

IN BRIEF

MP: Congress MLA booked for forgeryAGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, JAN. 20

A Congress MLA from Morena district in Madhya Pradesh was on Wednesday booked for forgery. Ajab Singh Kushwaha, who represented Sumaoli assembly constituency, has been accused of selling government land in Vikrampur Kheria village under Gwalior district with forged documents. Local revenue inspector Hari Mohan filed a FIR in this connection against him in the Maharajpura police station in the district, police said. According to the police, the alleged forgery came to light when the local administration was carrying out an anti-encroachment drive in Vikrampur Kheria village last week. "The local administration has lodged a complaint against the MLA. A case was registered against him after a probe", Gwalior SP Amit Sanghi said.

Rajnath, Singapore minister hold talksAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday co-chaired the 5th India-Singapore Defence Ministers Dialogue along with his Singapore counterpart Ng Eng Hen. During their virtual interaction, both ministers expressed satisfaction over the progress of ongoing defence cooperation engagements between the two countries despite limitations imposed by ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. During the virtual interaction, Mr Singh conveyed his compliments on effectiveness of pandemic mitigation measures implemented in Singapore and the contribution of Singapore Armed Forces in restricting the spread of Covid-19. He also highlighted the role of our Armed Forces in combatting Covid-19 and various missions undertaken to assist in repatriation of Indians stranded overseas.

IJU: Warrant against journalist vindictiveAGE CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 20

The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has severely condemned the issuing of an arrest warrant against senior journalist Paranjay Guha Thakurta by a court in Gujarat. The warrant pertains to a 2017 defamation case filed by the Adani Group for a news story published on the web portal "The Wire". In a statement issued on Wednesday, K. Sreenivas Reddy and Balwinder Singh Jammu, president and secretary-general respectively of the IJU, said the case was withdrawn by the Adani Group long back and reopening it now smacks of witch hunting. The latest action, the IJU said, "is nothing but a result of vindictive politics."

NADDA PRAISES PARTY CADRE FOR HARD WORKAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

BJP president J.P. Nadda, who completed one year in office on Wednesday, thanked the party cadre for their dedication and hard work during the Covid-19 lockdown and helping and assisting people and working in adverse and hostile situations,



J.P. Nadda

including in opposition ruled states like West Bengal and Kerala where assembly polls are scheduled this year and Jammu and Kashmir, where first elections post-abrogation of Article 370 of development committees elections recently concluded. Hailing the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in handling the global pandemic Covid-19 and "Made in India" vaccines, Mr Nadda, in an open letter to the party cadre, said under Mr Modi's leadership, the party not only carried out the "largest charity work in the world during Covid-19 lockdown" but also carried out campaigns for the PM's vision of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" and "Vocal for local."

AMAZON'S TANDAV HC relief for writer, producer and director**Trouble continues with more FIRs**

Mumbai, Jan. 20: At least two scenes were removed from the controversial web series Tandav, which found itself in more trouble on Wednesday with fresh FIRs against its makers and cast in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

In a sliver of hope, the Bombay High Court granted transit pre-arrest bail to director Ali Abbas Zafar, Amazon Prime India head Aparna Purohit, producer Himanshu Mehra and the show's writer Gaurav Solanki. The relief was granted for three weeks to enable them to approach the concerned court in Lucknow, where an FIR has been registered against them for allegedly hurting religious sentiments.

A scene of a play and a conversation between two key characters were



Bajrang Dal activists stage a protest against Amazon Prime web series Tandav in Jammu on Wednesday. — PTI

snipped from the show's first episode Tanashah, a day after the cast and crew of the nine-part starry political saga on Amazon Prime Video once again apologised and said they

had decided to implement changes to address the concerns raised. At the centre of the row over the show, which has hit national headlines with calls for boycotts, FIRs and

protests over its alleged depiction of Hindu deities, was a scene with Zeeshan Ayyub in the role of college student Shiva playing the Hindu god Mahadeva (another name for Lord Shiva) in a play. A conversation between Lord Shiva and Narad Muni in the theatre production raised hackles.

That scene has gone. Viewers now see Zeeshan's entry on stage as Mahadev amid cheers from the audience and the scene then abruptly shifts to police entering the campus to arrest a student. Also gone is a conversation depicting the character of prime minister Devki Nandan Singh, played by Tigmanshu Dhulia, insulting Dalit leader Kailash Kumar, enacted by Anup Soni. — PTI

■ National capital achieves highest NAS score**Landmark change in Delhi govt schools: Niti Aayog**AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

Government think tank Niti Aayog on Wednesday lauded the landmark transformation of the government school system in Delhi, as government-aided schools helped the national capital achieve the highest National Achievement Survey (NAS) score.

According to "India Innovation Index 2020", prepared by Niti Aayog, among all pillars under Human Capital, the states have performed the best on NAS scores (Class X), wherein the average NAS score achieved by all states is 35.66.

"Given Delhi's high income levels as well as the landmark transformation of the government school system, the national capital reported the highest NAS score (44.73)," it said.

Noting that the income level in a state also plays a major role, the index said the states ensuring good quality of education in government-aided schools can also help raise the NAS score significantly.

On the other hand, the index pointed out that the pillar score was weighed down by the low number of higher education institu-

Karnataka retains top slot in innovation indexAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

Karnataka has retained its position as the top ranking major state in Niti Aayog's India Innovation Index 2020, which ranks different states based on how they supported innovation and disruptive technologies. The index was released on Wednesday. Maharashtra took the second position in the index, followed by Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Kerala.

"Innovation will play a key role in upholding the spirit of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', by giving the required thrust through Competitive Federalism," Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said

tions ensuring high quality education, wherein only 3.37 per cent of the institutions had a NAAC grade A and above.

With 40.74 per cent of institutions in Chandigarh having grade A and above,

while launching the report.

Himachal Pradesh topped a separate index created for the ten North eastern and hill states, followed by Uttarakhand and Manipur.

Delhi took the first position in the list of union territories with Chandigarh and Daman & Diu at the second and third places, respectively.

The first edition of the index was launched in October 2019 to showcase the government's initiative to create an innovation-driven economy and the index will help in recognising areas of developmental intervention, with innovation as the central driver for growth.

it topped the ranking in that particular indicator, the index said adding, "enrolment in engineering and technology also showed a drop across India, albeit disproportionately."

SC: Why tarnish panel's members?

■ Continued from Page 1 up on January 12 to find ways to break the deadlock. The presence of Bhupinder Singh Mann, Parmod Kumar Joshi, Ashok Gulati and Anil Ghanwat on the panel was questioned as all four have voiced support for the three farm laws whose repeal is sought by the agitating farmers. Mr Mann, president of the Bhartiya Kisan Union, had subsequently recused himself from the panel, saying he can't go against the agitating farmers.

As senior counsel Dushyant Dave and Prashant Bhushan, representing eight of the 40 farmers' unions, said they don't want to engage

■ SENIOR COUNSEL Dushyant Dave and Prashant Bhushan said they don't want to engage with any committee as they are seeking repeal of the three laws, CJI Bobde said: "If you don't want to appear before the committee, we can't compel you. But you cannot malign people like this and cast aspersions on them, and also the court. If you don't want to appear, don't appear. Why do you need to brand people like this?"

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PM releases ₹2,691 cr for PMAY-G beneficiaries, slams previous govts

Lucknow, Jan. 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday lashed out at previous governments, saying the poor had to bear the brunt of their "wrong" policies and intentions.

He said the poor people never believed in the past that the government will help them get a roof over their heads.

"Their (previous governments') policies were wrong and the poor had to bear the brunt of their wrong intentions," he said while releasing financial assistance of ₹2,691 crore to 6.1 lakh beneficiaries in Uttar Pradesh under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

Budget session of Parliament: PM to chair all-party meet on Jan. 30

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair an all-party meeting on January 30 during which the government will put forth its legislative agenda for the Budget session of Parliament.

He said the meeting will be held virtually and an

The Prime Minister specifically criticised the state's previous Samajwadi Party govern-

Farmer eats poison at protest site, dies*Deceased Jai Bhagwan belonged to Rohtak dist of Haryana*BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

A farmer, who allegedly consumed a poisonous substance at the Tikri border, died during treatment at a hospital here on Wednesday, police said.

The deceased has been identified as Jai Bhagwan Rana (42), a resident of Pakasma village in Rohtak district of Haryana. He had consumed Sulphas tablets at the farmers' protest site at Tikri on Tuesday, they said.

In a purported suicide note, Rana said he was a small farmer and many peasants have taken to the streets to protest against the Centre's new farm laws. "The government

says it is a matter of only two to three states, but farmers from all over the country are protesting against the laws. Sadly, it is not a movement now, but a fight of issues. The talks between the farmers and the Centre also remain deadlocked," he wrote in the letter.

Deputy commissioner of police (Outer) A. Koan said the man was taken to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital by CAT ambulance where he passed away during the course of treatment. He added that legal proceedings under CrPc have been initiated in the matter.

Last month, a lawyer from Punjab had allegedly

► Deputy commissioner of police (Outer) A. Koan said the man was taken to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital by CAT ambulance where he passed away during the course of treatment

committed suicide by consuming poison a few kilometres away from the protest site at the Tikri border. A Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, had also allegedly ended his life near the Singhu border protest site claiming that he was "unable to bear the pain of the farmers".

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, have been protesting at various border points of Delhi for over two months demanding repeal of the three farm laws.

Enacted in September 2020, the Centre has presented these laws as major farm reforms aimed at increasing farmers' income, but the protesting farmers have raised concerns that these legislations would weaken the minimum support price (MSP) and "mandi" systems and leave them at the mercy of big corporations.

The government has maintained that these apprehensions are misplaced and ruled out repeal of the laws.

The veteran activist has said that the new farm laws do not conform to "democratic values" and people's participation is necessary in the drafting of legislations.

Mr Hazare has slammed the Centre for not finding a solution on the ongoing farmers' protests in Delhi.

Anna to hold hunger strike for farmersBHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 20

Social activist Anna Hazare has decided to go on an indefinite hunger strike from January 30 at his native village Ralegan Siddhi in Maharashtra to support the farmers who are protesting against the Centre's new farm laws in Delhi. He said it would be his 'last protest'.

Earlier Mr Hazare had observed a fast on December 8 in support of the Bharat Bandh called by farmer organisations demanding a repeal of the new agriculture laws. The veteran activist has said that the new farm laws do not conform to "democratic values" and people's participation is necessary in the drafting of legislations.

Mr Hazare has slammed the Centre for not finding a solution on the ongoing farmers' protests in Delhi.



Anna Hazare

14 die as stone-laden truck falls on cars with wedding guests

Jalpaiguri (WB), Jan. 20: Fourteen members of a marriage party were killed and 17 others injured after a boulder-laden truck collided head-on with a car and then fell on two other vehicles in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, police said on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and state Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced ex gratia for the victims of the accident which occurred in Jaldhaka area of Dhupguri block on Tuesday night.

The cars of the marriage party were going

towards Dhupguri on the wrong side of a highway and there was poor visibility due to dense fog, a senior police officer said.

The truck hit the first car which careened to a side and, under the impact of the collision, boulders started falling from it.

The driver lost control of the truck which toppled to a side partially crushing the two other cars. Boulders from the truck then fell on the two vehicles, he said.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee announced an ex gratia of ₹2.5 lakh each to the next of kin of

those killed in the accident.

The state government will provide ₹50,000 each to those who were seriously injured, she said at a programme in Purulia.

Banerjee also said that ₹25,000 would be given to each of those whose injuries are not serious.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that he was extremely anguished over the road accident and announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the family members of those who lost their lives in the incident.

Quite amusing that police land is encroached upon: HC judge

New Delhi, Jan. 20: A judge of the Delhi High Court was on Wednesday amused to hear that police land has been encroached upon in the national capital. The high court was hearing a plea seeking removal of encroachment from a police colony land located at Shalimar Bagh in north-west Delhi.

"I actually find it quite amusing that police land has been encroached upon," said Justice Pratibha M Singh. The high court issued notice to the Delhi government's Public Works Department (PWD), the police, NDMC and the people, who have allegedly encroached upon the land in question, seeking their stand on the petition by April 12. It asked the authorities to inform it what action has been taken against the encroachment.

The petitioner, Anil Kumar, has contended in his plea that in a criminal case before the high court involving the alleged encroachers, a categorical finding was arrived at they have encroached upon police land and built a house there despite they being neither employees of Delhi Police nor any land being allotted to them in the colony. — PTI

Centre offers to pause 3 farm laws for a year

■ Continued from Page 1 matter was sorted out between the two sides.

During the meeting, Mr Tomar told the union leaders the government was ready to give an undertaking in the Supreme Court that the new laws will not be implemented till the matter is fully resolved. He also offered to set up a committee of agricultural experts, the farmers' unions and government representatives to discuss all the three laws clause by clause to resolve the matter.

The farmers' leaders also raised the issue of NIA notices being served to some farmers, alleging it was being done just to harass those supporting the agitation, on which the government representatives said

they would look into the matter. The Supreme Court has already put on hold till further orders all the three farm laws, the Supreme Court appointed a four-member panel to talk to farmers to end the stalemate. But the farmers' leaders objected to the committee members' names, saying they had already expressed their pro-farm laws views.

