

SHORT TAKES

Illegal arms supplier arrested in Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

The Special Cell of the Delhi Police has arrested a 24-year-old illegal arms supplier in National Capital. Police said that they have also recovered a total of 35 semi-automatic pistols and 60 live bullets, which were hidden inside all doors of car, from the possession of the accused. The accused has been identified as Ashish Kumar Pandey, a resident of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh (UP). According to Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, police received a tip-off on Thursday that Pandey would come to Pitampura to deliver a consignment of illegal arms to his contact. "A trap was laid and Pandey was apprehended. During investigation, Pandey disclosed that he used to supply illegal weapons and cartridges after procuring them from a man named Prahalad, a resident of Barwani in Madhya Pradesh," said the DCP. "Pandey has been in this trade for over two years. He used to procure illegal pistols from suppliers in MP and supply them to criminals of Delhi, UP and Haryana," said the DCP. "Pandey during interrogation disclosed that he had made a secret cavity in doors of his Maruti Swift Dzire car to hide illegal pistols and to dodge the law enforcement agencies," said the DCP. "He also disclosed that it costs hardly ₹7,500 in manufacturing a pistol and he supplies these pistols in bulk for ₹15,000 per pistol. Pistols supplied by him in Delhi eventually go into the hands of dreaded criminals of Delhi and adjoining states from ₹25,000/- to 35,000 per pistol," said the DCP adding that further investigation is going on.

Konkani academy to be set up in Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

The Delhi Cabinet on Friday approved the setting up of a Konkani Academy in the national capital aimed at promoting the language, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said. "Congratulations to all Konkani speaking people and all those who love Konkani language. To promote Konkani language, Delhi Cabinet today approved setting up of a Konkani academy in Delhi," the CM tweeted. Konkani is the official language of Goa and is primarily spoken by the Konkani people, primarily along the western coastal region (Konkan) of India. Earlier on Sunday, the Delhi government's Department of Art, Culture, and Language also set up and notified the Tamil Academy to promote Tamil language and culture in the national capital. As per an official statement, the newly set-up academy will soon be allocated an office space with all necessary infrastructure.

Realtor on run after filing false complaint

New Delhi: A builder, along with an associate, allegedly hatched to conspiracy to mislead investigators by registering a false complaint of extortion to gain police protection and get rid of creditors, officials said on Friday. One of the accused, Ashok Yadav (37), who works as a POP contractor for the builder, has been arrested, they added. Raids are being conducted to nab builder Gaurav Jain, who cooked up a story and filed a false complaint at the Preet Vihar police station in a bid to get rid of his creditors, a police officer said. Jain approached the police with his complaint on December 29 last year, alleging that he received a letter by courier with an extortion demand of Rs 25 lakh and a threat to kill him if the money was not paid, he added. A case was registered, a database of around 40-45 suspects was prepared and their details were minutely analysed, Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Deepak Yadav said. "During sustained interrogation, one of the suspects, Ashok Yadav, confessed to the crime and said he was following Jain's directions so that the latter may get police protection and get rid of his creditors, who visit him often for money. He also disclosed that Jain had lured him with a promise of big contracts in the future. — PTI



A contingent of the Indian Air Force during a rehearsal for the Republic Day parade at Rajpath in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Officials asked to keep close watch on poultry from neighbouring states

'Noticeable dip' in chicken sales in Delhi

New Delhi, Jan. 8: As the bird flu scare takes over Delhi, shops selling poultry meat across the city have claimed that there has been a "noticeable dip" in sales over the last few weeks. "Ever since the news of bird flu came out, the chicken sales have gone down by at least 20 per cent. We understand that customers go in a state of panic and stop buying chicken as a precaution, but it is important to know that once cooked properly, there is no health risk," said Irshad Kureishi, general secretary of the Delhi Meat Merchants Association. According to him, the dip in chicken prices from "₹200 per kg to ₹150 per kg is a loss for both poultry farmers as well as the shopkeepers". He added that the impact of bird flu

► **THE CENTRE** on Wednesday had said that avian influenza or bird flu outbreak had been reported at 12 epicentres in Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, while Haryana is on high alert due to unusual mortality at poultry farms in Panchkula

scare on their business came while they were still dealing with the effects of Covid-19. "We are yet to go back to our pre-Covid-19 business because the restaurants are no longer ordering meat in the same quantities. In weddings too, the requirements have significantly decreased, and now the bird flu news has only made things worse," he said.

To reassure their customers, Kureishi said the Delhi Meat Merchants Association has sent out a set of new guidelines to all their "6,000 licensed member meat shops" to ensure top notch hygiene practices. "We issued a fresh set of guidelines to our members about keeping the shop clean, stocking only required amounts of meat, dealing with the fly menace and others," he said. Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia had on Thursday said no cases of bird flu were reported in Delhi yet, but had asked officials to keep a close watch on poultry birds coming in from neighbouring states to prevent any infection. The Centre on Wednesday had said that avian influenza or bird flu

outbreak had been reported at 12 epicentres in Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, while Haryana is on high alert due to unusual mortality at poultry farms in Panchkula. Ever since the bird flu scare began in Delhi, "everyday has been a Tuesday", said Ravinder Pal Singh of Sardar, a meat shop in Dwarka. "The bird flu news has had a huge impact on our sales. We haven't sold practically any chicken since last week. It's like everyday is a Tuesday, when we keep our shop closed because people prefer not to consume meat on that day," he said, adding that all their 52 outlets across NCR are facing a similar situation. — PTI

PIL seeks action against social media for disclosing rape victims' identity

New Delhi, Jan. 8: The Delhi High Court Friday sought responses of Delhi government, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and several media houses on a plea seeking action against them for allegedly disclosing the identity of rape victims, including in the Hathras gangrape case. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh issued notices on the petition and also sought replies from BuzzFeed, The Citizen, The Telegraph, iDivya, Janbharat Times, News 18, Dainik Jagran,

United News of India, Bansal Times, Dalit Camera, The Millennium Post and Wikifeed. The court listed the matter for further hearing on February 5. The petition has sought direction to the Delhi government to ask the social media platforms and media houses to take down or withdraw any material, news article, social media post or any such information on the details of identity of the victim in Hathras gang rape case or other similar cases. Petitioner

Manan Narula alleged gross violation of section 228 IPC and sought lodging of FIR against those who have violated the right to privacy of the victim by disclosing her identity. The PIL, filed through advocates Suman Chauhan and Jivesh Tiwari, claimed that all the named publications/ portals/ news organisations published information relating to the victim that disclosed her identity to the public at large. "The actions of such disclosure of the identity of the victim of rape is an

offence under Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and there has been no action taken on behalf of the respondent no. 1 (Delhi government) which is the law enforcement agency empowered to take notice of such offences," it said. During the hearing, the petitioner's lawyer informed the court that hashtags were used on Twitter with the name of the Hathras rape and murder victim by a large number of people including celebrities and cricketers. — PTI

3 'cow slaughterers' arrested after gunfight in Gr. Noida

Noida, Jan. 8: Three suspected cow slaughterers were arrested in Greater Noida early on Friday, following a gunfight with police in which two suspects got injured, officials said. Four other suspects managed to escape during the gunfight that took place near Maicha village under Dadri police station limits, they said. The local police were patrolling the area last night. Recently, they had found cattle carcasses strewn at a crematorium, so the vigilance had been raised in the area, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police,

Greater Noida, Vishal Pandey said. "Some suspected cow slaughterers were roaming in the area last night with the same objective. They were stopped by the police party for inquiry but the suspects opened fire on the policemen and fled," he said. "An exchange of gunfire broke out in which two men got hit on their legs while one was nabbed, and some managed to flee in the darkness," he added. Those held have been identified as Shah Alam and Gaffar, both hailing from nearby district Hapur, and Javed, a

native of Faridabad in Haryana, the official said. Those injured in the encounter have been sent to hospital for treatment, Pandey said, adding that three country-made pistols along with some ammunition have been seized from the accused persons. The police said four of the accused had managed to flee after the gunfight have been identified and a combing operation launched to arrest them. Initial probe has revealed that the accused persons have previously been involved in illegal cow slaughtering cases. — PTI

JNUSU calls for reopening campus in phased manner

New Delhi, Jan. 8: The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU), on Friday, called for reopening of the campus, libraries, and hostel mess in a phased manner. Satish Chandra Yadav, the general secretary of JNUSU, said that PhD final year students and those without any means to study online should be allowed to come back to the campus. "The administration needs to make a priority list. The students of final year PhD courses and those who do not have computers at home, or are victims of digital divide,

should be allowed to come back," he told a news agency. The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus was closed in March last year in view of the coronavirus pandemic. The phased reopening of the campus began on November 2 last year. The varsity had allowed only PhD science students from the PWD (persons with disability) category to return to the campus from December 21. Earlier, the administration had allowed science students from other categories, who require access to laboratories, to return. However, the university

► **THE JAWAHARLAL** Nehru University (JNU) campus was closed in March last year in view of the coronavirus pandemic. The phased reopening of the campus began on November 2 last year.

► The varsity had allowed only PhD science students from the PWD (persons with disability) category to return to the campus from December 21.

had announced that the central library and all canteens and dhabas would remain closed due to the pandemic. "Libraries should be opened while following Covid-19 precautions. In case that is not possible, students should at least be allowed to get books issued from the library," Mr Yadav suggested.

Earlier in the day, JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh shared a video on Twitter which purportedly showed tattered documents of a student and alleged that all the degree documents of the student were ruined due to the prolonged lockdown. "Mamidlala is forcefully implementing lockdown in JNU. Check this video,

After return from UK, 7-day quarantine must

Protocol tightened to protect Delhiites from UK variant of Covid: CM

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

Travellers coming to Delhi from the United Kingdom will have to undergo a seven-day institutional quarantine even if they test negative for Covid-19, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Friday, tightening protocols to "protect Delhiites" from the new UK variant of SARS-CoV-2.

After completion of the institutional quarantine, such passengers will have to go into home-quarantine for another seven days which will be ensured through "strict surveillance" by district authorities.

In an order issued on Friday, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said the new rules would be applicable on a trial basis till January 14. An official said a decision on extending the enforcement of the new rules will be taken after reviewing the situation.

Those who test positive for Covid-19 at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport upon arrival from the UK will be isolated at facilities set up by the government, the chief minister said.

"To protect Delhiites from exposure to the virus from the UK, the Delhi government has taken important decisions. Travellers coming from the UK will have to mandatorily undergo a self-paid RT-PCR test on arrival at the airport," he said.

"All those arriving from the UK, who test positive, will be isolated at an isolation facility. Negative ones will be taken to a quarantine facility for seven days, followed by seven days of home-quarantine," Mr Kejriwal tweeted.

"Those found negative will be given the option of both the paid and the government's free institutional quarantine facility," chief secretary Vijay Dev told a news agency. So far, 13 Delhi residents have been found infected with the mutant variant of Covid-19 that was first detected in the UK.

On Thursday, Mr Kejriwal had urged the Centre to extend the ban on flights between India and the UK till January 31 in view of the "extremely serious" Covid situation in that country.

A government official said the authorities have identified some hotels near the IGI Airport for paid institutional quarantine for those who do not want



A health worker takes sample for Covid-19 testing at Connaught Place in New Delhi on Friday. — G.N. JHA

2nd dry run for Covid-19 vaccination rollout begins

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

A second dry run for the Covid-19 vaccination rollout in Delhi was conducted across several districts of the national capital on Friday, officials said.

The districts include South Delhi, South East Delhi, North West Delhi and New Delhi, they added.

The first dry run for the Covid-19 vaccination rollout was held in Delhi on January 2 at three sites — the GTB Hospital, Shahdara, the Urban Primary Health Centre, Daryaganj and the Venkateshwar Hospital, Dwarka.

The officials said 10 vaccination centres have been chosen in South Delhi for the dry run, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), the Safdarjung Hospital, the Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya Hospital, the

Pushpawati Singhan Hospital and Research Institute.

