

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SUNDAY | 7 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 33.0°C
Min: 16.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
33/16 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+12,514)

(+74)

1,08,27,170

1,55,028

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+161)

(+1)

TS: 2,95,431

1,608

(+75)

(+1)

AP: 8,88,350

7,159

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,61,28,850

DEATHS

23,14,127

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana

Tithi: Pushya Bahula Ekadasi till 4.47 am (Monday)

Star: Jyeshtha till 4.15 pm

Varjyam: Nil

Durmuhurtam: 4.39 pm to 5.25 pm

Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm

HUIRI CALENDAR

Jamadi- ul- Akhir 24,1442 AH

PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.40 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.30 pm

Maghrib: 5.48 pm

Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM

SUNSET TODAY 6.01 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 02.23 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 02.46 PM

COUNTER POINT

Price rise again? I am not aware... I always travel in government vehicles!

SHORT TAKES

H1-B registration from March 9

Washington: The registration process for the H-1B visa application for the next fiscal year will begin on March 9 and the successful applicants through a computerised draw of lots would be notified by March 31, a federal agency has announced. The notification by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services on Friday came a day after the Biden administration announced that it will continue with the traditional lottery system to issue the much sought-after work visa to foreign professionals.

Comedian not yet released from jail

Indore: A day after he was granted interim bail by the Supreme Court in a case for allegedly hurting religious sentiments by passing objectionable remarks about Hindu deities during a show, comedian Munawar Faruqui was not released from the central jail here on Saturday with officials citing execution of a warrant issued by a Prayagraj court.

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SEC notifies phase III of GP elections

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India appreciated globally for handling of Covid

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Root first to hit double century in 100th Test

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Vol. 25 No. 278 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

CM urges PM to spare VSP

Suggests measures to put steel plant back on track in Vizag

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Saturday night requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reconsider disinvestment plans of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), popularly referred to as Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP). The CM suggested that the Prime Minister explore other opportunities to put the plant back on track.

In a letter to the PM, he assured that the Andhra Pradesh government will closely work with the Centre in reviving the steel plant. In particular, he sought three measures for the revival of VSP.

First, the Chief Minister suggested, was continuing operations to achieve turnaround, as with all sectors of the economy. This would make the steel sector also see a V-shaped recovery. In this regard, he pointed out that RINL achieved its highest ever capacity utilisation of 6.3 MTPA against the capacity of 7.3 MTPA in December 2020, posting a monthly profit of close to ₹200 crore.

Second, Jagan Mohan Reddy sought captive iron ore mines to reduce input costs. He stated that RINL is purchasing iron ore from NMDC Bailadila mines at market price, which puts a cost disadvantage of around ₹5,260 per MT of steel (at ore level). Allotment of captive mines will help RINL tide over its cost disadvantage.

Third, the CM sought financial restructuring under which short-term and long-term loans could be converted into equity, taking off repayment pressures and interest burden. The high cost debt, which is actually ₹22,000 crore, is being serviced at interest rates as high as 14 per cent.

Conversion of these loans into equity by banks can remove the interest burden. Further, listing RINL, Vizag, on the stock exchange would give banks the exit option



Police detain Left activists protesting against privatisation of Vizag Steel Plant at the Maddilapalem junction in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Ganta ‘quits’ by giving reasons

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 6

Former minister and Visakhapatnam North MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao on Saturday sent a resignation letter to Speaker Tammineni Sitaram and said it was in protest against the Centre’s decision to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

In his letter, the Telugu Desam legislator cited the reason for quitting his elected position as privatisation of RINL (Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited). As per norms, no resignation letter should cite any reason for taking such a decision as

it amounts to taking the decision under duress. However, the legislator deliberately stated the reason thereby indicating that it was clear drama to gain popularity.

Srinivasa Rao wanted all elected representatives in the state to resign and organise massive protests, so that the Centre is pressurised into withdrawing its decision.

Meanwhile, trade unions and mass organisations continued their sit-in on the national highway at Maddilapalem against VSP’s privatisation for the third day.

■ Page 2: 29 leaders arrested

through the stock exchange route, which would enable the general public to invest.

The Chief Minister pointed out that RINL, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, is a navratna company and the largest public sector industrial unit

in the state, providing employment opportunities for close to around 20,000 people directly and to many others indirect employment opportunities in the city of Vishakhapatnam.

■ Page 2: CM points to AP struggle for steel plant

ANURAG THAKUR DEFENDS RINL DIVESTMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 6

Minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur on Saturday strongly defended the disinvestment proposal of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) which owns the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP). Disinvestment was in the interests of the company and the employees, he said.

Speaking to the media here at the BJP office, Thakur termed the ongoing agitations in Andhra Pradesh against disinvestment in VSP as “political-ly motivated” and “artificial”. He said the Centre will decide on divesting stakes of public sector enterprises from time to time, based on the recommendation of Niti Aayog.

“Opposition parties and a few vested interests are trying to inflame regional emotions under the guise of opposing RINL disinvestment,” he said.

■ Page 2: Stakeholders in RINL to be consulted

SEC confines PR minister to house

Poll panel takes note of warning to collectors

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

In an unprecedented move, the State Election Commission has directed the AP Director-General of Police to confine minister for panchayat raj and rural development Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy to his house till the completion of gram panchayat elections on February 21.

This prohibits the minister from having access to the media in order to prevent him from “making inciting utterances” that could adversely impact the poll process and also the law and order situation in Chittoor district.

The SEC took serious note of the minister’s recent warning to collectors and returning officers, urging them to disobey instructions from State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar and to blacklist them if they followed Kumar’s instructions

● This prohibits the minister from having access to the media in order to prevent him from “making inciting utterances” that could adversely impact the poll process and the law and order situation

especially with regard to prevention of forced unanimous elections.

The minister had allegedly said that the SEC would be in power till March 31 while the YSRC government tenure would continue beyond it, and asked the returning officers to declare all unanimous elections. The minister was quoted as saying that the SEC was trying to gain an MP or MLC nomination from the Telugu Desam.

The SEC said that the intention for issuing such an order was to carry out the mandate given to the

Election Commission to hold free and fair elections and to insulate collectors and returning officers from fear psychosis following the minister’s threats. The SEC’s order will come into effect immediately.

The SEC said that the minister’s utterances were a serious breach of rule of law and unconstitutional. It said that the threats transgressed election laws and abuse of office for wrongful ends.

The SEC justified its action on the minister by saying that his exhortation in favour of forced unanimous elections was nothing but a veiled threat administered to disincite the citizens to participate in the election process as contestants and voters. However, it said that the restrictions imposed on the minister would not prevent him to access his medical aid and other exigencies and also to dispose of his official papers and matters.

Ambati slams poll panel for restraining minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

Ruling YSR Congress is up in arms against State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar for issuing orders confining panchayat raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy to his house.

Addressing a press conference here on Saturday, YSRC MLA and party official spokesperson Ambati Rambabu said the SEC has stepped out of his purview by passing such orders. He maintained that the election commissioner has no power to take such a decision of confining a public representative, as it

amounts to violating the rights of people.

He charged that Ramesh Kumar has put curbs on Ramachandra Reddy only because he is active in Chittoor district from where TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu hails.

■ Page 2: Rambabu warns action on officials

Yudh Abhyas



US soldiers arrive in Suratgarh, Rajasthan to participate in the 16th edition of annual bilateral joint exercise Yudh Abhyas, to be held from February 8. — PTI

AIADMK fears violence in TN

Chennai, Feb. 6: Ahead of expelled leader V K Sasikala’s return on February 8, the ruling AIADMK on Saturday said it has lodged a complaint with police against the camp of the close aide of late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa alleging a ‘conspiracy’ to unleash ‘violence’ and sought action to protect Tamil Nadu and ensure peace.

Amma Makkal Munn-etra Kazhagam chief and Sasikala’s nephew Dhinakaran rubbished the conspiracy allegation as defamatory and lies.

The allegation by the AIADMK comes ahead of Sasikala’s return to Tamil Nadu on Monday from Karnataka after her

recovery from COVID-19 and following completion of her jail term in a corruption case.

A high level AIADMK meet, chaired by Chief Minister K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam was meanwhile held here. Sources said the matters deliberated covered Assembly elections likely in April or May and the party organisation work. Party leaders however declined to comment if the ‘Sasikala factor’ was discussed. Law Minister C Ve Shanmugam said a complaint has been submitted with police seeking to “thwart a conspiracy to unleash violence in Tamil Nadu.” — PTI

SC JUDGE HAILS PM ‘VISIONARY, VIBRANT LEADER’

Ahmedabad, Feb. 6: Supreme Court justice M.R. Shah on Saturday described

Prime Minister Narendra Modi as “our most popular, loved, vibrant and visionary leader”.

The praise for the prime minister by Justice Shah came during a function to celebrate diamond jubilee of the Gujarat High Court. “I am proud and privileged to participate in the function to celebrate diamond jubilee of Gujarat HC and that too in the presence of our most popular, loved, vibrant and visionary leader, PM Narendra Modi,” Shah said in his address. — PTI

■ Report on Page 4

SHORT TAKES

STAKEHOLDERS
IN RINL TO BE
CONSULTED

From Page 1

"We will hold consultations with all RINL stakeholders before disinvestment which is being done in the interests of the company as well as the employees. We are confident of convincing all RINL stakeholders as several PSUs that were divested earlier have grown faster," Thakur said.

Replying to questions on the state of the economy, Thakur said the rising GST collections indicate that the economy is in recovery mode as the Centre has taken the right steps to save lives and the economy during the pandemic, he said.

The minister said India had received the highest foreign direct investment even during the Covid-19 times due to decisive leadership. "India is standing back on its feet. The economy is witnessing a V-shaped recovery and that is why in the last four months we have seen GST collection of more than ₹1 lakh crore per month," he said. In January, the total collection was close to ₹1.2 lakh crore.

"India has forex reserves of more than \$590 billion, which is the highest ever. It went up by \$119 billion from the previous year. The external debt is \$554 billion, making the country a 'net creditor'," Thakur said.

On the recent Union Budget, Thakur said that except the Opposition parties, all sections of people had appreciated it. Thakur said the Budget estimates for the current fiscal was ₹30.42 lakh crore, which was increased by over ₹4 lakh crore to ₹34.50 lakh crore for the next fiscal.

He hoped that India would become a \$5 trillion economy in the next four or five years. Describing the Budget as "transparent," the minister explained its salient features.

MLA DEMANDS
PROBE INTO NTR
STATUE DAMAGEDC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, FEB. 6

A detailed probe must be held over destroying of former chief minister late N.T. Rama Rao's statue at Dosakayalapalli village, stated Rajanagar MLA Jakkampudi Raja.

Speaking to reporters here on Saturday, he said destruction of statues belonging to political leaders is not a good culture. Everyone should condemn such incidents. He underlined that political leaders face several hardships for developing the state. They also sacrifice their lives in the interests of people. That is why people instal their statues.

But some miscreants, the MLA said, are now attacking statues, which will not be good for society. He said that there are two versions over destroying of NTR's statue. According to one group, certain miscreants had destroyed the statue. Another says the statue may have collapsed due to weakening of its foundation.

He demanded that in case the statue has been deliberately damaged, police must probe and severely punish the guilty.

● **JAKKAMPUDI RAJA** said destruction of statues belonging to political leaders is not a good culture. Everyone should condemn such incidents. He underlined that political leaders face several hardships for developing the state.

SEC assures protection to poll officials

Discharge poll duty with commitment, dedication with a consitutional spirit, says poll chief

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

State Election Commissioner (SEC) N. Ramesh Kumar has advised polling officials, including returning officers, against feeling insecure during the ensuing gram panchayats elections in the state.

In a statement here on Saturday he assured all officials that they would be under the protection of the SEC.

Ramesh Kumar said that if any disciplinary action has to be initiated against them, the SEC's prior approval was mandatory, as directed by the Supreme Court.

Maintaining that subjecting government employees to threat was unethical, he advised officials on poll duty not to get frightened over intimidating tactics. He said that the Election Commission is an independent constitutional authority and its mandate is to conduct the elections and added that the Governor serves as his custodian at the time of elections.

He called upon the officials on poll duty to discharge their duty with commitment, dedication bearing a constitutional spirit and said that persons occupying positions were temporary while institutions were permanent.

SEC NOTIFIES
PHASE III OF GP
ELECTIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

The State Election Commission notified conduct of gram panchayat polls in Phase III here on Saturday.

Accordingly, out of a total number of 3,255 gram panchayats, 3,211 are going for the polls and out of a total of 31,868 wards, 31,516 are going for the polls in all 13 districts in the state.

Receipt of nominations has begun and will continue up to February 8 and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is February 12 up to 3 pm. Polling will be held on February 17 from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm while counting will begin from 4.00 pm on wards on the same day.

ARRANGEMENTS
IN PLACE FOR
1st, 2nd PHASEDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 6

All the arrangements are in place for conducting the first phase polls on February 9 and second phase on February 13 in SPSR Nellore district.

District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu revealed this while addressing media persons at Naidupet after a review at the RDO's office on the process of nominations at Gudur and Naidupet divisions on Saturday.

He said the entire poll material had been shifted to the Mandals where polls are scheduled for the first two phases of the election, and special attention is being paid to observe the situation in the sensitive villages. According to the Collector, first phase polls are being conducted in Kavalu and second phase at Atmakur where the process nominations have been completed.

of speaking against privatisation of the steel plant.

The TD president recalled how the then TD government in AP brought pressure on A.B. Vajpayee government at the centre to protect the steel plant from a similar threat at that time. He demanded that the Chief Minister explain to people why his regime is not taking up any concerted action now.

