

DECCAN Chronicle

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

WEATHER

Max: 30.0°C
Min: 20.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Mostly Cloudy.
Max/Min temp.
30/20 °C

COVID-19
COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+18,341)

(+224)

1,03,92,443

1,50,338

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+417)

(+2)

TS: 2,88,410

1,556

(+289)

(+3)

AP: 8,83,876

7,125

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

8,72,51,023

DEATHS

18,83,650

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

218

worldometers.info/
coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Bahula Navami
till 11.56 pm
Star: Chitta till 3.43 pm
Varjyam: 8.58 pm to 10.27 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.32 am to 11.16 am
2.56 pm to 3.40 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HILIRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 22, 1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.30 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.15 pm
Maghrib: 5.38 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.44 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.29 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 1.22 PM

COUNTER POINT

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

SHORT TAKES

Cancel R-Day
festivities: Tharoor

New Delhi: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has suggested cancelling the Republic Day festivities after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson cancelled his India visit due to the coronavirus situation in the United Kingdom, saying getting crowds to cheer the parade as usual would be "irresponsible". Johnson, who was scheduled to attend the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi as chief guest, has cancelled his visit to India later this month due to the growing health crisis created by the new coronavirus variant in the United Kingdom.

69K birds culled
over bird flu scare

Thiruvananthapuram: Over 69,000 birds including ducks and chicken were culled in the districts of Alappuzha and Kottayam to contain the H5N8 strain of bird flu, Kerala animal husbandry minister K. Raju said on Wednesday. The minister said 19 Rapid Response Teams have been engaged in culling birds in both the districts and the regions suspected to have infected the birds will be sanitised on Thursday. Raju said there is no history of the H5N8 virus being transmitted to humans. As of now, he said there is no history of the virus being transmitted to humans.

NATION | 4

MP may bar non-veg
food at hotels

WORLD | 5

Democrats win first
Georgia runoff

SPORTS | 8

India vs Australia third
Test from today



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Vol. 25 No. 248 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

New AP chief justice sworn-in



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy offers a bouquet to Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami of the AP High Court after the latter was sworn-in at the Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Wednesday. ■ Report on Page 3 — By arrangement

AKHILA PRIYA ARRESTED FOR KIDNAP IN HYD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

The city police on Wednesday placed former AP minister Bhuma Akhila Priya under arrest for her alleged involvement in the kidnapping of former hockey player Praveen Rao and two of his brothers, Naveen Rao and Sunil Rao, on Tuesday night. The kidnapping was done by a gang posing as income-tax officials and arriving in three SUVs and leaving the home with the three victims. Police finally helped in the release of the kidnapped men.

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

■ Page 2: Land dispute
may have triggered kidnap

MLC BYPOLL TO BE HELD ON JANUARY 28

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

The Election Commission of India has announced the bypoll for a casual vacancy in AP Legislative Council scheduled to be held on January 28. The ECI in a statement on Wednesday announced the bypoll schedule and accordingly, notification for conduct of bypoll to be issued on January 11 and the last date for filing of nominations to be on January 18. Verification of nominations is to be held on January 19 and withdrawal of nominations on January 21. The counting of votes is to be held on January 28.

Telugu Desam MLC Potluri Sumitha resigned to her position on November 1 even as her tenure lasts up to March 3, 2023. She extended her support to the ruling YSRC.

● Notification for conduct of bypoll to be issued on January 11 and the last date for filing of nominations to be on January 18. Verification of nominations is to be held on January 19 and withdrawal of nominations on January 21.

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

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

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

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

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

ANTIGEN TEST PRICE SLASHED TO ₹230 IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

The state government has reduced the price of the Rapid Antigen Test for Covid-19 to ₹230 from ₹750 per test, in private NABL and ICMR approved labs. The department of health, medical and family welfare issued GO Rt No. 13 here on Wednesday stating that in the wake of increased availability of kits in the market and due to competition as more firms started manufacturing such kits, the cost of kits was decreased.

The country's drugs regulator on Sunday approved Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield and the indigenously developed Covaxin of Bharat Biotech for restricted emergency use in the country. "The roll out of Covid-19 vaccine is expected to begin in the near future. This milestone entails the need for testing of all planned mechanisms for conducting the vaccination drive in the country," it said. The entire planning of the vaccination drive including beneficiary registration, microplanning and vaccination at the planned session site will be tested under the leadership of District Collector during the dry run.

The dry run will also familiarize the state, district, block and hospital level officers on all aspects of the Covid vaccine roll out.

MYSTERY | CASE

Tapan Misra says he was poisoned ahead of promotion interview

Space scientist alleges poisoning at Isro

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

"The motive appears to be an espionage attack, embedded in the government set-up, to remove a scientist with critical contribution of very large military and commercial significance, like expertise in building synthetic aperture radar," he said.

"This radar system is 10 times costlier (than the indigenous one) if we buy it (from others)," he said. "The motive appears to be an espionage attack,

embedded in the government set-up, to remove a scientist with critical contribution of very large military and commercial significance, like expertise in building synthetic aperture radar," he said.

"A fatal dose was probably mixed with chutney served with snacks after lunch. What followed was a nightmare lasting for almost two years. I suffered from severe loss of blood to the tune of 30 to 40 per cent through anal bleeding. I could barely come back from hospital in Ahmedabad. It was fol-

lowed by severe breathing difficulty, unusual skin eruptions and skin shedding," the scientist said in a Facebook post on January 5. He said he was in hospitals for three years. "It was followed by loss of nails on feet and hands, terrible neurological issues due to hypoxia, skeletal pain, unusual sensations, one suspected heart attack and arsenic depositions and fungal infections on every inch of skin and internal organs," he added.

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

■ Page 2: Distributors bear
brunt of LPG consumers

Jagan to rebuild temples razed by Naidu's regime

CM to lay foundation for works at Kanakadurga temple tomorrow

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

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

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

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

Minister Srinivas alleged that TD president and then Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu had no faith in God and did not respect Hindu religion. "Hence he committed the sin of demolishing temples in Vijaya-wada during

BJP leaders ask state to let them visit Ramateertham

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 6

State BJP leaders will make a fresh attempt to visit Ramateertham and offer prayers at the Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple atop Bodikonda, Nellimerla, in Vizianagaram district.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, BJP state president Somu Veerajulu said the party would seek permis-

sion from the state government for the visit for prayers to Lord Rama. "When they allowed Rajya Sabha member V. Vijay Sai Reddy and Opposition leader Nara Chandrababu Naidu, what would be the harm if we are allowed," Veerajulu asked.

Stressing that the BJP is not against other religions, he said the party would honour the sentiments of Hindus who comprised 80 per cent of the

population in the state, and demand protection of Hinduism and Hindu temples.

He said the state BJP unit would, after January 20, launch a Jana Jagrana Yatra from Ramateertham to Tirumala via Pithapuram, Antarvedi, Rajahmundry, Vijayawada and Srisailem, where temples were attacked.

■ Page 2: Why no arrests
for temple attack, asks BJP



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

SC to hear pleas against agri laws, farmer protest

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

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

court's intention was to encourage and facilitate talks between farmers and the government.

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

The protests at Delhi's borders have been going on for over five weeks, with union leaders saying their agitation against the three farm laws will inten-

sify in the coming days. The farmers will also hold a tractor march on Thursday in protest over the farm laws.

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

The contentious farm laws found support from the All-India Farmers Association, headed by former PM Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson Sanjay Nath Singh.

CONSUMERS UNHAPPY OVER SUBSIDY ON LPG CYLINDERS

AVINASH P.
SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, JAN. 6

Several liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) consumers were unhappy for not getting the subsidy amount on refills while some complained that they get only a meagre amount being credited to their accounts. Frequent changes in domestic cylinder prices and subsequent change in the subsidy was creating a lot of confusion among the consumers.

As far as Chittoor district is concerned, there are around 10 lakh domestic LPG consumers and most of them are complaining that the drastic cut in subsidy amount is hurting their kitchen budget. They were seen visiting gas agencies to find out why the amount was so less, considering that the price of a domestic cylinder is currently ₹728.5.

In May 2020, the cost of a 14.2 kg cylinder in the district was priced at ₹593.5 and the subsidy amount was almost dropped to zero. In September, the cost of a refill rose to ₹628 and the subsidy amount remained between ₹25 and ₹22. However, the cooking gas price has been increased to ₹728.50 in December last year.