BKU leader B.S. Mann has already recused himself from the committee. The other three members of the committee are due to hold their first meeting with the stakeholders on Thursday. But the protesting farmers have made it clear they will not appear before the court-appointed panel.

IN BRIEF

INDIA, EU HOLD ONLINE TALKS ON MARITIME SECURITY

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

India and the European Union (EU) held their first-ever maritime security dialogue in a virtual format on Wednesday during which “developments in maritime security environment, regional cooperation activities, developments of mutual interest and opportunities for cooperation between India and the EU” were discussed.

It may be recalled that India and the EU had — during their 15th bilateral Summit in July last year — agreed to strengthen military-to-military relations and naval cooperation and establish a maritime security dialogue to preserve safety and stability in the Indian Ocean, in what was seen as a veiled but clear signal to China.

In a statement the ministry of external affairs said, “India and the EU held their first maritime security dialogue in a virtual format on 20 January 2021. The consultations involved exchanges on developments in maritime security environment, regional cooperation activities, developments of mutual interest and opportunities for cooperation between India and the EU.”

“The EU-India Maritime Dialogue was chaired by director Joanneke Balfourt on the EEAS side and joint secretary Sandeep Arya on the Indian side. The dialogue seeks to develop mutual understanding and cooperation opportunities between India and the EU in the maritime security domain as another factor of the strategic partnership between the two sides consistent with the India-EU Roadmap to 2025,” it added.

TN ELECTORATE IS 6.26CR, WOMEN OUTNUMBER MEN

Chennai, Jan. 20: Tamil Nadu has nearly 10 lakh more women voters than men and in total there are 6.26 crore electors, according to the final electoral rolls released by the Election Commission on Wednesday.

As per the final electoral rolls of Special Summary Revision-2021, Tamil Nadu's total electorate is 6,26,74,446. Chief Electoral Officer, Satyabrata Sahoo said in an official release here.

The Assembly election is expected to be held in April or early May in Tamil Nadu.

Women voters at 3,18,28,727 outnumber men, whose figure stands at 3,08,38,473 and 7,246 are third gender electors. The final rolls, with January 1, 2021 as the qualifying date, was published on Wednesday.

During the revision, 8,97,694 electors in the age group of 18-19 were enrolled, of whom 4,80,953 are men, 4,16,423 women and 318 third gender.

Cumulatively, 13,09,311 voters fall under this age group.

The voters in the 30-39 age bracket form the biggest chunk (1,38,48,056) of the 6.26 crore state electorate.

Forty seven overseas electors have also been enrolled and “so far 4,62,597 PwD (Persons with Disabilities) electors have been flagged in the electoral rolls,” the release said.

The Assembly constituency with the highest number of voters is Chengalpattu district's Shozhinganallur with 6,94,845 electors (men 3,48,262, women 3,46,476, Third gender, 107). The segment with lowest number is Harbour with 1,76,272 electors (Men 91,936, Women, 84,281, Third gender, 55). — *PTI*

Showstopper



Indian Air Force Rafale jet and Jaguar aircraft fly past Rajpath during the rehearsals for Republic Day Parade 2021 in New Delhi on Monday. — *PTI*

V.K. Sasikala complains of fever, shifted to hospital

Bengaluru, Jan. 20: Just days before her release from a prison here, V.K. Sasikala, a close aide of former Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalithaa, was on Wednesday admitted to the Government Bowring Hospital after she complained of fever and breathlessness, jail sources said.

Earlier she underwent treatment at the jail hospital but later taken to the Bowring Hospital for a second opinion, sources added. She arrived in an ambulance and was taken inside the Bowring and Lady Curzon Medical College and Research Institute, also known as Bowring Hospital, in a wheelchair, hospital sources said.

Later, the director-cum-dean of the institute Dr Manoj Kumar H.V. said in a statement that the 63-year-old Sasikala, with comorbidities of hypertension, diabetes and hypothyroidism, has been admitted with cough and fever.

He said she was stable with supportive measures and antibiotics and oxygen. — *PTI*

‘Leaking official secrets of military ops treason’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

The Congress on Wednesday said that leaking of official secret of military operations is treason and demanded that those involved must be punished. Referring to the purported chats of Republic TV chief Arnab Goswami that are doing the rounds on social media, former defence minister A.K. Antony said: “Leaking of official secret of military operations is a national security matter and is treason. Whoever is party to this leakage must be punished and those involved deserve no mercy.” Addressing a press conference, he also said that the government should immediately order an inquiry into information leak about the 2019 air strikes.

Referring to the chats he further added that India's national security has never been compromised in such a way and never have the high offices of the Prime Minister, home minister and others have “brazenly compromised”. Addressing a joint press conference, senior leaders Mr Antony, Sushil Kumar Shinde, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Salman

Barc’s ex-CEO bail plea rejected in TRP scam

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, JAN. 20

A Sessions court in Mumbai on Wednesday dismissed a bail application filed by Parto Dasgupta, former CEO of Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), who has been arrested in connection with the alleged Television Rating Points (TRP) scam case in December last year.

A graduate from IIM Calcutta, Partho Dasgupta was the CEO of Broadcast Audience

Research Council (“BARC”) between June 2013 and November 2019. He had moved the bail application after he was remanded to judicial custody. The Crime Branch has charged him under sections 409 (criminal breach of trust by a public servant), 420 (cheating) of the Indian Penal Code.

He had filed the bail application through advocate Shardul Singh and Arjun Singh on the grounds that there was nothing more left to be recovered from him.

Khurshid said: “We demand that the Prime Minister should come clean on these accusations immediately in order to restore the severely damaged credibility of the highest office of the country.” The Congress is also planning to raise this matter in the upcoming session of parliament. Mr. Shinde said that the Congress will talk to other parties in the joint parliamentary committee on the issue. Mr Khurshid men-

4 rapes in 10 days rock MP, Cong targets CM

Cong says Shivraj failed to check rising rapes

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 20

Madhya Pradesh has witnessed barbaric rape of four girls in the last 10 days, triggering public outcry.

In a shocking incident, a 13-year-old girl was raped in her family's farmland in Jangda village under Ghodadangar police limits in Betul district by a local villager late on Monday evening. The victim had gone to the farm to switch off the motor.

On finding her alone, the accused Sushil Verma (45) raped her and then buried her under a heap of stones, Betul district superintendent of police Shimla Prasad said on Wednesday. The victim's sisters who came to the farm while searching her late on Monday night, had found her buried in a pit and alerted their father, who carried her to Ghodadangar hospital. She was later referred to Nagpur Medical College hospital. The accused has been arrested.

In another incident, a 13-year-old girl, resident of

● **IN A SHOCKING** incident, a 13-year-old girl, resident of Umaria, had been raped for three days by nine people

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On January 11, the girl was abducted and taken to Chhatan jungle in Umaria district by two youths, identified as Rahul Kushwaha and Akash Singh, where they allegedly raped her.

She was later taken to a nearby eatery where she was allegedly raped by the ‘dhaba’ owner Paras Soni and four of his associates, according to a complaint lodged by the victim in the local police station. She was later taken to Chhatan jungle by them where she was gangraped, she alleged.

According to her complaint, she was then bundled in a Katni-bound truck on January 12 by the accused.

The truck driver had raped her and then dropped her at Kala Badbara check gate. Later, she got a lift in a Umaria-bound truck in which she was raped by the truck driver.

The victim along with her family members filed FIR in the Umaria police station on January 15. While 7 accused were arrested, 2 others were absconding, police said.

On January 10, a widow was raped by three youths in the village of Umilla in Sidhi district. The three accused had then inserted an iron rod in her private parts.

On Tuesday night, a girl was waylaid by two motorcycle-borne youths in Indore and then taken to nearby railway track where she was allegedly raped by them. Three other people who were waiting there also allegedly raped her.

They then bundled her in a jute sack and threw her on the railway track, police said. She managed to free herself and called her friend who took her to the hospital. All the five accused were absconding, police said.

Congress leader and former chief minister Kamal Nath slammed the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government for having failed to check growing incidents of rape in the state.

SC refuses to entertain plea against fake ‘babas’

New Delhi, Jan. 20: The Supreme Court Wednesday refused to entertain a plea seeking action against illegal ashrams run by fake “babas” across the country, saying the issue does not fall under its realm.

A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde asked senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy, appearing for a petitioner, as to how the court would ascertain that a person is a fake “baba” (god-man).

“Menaka Guruswamy, senior counsel appearing for petitioner (Dumapala Ramreddy) seeks permission to withdraw this petition. Permission, as sought for, is granted. Accordingly, the writ petition is dismissed as withdrawn,” said the bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian.

During brief hearing, the lawyer said “Akhil Bharatiya Akahara Parishad” has prepared a list of “fake babas”.

“How can we rely on that list. We do not know if the list was prepared after hearing them,” the bench said.

Ms Guruswamy then said that the list contained names like convict Ram Rahim Singh.

This provided all the more reason for people not to go to them, the bench said and asked, “Why do you want the Supreme Court to say that”. “We do not have disrespect for anybody or Akhara Parishad. But we do not know what Akhara Parishad thinks of them. We do not know know how the list was prepared,” it said. — *PTI*

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General public is hereby informed that a girl namely **Kanika Sharma, D/o Virender Sharma, R/o: H. No. 129/23 Gali No. 9, East Guru Angad Nagar, Delhi has been reported missing since 07.01.2021 at about 08:10 AM from her house. In this regard FIR No. 16/21, dated 15.01.2021 u/s 365 IPC has been registered at P.S. Preet Vihar, Delhi.** The description of missing girl is as under:

Name: Kanika, Age: 20 Year, Height: 5', Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Built: Normal, Wearing: Black colour Jacket, Black Pant, White Shirt and Black colour shoes in feet (ITI Uniform).

If anyone have any information about this missing girl please inform P.S. Preet Vihar, Delhi

Web: <http://cbi.nic.in>, Email: cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638/24368641, Fax: 011-24368639 **SHO**
Police Station Preet Vihar, Delhi
Ph: 011-22510291, 8750870604

DP/333/ED/21

ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL, SRINAGAR
BB CANTT, BATWARA, J&K-190004
Phone: 0194-2468224, Website: www.apssrinagar.co.in

REQUIRED TEACHING STAFF

1. Applications are invited for selection/ panel for the following posts in the category of Regular Appointments from eligible Combined Screening Board (CSB) qualified candidates :-

Posts	Subjects	Total Tentative Vacancies
PGTs	Mathematics (01), Physics (01), Chemistry (01), Commerce (01) & Geography (01).	05 (Five)
TGTs	English (01), Hindi (01), Science (01), Maths (01), Social Science (01), Computer (01), Special Educator (01), Lady Physical Education Teacher (01) & Counsellor (01).	09 (Nine)

Note:- Vacancies given above may increase/ decrease at the time of interview .

2. Age as on 01 April 2021

(a) **Fresh Candidates** - Below 40 years
(Less than 5 years experience)

(b) **Experienced Candidates** - Below 57 years (Incl.ESM)

3. Educational Qualification : As per CBSE Affiliation Bye-laws for all pots and CSB qualified (where applicable) for other details please visit school website www.apssrinagar.co.in

4. Posts: The posts are liable to transferable.

5. Application Forms : Desirous candidates to apply on application forms given on school's website along with attested copies of certificates and processing fee of **₹ 100/-** to the Principal APS, Srinagar **on or before 12 Feb 2021**. Bank Draft should be in favour of APS, Srinagar payable at Srinagar. Incomplete applications and not as per format given on school's website will be not be considered. Application forms may also be collected from APS Srinagar on cash payment of **₹ 100/-**.

6. Short-listed Candidates will be called for interview telephonically/ by e-mail.

7. Army widows and wives of Army Personnel Boarded out with 100% disability may be considered without CSB & B.Ed with conditions as per AWES guidelines. For details please visit school website www.apssrinagar.co.in

Dated: Jan 2021

Dir (AWES)
HQ Northern Comd

Thackeray, Pawar likely to share stage with Akhilesh

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, JAN. 20

In a bid to stop the BJP from coming to power in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the Samajwadi Party (SP) is planning to organise a grand public rally of north Indians in alliance with the Shiv Sena and NCP. SP leader Ram Charitra Nishad met Shiv Sena president and chief minister Uddhav Thackeray in this regard.

The proposed meeting will be addressed by NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Mr Thackeray and SP president Akhilesh Yadav. Mr Nishad said that the mega rally is likely to be held in Mumbai after Holi in March.

The BMC polls will be held along with UP Assembly elections in early 2022. Around 24 lakhs voters are north Indian in Mumbai.



Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar, Akhilesh Yadav

▶ **THE MOVE** is an attempt to stop the BJP from coming to power in the BMC

Speaking to this newspaper on Friday, Mr Nishad, who claimed to be an emissary of Mr Yadav, said that chief minister Uddhav Thackeray and NCP chief Pawar agreed to share the stage with Mr Yadav in Mumbai for a grand public rally. “We will contest the BMC election in alliance with Shiv Sena and NCP,” the SP leader said.

Mr Nishad has also spoken to the NCP chief about the public rally during the parliament session.