Naidu maintained that VSP is a jewel-like project won by Telugu people after fight against the Modi government by waging a hard-fought struggle in which over 32 people laid down their lives. He said TD will fight conspiracies of Jagan Reddy gang to buy precious lands of the steel plant at the price of scrap.



DGP D. Gautam Sawang addresses the media conference on panchayat raj elections at the police headquarters near Mangalagiri on Saturday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

State police gear up for smooth GP elections

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

AP police have taken all necessary measures to ensure smooth conduct of ensuing gram panchayat elections in the state, announced director general of police Gautam Sawang on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference here, he said the police department has identified 6,254 hyper sensitive, 8,555 sensitive and 983 problematic locations in 13 districts of AP. Measures have accordingly been taken to protect law and order in these areas. Check posts have been established at various points to curb illegal transportation of money and liquor.

Responding to a question on State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar order that panchayatraj minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy be put under house arrest, the DGP said that he is yet to receive instructions in this regard. Action will be taken after studying the order, he stated.

● **RESPONDING TO a question on State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar order that panchayatraj minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy be put under house arrest, the DGP said that he is yet to receive instructions in this regard.**

The DGP said police have formulated a special strategy for ensuring polling in extremist-affected and faction-ridden areas. Drones and body-worn cameras will be deployed and an eye will be kept on and social media in case people try to disturb peace. He pointed out that there are 9,942 different types of licensed arms in AP of which 9,199 have been deposited, 30 impounded, 677 are related to public sector and 36 arms are yet to be deposited.

Sawang said as many as 1,47,391 persons have been bounded over in the entire state, 1,13,157 of them under 107 Cr. P. C., 33,873 under 110 Cr. P. C. and 361

under other rules in agency areas. Police have increased searches and surveillance, leading to seizure of 1,058 gelatin sticks and detonators, 17 country-made weapons, 37 safety/detonator fuses, three electric wires, two batteries and one air pistol.

DGP said, "A total of 14,362 police had been affected by Coronavirus. They, apart from those older, have not been deployed for election duties as a precautionary measure. Police personnel who have recovered from Covid have also been kept out of poll duties. All personnel have been given PPE kits, face masks, sanitisers and hand gloves. They have been instructed to follow Covid-19 protocol while discharging duties during elections," he underlined.

Sawang said so far, ₹13,03,73,319 in cash, gold, silver, liquor, arrack, vehicles, ganja and sarees have been seized, including ₹5,02,49,007 in cash. He maintained that vaccination of police personnel will start after completion of the electoral process.

9 papers of Desam, Jana Sena cancelled

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 6

The nomination papers of nine aspirants, who were backed by the TD and the Jana Sena, were rejected after scrutiny at Ramapuram in Owk mandal, causing a tense situation. The papers of two aspirants, who were backed by the ruling party, were cleared.

Alleged that officials were acting at the behest of the ruling party leaders, the aspirants whose papers were rejected and their relatives staged a stir in front of the polling station at the village. A complaint was lodged with Nandyal sub-collector Kalpana Kumari seeking immediate action against the Ramapuram election officer.

The Ramapuram sarpanch post has been reserved for the SC general category.

Almost all candidates said they had have appended the necessary documents along with the nomination papers. Saturday was listed for entertaining objections to the nomination papers.

On learning of the rejection of papers, aspirants reached the election office and held a protest, demanding that the officials tell them why their papers were rejected. No election officer turned up to address the issue.

Sudershan, one of the nine aspirants whose papers were rejected alleged while speaking to the media that the officials were leaning towards the ruling party.

TD FILES PLAINT
TO SEC OVER CM's
PHOTO TELECASTDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

Opposition Telugu Desam has lodged a complaint with State Election Commission against AP State FiberNet Limited (APSFN)-IPTV for overusing Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's photo in its telecasts, alleging that this could make voters exercise their franchise in favour of the ruling party in gram panchayat elections.

In its complaint to SEC, TD has demanded that it restrain the state government from misusing FiberNet. Telugu Desam leader Darapaneni Narendra and others pointed out that APSFL is an enterprise promoted and operated by government of Andhra Pradesh.

Poll campaign gathers steam in Nandyal villages

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 6

Candidates in the fray in the first phase of the ensuing gram panchayat elections have raised the pitch of their respective campaigns while going around villages seeking votes in Nandyal division. Those allotted symbols like scissors, basket, and cot are prominently displaying the symbols in order to catch the attention and win support of the electorate across villages.

It is estimated that money spent on publicity appears to be crossing the limit of ₹2.5 lakh for a village with 10,000 population and ₹1.5 lakh in villages with less than 10,000 people. One contesting as a ward member should spend a maximum of ₹50,000. However, the ceiling on expenditure seems ridiculously low if one were to go by the money

spent by the candidates in villages.

District election expenditure observer N Vineet Kumar said that all the candidates must conform to the expenditure limits. He said they have to maintain an expenditure register and log all the money spent on canvassing. He held a review meeting with officials at Nandyal on Saturday and asked officials to stay alert and keep track of any breaches in the expenditure ceiling.

Meanwhile, villagers are finding new ways to circumvent the State Election Commission (SEC) watch over unanimous elections in Kurunool district. Pandurangapuram village near Nandyal is a model village as it is fully inhabited by migrants from Guntur district. The village was found by migrant farmers from Munnangi, Tenali, Duggirala, and Guntur who took the call

of former chief minister Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy to cultivate lands on the banks of the KC Canal. Since then they have been growing three crops every year and are prospering, said Venktarami Reddy, a villager.

He said Pandurangapuram is set for elections.

"Our villagers are united and choose their leader on a consensus basis. We are away from any kind of controversies and politics. The entire village backs YSR Congress party as they fondly remember Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy who helped them in their farming activities. But due to the SEC ruling on unanimous elections, we are fielding dummy candidates to give a semblance of contest," he said.

Dolavathy is the panchayat president candidate here against a TD opponent, he said.

RAMBABU
WARNS BABUS
ON NORMS

From Page 1

Rambabu warned that strict action will be taken against officials who violate norms by implementing the SEC's orders.

The MLA criticised the election commissioner for being vindictive and supporting the political interests of the Telugu Desam.

In this regard, he pointed out that no action has been taken against Chandrababu for releasing the TD manifesto for panchayat elections, though the polls are held on a non-party basis.

Rambabu stated that electing candidates unanimously is a common phenomenon in all states and not new to Andhra Pradesh too. He accused SEC of deliberately blowing non-issues out of proportion in a bid to corner the government at opposition TD's behest.



Left party activists stage 'rasta roko' against the new farm laws introduced by the central government in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Farmers block NH 44 as part of 'chakka jam'

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 6

A 'rasta roko' was staged in Kurunool city on Saturday as part of the 'chakka jam' protest called by farmer associations agitating at borders of Delhi against the three new farm laws.

Traffic on National Highway 44 near ITC circle was held up for an hour as activists from AP Rythu Sangam, CITU, Tenant Farmers Association, and Rythu Coolie Sangam raised slogans demanding the repeal of the three contentious farm laws. They urged the government to rollback the three acts and created an atmosphere of peace for farmers in the country.

No untoward incidents, say cops

From Page 1

On the other hand, as the farmers in villages are getting ready to take part in the gram panchayat poll campaign, only a few of them took out rallies to extend their solidarity with the nationwide stir. The rallies had the support of the Left parties and farmers' unions.

Police said no major untoward incident was reported from any part in the state.

A round table conference was held in the city under the aegis of AITUC Rashtra Samiti underlining the need to protect the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant from getting privatised. CPI state secretary K. Ramakrishna slammed the Centre for going on a spree of divestment from public sector companies when the country was facing hardships due to Covid-19 and called for all efforts to oppose privatisation of the plant in the steel city.

STRONG | OPPN VSP is a jewel-like project won by Telugu people after fight, says ex-CM

Naidu questions CM over Vizag plant

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday criticised Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for "mortgaging" all his party 151 MLAs, 22 Lok Sabha and six Rajya Sabha members to the Central government for saving himself from the 31 cases registered by the CBI.

Naidu said that as Chief Minister, Jagan Mohan Reddy had the responsibility of saving the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) from falling into private hands. He accused YSRC MPs of sealing their mouths at the behest of CM, instead

of speaking against privatisation of the steel plant.

The TD president recalled how the then TD government in AP brought pressure on A.B. Vajpayee government at the centre to protect the steel plant from a similar threat at that time. He demanded that the Chief Minister explain to people why his regime is not taking up any concerted action now.

Naidu maintained that VSP is a jewel-like project won by Telugu people after waging a hard-fought struggle in which over 32 people laid down their lives. He said TD will fight conspiracies of Jagan Reddy gang to buy precious lands of the steel plant at the price of scrap.

29 leaders, including women, held

From Page 1

About 29 leaders, including women, belonging to CPM, CPI and affiliated trade unions, HMS, IFTU and AITUC were arrested and bundled into waiting vans. The leaders said their protests are over steel plant's privatisation as well as opposing farm bills passed by the Centre.

Speaking on the occasion,

The TD chief said in the name of decentralisation and shifting of AP's capital,

city CPM secretary B. Ganga Rao said the Modi government's move to privatise the steel plant is a conspiracy against people of Andhra Pradesh.

The plant came up after 32 people sacrificed their lives for its establishment and farmers of 32 villages gave away their 24,000 acres of land for establishing the country's only shore-based steel plant. He demanded

that all political parties support the agitation all over the state till the union government drops its plan to privatise the plant.

Rao asked BJP leaders to spell their stand instead of making conflicting statements. He wanted Jana Sena leader Pawan Kalyan to snap his ties with BJP and participate in the agitation against privatisation of the steel plant.

Jagan Mohan Reddy has now set his sights on the steel plant lands, he stated.

YSRC chief has already grabbed hills and hillocks of the port city as well as prime

SHORT TAKES

TWO SPECIAL TRAINS TO TIRUPATI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 6

East Coast Railway has decided to run special express trains between Bilaspur-Tirupati via Visakhapatnam with effect from Sunday.

The Tirupati-Bilaspur special express will leave Tirupati on Thursday and Sunday with effect from February 7 at 10.50 am, reach Visakhapatnam on the next day at 4.35 am and depart at 4.55 am and will reach Bilaspur at 5.25 pm.

In return direction, the train will leave Bilaspur on Tuesday and Saturday with effect from February 9 at 3.35 pm which will reach Visakhapatnam on the next day at 3.05 am and depart at 3.25 am and reach Tirupati at 10.45 pm.

The Tirupati-Puri special express will leave Tirupati 5 days a week on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 10.35 am with effect from February 8 which will reach Visakhapatnam the next day at 4.40 am and depart at 5.00 am and reach Puri at 2.35 pm.

In the return direction, the train will reach Visakhapatnam on the next day at 3.05 am and depart at 3.25 am and reach Tirupati at 10.45 pm.

ADMISSIONS TO TTD JUNIOR COLLEGES

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 6

TTD is organising spot admissions on February 8 for remaining seats at the Sri Venkateswara Junior College and Sri Padmavati Junior College.

In a press release, the Education Department officials stated that spot admissions would commence at 9 am on February 8 with preference to locals without hostel facility.

Students who applied online <http://admissions.tirumala.org> had already undergone two rounds of counselling and seats were allotted through a computerised lottery system.

Students seeking only college seats should appear for spot admissions at concerned junior colleges with all certificates and fees.

FORMER MLA WITHDRAWS RESIGNATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 6

The former MLA Pilli Anantha Lakshmi and her husband Pilli Satyanarayana Murthy withdrew their resignations for the party posts to Telugu Desam Party on Saturday. They announced that they would tender resignations for the party posts on Friday, expressing resentment over the reported remarks of the former home minister Nimmakayala China Rajappa that they were not very effective in criticising YSRC leaders in Kakinada Rural Assembly Constituency.

However, the party senior leader, Yanamala Ramakrishnu and others persuaded Anantha Lakshmi and her husband Pilli Satyanarayana Murthy and continued in the party by holding their respective posts.

APSPDCL TO ENSURE POWER DURING POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 6

H. Haranatha Rao, Chairman and Managing Director of APSPDCL (AP Southern Power Distribution Company Ltd) has directed field officers to maintain uninterrupted power supply during the coming panchayat elections by taking necessary steps.

During a review with superintending engineers and divisional engineers attended of 5 districts at Tirupati on Saturday, he said that the APSPDCL had collected 117 per cent of LT revenue in January due to special attention paid the arrears from the government departments.

He directed the department's district officers to select top ten extended pending services and collect the dues through revenue recovery act.

● He directed the department's district officers to select top ten extended pending services and collect the dues through revenue recovery act.

Mercury drops in state

Cool weather will continue till February 11, says director of IMD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 5

Minimum temperature dropped in many coastal Andhra Pradesh parts for the second day on Friday. Nandigama in Krishna district witnessed a fall of 3.5°C registering 15.4°C, followed by Visakhapatnam where the minimum temperature dropped by 3.4°C and recorded 15.8°C. The minimum temperature dropped by 3.4°C in Anantapur which recorded 15.4 degrees Celsius. Kalingapatnam in Srikakulam registered a drop of 3.9°C and recorded 15.4°C.

Director of IMD, Amaravati S. Stella told *Deccan Chronicle* that northerly winds particularly blowing from Odisha caused the drop in the temperature.

The situation will continue till February 11, she added.