In the past, when a refill price was hiked, the subsidy part was also increased. In some metro cities, when a cylinder was priced at ₹714, the subsidy amount transferred to a consumer's bank account was around ₹174. Last April, when a refill was priced at ₹725, the subsidy was between ₹220-238.

In Chittoor district, the subsidy given per refill was between ₹175-195 in early 2020. Further, the subsidy was cut down drastically and now most of the consumers are getting only ₹19.75 per refill from the last six months. Representatives of gas agencies say that the actual price of a cylinder has been reduced beyond the subsidised cylinder price by the Centre, which is why the consumers aren't getting subsidy.

SHORT TAKES

CM CONSOLES CHALLA FAMILY, PROMISES HELP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 6

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy consoled the bereaved family of MLC Challa Ramakrishna Reddy, who has passed away recently due to Covid-19. A senior most politician, Ramakrishna Reddy was an MLC belonging to the YSRC.

On Wednesday, the CM visited Owk town to console Challa's family members. It was learnt that the vacant MLC seat is being promised to Challa's son Bhageeratha Reddy.

Meanwhile, the CM was accorded a grand welcome at Orvakal Airport by district collector G. Veera Pandian and MLAs. From there he took a helicopter to reach Owk town where Challa's family resides. By special convoy he reached the house of Challa where he met his family members and consoled them.

The Chief Minister garlanded the photo of Challa Ramakrishna Reddy and paid floral tribute. Later he spoke to the family members and assured them that his party will stand by them and extend all support whenever they needed.

MLC | POLLS

NO NEED OF GPF, EPF MEMBERSHIP FOR TEACHERS: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

The Andhra Pradesh High Court ruled out any need for membership in general provident fund and employees' provident fund for teachers to enrol as voters in the MLC polls for teachers' constituency.

The All Private Polytechnic and Engineering College Staff Welfare Association president Kota Saikrishna filed a petition in High Court seeking direction for not insisting on membership in GPF and EPF for registration of voters for MLC polls.

Single judge bench led by justice A.V. Sesha Sai held the hearing on the petition recently and asked the Election Commission of India to clarify on the issue.

Accordingly, the ECI filed an affidavit in the court and its counsel Avinash Desai informed the court that the membership in EGP and GPF to enrol as voters for MLC polls for teachers' constituency was not compulsory and it can be only voluntary. However, the ECI said that the private teachers were supposed to obtain service certificates from the heads of their institutions along with a counter signature from a competent authority with regard to EPG and GPF issues.

The ECI's counsel further informed the court that under the provisions of the Representation of People Act, 1951, any addition or removal of names could be carried out until the last day for filing of nomination and said that the members of the petitioner's Association could also apply for addition in voters' list under Form-19. In case of any failure to submit such forms by December 31, 2020, such members could apply until the last date for filing of nomination papers, he said and added that the final publication would be on January 18, 2021.

The judge after recording all details issued orders resolving the petition.

CASES BOOKED AGAINST REPORTERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 6

The Singayakonda police arrested several media personnel including reporters of three mainline TV channels and a truck driver on Wednesday over circulation of false news, messages, images in the media about damage to the idols of Lord Narasimha Swamy and Goddess Lakshmi in Singarayakonda in Prkasm district. Police said they registered cases against reporters of five popular electronic channels -- NTV, HMTV, ABN, TV 5, and ETV -- and of some Youtube channels, as they placed posts in a conspiratorial manner on facebook, whatsapp, twitter etc apart from broadcasting false news on television. Cases have been booked under various sections IPC and cable network act. Additional SP (Admin) of Praksam B. Ravichandra said said the cement scales on the statues had cracked and broken was not a recent development.

TD chants mantras to win

Naidu harps on Hindutva agenda to restrain BJP from relegating TD

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

Saffron and yellow parties are competing with one another by whipping up Hindutva sentiments in Andhra Pradesh.

Telugu Desam, which has always projected its secular credentials, is gradually shedding the secular veil and donning the role of 'Hindutva' protector, which gets evidenced from the scathing attacks against the YSR Congress and accusing it of promoting religious conversions.

The state's main Opposition party started an agitation against desecration and attacks on temples six months ago but the party never portrayed YSRC as a Christian party. However, now the TD has been openly terming Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, home minister Mekathoti Sucharita, and DGP Gautam Sawang as Christians who are unable to protect temples. Going a step further, they are alleging that the ruling party is into promotion of religious conversions.

Similarly, the BJP Telangana state president and MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar, while claiming that BJP was Bhagavad Gita party, stated that YSRC was a Bible party.

Senior political analysts state that as both TD and BJP are eyeing the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat in the by-election, they started communal politics. They said that as BJP is aiming to emerge as the second biggest party after YSRC, TD is hijacking Hindutva agenda in order to win over the electorate.

They recalled that TD swiftly responded to the Ramateertham temple idol damage issue and its chief N Chandrababu Naidu not only visited the temple but also took out a rally and staged protest ahead of the BJP, which responded a day later.

Analysts opine that for the past 18 months, TD's attempts to make amends with BJP were all in vain. In order to salvage prestige and not to lose out to BJP, Naidu is harping on Hindutva agenda to restrain the saffron party from relegating TD.

Many point out that the traditional BC vote bank of TD has had a change and many are pitching for YSRC. Noticing that Christians are supporting the ruling party, TD has raked up the issue of Christian conversions. To attract the majority Hindu votes, TD is whipping Hindutva sentiments, which they hope to take advantage of in the Tirupati by-election.

In a first for the party, it had Hindutva issue in the agenda of the politburo meeting. It decided to continue its fight for the protection of temples and religion donning the role of 'Hindutva saviour'.

Meanwhile, YSRC ministers, Vellampalli Srinivas Rao, Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao, and Perni Venkataramaiah allege that Naidu, who had no faith in God and religion, is changing his colours for political gains. They said that for the first time, TD has brought religion into politics but the people would not tolerate such unhealthy politics and would teach a befitting lesson to both TD and BJP.

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 6

Women's safety is possible only when the police department and people from all sections of the society join hands and play their part responsibly and effectively, observed Andhra Pradesh DGP Gautam Sawang on the third day of IGNITE-2021, here on Wednesday.

The DGP inaugurated the third day programme themed 'Women Safety' by signing an MoU on behalf of the police department with Sri Padmavathi Viswavidyalaya (SPMVV), represented by its Vice-Chancellor D.



State BJP chief Somu Veerraju addresses the party activists near GVMC Gandhi Statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday, as they stage a protest against the vandalisation of Lord Sri Rama idol at Vizianagaram Ramatheertham temple by unidentified miscreants.

-DC

Naidu encouraging temple attacks to boost TD: Ambati

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

YSR Congress MLA and party official spokesperson Ambati Rambabu lambasted Telugu Desam and BJP leaders for trying to portray the state government as anti-Hindu.

Refuting the claim of BJP terming YSRC as "Bible Party," he countered that YSRC is Bhagavad Gita, Quran and Bible Party. But BJP has not adhered to Bhagavad Gita by shunning welfare of all sections of the society. He accused opposition party members of vandalising temples for political gains and appealed to people not to fall into such a trap.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, Rambabu said good governance is above

any religion. State government is only trying to change the lives of poor through better welfare activities and not based on their religions. He charged that some parties are trying to profit by bringing religion into politics, to revive their existence following their huge defeat in the last elections. He maintained that temples are being vandalised according to a plan with clear political intentions.

The YSRC spokesperson

Ambati Rambabu criticised opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu for behaving like a saviour of Hindu religion when, in reality, he has no respect towards any religion other than his caste. He alleged that the same Chandrababu Naidu during his rule had demolished 40 temples and offered prayers wearing even shoes, thus showing scant respect or faith towards God.

Rambabu stated that there are many castes and religions in our country and in Andhra Pradesh, they are all living together in peace and harmony. He added that though Chief Minister and his father late CM Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy are Christian by birth, it did not come in the way of good governance.

BJP DOORS STILL CLOSED FOR NAIDU: VEERRAJU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 6

State BJP president Somu Veerraju said the doors are still closed for TD supreme and Opposition leader Nara Chandrababu Naidu.

Talking to reporters in Visakhapatnam, the BJP chief reacted to the statement of state minister who commented that Naidu was trying to get close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi by taking the name of Jai Sriram and protesting against the desecration of temples in the state.

Meanwhile AP BJP former president Kanna Lakshminarayana has demanded AP government to reconstruct 127 damaged temples thereby honouring the sentiments of Hindus.