Guj govt decides to rename dragon fruit as ‘Kamalam’

Gandhinagar, Jan. 20: The Gujarat government has decided to rename dragon fruit as ‘Kamalam’, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani has said.

The state government has applied for a patent to change the nomenclature of dragon fruit, which is largely grown in Kutch, Navsari and different parts of Saurashtra, to “Kamalam”, Mr Rupani told reporters on Tuesday.

“The name dragon fruit is not proper, and due to its name one thinks of China. So we have given it the name ‘Kamalam’,” he said.

Asked why the name ‘Kamalam’ has been given to the fruit, Rupani said, “Farmers say it looks like lotus

and that is the reason we have named it ‘Kamalam’.”

Notably, *Kamal*, or lotus, is the poll symbol of the BJP and Gujarat party unit headquarters is named Shri Kamalam. There is nothing political behind renaming of the fruit, Mr Rupani said.

The fruit is found in arid areas of the state and it is known for its nutritional value, like it also helps in increasing the hemoglobin, Rupani said in reply to question on the need to rename it.

The CM also said it is the most expensive fruit available in the market at this time. The change in nomenclature of the fruit is yet to find its way among the masses and farmers.

Ahmedabad-based

housewife Gayatri Vyas, who regularly eats the fruit for its nutritional value, said she is not aware that it has been changed as ‘dragon fruit’ only in markets.

The fruit comes from several different cactus species and is recommended to be eaten as it can boost immunity. Lately, cultivators from some of the state's arid regions like Kutch have largely taken up farming of this fruit.

The NCP on Wednesday targeted the BJP over the Gujarat government's decision to rename dragon fruit as ‘Kamalam’, saying the time may not be far when the saffron party would start calling the country as “Kamalastan”. — *PTI*

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,792.12	0.80
Nifty 50	14,644.70	0.85
S&P 500*	3,840.12	1.08
Dollar (₹)	73.02	0.20
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.92	-0.36
Euro (₹)	88.74	-0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,758	347 0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	56.42	0.93
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.942	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.101	0.009

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Laurus acquires majority stake in Richcore Life

Laurus Labs said it has acquired majority stake in Bengaluru-based biotech company Richcore Lifesciences, marking its entry into the biotechnology segment. In a regulatory filing in November, Laurus Labs had said that it signed definitive agreements with Eight Roads Ventures and VenturEast Proactive Fund and VenturEast Life Fund III, to acquire 72.55 per cent stake in Richcore Lifesciences Pvt Ltd for Rs 246.67 crore. The firm has now completed the transaction.

Dumping duty on newsprint for 5 yrs recommended



The DGTR has recommended the imposition of antidumping duty on newsprint—used in printing newspapers—from Australia, Canada, EU, Russia, Singapore and the UAE, for five years. Its probe concluded that 'newsprint in rolls or sheets, excluding glazed newsprint' from these countries have been exported at dumped prices into India. The duty suggested is \$5.15-\$98.6 per tonne. FinMin takes the final call on duties.

PayPal's Xoom lets PIOs remit money real time

Xoom, PayPal's international digital money transfer service, announced its integration with NPCI's UPI, a real-time payment system facilitating inter-bank transactions. NRIs and PIOs living in the US, Canada and Europe can now remit money to their family and friends in India. Overseas senders only need to know Indian receivers' UPI identity (ID) to send remittances instantly, 24x7.

IRFC's ₹4,600-cr IPO subscribed 3.49% times

The Indian Railway Finance Corporation's Rs 4,600-crore IPO got subscribed 3.49 times as per last update on the final day of the bidding process. The qualified institutional buyers portion was subscribed 3.78 times, high network investors category was subscribed 2.67 times and retail individual investors portion was subscribed 3.66 times. Shares reserved for employees were subscribed 43.76 times.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Hiring may surge in new academic year Education sector sheds 6 mn jobs

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 20

While most services sectors have been recovering in the past two quarters, the education sector has been witnessing a different trend. The sector has rather lost 5.4 million jobs by the end of the December quarter. Interestingly, the job losses had started even before the lockdown.

However, a silver lining is that once the schools reopen, Covid-19 restrictions may mandate schools to have fewer students in a classroom and this might raise the need for teachers.

The education sector, which had employed 15 million people in 2018 and 2019, had started showing weakness towards the end of 2019, according to a study by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. Employment fell to 14.5 million in the March quarter of 2020, even before lockdown hit all sectors. It further fell to 9.7 million in the June-September 2020 quarters. In the December 2020 quarter employment in education was down to 9.1 million.

From the 2019 levels, the sector has lost close to 6 million jobs.

"In 2019-20, the industry has been witnessing a disruption with the adoption of technology. While new edtech start-ups have been emerging on the one hand, regular institutions have been increasingly embracing technology on the other, which led to lesser demand for manpower. Even the job forecasts for the sector had predicted



PANDEMIC TAKES IT ALL

- ▶ Sector bucks the recovery trend in services sector
- ▶ Education sector had employed 15 million in 2018 and 2019
- ▶ This came down to 9.1 million in the

- December 2020 quarter
- ▶ Smaller-sized classes may raise demand for teachers in 2021
- ▶ Tech platforms could also ramp up hiring in new academic year

lesser hiring," said Shantanu Rooj, founder & CEO, Schoolguru Eduserve.

According to him, it was perceived that personalised care would increase the requirement of teachers by edtech start-ups. But artificial intelligence tools took care of this requirement. Further, AI-based assessments too reduced the need for manpower.

"The lock-down further legitimised online learning, as a shift in mindsets in favour of online happened among the student community. Educational institutions went online during the lockdown and most of them have not started functioning physically yet. Online reduced the requirement of teachers, leading to the decline in jobs," he said.

According to Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice president, Teamlease Services,

several institutions in smaller cities have not been operating as earlier since the lockdown. This has impacted jobs of both teachers and support staff.

"Even the contract staff in government institutions were out of job," said Aditya Narayan Mishra, director and CEO of CIEL HR Services.

The situation is expected to continue in the March quarter. The ongoing vaccination drive may help education institutions reopen in the next academic year.

"Then we would probably see a surge in hiring. When institutions reopen, they will have to split students into smaller-sized groups. This will increase the requirement of teachers. Hence we expect the jobs in the sector to bounce back to 2019-20 levels by next academic year. Tech platforms also would be ramping up hiring," said Rooj.

SUNDARAM FINANCE TO GET NEW MD FROM APRIL

Chennai, Jan. 20: Non-banking finance company Sundaram Finance on Wednesday announced that it has made key changes in its management.

The changes include the appointment of Rajiv Lochan as managing director, succeeding T. T. Srinivasaraghavan with effect from April 1, 2021, the company said.

T. T. Srinivasaraghavan, fondly called as 'TT' among close circles, would retire after serving the organisation for over 38 years as of March 31, 2021.

It was during his tenure the balance-sheet of the city-based company grew from Rs 800 crore to over Rs 30,000 crore today.

Srinivasaraghavan, during the last two decades, also led the group's diversification into a multi-product financial services provider, a company statement said.

Lochan, who is the current director (strategy), has over 25 years of experience in financial services and was a partner in the consulting firm McKinsey and Company. Recently, he served Kasturi and Sons as its managing director.

Commenting on the tenure of Srinivasaraghavan, Sundaram Finance chairman S. Vijil said, "Under his leadership, the company demonstrated its traditional focus on asset quality and most importantly its adherence to values of prudence and customer focus."

—PTI

Southern states top Niti Innovation Index

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Kerala have been ranked as top five states in innovation in the Niti Aayog's second Innovation Index released on Wednesday.

The index, released by Aayog's vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar and CEO Amitabh Kant, has been developed on the lines of the Global Innovation Index.

Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Bihar were ranked at the bottom of the index.

Karnataka topped the index for the second year. Among Union territories Delhi topped the chart, while in the North-Eastern and Hill States category Himachal Pradesh occupied the top spot.

"Amongst major states, the average innovation score is 25.35. Karnataka tops at 42.5, which is attributable to its strong number of venture capital



deals, registered GIs (geographical indications) and ICT (information and communication technology) exports. Karnataka's high FDI inflow has also enhanced the innovation capabilities of the state," the India Innovation Index 2020 said.

Maharashtra was ranked second with an innovation score of 38, while Bihar finished last at 14.5.

Tamil Nadu has a score of 37.91, followed by Telangana at 33.23 and Kerala at 30.58. "The case for the southern states as the top performers has

also become stronger as four of them occupy the top-five spots within the major states," the release said.

According to the index, the North-Eastern and Hill states achieved an average innovation score of 17.89, with Himachal Pradesh as the best performer with a score of 25, followed by Manipur (22.77) and Sikkim (22.28), respectively.

"With 31.9 per cent of its total employment generated being knowledge-intensive, Himachal Pradesh benefits from a high number of knowledge workers," it said.

The index noted that the innovation score of UTs and city states averages at 26.01. Delhi was the best performer among all groups.

The India Innovation Index 2020, ranks the states and UTs based on their relative performance of supporting innovation.

—PTI

Schneider asked to list or give exit option

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Markets regulator Sebi has asked Schneider Electric President Systems to either list on a stock exchange within six months or provide exit to its investors under the delisting norms.

If the company opts for de-listing, the reference date for computing the floor price would be the date on which the company made the public announcement for the exit offer, the regulator said.

Further, the shareholders who had tendered their

shares in exit offer would be given an opportunity by the company for buying back the shares at the exit price, the Sebi said in an order passed on Tuesday.

Schneider Electric President Systems, a designer, manufacturer and supplier of standard and customised enclosure systems in India, was earlier listed on the Banga-lore Stock Exchange (BgSE) and Pune Stock Exchange (PSE).

Following the de-recognition of BgSE and PSE in 2014 and 2015, respectively, the company moved to the

dissemination board (DB) of the NSE in July 2016.

Prior to being moved to the DB, the 2012 and 2014 circulars issued by Sebi had cast an obligation on the company to migrate to a nationwide exchange or provide an exit option to the shareholders in terms of the delisting norms.

Also, exclusively listed companies (ELCs) of de-recognised bourse were required to exercise one of the options prior to the exit of the stock exchanges where they were listed.

—PTI

Don't ignore comorbidities in life or business: Birla

New Delhi, Jan. 20: There is an open question over how much 'froth' is there in the euphoria seen in the financial markets and it will need another quarter or so to confirm that this booming trajectory is here to last, said Aditya Kumar Mangalam Birla.

Reflecting on the year gone by, he said the coronavirus pandemic has brought devastation and asked people and companies not to "ignore the comorbidities—whether in life or business", while asking them to build reserves of knowledge, ideas, collaboration and goodwill to emerge stronger from a crisis.

He also presented a contrarian view to the notion that work from home will be the 'mega trend' of the decade, saying office is not just a place where people come to work but is a melting pot of people, ideas, and conversations.

Terming volatility as a 'froth', Birla said it along with uncertainty have been an underlying phe-



Kumar Mangalam Birla

nomenon for almost two decades now and financial variables have become even more volatile in these unusual times.

Stating that after the outbreak there were prophets of doom predicting irreversible shifts in consumer demand and the evisceration of sectors but there has been recovery across sectors.

In India too, he said, the initial prognosis and narrative of experts proved to be excessively pessimistic but the country has witnessed strong recovery across manufacturing sectors, cement to paints, and automotive to aluminium.

"However, how much froth there is in the euphoric financial markets is still an open question. Perhaps, we still need another quarter or so to confirm that this booming trajectory is here to last. The economists, I am told, are now searching for alphabets that will adequately describe this trend of cautious optimism," he said.

Correlating the challenges brought by the pandemic to both individuals and companies, Birla said, "Don't ignore the comorbidities whether in life or business."

Stressing that the comorbidities are self-inflicted for businesses, Birla said, "The excessive financial leverage that provides sugar highs while weakening fundamentals in the long term, lax processes that lead to inventory build-ups clogging supply chain arteries like some pernicious cholesterol, or most devastating, a lack of focus on building consumer and human relationships."

—PTI

BREAKING UP | GIANTS

Firms with dominant market share could face anti-trust action

China to rein in online payment players

Jan. 20: China proposed measures to curb market concentration in its online payment market, potentially dealing another blow to financial technology giant Ant Group Co and its biggest rival Tencent Holdings Ltd.

The central bank said on Wednesday that any non-bank payment company with half of the market in online transactions or two entities with a combined two-thirds share could be subject to anti-trust probes, according to draft rules released by the People's Bank of China.

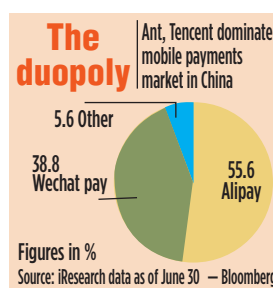
If a monopoly is confirmed, the central bank can suggest the cabinet impose restrictive measures, including breaking up the entity by its business type.

Firms already with payment licences would have a one-year grace period to comply with the new rules, the PBOC said.

The rules present the strongest and most detailed message yet of regulators' plans to curb monopolistic practices in the online payments industry. Ubiquitous in China, Ant and Tencent have transformed how consumers shop through their mobile apps that are used by a combined one billion people.

The regulator also vowed "comprehensive" oversight of companies in the space, and their transactions with affiliated parties.

It will step up supervision of any changes to shareholders or benefi-



aries at payments firms, it said.

