

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
KARIMNAGAR | THURSDAY | 7 JANUARY 2021



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MP may bar non-veg food at hotels



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Democrats win first Georgia runoff

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India vs Australia third Test from today



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WEATHER

Max: 30.2°C
Min: 18.9°C
RH: 56%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky. Moderate rain. Max/Min temp. 27/21 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES (+18,341)	DEATHS (+224)
1,03,92,443	1,50,338

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+417)	(+2)
TS: 2,88,410	1,556
(+289)	(+3)
AP: 8,83,876	7,125

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

8,72,51,023
DEATHS 18,83,650
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Bahula Navami till 11.56 pm
Star: Chitta till 3.43 pm
Varjyam: 8.58 pm to 10.27 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.32 am to 11.16 am; 2.56 pm to 3.40 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HILRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 22, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.43 am
Zohar: 12.32 pm
Asar: 4.20 pm
Maghrib: 6.02 pm
Isha: 7.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.48 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.56 PM
MOONSET 12.51 PM
MOONRISE 12.43 AM

COUNTER POINT

Let's invite Trump... he never supported our farmers agitation!

SHORT TAKES

Telangana HC CJ to be sworn-in today

Hyderabad: Justice Hima Kohli will be sworn-in as Chief Justice of the Telangana High Court on Thursday at 11.30 am. Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan will administer the oath to the newly appointed Chief Justice.

69K birds culled over bird flu scare

Thiruvananthapuram: Over 69,000 birds including ducks and chicken were culled in the districts of Alappuzha and Kottayam to contain the H5N8 strain of bird flu, Kerala animal husbandry minister K. Raju said on Wednesday. The minister said 19 Rapid Response Teams have been engaged in culling birds in both the districts and the regions suspected to have infected the birds will be sanitised.

Cancel R-Day festivities: Tharoor

New Delhi: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has suggested cancelling the Republic Day festivities after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson cancelled his India visit due to the coronavirus situation in the United Kingdom, saying getting crowds to cheer the parade as usual would be "irresponsible".

Arvind accuses My Home Group of illegal mining

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

The Bharatiya Janata Party's Lok Sabha member Arvind Dharmapuri has urged the Telangana state government to take action to put an end to "illegal mining activities in Telangana" by the My Home Group and respond to the Centre's notices on the matter.

The BJP leader, who has been pursuing this issue for some months now, on Wednesday took to Twitter to yet again highlight what he described as "lack of action" by the Telangana state government on the My Home Group on the issue of violations relating to mining

THE BJP MP questioned the Chief Secretary on the "delay in action or investigation against My Home group for its irregularities and violations of mining in reserve forest area."

government had received three notices from the Union mines ministry as well as two from the Centre State Division of the Union home ministry on the illegal mining activities. The BJP MP questioned the Chief Secretary on the "delay in action or investigation against My Home group for its irregularities and violations of mining in reserve forest area."

Arvind said that instead of responding to the notices from the Centre, the TS government was considering allocating more lands for mining operations by the company. Arvind said that instead of responding to the notices from the Centre, the TS government was considering allocating more lands for mining operations by the company.

■ Page 2: Don't allot any more land to My Home: MP

DESAM LEADER ACCUSED IN HYD KIDNAP CASE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD JAN. 6

The city police on Wednesday placed former AP minister Bhuma Akhila Priya under arrest for her alleged involvement in the kidnapping of former hockey player Praveen Rao and two of his brothers, Naveen Rao and Sunil Rao, on Tuesday night.

The kidnapping was done by a gang posing as income-tax officials and arriving in three SUVs and leaving the home with the three victims. Police finally helped in the release of the kidnapped men.

According to police, a complaint was received from law student Katakani Manish, stating that he was at home with his family at Krishna Residency in Manovikasnagar when about 15 persons, aged between 25-40 and speaking in English and Telugu arrived there. One wore a police uniform and carried a stick while the others were in plainclothes. They walked in, claiming they were I-T officials.

■ Page 2: Land dispute may have triggered kidnap

FOUR DIE AFTER INHALING TOXIC GAS FROM RSP

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
ROURKELA, JAN. 6

Four contractual employees at the Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) reportedly died on Wednesday after inhaling toxic fumes that leaked from the coal chemical unit of the plant. According to reports, around 15 employees were on duty in the morning when the incident took place. Ten of them fell ill following the leakage of toxic gas.

All of them were initially admitted to the dispensary on the plant premises. Later, four of them were shifted to the Ispat General Hospital (IGH) after their condition deteriorated. While two were declared brought dead, two more succumbed during treatment in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital.

The deceased were identified as Ganesh Chandra Pahil (55), Rabindra Sahu (59), Abhimanyu Sah (33) and Bramhananda Panda (51).

Six other employees have been discharged from the plant dispensary after preliminary treatment.

2nd nationwide dry run for Covid vaccine on Jan. 8

New Delhi, Jan. 6: In a simulation of the actual execution of the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out that is expected to begin in a few days, another round of dry run will be conducted in all districts across states and UTs, except UP and Haryana, on January 8 to ensure efficient planning and management of immunisation process.

Each district will identify three types of session sites, similar to the previous dry run conducted on January 2, including a public health facility (district hospital/medical college), private health facility and rural or urban outreach sites, the Union health ministry said on Wednesday.

In this regard, a meeting of Union health minister Harsh Vardhan with the health ministers of states and Union territories is scheduled to take place on January 7 to guide them on conducting the dry run, the ministry said.

"The vaccine dry run will be conducted on January 8 in all districts across India, except for UP and Haryana. Covid-19 vaccine dry run has already been conducted in all districts in UP on January 5 and Haryana is conducting it in all its districts tomorrow (Thursday)," a source said. "The Central government is gearing up for the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccine across the country. The Union ministry of health has been proactively carrying out the preparations for roll-out of Covid-19 vaccine, in collaboration with states and UTs and all stakeholders, over the past couple of months to ensure that the preparations for roll-out are on track," the ministry said in a statement.

STATE SEES 65% JUMP IN COVID CASES IN A DAY

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

Telangana state has registered very steep overnight hike in the number of Covid-19 cases with the health department reporting 417 fresh infections for January 5. This represents a 65 per cent increase over the 253 cases reported on Monday, January 4.

The department also reported that two more persons died from Covid-19, taking the toll to 1,556 while the cumulative cases rose to 2,88,410. The sudden leap in cases on Tuesday was caused by an increase in cases across the state with two districts — Kumaram Bheem-Asifabad and Warangal Urban — reporting fewer cases.

■ Full report on Page 2

"The roll out of Covid-19 vaccine is expected to begin in the near future. This milestone entails the need for testing of all planned mechanisms for conducting the vaccination drive in the country," it said.

The entire planning of the vaccination drive including beneficiary registration, microplanning and vaccination at the planned session site will be tested under the leadership of District Collector during the dry run.

The dry run will also familiarize officers on all aspects of the Covid vaccine roll out.

MYSTERY | CASE Tapan Misra says he was poisoned ahead of promotion interview

Space scientist alleges poisoning at Isro

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 6

Odisha-born space scientist Tapan Misra has alleged that he was poisoned with the deadly arsenic trioxide on May 23, 2017 at the headquarters of Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) at Bengaluru, when he had gone there to attend a promotion interview.

Misra is a senior adviser at the Isro and is retiring at the end of this month. The scientist said he came out in public as he feared for

his life post retirement. In a much more serious allegation, Misra said: "I will also not rule it out as a new modus operandi of adjusting seniority and clearing me, who was perceived as an obstacle. Whatever may be the reason, it was a great shame for the country and our security apparatus."

"My contribution was in developing radar imaging satellites — RISAT, considered a very high-grade technology. We can watch the earth's surface in any situation, be it day or night, using this system.

SC to hear pleas against agri laws, farmer protest

Farmers to hold tractors' march today against farm laws

PARMOD KUMAR and SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Expressing concern over the deadlock between the agitating farmers and the government, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday that all petitions challenging the three new agricultural reform laws will be heard together on Monday, January 11. A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde observed that "there is absolutely no improvement in the situation" regarding the farmers' protest.

The bench also said the court's intention was to encourage and facilitate talks between farmers and the government.

Apart from the challenge to the farm laws, the Supreme Court is also hearing petitions seeking the removal of farmers from the protest sites in the Delhi-NCR border areas on the ground that they are causing hardship to the public due to the blockade of roads.

The protests at Delhi's borders have been going on for over five weeks, with union leaders saying their agitation against the three farm laws will intensify in the coming days. The farmers will also hold a tractor march on Thursday in protest over the farm laws.

Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar expressed hope that the protesters will understand that the idea behind the laws was to bring reforms in the agricultural sector and arrive at a solution after discussions.

SC to examine validity of interfaith marriage laws

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to stay the Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh laws regulating inter-faith marriages and conversion while issuing notice in two pleas challenging the validity of the laws.

Refusing to stay the laws, a bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde said it can't decide which provisions of the two laws were oppressive unless it hears the state governments concerned.

The Uttar Pradesh government has promulgated an ordinance regulating inter-faith marriages and religious conversions and a similar was enacted by the Uttarakhand in 2018.

When advocate Pradeep Kumar Yadav pointed out



Farmers on a tractor raise slogans during their ongoing protest against farm reform laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Farmers' protest against laws to intensify further

New Delhi, Jan. 6: Camping at protest venues near Delhi borders for around 40 days, braving severe cold and sporadic rains, farmers have asserted that their stir against the farm laws will intensify in the coming days, even as they deferred Wednesday's proposed tractor march over a bad weather forecast.

The deadlock continues as the seventh round of talks with the Centre remained inconclusive, with the farmer groups

sticking to their demand for the repeal of the three new laws, and the government listing out various benefits of the new Acts.

The national capital, meanwhile, reels under a spell of harsh winter. The city woke up on Wednesday to the rumble of thunder and the sound of hailstones hitting rooftops and windows as it received rainfall for the fourth consecutive day. On Friday, the mercury had plummeted to 1.1 degrees Celsius,

the lowest in 15 years for January.

On Tuesday, the protesting farmers said they were deferring their proposed tractor march from January 6 to January 7 due to a bad weather forecast.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana and some other parts of the country have been camping at several Delhi border points since November 28, demanding repeal of the farm laws and, a legal guarantee on MSP.

YSRC REGIME TO RECONSTRUCT TEMPLES RAZED BY NAIDU GOVT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

The YSR Congress government would reconstruct Hindu temples demolished by the Telugu Desam government in Vijayawada.

Endowment minister Vellampalli Srinivas Rao said Chief Minister Jag-an Mohan Reddy would launch the reconstruction work at the auspicious hour of 11.01 am on Friday.

The Chief Minister would also lay the foundation stone for development works at the Kanakadurga temple here with a government fund outlay of ₹70 crore. Besides these, the government would reconstruct 40 temples in 13 districts of AP.

Minister Srinivas alleged that TD president and then Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu had no faith in God and did not respect Hindu religion. "Hence he committed the sin of demolishing temples in Vijayawada during Krishna Pushkaram, and never tried to rebuild those holy temples."

He said the Chief Minister, honouring the sentiments of Hindus, decided to reconstruct those temples. Five temples, namely the Dakshinamukha Anjaneya Swamy temple, the Seethamma Vari Paadaalu, the Rahu-Kethu, the Boddhu Bomma and Gosala Krishna temple would be rebuilt.

The minister alleged that the Telugu Desam and BJP were trying to divide the people in the name of religion.

■ Page 2: An NRI professor asked me to remain silent

OTHER STORIES

DON'T ALLOT ANY MORE LAND TO MY HOME: MP

From Page 1

The group, the BJP MP said, has not only been violating Forest Conservation Act but also provisions of the Mining Amendment Act.

He urged the Chief Secretary to ensure that no further lands are allotted to the company for mining.

The state government, he said, should also respond to notices it received on the leases given to My Home Group for mining from the Union ministries of mining, and environment and forests, and initiate immediate action on the company.

Arvind said that he was sending all the relevant documents relating to the case "proving the group's violations and irregularities," the notices received by the state from the Centre and relevant judgements by the Supreme Court.

The BJP MP, who had been seeking action by the state government on this matter for many months, in his letter to the Chief Secretary, said: "Hope your administration replies to this letter at least."

AN NRI PROF. ASKED ME TO REMAIN SILENT

From Page 1

According to Misra, one of the directors of Isro centres had told him on June 5, 2017, of the possibility of poison given to me. "I guess, he witnessed poison mixing in my food," Misra said. Two days later, ministry of home affairs security agency personnel alerted him to arsenic poisoning, the scientist said.

This helped the doctors focus on the exact remedy. Misra said he had learnt that this poison is given in molecular level suspension (crystal level is harmless) just after a heavy meal. "It is a colourless, odourless, tasteless suspension and hence cannot even be suspected."

It gets absorbed through the stomach during food ingestion, kills RBCs (red blood cells) immediately to such a large extent that the fine blood vessels are clogged, leading to heart attacks and strokes within two to three hours and the victim can easily be passed off as heart attack death," he said. Misra also said he was "bombaraded with hundreds of threatening emails to keep my mouth shut," while he had barely escaped from a "massive explosive incident, in which the ₹100 crore lab was destroyed" on May 3, 2018.

He alleged that on July 19, 2019, an Indian-American professor of a topmost US university suddenly appeared in his office and requested him not to utter a word in future; as a quid pro quo, his IIT-Kharagpur grandson would be accommodated in a top notch college in USA.

"I declined and he left my office at 1430 hrs (2.30 pm). And my thirty plus years contributing career was consigned to a sinecure position at 1630 hrs (4.30 pm). On the same day, I was removed from all responsibilities, including SAC directorship," Misra said.

He alleged on July 12, 2019 — two days before the scheduled launch of Chandrayaan-2 (which was however postponed to July 22) — he was poisoned again, spent a long period in hospital, and is still under treatment.