In South East district, 19 sites have been chosen across three sub-divisions. The sites include the Batra Hospital, the Fortis Hospital, the Escorts Hospital, the National Heart Institute, the Holy Family Hospital, the Apollo Hospital and the MCW Gautampuri.

In North West district, the 12 sites chosen for the exercise include the Max Hospital and the Fortis Hospital, both at Shalimar Bagh, the Saroj Hospital, the Jaipur Golden Hospital and the BSA Hospital, the officials said.

Four sites have been chosen in New Delhi district, including the Northern Railway central hospital and the Fortis hospital, Vasant Kunj.

Delhi recorded 444 fresh Covid-19 cases and 10 deaths on Friday.

to stay at government-run facilities.

Those who opt for the government's free institutional quarantine facility will be taken to Terapanth Bhawan in South Delhi's Chhatrapur area, the official said. Apart from Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital, the government has also created isolated facilities at Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital.

In its order, the DDMA said, "As a matter of abundant precaution, in view of the increased transmissibility of the new variant, it is decided that all travellers coming from United Kingdom (UK) to India would be mandatorily subjected to self-paid RT-PCR tests upon arrival at the airport." Around 1,400 Delhi residents have

arrived between November 25 and December 23, 2020, prompting the authorities to launch a door-to-door check-up of such persons and their contacts.

At least 66 people, including those who recently returned from the UK and their contacts, have tested positive for coronavirus. Most have been kept in a separate isolation facility at the LNJ Hospital.

On December 30, the Delhi government had ordered setting up of isolation facilities at four private hospitals—Max Smart Super Speciality Hospital in Saket, Batra Hospital and Research Centre in Tughlakabad Institutional Area, Fortis Super Speciality Hospital in Vasant Kunj, and Sir Ganga Ram City Hospital.

Nigerian among 5 held for cheating woman of ₹7 lakh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

Delhi Police has arrested five men, including three from Nepal and one from Nigeria, on Friday for allegedly cheating a woman in southwest Delhi's Kishangarh area. The accused duped the woman to the tune of ₹7 lakh after coming in contact with her through an online dating app.

The accused have been identified as Prakash Gurung (24), Paras Mehta (25), Ankit (20), residents of Nepal, Vinay Kumar (25), a resident of Bihar and Chijioke (37), a resident of Nigeria.

During investigation, police analysed the details of five bank

accounts in which the funds were transferred. It was found that all the accounts were in five different names out of which, one of the account holders was an African national," said the police. On Friday, a raid was conducted in CR Park area and three Nepalese nationals were apprehended. On their instance, Kumar, who used to prepare fake IDs for them, was also arrested from Rajender Nagar.

Further investigation led to the arrest of Chijioke. Police recovered 12 passbooks of different banks, 11 debit cards, seven cheque books, eight mobile phones among other things.

Echoing Ms Ghosh's stance, JNUSU general secretary Mr Yadav said that there have been several such cases where birds got inside the hostel rooms and caused filth. "Several students found fungus on their books and other articles since the rooms have been closed for such a long time," he added.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

MAJOR MAOIST HIDEOUT BUSTED IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 8

Security forces on Friday seized huge haul of arms and ammunition, including hand grenades and other explosives, after busting a major Maoist hideout in Kandhamal district. Kandhamal superintendent of police Vinit Agarwal said the Maoist camp was busted during a joint combing operation by Special Operation Group (SOG) jawans and district voluntary force.

“Based on reliable Intelligence inputs, an anti-Naxal operation was launched in the region on Thursday by a joint team of SOG and DVF. During the combing exercise, Maoists opened fire at the security forces and the latter also retaliated. We seized a huge cache of ammunition from the spot after the exchange of fire,” said Agarwal. The SP also informed that grenades, detonators, splinters, explosives, batteries and other various literature and camp articles used by the Maoists were seized from the hideout.

Taking advantage of dense forest cover and hilly terrain, the ultras however managed to escape from the spot.

“The exchange of fire lasted for over 30 minutes and 15-20 Maoists suspected to be inside the camp managed to flee and save their lives. We have intensified combing operations in the region and are trying to apprehend the ultras,” Agarwal added. On October 26, a country-made revolver, claymore mine and other explosives were seized from a Maoist dump in Malkangiri district.

LINK MAINTAINED AT GROUND LEVEL: MEA ON LAC ROW

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

India on Friday said both Indian and Chinese troops “have maintained communication at the ground level to avoid any misunderstandings and misjudgements” at the line of actual control (LAC) in the Ladakh sector where thousands of troops of both sides continue to be deployed despite the harsh winter. The military face-off there has now lasted several months and began this Summer. It may be recalled that a satisfactory resolution on the ground to the situation in the Ladakh sector still remains elusive despite several rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military level in the past several months.

On Friday, the MEA said, “As you are aware, the latest round of working mechanism for consultation & coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was held on December 18. The two sides have agreed to hold the next round of senior commanders meeting and are in constant communication through diplomatic and military channels in this regard. In the meantime, both sides have maintained communication at the ground level to avoid any misunderstandings and misjudgements even as discussions continue for achieving complete disengagement in all friction areas in accordance with the existing bilateral agreements to restore peace and tranquility.”

India had last month blamed China for the situation on the LAC.

MHA to link police stations via crime tracking network

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

● THE HIME ministry has allocated ₹2,000 crore for the CCTNS project with Amit Shah insisting that the technology now be extended to all 100 per cent police stations and investigating units across the country

The Union home ministry will connect all the 16,098 police stations in the country with the ambitious Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS), a key modernisation programme of the Narendra Modi government.

The CCTNS, which shares confidential data on criminals and other subversive activities among law enforcement agencies in the country, has already proved to be highly effective. The software was already being used in almost 95 per cent of the police station.

Home minister Amit Shah has been stressing on modernisation and greater use of technology among law enforcing and security agencies due to which ambitious projects like the CCTNS and Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) have been rolled out.

The home ministry has allocated ₹2,000 crore for the CCTNS project with Mr Shah insisting that the technology now be extended to all 100 per cent police stations and investigating units across the country.

“The CCTNS project has proved to be a force multiplier for investigating agencies and has already been extended to 95 per cent police stations all over the country. In the next couple of months we will cover all police sta-

Kerala Opp. stages noisy stir, boycotts gov address

GILVESTER ASSARY THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN. 8

The Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Friday boycotted governor Arif Mohammad Khan’s address on the opening day of the budget session of Kerala Assembly.

The opposition staged a noisy demonstration inside the House before boycotting the governor’s speech. The UDF MLAs came to the House carrying banners and posters demanding the resignation of Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan in connection with the allegations related to the gold smuggling case. They also levelled serious charges against the chief minister alleging that his office had become the epicenter of gold smuggling case.

The Opposition protest against the Speaker took place on a day when his additional private secretary K. Ayyappan was questioned by Customs in connection with the statements given by the accused in the gold smuggling case.



Village women collect snow to melt for water, due to non-supply of drinking water in their village, in Bhaderwah of J&K on Friday. The women claimed that the water supply department had not restored the frozen pipes for the last two months. — PTI

Girl, 19, raped at gunpoint in UP

Thrown off terrace as she tried to raise alarm, hospitalised

Moradabad, Jan. 8: A 19-year-old school student was allegedly raped by neighbour in her house at gunpoint and thrown off the terrace as she tried to raise an alarm over the incident, police said on Friday.

The girl suffered severe injuries from the fall and is undergoing treatment at Deendayal Upadhyay Government Hospital in Moradabad, Dilari police station SHO Satraj Singh said.

The incident occurred in a village under Dilari police station area on Tuesday night when woman’s neighbour Arvind Singh sneaked into her house through terrace and allegedly raped the girl at the gunpoint.

When the girl sought to raise an alarm to awaken her sleeping family members, Arvind allegedly pushed her off the terrace, said the police.

The woman’s family members, who rushed her to a nearby government hospital in Thakurdwara, said the local police, initially did not include the charge of rape in the FIR.

The police only included charges of outraging modesty, trespass and causing hurt in the FIR lodged on the day of the incident, but they included the rape charge after the intervention from Moradabad’s SSP Prabhakar Choudhury.

SSP Chaudhary said the victim after gaining consciousness, recorded her statement before a magistrate under Section 164 of the CrPC, in which she accused her neighbour of raping her. Accordingly, the rape charge too was added in the FIR and the accused arrested and sent to jail under judicial custody, the SSP said.

SHO Singh denying the allegation of the woman’s father, saying that the police performed its duties properly and all charges of the incident were included in the FIR while the rape charge was added after the victim’s made her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC.

The victim was also medically examined for rape and other injuries in the

40-year-old widow gangraped in temple in Tamil Nadu, 2 held

Nagapattinam, Jan. 8: A 40-year-old widow working as a construction labourer in Nagapattinam was allegedly gangraped in a temple.

Two men have been arrested in this connection, the police said.

On Thursday night, the two stalked the widow going towards her sister’s house nearby, and allegedly dragged her at knife-point to the temple, they said.

There, the duo allegedly gangraped her until the wee hours of today and fled the scene, the police said. The woman sustained injuries and fainted.

People residing in the locality rescued her and admitted her to the Nagapattinam district general hospital, they said. The rape victim said the duo was under the influence of alcohol, the police said. After dragging her into the place of worship, they beat her up, raped her and threatened her to not reveal about the incident. — PTI

hospital, but the hospital’s chief medical officer, Dr Sunita, did not disclose the findings of the medical examination, including the details of the woman’s various physical injuries. — PTI

Main accused in Budaun rape held after 5-day run

Mahant was arrested in a late-night crackdown

Budaun (UP), Jan. 8: A priest, who is the main accused in the alleged gangrape of an anganwadi worker in this Uttar Pradesh district, was quizzed throughout Friday night after his arrest in a late-night crackdown that ended his five-day run.

● THE 50-YEAR-OLD WOMAN, who had gone to a temple, was found dead under mysterious circumstances on Sunday

● HER FAMILY members accused the temple priest and his accomplices of raping and killing her

● THE PRIEST is being questioned and further action will be taken in accordance with the info provided by him

● SOME MORE people are on police radar and they are also being questioned and all the angles are being looked into

● CHIEF MINISTER Yogi Adityanath has ordered ‘strongest possible action’ in the case even as opposition parties have launched an attack on his government, terming the incident ‘horrific’ and ‘shameful’

They had informed senior officials about the incident after a delay of 17 hours, the SSP said. He said the priest is being questioned and further action will be taken in accordance with the information provided by him.

Some more people are on police radar and they are also being questioned, the SSP said, adding that all the angles are being looked into and the case will be solved soon.

The priest will be taken for a medical examination and produced before a local court for seeking remand later in the day, the police said.

The 50-year-old woman, who had gone to a temple, was found dead under mysterious circumstances on Sunday. Her family members accused the temple priest and his accomplices of raping and killing her.

A case was registered against the accused and two of them — Vedram and Jaspal — were arrested on Tuesday night.

The incident triggered an opposition outcry and a comparison with the 2012 Nirbhaya case in Delhi after the post-mortem report confirmed rape, a broken rib cage, a fractured leg and injuries in the victim’s private parts. — PTI

VISVA-BHARATI SUSPENDS PROF. OVER APPOINTMENT ALLEGATIONS

Kolkata, Jan. 8: Visva-Bharati authorities have suspended a professor who recently alleged irregularities in the appointment of a colleague and even wrote to President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi about it.

The professor also made derogatory remarks against his colleague in the allegations, the varsity said.

The decision to suspend him was taken at an executive council meeting of the varsity late on Thursday.

“The Visva-Bharati executive council... decided that disciplinary proceedings is to be initiated following applicable rules against Prof. Sudipta Bhattacharya and also decided to place him under suspension with immediate effect,” the notice said.