Children climb the fencing of the Hippopotamus enclosure at Indira Gandhi Zoological Park in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. — DC

India appreciated globally for handling of Covid: Jaishankar

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

Union minister for external affairs S. Jaishankar on Saturday asserted that India has received international acclaim for its successful handling of Covid-19 pandemic and reviving Indian economy through its Atmanirbhar Bharat programme.

Addressing mediapersons here on Saturday, he pointed out that the country, under leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has initiated a series of preventive and protective measures to control Coronavirus. This helped the country stand first globally in the Covid-19 recovery rate.

Mr Jaishankar explained in detail how the nation rose to the occasion and produced medical equipment like PPE kits and masks to



S. Jaishankar speaks to media in Vijayawada. — DC

fight Coronavirus. These other countries after were even exported to meeting the domestic

demand. BJP MP G.V.L. Narasimha Rao, who also addressed the press conference, alleged that the state government is spreading misinformation about Centre not allocating funds to Andhra Pradesh in the Union Budget. He asked how the Centre could allot funds without the state submitting project proposals. On Metro Rail, he said as no proposal has been sent to the Centre for allocation of funds, no money was allotted.

Referring to the Dugarajapatnam Port, he said that though the Centre had sought proposals for alternative ports owing to the non-viability of Dugarajapatnam Port, neither the previous Telugu Desam regime nor present YSR Congress government has responded.

SEB starts 18 control rooms to curb crimes

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 6

The AP Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) state commissioner Vineet Brijlal said that as many as 18 control rooms have been started for the restraintment of excise related crimes and election-related transactions in AP. He said Control Rooms were set up at state and district level to receive complaints round the clock, collection of intelligence and submission of DSR and reports to SEC. He said that complaints in all modes i.e., by toll-free 18004254868/phone/Whatsapp/online (ECMS-<http://cpe.ap.gov.in/EeGP/>) news from electronic media & print media and in-person are being received and redressed.

Mr Brijlal said that State Control Room was started in Vijayawada with 9491030853 / 0866-2843131 phone numbers and similarly control rooms were started in all districts with local numbers. He said that 50 Checkposts, 30 border mobile teams are formed by

● Brijlal said that coordination meetings with neighbouring states excise departments were conducted by Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, Anantapur, Krishna, Guntur SEB

SEB exclusively. He further said that 389 check posts and 100 mobile teams are set up. He said that the SEB booked 2,587 cases, arrested 1979 accused and seized 12,547 litres of IMFL (8682 litres of NDPL, 3865 litres of DPL), 20,578 litres of ID, destroyed 8,23,044 litres of FJ wash and seized 355 vehicles. He stated that SEB also seized ₹1,65,01,300 cash, one rifle, 7.3 kg of gold and 439-carat diamond ornaments worth ₹2.75 crore.

Mr Brijlal said that coordination meetings with neighbouring states excise departments were conducted by Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, Anantapur, Krishna, Guntur SEB/police officers with Odisha, Karnataka and TS excise officers respectively to prevent the inflow of liquor.

LIQUOR OUTLETS TO BE CLOSED BEFORE 44 HRS OF ELECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 6

The East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy issued orders for closure of all the liquor depots, distilleries, breweries, retail liquor outlets, 2B bars, toddy shops and all kinds of in-house licenses existing and falling in the jurisdiction 44 hours before the polling date. These liquor-related all shops should be closed from 7.30 pm of February 7 to 9 until the completion of counting in first phase elections, to be held in Kakinada and Peddapuram and from 7.30 pm of February 11 to 13 until the completion of counting in Rajamahendravaram and Ramachandrapuram divisions and February 15 to 17 till the completion of counting at third phase elections in Rampachodavaram and Yetapaka.

MLA launches door to door eye screening

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 6

Sankar Foundation Super Speciality Eye Hospital on Saturday launched door to door eye screening, a project funded by Andhra Petrochemicals Ltd (APL) under their CSR, in Mindhi village in Visakhapatnam. The eye care project, first of its kind in the city, aimed at eradicating avoidable blindness in Mindhi and its adjoining colonies. The project was inaugurated by Gudivada Anamath, MLA, Anakapalli recently in the presence of Narsappa, Vice President, APL and

● A team of medical and paramedical staff of Sankar Foundation started door to door eye screening every day morning at 7 am. As on date, around 4,324 persons screened and provided with 1800 spectacles to the needy persons and performed 133 cataract and subspecialty surgeries (over 30) in Mindhi and its adjoining colonies.

Sankar Foundation officials. A team of medical and paramedical staff of Sankar Foundation started door to door eye screening every day morning at 7 am. As on date, around 4,324 persons screened and provided with 1800 spectacles to the needy persons and performed 133 cataract and subspecialty surgeries (over 30) in Mindhi and its adjoining

colonies. During the screening, people suffering from refractive errors were provided with spectacles fitted in a frame of their choice free of cost. People identified with cataract were also operated in Sankar Foundation Hospital by providing transport, food, accommodation and post-operative surgery medicines.

Eat healthy



Kids enjoy their midday meal while sitting in a circle at an Anganwadi center near Dandubazar in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. — DC

ADIVASI RESOLUTION 30 sarpanches elected unanimously with single nomination

GP voters told to elect strong leaders

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 6

With completion of nominations and withdrawals for the first and second phase elections to gram panchayats, campaigning has gathered momentum in various villages of East Godavari district.

Sources said many candidates of opposition parties like Telugu Desam and Jana Sena are not keen on contesting the elections as they have no money to spare given their economic condition.

Though some TD candidates got ready to contest, YSRC leaders in their areas threatened them of economic retribution. They thus withdrew their candidatures.

“Though some contractors have completed development works during the



Enikepadu, Prasadampadu Rural area sarpanch and ward members conducting a campaign with their allotted symbols in Vijayawada on Saturday. — DC

Telugu Desam regime, their bills are yet to be sanctioned by the state government. When these contractors wanted to contest panchayat elections, YSRC leaders threatened them with non-payment of their dues. Thus, they have dropped out of con-

test,” said TD Kakinada parliamentary district general secretary Pilli Satyanarayana Murthy. He pointed out that most of the contests in East Godavari district are between YSRC groups themselves.

The Adivasi Maha Sabha

has appealed to voters that they should elect leaders who can strengthen their panchayats. Maha Sabha legal adviser I. Suryanarayana said one of the topics being discussed at the campaign meetings is resettlement of people displaced by the

Polavaram project. He said Maha Sabha has appealed that panchayats must elect leaders who would support the cause of people.

According to sources, 30 gram panchayat sarpanches have been elected unanimously with filing of a single nomination.

In Rampachodavaram and Yetapaka divisions, the third phase election process has started on Saturday. In Yetapaka division 55 nominations have been filed for sarpanch posts and 74 for ward member posts in four mandals of Chinturu, V. R. Puram, Kunavaram and Yetapaka. 70 nominations for sarpanch posts and 93 nominations for ward members have been filed in Rampachodavaram division.

EQUIPMENT TO 75 DISABLED PERSONS GIVEN

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, FEB. 6

The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) of East Godavari District Chairman and the District Principal Sessions Judge Ms M. Babitha distributed hearing and impaired machines, wheelchairs, tricycles and other equipment to 70 disabled persons through Sri Gurudeva Charitable Trust at Kothavalasa of Vizianagaram District here on Saturday. She said that the DLSA would take steps to affect poverty alleviation schemes affecting the poor through service organizations. She said that the Trust founder R. Jagadish Babu founded it with inspiration.

DECCAN Chronicle

7 FEBRUARY 2021



Shashi Warriar

Off the beaten track

The WhatsApp riddle: What's the big secret?

When I first saw the notice saying that the terms of WhatsApp's privacy agreement were going to change, I panicked. In my mind, at least, there was some reason for that panic. I sometimes share my writings with friends and publishers on WhatsApp, and I was afraid that Mark Zuckerberg would simply claim copyright on whatever I shared thus. Then came TV interviews with technology experts and lawyers saying that WhatsApp was going to swallow up everything you put on it, and let Zuckerberg do with it whatever he likes, which they said was against Indian law. And then Elon Musk came up with something about Signal, an app that allows you to do much the same things that WhatsApp does without gobbling up your data.

This was towards the middle of January, a couple of weeks late, because I see these things only when people point them out to me. I was stewing in my panic, unable to decide whether to change from WhatsApp to some other app, and people were giving me conflicting bits of advice: stay with WhatsApp, switch to Signal, switch to Telegram, get off social media, wait a little and go with the herd, and so on.

So when my professor friend came visiting, I was genuinely glad to see him. "What do you make of this WhatsApp trouble?" I asked him when he was seated comfortably with a cup of tea in his hand and a plate of snacks on the table in front of him.

"Nothing," he replied, taking a large bite from a hot samosa. The insides of the samosa were much hotter than the outside, and it took him a few seconds to regain control of his scalded mouth.

"Nothing?" I asked.

"Nothing," he repeated.

"I don't understand," I said. "What about all those invasions of privacy and so on?"

"The invasions started when you began to enjoy what you thought were the free benefits of the Internet," he replied.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Take email, for instance," he said. "You've been using it for decades without paying a paisa for it. But did you ever read the details of your agreement with the service provider?"

"No," I said. "Everyone I knew agreed, and so did I. I never knew there was anything untoward about the agreement."

"Ah!" he said. "How do you think all the companies that provide the service pay all their employees, and for the software and the servers and everything?"

"Advertising," I said, hopefully.

"Of course," he replied. "Business is like politics, like most human activity. Everyone tries to take his work one step past the competition. No one wants to be remembered as the person who let something stagnate and die. Right?"

"Right," I said, a bit tentatively. I hadn't really thought about it but he being a professor must have.

"So they're always looking for opportunities to expand their reach," he said, "and, with social media the way they are, the simplest way they can expand is by getting to know you better. And do you know why they're spending so much on machine learning and artificial intelligence?"

"No," I said. "I was hoping you'd tell me."

"Well," he said, "they've always had trouble finding people to analyse the data they've grabbed. You know, when people go out for a meal, they post photos of what they eat before they eat it. If I post a photo of my samosa on Facebook before I eat it, do you know how much they get to know? From my GPS they know that this is your home, and in a corner of the photo they see a Brand X sofa or a Brand Y TV, so they know about your tastes. But then, can you imagine anything more boring than going through millions and million of photos of samosas or cakes? So, artificial intelligence and machine learning."

"But I thought machine learning and artificial intelligence were meant to relieve people of the drudgery of things like housework and taking care of old people and so on," I said.

"That's what they say," he replied. "The truth is that they've developed all these algorithms to recognise, say, the brand of a sofa in a corner of a photo of a black forest pastry. And they've been following you using the GPS chip in your phone. So now they can figure out what you'll eat next and where, and, besides, your taste in furniture and appliances. Business."

"Right," I said.

"And then there are selfies," he continued, a samosa later. "Social media sites use them to figure out where you're going for your next holiday, and what you'll do there, whether you're stupid enough to try to get yourself in a selfie with a crocodile or at the edge of a thousand-foot cliff."

"Then someone realised that the programs that could analyse all this could also do other things. So there were spinoffs. Those same programs, with small modifications, can also recognise dirt on a floor, or chart a path in a room that'll get a robot to sweep the floor with the minimum of effort, in the least possible time. That's dead easy. So is something like facial recognition, or thumbprint identification."

"So, you see, all the good things that they claim, all that wonderful security stuff about recognising faces and thumbprints and explosives and everything, it's all secondary. It's a sort of side effect of having to make programs to analyse the largest and most boring collections of photos and videos and GPS locations that people have taken in the entire history of the mankind."

"So what's all the protest about?" I asked.

"Umm," he said, picking up the last samosa. "That's just misdirection. You know, almost all of us lead such dreary, boring lives. The protesters, they're afraid people will figure out that their biggest secret is that they have no worthwhile secrets!"

Shashi Warriar has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Besides writing, he teaches strategic communication at a business school.

Subhani



Maligning the messenger pays diminishing returns



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

In the days leading to the infamous declaration of the Emergency in 1975, PM Indira Gandhi, flush from her victory over Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, was showing signs of becoming increasingly autocratic. She was impatient about dissent, convinced of her own invincibility, and adamant about pursuing what she thought was good for the country irrespective of what the Opposition was saying. It was then that the theory of the "foreign hand" gained currency. She resorted to the not-unfamiliar stratagem of conflating all internal dissent as the manifestation of a conspiracy against her regime from abroad; "CIA agents", began to proliferate, and Opposition leaders, and those who had the temerity to oppose her, were seen as puppets playing to a conspiracy orchestrated by international powers.

A similar stratagem seems to be at play today. Undoubtedly, the sovereignty of our country is paramount, and we must ceaselessly be vigilant against outside powers that seek to destabilise it. But do Rihaana and Greta Thunberg qualify to pose such a threat?

Greta is a Swedish environmentalist activist not yet out of her teens; Rihaana is a celebrity singer-actor, who has sales of 250 million records worldwide, and is considered one of the most successful music artists of all time. Both of them have been involved in social activism. Greta's environmental evangelism has won her global recognition. Rihaana is known for her involvement in humanitarian causes, and has been vocal against police brutality in America against the blacks.

In a democracy there will be protests. Such protests, if they are allowed to linger on for so long, will attract global attention. Filing FIRs against those who comment is a highly immature and insecure way of responding.

First, the protesting farmers were called by over-zealous supporters of the government as Khalistanis, Maoists, Urban Naxals and Pakistanis. Then the Opposition parties supporting the farmers were called anti-national.

farmers dying in the bitter cold, it is bound to attract media attention worldwide. The government may be right in believing in agrarian reforms, but there is little doubt that the manner in which the bills were passed was undemocratic, and was unprecedented by the mandatory process of consultations with stakeholders. Equally, the manner in which the protests were handled leaves much to be desired. A certain arrogance informed the government's approach from the very beginning. What prevented the agricultural minister, if not the PM himself, in going to the protest site, and talking to the farm leaders over a glass of lassi? The offer to keep the laws in abeyance for some time could have been made much earlier, with the government assuring the farmers that there would be full discussions with them before the laws are implemented.