Misra also alleged of a plan to defame him by doctoring the CCTV recording of his room on January 23 and 24 last year. He sought help for his safety. Mishra wrote, "We, in Isro, occasionally heard about the highly suspicious death of Professor Vikram Sarabhai in 1971. Also heard occasional doubts about the sudden death of Dr S. Srinivasan, director of VSSC (Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre) in 1999. Case of Shri Nambinarayanan in 1994 is well known. But I never thought that I would be at the receiving end of such a mystery."

● Misra said he had learnt that this poison is given in molecular level suspension (crystal level is harmless) just after a heavy meal. "It is a colourless, odourless, tasteless suspension and hence cannot even be suspected".

● It gets absorbed through the stomach during food ingestion, kills RBCs (red blood cells) immediately to such a large extent that the fine blood vessels are clogged, leading to heart attacks and strokes within two to three hours and the victim can easily be passed off as heart attack death.

Huge overnight spurt in Covid cases in state

65 per cent rise in infections since 253 reported on Monday

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

Telangana state has registered very steep overnight hike in the number of Covid-19 cases with the health department reporting 417 fresh infections for January 5. This represents a 65 per cent increase over the 253 cases reported on Monday, January 4. The department also reported that two more persons died from Covid-19, taking the toll to 1,556 while the cumulative cases rose to 2,88,410.

The sudden leap in cases on Tuesday was caused by an increase in cases across the state with two districts — Kumaram Bheem-Asifabad and Warangal Urban — reporting fewer cases.

Two other districts maintained status quo: Narayanpet which since January 2 has been reporting zero cases and Wanaparthy which reported four cases each on both the days.

All other districts, including Hyderabad, that is counted by the health department as part of the GHMC area, reported an increase in Covid-19 cases overnight.

Though the daily case totals in the 200s coincided with a drop in number of tests by half of what was being conducted over the past few weeks, particularly during the weekends, the 253 cases on Monday were found from what appears to be the now normal testing daily rate of 40,000 or more. For January 4, the Telangana health department said it had conducted 42,485 tests.

For January 5, Tuesday, the government conduct-



Health workers collect swab samples for Coronavirus test at a health centre in Hyderabad on Wednesday. Due to change in weather people in large numbers are visiting health centres for Covid testings. — S. SURENDER REDDY

Covid-19 wave in TS					
29 districts report overnight increase in Covid cases					
District:	Jan. 4	Jan 5	District:	Jan. 4	Jan 5
Adilabad	4	10	Nagarkurnool	6	9
Bhadradi-Kothagudem	7	11	Nalgonda	10	11
GHMC area	61	82	Narayanpet	0	0
Jagtital	7	10	Nirmal	3	5
JS-Bhupalapalli:	4	5	Nizamabad	4	11
Jogulamba-Gadwal	1	7	Peddapalli	7	8
Kamareddy	3	10	Rajanna-Sircilla	4	7
Karimnagar	14	24	Ranga Reddy	17	34
Khammam	7	10	Sangareddy	3	19
KB-Asifabad	4	2	Siddipet	2	11
Mahbubnagar	6	8	Suryapet	4	9
Mahbubabad	4	8	Vikarabad	3	8
Mancherial	9	12	Wanaparthy	4	4
Medak	2	5	Warangal Rural	3	7
Med-Malkajgiri	18	32	Warangal Urban	20	13
Mulugu	5	7	Yadadri-Bhongir	5	11

ed 43,318 tests but new cases leapt to 417 from the previous day's 253.

The highest cases for

Tuesday, 82, were reported from the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) area

followed by 34 in Ranga Reddy, 32 in Medchal-Malkajgiri, and 24 in Karimnagar district.

Virus in air: Take safety measures, urges CCMB

KANIZA GARARI | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

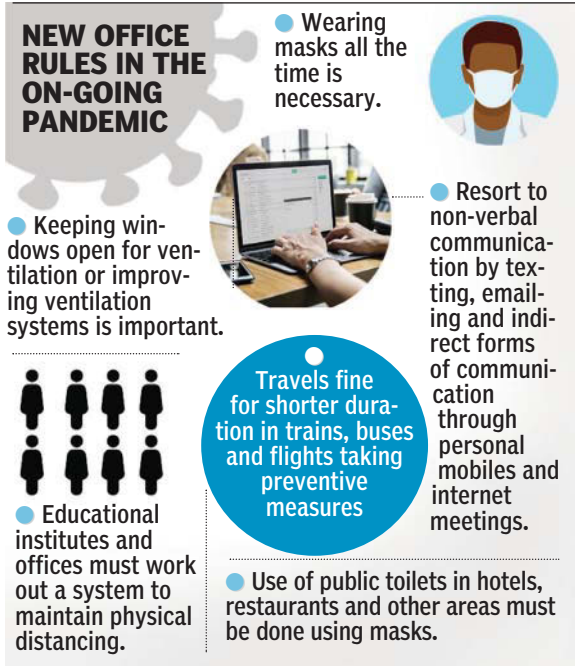
As public life returns to normal, more and more people are showing a tendency to ignore the Covid-19 safety protocols. Taking note, the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology has issued an advisory for offices, educational institutes and commercial sectors, urging them to observe safety.

With the virus being found live for more than two hours in the air and spread up to two metres from Covid-19 patients who visit air-conditioned facilities, the governmental agency said it was better for all to wear masks.

This must be made mandatory in offices "as the viral load for transmission is reduced in asymptomatic cases."

Researchers who carried out experiments found that if both affected and unaffected individuals wore masks, the risk of transmission of the virus would be very low.

Closed rooms are not properly ventilated and remain a challenge. For offices and commercial spaces, there is the need to opt for proper ventilation systems. With maximum offices having air-conditioners and hardly a few are having ventilation windows, this is a chal-



lenge to those returning to offices. Gatherings in open and well-ventilated spaces are not a problem, observed scientists.

Dr Rakesh Mishra, director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, said, "Schools, universities and colleges want to re-open. They must opt for well-ventilated spaces, keep windows open and follow social distancing norm. Instead of people gathering in office

rooms and talking, they must opt for meetings following the social distancing norm and do texting or emailing to discuss their points. What was followed in 'work from home' in terms of meetings must be followed in offices for some time."

Removing the masks and talking can allow generation of aerosols that spread the virus. Laughing and talking loudly must not be allowed.

because of caesarean sections.

Dr B.R. Shamanna, faculty in the School of Medical Sciences, the partner applicant from UoH, said, "We are excited as this study can have far-reaching impact, especially in locations where we have high caesarean section rates; both indicated and by choice; as per the recent results. This research will look at and address the issues related to safety, appropriate and timely caesarean sections in low and middle-income countries that have an impact across the world."

Kidnapping triggered by land dispute in HYD

From Page 1

"They claimed it to be a raid and flashed their 'official' ID cards. The men searched the premises and separated people inside the house by bringing Praveen, Naveen and Sunil, the paternal uncles, in the hall and confining the remaining members in the bedroom," Manish said in his complaint.

It was only when their neighbour Sarita opened the door and after checking CC cameras that they noticed the men taking away the trio in three vehicles.

The family told the police they suspected the involvement of their relatives A.V. Subba Reddy, Akhila Priya, her husband Bhargava Ram and their henchmen and the deed was done in the context of a previous land dispute.

Hyderabad police commissioner Anjani Kumar said multiple teams from Telangana state and AP police were keeping track of the kidnappers via their cellphone movement. "An alert was issued to the toll plazas in Telangana state and en route. Around 3.30 am, the kidnappers left the three victims at Narsingi toll plaza and they were rescued."

"It emerged during investigation that Bhumu Akhila Priya and husband Ram were involved in the kidnapping," said the official.

Akhila Priya was arrest-



Telugu Desam leader and former AP minister Bhumu Akhila Priya being taken into custody on Wednesday.

ed at her residence in Kukatpally on Wednesday morning and taken to the Bowenpally police station. "She was put through a medical examination at Gandhi Hospital. We are verifying the involvement of Srinivas Chowdhary alias Guntur Srinu, Prakash, Sai and Chanti," the official said.

Officials said Praveen Rao had purchased 25 acres of land at Hafeezpet, Hyderabad, in 2016 with the help of mediator Subba Reddy who took the help of late Bhumu Nagi Reddy, the father of Akhila Priya.

Trouble erupted when Subba Reddy and Bhumu Nagi Reddy developed differences. After the TD leader's demise, his daughter Akhila Priya approached Praveen Rao for a share of the property. Praveen refused, saying the process of transaction had been completed lawfully. She began threatening him.

"Earlier, a case was registered against Subba Reddy at Miyapur police station for trespassing and threatening. In order to get the share in the land, Akhila Priya and her husband hatched a conspiracy and kidnapped the victims," police said.

Hyderabad police booked Akhila Priya, Bhargava Ram and Subba Rao under Section 452 (trespass), 419 (cheating by impersonation), 341 (punishment for wrongful restraint), 506 (criminal intimidation), 149 (unlawful assembly), 120 (b) (criminal conspiracy), 147 (gathering with purpose of riot), and 342 (assault) of the IPC.

The Telangana state police have sent teams to Andhra Pradesh to nab the absconding accused. "Akhila Priya and Subba Reddy are the prime accused in planning the kidnap," the Hyderabad commissioner police added.

Govt monitoring bird flu outbreak in state

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

Bar-headed geese, which are among the suspects in the cases related to the outbreak of bird flu in India, also spend their winters in Telangana state. The birds, which in many ways look like large ducks, are seen almost every year during the winter months in various water bodies.

According to seasoned bird watchers, this is the peak season for migratory birds in the Telangana state.

"You can find bar-headed geese in Gandipet, Pocharam, Manjeera and many other water bodies. However, it is not to say that every bird that migrates carries disease. It is not known if the ones found with bird flu were late arrivals, or somehow caught it after coming to India," Humayun Taher, coordinator for the Asian Waterbird Census 2021 for Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh, told *Deccan Chronicle*.

The census goes on in the two states till the end of this month.

Escaping the harsh winters in their northern homes that stretch from Siberia in Russia to Afghanistan, the bar-headed geese go all the way down till Sri Lanka.

They begin returning home sometime in February when it starts getting warm in India in the run-up to the summer. At least five bar-headed geese that were found dead in Himachal Pradesh have tested positive for bird flu.

"This year, we expect a wider spread of wintering water birds. After good rains, the lakes and ponds are well-stocked with

Hyderabad, Warangal zoos take safety steps

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

The two zoos in Telangana state, in Hyderabad and Warangal, are on alert in the wake of bird flu outbreaks in different states. The zoos with their large protected premises, woods and water bodies, attract some migratory birds every year.

The zoos have set up a series of preventive measures, ranging from disinfection to reflecting ribbons on the trees.

"We have established sanitation stations at the entrance of the bird enclosures. All the animal keepers have been asked to use the foot bath. To prevent flocks of birds from entering or perching on the trees within the zoo, we have placed reflective ribbons which would drive them away," an official of the Nehru Zoological Park told *Deccan Chronicle*.

An official from Kakatiya Zoo in Warangal said that they are keeping a tab on crows and other

birds which fly into the zoo.

"We are cleaning the enclosures frequently. We do not want any bird to get infected due to the virus," said the official. Meanwhile, R. Shobha, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, who issued a series of instructions to department officials and staff on the subject, said rapid response teams are being created at Manjeera bird sanctuary, Sangareddy, the Pakhal wildlife sanctuary including Pakhal lake and Siwaram and Kinnersani wildlife sanctuaries for patrolling the shorelines of the water bodies and check areas where birds might congregate.

The department requested anyone from among the public to call the toll-free 18004255364 phone number in case they come across a dead bird or birds. This wildlife crime control cell toll-free number will be available round the clock, it said.

● According to seasoned bird watchers, this is the peak season for migratory birds in the Telangana state.

water," Taher said.

It is very possible that migratory birds that are wintering in Telangana state are not carrying any disease, he said adding that volunteers taking part in the census will be keeping an eye out for remains of wild birds.

No sign of bird flu in TS, says minister Talasani

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

Animal husbandry minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav clarified that there are no signs of bird flu in the state as of now.

He appealed that the people need not worry despite false news being spread on social media and other platforms.

On Wednesday, the minister conducted an emergency meeting with animal husbandry, NECC, Sneha Chicken and other

representatives on measures to be taken for the prevention of bird flu. Minister Srinivas Yadav said that there was no possibility of a bird flu outbreak in the state due to precautionary measures taken by the government.

He stated that 1,300 officers, formed into rapid response teams, were conducting regular medical examinations and awareness programmes on bird flu.

The teams tested 276

samples from poultries, all of which were negative.

The minister said Telangana has the third largest poultry industry in the country. Authorities at all levels have been alerted about bird flu.

Srinivas Yadav said bird flu was detected only in Rajasthan, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh. He said there was a small chance of bird flu being spread by migratory birds but not so much.

OTHER STORIES

DELAY IN NAMING TPCC CHIEF HELPS TRS, BJP: CADRE

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, JAN. 6

Many Congress leaders and cadre opined that the party high command should speed up the selection of TPCC president and announce the name so that second-rung leaders and cadre can confidently go to the people and agitate on public issues.

The long process of selecting the TPCC chief is testing the patience of the leaders and cadre and is also giving rise to divisions among them.

A leader said much time will be taken to strengthen the party from the grassroots even after the announcement of the TPCC president. The delay is indirectly helping the TRS and the BJP who can lure Congress leaders into their parties, the leader said.

NO NEED TO THINK, SCRUB THREE FARM LAWS: CPM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JAN. 6

CPM Telangana state secretary T Veerabhadram said that the NDA government should not take much time in scrapping the three farm acts. He said that the agitation being staged by the farmers is historic and no such agitation witnessed in the recent times.

“No government that creates problems for the peasants will sustain long. Prime Minister Narendra Modi should consider the demand of the farmers”, he said.