Bhattacharya, who is also the president of Visva-Bharati University Faculty Association, had shared allegations against the colleague about “irregularities” in his appointment as a ‘patha bhavana’ (open-air school) head on a WhatsApp group. — PTI

BOTTOM LINE

Actress claims she is being unfairly targeted for speaking out

Kangana quizzed for 2 hrs in sedition case

SHAHAB ANSARI MUMBAI, JAN. 8

Actor Kangana Ranaut and her sister Rangoli Chandel were questioned for two hours on Friday at the Bandra police station in Mumbai in a sedition case that has been filed against them. Earlier in the day, Ranaut had posted a video on Twitter saying she is being unfairly targeted for daring to speak her mind.

The sisters appeared before the police, as the Bombay High Court, while granting them interim protection from arrest had directed them to appear before the police on Friday. The HC is expected to continue hearing their petition on January 11.

Ranaut has been provided with ‘Y’ category security of CRPF personnel by the Union government. The sisters reached the police station around 1pm along with



Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut arrives at a police station in Mumbai on Friday, after being summoned in connection with a sedition case. — AFP

her lawyer. According to sources, the questioning is not complete because the police want to question her for her more than 100 tweets.

● THE BANDRA police registered a case against the sisters after receiving complaints that they are trying to create hatred and communal tension.

The Bandra police registered a case against them in October last here after receiving complaints that they are trying to create hatred and communal tension through their posts.

Meanwhile, the actress has shared a video on her official Twitter account claiming that she is being tortured emotionally, mentally and physically for speaking in the interest of the nation and recently speaking in favour for farmers.

The video is recorded in Hindi and the actress can be seen saying, “Why am I being mentally, emotional-

ly and now physically tortured?” She has further stated that she needs answer from the nation. According to her, she stood by the nation and it’s time it stands for her.

She has narrated how a case was filed against her even for laughing and in another case her name was dragged even though she was not on Twitter at that point of time. However, the Apex Court rejected these cases.

“I have even been ordered to give *haji* (attendance) at the police station although I don’t know for what reason. I have also been asked not to disclose to anyone or talk about the kind of torture I am facing. I want to ask the honourable Supreme Court, have we returned to the medieval age where women were burnt alive and their voices were silenced?” she said.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of Rail Passengers that the timings of the following Special Trains will be revised as under :-

Train No. & Name	Station	Existing Time	Revised Time	Date (from Originating station)
02616 New Delhi - Puratchi Thalaivar Dr. M.G. Ramachandran Central Railway Station Express Special	Nagpur	10:25/10:30	10:15/10:20	From 10.01.2021
	Chandrapur	13:00/13:02	13:08/13:10	
02806 New Delhi - Visakhapatnam Express Special	Nagpur	10:35/10:40	10:25/10:30	From 10.01.2021

Note :- The time-table of other stations of the above special trains will hold good.

Train No. 05101/05102 Chhapra - Lokmanya Tilak Terminus - Chhapra will arrive at / depart from Lomanya Tilak Terminus instead of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus with immediate effect.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., must be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <http://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

Security Helpline No. 182 Integrated Helpline No. 139

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

DOLPHIN BEATEN TO DEATH IN U.P.; THREE ARRESTED

Pratapgarh (UP), Jan. 8: A dolphin was beaten to death by a group of men in Uttar Pradesh's Pratapgarh, leading to the arrest of three people, police said on Friday.

According to police, some people killed the dolphin on December 31 in the Sharda canal near Kotharia village in the Nawabganj police station area, about 70 km way from the district headquarters.

A Forest Department team rushed to the spot on getting information and took the dead dolphin in custody.

During investigation, names of three persons belonging to Rae Bareilly district surfaced and they were arrested on Thursday, ASP (West) Dinesh Dwivedi said.

Those who killed the dolphin were not able to take it away because of its weight, the ASP added.

MEA'S PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIWAS TO BE HELD TODAY

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention — the flagship event of the ministry of external affairs (MEA) that provides an important platform to engage and connect with the overseas Indians — will be held on Saturday in a virtual format.

The MEA had recently said, "In view of the sentiments of our vibrant diaspora community, the 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention, is being organised on 9th January 2021, despite the ongoing Covid pandemic. The convention will be held in virtual format, as were the PBD Conferences held recently in the run up to the Convention. The theme of 16th PBD Convention is 'Contributing to Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

The PBD convention will have three segments."

The PBD convention will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and will feature a keynote address by the President of Suriname Chandrikapersad Santokhi who will be the chief guest.

'ENGAGED' WITH U.S. OVER H-1B VISA ISSUE: MEA

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

Reacting to latest developments on the H-1B visa issue, India on Friday said it had "noted recent proclamations of the US government extending by three more months the current suspension of entry of certain immigrants and non-immigrants to the United States of America", adding that it is "engaged with the US government for increased predictability in the visa regime and to minimise inconvenience to Indian nationals in the US or those proposing to travel to the US for bonafide reasons, including the movement of Indian professionals".

According to news agency reports from Washington on Friday, the US has now announced it would modify the selection process for the H-1B visa, giving priority to salary and skills instead of the current lottery procedures. US officials say the aim is to protect the economic interests of US workers. Pointing out that "people-to-people relations are a vital part of the partnership between India and the US", the MEA on Friday said there is "recognition in the US of the fact that Indian skilled professionals have contributed to the growth of the US economy and helped the US retain its competitive edge and innovation advantage".

Attacks on forest staff worry SC, says they be given arms

Forest staff in Maha have lathis, in K'taka they roam in chappals: Top court

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 11

The Supreme Court on Friday expressed serious concern over brutal attacks on the unarmed rangers and guards in forests by the poachers and suggested to equip them with arms and bulletproof jackets as has been done in Assam.

Heading a bench Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde said it was sad and distressing to see the forest guards wearing slippers and armed with lathis and tasked to protect huge tracts of forest land, with little chance to

meet the challenges of the armed poachers who are likely to be carrying arms," CJI Bobde said.

The apex court said it may pass orders to provide arms, bullet proof vests and helmets to officials above a certain rank to deal with heavily armed poachers as in some states they are only given lathis.

"We think the situation is serious and forest guards would have difficulty in protecting vast tracts of inhibited land. It is difficult to imagine how any law can be enforced by the forest

staff who are unarmed against poachers who are likely to be carrying arms," CJI Bobde said.

It took note of the fact that in Assam forest officials are heavily armed to prevent poaching, but in Maharashtra the forest officials are only given "lathi" and in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the staff are seen wearing "chappals (slippers)" on duty.

Sitting with Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian, CJI Bobde also suggested that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to expand its footprints to

deal with the illegal trade in the wildlife involving millions of dollars.

Appearing for the Central government, solicitor-general Tushar Mehta agreed to explore the option of arming the forest guards and expanding the role of ED to curb the illegal trade in the wildlife related assets.

The court was hearing a petition seeking appropriate directions to protect the lives of the forest officials, rangers and other employees, who many times are attacked by poachers when they are on duty in deep forest areas.

UP hooch tragedy: 5 dead, 16 in hospital

Bulandshahr/Lucknow, Jan. 8: Five people have died and 16 more have been hospitalised after allegedly consuming spurious liquor in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh, the police said on Friday.

Four policemen were suspended after the incident came to light, and chief minister Yogi Adityanath has issued directions to initiate action under the Gangsters Act against the accused.

Senior superintendent of police Santosh Kumar Singh said people started falling sick in Jeet Garhi village of the district on Wednesday night after consuming liquor purchased from a person identified as Kuldeep.

They were admitted to a hospital, where five of them in the age group of 45 to 60 have died till Friday morning, he said, adding that 16 more were undergoing treatment.

It has come to light that the liquor was being sold for some time, and therefore the Sikandrabad police station in-charge, the Anokhe-puri chowki in-charge and two constables have been suspended, the SSP said.

Efforts are on to nab the main culprit, and some of his associates are being interrogated in custody. The CM has taken a strong view of the incident, a government spokesperson said.

— PTI

MP mulls tribunals to try stone-pelting cases

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 8

Madhya Pradesh government is mulling to set up tribunals to try cases of stone-pelting in the state.

The state law department has prepared the draft Bill seeking to deal with people involved in stone-pelting strongly and it is going to be placed before the state cabinet for approval, sources said on Friday.

The draft Bill proposes to set up tribunals in the state to try cases of stone-pelting, a senior officer of state law department told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted.

The draft Bill has provided that the proposed tribunals have to dispose of the cases within 6 months, he added.

The draft bill would be referred to the chief minister

▶ **THE DRAFT** Bill has provided that the proposed tribunals have to dispose of the cases within 6 months, a government official said

ter Shivraj Singh Chouhan for his scrutiny before being placed in the state cabinet for approval, sources said.

Sources said the draft Bill has proposed to confiscate the properties of the attackers to compensate the losses caused by them.

Even the places of worship which would be found to be harboring the stone throwers would be confiscated as per the draft Bill, sources added.

The chief minister had earlier indicated that the accused involved in the stone-throwing attacks may be handed over a life term in jail under the proposed law.

26/11 mastermind Lakhvi gets 15-yr jail in Pakistan

▶ **Continued from Page 1** dispensary and used these funds for further terrorism financing. He also used these funds for personal expenses," the CTD said.

India termed the sentencing of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks mastermind as a "farical action", adding that "the timing of these actions clearly suggests the intention of conveying a sense of compliance ahead of the Asia-Pacific Joint Group (APJG) meeting and next Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary meeting in February 2021".

"It has become routine for Pakistan to come up with such farical actions prior to important meetings," New Delhi said.

"UN proscribed entities and designated terrorists act as proxies for Pakistani establishment to fulfil its anti-India agenda. It is for the international community to hold Pakistan to account and ensure that it takes credible action against terror groups, ter-

ror infrastructure and individual terrorists," India's ministry of external affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said.

Interestingly, Lakhvi was presented before the Lahore ATC on Friday and was convicted the same day in the terror financing case registered against him some time ago. The court was told that Lakhvi, a resident of Renal Khurd Okara district of Punjab, was living in Islamabad before his arrest in this case. Lakhvi, 61, who was on bail since 2015 in the Mumbai attack case, was arrested by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab province on Saturday. He was designated as a global terrorist by the UN in December 2008 for being associated with LeT and Al Qaeda and for participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing or perpetrating of acts by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf or in support of both the entities.

14 days quarantine must for UK returnees in Delhi

▶ **Continued from Page 1** coming from the UK have to undergo RT-PCR tests both at origin and destination, and that all passengers — including those testing negative — have to undergo seven days' institutional quarantine, followed by a further seven days' of home isolation. The airport authorities also said that the waiting time for Covid test results could extend up to 10 hours and that the cost of the test and intervening stay had to be borne by the passengers. The tweet did not say if exceptions could be made for certain groups, such as pregnant women.

Across the country 11 more patients were found to be carriers of the new mutant variant of the UK Covid-19 virus, taking the total number of such persons to 82.

The Centre had suspended services between the two

countries on December 23 over the new and more contagious strain of the coronavirus. While India has lifted the ban, many major European countries like France, Spain and Germany have extended it.

Meanwhile, PM Narendra Modi has called a meeting with the chief ministers of states and UTs on Monday to discuss the Covid-19 vaccine rollout plan. The meeting will be held through video conferencing. On Friday, another round of dry run for the Covid-19 vaccination programme was conducted across the country to check the delivery system and preparedness of those trained.

India on Friday reported 18,139 fresh cases and 234 new deaths from the virus.

Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan visited a few session sites in Tamil Nadu.

MP honey trap scandal

▶ **Continued from Page 1** alleged racket following police raids in 2019.

The racket came to light when a civil engineer of Indore Municipal Corporation, Harbhajan Singh, on September 19, 2019, lodged a complaint in the local police station alleging that a woman had been blackmailing him for

money. Four women and a man were arrested in connection with the racket.

Purported videos showing a senior bureaucrat of MP government and a senior politician in compromising positions surfaced soon after the alleged racket was unearthed, creating ripples in the state administration as well as political circle.

Bird flu confirmed in 6 states, unusual death of birds in Delhi

New Delhi, Jan. 8: The Centre on Friday said bird flu has been confirmed so far in Kerala, Rajasthan, MP, Himachal, Haryana and Gujarat, and asked these six states to contain the disease as per the action plan.