Reforms are desirable, but in a democracy, opposition to them — some of it very valid — must be taken on board. Besides, a large number of the protesters are from the sensitive border state of Punjab, which has seen radicalisation in the past, with the fullest support of Pakistan. It serves nobody's purpose to see Punjab radicalised again. Such factors should have weighed in with the government. After the condemnable violence on January 26, the protest movement was demoralised, and farmers were leaving for home on their own volition. But Yogi Adityanath's police gratuitously rekindled the

protest again. The visual footage of a government using nails and ditches to barricade itself from its own people made for dramatic watching, and it is futile to believe that its audience was restricted only to India.

Now, the government has made a laughing stock of the nation by filing an FIR against unnamed "foreign" conspirators, citing Greta's tool-kit tweet as evidence. Earlier, the government thought it fit to respond to Rihaana's tweet. The correct response would have been to ignore such tweets. If, however, the government felt that such "global influencers" should be replied to, the appropriate way would have been for a letter from a bureaucrat to be delivered to these commentators through the agency of our embassies explaining the government's point of view and saying that India as a democratic nation is well equipped to resolve such disputes. As the PM never tires of saying, we are a nation of "sawa karod" — 1.25 billion people. We are the world's largest democracy, an emerging global super power. In a democracy there will be protests. Such protests, if they are allowed to linger on for so long, will attract global attention. Filing FIRs against those who comment is a highly immature and insecure way of responding.

The game of tarnishing the messenger has diminishing returns. First, the protesting farmers were called by some over-zealous supporters of the government as Khalistanis, Maoists, Urban Naxals and Pakistanis. Then the Opposition parties supporting the farmers were called anti-national. Now, foreign commentators are being accused of being part of an international conspiracy against India. All of this, when the real priority is to sensibly resolve the impasse with the farmers.

The writer, an author and a diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

VIZAG STEEL PLANT

The NDA government is giving the Opposition a handle to protest against its privatisation spree (*Steel plant employees take out massive rally, DC, Feb. 6*). The latest being the disinvestment in Vizag Steel Plant. By all accounts the massive rally should send a clear message to the Centre that such an action will not be tolerated by the people of Andhra Pradesh as over 40 persons had sacrificed their lives to secure the steel plant. All the successive governments ever since the steel plant started functioning have failed to make the Centre allot a captive iron ore mine for the plant. As a result of that the plant is suffering from shortage of raw material affecting the output. It is a shame that the TD leaders now demand the present government to seek allotment of a captive iron ore mine.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

The proposed strategic sale of RINL, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, seems to be heading for a showdown between the trade unions and the ruling dispensation. The decision of the disinvestment by the Centre would deeply hurt the self-esteem of Telugu-speaking people as they have struggled and sacrificed for its cause. Further, the ruling party in the state needs to fight tooth and nail to get the proposal dropped with the Centre.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

The proposal to privatise the Vizag Steel Plant comes like a bolt from the blue. It was also not mentioned in the recent Union Budget presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman. However, it came to light through a tweet by the Secretary of Public Investment. However, it is a dent on the pride of Andhras as it was realised with sacrifices of politicians and students who agitated under the slogan 'Visakha Utku Andhrula Hakku'. It should be remembered that the privatisation process was commenced a few years ago when it was taken out from the control of SAIL and given to RINL.

Pratapa Reddy Yaramala
Tiruvuru, Krishna district

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Pakistan refuses to return hijackers

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY. 6 Pakistan said today that it would not hand over to India the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane. The refusal was conveyed to Indian High Commissioner B.K. Acharya by the Foreign Office on Islamabad. Radio Pakistan said, Mr. Acharya was summoned to the foreign office and told that the two hijackers, Mohammed Hashim Qureshi and Mohammad Ashraf, were "not Indian nationals" and, therefore, there was no question of their being handed over to India.

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Farm stir: Snap ties, says JJP to chief; Yogi gags his ministers

Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala of the Jannayak Janata Party is under immense pressure from his colleagues to walk out of the BJP-led ruling coalition in solidarity with the protesting farmers. The JJP's Karnal district president Inderjit Singh Goraya recently resigned from the party to support the farmers demand for the repeal of the three contentious farm laws. In addition, two JJP legislators have spoken in favour of the agitating farmers and have warned Mr Chautala that the party will pay a heavy price if he does not come out openly against the farm laws. Though JJP cadres are undoubtedly agitated about their party's wishy-washy stand on the farmers' agitation, Dushyant Chautala's unwillingness to share power with his colleagues has also contributed to the rumblings in the JJP. Mr Chautala is heading as many as 10 ministries, which include high-profile portfolios like excise and taxation, industry and commerce and food and civil supplies. There is only one more JJP minister in the Haryana Cabinet,

Anoop Dhanak who holds the inconsequential archeology and museums portfolio. Given the power he wields, it is not surprising that Mr Chautala is in no hurry to snap ties with the BJP.

Faced with a revolt by farmers in western Uttar Pradesh, the Yogi Adityanath government has ordered a virtual gag order on its ministers and MLAs. It has been informally conveyed to them that no one other than those authorised by the government should make any public statements or give interviews to the media regarding the farmers' protests. Any MLA or minister violating this "code of conduct" immediately receives a phone call seeking an explanation for his or her transgression. These instructions were issued after several legislators from western Uttar Pradesh failed to come out strongly against the ongoing farmers' agitation, especially BKU leader Rakesh Tikait, and have instead sounded apologetic and conciliatory when questioned by the media about their views on the stir. In fact, an MLA from this region even sidestepped ques-

tions on Mr Tikait's aggressive stand, saying the agitating farmers were like members of his extended family.

Though Congress members have become accustomed to Rahul Gandhi's habit of disappearing for long breaks abroad, there was panic in the party recently when word went round that the Nehru-Gandhi scion had left for Germany. After all, this was in the midst of the Budget Session of Parliament and at the peak of the farmers' protests. Party MPs and other leaders made frantic calls to ascertain the veracity of these reports. Many called up Rahul Gandhi's close aides and one leader even tapped into his contacts at the airport to find out if he had boarded an international flight. There was all-round relief when Rahul Gandhi's office confirmed that he was very much in town and that he would be attending Parliament. It is, however, difficult to understand the panic over the Congress leader's disappearance during a Parliament session given the fact that his contributions in the Lok Sabha have been minimal. On the plus side,

Rahul Gandhi has addressed the media several times in recent weeks both in Delhi and outside.

The security arrangements inside the Parliament House building have been beefed up to such an extent that it is being compared to barricading at the Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders. In an unprecedented and unusual move, Delhi police personnel have been deployed inside the building along with the Parliament's watch and ward staff. The presence of the police personnel, who have been stationed all along the corridors, is inescapable. As it is, the number of media persons allowed inside has been restricted and even those who have been issued passes are finding it difficult to move around freely. Reporters, who could earlier linger outside the offices of ministers in the hope of getting a tiny bit of news, are now shooed away if they dawdle in the corridors for longer than five minutes. The police personnel randomly stop reporters and demand to see their passes when it is

known that only passholders can enter the building. Several media-persons have lodged a protest but apologetic security officers maintain they have instructions "from the top" to keep a vigil on them.

It is close to a year since he brought down the Kamal Nath government in Madhya Pradesh but former Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia, now with the BJP, is out to take revenge against his former colleagues for humiliating him. When ministers were given duties in different constituencies for the Republic Day celebrations, Mr Scindia made sure that his loyalist Govind Rajput was sent to Chhindwara, Kamal Nath's fiefdom. According to the buzz in Bhopal, this was meant to be a message for the veteran Congress leader and his son, who represents the constituency now, that they are on Mr Scindia's radar and that his next target is to uproot them from their stronghold.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

IN BRIEF

MODI HAILS
COUNTRY'S
JUDICIARY

Ahmedabad, Feb 6: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday praised the country's judiciary, saying that it has performed its duty well in safeguarding people's rights and upholding personal freedom, and added that it has also strengthened the Constitution.

He said the Supreme Court in India has conducted the highest number of hearings via video-conferencing from among the top courts of all the countries in the world during the coronavirus pandemic.

Modi also said that in order to make the country's justice system future-ready, the possibility of using Artificial Intelligence was being explored. He was speaking after virtually releasing a commemorative postage stamp on the Gujarat High Court for sixty years of its establishment. "Every countryman can say that our judiciary has worked with firmness to uphold our Constitution. Our judiciary has strengthened the Constitution by its positive interpretation," Modi said.

"The Supreme Court has conducted the highest number of hearings through video-conferencing in the world during the pandemic," he said.

Through constructive and creative interpretation of the Constitution, our judiciary has strengthened the Constitution itself, he added.

"Whether it is to safeguard the rights of citizens, question of personal freedom, or a situation wherein the interest of the country is to be given top-most priority, the judiciary has both understood and fulfilled its responsibilities," he said.

He said the root of good governance is in law, as has been held in the ancient Indian scriptures, he said. "This idea has been a part of our 'sanskar' since ancient times. This mantra gave moral strength to our freedom struggle, and the makers of our Constitution also gave it top priority," he said. This trust towards the judiciary has given confidence to the common man, given him the strength to stand for truth, Modi said.

4 GIRLS
SENTENCED
FOR RAGGING

**RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOVAL, FEB 6**

A local court here sentenced 4 girls for ragging a junior in their college and driving her to commit suicide 8 years ago.

The District and Sessions court here on Friday evening delivered the judgement in the case relating to death of Anita Sharma (18), second year student of a pharmacy college here by suicide in 2013, convicting her 4 seniors of ragging her and abetting her to take the extreme step, according additional district prosecution officer Rajendra Upadhyaya. The court, however, acquitted the faculty member of the college Manish R in the case.

Those convicted in the case are Nidhi Magre, Dipti Solanki, Divyanshi Sharma and Kriti Gaur. The deceased hanged her in the bedroom of her residence here in 2013.

In the suicide note recovered in her room, she had blamed her 4 seniors and a faculty member of the college for driving her to commit suicide.

According to the suicide note, she was subjected to ragging by them ever since she took admission in the college. She was forced to write their mid-semester copies.

INDIA DEVELOPING
7 MORE COVID
VACCINES

Kolkata, Feb 6: Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Saturday said that the country is developing seven more Covid-19 vaccines and also working on further vaccine development to inoculate every citizen of India.

He said the Centre does not have any immediate plan to make the vaccines available in the open market and a decision will be taken as the situation demands. The inoculation process for people aged above 50 will start in March, he told reporters. "We are not dependent only on the two vaccines as the country is working on seven more indigenous vaccines." "Simultaneously, we are also working on the development of more vaccines because India is a huge country and we need more players and research to reach out to everyone," he said.

Nadda: People have decided
to bid adieu to dynastic rule

Nadda flags off BJP's rath yatra in Bengal; takes on Mamata, nephew

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
with agency inputs
KOLKATA, FEB. 6**

Flagging off the Bharatiya Janata Party's first ever Rath Yatra calling for 'Parivartan' (change) in poll bound West Bengal a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Saturday predicted that the people of the state have already decided to "bid adieu" to the dynastic rule of chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee and her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee to welcome the saffron party in the ensuing Assembly Election.

Mr Nadda led the first of the five Rath Yatras from Chotir Math Ground at Nabadwip in Nadia after he participated in a massive BJP roadshow from Foara More to Rabindranath Tagore statue and also had lunch with the farmers in Malda.

Nadda ate the humble khichdi seated on the floor with farmers as he reached out to peasants on Saturday.

On a day when farmer unions have called a 'chakka jam' against three contentious agricultural laws, Nadda reaffirmed the BJP and the Narendra Modi government's commitment to the welfare of the farming community.

Nadda was addressing a rally of farmers during the last phase of the month-long 'Krishak Suraksha Abhiyan' and 'Ek Mutthi Chawal' campaign which he had flagged off in order to mobilise the farming community in the state in favour of the BJP.

Mr Nadda told the farmers at Krishak Suraksha Saha-Bhoj at Sahapur of Malda, "I have an appeal to you all. Now the polls



BJP national president J.P. Nadda addresses a rally in Malda on Saturday.

- PTI

will be held. Say 'Ta Ta' and 'Namaste' to Mamataji. Wherever I go on a visit nowadays, I find big cut-outs of only two Pishi (aunt) and Bhaipo (nephew). Both are seen standing with folded hands. Mamataji, people of Bengal have decided to bid adieu to you and Bhaipo. You need to understand this."

Attacking the ruling TMC, he then sarcastically asked the crowd, "Tell me who is rice thief, who is the tarpaulin thief and who extorts money? You will bloom lotus here to usher development led by the Prime Minister in Bengal."

Mr Nadda, silent on the nationwide farmers' protests against the three farm laws, also alleged, "Mamataji meted out a very big injustice to the farmers. PM through his Kishan Samman Nidhi scheme allotted ₹6,000 per year to each farmer for welfare. But Mamataji, only to satisfy her arrogance and ego, did not

● On a day when farmer unions have called a 'chakka jam' against three contentious agricultural laws, Nadda reaffirmed the BJP and the Narendra Modi government's commitment to the welfare of the farming community.

allow the implementation of the central scheme, leaving more than 70 lakh farmers deprived here. However when 25 lakhs among the affected farmers sent their applications for the scheme on their own, only then she talked of implementing it."