The CPI-M leader said that the plan behind Modi and Amith Shah is being known to everybody and the corporate will only benefit with these farm acts. The acts will not only harm the farmers but also hit the interests of the labourers, small scale traders and others in the country.

The traders, farmers, export and importers and labourers formed human chain at market area in support of Delhi farmers.

BJP TOP LEADERS TO VISIT BODHAN TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, JAN. 6

For the first time, BJP national general secretary and Telangana state in-charge Tarun Chug and BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar will visit Nizamabad district on January 7. The saffron party was busy on Wednesday with plans to welcome the national and state leaders at the district border near Indalwai toll plaza on National Highway 44.

Senior Congress leader Medapati Prakash Reddy along with his followers will join BJP in the presence of Tarun Chug and Bandi Sanjay Kumar at a public meeting in Bodhan. Reddy has resigned from the primary membership of the Congress party and also from the Telangana PCC official spokesperson post.

A motorbike rally will be held from Indalwai toll plaza to the Madhavanagar Saibaba mandir in Nizamabad to welcome the BJP leaders. The BJP leaders' convoy will proceed to Bodhan town. Tarun Chug would inaugurate the party office at Anil Talkies Road in Bodhan. A public meeting will be held at the Kottha Ramakanth function hall on Rudrur Road, strictly under Covid-19 protocol.

Nizamabad MP Dharmapuri Arvind, BJP district president Baswapuram Laxminarsaiah and other leaders inspected the arrangements for the public meeting in Bodhan. Medapati Prakash Reddy and his followers were in the forefront of making the arrangements.

● Senior Congress leader Medapati Prakash Reddy along with his followers will join BJP in the presence of Tarun Chug and Bandi Sanjay Kumar at a public meeting in Bodhan. Reddy has resigned from the primary membership of the Congress party and also from the Telangana PCC official spokesperson post.

● A motorbike rally will be held from Indalwai toll plaza to the Madhavanagar Saibaba mandir in Nizamabad to welcome the BJP leaders. The BJP leaders' convoy will proceed to Bodhan town.

150 acres given to Rlys for POH workshop in Kazipet

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 6

The district administration on Wednesday handed over 150.05 acres to the Railways to set up a Periodic Overhauling Workshop in Kazipet. This clears a major hurdle for the project which was sanctioned way back in 2016.

While the district administration intended to hand over land belonging to the Seetharama Swamy temple in Ayodhyapuram village, local farmers who were cultivating the land opposed it.

Panchayat raj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao said as the land belongs to the endowments department, the issue had to be sorted out in court. That caused a delay in procurement of the land.

Ultimately, permission was secured and ₹56.86 crore was spent on acquiring the land: ₹45.3 crore at ₹30 lakh per acre and ₹11 crore paid to 114 farmers as compensation at ₹8



Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao hand over the land documents to the Railway officials in Warangal on Wednesday.

lakh per acre.

Reminding that the setting up of a railway wagon factory has been a long-standing dream of the people of Warangal, Dayakar Rao said he would go to New Delhi and pressurise

the Centre for the factory.

“With the support of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and IT minister K.T. Rama Rao, we will go to New Delhi and appeal to the Centre and put forth our

demand to set up the wagon factory in Kazipet,” Dayakar Rao said. He said he would also ask the Centre to Kazipet as a railway division as such projects would bring employment to the locals.

CHILLI PRICES GO DOWN IN KHAMMAM

RAVINDRA SESHU | DC
KHAMMAM, JAN. 6

Chilli prices in Khammam Agricultural Market have crashed by ₹6,000 per quintal since the last two days.

This is mainly owing to chilli coming from Madhya Pradesh giving a stiff competition to Khammam variety in the Indian market.

Traders of Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal are lifting more chilli from Madhya Pradesh markets.

The best varieties of chilli are not coming to Khammam market at present and traders are not ready to give a good price for the product.

Further, slowdown of chilli exports abroad has also contributed to the price crash.

Chilli prices had touched ₹18,000 per quintal in August against ₹14,500 in June and July. The price went up to at ₹19,000 in October and even touched ₹20,200 per quintal.

However, prices started falling thereafter to range between ₹14,000 to ₹17,000 in December. The prices further went down in January and traders are now lifting the produce at just ₹12,000 per quintal from farmers.

There are five companies in Khammam that exported its chilli to countries including China, Singapore and Malaysia. They stopped exporting the product one month ago.

Khammam market is one of the biggest in Telangana state and farmers bring their produce to the market from Mahabubabad, Surya-pet, Nalgonda and Kothagudem districts.

Nearly seven lakh bags had been stocked in fifteen cold storages in Khammam and Bhadradi-Kothagudem districts.

BE THE CHANGE

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 6

Just like one lamp can light a thousand other lamps, municipal staff must stay ahead in creating awareness about sanitation and follow environment-friendly practices, such as segregation of household waste and avoiding plastics, said Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) commissioner Pamela Satpathy.

She was addressing a meeting of the corporation employees after about 3,000 of them went in a procession from the Thousand Pillar Temple to Public Garden in

DC impact: Gulf migrant back home after 6 years

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC
NIZAMABAD, JAN. 6

The reunion of a Gulf migrant worker with family members after six years brought cheers among the family and relatives in Ankapur village of Armoor mandal on Wednesday.

Katthula Swamy returned home safely from Saudi Arabia and met his wife and two children. His plight was highlighted in Deccan Chronicle on November 25 and 26.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, Rena, sister-in-law of Katthula Swamy, said that they feared for the safety of Swamy in Saudi Arabia during Covid-19 pandemic.

“We had no hopes as he had lost employment and was struck in a financial crisis. The official machinery reacted immediately after the report was published in Deccan Chronicle,” she said.

Katthula Swamy of Ankapur village went to Saudi Arabia in 2012 in search of livelihood. He returned home for vacation in 2014. After going back he faced several



Katthula Swamy

problems. He worked as a driver by taking a vehicle on an engaged basis. He incurred heavy losses due to technical problems in the vehicle.

The owner of the vehicle demanded payment for the repair and denied to return Swamy's passport. The pandemic worsened his situation. He explained his pathetic condition to the Deccan Chronicle from Saudi Arabia over the phone and the news appeared in these columns.

Nizamabad commissioner of police Kartikeya directed Armoor police to submit a report on Katthula

No meaningful discussions in ZP meets

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, JAN. 6

Zilla parishad (ZP) general body meetings of Mancherial, Komaram Bheem Asifabad, Nirmal and Adilabad districts are lacking substantive discussions on public issues like drinking water, roads, sanitation, crop loans, seasonal diseases or poor implementation of welfare schemes for people by the government.

What is happening mostly is ZPTC members, whether belonging to ruling party or opposition, are making sensational

statements to draw public attention than discussing any serious issues related to public. Even MLAs are not showing much interest in taking part in general body meetings of the four ZPs.

Another development is earlier, zilla parishads used to get funds from the central government and allocation used to be done at the ZP level. But now, the centre is directly releasing the 14th Finance Commission funds to gram panchayat and mandal-level institutions. As a result, ZPs have lost their importance, unlike in the past.

Moreover, chairmen and vice-chairmen of all four ZPs belong to the ruling TRS. There is no strong opposition in terms of ZPTCs seats. Discussions that can corner the ruling party are not being held. This is leading to only trading of charges between the ruling and opposition parties. For example, at the zilla parishad meeting of Adilabad district held recently, ZP chairman Janardhan Rathod and Congress ZPTC Goka Ganesh Reddy verbal attacked each other, so much so, the chairman went on to announce the

suspension of Congress ZPTC. Shocking all, both Ganesh Reddy and Janardhan Rathod soon held a joint press meeting, announcing they had compromised among themselves.

A senior Congress leader said a strong opposition is essential if peoples' needs are to be served. Only then, public issues will come up for discussions in the ZP general body meeting. “Unfortunately, in all the four districts, TRS is in power with the chairmen, vice-chairmen and majority of ZPTCs belongs to TRS party”.

5,000 municipal employees can influence nine lakh citizens

GWMC staff asked to lead by example



GWMC commissioner Pamela Satpathy takes part in the rally in Hanamkonda on Wednesday.

Hanamkonda to create awareness among people about Swachh Survekshan 2021 and the Safai Mitra Suraksha

Challenge. Warangal Urban district collector Rajeev Gandhi Hanumanthu and mayor Gunda Prakash

Rao flagged off the procession, which passed through Hanamkonda Chowrastha and Lashkar Bazaar, with the civic body staff shouting slogans in favour of ensuring sanitation and against use of plastic. They also requested public to cooperate, so that the city could bag the accompanying cash reward.

Commissioner Pamela Satpathy asked GVMC staff, apart from people of Warangal and Hanamkonda, to be in the forefront of following good sanitation practices. She appealed appeal to people that they segregate household waste

into wet and dry categories and not throw them in drainages. Although plastic use has been banned, it is people who must shun plastic, she stated.

Further, quoting Mahatma Gandhi, she said, “Be the change you want to see. The 5,000 employees of GWMC must influence the nine lakh citizens to follow good sanitation practices,” she underlined.

District Medical and Health Officer Raji Reddy said the city had been ranked 144 in 2019 and 37 before that. He urged employees to achieve a better rank for the city this time.

Check before you talk: TRS to Bandi

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 6



Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay needs to get his act together and speak sensibly, said Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar referring to Sanjay's comments against Chief Minister K.

Chandrashekar Rao. Vinay Bhaskar said the BJP leaders are creating communal division by instigating people for gaining political advantage referring to Sanjay's recent remarks in which he asked voters in Tirupati to choose between the Bhagavad Gita and Bible.

Speaking to media persons here on Wednesday, he questioned where the BJP leaders were during the Telangana agitation.

“When all TRS MLAs resigned their posts in support of a separate state, the current Union minister G. Kishan Reddy did not resign his seat,” Vinay said.

He asked Sanjay how much funds he had brought to the state since

becoming an MP and said the BJP leaders are unable to see the development in the state.

No BJP leader came to help when incessant rains wreaked havoc in Warangal, he said.

Vinay criticised the BJP leaders for creating ruckus over land on which the government wants to construct Smriti Vanam in memory of Prof. Jayashankar.

MLA Nannapuneni Narender said that Sanjay was behaving like a gully leader. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself lauded the development model in Telangana, he said, advising Sanjay to learn before making a statement.

MLAs Aroori Ramesh and Challa Dharma Reddy were also present.



Government and private school teachers, along with students, take out a rally in Khammam on Wdnesday demanding that the school be reopened.

Teachers, students demand reopening of schools in dist

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JAN. 6

Teacher and student organisations took out a procession in Khammam from Ricob Bazaar School to collectorate on Wednesday demanding reopening of schools in the district.

Teachers of both government and private schools, apart from students, numbering around 1,000, raised slogans “open schools”, “save students and teachers” and “protect budget schools”.

Later, addressing a meeting, School Teachers' Federation state general

secretary Devarakonda Saidulu saw a conspiracy behind keeping schools closed for months together. He maintained that there is no alternative to direct teaching and students are finding it difficult to understand subjects during online teaching.

United Teachers Federation general secretary Parupalli Nageswara Rao accused the government of not being sincere about the future of students, as schools could be opened by following all guidelines of Covid-19.

Private Schools Teachers Association

leader Gouse Pasha said due to closure of schools, private teachers have been forced to work as labourers to eke out a living. Government should take a bold decision on schools keeping in view the pitiable condition of these teachers.

Students belong to organisations like SFI, AISF and PDSU also took part in the stir. AISF leader Nagaraju said students and their parents have been demanding reopening of schools for the last two months. The government should respect their sentiments and open schools, he stated.

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SHORT TAKES

EX-CONG MLA SAYS 11 OF 19 MLAS MAY JOIN JD(U)

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, JAN. 6

Former Congress MLA Bharat Singh has created a flutter in the political circle by predicting a major split in the party.

According to him around 11 MLAs of the party are in touch with the JD(U) leadership and may quit the Congress soon. He also alleged that Congress state president Madan Mohan Jha and senior party leader Ajit Singh are among those who may also defect to the JD(U).

Talking to reporters Singh said that, “Most of the candidates who contested Assembly elections on Congress ticket were outsiders. They got tickets by paying huge money and now after winning elections they are planning to quit and join hands with the ruling JD(U)”.

He added that, “The MLAs who are planning to join the JD(U) are being guided by Madan Mohan Jha and other senior leaders. We tried to raise the issue earlier also but nothing was done and tickets were distributed to those who had nothing to do with the party or its workers”.

The development comes a day after the party’s Bihar in-charge Shakti Singh Gohil was relieved from the post and Bhakt Charan Das was appointed in his place.

INDIA COMMITTED TO TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY: EAM

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Pitching for an “inclusive political outlook that encourages ethnic harmony” in a clear message to Colombo, visiting External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday said it “is in Sri Lanka’s own interest that the expectations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace and dignity within a united Sri Lanka are fulfilled”, adding that “India has been strongly committed to the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka”.

EAM Jaishankar who is currently on a three day visit to Sri Lanka that began on Tuesday referred to the “commitments made by the Sri Lankan government on meaningful devolution, including the 13th Amendment to the Constitution”, pointing out that the “progress and prosperity of Sri Lanka will surely be advanced as a consequence”.

Seeking to reassure India, the Sri Lankan government, meanwhile, reiterated during the visit that it considered the welfare and progress of all its citizens including Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims to be important.

Teams deployed to check bird flu in Kerala, Haryana

At present, there are 12 epicentres of Avian Influenza spread in four states

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Union health ministry has deployed multi-disciplinary teams to the Avian Influenza affected Alappuzha and Kottayam districts of Kerala, and Panchkula in Haryana.

The move comes shortly after the department of animal husbandry notified detection of Avian Influenza (H5N8), also known as bird flu, in the samples of dead poultry ducks from Alappuzha and Kottayam districts in Kerala, and from poultry samples from Panchkula in Haryana.