Unusual mortality of 16 birds has also been reported at DDA park Hastal Village in the national capital, and samples have been sent to a testing lab. "So far, the disease has been confirmed from six states (Kerala, Rajasthan, MP, Himachal, Haryana and Gujarat).

"It is learnt that culling operations have been completed in both the affected districts of

Kerala. The disinfection process is underway," according to an official statement. States that are still unaffected by avian influenza (AI) have been requested to keep a vigil on any unusual mortality among birds and to report immediately so that necessary measures are taken in the fastest possible time, it added.

Central teams have been deployed to visit the affected states of Kerala, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh for monitoring and for epidemiological investigation.

The government said that in Haryana, there has been confirmation of Avian Influenza positive samples from ICAR-NIH-

SAD in poultry (two poultry farms) of the Panchkula district. Positive samples have also been reported in migratory birds in the Junagadh district, Gujarat, and in crows in Sawai Madhopur, Palli, Jaisalmer and Mohar districts of Rajasthan.

Therefore, the department of animal husbandry and dairying has suggested the affected states to contain the disease as per the Action Plan on Avian Influenza.

The government said awareness among poultry farmers and the general public (consumers of eggs and chicken) about the disease is of foremost importance.

— PTI



A health worker takes a sample from a sadhu on his way to Gangasagar for Covid-19 test at a transit camp in Kolkata on Friday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYA

Odisha CM gets letter claiming threat to his life, probe ordered

Bhubaneswar, Jan. 8: The Odisha government is likely to bolster the security of chief minister Naveen Patnaik after he received an anonymous letter, claiming that a conspiracy has been hatched to eliminate him.

The state government has also ordered an enquiry into the matter, officials said on Thursday.

The letter, written in English, said contract killers armed with sophisticated firearms could attack the chief minister anytime.



Naveen Patnaik

"I would like to inform that some contract killers (illegible)... to kill you. These contract killers are professional criminals, equipped with latest weapons like AK-47 and semi-automatic pistols.

"I would like to tell you that you can be killed anytime, so please be aware..." it said, adding, the weapons have already been brought to the state.

The letter also said that the mastermind of the conspiracy lives in Nagpur.

Following the receipt of the letter on January 5, special secretary (home) Santosh Bala asked the state's director-general of police, director general of intelligence and the commissioner of police, Bhubaneswar, to inquire into the matter.

Mr Bala said the security of the chief minister at his residence, the secretariat as well as during journey to various places may be assessed and tightened. — PTI

DIGITAL | MOVE

Items like cars, bikes also can be now purchased online

With portal launch, CSD canteens go online

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 8

Army, Navy and Air Force personnel and veterans will now be able to purchase cars, motorcycles, and white goods (washing machines, TVs, and refrigerators among others), online from CSD canteens.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Friday launched the online portal for purchase of items against firm demand (AFD) from CSD canteens.

This will benefit 45 lakh CSD beneficiaries includ-

ing serving and retired persons from armed forces and serving civilian defence employees who will now be able to purchase AFD items (cars, motorcycles, washing machines, air conditioner, dishwasher, air purifier, music system, home theater, TVs, and refrigerator among others) from the comfort of their home.

This will facilitate faster and hassle-free experience to all these beneficiaries.

"CSD beneficiaries- Buy your next Car/Scooter and other AFD items from ease of your home. No multiple

● **THE MOVE** will benefit 45 lakh CSD beneficiaries, including serving and retired persons from armed forces and serving civilian defence employees, who will now be able to purchase AFD items from the comfort of their home

trips to CSD or banks," tweeted defence secretary Ajay Kumar.

The ceremony was held at New Delhi. During the ceremony there was also live streaming of delivery of cars and motorcycles to per-

sonnel in Mumbai, New Delhi, Ahmedabad and Jaipur for those who booked them during the trial run of the portal.

The defence minister said that the project was in line with the vision of Digital India, enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr Singh also conveyed the commitment of the government towards the welfare of all jawans and officers of armed forces and the veterans.

Canteen stores department (CSD) was set up in 1948 to provide "easy access to qual-

ity products of daily use, at prices less than market rates" to the soldiers, ex-servicemen and their families.

Its portfolio has grown from just a few items of daily use in 1948 to over 4,000 products today. While all products are procured based on demand from unit run canteens (URCs), cars, two wheelers and white goods cannot be stored at URCs and neither can they be shelved. For this reason, CSD procures these items from the trade on behalf of the end user "Against Firm Demand".



THE ASIAN AGE

9 JANUARY 2021

True picture of economy emerges in official data

In the wake of the information revolution, governments, too, are becoming savvy in the art of sophisticated media management that enables them to have their say in direct interaction with the people beyond the traditional print and TV media. However, such management also leads to the sowing of doubts in the minds of people as they struggle to sift real facts from managed news. Something similar may have happened in the case of the official Indian narrative about the economy.

The lockdown — the toughest in the world — had wiped out nearly 25 per cent of the country's productivity, but there was no official admission. Government officials did not directly comment on the sorry state of economic affairs even though several agencies, including the Reserve Bank of India, had painted a grim economic scenario. The moment of truth may have come when the National Statistical Office (NSO), a statistical body under the Union ministry of statistics and programme implementation, released its report on the economic outlook.

On Thursday, NSO projected a 7.7 per cent contraction for the Indian economy in 2020-21, highlighting the damage that the coronavirus has inflicted on the Indian economy. Though the contraction has become slightly milder after September 2020, making many analysts suggest a V-shaped recovery, the real picture has not become any better.

According to NSO data, the business of services like trade, hotels, transport, communication and broadcast is expected shrink by 21.4 per cent, construction sector which has a multiplier effect on other industries is expected to shrink by 12.6 per cent, mining and quarrying are projected to witness a degrowth of 12.4 per cent, and manufacturing is projected to lose productivity by 9.4 per cent. When such key segments of the economy are witnessing a degrowth, the economy can never be said to be in pink of its health. The impact of such widespread deceleration in the economy is evident in unemployment that has been left undressed for a long time.

In a recent report, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) said the unemployment rate in the country rose sharply to 9.1 per cent in December 2020, which is the highest since the beginning of India's recovery from the lockdown in June. The jobless rate stood at 10.99 per cent in June 2020. Unemployment in urban India rose from 7.1 per cent to 8.8 per cent.

While there is an improvement in hiring intentions in some sectors, a survey conducted by Manpower Group claims that it would take at least nine months for the country to reach pre-Covid levels. This scenario presents a tightrope walk for the government, as jobs will not increase unless economic output rises. Higher economic output and consumer confidence, however, are mutually dependent. People will not splurge unless they are confident about their financial future, which once again depends on the country's economic growth. Therefore, the role of the government and rich corporations assumes greater significance to spur economic growth of the country.

FB, Twitter: Action too late

Facebook and Instagram have banned Donald Trump "indefinitely", or at least until the end of his term. He will be denied access to his 35 million followers on Facebook but retains the key to addressing 88 million followers on Twitter because that platform has not taken as bold a stand and had locked him out only for 12 hours on the fateful day. Of course, social media, often criticised for being the publicity megaphone for the likes of the obstreperous US President, had acted belatedly and only after all that distressing violence had taken place on Capitol Hill. They were clearly guilty of bolting the doors after the horses had fled.

The action against Mr Trump is a warning shot that should have come long ago when he was blatantly misusing the social media after having built up his influence on them and misused the platforms to challenge the election results. The influence that the likes of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube wield as a platform linking people in the US, Europe, India and many other countries is huge. It is on record that the social media have been used as a vehicle for hate and not only in the obvious case of Trump and his acolytes. However, the conspiracy theorist QAnon also used other sites like Gab and Parler to gather members for the attack on democracy.

The point is social media has been guilty of allowing extremism to grow. Its lackadaisical attitude to curbing toxic content while chasing advertisement revenue based on number of users has led us to such a pass. It was never in the public interest to allow hate to come to a boil and let violence result from people operating in closed social media networks. By his perverse actions Mr Trump has become a stark warning to those who use the social media for nefarious purposes. In India, Facebook and others have been as reluctant to shut down unacceptable use to whip up communal passions and outright hate based on religion despite warnings from the government and civil rights groups. Will they reform at least now?

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Reassert 'core' values & halt democracy's decay

Ashwani Kumar

In his book *The Age Rights (1990)*, Prof. Louis Henkin, a celebrated scholar of international law, had claimed "human rights is the idea of our time, the only political-moral idea that has received universal acceptance". However, an objective analysis of the situation throughout the world, including India, belies that claim.

This disquieting conclusion flows from a distressing institutional response to the egregious infraction of human rights, raising a profoundly important question on the functioning of our democratic institutions. Repeated abuse of several stringent laws with punitive consequences has resulted from a reversal of the presumption of innocence in favour of the accused, declared by the Supreme Court as a human right. (Bhramajeet Singh Sharma, 2005)

Demonstrated arbitrariness in investigative processes and the failure of the Indian State to enact a comprehensive anti-custodial torture law question our willingness to civilise ourselves in the use of State power. Denial of basic human rights to undertrials, poignantly exemplified in the refusal of a sipper to an 80-year-old undertrial priest suffering from Parkinson's disease and the refusal of jail guards to allow an incarcerated public intellectual access to a pair of spectacles must shame the nation. This, despite Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's binding edict in the Sunil Batra case as early as 1978, that fundamental rights "do not part company with the prisoner at the prison gates..." Indiscriminate arrests of citizens on charges of sedition are etched in public memory as a repressive act of State power intended to crimi-

nalise dissent. Unconscionable arrests for inter-faith marriages mischievously labelled as "love jihad" have scarred the constitutional conscience. Heart rending sights of a dog nibbling at a dead woman's body inside a hospital, and the reported beating to death of a dalit worker just because he had served himself a mouthful of food while clearing the leftovers, condemn us irretrievably as a heartless society. Are we then really a people who can claim that they live in the shelter of each other? Despite the Supreme Court's repeated directives, trials by the media continue to infract the citizens' right to liberty, fair trial and reputation. As the highest forum of democracy, Parliament too cannot escape its share of responsibility for our faltering record on human rights. The three controversial agricultural reforms laws affecting the economic condition and dignity of millions of India's farmers, passed in both Houses of Parliament without any discussion by a voice vote, is a recent illustration. The enactment of often abused "broad" laws without thoughtful deliberation have had grave consequences for the liberty and dignity of citizens.

The offices of the Lokpal, the Central Information Commission and the National Human Rights Commission have remained largely dormant in practice, except for the occasional and unenforced interventions. Our national leaders, captive to personal animosities and dwarfed by timidity in the face of power, remain obsessed with a "manipulative conversation about our future", with little time to address themselves to the defining challenges of our times. Thus politics,

denuded of its larger purpose, thrives on the tyranny of the strong over the weak and is bereft of any inspiring moral appeal.

However, the nation's greatest regret is that having declared human dignity anchored in deference to human rights as a core constitutional value (Common Cause, 2018), the Supreme Court has failed to lean consistently in favour of individual rights against the State. Given the national context, Chief Justice S.A. Bobde's recent suggestion of a restricted recourse to Article 32 in bail matters is rather unfortunate and in some ways is a denial of its *raison d'être*. Citing with approval Ronald Dworkin's assertion of a right to individual dignity against the government in Puttaswamy (2017), the court's recent record in enforcing this right is, at best, mixed.

The continuing incarceration of public intellectuals, political leaders, academics and dissenters, even where the weight of evidence against them is prima facie weak, has regrettably blemished the court's otherwise sterling record as the sentinel of our fundamental rights. The Supreme Court's profound pronouncements in Shreya Singhal (2015), Shabnam (2015), Puttaswamy (Supra), Nambi Narayan (2018), Navtej Johar (2018), Anuradha Bhasin (2020) and several earlier decisions notwithstanding, its inability to enforce its own judgments has dented its standing as a designated guardian of constitutional principles. Deferment of its hearing on the Rohingya petitions, the challenge to the Citizenship

Clearly, this is our moment of reckoning. We must acknowledge the truth of a diminished Indian democracy and our collective failures. Hopefully, the process of democratic erosion can be arrested...