"This shows there's no let-up in regulatory tightening on the sprawling fintech businesses," said Dong Xiaomiao, a researcher at Zhongguancun Internet Finance Institute.

Regulators shocked markets in November by suspending billionaire Jack Ma's record initial public

offering of Ant as they stepped up oversight.

Ant has since been ordered to overhaul its business and an antitrust investigation was launched into affiliate Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.

While they've stopped short of directly asking for a breakup of Ant, the central bank has stressed that the company needs to "understand the necessity of overhauling" and come up with a timetable as soon as possible.

Global investors are still seeking clarity on what the future holds for the world's largest fintech firm.

Mobile payments are only part of what contribute to online transactions, but they have become the most impor-

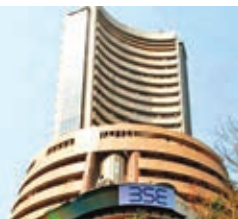
tant platform in the country. Alipay, the app operated by Ant, held 55.6 per cent of the mobile payments market as of the second quarter last year, according to internet consultant iResearch.

Tencent had a 38.8 per cent share. Room for growth in online payments is limited after years of a head-to-head rivalry between Ant and Tencent's Wechat Pay. Total transactions were 59.8 trillion yuan as of June 30 last year, up 8.8 per cent from a year earlier, according to data from iResearch.

That's sharply down from increases of 23 per cent and 65 per cent during the same period in 2019 and 2018, respectively.

—Bloomberg

MKT MOMENTUM MAY TAKE SENSEX TO 50000 ZONE



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 20

The Sensex is now poised to hit the 50000 landmark any time given the market momentum and Wednesday's 393 points gain on positive global and domestic cues. The 30-stock index closed at 49792 points after hitting an all-time high of 49874 in intra-day trade, as it gained further after Tuesday's big up-move by 834 points.

The Nifty-50 also closed at a new all-time high of 14644.70 up 123.55 points, or 0.85 per cent, after hitting a new peak of 14666.45.

Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,289.05 crore, marking a big jump from the last few sessions' trend of subdued buying.

Analysts expect the Sensex to breach the 50,000 mark given the upward momentum seen in the past two sessions and the earnings season trend.

"Even if the market does not hold at a high level, we can expect a rally in the best case scenario up to 14750/50000 and up to 14850/50500," said Shrikant Chouhan, executive VP, equity technical research, Kotak Securities.

"Global cues were positive ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration as US President on Wednesday. Further comments from US Treasury Secretary nominee Janet Yellen backing for more stimulus to ride out a pandemic-driven slump buoyed global markets," said Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

THE ASIAN AGE

21 JANUARY 2021

When Team India staged mother of all comebacks

Team India staged the mother of all comebacks to win an away Test series in one of the most difficult terrains to conquer while overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds. This win in Australia will go down in Indian cricket history as the greatest achievement, perhaps outranking the 1971 twin series wins in the West Indies and England and the 2001 win at home against Ricky Ponting's Australians in which too they had come back from a Test down to win the series. The team had similarly beaten Australia in the 2018-19 series Down Under but the home team then were without Steve Smith and David Warner.

This is indeed the dawn of a new era as the touring India squad laid to rest many conservative theories about experienced players and a settled XI being the key to success. The remarkable story of this triumph was shaped by fringe players who were pushed on to centrestage and who flourished beyond imagination in the limelight. Only Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara played all four Tests. And when India went into the decider at the Woolloongabba arena in Brisbane, India's combined bowling attack had fewer Test wickets in their bag than Australia's occasional leg spinner Marnus Labuschagne. It is the deeds of such unlikely heroes that makes folklore of sport.

Rahane at the helm was as if Buddha were put in charge of a cricket team as opposed to the demonstrative Kohli, which just goes to show there are many ways to play the great game

The saga of raw physical courage starring Pujara at the Gabba and before him that of Hanuma Vihari and Ashwin who salvaged the draw in Sydney will be spoken of for a long time to come. But nothing made all this seem like a fairytale than the transformation of young Rishabh Pant who went from impulsive striker to matchwinner in the space of two Tests, his 97 in Sydney turning the series on its head as it gave a glimpse of victory from counterattacking cricket before his decisive 89 not out in Brisbane which cemented the balletic 91 of opener Shubman Gill who had shown that the Australian pace bowlers could be taken on even in their Gabba.

Who would have imagined that the mother of all turnarounds would come from the very depths of despair of 36 all out in Adelaide and that the matchwinners would come from diverse backgrounds as the son of autorickshaw driver, Siraj being the only Indian bowler with a five-for in the series, the son of street vendor, Natarajan who went from net bowler to Test performer and Test benchwarmers Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur would star with bat and ball. It was cheeky of netizens to suggest that the series verdict means Virat Kohli is free to seek more paternal leave because he as the skipper had assiduously built not only this team but also instilled in it this positive attitude.

It is time then for Indian cricket to bury old shibboleths and reshape the future with an open and all-inclusive approach recognising the fact that today's youngsters, exposed to big team atmosphere and subject to expert international coaching and conditioning in the IPL, are equally adept at playing to win. Rahane at the helm was as if Buddha were put in charge of a cricket team as opposed to the demonstrative Kohli, which just goes to show there are many ways to play the cricket.

Vaccine aid for neighbours

India has long called itself the pharmacy of the world and has now decided to live up to the claim. By the time these lines are printed, lakhs of doses of made-in-India vaccines against the novel coronavirus would have landed in our neighbouring countries, and more will do so in the coming days. While six nations — Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles — will get the Indian vaccines in the first tranche, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius will get them once "necessary regulatory clearances" are given. It is noteworthy that the Indian vaccines would be the first to arrive in most of these nations.

Vaccine, all said and done, is a knowledge product: it calls for the use of the knowledge humankind has created and every single tool it has made till now for its successful rollout. India's soft move, peppered with diplomatic quotients, will earn a lot of goodwill for the country. It will also prove to the neighbours, and the world at large, that India becoming a superpower will benefit all.

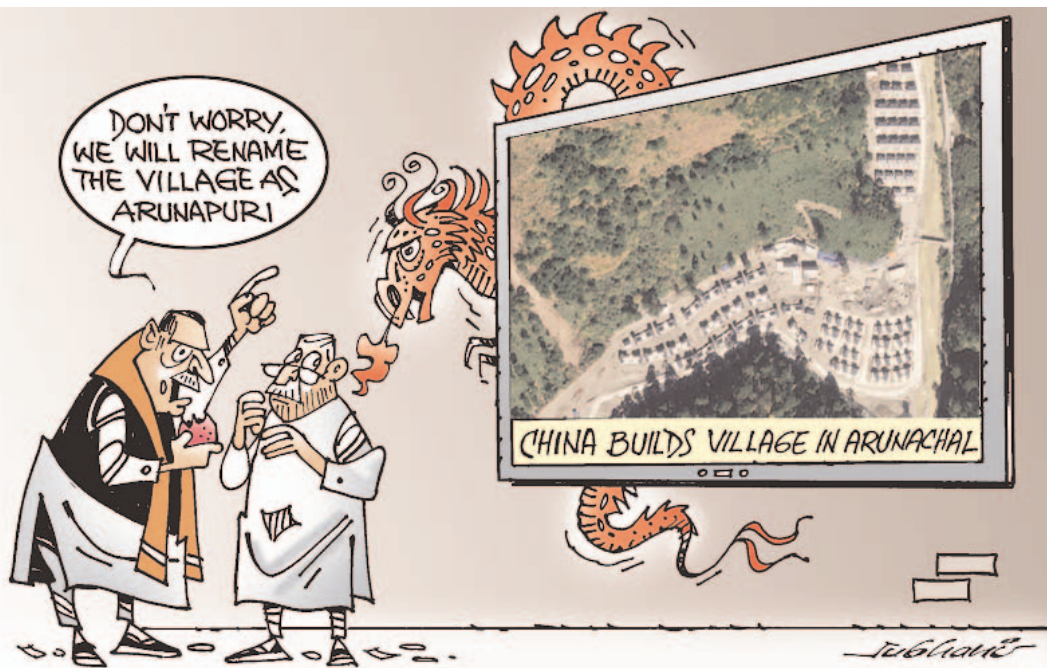
The only exception as of now is Pakistan. The Drugs Regulatory Authority of Pakistan has cleared the use of Covishield, manufactured by Serum Institute of India, and the government there is reportedly exploring ways to get it through Covax, an alliance set up by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and World Health Organisation or directly. Both the routes are fine but India should positively decide should a request come from the western neighbour. It will have no dramatic consequences but will be the stating of the obvious — the real challenges the two now-estranged nations face are similar, and the ways to overcome them will be more successful if they are adopted together. Should it happen, the vaccine could produce some antibodies against ultra-nationalism and religious bigotry, too. The government should seize this chance.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR
THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 25211124.
Published and Printed on behalf of and for
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.
London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



India, world must gear up as Biden era begins

K.C. Singh

President Joe Biden takes over America's presidency under unprecedented circumstances. It is only the fourth time in US history that the outgoing leader refused to attend his successor's inauguration, all earlier examples being from the nineteenth century. The transition has been disorderly, to say the least, despite the US facing a serious spike in Covid-19 cases, with over 400,000 dead and the economy slowing down. Domestic challenges are rivalled by those abroad as the Trumpian foreign policy legacy is equally fractious.

While Mr Biden's nominees to head the state and defence departments and the CIA are all well-known individuals, their depositions before Senate committees a day before the inauguration give an insight into the new administration's thinking. Antony Blinken, the incoming secretary of state, began with his personal story as the descendant of those who either fled Soviet pogroms or Nazi concentration camps. He ended with the touching tale about his late stepfather, hiding in a bush as disarray descended with Allied troops advancing into Germany in 1945, stepped out on seeing a tank with a five-pointed white star and told the African-American GI emerging from its turret the only three English words his mother taught him: "God bless America".

These anecdotes bolstered Mr Blinken's argument that the US must lead the world "not only by the example of our power, but by the power of our example". He listed the most pressing challenges as rising nationalism, receding democracy, growing rivalry from "China, and Russia and other authoritarian states, mounting a threat to a stable and open international system". He also noted "a technological

revolution" was reshaping our lives. If the US doesn't lead, he said, "there can be only two outcomes: another nation will step in or none will, and chaos shall ensue". On specifics, Mr Blinken argued the US must defeat Covid-19, out-compete China and take the lead in tackling climate change. President Biden is likely to take action on all three fronts the very first day. The US will rejoin the Paris climate agreement, return to the World Health Organisation, reverse travel bans on select Muslim nations and reach out to alienated allies. But he singled out China as the most significant challenge.

Therefore, President Trump was right in the direction of his China policy, but wrong in the means he chose. The defence secretary-designate, Gen. Lloyd Austin (Retd), talked about India's near western neighbourhood. While he reiterated the US resolve to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, he qualified it, as Mr Trump avoided doing, by saying safeguarding the gains in women's rights, etc, must be a precondition to a final settlement. On Pakistan, he seemed to regress to old formulations like underscoring its importance to Afghan peace and regional stability.

Mr Blinken also singled out democracy and human rights as central to the Biden administration's global outreach. Thus overall, while India would be happy with the tone and tenor on China, though what the new China containment strategy will be is still unclear, it would be cautious about Pakistan again getting more wriggle room. But New Delhi can't take the talk about human rights lightly. It was speculated whether the sudden early retirement of a bureaucrat close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his induction into Uttar Pradesh politics is

not a first step in curbing the zeal of UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath in pursuing a majoritarian agenda and intolerance towards anyone criticising him. A comedian's being detained for perceived insult raises questions about freedom of speech being curbed. The four-year free pass the government got on this count is now over. This is happening as the BJP prepares for a no-holds-barred electoral fight in West Bengal, and when the farmers' protests at Delhi's main entry points is nearing two months.

In Britain, the farmers' protests led to 100 MPs, across party lines, raising concern. A similar move can't be ruled out in Washington, with Democrats now controlling both Houses. External affairs minister S. Jaishankar had earlier drawn the ire of a congressional committee by illogically seeking the exclusion of Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal from a meeting he was to attend as she had been critical of the government's actions in Kashmir, including Article 370's abrogation. She has been re-elected and may revisit that issue and now new ones like the farmers' protests. President Donald Trump's administration poisoned US foreign policy well before departure by ramping up sanctions against Iran, raising the level of ties with Taiwan, declaring China's actions against Uighurs as genocide, etc. The aim was possibly to reduce Mr Biden's strategic space to re-balance ties with those nations, or if he did so make him vulnerable to attacks over being soft on perceived antagonists. Interestingly, like the debate over Mr Modi having gone overboard with his Houston rally with

China in UN bodies. None of this is possible unless the BJP takes a hard look at its domestic politics since Mr Modi's 2019 re-election. Peace at home, constitutionalism, rule of law and respect for human rights is a precondition to any genuine partnership abroad with major democracies recovering from the right-wing onslaught on their institutions.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambksingh.

The key question is whether Mr Biden can return the US and the world to its pre-pandemic, pre-Trump order. That seems unlikely because of China's rise and also as Mr Biden has a domestic right-wing insurgency on his hands.