Besides, advisory has been issued to Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh where too cases of Avian Influenza have been detected, to avoid further spread of the infection.

According to the Union government, at present there are 12 epicentres of bird flu spread in four states.

In Rajasthan dead crows were found in Baran, Kota and Jhalawar; in Madhya Pradesh samples of dead crows were positive to avian influenza in Mandsaur, Indore, and Malwa; while in Himachal Pradesh samples of dead migratory birds tested positive in Kangra. Officials said in Kerala there are four epicenters in Kottayam, and Allapuzha.

“As per the report received, Kerala has already initiated control and containment operations from January 5, at epicentres and culling process is in operation,” officials in Union ministry of animal husbandry said.

They added the measures suggested to the affected states to contain the disease and prevent further spread as per the Action Plan on avian influenza include strengthening the biosecurity of poultry farms, disinfection of affected areas, proper disposal of dead birds/carcasses, timely collection and submission of samples for confirmation and further surveillance, intensification of surveillance plan as well as the general guidelines for prevention of disease spread from affected birds to poultry and human.

Besides, coordination with forest department



A worker sprays disinfectant inside a poultry farm in view of Avian influenza, in the outskirts of Bhopal on Wednesday.

— PTI

for reporting any unusual mortality of birds has also been suggested to the states. The other states were also requested to keep a vigil on any unusual mortality amongst birds and to report immediately to take necessary measures.

In India, the disease spreads mainly in winters through migratory birds.

India notified its first outbreak of avian influenza in 2006.

So far infection in humans is yet reported in the country though the disease is zoonotic.

“There is no direct evidence that avian influenza viruses can be transmitted to humans via the consumption of contaminated poultry products. Implementing management practices that incorporate bio security principles, personal hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection protocols, as well as cooking and processing standards, are effective means of controlling the spread of the AI viruses,” officials asserted.

They, however, said secondary spread by human handling (through fomites) cannot be ruled out.

MP may bar hotels from serving non-veg food

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC With agency inputs BHOPAL, JAN. 6

Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday imposed a ban on chicken imports from southern states for 10 days in view of avian flu scare in the state.

Official sources here said the state government was seriously contemplating to bar hotels and restaurants in the state from serving non-vegetarian food if the bird flu took the form of an epidemic form in the state.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan convened an emergency official meeting here to take stock of the situation in the wake of the reports of death of at least 400 crows and some other avian species in various parts of the state in the last couple of weeks.

“Avian flu has been detected in chicken in Kerala and some other

● **SOURCES SAID** a decision to resume chicken imports from southern states would be taken after reviewing the bird flu situation in these states after 10 days.

southern states. We have taken a decision not to allow transportation of chickens from these southern states to MP for 10 days”, Chouhan told reporters here.

Official sources said a decision to resume chicken imports from southern states would be taken after reviewing the bird flu situation in these states after 10 days.

Chouhan said there was no cause for worry in MP since random inspections of poultry in the state has indicated that H5N8, called in common parlance as bird flu, has not been detected in chickens in the state so far. “We are keeping a strict vigil on the situation”, he said.

Earlier in the review

meeting, the Chief Minister ordered the authorities concerned to take precautionary measures to protect the poultry from the avian flu and step up vigil to prevent bird flu from taking epidemic form in the state.

He also directed the district collectors to remain in touch with poultry farm owners in their respective areas to ensure that they enforced guidelines issued by the Centre in their farms in view of outbreak of the disease.

Meanwhile, presence of H5N8 virus (a variant of avian influenza or bird flu) was found in the carcasses of crows in Mandsaur and Agar Malwa districts, an official said, citing test results of samples sent for laboratory analysis. A total of 155 dead crows in Indore have been found with the H5N8 virus since the pathogen was first detected in the state’s commercial hub a week back.

UP: 50-year-old gangraped, killed by priest, aides

Budaun (UP), Jan. 6: A 50-year-old anganwadi worker was gangraped and brutally murdered allegedly by a priest and his two accomplices in Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh, police said on Wednesday.

Two of the accused were arrested on Tuesday night after the post-mortem report confirmed rape while the priest is on the run, they said, adding that the woman’s leg and a rib bone were fractured and there were injuries in her private parts.

The incident, which triggered an instant hue and cry in the political circles, took place on Sunday and the matter came to light when her body was brought home at night. The FIR was registered two days later following which the duo was nabbed.

Opposition parties attacked the BJP government in the state and termed the incident “horrific” and “shameful”, with the Congress comparing it to the Nirbhaya incident of 2012.

“The post-mortem report confirms rape and there are injuries in her private parts and a fracture in the leg,” Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sankalp Sharma said. She suffered from a rib fracture too, he said, citing the autopsy report.

He said the station house officer (SHO) of Ughaiti police station has been suspended for “delay in informing higher authorities, laxity in taking action, dereliction of duty and failure in taking speedy action”.

“On Sunday, the 50-year-old woman, who had gone to a temple, was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Family members of the woman have accused the temple mahant (priest) and his accomplices of raping and murdering her. Based on this, a case was registered against the accused. Two of the accused persons were arrested on Tuesday night, while the mahant is still absconding,” he said.

Four teams have been formed to nab the priest, the SSP said.

The case was registered on Tuesday after the post-mortem report came.

“Based on complaints of the family members and the post-mortem report, a case has been registered under section 376D (gang-rape) and 302 (punishment for murder) of IPC,” the SSP said.

He said that opinion on the post-mortem report is being sought from medical experts and after that only any conclusion can be reached.

To a specific question as to whether the case bore any resemblance to the horrific

Nirbhaya rape case, the SSP said, “It will be wrong to link this incident to any previous incident. Let’s wait for the medical examination report.”

CMO Budaun Dr Yashpal Singh said the woman died of trauma and excessive bleeding. The victim’s son said his mother had gone to offer prayers at the temple on Sunday but she did not return home within expected time. It was only around 11 pm that the temple priest and two of his aides came to their house and handed over her body, he said.

Before the family members could ask how she died, the accused left the house saying that she had fallen in a dry well and her body was pulled out and brought to her home. He said police was informed on Monday.

Budaun District Magistrate Kumar Prashant said, “Whatever help can be given from the department, it will be given. She was an anganwadi sahayika. We are also paying attention towards the security of the family.” He too shared the CMO’s opinion.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is the Congress’ general secretary incharge of Uttar Pradesh, hit out at the Yogi Adityanath government, alleging that there was something wrong in the intentions of the Uttar Pradesh administration on the issue of women’s security.

Tagging a media report, Gandhi tweeted, “In Hathras, the government administration did not listen to the voice of those pleading. The government saved officials and suppressed the victim’s voice.”

“In Budaun, the police station officer did not listen to the one pleading and did not even examine the place of the incident. There is something wrong in the UP government’s intentions on women’s security,” she added.

Party spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala termed the incident “horrific” and “shameful for humanity”. “How many more Nirbhayas? How much more of this monstrosity (haivaaniyat)? When will the Adityanath government wake up? Where are our awakened journalists,” he said in a tweet in a Hindi.

Taking to Twitter, Samajwadi Party said, “50-year-old anganwadi assistant, who had gone to offer prayers at a temple in Budaun, gang-raped and subsequently murdered. Those in power who only make false claims of women security should drown themselves. The guilty should be punished at the earliest, and justice should prevail.” — PTI

VIRUS | BLUES

Delhi govt has conducted its own dry run for vaccine

Steady decline in Coronavirus cases

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Thirteen more cases of new, mutated UK virus of Covid-19 have been detected in the samples of people who have travelled back from the United Kingdom taking the total number of cases infected with the new strain to 71.

India so far has reported 1,03,74,932 cases out of which 18,088 were detected in the last 24 hours. Till now 1,54,114 deaths have been recorded out of which 264 are fresh fatalities. The Union health ministry said there is a steady decline in the number of daily deaths in the country and less than 300 new deaths have been recorded in the country in the last 12 days.

The Delhi government conducted its own dry run for the vaccine on Wednesday. “The Central government is gearing up for the roll out of Covid-19 vaccine across the country. Union ministry of health has been pro-actively carrying out the preparations for roll out of the vaccine, in collaboration with states/UTs and all stakeholders, over the past couple of months to ensure that the preparations for roll-out of Covid-19 vaccine are on track.”

“As a simulation of actual execution, another round of dry run/mock drill in all 700 plus districts of all states/UTs (except UP and Haryana who have already conducted/ will be conducting the dry run in all districts on 5th January and 7th January, respectively) is planned on 8th January 2021 to ensure efficient planning and

Schools to reopen in Punjab today

Chandigarh, Jan. 6: The Punjab government on Wednesday decided to reopen all schools from January 7 for students of classes 5 to 12.

State education minister Vijay Inder Singla said following the persistent demand of parents, the state government has decided to reopen all government, semi-government and private schools from January 7 onwards.

In a statement here, Singla said the timings of the schools will be from 10 am to 3 pm.

The students only of classes 5 to 12 will be allowed to physically attend their classes, said the minister.

Singla said while giving his nod, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh directed the department to ensure the safety of the children, amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The minister said following the CM’s directions, all school managements have been asked

management for vaccine delivery in each district of all states/UTs. Each district will identify three types of session sites, similar to the previous dry run including a public health facility (District Hospital/Medical College), private health facility and rural or urban outreach sites,”

to strictly comply with all anti-Covid precautions in schools.

The Cabinet minister also said that the education department had taken feedback from school heads.

Besides ensuring safety of the children, they also suggested the reopening of schools before the annual exams for final revision of the course, he said.

Meanwhile, the Gujarat government also on Wednesday announced that schools for classes 10 and 12, and colleges for the final year graduation and post-graduation students in the state would be reopened from January 11, months after remaining shut due to pandemic.

The decision was taken at the state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Vijay Rupani and Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel in Gandhinagar Wednesday.

— PTI

Union health ministry officials said.

Two Covid-19 vaccines have been given emergency use authorisation by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) recently.

The roll out of Covid-19 vaccine is expected to begin soon.

ODISHA RECORDS NO DEATHS DUE TO VIRUS AFTER 6-MTHS

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 6

Even as the new strain of Coronavirus has begun to scare the countrymen, Odisha on Tuesday registered zero deaths due to the deadly virus for the first time after six months.

“There have been no Covid deaths in the state in the last 24 hours,” the state health and family welfare department informed on Wednesday.

“Happy to share that after over six months, there are no Covid deaths reported in the state on 5th January 2021. We salute our Covid Warriors whose tireless efforts have made this possible,” the department said.

With no Covid death in the last 24 hours, the toll stood at 1,887 in the state.

The first death due to Covid-19 was reported on April 7 last year in Odisha after a 72-year-old man of Jharpada area succumbed to the virus on April 6, 2020 while undergoing treatment at the AIIMS, Bhubaneswar.

The state has so far recorded 3,32,921 Covid-19 cases. While 3,27,008 cases have recovered, 1973 cases are still active. The government, however, did not mention the number of tests conducted in the past 24 hours.

Purohit wants charges dropped

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 6

Lt Col Prasad Shrikant Purohit, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case, on Wednesday through his lawyer claimed that he was collecting intelligence for the Indian Army as part of his duty by attending conspiracy meetings for the 2008 blast.

The high court was hearing Purohit’s application seeking that all charges against him in

the case be dropped because the prior sanction to prosecute him was not taken. He has claimed that the court could not take cognisance of charges against him because he is an army officer. Hence all charges against him should be dropped.

Neela Gokhale, Purohit’s counsel in the high court claimed before the division bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and M.S. Karnik that he had been meeting conspirators and

attending secret meetings in a bid to gather information and pass it on to the Army.

Gokhale cited documents from the Indian Army, and former Mumbai joint commissioner of Mumbai Police, Himanshu Roy, commending Purohit for the inputs and information he had allegedly shared with them over the years.

Relying on these documents she claimed that he was discharging his duty, infiltrating in the groups and reporting to

his superiors for protecting national security. And for this work, they put him in jail in 2009, tortured him, and branded him a terrorist.

The NIA, however, opposed Purohit’s petition claiming in an affidavit, filed in the high court in September last year, that in attending the conspiracy meetings, Purohit was not working for the Army and therefore, no sanction under 197 of the CrPc was required for his prosecution.

NCB SUMMONS RAMPAL’S SISTER IN DRUG PROBE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 6

The Narcotics Control Bureau has summoned actor Arjun Rampal’s sister to office for questioning in connection with a drugs case, however, instead of appearing before the agency on Wednesday she has sought more time to comply with the summons. The agency is likely to call Rampal again for questioning, as the agency has found discrepancies in his statement given to it.

Komal Rampal slipped appearing before the agency and conveyed to them that due to some personal reasons she needs more time.

IN BRIEF

Indian hacker jailed for 11 years in UK

London: An Indian-origin man who hacked into the computer accounts of over 574 girls and young women to exploit them has been sentenced to 11 years in prison for blackmail, voyeurism and cyber-crimes by a UK court. Akash Sondhi gained unauthorised access to hundreds of social media accounts, in particular Snapchat, and went on to commit blackmailing crimes between December 26, 2016 and March 17, 2020, the UK's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said. The 27-year-old from Chafford Hundred in Essex, south-east England, threatened his victims that if they didn't send him nude images of themselves, he would post intimate images of them to their friends and family. Some of the women complied and in at least six cases he went on to carry out his threats, it said.