Why no arrests for temple attack, asks BJP

From Page 1

"It was unfortunate that not a single person was taken into custody in any of the attacks made so far on the temples."

Asked whether the BJP would demand a CBI inquiry, Somu Veerraju

said it was the responsibility of the state government to identify the culprits.

The BJP leader also strongly reacted to the presence of police personnel at the Visakhapatnam BJP office and at the GVMC dharna programme. The YSRC leaders, on one hand, have been saying the BJP has no presence in Andhra Pradesh and would lose deposits in all polls. On the other hand, they are wary of the BJP and obstructing the party's programmes," he said.

Distributors bear brunt of LPG consumers

From Page 1

"Consumers are arguing with us because they are used to get subsidy amounts of above ₹100-₹150 each time they book a refill. Distributors like us have nothing to do with pricing or subsidies. Only the centre will fix the price and the subsidy, and

whatever the decision our commission remains the same", a gas agency staff in the city said.

However, consumers who are paying over ₹700 for a cooking gas cylinder have been complaining that the centre cheated them for a very small amount being given as subsidy.

"Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our earnings took a nosedive, and we are yet to see any relief. The Central government should consider enhancing the subsidy amount because a small relief will save our budget", said Mr S. Sai Kiran, a resident of Subbareddy Nagar in Tirupati.

NRI prof asked me to remain silent

From Page 1

According to Misra, one of the directors of Isro centres had told him on June 5, 2017, of the possibility of poison given to me. "I guess, he witnessed poison mixing in my food," Misra said.

Two days later, ministry of home affairs security agency personnel alerted him to arsenic poisoning, the scientist said. This helped the doctors focus on the exact remedy.

Misra said he had learnt that this poison is given in molecular level suspension (crystal level is harmless) just after a heavy meal. "It is a colourless, odourless, tasteless suspension and hence cannot even be suspected. It gets absorbed through the stomach during food ingestion, kills RBCs (red blood cells) immediately to such a large extent that the fine blood vessels are clogged, leading to heart attacks and strokes within two to three hours and the victim can easily be passed off as heart attack death," he said.

Misra also said he was "bombarded with hundreds of threatening emails to keep my mouth shut," while he had barely escaped from a "massive explosive incident, in which the ₹100 crore lab was destroyed" on May 3, 2018.

He alleged that on July 19, 2019, an Indian-American professor of a

topmost US university suddenly appeared in his office and requested him not to utter a word in future; as a quid pro quo, his IIT-Kharagpur grandson would be accommodated in a top notch college in USA.

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

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

Misra also alleged of a plan to defame him by doctoring the CCTV recording of his room on January 23 and 24 last year. He sought help for his safety.

Mishra wrote, "We, in Isro, occasionally heard about the highly suspicious death of Professor Vikram Sarabhai in 1971. Also heard occasional doubts about the sudden death of Dr S. Srinivasan, director of VSSC (Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre) in 1999. Case of Shri Nambinarayanan in 1994 is well known. But I never thought that I would be at the receiving end of such a mystery."

Kidnapping triggered by land dispute

From Page 1

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

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

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

Hyderabad police commissioner Anjani Kumar said multiple teams from Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh police were keeping track of the kidnappers via their cellphone movement.

"An alert was issued to the toll plazas in Telangana state and en route. Around 3.30 am, the kidnappers left the three victims at Narsingi toll plaza and they were rescued.

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

Akhila Priya was arrested at her residence in Kukatapally on Wednesday morning and taken to the Bowenpally police station.

"She was put through a medical examination at Gandhi Hospital. We are

verifying the involvement of Srinivas Chowdhary alias Guntur Srinu, Prakash, Sai and Chanti," the official said.

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

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

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

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

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



Andhra Pradesh DGP Gautam Sawang interacts with women police on the third day of IGNITE-2021, in Tirupati on Wednesday.

- DC

SHORT TAKES

ASI, CONSTABLE
CAUGHT PLAYING
CARDSDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 6

An assistant sub-inspector of police and a constable, who were on duty, were booked by the police on charges of playing gambling at a private lodge in Palamaner town during their break hours late on Tuesday night.

According to CI Jaya Ramaiah, acting on the instructions of Chittoor SP S. Senthil Kumar, Palamaner Police led by him conducted raids on a private lodge in the town and caught the ASI and constable along with six others red-handed while playing cards on Tuesday night.

The arrested were identified as ASI Jaya Krishna and constable Mahesh, Guna, Venkataramana, Mohammad Ghouse Basha, Alibabu, who were playing cards in the lodge during their leisure time. The police had booked a case under relevant sections against the ASI, constable and other gamblers and seized ₹9,014 cash from them.

39 GRAMS OF
GOLD RECOVERED
FROM ACCUSEDDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 6

Kavali I Town Police arrested an offender involved in a theft and recovered 39 grams of gold worth Rs.1.46 lakh from him on Wednesday.

The accused has been identified as M.Manohar, 25, of Kavali. According to Kavali I Town Circle Inspector K.Srinivasa Rao, the accused relieved the gold from the house of one Pulli Lakshmi living in Gayathi Nagar at Kavali town on January 1st this year.

The theft took place when Lakshmi gone to the nearby grocery store to buy essentials without locking the house.

She approached police after she found the gold missing from the house after she returned home.

BJP MEN STAGE
PROTESTS BEFORE
COLLECTORATESDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 6

BJP leaders staged protests before Nellore and Prakasam district Collectorates for preventing party president Somu Veerajulu from going to Ramateertham and arresting him.

Mild tension prevailed at the Collectorate in Ongole when Police attempted to contain BJP men after they barged into the office.

TD SLAMS YSRC
FOR SHIFTING
BLAME ON NAIDUDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 6

Telugu Desam State Spokesperson Anam Venkataramana Reddy came down heavily on the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for the desecration of various temples in Andhra Pradesh.

“Such incidents never took place even during the 200 years of British rule also and the British rulers never interfered in religious activities,” Mr Ramana Reddy said while speaking to media persons at the TD office here on Wednesday.

He observed that a systematic effort to mobilise people on religious grounds for vote bank politics is taking place after the advent of Jagan Reddy. Reminding that Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy and N. Chandrababu belong to different religions but they treated people of all religions equally and devised welfare programmes for all sections of people after they sat on Chief Minister's chair.

He said both YSR and Naidu would not have tolerated if temples are targeted and they would have handled the situation with an iron fist to ensure the arrest of culprits immediately.

Mr Ramana Reddy questioned the rationale behind attributing the Ramateertham incident to Chandrababu Naidu while alleging that it has become a practice for YSRC leaders to blame TD chief whether it is murder of Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy, pink diamond case. He observed that the government is trying to find a scapegoat so that the blame could be shifted on Mr Naidu.

Fearing bird flu, zoos
increase vigil in state

Forest authorities are disinfecting all bird enclosures

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

Forest authorities are initiating several measures to contain bird flu, especially among birds in the zoological parks in Visakhapatnam and Tirupati.

As several states are already reporting the presence of avian influenza affecting their bird population, the AP government is also taking up measures, especially in Indira Gandhi Zoological Park in Visakhapatnam and Sri Venkateswara Zoological Park at Tirupati.

Forest authorities are disinfecting all bird enclosures in Indira Gandhi Zoo Park by spraying chemicals and blow-torching the iron grills of the enclosures to kill the virus. They are also removing surface soil in enclosures and

● Bird keepers have been instructed to keep a watch on enclosures assigned to them and they are not allowed to move from one set of enclosures to another as a precautionary measure.

● Visitors to the zoo are asked to take foot bath and their vehicles to undergo tyre bath using potassium permanganate at the entrance of the zoo itself

spaying lime powder and also frequently removing faecal matter.

Bird keepers have been instructed to keep a watch on enclosures assigned to them and they are not allowed to move from one set of enclosures to another as a precautionary measure.

Visitors to the zoo are asked to take foot bath and their vehicles to undergo tyre bath using potassium permanganate at the entrance of the zoo itself to avoid any spread of the virus from outside. The tyres of the vehicles take a dip in the

pit filled with the chemical before entering the zoo.

The zoo is following the Covid-19 protocol and as they have to face another virus H5N1, they have strengthened all safety measures to avoid the birds getting infected either inside or from outside sources.

Indira Gandhi Zoo curator Dr Nandani Salaria said, “We are taking all requisite measures to protect the birds from infections with the avian influenza and constantly keeping a watch on them for any unusual behaviour or symptoms

of infection. So far no bird or animal in the zoo are affected with the bird flu. At present we are having 223 birds in the zoo.”