Amendment Act's validity and on the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Constitution, the petitions concerning the plight of the elderly and their right to dignity, a hesitant intervention in aid of the coronavirus migrants and misplaced priorities in the hearing and disposal of cases have added to the blemish.

The need to reclaim a consistent vocabulary of constitutional discourse rooted in intellectual integrity is self-evident. The highest court has itself reminded us that the majesty of courts lies in the objectivity, consistency and wisdom of its judgments, not in the "coercive power of judges, but the deference and respect which is paid to them and their acts from an opinion of their justice and integrity" (Baradakanta Misra, 1974).

Clearly, this is our moment of reckoning. We must acknowledge the truth of a diminished Indian democracy and our collective failures. Hopefully, the process of democratic erosion can be arrested with the citizens' collective assertion of our core constitutional values. Despite the disappointments, we can take comfort in history's abiding lesson — that the ideals of freedom, equality and justice are best secured in the consciousness of an enlightened people and that no one can diminish the appeal of dignity or extinguish the flame of liberty as long as it burns brightly in our hearts. We know that "the history of the world is none other than the progress of consciousness of freedom" and "the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice". In these testing times, when the centre have ceased to hold, a relentless pursuit of human dignity admits of no bystanders. To recall Thomas Paine's felicity: "When my country... was on fire about my ears, it was time to stir. It was time for every man to stir."

The writer is a former Union law minister. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

BOSE NIECE PASSES

The demise of Chitra Ghosh, daughter of Sarat Chandra Bose and niece of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on January 7, 2021, is shocking. Prof. Ghosh made pioneering contributions to academics and community service and authored many books too. These include *Mother of My Heart: The Story of Bibhabati Bose, Women's Movement Politics in Bengal, A Daughter Remembers*, to name a few. RIP.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

INEPT, REGRESSIVE...

NCW MEMBER Chandramukhi Devi has tried to slut-shame the Badaun gangrape victim for going out at night. My experience has been that until the time they are told that it is politically incorrect to do so, patriarchal women actually enjoy such artificial dilemmas about women stepping out, because they can thereby use them to exert social control, or, occasionally, cite them to complain about the difficulties they face. Yet, once "enlightened", they try their best to show how "progressive" they are, often sermonising to those who did their bit in terms of challenging these conventions.

Priyanka Mathur
Kolkata

TRUE-BLUE INDIAN

AS IF THE HIGHLY shabby treatment meted out to Amartya Sen as the first chancellor of Nalanda University were not enough, now the globally respected economist and Nobel laureate is definitely a "land grabber" indeed! What an "unpardonable sin" Mr Sen has committed by remaining true to the secular and humanitarian ethos of his land by drawing inspiration from Tagore and fighting against forces of intolerance and communalism. Kudos to West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee for standing up for the much humiliated Mr Sen.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

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

Farukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Now the new year reviving old desires
The thoughtful soul with his bottles retires
With good wishes for friend and foe alike
And for saints and even for consummate liars."

— From Rubaiyat of Bachchoo Ka Adda

Of Chinese virus, Spanish flu, UK strain: Do points of origin matter?

The soon-to-be ex-President Donald Trump insists on calling the Covid-19 plague the "Chinese virus". Very many viruses have been given adjectival and territorial names. The least antagonistic is "common cold". It blames no nation, continent or species as do the descriptions like "Spanish flu", "Asian flu", "swine flu" and "bird flu".

The last two are comparatively innocuous but Mr Trump's insistence on calling this worldwide pandemic "Chinese" is part of his nastiness and his attempt to deepen the antagonism between Americans and all things Chinese.

I don't know if there was any malignant intention on the part of Britons who christened that infliction "Spanish". Just part of British xeno-

phobic contempt. I have no doubt that if Mr Trump is challenged, he will produce evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan. He might even say that it was deliberately set free from a laboratory there in accordance with some devilish Chinese world domination strategy.

Incidentally, there is now an invitation from Wuhan scientists for objective observers to re-examine the common claim that the epidemic originated in that city. What the result of this challenge will be is yet to be seen.

Britain is, as I write, gentle reader, under a severe lockdown. The last two weeks have seen an exponential rise in the number of cases of infection and the number of deaths as a result. I use the word exponential literally, as the graphs of the spread that are plastered on the TV screen each day and night are the shape of the ones that we studied for our Pune University maths degrees.

The increase in person-to-person transmission of the pandemic, scientists say, is owing to the virus having mutated. The mutation is, the epidemiology and science tell us, is much more easily transmitted through the air. And now this muta-

ted organism, is with some justification, known in Spain as the "British virus".

Referring to it as such is possibly motivated by Spanish revenge.

The phrases "British variant", "British mutant virus" and other such descriptions are spreading through the world media and, of course, occasioning a backlash in Britain, even though the fact stands that the mutant strain and its effects were first noticed in this country. Nevertheless, there is a sense of shrill protests of victimisation from those who challenge the description. One of the shrillest protesters is a character called Roger Helmer, who used to be a British Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and is a supporter of the jingoistic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

His tweet, reported in *Private Eye*, says "it was FIRST IDENTIFIED in the UK" and that is not tantamount to it originating in the UK. Earlier last year, Mr Helmer had objected to the characterisation of Mr Trump's contention that this pandemic was a "Chinese virus" as racist.

"So, is it racist to mention 'Chinese food' or 'Indian curry' or 'Korean Kimchee' or 'German Sauerkraut'?

So why not 'Chinese virus'?" he tweeted to his followers.

One may wonder how many of his followers have now noticed a flaw, dissension or even hypocrisy in his statements.

I don't tweet (though I can whistle inefficiently), but if I did, I might point out to poor Roger that if a virus first identified in China can be called the "Chinese virus", then a variant of it which was first identified in Britain... "Geddit Roj, me ole fruit-cake?"

And then there is the question of what characterises a flu as Spanish. Does it say, "tonight we drink, tomorrow we kill the gringos!" as it threatens to infect another human, or "hasta la vista?" as it is expelled or killed by a vaccine?

The gaping flaw in poor Roger's argument is that "Indian curry" carries in its flavour everything that characterises Indian cuisine. If I want, which I frequently do, a "Goa sausage", I want it not just because it originates in Goa, but because it contains the ingredients and flavours particular to that region — a bratwurst or a Polish-garlic sausage won't do just as well. Whereas Covid-19 doesn't carry the characteristics of anything Chinese and its variant,

apart from infesting places where the sun never sets, has nothing British about it.

Of course, viruses, just like us Parsis, are sometimes named after the things we do and sometimes after the places from which we come. So, a Parsi called Batliwalla must have ancestors who dealt in bottles — and it should be quite clear what my distant relatives Russi Immoralearningswalla and Imoji Feromonereplacementwalla do for their living.

And moving on to places, Satarawalla and Poonawalla come from the places with those names. What has always been a dilemma for my family is the origin of our surname "Dhondy". It certainly doesn't derive from the town of Dhond in Maharashtra, so eliminating geographical origins, we come to professions. Now in some Gujarati dialects the word might mean stonebreaker, which points to the option that my ancestors could have been stone masons.

The other possibility, which we pointedly disregard, was that they were perhaps put to breaking stones in an institution as guests in the colonial era of His Imperial Majesty, the King Emperor.

SHORT TAKES

POLICE CHIEF
QUITS AFTER
MOB INVASION

Washington, Jan. 8: The US Capitol police chief handed in his resignation Thursday, a day after Congress was invaded by a mob egged on by President Donald Trump, a source close to the agency said.

Steven Sund "is resigning effective January 16, 2021," the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said, hours after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called for his resignation, following sharp rebukes for what many criticised as a lack of preparation.

POMPEO SAYS
US NOT 'BANANA
REPUBLIC'

Washington, Jan. 8: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday hit back at assertions that a mob attack on the Capitol showed the United States to be a "banana republic." A number of foreign critics as well as former US president George W. Bush made the analogy after rioters stirred up by President Donald Trump rampaged through a session of Congress that certified his loss to Joe Biden.

"The slander reveals a faulty understanding of banana republics and of democracy in America," said the top US diplomat, a staunch Trump loyalist, as two other members of the cabinet resigned over Wednesday's violence.

"In a banana republic, mob violence determines the exercise of power. In the United States, law enforcement officials quash mob violence so that the people's representatives can exercise power in accordance with the rule of law and constitutional government," Pompeo wrote on Twitter. Bush in a statement Wednesday made veiled criticism of the "reckless behavior" of members of his Republican Party in fueling the "insurrection." "This is how election results are disputed in a banana republic -- not our democratic republic," Bush wrote.

STAY ON,
LAWMAKERS TO
WH STAFF

Washington, Jan. 8: US lawmakers urged White House staff to stay in their jobs amid a spate of resignations in protest at President Donald Trump's support for the attack on Congress by his followers.

Senior Republican Senator Lindsey Graham urged top Trump aides to keep working for the final 14 days of the administration, naming chief of staff Mark Meadows, White House Counsel Pat Cipollone, and National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien.

"Most Americans will never know the service that Mark Meadows and Pat Cipollone and those under their charge provided to this country over the last year," Graham said in a press conference.

"To those who believe you should leave your post now to make a statement, I would urge you not," he said.

"To Robert O'Brien: you have been a good counsel to the president, you have been a steady hand. I've been missing your phone calls; Robert, stay on." "To those in the national security apparatus, we need you now more than ever." It was "a traumatic and entirely avoidable event as supporters of the President stormed the Capitol building following a rally he addressed," said Chao, the wife of Senate majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Earlier Thursday, former chief of staff Mick Mulvaney said he was quitting his diplomatic post.

COPS REJECTED OFFERS FOR HELP

Pentagon asked if National Guard was needed, Justice Dept reached out with FBI

Washington, Jan. 8: Three days before supporters of President Donald Trump rioted at the Capitol, the Pentagon asked the US Capitol Police if it needed National Guard manpower.

And as the mob descended on the building Wednesday, Justice Department leaders reached out to offer up FBI agents. The police turned them down both times, according to senior defence officials and two people familiar with the matter.

Despite plenty of warnings of a possible insurrection and ample resources and time to prepare, the Capitol Police planned only for a free speech demonstration. Still stinging from the uproar over the violent response by law enforcement to protests last June near the White House, officials also were intent on avoiding any appearance that the federal government was deploying active duty or National Guard troops against Americans. The result is the US Capitol was overrun Wednesday and officers in a law enforcement agency with a large operating budget and experience in high-security events protecting lawmakers were overwhelmed for the world to see.

Four protesters died, including one shot inside the building. A Capitol Police officer died Thursday after being injured in the Wednesday melee. The rioting and loss of control has raised serious questions over security at the Capitol for future events. The actions of the day also raise troubling concerns about the treatment of mainly white Trump supporters, who were allowed to roam through the building for hours, while Black and brown protesters who demonstrated last year over police brutality faced more robust and aggressive policing.

"This was a failure of imagination, a failure of leadership," said Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo, whose department responded to several large protests last year following the death of George Floyd. "The Capitol Police must do better and I don't see how we can get around that."

Acevedo said he has attended events on the Capitol grounds to honour slain police officers that had higher fences and a stronger security presence than what he saw on video Wednesday. Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said that as the rioting was underway, it became clear that the Capitol Police were overrun. But he said there was no contingency planning done in advance for what forces could do in case of a problem at the Capitol because Defence Department help was turned down.

"They've got to ask us, the request has to come to us," said McCarthy. US Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund, under pressure from Schumer, Pelosi and other congressional leaders, was forced to resign.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell asked for and received the resignation of the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, Michael Stenger, effective immediately. Paul Irving, the longtime Sergeant at Arms of the House, also resigned. — AFP



Demonstrators hold a banner calling for impeachment of US President Donald Trump during a protest outside the Barclays Centre in Brooklyn, New York on Thursday, a day after pro-Trump mob stormed and trashed the Capitol. — AFP



LIKE ALL Americans, I am outraged by the violence, lawlessness and mayhem. I immediately deployed the national guard and federal law enforcement to secure the building and expel the intruders.