Kim admits failures as congress opens

Seoul, Jan. 6: North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un admitted the country's economic development plan had fallen short in "almost all areas" as he opened a rare congress of the ruling Workers' Party, state media reported on Wednesday. The gathering is the first of its kind in five years, only the eighth in the nuclear-armed country's history, and comes weeks before US President-elect Joe Biden takes office. Relations with Washington have been deadlocked since talks between Kim and President Donald Trump stalled over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return. At the same time the North is more isolated than ever after closing its borders last January to protect itself against the Coronavirus that first emerged in neighbour and key ally China. The congress opened on Tuesday in the capital, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

GRAMMY AWARDS POSTPONED TO MARCH OVER VIRUS

New York, Jan. 6: The Grammy music awards slated for January 31 in Los Angeles have been postponed until March over Covid-19, which has been rapidly spreading in California. The Recording Academy released a statement saying it rescheduled the show to March 14, a week earlier than the date briefly listed on its website. "The deteriorating Covid-19 situation in Los Angeles, with hospital services being overwhelmed, ICUs having reached capacity, and new guidance from state and local governments have all led us to conclude that postponing our show was the right thing to do," organisers said. "Nothing is more important than the health and safety of those in our music community and the hundreds of people who work tirelessly on producing the show." The ceremony's delay comes less than a month before it was set to take place in the shadow of the pandemic, which has dealt devastating blows to the music industry. The organisation had said the show set for late January would be mostly virtual, but had not released specific plans. Beyonce, Dua Lipa, Taylor Swift and rapper Roddy Ricch are the top nominees at the normally star-studded gala. Comedian Trevor Noah was set to host the 2021 show, and it wasn't immediately clear if that was still the plan.

WOMAN | POWER Legislators move to even up executive boards after voluntary efforts to close gender gap

Germany to require women on large firms' boards

Frankfurt am Main, Jan. 6: German listed companies must include women on executive boards as part of a landmark bill agreed by the country's coalition government on Wednesday after voluntary efforts failed to close a gender gap. Listed companies with four executives or more must appoint at least one woman to their boards, according to a draft law to be voted on by parliament. The legislation sends "a very strong signal", Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht told reporters, urging corporations to

"take advantage of the opportunity presented by highly qualified women". "We can show that Germany is on the way to becoming a modern society fit for the future," Family Affairs Minister Franziska Giffey added. With the new legislation, Germany is "one step closer" to the goal of equal opportunities and equal rights, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said. The women's quota is "overdue" and the time for voluntary measures is "finally over", he added. Europe's largest economy fares relatively poorly in terms of representation of women in senior positions, particularly striking in a country led by the world's longest-serving elected female leader. Chancellor Angela Merkel, in power since 2005, has spoken out at foot-dragging by business leaders, against the resistance of some in her own conservative bloc. The boss of her CDU party's economic council, Astrid Hamker, last year called the idea of a quota system "completely counterproductive", and said diversity should be "not according to gender, but rather competence". Yet evidence suggests companies with women at the top outperform the average of Germany's blue-chip DAX companies by more than two percent, according to a report by the management firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG). Included in the new legislation, companies in which the government holds a majority stake — such as the rail group Deutsche Bahn — will have stricter rules, with at least one woman on management boards with more than two members. — AFP



German Chancellor Angela Merkel walks beside Federal Finance Minister Olaf Scholz and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, from right, prior the weekly cabinet meeting on Wednesday. — AP

Democrats win first seat in battle for US Senate runoffs

Democrat Warnock becomes Georgia's first African-American Senator



People wait for a rally of supporters of US President Donald Trump challenging the results of the 2020 US Presidential election on the Ellipse outside of the White House on Wednesday. — AFP

Atlanta, Jan. 6: Joe Biden's Democratic Party took a giant step on Wednesday towards seizing control of the US Senate as they won the first of two Georgia run-offs, hours before Congress was set to certify the president-elect's victory over Donald Trump. President-elect Joe Biden on Wednesday hailed his Democratic Party's likely takeover of the Senate as a sign that Americans want action and made an appeal for bipartisanship. "It's time to turn the page. The American people demand action and they want unity. I am more optimistic than I ever have been that we can deliver both," Biden said in a statement that congratulated Democratic candidates on their likely wins in Georgia. Democrat Rev Raphael Warnock on Wednesday secured a crucial win in the senatorial race, becoming the first person of colour enator from Georgia and bringing his party within the reach of a majority in the US Senate ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. Multiple news outlets on Wednesday morning projected 51-year-old Warnock, a senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, winner against Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler in the Georgia Senate runoff. He is the first African-American to represent Georgia in the US Senate. He is also the first Democrat to win the Senate race from Georgia in 20 years. Democrat Jon Ossoff also claimed victory in

Georgia. "I congratulate Reverend Warnock on his ground breaking win last night and I am hopeful that when the count is complete, Jon Ossoff will also be victorious. I congratulate the people of Georgia, who turned out in record numbers once again, just as they did in November, to elect two new Senators, demand action, and call on our elected leaders to end the gridlock and move us forward as a nation," the President-elect said. Donald Trump faced one of the darkest days of his presidency Wednesday with Congress poised to certify Joe Biden's White House victory and Democrats on track to take control of the Senate with a pair of stunning upset victories in Georgia. Thousands of Trump supporters, fueled by his spurious claims of voter fraud, were flooding the nation's capital, meanwhile, to protest the certification. With political tensions running at fever pitch, there was a heavy police presence in downtown Washington and many business owners, fearing clashes, have boarded up doors and windows. "They stole our election," said Katherine Caldwell, a 61-year-old woman from Oregon wearing a white cowboy hat that read "Trump Is My President." Certification of the Electoral College vote at

a ceremony presided over by the vice president is usually just a formality. Trump, 74, has refused to concede defeat in the November 3 election and has been ramping up the pressure on fellow Republicans and Vice President Mike Pence to back his baseless claims of election fraud. "The Vice President has the power to reject fraudulently chosen electors," Trump tweeted on Tuesday. "If Vice President @MikePence comes through for us, we will win the Presidency." The vice president has no legal authority to reject the results, however, and Pence has given no public indication of what he will do at the joint session. — AFP/PTI

53 arrested in HK crackdown

Hong Kong, Jan. 6: Hong Kong police arrested 53 former lawmakers and democracy proponents Wednesday for allegedly violating the new national security law by participating in unofficial election primaries for the territory's legislature last year. The mass arrests, including of former lawmakers, were the largest move against Hong Kong's democracy movement since the law was imposed by Beijing last June to quell dissent in the semi-autonomous territory. "The operation today targets the active elements who are suspected to be involved in the crime of overthrowing, or interfering (and) seriously destroy the Hong Kong governments legal execution of duties," John Lee, Hong Kong's security minister, said at a news conference. He said those arrested were suspected of trying to paralyze the government, via their plans to gain a majority of the seats in the legislature to create a situation in which the chief executive had to resign and the government would stop functioning. In a video released by former

● **MASS RESIGNATIONS** and disqualifications of pro-democracy lawmakers have left the legislature largely a pro-Beijing body. lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting on his Facebook page, police turned up at his house and told him he was "suspected of violating the national security law, subverting state power." Police told those recording the video to stop or risk arrest. The legislative election that would have followed the unofficial primaries was postponed by a year by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who cited the public health risks during the coronavirus pandemic. Mass resignations and disqualifications of pro-democracy lawmakers have left the legislature largely a pro-Beijing body. Lee said the police would not target those who had voted in the unofficial primaries, which were held in July last year and attracted more than 6,00,000 voters even though pro-Beijing lawmakers and politicians had warned the event could breach the security law. — AP

China blocks entry for virus experts, says WHO

Beijing, Jan. 6: An expert mission to China to probe the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic was in disarray on Wednesday after Beijing denied entry to the World Health Organisation team at the last minute despite months of painstaking negotiations. Ten experts were due to arrive in China this week for the delicate, highly politicised task of establishing how and where the virus jumped from animals to humans. But with a number of the team already in transit, China denied them entry visas, prodding WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, to say he was "very disappointed". China is determined to control the origin story of the virus, which has killed more than 1.8 million people around the world and laid waste to global economies. The first cases of the Coronavirus were recorded in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, prompting accusations of chaotic, secretive handling by Chinese authorities which led to its spread beyond China. US President Donald Trump called the pandemic the "China virus".

EU WATCHDOG GIVES GREEN LIGHT FOR SECOND CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

The Hague, Jan. 6: The European Union's medicines watchdog on Wednesday approved a second Coronavirus vaccine, in a relief to struggling European countries as the world reached a grim new record of 15,700 deaths in 24 hours. The Moderna vaccine is now set to join Pfizer-BioNTech's jab for use in the 27-nation EU, where governments are grappling with soaring case-lloads and slow rollouts of the vaccines already available. "Good news for our efforts to bring more Covid-19 vaccines to Europeans!" European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted. The breakthrough came as more than 15,700 Covid-19 deaths around the world were registered in the past 24 hours, according to a count by AFP at 1100 GMT on Wednesday — a new record. The United States, the world's worst-hit country, logged a record 3,936 daily deaths in a separate tally by Johns Hopkins university. Los Angeles ambulance workers have been told to stop transporting some patients with extremely low survival chances to overwhelmed hospitals. — AFP

Despite the hail of criticism, Beijing has so far resisted pressure for an independent probe and instead has seeded doubt as to whether the pandemic even started inside its borders. Beijing foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying confirmed the WHO team had not been admitted as planned, and admitted it was "not just a visa issue". "The issue of origin-tracing is incredibly complicated," she said. "To ensure the work of the international expert team in China goes smoothly, we have to carry out necessary procedures and make relevant arrangements." Talks were continuing over "the specific date and specific arrangement of the expert group's visit," Hua added, despite the months of negotiations already spent on setting up the trip. — AFP

Trump orders ban on 8 more Chinese apps

Washington, Jan. 6: President Donald Trump has signed an executive order barring transactions with eight Chinese apps including Alipay and WeChat Pay to protect America's national security, citing the steps taken by India to ban more than 200 Chinese connected software applications. Trump's order said action is needed to "deal with the national emergency" caused by the "pervasiveness of the spread" of apps created and controlled in China. The ban against the eight Chinese apps — Alipay, CamScanner, QQ Wallet, SHAREit, Tencent QQ, Vmate, WeChat Pay, and WPS Office — will come into effect in 45 days from on Tuesday. "The pace and pervasiveness of the spread in the United States of certain connected mobile and desktop applications and other software developed or controlled by persons China, to include Hong Kong and Macau (China), continue to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," Trump said on Tuesday. "At this time, action must be taken to address the threat posed by these Chinese connected software applications," Trump said in his executive order. The orders follow two others Trump signed in August banning dealings with the popular video app TikTok as well as the main WeChat app. Trump said that India has banned the use of more than 200 Chinese connected software applications throughout the country. In a statement, India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology asserted that the applications were "stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users' data in an unauthorised manner to servers which have locations outside India," according to the executive order. The United States has assessed that a number of Chinese connected software applications automatically capture vast swaths of information from millions of

BEIJING SLAMS DON OVER ORDER AGAINST APPS

Beijing, Jan. 6: Beijing accused the US on Wednesday of "bullying" after President Donald Trump ordered a ban on a series of Chinese apps in his last weeks in office, branding them a threat to national security. Under the Trump administration Beijing and Washington have clashed repeatedly over trade, technology, human rights and the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic. In the latest move to raise tensions, Trump ordered a ban on transactions involving Alipay, WeChat Pay and other apps linked to Chinese companies, saying they could route user information to the government in Beijing. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said on Wednesday the move was an example of "bullying" by the US, and accused Washington of "stretching the concept of national security." "This harms both itself and others." — AFP

users in the United States, including sensitive personally identifiable information and private information, which would allow the Chinese Army and the Chinese Community Party access to Americans' personal and proprietary information. "The United States must take aggressive action against those who develop or control Chinese connected software applications to protect our national security," he said. Trump said that by accessing personal electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, Chinese connected software applications can access and capture vast swaths of information from users, including sensitive personally identifiable information and private information. — PTI

UK denies bail for WikiLeaks Assange

London, Jan. 6: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange must remain in custody in Britain, while the US appeals a court decision to block his extradition to face charges there for leaking secret documents, a judge in London ruled on Wednesday. Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who on Monday refused to grant his extradition, told Westminster Magistrates Court that if released there were "substantial grounds" to suspect Assange would "fail to surrender" for future appeal hearings. "Mr Assange still has an incentive to abscond from these as yet unresolved proceedings," she said. "As a matter of fairness the United States must be able to challenge my decision. If Mr Assange absconds during this process then they will have lost the opportunity to do so." Outside court, lawyer Stella Morris, Assange's fiancée and the mother of two of his children, called the decision "a huge disappointment" and urged the US Justice Department to drop the charges. A lawyer for the US government earlier urged Baraitser not to release the controversial Australian

publisher, and detailed how it planned to challenge her decision to block his extradition on mental health grounds. "We respectfully submit on behalf of the United States that there are insurmountable hurdles to Mr Assange being granted bail," Clair Dobbin said. She added there were "no conditions that could guarantee his surrender" in future. The history of his attempts to evade extradition to the United States demonstrate that he is capable of going to any length to avoid that possibility," Dobbin said. The court "should be under no doubt about his resources to abscond" and pointed to offers of political asylum, notably from Mexico, she added. Assange attended court wearing a suit and mask over his mouth, two days after the unexpected decision to deny his removal to the United States on the basis the risk of his suicide there was too great. Edward Fitzgerald, his lawyer, argued he should be freed after spending 15 months in custody awaiting the extradition proceedings. — AFP

Career Chronicle

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DECCAN Chronicle

7 JANUARY 2021

Scrap laws, ask farmers, don't skip due process

The seventh round of talks between the government and farmers protesting against the three new laws regulating agriculture in India on Monday produced no immediate result other than fixing the date for a new round. However, two things have emerged after the talks ended in stalemate: the government has offered to sit with the farmers' unions and discuss the laws "clause by clause"; two; Prime Minister Narendra Modi is understood to have directed officials in the agriculture ministry to look for an amicable solution to the issue.