Sri Venkateswara Zoo Park on an average attracts 2,000 persons every day and the authorities are taking all measures to avoid spread of infection from any source be it keepers or visitors.

Its curator Hima Sailaja said, “We are having 558 birds, including water birds like pelicans and painted storks. We are taking all measures to protect them from getting infected with bird flu. We will also keep close watch on them for any symptoms of the infection.”

The zoo authorities are also keeping watch for the spread of infection from birds to humans and vice-versa.

State records 289 Covid
cases, 3 deaths in 24 hrsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

Andhra Pradesh registered 289 new Covid-19 cases and three deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities issued Covid-19 bulletin here on Wednesday reporting that out of 51,207 samples tested, 289 persons were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,21,05,121 samples tested so far in the state, 8,83,876 persons were found infected with Coronavirus and of them, 8,73,855 were recovered while 2,896 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of confirmed Coronavirus, Guntur reported the highest number of 42, followed by 40 each in Chittoor and Visakhapatnam, 39 in East Godavari, 33 in West Godavari, 27 in Krishna, 16 in Nellore, 15 in Anantapur, 11 in

FORMER MINISTER SOMIREDDY
TESTS POSITIVE, SELF ISOLATEDDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 6

Former minister and TD Politburo member Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy went into isolation at his residence in Hyderabad after he was tested positive for Coronavirus on Tuesday.

In a tweet, the senior TD leader has advised the people who came into contact with him in the recent past to take precautions.

Mr Reddy also appealed his followers not to worry about his condition while maintaining that his health is stable.

Kadapa, nine in Vizianagaram, eight in Srikakulam, seven in Kurnool and two in Prakasam.

Krishna topped the state with cumulative Coronavirus active cases with 470 followed by 447 in Nellore, 438 in Guntur, 317 in East Godavari, 260 in Chittoor, 217 in Visakhapatnam, 208 in West Godavari, 170 in Kadapa, 116 in Anantapur, 73 in

Prakasam, 70 each in Kurnool and Srikakulam and 40 in Vizianagaram.

Among daily cases of death of Coronavirus infected patients, Krishna, Prakasam and Visakhapatnam reported one each taking the toll to 7,125. Chittoor registered the highest number of cumulative deaths with 845 followed by 668 in Krishna, 667 in Guntur, 636 in East Godavari.

Rejected by FB pal, 25-yr-old ends life

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 6

A 25-year-old man hanged himself on Wednesday reportedly after his Facebook girlfriend rejected his marriage proposal. The incident was reported from

the Industrial estate area of Palamaner town in Chittoor district.

According to Circle Inspector Jaya Ramaiah, the man, identified as Hari Krishna, is a resident of Dandupalli road near Palamaner. He worked in a handloom

factory at the industrial estate area.

The CI said, according to the family members of the deceased, he befriended an unknown woman on Facebook three months ago and started loving her. Recently, he proposed to

the woman about his love and requested her to marry him.

However, he took the extreme step after she rejected his proposal. He also recorded a selfie video, explaining his pain before taking the extreme step.

DRDO to assist in agri
processing units in APDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 6

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has come forward to assist in the manufacture of agriculture equipment for processing of horticulture produces through its Defence Food Research Laboratory to benefit farmers in drought-hit areas.

DRDO chairman Sathish Reddy responded positively to be part of measures aimed at uplift of the farming community through cost-effective innovations.

Anantapur MP Talari Rangaiah met the DRDO chairman on Wednesday and explained the situation in drought-hit areas, especially Anantapur.

DFRL scientists from Mysore had recently visited fields of Anantapur district and had interacted with farmers into horticulture and agriculture.

Responding to representations by farmers and officials, the DFRL team agreed to set up processing units of tomato paste and sauce in Anantapur,



Sathish Reddy

● DRDO chairman Sathish Reddy responded positively to be part of measures aimed at uplift of the farming community through cost-effective innovations.

Kadiri and Kalyanadurgam and other parts of the district. The team also opined that horticulture and agriculture produce should have marketing facilities through processing units in the non-season while tomato price could be seen in the range of ₹1 to ₹100 per a kg in the market.

Consumption
of liquor downDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

The liquor policy of Andhra Pradesh, imposing prohibition in a phased manner, is showing good results. The consumption has come down last year as compared to the previous year.

The sale of IM liquor from April to December 2019 was 239.56 lakh cases as compared to 126.55 lakh cases in 2020. This meant a drop of 47.17 per cent. Sale of beer for the same period in 2019 was 186.36 lakh cases and it was 126.55 lakh cases in 2020, showing an 80.91 per cent dip.

The sale of IM liquor in December 2019 was of 25.88 lakh cases compared to 21.41 lakh in 2020, with a 17.27 per cent fall in sales. Sale of beer in December 2019 was 7.93 lakh cases compared to 6.14 lakh cases in 2020, showing a 22.57 per cent fall.

The sale of IM liquor on December 30 and December 31 in 2019 was of 96,330 and

Casting net



A fisherman casts his nets into the sea during the sunrise at Ramakrishna Beach in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

BIE ANNOUNCES
FIRST PHASE
ADMISSIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

Based on a direction from the Andhra Pradesh High Court, the Board of Intermediate Education announced the first phase schedule of offline admission for the academic year 2020-21.

BIE secretary V. Ramakrishna issued a statement here on Wednesday said sale of application forms will start on January 7 and the last date for receipt of filled-in application forms in the colleges is January 17.

Principals of government, private aided, private unaided, cooperative, AP residential, social welfare residential, tribal welfare residential, incentive and AP model junior colleges and composite degree colleges offering two year intermediate course in general and vocational streams are requested to take care in enrolment of students.

WOMAN KILLED
IN CLASH OVER
PROPERTYDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 6

Following clashes between two factions over a property dispute in a village in Chittoor district, a 47-year-old woman was killed while two others were severely injured.

According to the CI Chandra Sekhar, factions led by two rivals Vijaya Sekhar Reddy and Narayan Reddy from the village had an old feud over a piece of land. On Wednesday morning, they both had an argument.

TTD TO OBSERVE ‘GOW’ PUJA IN ALL
SOUTHERN STATES ON KANUMA DAYDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 6

In view of the Kanuma festival falling on January 15, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is all set to celebrate the festival by performing ‘Gow’ Puja across several Hindu temples in both the Telugu states as well other south-

ern states.

TTD states that as part of its mission of Hindu Sanatana Dharma Prachara, the temple body will observe Gow Puja in the selected temples across the Telugu states and other states in south, particularly in Chennai, Bengaluru and Guruvayur under the aegis of Hindu dharma prachara parishad.

Pre-arrest bail plea
of ex-intel chief ABDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 6

Andhra Pradesh High Court to take up hearing on a petition filed by the former intelligence chief and senior IPS officer A.B. Venkateswara Rao is seeking sanction of anticipatory bail fearing his arrest in a scam in purchase of security equipment on Thursday.

The single judge bench headed by justice K. Lalitha held a hearing on the petition on Wednesday. Petitioner's counsel B. Adinarayana Rao asked the judge for an urgent hearing of the petition.

However, the public prosecutor K. Srinivasa Reddy raised objection stating that the petitioner was seeking anticipatory bail on an issue even no case was booked. He said that law and order police had not registered any case so far and expressed ignorance on the issue raised by the petitioner. He further said that he was unable to argue on

the petition with no details and asked the court to adjourn the hearing on the petition after a week to give him time to get details.

But the petitioner's counsel B. Adinarayana Rao interfering in the argument informed the court that ACB and others were made respondents in the case and further said that the public prosecutor was representing one of them while other agencies were having their own standing counsels to represent in the court.

In response to it, public prosecutor told the court that the name of public prosecutor was mentioned in the list while ACB was having its own counsels. He further informed the court that it was impossible to argue in the case without knowing what case and under what sections to be booked. However, the petitioner's counsel asked the court to hear the case and its background at the first instance so that the court could adjourn the hearing.

Man stabs son two
days before weddingDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL JAN. 6

● Marriage was fixed with approval of parents only

Disapproving love marriage proposal of his son, Harsha Vardhan, who is a bank employee at Gulbarga of Karnataka, the father, Srinivasa Achari stabbed his son with a knife and tried to pass on the blame on some unidentified person.

However, locals shifted severely injured Harsha Vardhan to a nearby government hospital. His condition is stable now. Police took the accused father into custody and booked a case against him. Knowing about the incident, the bride fell unconscious and was shifted to a hospital in Kadiri.