LETTERS

RAP ON MEDIA WRIST

We are all witness to how the media, particularly some TV channels, villified actor Sushant Singh's girlfriend, Rhea Chakraborty and her family, harassed them and almost held them responsible for the murder of the actor. Passing a verdict on a number of petitions against the media coverage of the case, a bench of the Bombay high court has ruled that the media trial in the case was contemptuous and hindered the administration of justice. The court further said that media houses should avoid reconstructing crime scenes, interviewing potential witnesses and leaking sensitive and confidential information. It should give out only such information which it officially gets from the investigating agency.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

SAVE THE WORLD

THE VACCINES developed in India have been adjudged the most risk-free in the world. This is indeed a great achievement and a testimony to the expertise we possess in this sector. The ministry of external affairs is receiving continuous requests for exporting the vaccine. Starting from today India will be supplying the life saving shot to six countries, Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles. It will develop international co-operation and take India's diplomatic relations to a new level.

Kavya Shah
Ujjain

SEGREGATE WASTE

COLLECTING GARBAGE from residents is fast becoming a troublesome issue for the municipal corporation in Mumbai and its suburbs, since no steps have been taken in all these years to segregate it. Segregation of garbage should be made compulsory for all housing societies not only in Mumbai, but all over the country. Dry waste, wet waste and e-waste should be collected separately. Those unwilling to co-operate should be fined heavily.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Free to air views, ex-babus square up in 'letters war' on 'love jihad' law

Perhaps service rules stopped them from airing their views but after retirement bureaucrats are not bound anymore and can voice their thoughts freely. This has led to the formation of pro and anti-government groups among retired babus who jump into the fray at the behest of their conscience (or political leaning).

In the most recent instance, the "love jihad" law legislated by the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has triggered a "letter war" between former bureaucrats, those who criticise the law and those who have rallied behind the state government. The ranks of the ex-babus have been joined by retired Army officers, members of the judiciary and others.

Earlier, a group of 104 retired bureaucrats wrote to Yogi Adityanath, expressing "deep disapproval" and concern at the use of the "love jihad" law. Noted signatories included retired bureaucrats

like former NSA Shiv Shankar Menon, former chief of R&AW A.S. Dulat, former Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah, former principal secretary in PMO, T.K.A. Nair and former Union health secretary K. Sujatha Rao among other notables.

Now, a Forum of Concerned Citizens, comprising of over 250 retired officers has written to the chief minister endorsing the 'Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance 2020' and the motive behind it. In their letter, the group of former babus and ex-Army officers said that the legislation rightly provides that marriages done for sole purpose of unlawful conversion can be declared unlawful by family courts. They termed the letter by anti-love jihad babus a "politically motivated pressure group" and said that they don't represent thousands of civil servants who believe in New India emerging as the greatest democra-

cies of the world.

One may be tempted to believe that this is an instance of political battles being fought by proxy!

CADRE MERGER

More than a year after the Centre abrogated Jammu & Kashmir's special status under Article 370 and bifurcated the state into Union territories, the J&K cadre of IAS, IPS and IFS has been merged with the Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre. This allows officers posted in these states and UTs to work in J&K and vice-versa.

Necessary modifications may be made in the corresponding cadre allocation rules by the Centre. The notification issued by the government states that officers allocated to AGMUT cadre shall function following the rules framed by the Centre.

Observers see in the move a message of total integration of J&K with the Centre. It also solves the

Centre's problem of the reluctance of J&K cadre officers to serve in Ladakh, as it now creates a larger pool of UT cadre officers. Ladakh, they say, suffers from a paucity of officers. Due to its harsh climate officers are reluctant to serve there. But with the Chinese threat looming, the Centre wishes to focus on Ladakh's development. So, clearly, it is as much a political move as an administrative one.

MAMATA'S BIG PROMOTION PUSH IN BENGAL

Political or administrative compulsion? West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has promoted 31 IAS officers as secretary and additional secretary in one big push to bolster the state government's administration ahead of the Assembly elections.

With the BJP making a determined effort to breach her stronghold, the Trinamul leader is taking steps to strengthen the administra-

tive machinery, which has come under fire from various quarters. Among the 19 officers promoted as secretaries are additional secretaries Smita Pandey, Vijay Bharti, Shubhanjan Das, Samir Kumar Bhattacharya, C.C. Guha, Rajat Bose, Kaushik Halder, N.C. Sarar and T.K. Rudra.

The new additional secretaries include V. Lalithalakshmi, Sourav Pahari, Mukta Arya, Devi Prasad Karanam, Shakeel Ahmed, Uttam Patra, Santanu Saha, Nirmalya Ghosh, Anindya Narayan Biswas and Dipankar Chowdhury.

But this is early in the poll campaigning and chances of further changes in the state administration cannot be ruled out as the CM seeks to stave off the BJP's onslaught to dislodge her party from power. Watch this space for updates.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian@Twitter.com](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian). Let's multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

2 SECURITY MEN
KILLED IN PAK
TERROR ATTACK

Peshawar, Jan. 20: At least two security personnel were killed and one injured when unknown terrorists riding a bike opened fire at a Security Forces Road Protection team in northwest Pakistan late on Tuesday night, local police said.

The incident occurred in the jurisdiction of Gomal police station in Tank district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering the South Waziristan tribal district. The policemen who died in the firing were identified as Sepoy Khalid and Sepoy Ayaz. The injured cop was identified as Sepoy Muhammad Ramazan.

Security forces rushed to the site, cordoned off the entire area and started a search operation to nab the fleeing culprits. No group claimed responsibility for the attack till the filing of this report.

LIBYA AMMO
WAREHOUSE
BLAST KILLS 3

Cairo, Jan. 20: A fire, followed by an explosion at an ammunition warehouse at a naval academy in western Libya killed three people, including two officers, a Libyan spokesman said Wednesday.

It was not clear what caused the overnight blaze at the academy in the town of Janzur, about 24 kilometres (14 miles) west of the capital of Tripoli, said Masoud Abdal Samad, the spokesman of the Libyan navy.

Four people were also wounded in the incident. Samad said the dead included Brig. Gen. Ahmed Ayoub, the head of the academy, and Brig. Gen. Salem Abu Salah, who ran the naval college.

The third person who died was not identified. Video footage that circulated online following the incident shows firefighters and ambulances rushing to the site where a building is engulfed in a huge fire.

2 BRITISH SIKHS
CHARGED FOR
STREET FIGHT

London, Jan. 20: Two British Sikh men have been charged following what Scotland Yard described as a large altercation involving swords and knives in Southall, west London. Sukwir Singh, 22, and Lakha Singh, 29, both residents of Southall here, appeared at the Willesden Magistrates' Court on Monday charged with affray and threatening a person with a blade/sharply pointed article in a public place.

"Police were called at around 00:20hrs on Sunday, 17 January, to reports of a large group of around 30 men fighting with various weapons, including knives and swords," the Metropolitan Police said in a statement. "Officers attended and arrested two males, both aged in their 20s, on suspicion of violent disorder and affray. There were no reported injuries," the statement added.

The two men have been remanded in custody and will appear at the Isleworth Crown Court on February 15. The Met Police is appealing to witnesses to come forward.

INDIAN JAILED
FOR MOLESTING
S'PORE WOMAN

Singapore, Jan. 20: A 26-year-old Indian painter in Singapore was sentenced to nine months in prison on Wednesday for molesting a pregnant woman after following her to a lift lobby, according to a media report.

Kota Durga Prasad molested the three-month pregnant woman who was visiting her husband in Singapore on the night of September 5 last year, reported the *Channel News Asia*. Kota thought that the victim "looked pretty" and decided to follow her on seeing her crossing a traffic junction in the Jurong West residential area. He cycled behind her to a lift lobby of a housing block, where he approached her and asked for her phone number, the prosecution told the court.

The woman declined. The victim entered the lift when it arrived, and Kota followed her. When the woman tried to escape, Kota blocked her several times with his body and hands. The lift doors closed and the victim was trapped in the lift with Kota, who hugged her and put his face very close to her. The victim gave him her number after Kota cornered her and repeatedly blocked her attempts to flee.

DEMOCRACY HAS PREVAILED: BIDEN

Newly inaugurated US Prez, in maiden speech, calls on Americans 'to defend the truth and defeat the lies'

Washington, Jan. 20: "Democracy has prevailed," newly inaugurated US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday in his maiden speech as he called on Americans "to defend the truth and defeat the lies". Speaking shortly after taking oath as the 46th President of the United States, 78-year-old Biden also pledged to repair America's global allies, which suffered during his predecessor Donald Trump's four-year regime. "This is America's day, democracy has prevailed," Biden said, apparently referring to his Trump's efforts to deny him victory in the November 3 election won by him.

"With unity we can do great things," he said referring to the challenges ahead of him from fighting the Coronavirus to addressing racial injustice. "Unity is the path forward," he asserted, laying out his vision to defeat the pandemic, build back better, and unify and heal the nation. Biden asserted that he will be the president for all Americans, all those who voted for him and those who did not vote for him. In his speech that lasted for 21 minutes, Biden praised Americans for rising to the challenge and reclaiming democracy. He mentioned the attempt to undo it at that exact location two weeks ago, and renewed his campaign goals of overcoming the pandemic, bringing racial justice and fighting climate change.

Biden also criticised those who have stoked anger and division, and asked those who opposed him to "hear me out." He called out those who lie for political power and profit. "There is truth, and there are lies," he added. In a message to the international community, Biden said that he would rebuild the alliances frayed over the past four years. "We can make America once again the leading force of good in the world." "We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again, not to meet yesterday's challenges but today's and tomorrow's challenges," he said. "We will lead by the power of our example," he said in his message to the international community.

The 78-year-old veteran Democratic leader said: "We'll be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress and security." "America has been tested, and we have come out stronger for it. We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again. "We'll lead, not merely by the exam-

READY TO SERVE,
SAYS KAMALA IN
1ST TWEET AFTER
TAKING OATH

Washington, Jan. 20: Kamala Harris was on Wednesday sworn in as America's first woman Vice President during a historic inauguration at the West Front of the Capitol. Harris, 56, the 49th US Vice President, will serve as the deputy of President Joe Biden, 78, who also took the oath of office, becoming the 46th US President.

Harris took over the office of the US Vice President from 61-year-old Mike Pence. Biden succeeded President Donald Trump, 74. In her first tweet as Vice President from her official Twitter handle, she said: "Ready to serve."

Harris, the daughter of an Indian immigrant from Chennai, scripted history by becoming the first-ever woman Vice President of the United States. She is also the first female, first Black and first South Asian American vice president. Her husband Douglas Emhoff, 56, is the first 'Second Gentleman' — the first male spouse of a vice president in the US. Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina member of the Supreme Court, administered the oath of office to Harris. She was sworn in on two Bibles — one that belonged to a close family friend named Regina Shelton and another that belonged to Thurgood Marshall — the country's first African American Supreme Court justice. — PTI

ple of our power, but by the power of our example. We'll be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress and security," Biden said. Many world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have tweeted their congratulations to the new administration and expressed their optimism at working together. "My warmest congratulations to Joe Biden on his assumption of office as President of the United States of America. I look forward to working with him to strengthen India-US strategic partnership," Modi said. "My best wishes for a successful term in leading USA as we stand united and resilient in addressing common challenges and advancing global peace and security," he said. — PTI



Vice President-elect Kamala Harris greets former US President Barack Obama ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration as the 46th President of the United States on the West Front of the US Capitol in Washington, on Wednesday. — AP

12 Guard troops pulled out

Washington, Jan. 20: Twelve US National Guard troops have been pulled from duty protecting the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden, partly due to an investigation of extremist sympathies in the ranks, the Pentagon said Tuesday. Two of the 12 were removed from duty for making "inappropriate comments or texts," said National Guard Commander General Daniel Hokanson.

The two were sent home, he said, declining to explain what was said in the comments. They were pulled from

BIDEN HOMELAND SECURITY PICK TO
REOPEN ASYLUM FOR MIGRANTS

Washington, Jan. 20: President-elect Joe Biden's Homeland Security secretary nominee Alejandro Mayorkas promised Tuesday to apply US asylum laws to undocumented immigrants but did not say how he would deal with a caravan of Hon-

duran migrants now bound for the US.

Mayorkas told a Senate committee vetting his nomination that the government would roll back departing President Donald Trump's tough measures to seal the southern US border. — AFP

the force "out of an abundance of caution," he said. The removal of the other 10 troops was also unex-

plained, but was "unrelated to the events taking place at the Capitol or to the concerns that many people

'Aggressive stance' against China: Spy chief

Washington, Jan. 20: Asserting that China is a "challenge" to the security and prosperity of the US, spy chief nominee Avril Haines has said she supports an "aggressive stance" to deal with the challenges that the country is now facing from Beijing.

America's approach to China has to evolve and essentially meet the reality of the particularly assertive and aggressive China that is being experienced now, Haines told lawmakers during her confirmation hearing for the post of Director of National Inte-

ligence on Tuesday. US President-elect Joe Biden has nominated Haines, who had served as White House Deputy National Security Advisor in the Obama administration, as his next spymaster.