DONALD TRUMP, US Prez



THE STORMING of the US Congress by Donald Trump's supporters is a disgrace that has "shocked humankind".

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN, Turkish President



THE MOB attack by his supporters on the US Capitol was the "ugly ending" to Trump's time at the White House.

SILVIO BERLUSCONI, Former Italian premier



WE CALL on the president of the United States, to disavow false and dangerous narratives, and encourage their supporters to do so as well.

MICHELLE BACHELET, UN rights chief

THEY WEREN'T protesters. They were a riotous mob, insurrectionists, domestic terrorists. The past four years we have had a Prez who has made his contempt for our democracy, our Constitution, the rule of law, clear in everything he has done.

JOE BIDEN, President-elect



VP: No radical move to oust Don

Washington, Jan. 8: US Vice President Mike Pence is opposed to using the constitution's 25th Amendment to force President Donald Trump from office, despite pressure from Democrats and some Republicans, the *New York Times* reported Thursday.

While Pence has not spoken publicly about invoking the mechanism, never used before in US history, the newspaper

cited a person close to the vice president saying he is against the radical move.

The calls to remove Trump came after supporters who he had encouraged invaded and shut down the US Congress Wednesday as it was poised to certify the election victory of Trump's rival, Democrat Joe Biden.

Democrats demanded action even though Trump only has 13 days left in office.

"This is an emergency of the highest magnitude," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"By inciting sedition, as he did yesterday, he must be removed from office." The Times said Pence's stance is supported by several cabinet members, whose backing would be necessary to carry out a 25th Amendment removal.

Democrats in the US House of Representatives said that if the

25th Amendment is not invoked they will move quickly to impeach Trump.

"We have a limited period of time in which to act," said House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler, who led the successful impeachment of Trump a year ago, before the president was ultimately acquitted by the Republican-led Senate.

— AFP

Cop's death
takes unrest
toll to five

Washington, Jan. 8: Flags over the US Capitol were lowered to half-staff Friday after the death of a police officer took to five the number of people who died after President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the legislature.

US Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick was reportedly struck in the head with a fire extinguisher on Wednesday while struggling with the rioters who swarmed through the halls of Congress.

The 42-year-old member of the force that protects the ground of the Congress returned to his division office where he collapsed and was taken to the hospital, according to the Capitol Police.

He died of his injuries late Thursday, they said. According to reports, the FBI will open a murder investigation into his death.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi ordered flags over the Capitol lowered in his honour.

"The violent and deadly act of insurrection targeting the Capitol, our temple of American Democracy, and its workers was a profound tragedy and stain on our nation's history," she said. — AFP

Cops lenient with mob,
severe with anti-racists

Los Angeles, Jan. 8: Like many Americans, President-elect Joe Biden on Thursday accused US authorities of treating a pro-Trump mob that stormed the Capitol more leniently than last year's anti-racism demonstrators.

"No one can tell me that if it had been a group of Black Lives Matter protesting yesterday... they wouldn't have been treated very, very differently than the mob of thugs that stormed the Capitol," Biden said in an address from his hometown in Delaware.

"We all know that's true, and it is unacceptable," said Biden, who will take over the White House on January 20, after winning November's election in part due to strong support

from Black voters.

On Wednesday thousands of protesters — spurred on by a speech given by President Donald Trump — marched to the seat of the US legislature, where some broke down barriers and doors to invade the building in an unprecedented act that played out on live television.

But police officers in charge of security held off using tear gas until intruders had reached the heart of the building, where they roamed freely, ransacking offices.

US media reported that some law enforcement officials even opened doors for them.

The scene stood in stark contrast to last year's anti-racism protests in the nation's capital and beyond. — AFP

Pelosi: Remove
Trump urgently

Washington, Jan. 8: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called Thursday for President Donald Trump to be urgently removed from power, branding him "a very dangerous person who should not continue in office."

"This is an emergency of the highest magnitude," the top-ranking Democrat in Congress said as she urged Vice President Mike Pence and Trump's cabinet to invoke the 25th amendment, one day after a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol with his encouragement in a bid to overturn the presidential election results.

— AFP

Trump to skip
Biden swearing

Washington, Jan. 8: President Donald Trump said Friday he won't attend President-elect Joe Biden's Inauguration on January 20. He will be the first incumbent president since Andrew Johnson to skip his successors inauguration.

To all of those who have asked, I will not be going to the Inauguration on January 20th," Trump tweeted. Trump offered no clues for how he would spend his final hours in office. Biden will become president at noon on January 20 regardless of Trump's plans. On Thursday, Trump delivered a video statement admitting his presidency would soon end.

— AP

Sedition charge
likely for rioters

Washington, Jan. 8: The top federal prosecutor for the District of Columbia has said that "all options are on the table" for charging members of the violent pro-Trump mob that stormed the US Capitol — including sedition charges.

Michael Sherwin, acting US attorney for DC, said prosecutors plan to file 15 federal cases on Thursday for crimes including unauthorised access and theft of property, and investigators are combing through reams of evidence to bring additional charges. "All of those charges are on the table. ... We will bring the most maximum charges we can," he said.

— AP

Capitol storming: Two
Cabinet members quit

Washington, Jan. 8: Two members of Donald Trump's Cabinet resigned Thursday with days left in the administration in protest over the storming of the Capitol by a mob of the president's supporters.

The education secretary and transportation secretary — the only two women in Trump's inner Cabinet — both said they could no longer remain in office after the violent rampage on a ceremonial session of Congress that certified President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

"That behaviour was unconscionable for our country. There is no mistaking the impact your rhetoric had on the situation, and it is the inflection point for me," said Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, a conserva-

tive stalwart who had served throughout the administration.

"Impressionable children are watching all this, and they are learning from us," she said in a letter to Trump.

"They must know from us that America is greater than what transpired yesterday." Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, who is married to Republican Senate majority Leader Mitch McConnell, earlier said it was "a traumatic and entirely avoidable event as supporters of the president stormed the Capitol building following a rally he addressed." "It has deeply troubled me in a way I simply cannot set aside," she added.

— AFP

Trump considering
self-pardon: US media

Washington, Jan. 8: Embattled President Donald Trump has discussed with his close aides the possibility of pardoning himself before leaving the office on January 20, US media reports have said, amid growing calls for his removal from the White House. According to CNN, some of those conversations happened in recent weeks, and Trump has asked about the legal and political consequences of a self-pardon.

The news comes as Democratic and Republican lawmakers alike rebuked Trump's conduct as thousands of his supporters stormed the US Capitol building on Wednesday and clashed with police, resulting in four deaths and interrupting a constitutional process by Congress to affirm the

victories of President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris in the November 3 election.

It is not clear if the issue has come up since Wednesday's mayhem at the Capitol building fomented by the President's rhetoric or after his recent controversial call with the Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger; the report said, citing multiple sources.

The president has also asked for legal opinions on whether he has the authority to issue a self-pardon and has been advised on the potential political fallout, it said. The *New York Times* reported on Thursday that Trump has suggested in conversations since Election Day that he wants to pardon himself. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,782.51	1.43
Nifty 50	14,347.25	1.48
S&P 500*	3,811.72	0.21
Dollar (₹)	73.24	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.61	0.06
Euro (₹)	89.64	0.36
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,763*614	1.23
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.52	2.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.892	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.088	0.017

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Gold bond issue price fixed at ₹5,104 per gm

The issue price for the Sovereign Gold Bond has been fixed at Rs 5,104 per gram of gold, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said. The Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2020-21-Series X will be open for subscription from January 11 to January 15. "The nominal value of the bond...works out to Rs 5,104 per gram of gold," the RBI said. Investors applying and paying online will get a discount of Rs 50 per gramme.

Forex reserves swell \$4.48 bn to record \$585.32 bn



The country's foreign exchange reserves surged by \$4.483 billion to touch a record high of \$585.324 billion in the week ended January 1, RBI data showed. In the previous week ended Dec. 25, the reserves had declined by \$290 million to \$580.841 bn. Foreign currency assets climbed by \$4.168 bn to \$541.642 bn. Gold reserves rose by \$315 million to \$37,026 bn. The special drawing rights with the IMF stood at \$1,510 bn.

Manipal buy of Columbia Asia gets CCI nod

The Competition Commission of India approved acquisition of Columbia Asia Hospitals by Manipal Health Enterprises. The approval came after Manipal Hospitals in November 2020 said it has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Columbia Asia Hospitals in India. The acquisition will be for Rs 2,100 crore, sources had earlier said. The combined entity will have a presence of 27 hospitals across 15 cities.

MG Hector SUV facelift launched at ₹12.89 lakh

MG Motor, the British iconic car brand now owned by Chinese giant SAIC Motor, has rolled out the all-new seven-seater version of the Hector Plus SUV and the MG Hector SUV facelift with prices starting at Rs 13.34 lakh and Rs 12.89 lakh, respectively. The facelift for the Hector-introduced about 18 months after the mid size SUV's launch in India-and updated Hector Plus get a few cosmetic and equipment upgrades.

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Lower margins, higher loan growth seen Q3 to be a mixed bag for lenders

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JAN. 8

Third quarter (Q3FY21) earnings for banks are expected to be a mixed bag this season. While credit flow and collection efficiency could slightly improve quarter-on-quarter (QoQ), driven by a bounce back in the retail sector and sustained momentum in agriculture, the asset quality recognition could be delayed again by a quarter due to the Supreme Court's impending decision on loan recast. Hence, gross non-performing asset (GNPA) ratios might be a tad better QoQ, with lenders reporting asset quality adjusted for the SC verdict. Other income may dip sequentially due to lower treasury gains and fee income.

The Supreme Court in its order last year had banned banks from marking defaulted loans as non-performing assets (NPAs). The apex court had earlier directed banks not to recognise fresh NPAs, till further orders in the interest on interest case. A public interest litigation (PIL) was earlier filed in the Supreme Court to waive off interest on interest for borrowers during the March to August moratorium period.

Provisional data released by private banks showed slight improvement in loan growth sequentially during the December quarter compared to the September quarter. According to analysts,



large banks are likely to report better credit growth. The country's largest private sector lender, HDFC Bank, reported a loan growth of 16 per cent for the quarter ended December 2020. In a BSE filing, HDFC Bank said, its advances aggregated to about Rs 10.82 lakh crore as of December 31, a growth of around 16 per cent. The total loans and advances for Yes Bank grew by 1.8 per cent to Rs 1.69 lakh crore.

"For our banks, we see better QoQ loan growth of 2 per cent versus one per cent in the last quarter, although net interest margin (NIM) may contract by 10 basis points to 3.4 per cent due to the flow through impact of lower deposit rates. Provisioning could remain elevated as banks might be conservative on future recognition. Consequently, net profit may decline by 17 per cent QoQ to Rs 9,280 crore," said Gaurav Jani, analyst, Centrum Broking, Motilal Oswal Institu-

tional Equities said, "higher credit costs, coupled with suppressed credit growth, are likely to put pressure on near-term earnings. Although slippages are likely to increase in 2HFY21, we expect heavyweights like Kotak Mahindra Bank/HDFC Bank to post a PAT growth of 20 per cent/11 per cent year on year. We expect net profit for IndusInd Bank/Federal Bank/Axis Bank/ICICI Bank to decline by 56 per cent/20 per cent/15 per cent/14 per cent year on year."

"PSU Banks are expected to deliver NIL/PAT growth of 2.8 per cent/around 18 per cent year on year, led by Bank of Baroda, which is expected to report a profit in 3Q," it added.

Sharekhan said, "even though overall credit growth has been weak on system levels, at 5 per cent over the previous year, larger and well placed banks such as HDFC Bank, ICICI, SBI are expected to report better advances growth."

SBI RAISES DISCOUNTS ON HOME LOANS BY 30 BPS

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JAN. 8

The country's largest lender, State Bank of India (SBI), on Friday announced further interest concession of upto 30 basis points (bps) on home loans and full waiver on processing fees. One basis point is one hundredth of a percentage point.

