayed (MSport) 120 points

First Runner-Up: Dhruvin Gajjar (DTS Racing) 49 points

Second Runner-Up: Aman Chaudhary (DTS Racing) 46 points