All arrangements were made for the marriage in a function hall.

Srinivasa Achari attacked his son with a knife and tried to pass on the blame on some unidentified person.

However, locals shifted severely injured Harsha Vardhan to a nearby government hospital. His condition is stable now. Police took the accused father into custody and booked a case against him. Knowing about the incident, the bride fell unconscious and was shifted to a hospital in Kadiri.

GPS for septic tank
cleaning vehiclesDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 6

Commissioner of Nellore Municipal Corporation K. Dinesh Kumar directed the firms involved in cleaning the septic tanks to obtain licences from the civic body and strictly follow the safety norms.

During an interaction with representatives of septic tanks cleaning agencies here on Wednesday, he called for professionalism in their operations and instructed them to provide safety gear to the workers without fail.

Mr Dinesh Kumar also instructed them to fix GPS equipment immediately to

their vehicles to secure permission from the Civic body while underlining the need for data on the movement of the vehicles.

The Commissioner told them to dump the waste material only at the sewage treatment plant at Venkateswarapuram while warning that they would take stern action if they unload the waste anywhere else.

Mr Dinesh Kumar also instructed them to fix GPS equipment immediately to their vehicles to secure permission from the Civic body while underlining the need for data on the movement of the vehicles.

SHORT TAKES

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

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, JAN. 6

Former Congress MLA Bharat Singh has created a flutter in the political circle by predicting a major split in the party. According to him around 11 MLAs of the party are in touch with the JD(U) leadership and may quit the Congress soon. He also alleged that Congress state president Madan Mohan Jha and senior party leader Ajit Singh are among those who may also defect to the JD(U).

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

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

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

INDIA COMMITTED
TO TERRITORIAL
INTEGRITY: EAM

SRIDHAR
KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

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

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

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

Teams deployed to check bird flu in Kerala, Haryana

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

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Besides, coordination with forest department



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

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

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

India notified its first outbreak of avian influenza in 2006.

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

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

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

MP may bar hotels from serving non-veg food

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Earlier at the review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIRUS | BLUES

Delhi govt has conducted its own dry run for vaccine

Steady decline in Coronavirus cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

Schools to reopen in Punjab today

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

ODISHA RECORDS NO DEATHS DUE TO VIRUS AFTER 6-MTHS

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

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

The state has so far recorded 3,32,921 Covid-19 cases. While 3,27,008 cases have recovered, 1,973 cases are still active. The government, however, did not mention the number of tests conducted in the past 24 hours.

Purohit wants charges dropped

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NCB SUMMONS RAMPAL’S SISTER IN DRUG PROBE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 6

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

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

IN BRIEF

Indian hacker jailed for 11 years in UK

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

Rare white tiger born in Nicaragua

Masaya: A rare white tiger, named "Nieve" (snow in Spanish) was born at the Nicaragua zoo, and is being raised by humans after its mother rejected it, the director of the zoo said. Nieve came into the world a week ago, weighing just under a kilogramme at birth, said director Eduardo Sacasa. Conservation group WWF describes white tigers as "a genetic anomaly", with none known to exist in the wild. There are several dozen in captivity. White tigers are Bengal tigers whose parents carry a recessive gene, according to The Wildcat Sanctuary in Minnesota which helps and studies felines. They are not albinos or a separate species. Some parks and zoos inbreed white tigers, as white cubs draw more visitors, though this is often at the cost of malformations and other genetic problems, states the sanctuary website.

Kim admits failures as congress opens

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

GRAMMY AWARDS POSTPONED TO MARCH OVER VIRUS

New York, Jan. 6: The Grammy music awards slated for January 31 in Los Angeles have been postponed until March over Covid-19, which has been rapidly spreading in California.

The Recording Academy released a statement saying it rescheduled the show to March 14, a week earlier than the date briefly listed on its website.

"The deteriorating Covid-19 situation in Los Angeles, with hospital services being overwhelmed, ICUs having reached capacity, and new guidance from state and local governments have all led us to conclude that postponing our show was the right thing to do," organisers said.

"Nothing is more important than the health and safety of those in our music community and the hundreds of people who work tirelessly on producing the show."

The ceremony's delay comes less than a month before it was set to take place in the shadow of the pandemic, which has dealt devastating blows to the music industry.

The organization had said the show set for late January would be mostly virtual, but had not released specific plans.

Beyonce, Dua Lipa, Taylor Swift and rapper Roddy Ricch are the top nominees at the normally star-studded gala. Comedian Trevor Noah was set to host the 2021 show, and it wasn't immediately clear if that was still the plan.

Democrats win first seat in battle for US Senate runoffs

Democrat Warnock becomes Georgia's first African-American Senator

Atlanta, Jan. 6: Joe Biden's Democratic Party took a giant step on Wednesday towards seizing control of the US Senate as they won the first of two Georgia runoffs, hours before Congress was set to certify the president-elect's victory over Donald Trump.

President-elect Joe Biden on Wednesday hailed his Democratic Party's likely takeover of the Senate as a sign that Americans want action and made an appeal for bipartisanship.

"It's time to turn the page. The American people demand action and they want unity. I am more optimistic than I ever have been that we can deliver both," Biden said in a statement that congratulated Democratic candidates on their likely wins in Georgia.

Democrat Rev Raphael Warnock on Wednesday secured a crucial win in the senatorial race, becoming the first person of colour enator from Georgia and bringing his party within the reach of a majority in the US Senate ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration.

Multiple news outlets on Wednesday morning projected 51-year-old Warnock, a senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, winner against Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler in the Georgia Senate runoff.

He is the first African-American to represent Georgia in the US Senate. He is also the first Democrat to win the Senate race from Georgia in 20 years.

Democrat Jon Ossoff also claimed victory in the second of two Georgia run-off votes, claiming a win that would give



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

— AFP

President-elect Joe Biden control of the US Senate.

"Georgia, thank so much for the confidence you have placed in me. I am honoured by your support, by your confidence, by your trust and I will look forward to serving you," Ossoff said in a televised statement.

The US media have not yet called the race, and Ossoff's Republican opponent has not conceded.

Both President Donald Trump and President-elect Joe Biden had campaigned for their respective candidates. Biden congratulated Warnock on his historic win in Georgia. "I congratulate Reverend Warnock on his ground breaking win last

night and I am hopeful that when the count is complete, Jon Ossoff will also be victorious. I congratulate the people of Georgia, who turned out in record numbers once again, just as they did in November, to elect two new Senators, demand action, and call on our elected leaders to end the gridlock and move us forward as a nation," the President-elect said.

Donald Trump faced one of the darkest days of his presidency Wednesday with Congress poised to certify Joe Biden's White House victory and Democrats on track to take control of the Senate with a pair of stunning upset victories in Georgia.

Thousands of Trump supporters, fueled by his spurious claims of voter fraud, were flooding the nation's capital, meanwhile, to protest the certification.

With political tensions running at fever pitch, there was a heavy police presence in downtown Washington and many business owners, fearing clashes, have boarded up doors and windows.

"They stole our election," said Katherine Caldwell, a 61-year-old woman from Oregon wearing a white cowboy hat that read "Trump Is My President." Certification of the Electoral College vote at a ceremony presided over by the vice president

is usually just a formality.

Trump, 74, has refused to concede defeat in the November 3 election and has been ramping up the pressure on fellow Republicans and Vice President Mike Pence to back his baseless claims of election fraud.

"The Vice President has the power to reject fraudulently chosen electors," Trump tweeted on Tuesday. "If Vice President @MikePence comes through for us, we will win the Presidency."

The vice president has no legal authority to reject the results, however, and Pence has given no public indication of what he will do at the joint session.

— AFP/PTI

53 arrested in HK crackdown

Hong Kong, Jan. 6: Hong Kong police arrested 53 former lawmakers and democracy proponents Wednesday for allegedly violating the new national security law by participating in the territory's legislature last year.

The mass arrests, including of former lawmakers, were the largest move against Hong Kong's democracy movement since the law was imposed by Beijing last June to quell dissent in the semi-autonomous territory.

"The operation today targets the active elements who are suspected to be involved in the crime of overthrowing, or interfering (and) seriously destroy the Hong Kong governments legal execution of duties," John Lee, Hong Kong's security minister, said at a news conference.