He argued, "Mamataji, the election has come. So what is the point in trying to take advantage of what has already been lost! The way farmers and labourers have been deprived, Bengal, under her rule, has slipped to 24th position among the states in the list of 29."

Mocking Ms Banerjee for her allergy to 'Jai Shree

Ram' slogan, the BJP chief wondered, "When I talk, 'Jai Shree Ram' slogan is raised in front of me. Same happened on my way here from the helipad. As I waved my hands at the crowd, I was greeted with 'Jai Shree Ram.' But why does Mamataji feel so angry about it? Why does she have so much hatred for 'Jai Shree Ram' slogan? What is the problem? Is it wrong to be associated with the Indian culture? Is it wrong to remember the legend? If someone chants the slogan, her face turns red in so much anger. This reflects politics of these people is above the culture. They will not protect culture rather bring it down to serve their political interests."

It may be recalled that Banerjee had declined to speak at the event to celebrate Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary where "Jai Shree Ram" slogans were raised in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

SOU MEN MITRA
NAMED NEW
KOLKATA POLICE
COMMISSIONER

**DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 6**

The Mamata Banerjee government on Saturday transferred Anuj Sharma from the post of the Kolkata Police Commissioner and replaced him with Soumen Mitra, a Bengali face having previous experience in handling polls with iron hands, in a list of major reshuffle of 24 senior IPS officers, for their completion of a term of three years at the same post or unit, ahead of the Assembly Election.

Incidentally, this is also the second stint for Mr Mitra, who was posted as the additional director general (ADG) for training in the state police in his last assignment, as the Kolkata Police Commissioner. He earlier served the post on the orders of the Election Commission after it removed Rajeev Kumar as the city police chief before the Assembly Election in 2016 following allegations by the BJP of partiality.

While Mr Mitra earned a distinction for ensuring one of the most peaceful elections in the city with a strict police deployment, the Trinamul Congress supremo, after returning to power for the second consecutive time, however transferred him from the Kolkata Police Commissioner's post as ADG (Training) and replaced him with Mr Kumar, also her favourite cop.

N'land govt staff
to face action for
'seditious' posts

**MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, FEB. 6**

Nagaland Governor R N Ravi has directed the state chief secretary to initiate criminal proceedings against the state government employees indulging in seditious and subversive writings challenging the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country and posting them on social media.

Referring to one such instance of Dr H Inato Jimomi Naga, serving under the department of animal husbandry and veterinary department, Government of Nagaland, the commissioner and secretary to the Governor Mr T Mahabemo Yanthan said, "Such act of government servant constitutes serious offences under the penal laws and also gross misconduct under the service conduct rules inviting criminal prosecution and disciplinary action including dismissal from service."

Pointing out that Mr Jimoni's social media post justifying the demand of sovereign Nagaland was still in circulation on media platforms, security sources said that there have been numerous instances in

which state government employees are found to have been voicing separatist sentiment on various platforms.

Asserting that it was not only harming the national interest, security sources said that such activities of a section of government employees was hampering the development activities of the state as well.

Directing all the heads of the departments to sensitize the state government employees in the regard, the commissioner and secretary to governor in his letter to the state chief secretary said, "I have been directed to request the state government to take serious cognizance of such misconducts and initiate appropriate legal and disciplinary action against the delinquent government servants."

The letter of the governor has also been marked to union home secretary Mr Ajay Kumar Bhalla for necessary action and to check such seditious and subversive acts of state government employees.

State government sources told this newspaper that departmental proceedings have been initiated against the particular officer.

UN RIGHTS OFFICE ASKS AUTHORITIES,
FARMERS TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT

**DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 6**

The United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner, Human Rights (UN-OHCHR), on Saturday called for "maximum restraint" by both, the agitating farmers and the government, during the ongoing farmers' protest in India against

three new agriculture laws. It also called for an "equitable solution" in the matter and people's right to peaceful protest and Internet freedoms must be respected.

"We call on the authorities and protesters to exercise maximum restraint in the ongoing farmers' protests," the UN-OHCHR tweeted.

2 PROFESSORS
CLASH IN MP
UNIVERSITY

**DC CORRESPONDENT
BHOVAL, FEB 6**

Two professors of Vikram University in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh on Friday evening indulged in a violent clash, leaving other faculty members and students shell-shocked.

The incident went viral on Saturday forcing state higher education minister Mohan Yadav to order a probe into it.

Head of the Department of MBA stream in the university D D Bedia had heated arguments with his colleague in the department, professor Kamran Sultan in the office room of university registrar U N Shukla over the latter's plea to allow him to pursue LL.M in the university.

The argument flared up leading to exchange of blows between them.



Workers sanitize a classroom ahead of reopening of schools for 6 to 8 standard students in Prayagraj on Saturday. Schools were closed due to Covid-19 pandemic.

- PTI

NEW | SPEAKER

Prithviraj Chavan, Sangram Thopte are contenders for the post

Patole's resignation: Sena, NCP upset with Cong

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 6**

After the resignation of Nana Patole as Maharashtra Assembly speaker, the Congress party is contemplating on two names, Prithviraj Chavan and Sangram Thopte, for the post. Former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan is the top contender for the assembly speaker's post, in case the Congress keeps the post with them.

However, the possibility of former CM's appointment to the post has made the NCP nervous. Mr Chavan has a long history with the Sharad Pawar-led party, which accuses him of making every effort to undermine the NCP when he was the CM.

Therefore, Mr Pawar on Thursday had said that there would be afresh negotiations among all the

constituents of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress to decide a new nominee for the vacant post of Maharashtra Assembly speaker.

"Mr Pawar's statement is a pressure tactic to prevent Mr Chavan from taking over the Speaker's post. But if there are fresh talks, that also gives opportunity to the Congress to negotiate for deputy chief minister's post," a senior state Congress leader said.

"Once Mr. Patole took charge of state Congress chief's office from Balasaheb Thorat on February 11, he would have a meeting with the Sena and NCP to hold a discussion whether the Speaker's post would be exchanged for DCM post or not. If that is accepted, the Congress will give up its claim on the Speaker's

● An editorial in *Saamana* said there was substance in Pawar's view that the three coalition partners will take decision on the Speaker's post through negotiations now.

● It said the Congress had been given the post for five years, and not for forcing an election for the post midway through

post," he added.

The Shiv Sena on Saturday appeared to disavow ally Congress' decision to replace state Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat with Nana Patole and the latter's resignation as Maharashtra Assembly Speaker.

An editorial in the Sena mouthpiece *Saamana* also said there was substance in NCP chief Sharad Pawar's reported view that the three coalition

partners will take decision on the Speaker's post through negotiations now.

The *Saamana* editorial said the Congress had been given the post of Speaker for five years, and not for forcing an election for the post midway through which should have been avoided. "NCP chief Sharad Pawar said the three parties will sit together and decide what is to be done about the Speaker's post. One thing is certain, there is substance in Pawar's view," the Sena said.

Though organisational changes was an internal matter of the Congress, extra caution is required to ensure the decision does not impact the government, it said. "Two years ago, the situation was such that no leader was ready to take the mantle of the state Congress chief. Thorat took up the

responsibility and the party got more seats than expected in Assembly polls," the Sena said.

Apart from Mr Chavan, Sangram Thopte is also a contender for the Speaker's post. Earlier, Mr Thopte, who is representing Bhor Assembly Constituency, was promised to be accommodated in the MVA cabinet, but the party did not give him a berth in the cabinet. "In a case, Prithviraj Chavan does not take this post, Mr. Thopte would be a preferable choice for the speaker's post," the Congress leader said.

Mr Thopte is a senior Congress leader and has been elected four times to Maharashtra Assembly. The budget session of Maharashtra legislature is slated to begin from March 1 before which the new Speaker will be elected.

Rane rules out
BJP's alliance
with Shiv Sena

**BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 6**

Senior BJP leader Narayan Rane has said that there will be no truce with the Shiv Sena in future by his party. The BJP will come to power on its own in Maharashtra, he said.

With the differences among the coalition partners of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government being in open over several issues, there are speculations that the former estranged allies - BJP and Shiv Sena - might bury their hatchet and join hands again to rule the state. The possibility has been fueled by the meetings of some of the Sena-BJP leaders of late.

However, Mr Rane, the former Sena man and now BJP Rajya Sabha MP, scoffed off the possibility. "Some BJP leaders earlier might have talked about coming together with the Shiv Sena. But those are things of the past. Nobody in the BJP now wants to go with the Sena. Henceforth there will be no patch up with them," he said.

With the all-important B r i h a n n u m b a i Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections due next year, Mr Rane vowed that the next mayor will be from the BJP. "Mumbai needs the BJP for its development. We will provide infrastructure of international standard to the city," he said.

IN BRIEF

TWO SUMATRAN TIGERS ESCAPE INDONESIAN ZOO

Pontianak, Indonesia, Feb. 6: A critically endangered Sumatran tiger was shot dead on Saturday while another is still on the loose after they escaped from a zoo on Borneo island, leaving a zookeeper dead, an official said.

The tigers, both female and about 18 months old, escaped from Sinka Zoo in the town of Singkawang, West Kalimantan late Friday after days of torrential rain caused a landslide and opened a tunnel allowing their exit. A 47-year-old zookeeper was found dead with scratches and bite wounds on his body. Authorities also found dead a cassowary, ostrich and monkey near the tiger cage. Police and conservation officials were immediately dispatched to search for the tigers. Nearby tourism attractions were ordered to close and locals were told to stay at home while police searched for the animals.

THREE CLIMBERS MISSING ON K2 MOUNTAIN

Islamabad, Feb. 6: Three climbers have gone missing attempting to summit the world's second-highest mountain, K2, their expedition manager and the Alpine Club of Pakistan said Saturday.

Climbers John Snorri from Iceland, Juan Pablo Mohr from Chile and Muhammad Ali Sadpara from Pakistan reportedly lost contact with base camp on Friday.

"It's already been more than 30 hours, we (at base camp) have received no news of John Snorri, Ali Sadpara, and Juan Pablo Mohr, since none of the GPS trackers seem to be working", Chhang Dawa Sherpa, expedition manager, said.

An army helicopter has conducted a search flight for the missing climbers, Sherpa said in a separate statement.

"Unfortunately, they cannot trace anything and the condition up in the mountain and even at the base camp is getting poor", he said. News of the missing men comes a day after a Bulgarian mountaineer was confirmed to have died on K2.

He is the third mountaineer to die on K2's slopes this year, after a Spanish climber fell to his death last month. Russian-American Alex Goldfarb also died on a nearby mountain during an acclimatising mission in January. A team of Nepali climbers made history on K2 last month when they became the first to scale it in winter.

Will reverse Myanmar coup, says UN

'Absolutely essential' to carry out UNSC's calls for a return to democracy, asserts Secy-Gen Guterres

United Nations, Feb. 6: Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pledged Friday that the United Nations will do everything it can to unite the international community and create conditions for the military coup in Myanmar to be reversed.

The UN chief told a news conference it is "absolutely essential" to carry out the Security Council's calls for a return to democracy, respect for the results of the November parliamentary elections, and release of all people detained by the military, "which means the reversal of the coup that took place." "It is absolutely essential that that moves forward, and for that, I believe, we need to have all possible areas of pressure to make it happen," Guterres said.

Myanmar's military announced Monday on the eve of the meeting of new Parliament that it will take power for one year, accusing leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government of not investigating allegations of voter fraud in the November elections, where its party did poorly. It detained Suu Kyi, whose party swept that vote, and other lawmakers, activists, journalists and mem-



A protester gives bouquets of flowers to a line of riot police during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon on Saturday. — AFP

bers of civil society.

The election commission had refuted the military's allegations. In its first statement following the military's takeover on Thursday, the Security Council "stressed the need to uphold democratic institutions and processes, refrain

from violence, and fully respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law."

It also "emphasised the need for the continued support of the democratic transition in Myanmar," Guterres said. Christine Schraner Burgener, the

UN special envoy for Myanmar, had a first contact Friday with the military since the coup and expressed the UN's strong opposition to the takeover.

According to UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, she reiterated to Deputy Commander-in-Chief Vice

Gen. Soe Win "the secretary-general's strong condemnation of the military's action that disrupted the democratic reforms that were taking place in the country."

Schraner Burgener also reiterated her call for the immediate release of all detainees and emphasised the need for progress on the safe and voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya refugees, Dujarric said, calling it "an important conversation." More than 700,000 Rohingyas have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh since August 2017, when the military launched a clearance operation in response to attacks by a rebel group. The security forces have been accused of mass rapes, killings and the burning of thousands of homes.

A year ago, the UN's top court, the International Court of Justice, ordered Myanmar to do all it can to prevent genocide against the Rohingya, a Muslim minority. Guterres said Schraner Burgener is also in contact with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Brunei, which chairs the 10-nation regional group, including Myanmar.

— AP

Myanmar junta blocks net access

Yangon, Feb. 6: Myanmar's new military authorities appeared to have cut most access to the Internet on Saturday as they faced a rising tide of protest over their coup that toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's elected civilian government. Numerous internet users noted a slow disappearance of services, especially from mobile service providers, that accelerated sharply late Saturday morning. Broadband connection also later failed, while there were mixed reports on whether landline telephone service was still working.

Netblocks, a London-based service that tracks internet disruptions and shutdowns, said Saturday afternoon that "a near-total internet shutdown is now in effect" in Myanmar, with connectivity falling to just 16% of normal levels.