The higher interest concession would be based on the loan amount, the creditworthiness of the borrower and the location of the property and would be available till March 2021.

"The largest home loan lender has sweetened its past offers and now provides higher interest concession based on loan amount, the creditworthiness of the borrowers and the location of the property. SBI believes that it is important to offer better rates to customers displaying good repayment history. SBI home loan interest rates are linked to Cibil score and start from 6.80 per cent for loans up to Rs 30 lakh and 6.95 per cent for loans above Rs 30 lakhs. Interest concessions up to 30 bps is also available in eight metro cities for loans up to Rs 5 crore," the lender said in a statement.

Customers can also apply via Yono app or from homeloans.sbi/www.sbi.loans.in/59minutes.com and get additional interest concession of 5 bps, the bank said in a statement.

TCS beats estimates after Covid drives digital boom

SARITHA RAI JAN. 8

Tata Consultancy Services Ltd beat expectations after record deal wins underscored a global shift toward digitalization during the pandemic.

Asia's largest software outsourcing provider reported profit rose to Rs 8,700 crore (\$1.2 billion) in the quarter ended December, compared with the average estimate of Rs 8,590 crore. Sales climbed to Rs 42,020 crore.

India's top software companies like TCS and rival Infosys Ltd were expected to deliver their best December-quarter performance in a decade, defying a global downturn. Despite struggling with lockdowns that



forced hundreds of thousands of their employees to work from home, the IT services industry has largely experienced healthy order pipelines, steady revenues and expanding margins.

India's \$181 billion tech outsourcing industry is riding a wave of digital transformation that's expected to underpin deal signings and outlook revisions from its top players. Technology

emerged as the second-best performing sector in India's equity market last year, behind only healthcare, as the pandemic hastened a push toward digitalization and work-from-home activities spurred demand for video-conferencing, cloud services and e-commerce. Global banks and insurers are accelerating efforts to shed non-core assets, like in-house tech support, as they navigate through the economic uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Bloomberg Intelligence said, a boost in spending on digital transformations and a need for deeper IT savings will be the main drivers that accelerate sales growth over the next "two-three quarters."

— Bloomberg

Indices inch up on rotational buying

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 8

The market closed at a new record high, led by buying in IT & auto stocks, with third quarter earnings expectations and global cues boosting investor sentiments.

The Sensex gained 689 points or 1.43 per cent to close at 48,782 while the Nifty-50 closed at 14,347.25, gaining 209.90 points, or 1.48 per cent.

Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 6,029.83 crore while the domestic institutions were net sellers by Rs 2,372.54 crore.

"Global cues were positive as investors expected that a new Democratic-controlled US government would lead to heavy spending and borrowing to support the country's economic recovery," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

"The rally was led by the IT stocks, BSE IT index was up by 3.55 per cent, on high expectation from TCS result, which was to be announced by the company after the market hours," he said.

TCS soared to a new life time high of Rs 3,127.55 on the BSE and finally closed

at Rs 3,120.35. Other gainers included Infosys (3.95 per cent), Wipro (5.75 per cent), Tech Mahindra (5.64 per cent) and HCL Tech (3.13 per cent).

"At present, the rotational buying across the sectors is helping the index to inch higher," said Ajit Mishra, vice president-research, Religare Broking.

BSE Auto Index also gained 3.37 per cent, led by gains for Maruti Suzuki (5.94 per cent), Eicher Motors (4.23 per cent), Mahindra & Mahindra (3.51 per cent) and Hero MotoCorp (3.31 per cent) and Bajaj Auto (2.75 per cent).

FPOs NO LONGER NEED MINIMUM CONTRIBUTION FROM PROMOTER

New Delhi, Jan. 8: Capital markets watchdog Sebi on Friday relaxed the framework for follow-on public offers (FPOs), a move that will help pomoters of companies to raise funds more easily through this route.

The applicability of minimum promoters' contribution norm and the subsequent lock-in requirements for the issuers making FPO have been done away with by the regulator, as per a notification.

Earlier, promoters had to contribute 20 per cent towards a company's FPO. Besides, in case of any issue of capital to the public, the minimum promoters' contribution was required to be locked-in for three years.

The regulator said the relaxation would be available for companies which are frequently traded on a stock exchange for at least three years. Also, such firms should have redressed 95 per cent of investor complaints.

The issuer company needs to be in compliance with the LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosures Requirements) Regulations for at least three years, according to Sebi. —PTI

Hyundai stock turns red hot on reports of tie-up for Apple car

YOOJUNG LEE JAN. 8

A reported potential tie-up with Apple Inc is making South Korea's second-richest family even richer: Shares of Hyundai Motor Company jumped as much as 25 per cent in Seoul on Friday --the most since 1988--after the company said it's been receiving requests to cooperate on developing self-driving electric vehicles. An earlier report in local media named the US tech giant.

That boosted the combined fortune of Hyundai Motor Group chairman Euisun Chung and his father Mong-Koo, by some \$2 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Euisun, who succeed his father as the group's chairman in October, has been pushing for technologies, including electric and driverless vehicles to turn the carmaker into one of the world's leaders. Hyundai Motor will spend more than 60 trillion won (\$55 billion) in those areas over the next five years and in 2019 set up a \$4 bil-



Euisun Chung

lion autonomous-driving joint venture with a General Motors Co. spin-off. It plans to release its first electric vehicle this year.

Any collaboration with a big tech company could boost that push. Apple has said it will take at least five years to introduce an autonomous, electric vehicle, according to people familiar with the plans, meaning that it's in no hurry to decide on potential auto-industry partners.

With Friday's stock surge, Euisun Chung is now worth \$5 billion and his father's wealth has jumped to \$7.4 billion. The two directly hold about 8 per cent of Hyundai Motor.

— Bloomberg

CHINA ORDERS MEDIA TO CENSOR ALIBABA COVERAGE

SHIYIN CHEN & COCO LIU JAN. 8

China has ordered its domestic media to censor reports about an antitrust probe into Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, signalling how the issue has become a matter of national political sensitivity, the Financial Times reported.

A directive issued by the

government's propaganda arm toward the end of last year ordered news outlets to strictly invoke the official line on the investigation into the tech giant and prohibited them from engaging in extended analysis without permission, the FT said, citing two sources.

Jack Ma's empire has become the most promi-

nent target of China's campaign against the technology industry, which as so far torpedoed affiliate Ant Group Co's \$35 billion initial public offering and led to an antitrust investigation at the e-commerce giant. Ma, who hasn't been seen in public for months, has been advised by the government to stay in the country. — Bloomberg

GREEN | CONUNDRUM

Vessel owners don't know which alternative technology to be adopted

Ship orders dip 50% over fuel use uncertainty

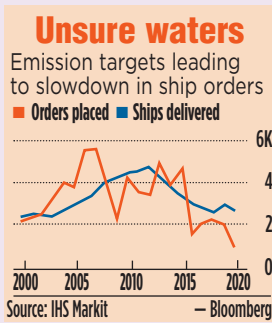
ELIZABETH LOW & JACK WITTELS JAN. 8

Ship owners facing looming deadlines to use less-polluting fuels have slashed the number of new vessels on order because they don't know which alternative technology to switch to.

Ammonia, hydrogen, biofuels and electrification are some of the many contenders to power the world's future merchant fleet, but most are only in the trial stage and won't be scalable for

at least a decade. With the life of a commercial ship averaging around 20 years, opting for a technology that doesn't take off could be very costly.

But owners are running out of time to make the choice. In 2018 the International Maritime Organization set a target to cut shipping's greenhouse-gas emissions in half by 2050 from 2008 levels. The deadline prompted some ship owners to hold off on new orders until it became clearer which new fuels would be the best option--a decline



that has turned into a slump with the subsequent global trade disputes and the pandemic. Orders fell almost 10 per

cent in 2019 and then more than 50 per cent in 2020 to the lowest in at least two decades, IHS Markit data show. If activity doesn't pick up, that could lead to a dearth of vessels and a spike in freight rates in a few years.

"People aren't ordering ships because we don't know what to fuel them with," said Morten Aarup, head of market research at Danish vessel owner D/S Norden A/S. "Engineers, ship designers need to come together" urgently to find the

best solution, he said in a recent panel discussion on shipping trends.

Ship owners who fail to switch to new, cleaner vessels could find themselves at a competitive disadvantage as more customers demand environmentally-friendly transport. About 12.3 per cent of vessels on order have alternative-fuel propulsion, compared with just 0.6 per cent of the current global fleet, according to data from Drewry Maritime Services.

But the use of alterna-

tive fuels in shipping is still in its infancy, with many of the big ship owners pursuing different alternatives. Trafigura Group, one of the world's biggest energy traders, has a stake in a company selling marine biofuels, vessel classification society Lloyd's Register has given approval in principle to several ammonia-fuelled ship projects and Swedish tanker line Stena Bulk AB is planning to run some of its vessels on used cooking oil.

— Bloomberg

KYC NOT MUST FOR JEWELLERY BUYING

New Delhi, Jan. 8: No new KYC disclosures have been mandated for cash purchase of gold, silver or precious gems and stones and only high-value cash transactions continue to require the filing of documents such as income tax PAN or biometric ID Aadhaar, finance ministry sources said on Friday.

Clarifying a December 28, 2020 notification, the Department of Revenue in the ministry said "cash purchase" of jewellery, bullion and precious gems and stones of value more than Rs 2 lakh is not allowed without KYC in the country for the past few years.

This continues, the official said. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

IOC member not sure of Olympics

Tokyo: A senior member of the International Olympic Committee has said he can't be certain the postponed Tokyo Olympics will open in just over six months because of the surging pandemic in Japan and elsewhere. The comments by Canadian IOC member Richard Pound to British broadcaster the BBC came as Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga declared a state of emergency on Thursday for Tokyo and surrounding prefectures. I can't be certain because the ongoing elephant in the room would be the surges in the virus, Pound said speaking about the future of the Tokyo Games. Japan's emergency order, which is largely voluntary, will be in force until the first week of February. It's crunch time for Tokyo. Organizers say the Olympics will take place, but they are not expected to reveal concrete plans until spring. — *AP*

Fifa ex-president Blatter in hospital

Geneva: Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter has been taken to hospital, a Swiss newspaper said on Thursday, but media insisted the disgraced official's life was not in danger. "My father is in hospital. He's getting better every day. But he needs time and rest," his daughter Corinne Blatter Andenmatten was quoted as saying by Blick, which said the he was in a serious but non-life-threatening condition. "On behalf of my family, I ask for privacy," his daughter said. Blatter was removed from office in 2015 after 17 years at the head of world football's governing body. He was suspended from football for six years over a two million Swiss franc payment to then UEFA boss Michel Platini in 2011. Blatter and Platini are now being investigated for alleged "fraud" and "breach of trust" in Switzerland. — *AFP*

City owner buys FA Cup trophy

London: Manchester City owner Sheikh Mansour has bought the first piece of silverware won the club — the Football Association Challenge Cup used from 1896 to 1910. The trophy, a forerunner of the FA Cup in use today, was won by the club in 1904, when they beat Bolton Wanderers 1-0 in the final. "City are delighted to announce we are now the proud custodian of the 1896-1910 Football Association Challenge Cup (FA Cup) following the recent purchase of the trophy at auction by club owner, His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed," read a club statement. "A forerunner of the FA Cup in use today, the trophy is one of the most significant artefacts in world football and the oldest surviving piece of FA Cup silverware in England," it added. Sheikh Mansour, who reportedly paid more than \$1 million for the trophy, is loaning it to the National Football Museum in Manchester. — *AFP*

Honda riders in third 1-2 at Dakar

Al Qaisumah, Saudi Arabia: With the opening third of the Dakar Rally completed, Monster Energy Honda Team riders now aim to consolidate positions which will allow them to attack in the second half of the race. Thursday saw another one-two for the Honda CRF450 RALLY, with Kevin Benavides and Jose Ignacio Cornejo occupying the top two places in fifth stage. Kevin Benavides claimed the day's victory spoils after a ferocious performance from start to finish. Cornejo also collaborated in the Honda one-two. The Chilean, who opened the track for much of the 456-kilometre special, finished second on the day, a minute behind his teammate.