He said those arrested were suspected of trying to paralyze the government, via their plans to gain a majority of the seats in the legislature to create a situation in which the chief executive had to resign and the government would stop functioning. In a video released by former law-

● **MASS RESIGNATIONS and disqualifications of pro-democracy lawmakers have left the legislature largely a pro-Beijing body.**

maker Lam Cheuk-ting on his Facebook page, police turned up at his house and told him he was "suspected of violating the national security law, subverting state power."

Police told those recording the video to stop or risk arrest. The legislative election that would have followed the unofficial primaries was postponed by a year by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who cited the public health risks during the coronavirus pandemic. Mass resignations and disqualifications of pro-democracy lawmakers have left the legislature largely a pro-Beijing body.

Lee said the police would not target those who had voted in the unofficial primaries, which were held in July last year and attracted more than 6,00,000 voters even though pro-Beijing lawmakers and politicians had warned the event could breach the security law.

—AP

China blocks entry for virus experts, says WHO

Beijing, Jan. 6: An expert mission to China to probe the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic was in disarray on Wednesday after Beijing denied entry to the World Health Organisation team at the last minute despite months of painstaking negotiations.

Ten experts were due to arrive in China this week for the delicate, highly politicised task of establishing how and where the virus jumped from animals to humans.

But with a number of the team already in transit, China denied them entry visas, prodding WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, to say he was "very disappointed".

China is determined to control the origin story of the virus, which has killed more than 1.8 million people around the world and laid waste to global economies.

The first cases of the Coronavirus were recorded in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, prompting accusations of chaotic, secretive handling by Chinese authorities which led to its spread beyond China.

US President Donald Trump called the pandemic the "China virus".

Despite the hail of criti-

EU WATCHDOG GIVES GREEN LIGHT FOR SECOND CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

The Hague, Jan. 6: The European Union's medicines watchdog on Wednesday approved a second Coronavirus vaccine, in a relief to struggling European countries as the world reached a grim new record of 15,700 deaths in 24 hours.

The Moderna vaccine is now set to join Pfizer-BioNTech's jab for use in the 27-nation EU, where governments are grappling with soaring case loads and slow rollouts of the vaccines already available. "Good news for our efforts to bring more Covid-19 vaccines to Europeans!" European

Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted.

The breakthrough came as more than 15,700 Covid-19 deaths around the world were registered in the past 24 hours, according to a count by AFP at 1100 GMT on Wednesday — a new record.

The United States, the world's worst-hit country, logged a record 3,936 daily deaths in a separate tally by Johns Hopkins university. Los Angeles ambulance workers have been told to stop transporting some patients with extremely low survival chances to overwhelmed hospitals.

— AFP

cism, Beijing has so far resisted pressure for an independent probe and instead has seeded doubt as to whether the pandemic even started inside its borders.

Beijing foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying confirmed the WHO team had not been admitted as planned, and admitted it was "not just a visa issue". "The issue of origin-tracing is incredibly complicated," she said.

"To ensure the work of the international expert team in China goes smoothly, we have to carry out necessary procedures and make relevant arrangements."

Talks were continuing over "the specific date and specific arrangement of the expert group's visit," Hua added, despite the months of negotiations already spent on setting up the trip.

— AFP

Trump orders ban on 8 more Chinese apps

Washington, Jan. 6: President Donald Trump has signed an executive order barring transactions with eight Chinese apps including Alipay and WeChat Pay to protect America's national security, citing the steps taken by India to ban more than 200 Chinese connected software applications.

Trump's order said action is needed to "deal with the national emergency" caused by the "pervasiveness of the spread" of apps created and controlled in China. The ban against the eight Chinese apps — Alipay, CamScanner, QQ Wallet, SHAREit, Tencent QQ, VMate, WeChat Pay, and WPS Office — will come into effect in 45 days from on Tuesday.

"The pace and pervasiveness of the spread in the United States of certain connected mobile and desktop applications and other software developed or controlled by persons China, to include Hong Kong and Macau (China), continue to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," Trump said on Tuesday.

"At this time, action must be taken to address the threat posed by these Chinese connected software applications," Trump said in his executive order.

The orders follow two others Trump signed in August banning dealings with the popular video app TikTok as well as the main WeChat app.

Trump said that India has banned the use of more than 200 Chinese connected software applications throughout the country. In a statement, India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology asserted that the applications were "stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users' data in an unauthorised manner to servers which have locations outside India," according to the executive order.

The United States has assessed that a number of Chinese connected software applications automatically capture vast

BEIJING SLAMS DON OVER ORDER AGAINST APPS

Beijing, Jan. 6: Beijing accused the US on Wednesday of "bullying" after President Donald Trump ordered a ban on a series of Chinese apps in his last weeks in office, branding them a threat to national security.

Under the Trump administration Beijing and Washington have clashed repeatedly over trade, technology, human rights and the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic.

In the latest move to raise tensions, Trump ordered a ban on transactions involving Alipay, WeChat Pay and other apps linked to Chinese companies, saying they could route user information to the government in Beijing.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said on Wednesday the move was an example of "bullying" by the US, and accused Washington of "stretching the concept of national security." "This harms both itself and others." — AFP

swaths of information from millions of users in the United States, including sensitive personally identifiable information and private information, which would allow the Chinese Army and the Chinese Community Party access to Americans' personal and proprietary information.

"The United States must take aggressive action against those who develop or control Chinese connected software applications to protect our national security," he said.

Trump said that by accessing personal electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, Chinese connected software applications can access and capture vast swaths of information from users, including sensitive personally identifiable information and private information. — PTI

UK denies bail for WikiLeaks Assange

London, Jan. 6: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange must remain in custody in Britain, while the US appeals a court decision to block his extradition to face charges there for leaking secret documents, a judge in London ruled on Wednesday.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who on Monday refused to grant his extradition, told Westminster Magistrates Court that if released there were "substantial grounds" to suspect Assange would "fail to surrender" for future appeal hearings. "Mr Assange still has an incentive to abscond from these as yet unresolved proceedings," she said.

"As a matter of fairness the United States must be able to challenge my decision. If Mr Assange absconds during this

process then they will have lost the opportunity to do so." Outside court, lawyer Stella Morris, Assange's fiancée and the mother of two of his children, called the decision "a huge disappointment" and urged the US Justice Department to drop the charges.

A lawyer for the US government earlier urged Baraitser not to release the controversial Australian publisher, and detailed how it planned to challenge her decision to block his extradition on mental health grounds.

"We respectfully submit on behalf of the United States that there are insurmountable hurdles to Mr Assange being granted bail," Clair Dobbin said.

She added there were "no conditions that could guarantee his surrender" in future. — AFP

WOMAN | POWER

Legislators move to even up executive boards after voluntary efforts to close failed gender gap

Germany to require women on large firms' boards

Frankfurt am Main, Jan. 6: German listed companies must include women on executive boards as part of a landmark bill agreed by the country's coalition government on Wednesday after voluntary efforts failed to close a gender gap.

Listed companies with four executives or more must appoint at least one woman to their boards, according to a draft law to be voted on by parliament.

The legislation sends "a very strong signal", Justice Minister Christine

Lambrecht told reporters, urging corporations to "take advantage of the opportunity presented by highly qualified women".

"We can show that Germany is on the way to becoming a modern society fit for the future," Family Affairs Minister Franziska Giffey added.

With the new legislation, Germany is "one step closer" to the goal of equal opportunities and equal rights, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said.

The women's quota is "overdue" and the time for voluntary measures is

"finally over", he added. Europe's largest economy fares relatively poorly in terms of representation of women in senior positions, particularly striking in a country led by the world's longest-serving elected female leader.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, in power since 2005, has spoken out at foot-dragging by business leaders, against the resistance of some in her own conservative bloc.

The boss of her CDU party's economic council, Astrid Hamker, last year called the idea of a quota

system "completely counterproductive", and said diversity should be "not according to gender, but rather competence".

Yet evidence suggests companies with women at the top outperform the average of Germany's blue-chip DAX companies by more than two percent, according to a report by the management firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

Included in the new legislation, companies in which the government holds a majority stake — such as the rail group

Deutsche Bahn — will have stricter rules, with at least one woman on management boards with more than two members, and a 30-percent quota to come in the future.

German research institute DIW said it welcomed the women's quota but noted that female participation in management boards continues to move at a "snail's pace".

The new regulations cover around 70 companies, of which about 30 have no women on their boards.

— AFP



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

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

7 JANUARY 2021

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

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

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

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

The catch, however, lies in the openness of the government. In our country, laws, especially those that have an implication for large sections of people, are passed after an elaborate process, which includes discussions in Parliament, parliamentary committees and even outside. This process, though painstakingly slow, ensures that the safeguards necessary to protect the interests of the stakeholders are not overlooked or omitted.