If confirmed by the Senate, 51-year-old Haines would be the first woman to occupy this position. In this capacity she would oversee as many as 18 American intelligence agencies, including CIA and FBI. "China is a challenge to our security, to our prosperity, to our values across a range of issues, and I do

support an aggressive stance, in a sense, to deal with the challenge that we're facing. So I think that's the place that we are now, and one that is more assertive than where we had been in the Obama/Biden administration. And if I'm confirmed, I think frankly the intelligence community can do a lot to help in that respect," she said. "Providing, keeping our focus, putting our resources and effort in making sure that we understand the intentions and capabilities of China," she said. — PTI

APPROACH CHINA FROM POSITION OF
STRENGTH, NOT WEAKNESS: BLINKEN

Washington, Jan. 20: Identifying a rising and assertive China as a major national security threat to the United States, the incoming US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has said that America needs to approach the challenge from a "position of strength, not weakness".

"As we look at China, there is no doubt that it poses the most significant challenge of any nation

state to the United States in terms of our interests, the interests of the American people," Blinken told members of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his confirmation hearing. "There are rising adverse aerial aspects to the relationship. Certainly competitive ones and still some cooperative ones when it is in our mutual interest," Blinken added. — PTI

Village in TN cheers for Kamala Harris

RISHI LEKHI and AIJAZ RAHI
THULASENDRAPURAM
(TAMIL NADU), JAN. 20

Residents of a tiny Indian village surrounded by rice paddies flocked to a Hindu temple, setting off firecrackers and praying and as they watched Kamala Harris, who has strong roots to the village, take her oath of office and become the US vice-president on Wednesday.

Groups of women in bright saris and men wearing white dhoti pants watched the inauguration live as reporters broadcast the villager's celebrations to millions of Indians. The

villagers chanted "Long live Kamala Harris" while holding portraits of her and blasted off fireworks the moment she took the oath.

Earlier, the villages adorned their temple with flowers, offering special prayers for Harris' success. Her maternal grandfather was born in the village of Thulasendrapuram, about 350 kilometres (215 miles) from the southern coastal city of Chennai.

"We are feeling very proud that an Indian is being elected as the vice president of America," said teacher Anukampa Madhavasimhan.

● Kamala Harris grandfather was born more than 100 years ago. Many decades later, he moved to Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu state. Harris' late mother was also born in India, before moving to the US to study at the University of California.

At the prayer ceremony in Thulasendrapuram, the idol of Hindu deity Ayyanar, a form of Lord Shiva, was washed with milk and decked with flowers by a priest. Then the village reverberated with the sound firecrackers as people held up posters of

Harris and clapped their hands.

Harris made history Wednesday as the first Black, South Asian and female US vice-president and what made her special for the village is is her Indian heritage.

Harris' grandfather was born more than 100 years ago. Many decades later, he moved to Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu state.

Harris' late mother was also born in India, before moving to the US to study at the University of California. She married a Jamaican man, and they named their daughter Kamala, a Sanskrit word

for "lotus flower."

In several speeches, Harris has often spoken about her roots and how she was guided by the values of her Indian-born grandfather and mother.

So when Joe Biden and Harris triumphed in the US election last November, Thulasendrapuram became the centre of attention in entire India. Local politicians flocked to the village and young children carrying placards with photos of Harris ran along the dusty roads.

Then and now, villagers set off firecrackers and distributed sweets and flowers as a religious offering. — AP

Vogue's new Harris
cover after row

New York, Jan. 20: Vogue will publish a limited edition of its latest issue featuring a different photo of Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris after the original cover image sparked controversy, the magazine said Tuesday.

Critics slammed the photo that graced the hard copy of the February issue, saying it was poorly composed and diminished Harris's achievements as the first Black woman to be elected vice president. Social media users criticised the lighting of the photo — in which

Harris wears a blazer, jeans and sneakers — and also questioned whether the magazine had lightened her skin.

Following the backlash, Vogue announced it would release some copies with a more formal portrait of Harris wearing a light blue Michael Kors pantsuit. "In recognition of the enormous interest in the digital cover, and in celebration of this historic moment, we will be publishing a limited number of special edition inaugural issues," a Vogue spokesperson said. — AFP

GRANTING | CLEMENCY

The commutations came in addition to actions Trump took after losing Nov. 3 elections

Don's last-minute pardons include Bannon, 73 others

Washington, Jan. 20: Outgoing President Donald Trump has pardoned his former political strategist Steve Bannon, one of the key architects of his 2016 electoral victory, as he issued a wave of pardons using the final hours of his presidency to grant clemency to 143 people.

The record 73 pardons and 70 commutations came in addition to the dozens of similar actions that Trump took after he lost the November 3 presidential elections to Joe Biden of the Democratic

Party. Biden, 78, will be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on Wednesday.

The White House in a statement issued on Wednesday said that Trump granted a full pardon to Bannon, who was in charge of the final months of his 2016 presidential campaign.

Bannon was indicted in August when New York federal prosecutors charged him and three others with defrauding donors of more than a million dollars as part of an

online fundraising campaign purportedly aimed at supporting Trump's

farewell address: TRUMP'S 'BEST WISHES' TO NEW ADMIN

Washington, Jan. 20: Extending his "best wishes" and praying for the success of the new administration in keeping America safe and prosperous, outgoing US President Donald Trump in his farewell address has said that Americans must unify around their shared

values and rise above partisan rancour to forge their common destiny.

Trump has still not fully accepted the result of last November's election, which he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Trump, a Republican, made no mention of Biden in his pre-recorded video address,

but did allude to the violence at the Capitol earlier this month.

In the video farewell message released by the White House on Tuesday, Trump, 74, said he embarked on a mission to make America great again for all Americans. — PTI

border wall.

The White House in its statement said Bannon

has been an important leader in the conservative movement and is known



SHORT TAKES

PAK TEST-FIRES
NUKE-CAPABLE
MISSILE

Islamabad, Jan. 20: Pakistan said on Wednesday that it successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile which can strike targets up to 2,750 kilometres. The launch of Shaheen-III missile was "aimed at revalidating various design and technical parameters of weapon system," said a statement issued by the media wing of the Pakistani army — the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

The missile is capable of carrying nuclear and conventional warheads to a range of 2,750 kms, the statement said. President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Imran Khan and top army generals congratulated scientists and engineers on the successful test of the missile.

GHOSN FLIGHT:
TURKISH PILOTS
FACE JAIL

Istanbul, Jan. 20: Turkish prosecutors on Wednesday sought the maximum possible 12 years in prison each for a Turkish private airline official and two pilots accused of smuggling the former Nissan Motor Co chairman out of Japan, Turkey's state news agency reported.

In the third hearing in the trial of seven people over Carlos Ghosn's dramatic escape in 2019, prosecutors also requested that the court acquits two other pilots of the charge of "illegally smuggling a migrant," Anadolu Agency said. They recommended instead that the two — who flew him from Istanbul to Beirut — be tried on charges of failing to report a crime.

Delivering their final opinion on the case, the prosecutors also demanded that charges against two flight attendants be dropped.

SHIPWRECK OFF
LIBYA KILLS 43
MIGRANTS

UN, Jan. 20: A "tragic" shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea off Libya's coast killed at least 43 migrants bound for Europe, the UN migration agency said Wednesday.

The International Organisation for Migration said the shipwreck that took place a day earlier was the first maritime disaster in 2021 involving migrants seeking better lives in Europe.

The IOM said coastal security in Libya's western town of Zuwara rescued 10 migrants and brought them to shore. It said the dead were all men from Western African nations. It said the boat left the western city of Zawiyah early Tuesday and capsized a few hours later after its engine stopped working amid rough seas. Libya, which descended into chaos following the 2011 uprising that toppled and killed dictator Moammar Gadhafi, has emerged as a major transit point for African and Arab migrants fleeing war and poverty to Europe. Most migrants make the perilous journey in ill-equipped and unsafe rubber boats.

GAS LEAK
EXPLOSION KILLS
TWO IN MADRID

Madrid, Jan. 20: A powerful explosion apparently caused by a gas leak ripped the facade off a residential building in central Madrid on Wednesday, killing two people and injuring at least two more, according to the mayor.

The first images and footage shared on social media showed a tower of smoke coming out from the six-story building and rubble scattered in Toledo Street, near the city center. Emergency crews could be seen aiding several people on the ground.

Mayor Joss Luis Martinez Almeida confirmed the two deaths and two injuries to reporters as he visited the site and said that the initial assessment was that the blast was caused by a gas leak. The Madrid general vicar, Avelino Revilla, told Spain's TVE that one person linked to the Catholic church occupying part of the building was still missing.

A fire that started inside the building is making more difficult for rescuers and firefighters to look for any other possible survivors, Almeida said.

A nearby nursing home was evacuated although no injuries were initially reported among the residents, Martinez Almeida said. He said the residents were being taken to a hotel across the street.

Ma resurfaces
in online video

Beijing, Jan. 20: (AP) China's highest-profile entrepreneur, Jack Ma, appeared Wednesday in an online video, ending a 2 1/2-month absence from public view that prompted speculation about the future of the e-commerce billionaire and his Alibaba Group.

In the 50-second video, Ma congratulated teachers supported by his foundation and made no mention of his disappearance or official efforts to tighten control over Alibaba and other internet companies over the past six months. The video appeared on Chinese business news and other websites.

The normally voluble Ma disappeared from public view after he irked regulators by criticising them in an October 24 speech at a Shanghai conference. Days later, regulators suspended the planned multibillion-dollar stock market debut of Ant Group, a financial platform that grew out of Alibaba's payments service, Alipay.

That prompted speculation online about whether the 56-year-old Ma, China's biggest global business celebrity and a symbol of its tech boom, had been detained or might face legal trouble. Alibaba and the government haven't responded to questions about him.

The Jack Ma Foundation said in a statement Wednesday: "Jack Ma participated in the online ceremony of the annual Rural Teacher Initiative" event on January 20.

The foundation and Alibaba didn't respond to questions about Ma's status and when his next public event might be.

President Xi Jinping's government says anti-monopoly enforcement against internet companies will be a priority this year. Alibaba and other



Jack Ma

companies have been fined for violating anti-monopoly rules. Some social media services have been reprimanded for lapses in enforcing censorship.

In his October speech, Ma complained regulators had an antique "pawnshop mentality" and were hampering innovation, according to Chinese media. He appealed to them to make it easier for entrepreneurs and young people to borrow.

That clashed with the ruling party's marathon campaign to reduce surging debt in China's financial system that prompted fears about a possible bank crisis and led rating agencies to cut Beijing's credit rating for government borrowing.

Some people suggested the ruling Communist Party was making an example of Ma to show entrepreneurs couldn't defy regulators. But finance experts said Xi's government was uneasy about Alibaba's dominance in retailing and Ant's potential financial risks.

Anti-monopoly regulators warned executives Alibaba and five other tech giants in December not to use their dominance to block new competitors from entering their markets.

The central bank and other regulators have ordered Ant to overhaul its business before its market debut can go ahead. — AP

China dismisses
Pompeo Uighur
genocide claims

Beijing, Jan. 20: China's Foreign Ministry described outgoing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday as a "doomsday clown" and said his designation of China as a perpetrator of genocide and crimes against humanity was merely "a piece of waste paper."

The allegations of abuses against Muslim minority groups in China's Xinjiang region are "outright sensational pseudo-propositions and a malicious farce concocted by individual anti-China and anti-Communist forces represented by Pompeo," spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters at a daily briefing.

"In our view, Pompeo's so-called designation is a piece of waste paper. This American politician, who is notorious for lying and deceiving, is turning himself into a doomsday clown and joke of the century with his last madness and lies of the century," Hau said.

Pompeo's announcement on Tuesday doesn't require any immediate actions, although the US must take the designation

● **CHINA SAYS** its policies in Xinjiang aim only to promote economic growth and social stability.

into account in formulating policy toward China. China says its policies in Xinjiang aim only to promote economic growth and social stability.

The US has previously spoken out and taken action on Xinjiang, implementing a range of sanctions against senior Chinese Communist Party leaders and state-run enterprises that fund repressive policies in the vast, resource-rich region.

Last week, the Trump administration announced it would halt imports of cotton and tomatoes from Xinjiang, with Customs and Border Protection officials saying they would block products from there suspected of being produced with forced labour.

Many of the Chinese officials accused of having taken part in repression are already under US sanctions. — AP

LOST | ART

Rome, Jan. 20: Italian police have found a 500-year-old copy of Leonardo da Vinci's Salvator Mundi in a Naples flat and returned it to a church that had no idea it had been stolen.

Officers said late Monday they had arrested the 36-year-old owner of the apartment on suspicion of receiving stolen goods, after the painting was found in his bedroom cupboard.

Depicting Jesus Christ with his hand raised in a blessing and holding a

crystal orb, the painting is part of the Doma Museum collection within the San Domenico Maggiore church complex in Naples.

It is a copy of Leonardo's famous work that in 2017 became the most expensive painting ever sold, fetching \$450 million at a Christie's auction.

But the collection has been without visitors for months due to coronavirus restrictions and nobody had reported it missing. It was not immediately clear how the police came to discover the theft

China mum on its top leaders
who are yet to take vaccine

China has launched the free vaccination drive for 1.4 billion people

Beijing, Jan. 20: China on Wednesday boasted that several world leaders have taken its Covid-19 vaccines, but remained silent on why the top Chinese leaders are yet to take the jab. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying in her daily media briefing here named leaders of several countries who have taken one of the two Covid-19 vaccines made in China, publicly reposing their faith in them.

Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Seychelles President Wavel Ramkalawan, leaders of the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt and Indonesia have been publicly inoculated with Chinese vaccines, she said.

"China has started the inoculation of the vaccines in key groups. We will also carry out vaccination for all Chinese citizens for free. All people that meet the conditions should be vaccinated in an orderly manner," she said.

Responding to a query whether top Chinese leaders including President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and others have taken the jabs, she said: "As for the specific question you asked, I have no answer at this moment."

"Vaccine is our silver bullet for epidemic prevention and for our ultimate victory against the virus," she said.

China has launched massive vaccine diplomacy even as it approved only one of its four vaccines, Sinopharm for emergency use. Its other vaccines like Sinovac and CoronaVac have made their way abroad and are being used while they are undergoing the trial process.

Back home, China has launched the free vaccination drive for all its 1.4 billion people starting with key groups. Over 10 million people have been inoculated in the country. The ruling Communist Party leadership and the party cadre are yet to get vaccinated.

Asked whether the World Health Organisation (WHO) has granted emergency approval for its vaccines and will it distribute them through COVAX, the international vaccine alliance, Hua said, "as I understand the relevant companies are in communication with the WHO."

"They are also discussing concrete cooperation for being included in

MOSCOW COURT
DELAYS
NAVALNY TRIAL

Moscow, Jan. 20: A Moscow court on Wednesday postponed the start of the trial of detained Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on charges of defaming a World War II veteran, his lawyers said.

Olga Mikhailova, a lawyer for Navalny, told journalists the court pushed back the trial until February 5 because the opposition figure is currently in virus quarantine after returning from Germany on Sunday and being immediately put behind bars.

The court ruled that the "hearing has to take place with his participation", Mikhailova said. — AFP

● **OFFICERS SAID** late Monday they had arrested the 36-year-old owner of the apartment on suspicion of receiving stolen goods, after the painting was found in his bedroom cupboard..

● **IT IS** a copy of Leonardo's famous work that in 2017 became the most expensive painting ever sold, fetching \$450 million at a Christie's auction.

of the painting, but they said it was a "particularly complex operation".

"The painting was found on Saturday thanks to a brilliant and diligent police operation," said Naples prosecutor Giovanni Melillo. "There was no



Zelia de Carvalho Morley, 106, gets a shot of Chinas Sinovac CoronaVac vaccine at the retirement home where she lives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Wednesday. De Carvalho Morley lived through the 1918 flu pandemic. — AP

US virus toll crosses 4L
in Trump's final hours

Washington, Jan. 20: More than 4,000,000 people have died from Covid-19 in the United States since the pandemic began, according to Johns Hopkins University on Tuesday, the eve of the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden, who has made the fight against the Coronavirus a priority of his first term.

The bleak threshold was reached only about a month after the US recorded its 3,000,000th death from the disease, in mid-December, and nearly a year since it announced its first Covid death, at the end of February 2020.

The toll in the world's wealthiest nation remains by far the highest in absolute terms, though some other countries are registering more deaths in proportion to their populations, such as Italy, Britain and Belgium.

After the first Covid-19 death was announced in the US in February 2020 it took about three months to pass the 100,000 mark, during a first wave that hit New York particularly hard.

It took another four months to reach 2,000,000 fatalities, and just under three months to reach 3,00,000. — AFP

OXYGEN TANKS IN SHORT SUPPLY
AS MEXICO SEES SPIKE IN DEATHS

Mexico City, Jan. 20: Thefts of oxygen mounted as Mexico reported its highest daily death toll since the Coronavirus pandemic began, with 1,584 deaths confirmed ON Tuesday. There was also a near-record one-day rise in new virus cases of 18,894.

The Mexican Social Security Institute reported that an armed man burst into a government hospital in northern Sonora state around noon on Tuesday and stole seven oxygen tanks.

The institute said the

man pointed a gun at a hospital employee, demanded to know where the oxygen was kept, and took four empty canisters and three full ones. Authorities in the city of Navajoa are looking for the man and another suspect who drove off in a car carrying the tanks.

Also on Tuesday, police in the town of Tultepec, just north of Mexico City, chased down a small freight truck carrying 44 oxygen tanks, after the truck was reported stolen. — AP

US state nixes methanol
plant for supply to China

Olympia (US), Jan. 20: Officials in Washington state denied a key permit for a large proposed methanol plant Tuesday, saying the project that aims to send the chemical to China to be used in everything from fabrics and contact lenses to iPhones and medical equipment would pump out too much pollution.

A significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions and inconsistencies with the Shoreline Management Act were the main reasons the permit was rejected for the project planned on the Columbia River, the state Department of Ecology said in a news release.

The \$2 billion Northwest Innovation Works plant proposed in Kalama would take natural gas from Canada and convert it into methanol. It would then be shipped to China to make olefins — compounds used in many everyday products.

An environmental analysis done by the state agency found that the facility would be one of the largest sources of carbon pollution in Washington, emitting nearly 1 million metric tons a year within the state, and millions of tons more from extracting natural gas, shipping the product to Asia and final uses of the methanol, officials said. "I believe we were left with no other choice than to deny the permit for the Kalama project," Ecology Director Laura Watson said in a written statement.

"The known and verifiable emissions from the facility would be extremely large and their effects on Washington's environment would be significant and detrimental."

The Department of Ecology last year had demanded additional environmental analysis, saying after five years of planning, its backers had failed to provide enough information about the greenhouse gas emissions and how they would be offset. — AP

New York, Jan. 20: A US Army soldier was arrested on Tuesday in Georgia on terrorism charges after he spoke online about plots to blow up New York City's 9/11 Memorial and other landmarks and attack US soldiers in the Middle East, authorities said.

Cole James Bridges of Stow, Ohio, was in custody on charges of attempted material support of a terrorist organisation — the Islamic State group — and attempted murder of a military member, said Nicholas Biase, a spokesperson for Manhattan federal prosecutors.

The 20-year-old soldier, also known as Cole Gonzales, was with the Third Infantry Division out of Fort Stewart, Georgia, when he thought he was communicating with the Islamic State online about the terrorism plots. Unbeknownst to Bridges, an FBI employee was in on the chat as Bridges provided detailed instructions on tactics and manuals and advice about attacking the memorial and other targets in New York City, Biase said.

"As we allege today, Bridges, a private in the US Army, betrayed our country and his unit when he plotted with someone he believed was an ISIS sympathiser to help ISIS attack and kill US soldiers in the Middle East," said William F. Sweeney Jr, head of New York City's FBI office. — AP

UK SEES RECORD
DEATHS AS NEW
STRAIN DEEPENS
CONCERN

London, Jan. 20: The world received more frightening reminders of the pandemic's worsening danger on Tuesday as Britain's daily death toll reached a record, Germany looked set to tighten its partial lockdown and two Australian Open players tested positive. With the global death toll now well past two million and new variants of Covid-19 causing deep concern, countries across the world grappled with how to slow infections until vaccines become widely available.

They also sought ways to speed up vaccine distribution, with the European Union saying it aims to inoculate 70 percent of its adult population before the end of August. Most EU member states have struggled to get the ball rolling on vaccinations, with other countries from Russia to India also experiencing teeth ing problems. Recent days have also seen a renewed focus on the initial outbreak a year ago, and China defended its handling of the virus Tuesday after independent experts criticised the speed of its response. — AFP

U.S. SOLDIER
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SHORT TAKES

Nadella, Pichai hail Indian team

Washington: Top Indian American CEOs Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella on Tuesday congratulated the Indian cricket team on their historic test series win in Australia. A fearless Indian team, driven by its courageous youngsters, pulled off an exhilarating three-wicket win over Australia in the fourth and final test of the the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Brisbane on Tuesday. "One of the greatest test series wins ever. Congrats India and well played Australia, what a series #INDvsAUS," tweeted Pichai, chief executive officer of Google and Alphabet. "Last hour of the last day of the last test. Test series for the ages. Congrats to Team India!", Microsoft CEO Nadella wrote on the microblogging site. Both Nadella and Pichai are self-confessed cricket enthusiasts and closely follow the Indian team, making interesting observations at the end of important tournaments. — PTI

More Covid cases linked to Oz Open

Melbourne: Three more people linked to the Australian Open have tested positive for Covid-19 in Melbourne, increasing to 10 those associated with the Grand Slam tennis tournament which begins on February 8. Victoria state Emergency Services Minister Lisa Neville confirmed the new cases had been detected on Wednesday, adding that authorities are "very confident" one of the cases is a tennis player who is shedding the virus and is not infectious. The player is already in hard lockdown as they were on board a flight into Melbourne with another positive case. The other two cases are a player and their support person. Those 10 positive cases mean a total of 72 players remain in hard lockdown after being deemed close contacts of those positives on three charter flights into Melbourne from Abu Dhabi, Doha and Los Angeles. There were 17 tournament charter flights which arrived into Australia over three days last week so players and their entourages could undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine. Australian Open director Craig Tiley said 3,200 tests have been conducted on the more than 1,200 players, support staff and tournament officials. — AP

Leicester City humble Chelsea

Leicester, UK: Leicester moved to the top of the Premier League at the midway point of its campaign after a dominant 2-0 victory over Chelsea. Wilfred Ndidi and James Maddison scored in the first half on Tuesday to lift Leicester above Manchester United and Manchester City into first place. Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers has been happy for his players to go under the radar in the title race, but his bright and energetic team continues to show its credentials and is now unbeaten in six league games. Even with Vardy's goal drought extending to five games, Leicester had enough quality to beat Chelsea that has now lost five of its last eight league games to pile pressure on manager Frank Lampard. — AP

Shakib shines in Bangla win vs WI

Dhaka: Shakib Al Hasan took four wickets for just eight runs in a stunning international comeback Wednesday as Bangladesh beat the West Indies by six wickets in their first one-day international in Dhaka. Shakib, playing his first ODI after a one-year ban, helped Bangladesh bowl out a weakened West Indies for 122 in just 32.2 overs. In reply, the home side reached 125-4 in 33.5 overs, with skipper Tamim Iqbal hitting 44 off 69 balls. Kyle Mayers top-scored for the Windies with 40, while debutant Hasan Mahmud claimed 3-28 for Bangladesh. — AFP

Brief scores: West Indies 122 in 32.2 overs (K. Mayers 40; Shakib Al Hasan 4/8) lost to Bangladesh 125/4 in 33.5 overs (T. Iqbal 44; A. Hosen 3/26).

HEAT'S ON KOHLI

Victory under Rahane puts Virat in focus

New Delhi, Jan. 20: First things first. There is no imminent threat to Virat Kohli's captaincy in any format and neither is BCCI even remotely thinking on those lines. But that's the news part of the story. When it comes to views, there are many — some are quite open about the theory of split captaincy and some are speaking about it in hushed tones.

Ajinkya Rahane's calm demeanour in India's biggest overseas series win has opened up a debate but to disappoint the fans of the Test vice-captain, there is little chance of a permanent anointment for him in the immediate future.

However, there could be a paradigm shift in how the leadership group in the Indian cricket team works when Kohli re-enters that dressing room after a month-long paternity break.

When Kohli left, it was a team that was down in the dumps — dismissed for its lowest Test score of 36. But a lot has changed since that fateful afternoon in Adelaide.

While head coach Ravi Shastri is absolutely right in saying that this team bears Kohli's "stamp and character" but from December 19 in Adelaide to January 19 in Brisbane, a few senior cricketers will be perceived a bit differently.

Rohit Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin, Cheteshwar Pujara and certainly Rahane, in their own little way, have created a legacy but post Brisbane, that legacy will need proper acknowledgement.

These four will not ask for it as they have now earned it after quite literally putting their bodies on line.

So when Kohli enters that Indian dressing room, he will remain the "first" but "among equals" in a leadership group that possibly will be more inclusive.

On Friday, when a question was put forth on this to stand-in skipper Rahane after the match got over but expectedly, his tight defence couldn't be breached.

"I don't want to think about all these things. This is a victory that we all need to enjoy and I will think about England series once I am back in India," Rahane dodged the question. — PTI



Indian coach Ravi Shastri (right) talks to players in the dressing room with captain Ajinkya Rahane by his side after India beat Australia to clinch the Border-Gavaskar Test series 2-1 at the Gabba in Brisbane on Tuesday.

Pant is best keeper-batsman

Dubai, Jan. 20: India's Rishabh Pant became the top-ranked wicket-keeper batsman in the world after his sensational series-winning 89-run knock in the Brisbane match pushed him to a career-best 13th spot in the ICC Test batting rankings, issued on Wednesday.

Pant, who won many admirers for his fearless and mature batting, has 691 points in his kitty. South Africa's Quinton de Kock (677) is the next best wicket-keeper batsman in the list in the 15th position.

Australia batsman Marnus Labuschagne's first-innings century in Brisbane took him past India skipper Virat Kohli (862 points) to third position with a career-best 878 rating points. Kohli missed the action as he was on paternity leave.