The broad outage followed Friday's govern-

ment order to block Twitter and Instagram that said some people were trying to use the platforms to spread what it deemed fake news. Facebook had already been blocked earlier in the week — though not completely effectively.

The communication blockages are a stark reminder of the progress Myanmar is in danger of losing after Monday's coup plunged the nation back under direct military rule after a nearly decade-long move toward greater openness and democracy.

— AP

Rana attorney: No hint India let go Headley extradition

Washington, Feb. 6: There is no indication that India has given up on the extradition of David Coleman Headley, the Mumbai terror attack accused, attorney of his co-accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana has told a US court. Rana, 59, a childhood friend of Headley, is facing extradition request by India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack in which 166 people, including six Americans, were killed.

Rana, who has been declared a fugitive by India, is opposing his extradition. In a submission early this week before the US District Court Judge in Los Angeles Jacqueline Chelonian, opposing his extradition, the attorney of

Rana claimed that as of now there is no indication in the record that India has agreed to forgo Headley's extradition to India. "India presumably could have agreed to forgo Headley's extradition in return for his assistance to the US, but there is no indication in the record that it did so," the court submission said.

"In fact, the opinion of the Indian prosecutor serving as the government's expert states: 'The present opinion is specific to the extradition request in respect of fugitive Tahawwur Hussain Rana. This opinion may not be construed in any manner to indicate that the various extradition requests pending with different sovereign nations.

— PTI



U.S. Sec. Blinken presses China on Uighurs, HK

Washington, Feb. 6: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed Beijing on its treatment of Uighurs, Tibetans and Hong Kong while China defended its policies in the first conversation between top officials of the two powers since President Joe Biden took office.

"I made clear the US will defend our national interests, stand up for our democratic values, and hold Beijing accountable for its abuses of the international system," Blinken said on Twitter of his call with senior Chinese official Yang Jiechi.

Blinken told Yang that the United States "will continue to stand up for human rights and democratic values, including in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong," a State Department statement said of the call, which took place on Friday Washington time.

Blinken also "pressed China to join the international community in condemning the military coup in Burma," it said, using the former name of Myanmar.

The top US diplomat said the United States would hold Beijing "accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific, including across the Taiwan Strait, and its undermining of the rules-based international system." The tough tone comes after Blinken in his confirmation hearing said he would continue former president Donald Trump's approach to China in a rare point of agreement

BIDEN'S SON PENS MEMOIR OF SURVIVAL

New York, Feb. 6: US President Joe Biden's son Hunter will come out with his memoir of addiction, loss and survival on April 6.

"Beautiful Things" will be published by Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster. "I come from a family forged by tragedies and bound by a remarkable, unbreakable love," Hunter, a lawyer, writes. The book details his descent into substance abuse and his tortuous path to sobriety. Holly Harris, publishing director (non-fiction) at Simon & Schuster UK, acquired UK and Commonwealth rights from Caspian Dennis at Abner Stein on behalf of Laura Nolan and David Granger at Aevitas Creative.

"This book is an extraordinary accomplishment — as gripping as it is courageous. I cannot wait to publish it," says Harris. — PTI

between the two administrations.

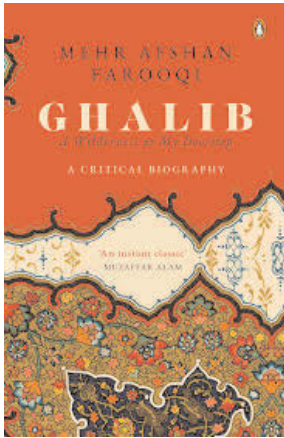
Yang however warned on the call that Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet were "China's internal affairs" and "no external forces are allowed to interfere," urging the US to "correct mistakes" made in recent years.

— AFP

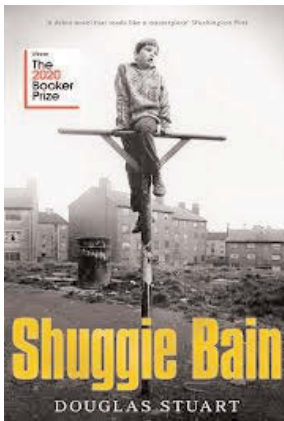


INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS

NON-FICTION

1 **GHALIB: A WILDERNESS AT MY DOORSTEP: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY**
Mehr Afshan Farooqi
Allen Lane, ₹7992 **THE BATTLE OF BELONGING**
Shashi Tharoor
Aleph, ₹7993 **A PROMISED LAND**
Barack Obama
Penguin Viking, ₹1,9994 **BY MANY A HAPPY ACCIDENT: RECOLLECTIONS OF A LIFE**
M. Hamid Ansari
Rupa, ₹7955 **THE PRESIDENTIAL YEARS 2012-2017**
Pranab Mukherjee
Rupa, ₹6956 **THE TALE OF THE HORSE: A HISTORY OF INDIA ON HORSEBACK**
Yashaswini Chandra
Pan Macmillan, ₹6997 **REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**
Aanchal Malhotra
HarperCollins
₹5998 **THE LANGUAGE OF HISTORY: SANSKRIT NARRATIVES OF MUSLIM POETS**
Audrey Truschke
Penguin Allen Lane, ₹6999 **JUGALBANDI: THE BJP BEFORE MODI**
Vinay Sitapati
Penguin Viking, ₹79910 **VAJPAYEE: THE YEARS THAT CHANGED INDIA**
Shakti Sinha
Penguin Vintage, ₹599

FICTION

1 **SHUGGIE BAIN**
Douglas Stuart
Picador, ₹4992 **THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING**
Marieke Lucas Rijneveld
Faber & Faber, ₹4993 **THE LAST QUEEN**
Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni
HarperCollins, ₹5994 **A TIME FOR MERCY**
John Grisham
Hodder & Stoughton
₹6995 **WRITERS & LOVERS**
Lily King
Picador, ₹6996 **HOMELAND ELEGIES**
Ayad Akhtar
Tinder Press, ₹1,0507 **THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY**
Matt Haig
Canongate UK, ₹6998 **HAMNET**
Maggie O' Farrell
Tinder Press, ₹5999 **WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS**
Shauna Singh Baldwin
Tara- India Research Press, ₹59910 **DAYLIGHT**
David Baldacci
Pan Macmillan
₹650

Bahrisons, New Delhi

‘India’s diversity fact of life that can’t be wished away’

Career diplomat **HAMID ANSARI**, who rose to become Vice-President of India, in which capacity he served from 2007 to 2017, in a conversation with **ASHHAR KHAN** over his just-released book *By Many A Happy Accident*, and the many controversies surrounding it

What was the idea or inspiration behind writing your autobiography?

Well, it was nothing, actually. I was not too keen but my children and my friends said that I should write as I had a diverse life. So, one fine day, I started writing and kept on writing. I had sent it to the publisher in last March but due to Covid-19 it will be formally launched only now. The book is a recollection from memory.

You have had run-ins with the Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi? Could you explain?

There was no run-in. Everybody has got it wrong. I had met Mr Modi for the first time when he was the Gujarat chief minister in 2007 and he came to congratulate me on my election. I asked him a question about the post-Godhra issue. I recorded his reply. As PM he came to my room unannounced. Though meetings between the PM and the VP are not abnormal, they are rarely unannounced. He spoke about bills getting stuck and I replied that Mr Jaitley had been a witness to that during UPA times. I did not agree to pass the bills in the din. Even the UPA was



not happy with that. Then Mr Modi asked about Rajya Sabha TV. I said I have no role in it and there is a committee that takes care of it. On my retirement, he said something in the morning and I replied to him, and in the evening he spoke differently. Now, why he changed his tone I do not know, but neither did I try and find out. I have normal relations with him. He has his own views and I have my own; that's all.

Do you feel that, diplomatically, you have handled China well, considering all the action at the LAC?

A structure was put in place in 1993-94 and during the UPA government's tenure, which had a two-pronged approach.

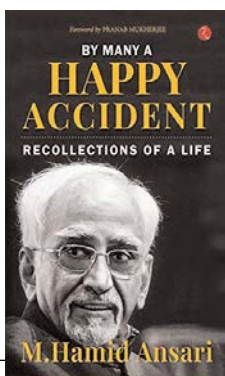
You have been a diplomat in important places like Australia, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan. Would it be correct to say that the prestige of India has increased post 2014?

No. That is actually not correct. I have been around in the 1980s and the 1990s, mostly as an ambassador of India. The image of India was always high in political terms. India was an important country as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and it also played an important role in the councils of the world. Post economic reforms in 1992, India's economic capacities were being looked at afresh. When I was Ambassador in Saudi Arabia around 1996, I noticed that India was being looked upon

as a market where investments can be made. One day, two senior officers of the oil company, Aramco, came to me for seeking visas. They wanted to establish a product experimental centre in India. The other centre was in Houston. Finally, they set up the centre in Vadodara. This hugely changed the perception of political relations. Since 2000, perceptions have changed and India is viewed as a political, economical and military force.

Do you feel that, diplomatically, you have handled China well, considering all the action at the LAC?

A structure was put in place in 1993-94 and during the UPA government's tenure, which had a two-pronged approach.



BY MANY A HAPPY ACCIDENT: RECOLLECTIONS OF A LIFE
By M. HAMID ANSARI
Rupa
₹795

One that we have to keep talking to find a solution to the boundary problem, as there existed different perceptions. This made sure that there was no active conflict or blow-up. That worked very well. We exchanged visits. A great deal of trade was taking place. The full story of Doklam or Galwan will not be known. Probably, someone will write it someday. But there was a skirmish and, in Galwan, it went out of hand. In spite of that the perception on both sides is to keep talking. Talking will yield results. I don't think both are interested in starting a war. But, yes, something did go wrong in Galwan. Both states realise that we are big neighbours, and that cannot be wished away.

In the last couple of years, do you think that there is a concerted effort to attack minorities under the garb of legal sanction, like love jihad, anti-conversion law, etc.?

It's all there. It is true, but my thing is that you cannot travel on that path in this country. That is my firm belief. The diversity of this country is a fact of life that you just cannot undo. Identity is a very important factor in any society. And it's multiple identities in this case. Yes, all that you asked in your question is true as a political agenda that is being spread in a crass manner. It may trouble people for the time being, but it just cannot go on.

One of the predominant

themes in your book is equality before law, justice. Do you think this is happening in present-day India?

Yes, I see everything. The simple thing is, one should read the copy of the preamble. One should read it. It says equality, justice and fraternity. I have hinted in my book that we should take lessons from the experiences of other diverse societies in our own times. Accommodation and fraternity is very important for the well-being of the country, and the foundation of this country is based on this.

Do you think governments that have brute majorities use Parliament as a post office?

That is very unfortunate thing because the system of government of a parliamentary democracy rests on four pillars, and the Parliament or legislature is one of them. The Parliament has to do its work. Thirty years ago, the House would meet for 100 days, and now it is barely 60 days. This means, the Parliament is not doing enough work. The question is why this should be allowed. It is within the rights of members to say that they want more sittings. But they just want to sign on the attendance register and leave. State legislatures are even worse. The Standing Committee is a very good system as all parties are represented. The money bill technique of passing laws is also an aberration, which has been tried in the recent past.

Privilege-bound but absorbing study of rural Sri Lanka



Devapriya Roy

review

Nilwatte Beach, somewhere off the coast of southern Sri Lanka, is a beautiful place. The sea, “with its yearning rising green-blue swell and the deep-blue simmering stillness of horizon” crashes upon a languorous beach that is dotted with shacks selling beer and fish, peopled with a few foreign (mostly white) tourists or posh Sri Lankans — the sort who favour scrappy holidays over five-star comfort that they can certainly afford — lounging on beach chairs, gazing at the sunset. Around them hover a smattering of local villagers, selling “marijuana, magic mushrooms, lottery tickets, trips to turtle conservation beaches”. The economy — and as a consequence, the culture — of the village has been permanently disrupted by the rise of tourism, and the villagers cannot decide if their longing for the outsiders’ money outstrips their loathing of the same people, who bring their peculiar morals, tastes, and the stench of their unimaginable wealth to the area.

Barely a few minutes from the beach and close enough to the village stands Hibiscus Villa, the site of most of the action. The beating heart of A m a n t h i

Harris’s debut novel *Beautiful Place*, Hibiscus Villa is reminiscent of the regal mansions in coconut estates of yore. With its white pillars, clay-tiled roofs and profusion of trees, it is now an upper crust guest house run by Padma, the beguiling protagonist.

A daughter of that very village, Padma had been brought to the villa by her greedy father, Sunny, a hustler with criminal tendencies, when she was still a child, as an offering to Gerhardt, the brilliant Austrian architect who had designed it. Sunny had no compunctions about what the foreigner might demand of the child as long as he made a quick buck off it, but horrified at the future that awaited a child with such a parent, Gerhardt adopted Padma, and subsequently brought her up in the villa as a single parent. Content with regular pay outs, Sunny and his family did not bother them further. However, now that Padma has returned to Nilwatte again, to run this business — she hated her time at university in Colombo and failed the exams — Sunny, now the henchman of a powerful politician, tries his best to reclaim her.

A deeply absorbing novel of the old school, *Beautiful Place* is strongest when it portrays the worlds that the author is familiar with: the people who come to the guest house (handsome Rohan, who has emerged from the wreckage of a messy divorce; sassy Ria, looking to reclaim a childhood home she was nostalgic about; runaway lovers Anjali and Dan; and later, in pursuit, Anjali’s conservative parents), the architect and single parent Gerhardt, the dancer-turned-yoga guru-turned-controversial-writer Jarryd — both expats who have made Sri Lanka their home — and Ruth, Gerhardt’s old flame and doyenne of Colombo high society. They are all competently crafted characters, interesting, alive, their lives and worlds rich with detail. As Padma’s story intersects with that of her guests, the point of view shifts from one character to the other, introducing a delicious sense of variety as we see people from different perspectives.