But the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, especially its second edition, does not seem to believe in such democratic niceties. Laws that sought to alter the basic idea of India such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 and the virtual annulment of Article 370 of the Constitution were pushed through Houses of Parliament after a single day's discussion each.

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

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

Scale down the parade

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

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

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

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

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEW TRANSFER POLICY FOR POLL-BOUND TAMIL NADU

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

Officers who are retiring within

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

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

A THORNY ISSUE

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

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

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

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

Subhani



Why trust needs to be the key word in 2021

Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

part in a clinical trial.

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

Till date, there is no convincing answer.

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

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

How do we restore trust?

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

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

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

Ms Menghaney cites the example of the European Medicines Agency (EMA), that has set a minimum level of transparency for itself.

In many areas, the agency has decided to go beyond what the law requires. During the pandemic, EMA is implementing exceptional measures to maximise the transparency of its regulatory activities on treatments and vaccines for Covid-19 that are approved or are under evaluation. This includes making public the detailed minutes of various committee meetings.

In 2019, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on improving the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines and other health products in an effort to expand access. The resolution urges member states to enhance public sharing of information on actual prices paid by governments and other buyers for health products, and greater transparency on pharmaceutical patents, clinical trial results and other determinants of pricing along the value chain from laboratory to patient.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trust and transparency during a crisis mean that not only should the political and administrative leadership be decisive, it must also convincingly explain to all groups that whatever is being done is being done in their interest.

Opacity in decision-making, attempts to gloss over mistakes or polarise the populace on any count will punch holes in the trust narrative.

We must not let that happen in 2021.

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

LETTERS

NETAS FIRST

If the Supreme Court judgement on Central Vista was 2:1, the entire issue cannot be wished away by the government. It is a fact that the 93-year-old Parliament building outlived its service and it is time to make it a heritage monument for ceremonial use. The NDA government rightly chose to construct a new Parliament building keeping future needs of the growing nation. But then, leaving aside the pleas for and against Central Vista project, the point to be considered is the financial aspect at a time when the pandemic is causing havoc with the country's economy.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

IDOLS OF GODS

The new Coronavirus strain, the mutant variety, is slowly and steadily increasing day by day which is a cause for concern. It cannot not be brushed aside and may be recalled that the government was complacent and self-congratulatory in the initial stages of Covid-19 and paid the price for the same (*AP Records 377 Covid-19 Cases, DC, Jan. 6*). We need to be vigilant and cannot lower the guard as prevention is better than cure.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Concern over Sheikh's talks with Pak. envoy

The Ruling Congress here has "taken serious view" of Sheikh Abdullah's meeting with the Pakistan High Commissioner in New Delhi yesterday, according to the senior Vice-President of the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee, Mr. Mohd. Ayub Khan.

Mr. Ayub Khan said in a statement, the Government of India should prevent "unfriendly countries like Pakistan" from interfering in the affairs of the State through the Plebiscite Front at this juncture.

He appealed to the people of the State to remain vigilant and protect the Constitution and secular traditions.

Mr. Khan said during the past few days, the Plebiscite Front leaders in Kashmir had steeped up their "sinister campaign" to create a situation of instability in the State by "misleading" the people in the name of religion.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,174.06	-0.54
Nifty 50	14,146.25	-0.38
S&P 500*	3,773.05	1.24
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.75	-0.43
Euro (₹)	90.21	-0.45
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	51,125*71	0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	54.43	0.83
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.894	0.044
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.030	0.075

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Services sector expands at a slower rate

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

DoT: Spectrum auction bidding to start in March



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

Housing sales decline in 2020: Knight Frank

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

SpiceJet to run 21 new flights from next week

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



IIFCL could be merged with new company Govt mulls infra bank with ₹1 lakh-cr corpus

SIDDHARTHA SINGH JAN. 6

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



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

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

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

— Bloomberg

PFC plans ₹10,000-crore retail bond issue

DIVYA PATIL & RAJESH KUMAR SINGH JAN. 6

India's biggest lender to the power sector plans to sell bonds to individual investors as it tries to attract savers dissatisfied with deposit rates at a 16-year low. Power Finance Corp has filed a draft prospectus for a Rs 10,000-crore offering (\$1.4 billion), and plans to raise the entire sum this

quarter, according to Parminder Chopra, director (finance). "We want to explore an alternative source of funds," Chopra said in a telephone interview. "Fixed deposit rates are quite low, so there could be interest from the public to get a bit better rate." Unprecedented monetary stimulus to help cushion the economy from damage wrought by the Covid-19 crisis has

dragged down rates that households get on bank savings. The rate on term deposits maturing in three years at the country's largest lender, State Bank of India, is 5.3 per cent, the lowest since September 2004. Power Finance has previously sold notes to retail investors, but those were tax-free infrastructure bonds, Chopra said. This planned offering would be the company's maiden tax-

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

— Bloomberg

'Saudi oil output cut signals demand risks'

Jan. 6: Saudi Arabia's pledge to cut its oil output by more than required under its pact with other Opec+ producers points to weakening oil demand following new Covid-19 lockdowns and sets the stage for a tighter market in the second quarter, Goldman Sachs said in a note released on Tuesday. "Saudi's action and the prospect for a tight market in 2Q21, as the rebound in demand stresses the ability to restart production, will likely support prices in coming weeks, leading us to reiterate our bullish oil view," the analysts wrote. Benchmark Brent oil prices on Wednesday hit their highest level since February after Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, said it would cut by an additional, voluntary 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March. Two Opec+ members—Russia and Kazakhstan—will bump up their output by a combined 75,000 bpd while other producers will hold production steady. Producers are wary of the impact of new lockdowns on oil demand.



China on Wednesday introduced more restrictions near Beijing following tougher measures announced by Germany and Britain. Goldman analysts said their updated first-quarter 2021 market balance outlook had weakened and that the latest Opec+ plans point to a surplus of 250,000 bpd versus a deficit previously. The "Opec+ March production level will still be low just as global demand starts rebounding sharply driven by warmer weather and rising vaccinations. This points to the group potentially struggling to ramp-up output quickly enough," they wrote. Goldman expects sustained backwardation and lower implied volatility and sees year-end Brent prices at \$65 per barrel.

— Reuters

UAE TO PRODUCE SINOPHARM VACCINE THIS YR

FARAH ELBAHRAWY JAN. 6

The United Arab Emirates, which aims to inoculate half of its population in the first quarter, plans to start manufacturing Sinopharm Group Co's vaccine this year, according to *The National*. The country is seeking to achieve herd immunity later this year by vaccinating as many as 70 per cent of its residents, the Abu Dhabi-based newspaper reported, citing an interview with Nawal Al Kaabi, chairwoman of the National Covid-19 Clinical Management Committee, and Ashish Koshy, chief executive officer of G42 Healthcare. Sinopharm unit China National Biotech Group, which developed the vaccine, delivered 3 million doses to the UAE so far. The UAE is offering vaccines free of charge for its residents. On Tuesday, a top health official said the Gulf nation administered more than 826,000 doses so far. The UAE has approved the Pfizer Inc-BioNTech SE Covid-19 vaccine, along with the Sinopharm shot.

— Bloomberg

Sovereign debt rises by \$10 trillion in 2020

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 6

Global government debt is estimated to have increased by about \$10 trillion in 2020 to \$77.8 trillion, equivalent to 94 per cent of the world GDP, according to rating agency Fitch. Nearly all governments have coped with the economic fallout of the pandemic similarly—by boosting spending on health sectors and providing support to households and businesses, while running up debt to pay for it. Both the increase and level of debt will be records, Fitch said. The previous \$10 trillion tranche took seven years to build, from 2012 to 2019. "The rapid and widespread increase in debt has had a significant effect on sovereign credit ratings, with a record 51 downgrades of 33 sovereigns in 2020, 27 of which are emerging markets. The sovereigns downgraded multiple times were all emerging markets," James McCormack, global head of sovereigns,



Fitch Ratings said. There are three primary consequences of the high and rising emerging-market debt burden, all of which are already in play, according to Fitch. First, there will be additional episodes of credit stress and default. There were five defaults in 2020—Argentina, Ecuador, Lebanon, Suriname and Zambia—a record yearly high. "We expect there to be more defaults in 2021, along with greater attention on debt-remedy initiatives," Fitch said. "Second, some emerging markets that are not at risk of default and have well-developed local-currency debt markets will continue to explore unconventional monetary

policies." "In emerging markets, government debt increased seven-fold to \$19 trillion, and interest payments jumped to an estimated \$680 billion in 2020 from \$220 billion in 2000. While the increase in interest payments did not fully keep pace with the increase in debt, there has been an uninterrupted rise," McCormack said. Comparing 2010 with 2020, the median effective interest rate for developed-market sovereigns fell from just over 4 per cent to just under 2 per cent. For emerging markets, the rate went in the other direction, increasing from 4.3 per cent to 5.1 per cent. The third consequence will be, if developed-market rates sink even lower, there may be a greater incentive for emerging-market sovereigns to turn to foreign-currency funding. On current trends, Fitch forecasts interest payments by governments in developed and emerging markets will converge by 2022 at about \$860 billion.