Young India opener Shubman Gill continued his upward trajectory, moving up from 68th to 47th spot after a crucial 91 in the second innings of the fourth Test, which India won by three wickets on Tuesday.

Middle-order mainstay Cheteshwar Pujara moved up one place to seventh after his dogged effort, while Mohammad Siraj



India's Rishabh Pant hits a six during his match winning knock against Australia on the final day of the fourth Test at the Gabba in Brisbane on Tuesday. — AP

jumped 32 places to 45th after taking six wickets in the match, including a five-wicket haul in the second innings.

Debutant Washington Sundar and Shardul

tions, while Thakur re-entered the batting list in 113th position and bowling list in 65th position.

Australia captain Tim Paine moved up three spots to 42nd after scores of 50 and 27 while fast bowler Josh Hazlewood leapfrogged New Zealand's Tim Southee to the fourth spot after grabbing six wickets in the match, including a haul of five for 57 in the first innings.

England's Joe Root has returned to the top five with his highest rating points tally (738) in two years after scoring a first-innings 228 to help his team win the first Test against Sri Lanka by seven wickets in Galle.

Root has advanced six places, overtaking the likes of Pakistan's Babar Azam and Pujara in the process.

Jonny Bairstow (up five places to 58th in batting) and Sam Curran (up two places to 39th in bowling) also gained.

For Sri Lanka, Lahiru Thirimanne's progressed 12 places to 87th position while left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya (up six places to 47th) and medium pacer Asitha Fernando (up 11 places to 96th) also gained. — PTI

Smith axed, Sanju to lead Rajasthan

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Sanju Samson replaced Steve Smith as Rajasthan Royals captain after the Australian batsman and some other under-performing stars were released by their respective IPL franchises even as Chennai Super Kings retained veteran Suresh Raina for the upcoming 14th edition of the league.

The deadline for the eight franchises to submit the lists of retained and released players for the next season ended on Wednesday.

Samson was appointed to the top job after RR decided against renewing former skipper Steve Smith's contract.

Smith's contract ended in October 2020.

The Australians, smarting from a Test series loss to an injury-plagued India, took a hit as the likes of the explosive Glenn Maxwell and opener Aaron Finch too were released by Kings XI Punjab and Royal Challengers Bangalore respectively.

Also released by KXIP were West Indies all-rounder Sheldon Cottrell, Afghanistan's Mujeeb-ur-Rahman and New



Steve Smith

Zealand's Jimmy Neesham, who underwent a surgery recently to treat an injured finger.

CSK's Harbhajan Singh and Mumbai Indians' Lasith Malinga were among the other big names to be released by their respective sides ahead of next month's auction.

Harbhajan was joined by the likes of Kedar Jadhav, Piyush Chawla and Murali Vijay who were also let go by CSK. Also released by MI was Sherfane Rutherford, while Delhi Capitals decided to enter the next edition without English batsman Jason Roy, wicketkeeper Alex Carey, leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane and seamer Mohit Sharma. — PTI

WHO'S IN & OUT

■ **Chennai Super Kings — Players retained:** MS Dhoni, Ravindra Jadeja, Narayan Jagadeesan, Ruturaj Gaikwad, KM Asif, Josh Hazlewood, Karn Sharma, Ambati Rayudu, Suresh Raina, Imran Tahir, Deepak Chahar, Faf du Plessis, Shardul Thakur, Mitchell Santner, Dwayne Bravo, Lungi Ngidi, Sam Curran, Sai Kishore. **Released (6):** Harbhajan Singh, Shane Watson, Piyush Chawla, Kedar Jadhav, M. Vijay, Manu Kumar Singh.

■ **Delhi Capitals — Players retained:** Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant, Kagiso Rabada, Anrich Nortje, Marcus Stoinis, Daniel Sams, Shimron Hetmyer, Chris Woakes, Shikhar Dhawan, Prithvi Shaw, Shreyas Iyer, Axar Patel, Amit Mishra, Ishant Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin, Harshal Patel, Lalit Yadav, Pravin Dubey, Avesh Khan. **Released (6):** Mohit Sharma, Tushar Deshpande, Keemo Paul, Sandeep Lamichhane, Alex Carey, Jason Roy.

■ **Kings XI Punjab — Players retained:** K. L. Rahul, Chris Gayle, Mayank Agarwal, Nicholas Pooran, Mandeep Singh, Sarfaraz Khan, Deepak Hooda, Prabhsimran Singh, Mohammed Shami, Chris Jordan, Darshan Naidkande, Ravi Bishnoi, Murugan Ashwin, Arshdeep Singh, Harpreet Brar, Ishan Porel. **Released (9):** Glenn Maxwell, Karun Nair, Hardus Viljoen, Jagadeesha Suchith, Mujeeb ur Rahman, Sheldon Cottrell, Jimmy Neesham, Krishnappa Gowtham, Tajinder Singh.

■ **Kolkata Knight Riders — Players retained:** Eoin Morgan, Dinesh Karthik, Nitish Rana, Shubman Gill, Rinku Singh, Rahul Tripathi, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Kuldeep Yadav, Lockie Ferguson, Pat Cummins, Prasidh Krishna, Sandeep Warrier, Shivam Mavi, Varun Chakravarthy, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Tim Seifert. **Released (5):** Nikhil Naik, Siddhesh Lad, M. Siddharth, Tom Banton, Chris Green, Harry Gurney. ■ **Mumbai Indians — Players retained:** Rohit Sharma, Quinton de Kock, Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan, Chris Lynn, Anmolpreet Singh, Saurabh Tiwary, Aditya Tare, Kieron Pollard, Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya, Anukul Roy, Jasprit Bumrah, Trent Boult, Rahul Chahar, Jayant Yadav, Dhawal Kulkarni, Mohsin Khan. **Released (7):** Lasith Malinga, Mitchell McClenaghan, James Pattinson, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Sherfane Rutherford, Prince Balwant Rai, Digvijay Deshmukh.

■ **Rajasthan Royals — Players retained:** Sanju Samson, Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer, Jos Buttler, Riyan Parag, Shreyas Gopal, Rahul Tewatia, Mahipal Lomror, Kartik Tyagi, Andrew Tye, Jaydev Unadkat, Mayank Markande, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Anuj Rawat, David Miller, Manan Vohra, Robin Uthappa. **Released (8):** Steve Smith, Ankit Rajpoot, Oshane Thomas, Akash Singh, Varun Aaron, Tom Curran, Anirudha Joshi, Shashank Singh.

■ **Royal Challengers Bangalore — Players retained:** Virat Kohli, AB de Villiers, Yuzvendra Chahal, Davidu Padikkal, Navdeep Saini, Washington Sundar, Mohammed Siraj, Kane Richardson, Adam Zampa, Josh Philippe, Shahbaz Ahmed and Pavan Deshpande. **Released (10):** Aaron Finch, Chris Morris, Isuru Udana, Moeen Ali, Pawan Negi, Gurkeerat Singh Mann, Shivam Dube, Dale Steyn, Parthiv Patel, Umesh Yadav.

■ **Sunrisers Hyderabad — Players retained:** David Warner, Kane Williamson, Rashid Khan, T. Natarajan, Abhishek Sharma, Basil Thampi, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jonny Bairstow, Manish Pandey, Mohammad Nabi, Sandeep Sharma, Shahbaz Nadeem, Shreyas Goswami, Siddarth Kaul, Khaleel Ahmed, Vijay Shankar, Wriddhiman Saha, Abdul Samad, Mitchell Marsh, Jason Holder, Priyam Garg, Virat Singh. **Released (5):** Sanjay Yadav, B. Sandeep, Billy Stanlake, Fabian Allen, Yarra Prithvira.

CA lauds India, BCCI for sacrifices

Melbourne, Jan. 20: Cricket Australia on Wednesday saluted the Indian team's "resilience, courage and skill" during its historic Test series win over the hosts and expressed gratitude to the BCCI for the "sacrifices" it made to ensure a smooth conduct of the epic contest.

A second-string Indian team, led by Ajinkya Rahane, braved all odds to defeat a full-strength Australia by three wickets at the Gabba here to win

the four-Test series 2-1 and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy on Tuesday in Brisbane.

"On behalf of everyone at Cricket Australia, we congratulate Team India for their resilience, courage and skill demonstrated in retaining the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in a series that will be talked about for generations to come," CA wrote in a Thank You note to the BCCI.

The note, written by CA interim CEO Nick

Hockley and Chair Earl Eddings, was addressed to "friends in Indian cricket", the BCCI, acknowledging the role played by the Sourav Ganguly-led board in successfully completing the tour amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Australian cricket will forever be grateful to the BCCI for their friendship, trust and commitment in helping to deliver a series that has brought joy to many millions of people around the world at a time they needed it most," the

letter read.

"The unique challenges of international touring during a global pandemic are considerable and we thank India's players, coaches and support staff for all they have given.

"Over the past nine weeks, the Indian and Australian men's teams completed outstanding One-Day International and Twenty20 International series, followed by one of the greatest Border-Gavaskar Test series ever competed," it

added. The CA officials said that the BCCI's cooperation was crucial to making the tour a hit. The series gave the financially struggling CA a major boost with an expected revenue of 300 million Australian dollars.

"Despite the many public health and logistical challenges, the BCCI engaged with a spirit of cooperation befitting their status as one of international sport's greatest ambassadors," CA further added. — PTI

Warne predicts huge Oz fallout

Brisbane, Jan. 20: The legendary Shane Warne believes the embarrassing Test series loss to an under-strength India will result in a "huge fallout" in the Australian team and said a few heads could roll in the coming days. India recorded one of their most memorable wins on Tuesday when they defeated a full-strength Australia by three wickets in the fourth Test here to pocket the four-match series 2-1 and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"I think there'll be a huge fallout from this (defeat). There's not too many times that you lose to the second or third (choice) side," Warne was quoted as saying by Fox Cricket.

"Their (Australia) tactics will come into question, and they have to. Bowlers will come into question, people's spot in the team will come into question. It has to. You can't just deflect it and flick it off and say India were too good for us," he added.

Warne was, however, effusive in his praise for the Indian team which braved injuries to its key players and absence of Virat Kohli after the first Test on paternity leave to emerge triumphant.

"That's not taking anything away from those Indian guys that played but their first selection side, there's probably only two or three players in that side who would play," Warne added. — PTI

Ponting in awe of rookie Indian team's super win

Brisbane, Jan. 20: A "shocked" Ricky Ponting is struggling to comprehend how India's "A team" overwhelmed Australia in the Test series in their own backyard.

"I'm quite shocked that Australia weren't quite good enough to win this series. The cold hard facts of it are pretty much that was the India 'A' team that played this Test match and still won," Ponting told cricket.com.au.

"Considering everything the Indian team has been through in the last five or six weeks, with the captain leaving, all the injuries they've had they've been through 20 players (Australia) have been at full-strength, bar Davey (Warner) missing

I'm quite shocked that Australia weren't quite good enough to win this series. The cold hard facts of it are pretty much that was the India 'A' team that played this Test match and still won.

— **RICKY PONTING**
former Australia captain



early on, so it's really hard to comprehend.

"It's probably not even (India's) second-picked team because you think of Bhuvneshwar and Ishant Sharma and those guys who didn't even make it out here. Rohit Sharma turns up for the last two Test matches only," he added. Ponting said India

won all the key moments throughout the series.

"They've played really good, tough, hard Test match cricket day-in and day-out. India have won all the big moments in every Test match and Australia have fallen short. That's been the difference between the two teams," he added. — PTI

Covid-19 halts Sai, Srikanth Thai run

Bangkok, Jan. 20: Indian shuttler B. Sai Praneeth, one of the frontrunners to represent country at the Tokyo Olympics, has pulled out of the ongoing Thailand Open Super 1000 badminton tournament after testing positive for Covid-19 here.

Former world number one Kidambi Srikanth, who was sharing the room with Praneeth, was also forced to withdraw as per protocols laid down by the Badminton World Federation (BWF). "Badminton World Federation (BWF) can confirm India player Sai Praneeth B has tested positive for COVID-19 and has been withdrawn from the TOYOTA Thailand Open," the governing body said in a statement on Tuesday night.

However, Thai health authorities, Badminton Association of Thailand (BAT) and BWF, restricted "the movement and schedule of the rest of the India team as per tournament protocol," which will be in place for 14 days till February 1.

PRANNOY DIGS IN DEEP TO STUN CHRISTIE

Indian shuttler H S Prannoy battled through pain in his ribcage and a shoulder injury to stun Asian Games champion Jonatan Christie in the opening round of Toyota Thailand Open Super 1000 tournament here on Wednesday.

A former top 10 player;



India's H. S. Prannoy reacts after defeating Indonesia's Jonatan Christie 18-21, 21-16, 23-21 in their men's singles first round match at the Thailand Open badminton tournament in Bangkok on Tuesday. — AFP

Prannoy showed great resilience in the men's singles competition and didn't let the physical discomfort disturb his focus, outwitting the world number seven Christie 18-21, 21-16, 23-21 in a thrilling contest that clocked an hour and 15 minutes.

It is Prannoy's first win against the sixth seeded Indonesian in last four attempts. Prannoy and Sameer Verma will carry India's charge in the men's singles after the withdrawal of fellow colleagues B Sai Praneeth and Kidambi Srikanth. — PTI