Given Mr Modi's initiative and the offer to discuss the laws threadbare, it looks like an open approach to the issue could solve it so that the lakhs of farmers could call off their agitation they are holding now braving the gripping cold and pouring rains on the outskirts of the capital city. It could allow them to drop the plan to take out a tractor rally on the Republic Day and spare the nation from having to watch the spectre of more of its *annadatas* dying on the streets and adding to the present toll of 50.

Given Mr Modi's initiative and the offer to discuss the laws threadbare, it looks like an open approach to the issue could solve it

The catch, however, lies in the openness of the government. In our country, laws, especially those that have an implication for large sections of people, are passed after an elaborate process, which includes discussions in Parliament, parliamentary committees and even outside. This process, though painstakingly slow, ensures that the safeguards necessary to protect the interests of the stakeholders are not overlooked or omitted. But the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, especially its second edition, does not seem to believe in such democratic niceties. Laws that sought to alter the basic idea of India such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 and the virtual annulment of Article 370 of the Constitution were pushed through Houses of Parliament after a single day's discussion each.

As for the farm laws, the government has done too little to take the stakeholders into confidence. The government which is now willing to discuss the laws "clause by clause" had not bothered to persuade its own partners, resulting in the exit of the Shiromani Akali Dal, one of the oldest allies of the BJP, from the Cabinet and the NDA. The bill was not sent to the House committee either. Worse, there was no proper voting on the bill in the Upper House of the Parliament. The protesters have little reason to trust the government.

The NDA government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have spared no occasion to champion the farmers' cause. Mr Modi has long promised to double the income of farmers by 2022; Niti Aayog brought out an action plan in 2017 proposing to achieve it; and the first budget of the new government finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented in 2019 talked of promoting zero-based farming as a means to achieve the target. But the farmers saw little action on the ground. If the government is serious, and if farmers' welfare is its priority, then it should keep the laws in abeyance, sit with them and draft new ones that address their concerns.

Scale down the parade

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who had accepted India's invitation to be the chief guest for the Republic Day celebration this year, has had to back out unexpectedly on account of domestic compulsions caused by a renewed surge of Covid-19 infections in the UK. We sympathise with his situation. Since this is a last-minute problem, let us just be practical about it and not bother tearing our hair to find a suitable replacement at such a late stage.

There is no harm in saying pass this year. Since this is an unusual period for all of the world, the pandemic provides us a perfectly good reason to not go scouting for a dignitary after the British leader has been obliged to drop out.

Late in 2018, when US President Donald Trump informed us that he was unable to accept the invitation to be chief guest on account of scheduling difficulties, we were fortunate that President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa did not stand on ceremony and agreed to step in at a late hour. South Africa is a good friend and its President was most gracious. Nevertheless, the pandemic poses a problem for all and it is not fair to put friendly nations in a quandary by asking them when barely three weeks remain.

Although institutional memory may have faded in this regard, it may be recalled that in the years 1952, 1953, and 1966 no invitation was extended to an international dignitary to be chief guest. Of course, since then invitations have gone out each year. There have also been somewhat unusual situations. In 2018, for example, the ten leaders of Asean nations were collectively invited to be chief guest. In 1956, there were two chief guests — Britain's chancellor of the exchequer as well as the chief justice of Japan.

Hospitality being a part of diplomacy, Republic Day chief guests are chosen from countries that India may want to be especially solicitous toward for reasons of geopolitics or geo-economics in a given year. Not having one in a particular year just speaks of extraordinary circumstances.

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Subhani



Why trust needs to be the key word in 2021



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

India has a good story to tell when it comes to vaccines — it produces more than 60 per cent of all vaccines sold across the globe.

Why then has India's final approval of two Covid-19 vaccines kicked up such a storm, with many respected health experts and scientists calling it a hasty decision?

Unless you have been living under the rock the past few days, you probably know the answer.

In brief, last weekend, India's drugs regulator gave the green signal for the emergency use of two coronavirus vaccines. One, called Covishield, is developed by AstraZeneca-Oxford University and is being made in India by Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine producer by the number of doses produced.

The controversy, however, is more about the drug regulator's emergency approval to the second coronavirus vaccine, the indigenously produced Covaxin, before critical efficacy data of the third phase of clinical trials are out. Covaxin is being made by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Virology. Bharat Biotech is a well-known vaccine maker and has a track record of clinical trials in 20 countries.

But Covaxin has completed only two of the three required phases of clinical trials. The vaccine is safe. The critical Phase 3 trial, meant to test efficacy, started last November. The company expects to release the efficacy data by March.

What further complicates the situation is the drug regulator saying that Covaxin would be administered in "clinical trial mode". This has led to questions about whether those being vaccinated with Covaxin in the immediate future will, in effect, be taking

part in a clinical trial.

Why could India's regulatory authorities not wait for a few more weeks for all the three phases of the clinical trial to be over and approved an indigenous vaccine of proven efficacy?

Till date, there is no convincing answer.

Perplexingly, over the past few days, we have also been witnessing bizarre incidents such as the Drugs Controller-General of India not taking any questions from journalists at a press conference, and the two companies which have got the green signal engaging in a temporary slanging match about the merits of their respective vaccines.

All this plays havoc with public trust in oversight mechanisms when there are signs of vaccine hesitancy in the country.

How do we restore trust?

"Transparency breeds trust, and trust is very important during a health crisis like a pandemic," says virologist Shahid Jameel, director of the Trivedi School of Biosciences at Ashoka University. "Science does not work on beliefs. Science works on data, and we still don't have data on the efficacy of one of the approved vaccines. Science does not say it has answers to everything but there should be clear communication about what is not known, and this has to be communicated openly and transparently."

"A common man who does not understand the difference between the different vaccines needs to be told what exactly is known and what is not known," Dr Jameel adds. "Otherwise, there is a risk of vaccine hesitancy spreading."

Leena Menghaney, South Asia head of the access campaign at humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, also points out that transparency is a key component to building trust. And it is important to adopt it as a public health strategy.

Ms Menghaney cites the example of the European Medicines Agency (EMA), that has set a minimum level of transparency for itself. In many areas, the agency has decided to go beyond what the law requires. During the pandemic, EMA is implementing exceptional measures to maximise the transparency of its regulatory activities on treatments and vaccines for Covid-19 that are approved or are under evaluation. This includes making public the detailed minutes of various committee meetings. In 2019, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on improving the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines and other health products in an effort to expand access. The resolution urges member states to enhance public sharing of information on actual prices paid by governments and other buyers for health products, and greater transparency on pharmaceutical patents, clinical trial results and other determinants of pricing along the value chain from laboratory to patient.

A trust deficit can arise due to multiple reasons, acting independently and together.

There is a lesson from India's victory in the battle against polio. Then too, there was a trust deficit in some quarters, though due to different reasons.

While researching a report on a sudden spurt of polio cases in parts of Uttar Pradesh in 2006, I saw firsthand how lack of trust could derail a public health intervention. Official explanations attributed the spike to rumours and fear among the Muslim minority. But a visit to Moradabad, one of the worst affected dis-

tricts in UP, offered nuanced insights into the reality of traditionally disadvantaged communities that have little contact with the healthcare system. Rumour mongers were exploiting grievances accumulated over years. This was among the most daunting challenges in the global battle against polio.

In a narrow bylane flanked by open sewers in Karula, in the outskirts of Moradabad, I met Muslim families who were convinced that a "geopolitical conspiracy" lurked behind the persistent attempts to give polio drops to their children. Many people told me they wanted to know why the government was so eager to protect their children against polio when it paid no heed to other ailments that struck them. There were rumours about the polio drop making male children impotent.

Frustration and rage at a dysfunctional healthcare system had morphed into irrational fear and distrust of "outsiders", including health workers and field operatives of international agencies. Muslim clerics in some local mosques in Uttar Pradesh had reportedly opposed the polio vaccine.

Distrust was dispelled through concerted trust-building efforts by civil society, universities like Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia, health officials and international agencies like Unicef, as Dr Jameel points out. Many respected Imams worked hard to build trust among communities resisting the vaccine.

Trust and transparency during a crisis mean that not only should the political and administrative leadership be decisive, it must also convincingly explain to all groups that whatever is being done is being done in their interest. Opacity in decision-making, attempts to gloss over mistakes or polarise the populace on any count will punch holes in the trust narrative.

We must not let that happen in 2021.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

NETAS FIRST

In India, if anyone has to set an example, it should be the politicians. This way, people can trust and take the Covid-19 vaccine. Why are they insisting on frontline workers taking the vaccine first? Since there are a lot of doubts about the vaccines not both Indian and foreign, politicians must be given the vaccine first because they are the rulers and policy-makers.

S. Laxmirajam
Hyderabad

IDOLS OF GODS

Members and supporters of the BJP and the RSS and their affiliates should know that man-made idols cannot be all-powerful Gods. They are personified concepts of various competing supernatural powers of the long bygone Vedic period. In that period, too, numerous and inclusive intra-religious sectarian wars were waged for supremacy. Be it religion or politics, it is all a question of domination over others.

V.N. Ramaswamy
Hyderabad

BIRD FLU

With humans facing their worst-ever pandemic, birds are also not spared now with a few states in India confirming return of the bird flu and others on high alert (*Telangana on Bird Flu alert, DC, Jan. 6*). Many birds like chickens, crows and sparrows have lost their lives in last one week and many are ailing. This will surely have an adverse impact on the poultry industry. Treatment of ailing birds as well as safe disbursement of dead ones should be a high priority amidst the Covid-19 situation.

Jitesh Mathur
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Concern over Sheikh's talks with Pak. envoy

JAMMU, January. 6 The Ruling Congress here has "taken serious view" of Sheikh Abdullah's meeting with the Pakistan High Commissioner in New Delhi yesterday, according to the senior Vice-President of the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee, Mr. Mohd. Ayub Khan. Mr. Ayub Khan said in a statement, the Government of India should prevent "unfriendly countries like Pakistan" from interfering in the affairs of the State through the Plebiscite Front at this juncture. He appealed to the people of the State to remain vigilant and protect the Constitution and secular traditions.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



India's toppers no longer find civil services a dream career?

Is the civil service no longer a dream career for aspiring youngsters in India? The recent survey of national school board toppers over 20 years suggests that it may be so.

Of the 86 men and women who topped in their school board exams between 1995 and 2015, more than half live abroad, and most are working or pursuing advanced degrees in science and technology. Of those working most are in the tech sector, followed by medicine and finance. More than half grew up outside India's metros in Tier-II and Tier-III cities. No surprises there!

What is surprising is that only one of these toppers joined the civil service. Subhankar Mohapatra, who topped the Class X CBSE exam in 2006, chose to

become a civil servant (after studying at medical college). He cleared the IRS exam in 2016, the IPS in 2017 and finally the UPSC in 2018. The Odisha cadre officer is presently posted as sub-collector and SDM in Kandhamal, Odisha. Two others from the Toppers Club are preparing for the civil service exam. That's it.

Could it be that there are many more attractive alternative career paths available now that are more rewarding financially and career-wise than what the civil service can offer to our brightest? For decades, the civil services have enjoyed an unparalleled social standing. While there have always been officers who have quit the civil service for better opportunities outside the government in the private sector and even politics,

largely, the IAS and allied services have been a top draw, as seen in the lakhs of hopefuls who appear for the UPSC. But that seems to be changing now.

NEW TRANSFER POLICY FOR POLL-BOUND TAMIL NADU

The Election Commission has already started gearing up for the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections due in May 2021, starting with the babus who will be on election duty. In a recent letter to the state Chief Electoral Officer, Sathyabrata Sahoo, and chief secretary K. Shanmugam, the Election Commission has stressed the need for effective transfer of officers who have completed three years and to ensure that no officer is posted in their native district. Officers who are retiring within

six months and those who are facing disciplinary actions recommended by the Election Commission for earlier poll duty lapses should not be designated for poll duty. Further, officials who will complete three years in an election-related post before May 31 should be transferred.

Sources say that the Tamil Nadu government has transferred more than 50 IAS and IPS officers, including district collectors and district superintendents of police of more than 20 districts in the last two months.

A THORNY ISSUE

The Punjab government has appointed 1995-cadre IPS officer G. Nageswara Rao as secretary in the department of home affairs and justice, a post that has traditionally

been held by the IAS cadre. The appointment is part of a larger reshuffle of officers effected by the Congress government of Captain Amarinder Singh.

The move is unlikely to help in the long ongoing tussle between IAS and IPS officers. The IAS officers are likely to see this as another encroachment on their turf, a trend that has become more pronounced at the Centre after the Modi *sarkar* came to power. The rivalry between the two elite services — be it at the Central or state level — is also over issues like pay parity, promotions, central empanment and avenues for deputation and training courses.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,174.06	-0.54
Nifty 50	14,146.25	-0.38
S&P 500*	3,773.05	1.24
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.75	-0.43
Euro (₹)	90.21	-0.45
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	51,125.71	0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	54.43	0.83
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.894	0.044
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.030	0.075

Services sector expands at a slower rate

Services sector activity expanded at a slower pace in December as growth in sales eased to a three-month low and hiring came to a halt amid weak business optimism. The India Services Business Activity Index fell from 53.7 in Nov. to 52.3 in Dec. "Although the news that the service sector remained in expansion mode during Dec. is welcome, the fact that growth lost momentum yet again shouldn't be disregarded," IHS Markit said.

DoT: Spectrum auction bidding to start in March



Bidding for the sixth round of spectrum auction for radio-waves worth Rs 3.92 lakh crore will start from March 1, according to a DoT notice. The long-awaited spectrum auction is being held after a gap of four years and over two years after the Trai recommended the base price for the radiowaves. The DoT has fixed January 12 for the pre-bid conference. Telecos will need to submit their application by February 5.