Motown Buzz

Toyota Fortuner facelift launched



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 6

Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Wednesday introduced the 2021 Toyota Fortuner SUV with prices starting at Rs 29.98 lakh for the base petrol variant and going all the way up to Rs 37.43 lakh at Delhi showroom for the range-topping four-wheel drive diesel automatic variant. The company has also launched a sportier variant called Legendar priced at Rs 37.58 lakh.

TATA SAFARI ALL SET FOR A COMEBACK

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

KIA MOTORS UNVEILS NEW LOGO, SLOGAN



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

AGRITECH | BLOOMING

Firm helps improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops

Startup CropIn bringing AI technology to farms

SARITHA RAI JAN. 6

CropIn, an artificial intelligence and data-based agritech startup, has raised \$20 million in a funding round led by Temasek Holdings Pte-backed ABC World Asia, as the coronavirus pandemic accelerates the adoption of digital technologies in farming. The Bengaluru-headquartered agricultural AI startup provides software-as-a-service, or SAAS, products to farms and development organisations globally to improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops.

Additional new investors in the Series C funding include Infosys co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan's family office and a fund of the UK government, CDC Group. CropIn has raised \$33.1 million so far. The company was set up in 2010 by Krishna Kumar, who hails from a family of farmers in central India and quit a career at General Electric Co to found the startup after being deeply affected by widespread rural suicides in his country. The firm analyses data such as aerial imagery, ground scouting, hyper-local weather and market price fluctuations from 13



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

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

Foundation and Singapore-based VC BeeNext, CropIn has customers and partners in 52 countries, including Basel-headquartered Syngenta Corp, the World Bank, Canada-based McCain Foods Ltd and Germany's BASF SE. The new funding will fuel further global expansion and help strengthen its technology. India's agritech space is abloom, with dozens of startups sprouting up in the last few years to disrupt dated farming practices and bring more efficiency into a massive industry dominated by small land holdings. One in nine agritech startups

globally are from the South Asian nation, which had 450 such businesses in 2019, according to a report by the Indian trade body Nasscom. That's piqued the interest of investors such as Tiger Global and Accel, which have plowed tens of millions into early-stage companies. Though much of the focus has been on supply chain improvements through practical approaches like aggregating farm produce and renting farm equipment, deep tech startups like CropIn working in areas like crop diagnostics and farm automation are also earning recognition.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Claire 1st female official in Tests

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

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

Indian shuttlers to start training

New Delhi: The entire Indian badminton contingent cleared the Covid-19 test on Wednesday and is set to begin training ahead of the Yonex Thailand Open, starting next week. The Indian team, part of the Green Zone, consisting of players and all stakeholders such as umpires, line judges, personnel from BWF, Badminton Association of Thailand, medical staff, and TV production crew, were tested after arrival in Bangkok. The Asia leg in Bangkok consists of two Super 1000 events — Yonex Thailand Open (January 12-17) and Toyota Thailand Open (January 19-24) followed by the \$1,500,000 HSBC BWF World Tour Finals (January 27-31). "The Asian Leg in Bangkok received a boost with all 824 participants in the Green Zone quarantine bubble testing negative for Covid-19," BWF said in a statement. — PTI

Woman footballer Alex catches Covid

Los Angeles: Alex Morgan, a two-time World Cup winner with the US women's football team, has tested positive for Covid-19, the star striker said on *Twitter* on Tuesday. "Unfortunately, my family and I closed out 2020 learning that we had contracted Covid while in California over the holidays," Morgan, 31, said in a Tweet. "We are all in good spirits and recovering well. After our isolation is completed, I will follow US Soccer's return to play guidelines to ensure my body is fully recovered and I can join my teammates back on the field soon," the tweet added. Morgan is married to former Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder Servando Carrasco, and the couple have a seven-month old daughter, Charlie. The family returned to California from London, where Morgan had appeared in five matches for Tottenham in the Women's Super League before announcing her intention to return to the US to play in 2021. — AFP

Kevin does well in Dakar's Wadi loop

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

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

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

FOOTBALL

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

OPENING GAMBIT

Rohit and India ready to change Sydney script

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

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

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

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

The pressure is understandable as Australia are literally pushing a 70 per cent fit David Warner out there in the middle to combat fire with fire even as his statements make it clear that he is not at all comfortable with the idea.

And in this backdrop, enters Rohit Sharma, whose last couple of months have been loads of off-field drama.

But, his mere presence has added spring in the strides of the team and the youngsters in this current set-up swear by him.

On the other hand, Australia need Smith to be back in form and someone like Travis Head to deliver as he has failed to get a hang of both pace and spin.

— PTI



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

— AFP



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

— AFP

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA HAVE WON JUST ONE TEST AT SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND

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

FOR THE RECORD

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

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

WE'RE A BETTER TEAM WITH WARNER: PAINE

Sydney, Jan. 6: David Warner's mere presence makes Australia a better side and fills the other 10 on the park with exuberance and energy, skipper Tim Paine gushed on Wednesday as the opener looks set for return to Test cricket when the third match against India begins here Thursday.

Warner missed a lot of action since India arrived as he sustained a groin injury during the second ODI.

"Hopefully, if he gets in and gets away, that puts pressure back on opposition right away. Regardless of whom we are playing, we are a better team when David Warner is in that team from the runs he scores or the energy he brings into the group," Paine said.

"He protects our middle-order a bit with Marnus (Labuschagne) and Steve coming in. Other guys coming when bowlers are a bit tired, it's an advantage. So David has got a huge role for us," the skipper said even as the senior opener is battling against time to get closer to full fitness.

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

— PTI

Captain Jinks all praise for Ashwin and Jadeja

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

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

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

— AJINKYA RAHANE
India's stand-in Test captain

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

"As a batsman Ravindra Jadeja has improved a lot and that is a massive point as a team's perspective," Rahane said. "When you know that your number seven can contribute with the bat, that becomes really easy for you to actually get that (decent) total and obviously

ly in the field, you have seen him taking some brilliant catches. "So yes his addition in the team helped us a lot and he has been really fantastic and it is really great for us," he said.

— PTI

Kiwis sweep series, are No.1 in Tests

Christchurch (New Zealand), Jan. 6: Towering paceman Kyle Jamieson completed an 11-wicket match haul on Wednesday as New Zealand thrashed Pakistan in the second Test to become the world's top-ranked team.

Jamieson was near unplayable in Pakistan's second innings, finishing with six for 48 after his five for 69 in the first innings, to give New Zealand victory by an innings and 176 runs.

The win inside four days in Christchurch, which completed a 2-0 series sweep, also confirmed New Zealand had overtaken Australia to be the world's number one Test side for the first time.

New Zealand batted Pakistan out of contention with a first innings 659 for six, with Williamson's masterful 238 supported by Henry Nicholls (157)

and Daryl Mitchell (102 not out).

But there was still a chance Pakistan could force a draw until Jamieson took the ball.

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

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

BRIEF SCORES

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



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

— AFP

Rohan hits ton as HCA league halts

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 6

G. Rohan Yadav of Central Excise completed his century but the Hyderabad Cricket Association's A-1 Division three-day league matches were stopped midway through the second day on Wednesday following an order from the Telangana High Court, which was dealing with the raw deal meted to the Union Bank of India team.

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

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

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

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



G. Rohan Yadav

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

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

Brief scores:

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

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

ENGLISH | LEAGUE CUP



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

— AP

Tottenham ride on Son's exploits

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

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

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

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

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

THE RESULTS

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

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

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

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

— AFP

ONLINE CHESS AT WEEKEND

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

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2021-23

Printed and Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: Kaushik Mitter