Where the novel enters a somewhat sinister space is when it steps out of the villa, as it naturally must. Around the idyll of Villa Hibiscus — helping the guests heal and come to terms with their own burdens — is the shadowy space of the village, now firmly overshadowed by a vicious strain of politics. Like in other parts of the world, the tide of chauvinistic identity politics is on the rise in Sri Lanka too, and as Jarryd falls into the sinister crosshairs of right-wing Sinhalese extremists, the lives of Padma and Gerhardt are set to change forever too.

However, the author’s depiction of the slippery world of the village, where nothing as it at seems and no one speaks the truth, standing in the darkening twilight of the sea, leaves us with a sense of complex unease. Part of it must be deliberate on the author’s part, given that her main characters all — except for the cook, Soma — occupy a liberal upper-class ecosystem that is invariably a rift or three apart from the world of the village, and would be exhausted by the seeing servility and hostility of the people. But as Sunny’s web darkens, he assumes almost comic book villain proportions. While we understand the author’s deeper critique of rural Sri Lanka, we also feel our inability to truly access the inner life of the village as we do the Villa, as a failure of sorts, not of imagination but of the proclivities that tie us so deeply to the world of the Villa.

Devapriya Roy is the author of five books, most recently Friends from College



FAST FACT: The later Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle (the last one published in 1927) remain under copyright in the US. When Netflix’s *Enola Holmes* based on the YA series written by Nancy Springer was released last year, the estate

argued that the film had infringed copyright by depicting a warmer and more emotional version of Holmes. The case was eventually dismissed.

‘Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam is the story of our lives’



Yasser Usman

excerpt

1 January 1961, the shooting of *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* began with an auspicious *muhurat* ceremony. The first shot was being canned. Writer Bimal Mitra was invited again from Calcutta to grace the momentous occasion. Guru Dutt had shaved his trademark moustache to play Bhootnath. He appeared super excited. Then there was Waheeda Rehman who was playing the character of the Bengali girl, Jaba. Waheeda was wearing a traditional Bengali sari. But there was another big surprise in store for everyone during the lunch. The crew at the Guru Dutt studios saw Guru Dutt, Geeta Dutt and Waheeda Rehman eating together.

A curious Bimal Mitra asked Geeta, ‘Hello! Good to see you. Never seen you in the studio before?’

‘The film was being launched today, so I came,’ replied Geeta.

Guru Dutt interrupted, ‘No, I have called Geeta.’

Waheeda didn’t know how to tie a Bengali style sari, so I asked Geeta to tell her.

‘How am I looking?’ asked Waheeda.

‘Very good.’

‘Am I looking like a Bengali girl?’

‘Hundred per cent!’ replied Bimal Mitra.

The women were referring to each other as Geeta Ji and Waheeda Ji. Post lunch, Guru Dutt and Waheeda left for the shot. Bimal Mitra and Geeta were left alone at the table.

Mitra asked Geeta, ‘How did you like the shooting?’

Geeta replied, ‘It was good! There was a time when I had asked him not to make this film.’

‘Why?’

‘Because, *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* is the story of our lives.’

The accounts of most of Guru Dutt’s close friends suggest that during the making of *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*, Guru Dutt and Geeta had grown further apart. They had realised that their marriage was not working. Geeta Dutt too had taken to alcohol and sleeping pills majorly and left the Pali Hill bungalow to live in his mother’s house.

Johnny Walker used to say, ‘Studio *ke darwaaze aur ghar ke darwaaze mein jitna faasla rukhoge, sukhi rahogey. Nahii to ghar mein kaam ki baatein hongii aur studio mein ghar ki baatein hongii. Tum confuse ho jaoge ki tum aa rahe ho ya ja rahe ho. And you’ll pay a price for it and it’s very very costly. Nobody can afford it.*’

Then one night, Guru Dutt swallowed thirty-eight sleeping pills. It was his second attempt at suicide.

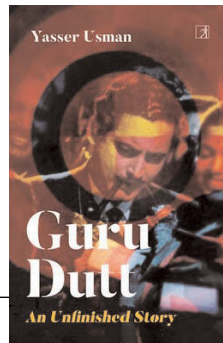
It was an overdose of sleeping pills. We rushed him to Nanavati Hospital but his condition was very serious. His body had gone completely cold. He was unconscious for three days. Then on the fourth day we heard his scream. My brother was shouting. The first person he asked for was Geeta. It was strange because their relationship was going through hell. They were thinking of separation but in those moments, he wanted Geeta to be near him. I think they deeply loved each other despite their major differences,’ Lalitha Lajmi told this author.

But she says Guru Dutt never talked about the reason why he tried to end his life. ‘Sometimes if there was an altercation with Geeta he used to call me. I would rush to him even in the middle of the night. But he would sit quietly, not say anything. I felt he wanted to say something. But he never did. Never.’

A person who attempted suicide twice yet never talked about it with his family. It was as if through these suicide attempts, Guru Dutt was crying for help. On the doctor’s suggestion, the family called a psychiatrist for counselling. ‘I was much younger than him and in those days no one really talked about such things. We also called a psychiatrist but he charged Rs 500 for a visit. My brother Atma laughed

that he was just talking with Guru and he is so expensive. We never called him again,’ said Lalitha, adding that sometimes she blames herself for not doing enough for her brother.

But apparently there were numerous other times that Guru Dutt experimented with sleeping pills. Screenwriter Nabendu Ghosh recounts, ‘Let me tell you about a doctor whose name was A.J. Ribero, a very stubborn man. He was an MBBS, and a sweet-spoken doctor, who had [his] clinic in Santa Cruz. Ribero was a general physician. Because of Ribero’s goodwill, all affluent people of Santa Cruz, Khar and Bandra would visit him. Especially all those who were associated with films. Famous film personalities like Filmistaan’s Shashadhar Mukherjee, director Aurobindo Sen, Shakti Samanta, etc. Guru Dutt was



GURU DUTT: AN UNFINISHED STORY
By YASSER USMAN
S&S India, ₹599

no exception. I have already said how I often visited Guru Dutt’s Pali Hill home for discussions. One morning, I reached his house and found out that the situation was tense. I saw Dr Ribero, going inside the bedroom and coming out every two or three minutes with a tense look on his face. I asked, ‘What’s up, doctor?’ Dr Ribero said, ‘Guru took sleeping pills, he’s still not coming back to his senses, I have been trying for half an hour; Geeta is crying.’ But about five minutes later, Dr Ribero came out of the room, sat down on the chair and said, ‘Thank god, he’s now conscious.’

Then again one day, about three months later, I saw a similar situation at their house. I asked Dr Ribero, ‘Now what has happened?’ Ribero said, ‘Today Debi [Geeta] is unconscious. She took a lot of sleeping pills. Guru is sitting quietly. I will wait for another ten minutes. If she doesn’t recover, I’ll be forced to call the police.’ But five minutes later, Geeta came back to her senses.’

Lalitha Lajmi says, ‘Later he went into depression then slowly his entire personality went down. He kept to himself and became very lonely.’

Guru Dutt just wanted to run away from Bombay. An escape from the city, studio, family life. To anywhere. He couldn’t sleep in Bombay. His constant refrain was: ‘I think I will go crazy.’

Excerpted from Guru Dutt: An Unfinished Story (2020, Simon & Schuster India) with permission from the author

A CLEVER & FUNNY TALE OF A MONK IN PLAGUE-STRUCK ENGLAND

Anthony Cummins

review

In an essay for *Prospect* a few years back the writer Leo Benedictus noticed how many contemporary novels used what he called a “hindered” narrator: that is, a protagonist (often a child) whose partial understanding of their world forces us to read between the lines. Unreliable narrators set out to deceive. By contrast, hindered narrators — such as the trapped five-year-old in Emma Donoghue’s *Room* — genuinely believe what they tell you: it’s all they know.

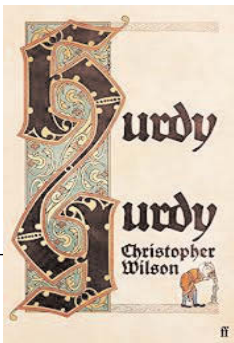
As in *Room*, a hindered narrator can supply drama and pathos, but

it’s handy for farce, too, as Christopher Wilson knows well. He likes to write about science biting off more than it can chew (literally, in 1987’s *Baa*, about a fin-de-siecle biologist who gets into cannibalism), and he’s especially interested in the interface between naivety and pretension; with Wilson, a little learning goes a catastrophically long way.

It’s a theme he revisits in his latest novel, a scatological comedy of errors narrated by young Brother Diggory, of the Order of Odo,

who is desperate to get laid during the Black Death. As the sole survivor of an outbreak at his monastery, he super-spreads his way through a ragtag bunch of bandits, bailiffs, pilgrims and prostitutes on a picaresque road trip that brings unadmitted liberation to this meat-avoiding celibate, previously permitted to laugh only on feast days.

The effect is a little like Chaucer as told by Adrian Mole. Much of the humour resembles the amputation scene in *Madame Bovary*, in which the stable boy with a clubfoot gets his leg clumsily sawn off after bungled advice by puffed-up professionals.



HURDY GURDY
By CHRISTOPHER WILSON
Faber, £14.99

Diggory, once schooled by an older monk in the ways of “piss-prophecy” (drinking a patient’s urine), finds himself in demand as a medic, recounting his ensuing adventures in gynaecology and neurosurgery with alarming deadpan.

This boisterous, bubo-busting muckfest would probably have felt more of an oddity were it not for the timeliness conferred by — well, don’t make me type it. A strangely dangling sub-thread involves the ability of the founder of Diggory’s monastery to foretell the rise of an ‘orange-faced king, Small Hands, with straw-yellow hair wound round his head like a helmet’. Cheap, no doubt; but I guess it’s true that, 700 years hence, if there’s even anyone around, our own notions may come to seem as laughably outlandish as anything Diggory gets up to here.

By arrangement with the Spectator

SHORT TAKES

Russia, Italy in ATP Cup final

Melbourne: Alexander Zverev tweaked his back in the second set of his must-win ATP Cup match against Daniil Medvedev here on Saturday. He left the court for treatment and returned, taking the match to three sets before Medvedev finally converted to secure Russia's win over Germany and a spot in the final.

No.4-ranked Medvedev lifted when Zverev started to struggle but he got tight in the end, twice double-faulting on match point before serving out for 3-6, 6-3, 7-5. Andrey Rublev had earlier beaten Jan-Lennard Struff 3-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Russia will meet Italy in the final after Fabio Fognini beat Pablo Carreno 6-2, 1-6, 6-4 and Matteo Berrettini swept Roberto Bautista 6-3, 7-5 to account for 2020 runners-up Spain. — AP

Osaka, Azarenka out of warm-ups

Melbourne: World number three Naomi Osaka and two-time major winner Victoria Azarenka pulled out of Australian Open warm-up tournaments Saturday, joining Serena Williams and Simona Halep with injury concerns.

Japan's Osaka, the 2019 Australian Open winner, was set to play Elise Mertens in the Gipsland Trophy semifinal but withdrew. "Sorry to Tennis Australia and the fans to have to withdraw today," she said on the WTA's Twitter account.

"I have a niggling injury and in light of the AO on the horizon I need to be cautious. I look forward to competing next week."

Two-time Australian Open champion Azarenka was also a casualty, opting not to play her quarter-final clash with Anett Kontaveit at the Grampians Trophy due to a lower-back injury. — AFP

Barella, Perisic send Inter atop

Milan: Nicolo Barella and Ivan Perisic scored in either half as Inter Milan moved top of Serie A on Friday with a 2-0 win at Fiorentina. Antonio Conte's side pulled one point clear of AC Milan to keep the pressure on their city rivals who host lowly Crotone on Sunday.

Inter bounced back after their midweek Italian Cup semi-final, first leg defeat to Juventus in the San Siro.

Italy midfielder Barella curled in the opener from a distance after half an hour with Achraf Hakimi setting up Perisic for the second seven minutes after the break to give Inter a first league win in Florence in seven years. Conte sat out a touchline ban but Inter controlled the game against 12th-placed Fiorentina who were without injured French midfielder Franck Ribery. — AFP

Manvir, Krishna win it for Bagan

Goa: ATK Mohun Bagan dished out a ruthless performance and closed down the gap on leaders Mumbai City FC, with a thumping 4-1 victory over Odisha FC in the Indian Super League at the GMC Stadium, Bambolim on Saturday.

The result meant the Mariners closed the gap with Mumbai to three points. Odisha's top-four chances are all but over. The opening half proved to be a cagey contest but two fine goals from either side meant the score line was all square at the break.

Cole Alexander's equaliser for Odisha (45+1') was sandwiched between two goals from Manvir Singh (11', 54') before a quick-fire brace from Roy Krishna (83', 86') led Bagan to their ninth win of the season. Bagan showed intent early on and opened the scoring with their first shot on target.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: First Test, Day 3 from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Tottenham Hotspur vs West Brom from 5.30 pm; Wolverhampton vs Leicester City from 7.30 pm; **Liverpool vs Manchester City from 10 pm;** Sheffield vs Chelsea from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, Star Sports Select 1 HD

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 Rajamahendravaram, Venugiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajamahendravaram, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208.
RNI Registration No. 3081/1957.
Editor: Kaushik Mitter

DOUBLE ROOT

Joe slams double ton as England make India toil

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 6

Joe Root has an insatiable appetite for scoring runs. And it goes up a notch when the England skipper takes guard in India and Sri Lanka where he averages in the mid 60s. Close on the heels of notching up a double hundred and a 186 in Sri Lanka, on Saturday, Root feasted on Indian bowlers for another big knock.