Housing sales decline in 2020: Knight Frank

Housing sales in Delhi-NCR fell 50 per cent in 2020 to 21,234 units on low demand because of the pandemic, property consultant Knight Frank India said. The sales of residential properties fell 37 per cent to 1,54,534 units in 2020 across eight major cities versus 2,45,861 units. Mumbai saw 20 per cent decline at 48,688 units. The sales of residential properties in Hyderabad declined 38 per cent to 10,042 units from 16,267 units.

SpiceJet to run 21 new flights from next week

SpiceJet said it would operate 21 new domestic and international flights from January 12. It will introduce two weekly flights on the route from Mumbai to Ras Al-Khaimah in the UAE and increase frequency on the Delhi-Ras Al-Khaimah route to four weekly flights. The airline has launched new daily non-stop flights connecting Hyderabad with Visakhapatnam, Tirupati and Vijayawada. It will also connect Jharsuguda with Mumbai.



Govt mulls infra bank with ₹1 lakh-cr corpus

SIDDHARTHA SINGH JAN. 6

India is considering a proposal to create a bank to help fund port, road and power projects as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government aims to lift Asia's third-largest economy out of the recession. The new entity, likely to be part of the budget announcement in February, may have an equity capital of Rs 1 lakh crore (\$13.7 billion), people with knowledge of the matter said, asking not to be identified as the matter isn't public. The existing India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd, which has a Rs 2,000-crore corpus, will be merged with the bank, they said. Initially, the institution will be funded by the government, which will later invite investors, the people said. It could be on the



lines of state-run National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Ltd, which counts the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, Asian Development Bank and Abu Dhabi Investment Authority among its investors. The finance ministry has prepared a note for the cab-

inet to discuss the proposal. The spokesperson at the ministry declined to comment. India faces the challenge of boosting spending on productive assets that aid economic growth after being forced to direct the bulk of stimulus last year on the poor and the farm-

ers to protect them from a pandemic-induced slowdown. Citigroup Inc economists wrote last year that spending should be directed on infrastructure, rather than populist measures, to cushion the economy headed for the deepest slump among emerging nations. Attracting foreign investment is also crucial to meet Modi's goal of spending \$1.5 trillion on new roads, rail links and other infrastructure over the next five years as public finances deteriorate. The government pumped nearly Rs 1.7 lakh crore into public sector banks in the two years to March 2020. But a widening budget deficit and weak revenue growth put a brake on any further recapitalisation plans for the current financial year.

— Bloomberg

TCS BUYBACK: TATA SONS TENDERS SHARES WORTH ₹9,997 CRORE

New Delhi, Jan. 6: Tata Sons tendered shares worth Rs 9,997 crore of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) during the IT major's Rs 16,000-crore buyback offer that concluded recently.

Tata Sons, the single largest shareholder of TCS, tendered more than 3.33 crore shares during the offer, a regulatory filing said. TCS said over 5.33 crore equity shares were bought back under the offer at a price of Rs 3,000 apiece and out of the total, Tata Sons' 3,33,25,118 shares were accepted under the buyback offer.

The total amount utilised for the buyback offer—which opened on December 18 and closed on January 1—was around Rs 16,000 crore, as per the filing.

The shares tendered by Tata Sons were worth Rs 9,997.5 crore.

Among others, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and RBC Emerging Markets Equity Fund tendered around 16.69 lakh shares and 7.69 lakh shares of TCS, respectively.

Late last year, TCS CEO and MD Rajesh Gopinathan said the company is focused on its policy to return capital to shareholders.

The Mumbai-based company's cash reserves stood at Rs 58,500 crore as of September 2020.

In October 2019, TCS' board declared a special dividend of Rs 40 per equity share.

— PTI

NBFCs require ₹2.2 L-cr extra funding next yr

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 6



NBFCs need additional funding of Rs 1.9-2.2 lakh crore in FY22, apart from refinancing of existing credit lines. This additional funding will help non-banks achieve assets under management (AUM) growth of 7-9 per cent in FY22 after a flat-tish performance in FY21, says Icra.

Growth would be contingent upon access to adequate funding lines. However, it has to be seen if banks will provide additional funding. Mutual fund exposures to non-banks have improved in the recent past, but their sustainability is critical. Other sources for funding could be securitisation and retail or overseas lenders/investors.

According to Motilal Oswal Research, while the cost of market borrowings has declined sharply, NBFCs have a lower share of market borrowings now as compared to two years ago. Post the IL&FS crisis, companies reduced their non-convertible debenture and commercial paper exposures. They focused on bank borrowings and alternative sources like sell-downs and external commercial borrowings to raise incremental money.

While most issuers expect to maintain or augment their on-balance sheet liquidity profile, most of the investors want to reduce it. This

divergence could pose challenges for incremental funding to the sector and has the potential to affect growth revival in FY22 and a sustained improvement in the subsequent years, says Icra. NBFC AUMs had registered a growth at a CAGR of 16 per cent between March 2016 and March 2020. The key segments which would bolster growth include gold loans, home loans, personal credit, rural finance and microfinance. Growth in vehicle finance, business loans including loan against property and other commercial lending segments, which are closely linked to the economic activities, are expected to take longer to see a reasonable revival. "Non-bank exposures to the commercial real estate and other large corporate/wholesales exposures are expected to register a decline even in FY2022 after the decline of about 15 per cent in FY2020 and about 10 per cent expected contraction in FY2021," said A. M. Karthik, vice president of Icra.

PFC plans ₹10,000-crore retail bond issue

DIVYA PATIL & RAJESH KUMAR SINGH JAN. 6

India's biggest lender to the power sector plans to sell bonds to individual investors as it tries to attract savers dissatisfied with deposit rates at a 16-year low.

Power Finance Corp has filed a draft prospectus for a Rs 10,000-crore offering (\$1.4 billion), and plans to raise the entire sum this

quarter, according to Parminder Chopra, director (finance).

"We want to explore an alternative source of funds," Chopra said in a telephone interview. "Fixed deposit rates are quite low, so there could be interest from the public to get a bit better rate."

Unprecedented monetary stimulus to help cushion the economy from damage wrought by the Covid-19 crisis has

dragged down rates that households get on bank savings. The rate on term deposits maturing in three years at the country's largest lender, State Bank of India, is 5.3 per cent, the lowest since September 2004.

Power Finance has previously sold notes to retail investors, but those were tax-free infrastructure bonds, Chopra said. This planned offering would be the company's maiden tax-

able issuance to individual buyers, she said.

The New Delhi-based company has hired Trust Investment Advisors Pvt Ltd, A.K. Capital Services Ltd, Edelweiss Financial Services Ltd and JM Financial Services Ltd as lead managers for the offering. It plans to issue the AAA rated notes in one or more tranches, according to the draft prospectus.

— Bloomberg

'Saudi oil output cut signals demand risks'

Jan. 6: Saudi Arabia's pledge to cut its oil output by more than required under its pact with other Opec+ producers points to weakening oil demand following new Covid-19 lockdowns and sets the stage for a tighter market in the second quarter, Goldman Sachs said in a note released on Tuesday.

"Saudi's action and the prospect for a tight market in 2Q21, as the rebound in demand stresses the ability to restart production, will likely support prices in coming weeks, leading us to reiterate our bullish oil view," the analysts wrote.

Benchmark Brent oil prices on Wednesday hit their highest level since February after Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, said it would cut by an additional, voluntary 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March.

Two Opec+ members—Russia and Kazakhstan—will bump up their output by a combined 75,000 bpd while other producers will hold production steady. Producers are wary of the impact of new lockdowns on oil demand.



China on Wednesday introduced more restrictions near Beijing following tougher measures announced by Germany and Britain.

Goldman analysts said their updated first-quarter 2021 market balance outlook had weakened and that the latest Opec+ plans point to a surplus of 250,000 bpd versus a deficit previously.

The "Opec+ March production level will still be low just as global demand starts rebounding sharply driven by warmer weather and rising vaccinations. This points to the group potentially struggling to ramp-up output quickly enough," they wrote.

Goldman expects sustained backwardation and lower implied volatility and sees year-end Brent prices at \$65 per barrel.

— Reuters

UAE TO PRODUCE SINOPHARM VACCINE THIS YR

FARAH ELBAHRAWY JAN. 6

The United Arab Emirates, which aims to inoculate half of its population in the first quarter, plans to start manufacturing Sinopharm Group Co's vaccine this year, according to *The National*.

The country is seeking to achieve herd immunity later this year by vaccinating as many as 70 per cent of its residents, the Abu Dhabi-based newspaper reported, citing an interview with Nawal Al Kaabi, chairwoman of the National Covid-19 Clinical Management Committee, and Ashish Koshy, chief executive officer of G42 Healthcare.

Sinopharm unit China National Biotec Group, which developed the vaccine, delivered 3 million doses to the UAE so far.

The UAE is offering vaccines free of charge for its residents. On Tuesday, a top health official said the Gulf nation administered more than 826,000 doses so far.

The UAE has approved the Pfizer Inc-BioNTech SE Covid-19 vaccine, along with the Sinopharm shot.

— Bloomberg

Sovereign debt rises by \$10 trillion in 2020

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 6

Global government debt is estimated to have increased by about \$10 trillion in 2020 to \$77.8 trillion, equivalent to 94 per cent of the world GDP, according to rating agency Fitch.

Nearly all governments have coped with the economic fallout of the pandemic similarly—by boosting spending on health sectors and providing support to households and businesses, while running up debt to pay for it.

Both the increase and level of debt will be records, Fitch said. The previous \$10 trillion tranche took seven years to build, from 2012 to 2019.

"The rapid and widespread increase in debt has had a significant effect on sovereign credit ratings, with a record 51 downgrades of 33 sovereigns in 2020, 27 of which are emerging markets. The sovereigns downgraded multiple times were all emerging markets," James McCormack, global head of sovereigns,



Fitch Ratings said. There are three primary consequences of the high and rising emerging-market debt burden, all of which are already in play, according to Fitch.

First, there will be additional episodes of credit stress and default.

There were five defaults in 2020—Argentina, Ecuador, Lebanon, Suriname and Zambia—a record yearly high.

"We expect there to be more defaults in 2021, along with greater attention on debt-remedy initiatives," Fitch said.

"Second, some emerging markets that are not at risk of default and have well-developed local-currency debt markets will continue to explore unconventional monetary

policies."

"In emerging markets, government debt increased seven-fold to \$19 trillion, and interest payments jumped to an estimated \$680 billion in 2020 from \$220 billion in 2000. While the increase in interest payments did not fully keep pace with the increase in debt, there has been an uninterrupted rise," McCormack said.

Comparing 2010 with 2020, the median effective interest rate for developed-market sovereigns fell from just over 4 per cent to just under 2 per cent. For emerging markets, the rate went in the other direction, increasing from 4.3 per cent to 5.1 per cent.

The third consequence will be, if developed-market rates sink even lower, there may be a greater incentive for emerging-market sovereigns to turn to foreign-currency funding.

On current trends, Fitch forecasts interest payments by governments in developed and emerging markets will converge by 2022 at about \$860 billion.

Motown Buzz

Toyota Fortuner facelift launched



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 6

Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Wednesday introduced the 2021 Toyota Fortuner SUV with prices starting at Rs 29.98 lakh for the base petrol variant and going all the way up to Rs 37.43 lakh at Delhi showroom for the range-topping four-wheel drive diesel automatic variant.

The company has also launched a sportier variant called Legendar priced at Rs 37.58 lakh.

TATA SAFARI ALL SET FOR A COMEBACK

Pune, Jan. 6: Tata Motors on Wednesday announced that it is bringing back its iconic brand 'Safari' with its forthcoming flagship SUV codenamed the Gravitas. "Tata Safari introduced India to the SUV lifestyle, and glamourised the segment in India for other players to follow. For over two decades, Safari has represented prestige and performance, and in its new avatar, the Safari will carry forward this rich idea," the firm said.

KIA MOTORS UNVEILS NEW LOGO, SLOGAN



New Delhi, Jan. 6: Kia Motors on Wednesday said it has come up with a new corporate logo and global brand slogan signifying its transformation and all-new brand purpose. "Kia's new logo represents the company's commitment to becoming an icon for change and innovation," said president and CEO Ho Sung Song.

AGRITECH | BLOOMING

Firm helps improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops

Startup CropIn bringing AI technology to farms

SARITHA RAI JAN. 6

CropIn, an artificial intelligence and data-based agritech startup, has raised \$20 million in a funding round led by Temasek Holdings Pte-backed ABC World Asia, as the coronavirus pandemic accelerates the adoption of digital technologies in farming.

The Bengaluru-headquartered agricultural AI startup provides software-as-a-service, or SAAS, products to farms and development organisations globally to improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops.

Additional new investors in the Series C funding include Infosys co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan's family office and a fund of the UK government, CDC Group.

CropIn has raised \$33.1 million so far. The company was set up in 2010 by Krishna Kumar, who hails from a family of farmers in central India and quit a career at General Electric Co to found the startup after being deeply affected by widespread rural suicides in his country.

The firm analyses data such as aerial imagery, ground scouting, hyper-local weather and market price fluctuations from 13



million acres across 4 million farms worldwide to predict productivity and monitor risks for thousands of variants of crops. That allows the company to provide warnings to small farms on what disease will hit a particular crop or when to expect an adverse climate event such as morning frost.

"Covid has brought

home for countries the risks of disrupted food supply chains, food safety and food security," Kumar, also the startup's chief executive officer, said in a phone interview. "Every country and every agribusiness wants to remotely monitor and safeguard the supply chain."

Backed by early investors, including the Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation and Singapore-based VC BeeNext, CropIn has customers and partners in 52 countries, including Basel-headquartered Syngenta Corp, the World Bank, Canada-based McCain Foods Ltd and Germany's BASF SE. The new funding will fuel further global expansion and help strengthen its technology.

India's agritech space is abloom, with dozens of startups sprouting up in the last few years to disrupt dated farming practices and bring more efficiency into a massive industry dominated by small land holdings. One in nine agritech startups

globally are from the South Asian nation, which had 450 such businesses in 2019, according to a report by the Indian trade body Nasscom.