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FOOTBALL

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

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STEVE RUNSMITH

Jadeja and Gill star for India despite Smith's century

Sydney, Jan. 8: Steve Smith's typically gutsy hundred was neutralised by Ravindra Jadeja's four-wicket haul and rookie Shubman Gill's fluent half-century as a resolute India reached 96/2 after dismissing Australia for 338 on the second day of the third Test here on Friday.

The Indian bowlers, especially Jadeja (18-3-62-4) and the ever-dependable Jasprit Bumrah (25.4-7-66-2), were brilliant with their length on a flat SCG deck where Smith (131 off 226 balls) along with Marnus Labuschagne (91 off 196 balls) raised visions of a 450-plus total by taking the side to 206 for 2 at one stage.

But in the end, 338 was all they managed in a little less than 106 overs with none of the other batsmen making any telling contribution.

It was only fitting that Jadeja's split second brilliance from the deep found Smith short of his crease.

Then it was the calm and collected Gill (50, 101 balls), who was assured during those cover drives off Nathan Lyon and equally breathtaking while presenting his forward defence to Pat Cummins.

The 21-year-old and Rohit Sharma (26 off 77 balls) added 70 in 27 overs but more importantly set the stage for skipper Ajinkya Rahane (5 batting off 40 balls) and Cheteshwar Pujara (9 batting off 53 balls) to cash in on the batting-friendly conditions on the third day.

It was Gill's maiden Test half century in just his second match. The Australian attack looked more insipid than ever and Rohit, playing his first game in nearly two months, did all the hard work for nearly two hours before failing to check an uppish drive that was pounced by the bowler.

But it was a day when India had two openers, who were both ready to pull the fast bowlers during their opening spells and dominate Lyon with precise footwork. — *PTI*

BCCI ALL SET TO DUMP I.M.G AS IPL ORGANISER

New Delhi, Jan. 8: The BCCI has decided to part ways with International Management Group (IMG), which has held the events rights of the IPL since its inception, a top Board official revealed on Friday.

"Yes, we have sent them a termination notice," the official said.

It has been learnt the notice was sent earlier this week and the board plans to run its premier tournament with its own set of professionals from this year. The UK-based company had retained the event rights for the IPL in 2017 for a five-year period till 2022.

The 2021 edition is expected to be held in its usual window of March-April but it is not yet decided whether it will take place in India or overseas like the 2020 one.

A mini auction before the IPL is expected to be held in February. — *PTI*

Brisbane Test is under Covid cloud

Sydney, Jan. 8: A new three-day lockdown in Brisbane has put Cricket Australia in a spot of bother as it makes desperate efforts to hold the fourth and final Test against India in the Queensland state capital from January 15.

The Lockdown was announced less than 24 hours after top cricket board officials from India and Australia were engaged in a discussion on relaxation of hard quarantine measures for the visitors.

"Cricket Australia executives are urgently trying to determine the impact of a three-day lockdown in Brisbane on next week's fourth Test at the Gabba, which was already under a cloud because of India's hesitation to fly north and be subjected to tighter bio-security restrictions," the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported.



Australia's Steve Smith celebrates after scoring a century against India on the second day of their third Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

Smith laughs off form slump

Sydney, Jan. 8: Former Australia skipper Steve Smith dismissed talk of a form slump but credited a more positive attitude after his battling century against India in Sydney on Friday.

He reached three figures in a Test for the first time since 2019, smacking 131 for his 27th ton to help steer Australia to a first innings 338.

He bounced back after failing to reach double figures in the opening two Tests, which sparked a flurry of concern about

his form among pundits and the media.

But Smith said he was never worried, pointing out that he hit pulsating back-to-back centuries in the limited-overs series against India late last year.

"I read a lot of things and plenty of people said I was out of form so it was nice to come back into form, if that's what you want to call it," he said.

"I mean, it was only about three or four weeks ago that I scored two hundreds at the Sydney

Cricket Ground. So yeah, it kind of just makes me laugh sometimes when people say that kind of thing.

"I missed out in the first two Tests obviously and came back today and scored some runs and helped I guess put us in a decent position." Smith struggled against the spin of Ravi Ashwin in Adelaide and Melbourne and admitted he made some adjustments to his game, which helped him build his near-flawless score.

— *AFP*

On-top Jaddu relishes field day

Sydney, Jan. 8: An exceptional all-rounder, India's Ravindra Jadeja was pretty chuffed about running Steve Smith out with a direct hit in the ongoing third Test against Australia and called it his "best ever" fielding effort which he can watch any number of times.

Smith, who was batting on 130 and was in a mood to slog every ball in company of No.11 batsman Josh Hazlewood, couldn't beat a direct throw from Jadeja, who sprinted from his deep square leg position and effected a direct hit with throw reminiscent of the great Kapil Dev during his heydays.

Asked what will he like to watch, the four wickets he got or the run-out, the senior all-rounder replied: "I will rewind and play this run-out as this is my best effort. A direct hit from outside the 30-yard circle and that's like a moment that gives you that satisfaction."

"Three or four wicket hauls are fine but this



India's Ravindra Jadeja (left) celebrates after taking the wicket of Australia's Nathan Lyon during Day Two of the third Test match at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

run-out will stay with me," said the Saurashtra all-rounder.

Jadeja has been a live wire on the field during this tour with some fantastic catches like the one he took running back-

wards at the MCG to dismiss Matthew Wade or this run-out at a crucial juncture when Smith could have added an extra 25 to 30 runs.

Jadeja also said that the plan was to vary pace of

SCORECARD

Australia first innings (overnight 166 for 2): M. Labuschagne c Rahane b Jadeja 91, Steve Smith run out 131, M. Wade c Bumrah b Jadeja 13, C. Green lbw b Bumrah 0, T. Paine b Bumrah 1, P. Cummins b Jadeja 0, M. Starc c Gill b Saini 24, N. Lyon lbw b Jadeja 0, J. Hazlewood not out 1, Extras (b4, w1, nb5) 10. **Total (all out in 105.4 overs) 338**

FoW: 1-6, 2-106, 3-206, 4-232, 5-249, 6-255, 7-278, 8-310, 9-315.

Bowling: Bumrah 25.4-7-66-2, Siraj 25-4-67-1, Ashwin 24-1-74-0, Saini 13-0-65-2, Jadeja 18-3-62-4.

India first innings: R. Sharma c&b Hazlewood 26, S. Gill c Green b Cummins 50, C. Pujara not out 9, A. Rahane not out 5. Extras (w5, nb1) 6. **Total (two wickets, 45 overs) 96.**

FoW: 1-70, 2-85.

Bowling: Starc 7-4-19-0, Hazlewood 10-5-23-1, Cummins 12-6-19-1, Lyon 16-7-35-0.

NUMBERS GAME

● Steven Smith equalled the record of most Test hundreds against India by making 131 in Australia's first innings on the second day of the third Test match against India at Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday (January 8).

● It was his eighth hundred in 30th innings of 18 Test matches against India. West Indian Garry Sobers (30 innings of 18 Tests) and Viv Richards (41 innings of 28 Tests) and Australian Ricky Ponting (51 innings of 29 Tests) also scored the same number of hundreds against India in Tests.

● The former Australian skipper also became the fifth Australian after Ricky Ponting (2,555 runs), Michael Clarke (2,049 runs), Matthew Hayden (1,888 runs) and Allan Border (1,567 runs) and the 19th batsman overall to score over 1,500 runs against India in Tests.

● Steven Smith has scored 1,570 runs till the end of Australian first innings.

● Ravindra Jadeja recorded his best bowling in Australia by taking 4 for 62. It was his third best performance in away Tests after 6 for 138 against South Africa at Durban in 2013-14 and 5 for 152 against Sri Lanka at Colombo in 2017. Ravindra Jadeja's previous best in Australia was 3 for 82 at Melbourne in 2018-19.

— *S. PERVEZ KAISER*

Non-compliance warning to NSFs

New Delhi, Jan. 8: National Sports Code is the law and the federations which are not complying with it cannot be granted recognition, the Delhi High Court on Friday made it clear while granting a last opportunity to the Centre to show that the 41 NSFs granted recognition were complying with the requirements of the code.

The high court said in case of failure of the Centre in complying with its direction, the secretary of sports, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports will have to be present before in the hearing.

"We grant one last opportunity to the Respondent (Centre) to comply with the order of November 6, 2020 failing which we direct the secretary (sports), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to remain present during the next hearing. The affidavit shall be filed within 10 days," a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Najmi Waziri said.

The court listed the matter for further hearing on January 22.

The special bench was hearing a plea challenging the recognition granted to

● **The Delhi High Court granted a last opportunity to the Centre to show that the 41 National Sports Federations which were granted recognition were complying with the requirements of the national sports code.**

the 41 National Sports Federations (NSFs).

During the hearing, senior advocate Sachin Dutta and central government standing counsel Anil Soni, representing the Centre, sought some more time to file a reply in the matter.

This was opposed by petitioner lawyer and sports activist Rahul Mehra who said enough time has already been granted to the authorities who have filed an affidavit earlier and washed off their hands.

The bench said, "You need to change the game you are playing. You were playing soft ball, now you have to play hard ball. There is no compliance of the sports code. What is this happening?" — *PTI*

Ban on 3 shuttlers for match-fixing

New Delhi, Jan. 8: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Friday handed life bans to three Indonesian shuttlers for involvement in match-fixing, match manipulation and betting.

The sport's governing body said, "eight Indonesian players who knew each other, and competed in lower-level international competitions mostly in Asia up until 2019, breached BWF Integrity Regulations related to match fixing, match manipulation and/or betting on badminton."

"Three of them were

found to have coordinated and organised others into being complicit in the behaviour and have been suspended from all badminton related activities for life," BWF said in a statement.

"Five others were suspended for between six to 12 years and fined between \$3,000 and \$12,000 each."

The BWF said it was a report by a whistleblower which allowed its integrity unit to start a probe and interview a number of players about the matter, following which all eight players were provisionally suspended in January last year.

— *PTI*



Jarrett Allen (left) of Brooklyn Nets reaches for a rebound above Joel Embiid of Philadelphia 76ers during their NBA game in New York on Thursday. Nets won 122-109.

Harris scores as Nets snare 76ers

Los Angeles, Jan. 8: Joe Harris scored a team high 28 points as the Brooklyn Nets shook off the absence of two stars to snap the Philadelphia 76ers' five-game winning streak with a 122-109 victory on Thursday.

Caris LeVert scored 22 points and had 10 assists as the Nets cooled off the NBA's hottest team despite missing their two top players Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving.

Harris got the job done, finishing two points shy of his career high as the Nets posted their second straight double-digit win after dropping four of five.

LeVert, who started in place of Irving, made the most of his opportunity. He scored 18 points by halftime as the Nets shot 45.4 percent and scored 35 points off 20 Philadelphia turnovers.

Stars Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons had quiet nights for the 76ers. Embiid scored 20 points on seven-of-14 shooting while

Simmons had just 11 points.

Shake Milton started in place of injured Seth Curry and led the Sixers with 24 points and seven assists.

PORTLAND HUNT WOLVES

Elsewhere, Damian Lillard delivered 39 points, seven rebounds and seven assists as the Portland Trail Blazers breezed past the slumping Minnesota Timberwolves 135-117.

C.J. McCollum tallied 20 points and Jusuf Nurkic finished with 17 points and seven rebounds for Portland, who snapped a two-game skid and posted its highest-scoring effort of the season.

D'Angelo Russell and Anthony Edwards scored 26 points apiece for the Timberwolves.

Naz Reid chipped in 13 points in 16 minutes as Minnesota dropped its sixth straight game.

Also, Cleveland Cavaliers defeated the host Memphis Grizzlies 94-90.

— *AFP*