His stroke-filled 218 that steered England to 555/8 (180 overs) in the first innings of the opening Test here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium has put him on a high pedestal. Of the many firsts he achieved on Saturday, he would definitely cherish the feat of becoming the highest individual scorer in a 100th Test.

Continuing from where he left off on the opening day, Root found another able ally in Ben Stokes (82) and forged a century stand to give impetus to a huge total. England have made it clear that they will bat, at least, for one more hour on day three.

Having made a quiet start, Stokes pulled off a surprise when he popped his 16th ball back over R. Ashwin's head for a six. That shot sparked the day's play into life. Stokes also enjoyed some luck. He was dropped twice in the next two overs — once by Ashwin, off his own bowling, and then by Cheteshwar Pujara, off Shahbaz Nadeem. The dangerous Stokes eventually fell to left-arm spinner Nadeem after mistiming a slog sweep. This time, Pujara, stationed at deep backward square leg, held on to the ball after a fumble.

Exhibiting great technique and temperament, Root brought up his double ton in style by charging down and launching Ashwin over long on for a six. He became the first England player to do it with a big hit.

India heaved a huge sigh of relief when Nadeem's quicker delivery crashed into Root's pads. The England skipper reviewed instantly, but the third umpire upheld the on-field decision, ending Root's marathon 377-ball vigil.



England's Joe Root celebrates after scoring 200 runs against India on the second day of their first Test at the M. A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Saturday. — PTI

As he walked back, drenched in sweat, Kohli was the first to applaud his effort with a pat on his back.

Playing a long innings in Chennai's humid conditions is not easy. Root has left a lasting impression by making the highest individual score for a visiting batsman at Chepauk, surpassing

Aussie Dean Jones' 210.

Indian bowlers who slogged through the day found some solace in the final session by taking four wickets. Ishant Sharma bowled his heart out.

The pacer's persistent line and length finally earned him rewards. He castled Jos Buttler (30) and Jofra Archer (0) off

consecutive balls.

The fact that Washington Sundar and Nadeem, who shared 70 overs between them, could manage only six maidens highlighted their lack of control. As many as 19 no-balls and a few dropped catches — Rohit Sharma dropped a dolly — didn't help India's cause either.

SCORECARD

England 1st innings (overnight 128/3): Rory Burns c Pant b Ashwin 33, Dominic Sibley lbw b Bumrah 87, Daniel Lawrence lbw b Bumrah 0, Joe Root lbw b Nadeem 218, Ben Stokes c Pujara b Nadeem 82, Ollie Pope lbw b Ashwin 34, Jos Buttler b Ishant 30, Dominic Bess batting 28, Jofra Archer b Ishant 0, Jack Leach batting 6. Extras (b-2, lb-15, nb-19) 37. **Total (for 8 wkts, in 180 overs) 555.**
FoW: 63-1, 63-2, 263-3, 387-4, 473-5, 477-6, 525-7, 525-8.
Bowling: Ishant Sharma 27-7-52-2, Jasprit Bumrah 31-4-81-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 50-5-132-2, Shahbaz Nadeem 44-4-167-2, Washington Sundar 26-2-98-0, Rohit Sharma 2-0-7-0.

NUMBERS GAME

JOE ROOT FIRST TO SCORE DOUBLE TON IN 100TH TEST

● Joe Root became the first batsman to score a double century in his 100th Test match. He achieved this feat by making 218 on the second day of the first Test against India in Chennai on Saturday.

● Pakistan's Inzamam-ul-Haq, who had posted 184 against India at Bangalore in 2004-05 in his 100th Test match, held the previous record.

● Root's 218 was his fifth double century in 182 innings of 100 Test matches. With this double hundreds he became England's third and 16th batsman overall to score five or more double hundreds in Tests.

● Root also became the first captain after 84 years to register a hat-trick of 150-plus scores in Test cricket. The England captain became only second skipper after legendary Don Bradman to achieve the feat. Australia's Bradman was the first captain to notch up three successive 150-plus scores in Test way back in 1937.

● Root had scored 228 and 186 in his previous two Tests in Sri Lanka. He is the 7th player to make 150-plus runs in three consecutive Tests as he joins an elite list including New Zealand's Tom Latham, Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara (4 consecutive Tests), Pakistan's Mudassar Nazar and Zaheer Abbas, Bradman, and England's Wally Hammond.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

Pak increase lead against Proteas

Rawalpindi, Feb. 6: The lower order increased Pakistan's lead to 200 runs against South Africa on the third day of the second and final Test on Saturday. Allrounder Faheem Ashraf and Mohammad Rizwan were dropped off successive deliveries before featuring in a 52-run sixth-wicket stand which guided the home team to 129-6 in the second innings at stumps.

Rizwan was unbeaten on 28 but Ashraf fell late in the second session for 29 when he sliced a catch at point to give George Linde (3/12) his third wicket.

Earlier, fast bowler Hasan Ali's (5/54) five-wicket haul earned Pakistan a vital 71-run first innings lead as the visitors were bowled out for 201, half an hour after lunch.

Hasan, returning to the five-day format after a two-year absence due to injuries, picked up three wickets on Saturday, but poor running cost South Africa with two batsmen getting run-outs.

Temba Bavuma, who resumed on 15, fought a lone battle to remain unbeaten on 44 off 138 balls before Hasan wrapped up the innings by claiming the last two wickets of successive deliveries.

The diminutive Bavuma successfully overturned a

● **Allrounder Faheem Ashraf and Mohammad Rizwan were dropped off successive deliveries before featuring in a 52-run sixth-wicket stand which guided the home team to 129-6 in the second innings at stumps.**

leg before decision against him in the fourth over of the day, but could not get enough support from the lower order.

Bavuma and Wiaan Mulder (33) dug in for 90 minutes and raised a half century stand before Pakistan struck with two quick wickets.

Mulder was shaping up well against the spinners as he lofted Yasir Shah for a six over long off and also swept well against left-arm spinner Nauman Ali before he was run-out while going for a needless second run.

George Linde scored a run-a-ball 21 with three fours and a six before he was deceived by Hasan with a slower delivery and was clean bowled. — AP

Brief scores (Day 3): Pakistan 272 & 129/6 (Rizwan 28 batting, Hasan 0 batting; Linde 3/12) **vs South Africa 201** (Bavuma 44 not out, Hasan 5/54).

Haque's hundred puts WI in trouble

Chattogram (Bangladesh), Feb. 6: Captain Mominul Haque hit his 10th Test century and off-spinner Mehidy Hasan continued his good form for Bangladesh on the fourth day of the first Test against West Indies on Saturday.

Mominul's 115 reaching the 3,000 runs milestone in the process helped Bangladesh set a fearsome 395 runs target for West Indies. At the end of the day, the visitors reached 110-3, with two debutants Kyle Mayers (37) and Nkrumah Bonner (15) batting. Mehidy Hasan (3-52) took all the three wickets. Resuming the day on 47/3, Bangladesh declared their second innings on 223/8 with Liton Das playing an important role alongside the captain. Das struck 69 and shared 133 for the fifth wicket stand

with Mominul to keep the visitors frustrated.

West Indies got a glimmer of hope when off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall struck early, dismissing Mushfiqur Rahim for 18. Mushfiqur reviewed the decision in vain.

With the ball keeping low, Mominul and Liton had to be watchful. Mominul completed his 10th century off 173 balls, pushing the ball toward cover for a quick single.

This made him the highest centurion for Bangladesh, eclipsing opener Tamim Iqbal's nine tons. The century is also his seventh in Chattogram venue. — AP

Brief scores (Day 4): Bangladesh 430 & 223/8 decl. (Haque 115, Das 69, Warican 3-57, Cornwall 3-81) **vs West Indies 259 & 110/3** (Mayers 37 batting, Bonner 15 batting, Miraz 3-

STOKES REVEALS ENGLAND HAD NO INTENTION OF DECLARING

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 6

England all-rounder Ben Stokes said in-form skipper Joe Root made him "feel rubbish" during their stand of 124 runs against India on Saturday. "That's pretty much where he is at the moment. He makes everyone around him not look very good. He is an amazing player and I am not sure we have ever had an England player play spin so well, with such control, such ease," said Stokes.

Stokes said Root makes it look easy against spinners. "He is so consistent. He has a game plan for all types of spin," he added.

Having lost their previous Test that was played in Chennai in 2016 despite scoring 477 in the first innings, Stokes knows the importance of scoring big in the subcontinent. He said England had no intention of declaring their innings on day two here. "We are in a strong position. You can't really complain when you are 500-plus and it would be lovely if we could bat for another hour on day three."

Stokes who will be playing the role of a third seamer behind James Anderson and Jofra Archer said the job is only half done and the England bowling unit have a lot of work to do.

Ishant's double strike lifted team morale, says Nadeem

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 6

Shahbaz Nadeem is no stranger to conditions in Chennai. He has played Tamil Nadu Cricket Association's first division league here and taken plenty of wickets. The left-arm spinner, however, had to toil against England before picking two wickets — both big fish, Ben Stokes and Joe Root.

"I felt really happy to pick those wickets, especially on such a track. Root was sweeping well, you really have to plan well for him," he said.

Nadeem had a different plan for Stokes. "I was trying to bowl in the rough outside the off-stump. But he (Stokes) was trying to counter attack me by playing reverse sweep and different attacking shots. I tried to change my line and length and was thinking to bowl from around the wicket and maybe try and get him out," said Nadeem.

Nadeem said India's bowling plan was simple as the pitch didn't have to offer. "Basically, the plan was to bowl in the right areas. If you go for wickets, you will end up

giving more runs. The plan was always to bowl the right line and length and if the batsmen played a wrong shot, you could end up getting a wicket."

India managed to find some success in the final session with Ishant Sharma's double strike. Nadeem said those wickets lifted the team morale. "Had we not got those, there would have been a batsman on the crease rather than tallenders. Now, two England bowlers are on the crease, so we can say we have got an upper hand."

Confronting 550 score will be a tall task for India



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

The first couple of days of the opening Test have been rather deflating for India. While the bowlers stuck to their task quite admirably on a heart-break pitch, the fact that only eight wickets were taken and 555 runs conceded reveals which team has performed better.

Starting as underdogs, England have unexpectedly roared their way to a mammoth score, showing ambition, application and not a little flair, riding the

luck that came their way. Cricket's uncertainties are unlimited, but England have done almost everything to insured themselves against defeat.

The scenario is contrary to that envisaged before the match began. The dice looked heavily loaded against Joe Root's team. Some experts spoke of a sweep by India, others of 2-0 win, the kindest ones saying 2-1 in favour of the home team. It's early days yet in this series, but such prognosis may not stand

scrutiny if England play the way they have done so far.

The flat track was a big factor no doubt in their success. The Chepauk pitch traditionally favours batsmen on the first couple of days, but this one played truer than normal. In fact, it was as securely even as a runway, offering little assistance to bowlers — pace or spin — barring the occasional vagary in bounce, seam or turn.

But this does not take away anything from the masterly, majestic double century by Root. With significant contributions from Dom Sibley, Ben Stokes, Rory Burns and Jos Butler, England were able to swell the score beyond 500, making the script go awry for India.

Root passed a few milestones in his monumental knock and now stands as the third highest run-getter for his country. This was his second double century in three consecutive Tests, apart from which he also has another 150-plus score. In his last five innings, Root has scored an astonishing 644 runs, incidentally the same as New Zealand captain Kane Williamson.

These are riveting statistics, and also reveal how Root has reinvigorated his quest to be recognized as the world's best Test batsman. In the past couple of years, it had appeared he had fallen behind Steve Smith, Kohli and Williamson.

In the last two months, he's come storming back,

and the race for top honours between these four has reached an even more fascinating stage.

Could India have done anything to prevent England from running up such a huge score on a featherbed pitch?

As mentioned earlier, the bowlers strived hard, but some questions have arisen about the playing XI? Mohamed Siraj, highest wicket taker for India in Australia, was benched in favour of Ishan's greater experience.

Harsh on young Siraj, but not entirely unwarranted. Moreover, Ishant has been the pick of the attack.

Kuldeep Yadav being ignored has more pertinence. As a like for like bowler to Jadeja, Axar

Patel was first choice to play, but unfortunately got injured on the morning of the match. Instead of Kuldeep, however, Shahbaz Nadeem was drafted in at the last minute to play.

Nadeem's vast experience in domestic cricket, and his ability to bowl a flat, restrictive line were perhaps the reasons for his inclusion. It has worked only inconsistently so far in this match. Moot question, however, is if Kuldeep is not first or second choice, why is he in the squad?

In the context of what's transpired so far in this match, however, these arguments are academic. The bigger cause for India's agony so far in this match is poor fielding. On such a true surface, half

chances are a boon to the bowling side. India dropped a few of these, which allowed the Root-Stokes partnership to flourish.

Late in the day, Rohit dropped a sitter of Bess to make it worse.

I would have thought that Root would declare after Jos Butler was dismissed and have a few overs to attack the Indian openers. He chose to bat the day out, perhaps to wear down the Indian players psychologically.

A defensive decision in my opinion, but England hold all the aces from here. Even if the pitch continues to be flat, confronting a 550 score creates anxieties and hardships. The pressure is on India to emerge from this match unscathed.