That's piqued the interest of investors such as Tiger Global and Accel, which have plowed tens of millions into early-stage companies. Though much of the focus has been on supply chain improvements through practical approaches like aggregating farm produce and renting farm equipment, deep tech startups like CropIn working in areas like crop diagnostics and farm automation are also earning recognition.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Claire 1st female official in Tests

Sydney: Australia's Claire Polosak is set to become the first female match official in a men's Test match when she takes up the fourth umpire's role in the third Test between India and Australia starting here from Thursday.

The 32-year-old from New South Wales has already earned the distinction of being the first woman on-field umpire in a men's ODI match in ICC's Division 2 league between Namibia and Oman played at the Windhoek in 2019. As per ICC rules for Test matches, the fourth umpire is appointed by the home cricket board from their nominees to the International Panel of ICC Umpires and from the host country.

Polosak, who is a resident of New South Wales's Goulburn city, has also had the distinction of being the first female match official in a men's List A game in Australia. — PTI

Indian shuttlers to start training

New Delhi: The entire Indian badminton contingent cleared the Covid-19 test on Wednesday and is set to begin training ahead of the Yonex Thailand Open, starting next week. The Indian team, part of the Green Zone, consisting of players and all stakeholders such as umpires, line judges, personnel from BWF, Badminton Association of Thailand, medical staff, and TV production crew, were tested after arrival in Bangkok. The Asia leg in Bangkok consists of two Super 1000 events — Yonex Thailand Open (January 12-17) and Toyota Thailand Open (January 19-24) followed by the \$1,500,000 HSBC BWF World Tour Finals (January 27-31).

"The Asian Leg in Bangkok received a boost with all 824 participants in the Green Zone quarantine bubble testing negative for Covid-19," BWF said in a statement. — PTI

Woman footballer Alex catches Covid

Los Angeles: Alex Morgan, a two-time World Cup winner with the US women's football team, has tested positive for Covid-19, the star striker said on Twitter on Tuesday. "Unfortunately, my family and I closed out 2020 learning that we had contracted Covid while in California over the holidays," Morgan, 31, said in a Tweet.

"We are all in good spirits and recovering well. After our isolation is completed, I will follow US Soccer's return to play guidelines to ensure my body is fully recovered and I can join my teammates back on the field soon," the tweet added. Morgan is married to former Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder Servando Carrasco, and the couple have a seven-month old daughter, Charlie. The family returned to California from London, where Morgan had appeared in five matches for Tottenham in the Women's Super League before announcing her intention to return to the US to play in 2021. — AFP

Kevin does well in Dakar's Wadi loop

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: After a fine stage on Tuesday, with a one-two for Joan Barreda and Ricky Brabec who claimed the top of the overall rally standings, Wednesday was the turn of Kevin Benavides. The Argentinean Monster Energy Honda Team rider finished the Dakar 2021 third stage in runner-up spot, just short of the leadership. The Wadi Ad-Dawasil loop, over 630 total kilometres, including 403 km against the clock, once again turned the Dakar standings on their head. Second place at the end of the first looping stage went to Kevin Benavides. The rider, hailing from Salta, Argentina, got off to a strong start, hoping to clinch a partial victory, but eventually had to settle for the second best time of the day.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: Third Test — Day Two from 5 am (Fri 10) on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

Big Bash League: Hobart Hurricanes vs Sydney Thunder from 12.40 pm; Brisbane Heat vs Melbourne Stars from 3.50 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Bengaluru FC vs East Bengal from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

OPENING GAMBIT

Rohit and India ready to change Sydney script

Sydney, Jan. 6: Having touched nadir and zenith in a span of 10 days, Ajinkya Rahane's India will look to start afresh against Australia with the big-hitting Rohit Sharma's presence adding a new dimension to what promises to be an enthralling third Test starting here on Thursday. The Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), despite being witness to some extraordinary batting performances from the touring Indian sides over the years, has not exactly been a happy hunting ground with six defeats. The lone win came a good 42 years back.

If Rahane's side can go 2-1 up and ensure the retention of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, it will be one of the finest hours in the history of Indian cricket. Making it even more special is the fact that the side has been without two world class performers and a senior pacer against a nearly full-strength Australian team.

Seldom has an Australian batting unit, that boasts of a player of Steve Smith's calibre, looked so circumspect and literally intimidated by an Indian bowling unit, which isn't operating at full-strength.

Pacer Navdeep Saini will make his debut here, replacing Umesh Yadav who went home following an injury.

The pressure is understandable as Australia are literally pushing a 70 per cent fit David Warner out there in the middle to combat fire with fire even as his statements make it clear that he is not at all comfortable with the idea. And in this backdrop, enters Rohit Sharma, whose last couple of months have been loads of off-field drama.

But, his mere presence has added spring in the strides of the team and the youngsters in this current set-up swear by him. On the other hand, Australia need Smith to be back in form and someone like Travis Head to deliver as he has failed to get a hang of both pace and spin. — PTI

WE'RE A BETTER TEAM WITH WARNER: PAINE

Sydney, Jan. 6: David Warner's mere presence makes Australia a better side and fills the other 10 on the park with exuberance and energy, skipper Tim Paine gushed on Wednesday as the opener looks set for return to Test cricket when the third match against India begins here Thursday. Warner missed a lot of action since India arrived as he sustained a groin injury during the second ODI.

"Hopefully, if he gets in and gets away, that puts pressure back on opposition right away. Regardless of whom we are playing, we are a better team when David Warner is in that team from the runs he scores or the energy he brings into the group," Paine said. "He protects our middle-order a bit with Marnus (Labuschagne) and Steve coming in. Other guys coming when bowlers are a bit tired, it's an advantage. So David has got a huge role for us," the skipper said even as the senior opener is battling against time to get closer to full fitness.

"David has been awesome. Fills the guys with lot of confidence. He is a player you love having on your side. Always got plenty to say, really energetic, professional and I have always loved playing with him," he further added. Paine also admitted that "tension is boiling under the surface" after unnamed sources from the Indian camp expressed apprehensions about playing the final match of the series in Brisbane from January 15. — PTI

Kiwis sweep series, are No.1 in Tests

Christchurch (New Zealand), Jan. 6: Towering paceman Kyle Jamieson completed an 11-wicket match haul on Wednesday as New Zealand thrashed Pakistan in the second Test to become the world's top-ranked team. Jamieson was near unplayable in Pakistan's second innings, finishing with six for 48 after his five for 69 in the first innings, to give New Zealand victory by an innings and 176 runs. The win inside four days in Christchurch, which completed a 2-0 series sweep, also confirmed New Zealand had overtaken Australia to be the world's number one Test side for the first time. New Zealand batted Pakistan out of contention with a first innings 659 for six, with Williamson's masterful 238 supported by Henry Nicholls (157)

and Daryl Mitchell (102 not out). But there was still a chance Pakistan could force a draw until Jamieson took the ball.

Pakistan resumed the day at eight for one, needing to bat for the better part of two days to salvage a draw, but they were never in the hunt.

Trent Boult had nightwatchman Mohammad Abbas out for three in the fifth over and after that the day was mainly about Jamieson, who recorded his best match performance. After Abbas departed, Abid Ali and Azhar Ali looked to be laying the groundwork for a solid third-wicket stand and moved the score to 46 when Jamieson removed Abid for 26. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 297 & 186 in 81.4 overs (Zafar Gohar 37; Jamieson 3/48) lost to New Zealand 659/6 decl.



India's Rohit Sharma prepares to bat in the nets during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday, ahead of the third Test against Australia.

— AFP



Australia's David Warner bats during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday.

— AFP

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA HAVE WON JUST ONE TEST AT SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND

- The third Test match of the series between India and Australia will be played at Sydney Cricket Ground from Thursday (January 7).
- Australia have a good record at this ground. They have won 60, lost 28 and drew 20 in 108 previous Test matches played here. India, on the other hand, have won just one, lost five and drew six in 12 previous Test matches.
- Australia have won six, lost one and drew three of their past 10 Test at this ground, the only loss having come against England in the disastrous 2010-11 Ashes series. The only team to have beaten Australia in Sydney Tests in the past 18 years was England, who did it in 2003 by winning the match by 225 runs and in 2011 by an innings and 83 runs.
- India's only victory at this ground came in 1977-78 when they beat Australia by an innings and two runs. The last Test match at this ground between the two teams in 2018-19 ended in a draw.

FOR THE RECORD

- Nathan Lyon who took 394 wickets at an average of 31.63 in 187 innings of 98 Tests, needs six wickets to become third Australian and 16th bowler overall to reach the 400 mark in Test cricket.
- Cheteshwar Pujara, who scored 5,903 runs at an average of 45.80 in 132 innings of 79 Tests, is 97 runs short of the 6,000 mark in Tests. He will become the 11th Indian and 69th batsman overall to reach this landmark.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

Captain Jinks all praise for Ashwin and Jadeja

Sydney, Jan. 6: The ever inquisitive Ravichandran Ashwin, who has a knack for learning new things, and much-improved batsman Ravindra Jadeja have stood out for India in the first two Tests against Australia, skipper Ajinkya Rahane said on Wednesday.

While Ashwin is currently leading the wicket-takers' chart with 10 scalps, Jadeja's half-century and the hundred plus stand with Rahane in the second Test formed the cornerstone of India's eight-wicket win in Melbourne. Rahane said, "He is always looking to learn new things. He has good skills but is always looking to learn new things, and that's what makes Ashwin great."

He is always looking to learn new things. He has good skills but is always looking to learn new things, and that's what makes Ashwin great.

— AJINKYA RAHANE
India's stand-in Test captain

If Ashwin's improvisation has impressed Rahane, he is mighty pleased with Jadeja's Test match application which adds the necessary balance the team has often lacked.

"As a batsman Ravindra Jadeja has improved a lot and that is a massive point as a team's perspective," Rahane said.

"When you know that your number seven can contribute with the bat, that becomes really easy for you to actually get that (decent) total and obvious-

ly in the field, you have seen him taking some brilliant catches.

"So yes his addition in the team helped us a lot and he has been really fantastic and it is really great for us," he said.

Also, Rahane tried to douse the quarantine controversy, stating that his team is "not annoyed" with strict bio-safety protocols but conceded that it was "challenging" to be confined when life outside their five-star facility here seems to be "normal". — PTI



New Zealand players pose for a team photo with their trophy after defeating Pakistan to claim the series 2-0 at Hagley Oval in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Wednesday.

— AFP

Rohan hits ton as HCA league halts

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 6



G. Rohan Yadav

Resuming at his overnight score of 71, Rohan went on to score 136 with the help of 26 boundaries and a six as Central Excise replied to EMCC's 126 with a strong 306 for 3 in 64.1 overs. J. Anshul Lal, the other overnight batsman, made 87 while No.4 P. S. Chaitanya Reddy was batting on 63 when play was stopped.

HCA joint secretary Naresh Sharma said the stalled matches would be replayed as fresh games at the end of the season. "However, the performances of players over the past one-and-a-half days of action will be taken into account. They will count," he assured.

Naresh was confident that the next round of matches, starting on Tuesday, would not be affected. "I am sure things will be sorted out by then," he said.

The Telangana High Court had on Tuesday stayed all ongoing matches of the league conducted by the HCA, for not carrying out its orders — the court had directed the HCA to include the cricket team of the Union Bank of India

(formerly Andhra Bank team) to participate in league matches for the season.

Teams were into the second half of the second day when a message from HCA secretary R. Vijayanand addressed to the Joint Secretary, League Committee and other Grounds In-charges brought the games to a halt, at 1.10 pm. "Dear all, in the light of the interim stay order issued by the Honourable Court, you are hereby informed that all the ongoing league matches stand postponed with immediate effect. Kindly be guided accordingly," the message read.

BRIEF SCORES:

A-1 DIVISION (THREE-DAY) Group A, Day-2

■ EMCC 126 in 43.4 overs vs Central Excise 306 for 3 in 64.1 overs (G. Rohan Yadav 136 — 144b, 26x4, 1x6, J. Anshul Lal 87, P. S. Chaitanya Reddy 63 n.o.). Match called off following Court order.

ENGLISH | LEAGUE CUP



Son Heung-min (right) of Tottenham Hotspur controls the ball during the EFL Cup semifinal against Brentford at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on Tuesday. Tottenham carved out a 2-0 victory.

— AP

Tottenham ride on Son's exploits

London, Jan. 6: Jose Mourinho urged Tottenham to kick on after Son Heung-min fired them into the League Cup final with the decisive goal in a 2-0 win against Brentford on Tuesday.

Moussa Sissoko put Mourinho's team ahead in the semifinal at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

But Tottenham were still searching for the knockout blow against spirited second tier Brentford until Son netted with 20 minutes remaining.

Tottenham will face Manchester United or holders Manchester City, who meet in the second semifinal on Wednesday, at Wembley on April 25.

It will be the club's first domestic final since losing

THE RESULTS	
Tottenham Hotspur (Sissoko 12, Son 70)	2
Brentford	0

the 2015 League Cup showpiece against Chelsea, and their first final in any competition since the 2019 Champions League defeat against Liverpool in Madrid.

"The final is now in a pocket for three months, we have to wait for the final so we have to focus on what we have coming up," Mourinho said.

Mourinho, appointed in November 2019, is hoping to lead Tottenham to their first major trophy since the 2008 League Cup.

— AFP

ONLINE CHESS AT WEEKEND

Hyderabad, Jan. 6: The Brilliant Chess Academy is conducting the 176th Brilliant Trophy Open Chess Tournament Online on Saturday and Sunday. A total of ₹10,000 prize money will be given to Top 20 places in the Open category. Special prizes will be given to top two places in juniors category — Under 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 age groups for boys and girls separately. For further details contact J. Subrahmanyam on phone number 9247399717.

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