

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | SATURDAY | 6 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 33.0°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 37%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 33/19 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES (+11,702)
DEATHS (+108)

1,08,14,656 1,54,954

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+169) (+1)
TS: 2,95,270 1,607

(+97) (+1)
AP: 8,88,275 7,158

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,56,28,160
DEATHS 23,00,112

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula Navami till 8.13 am; Dasami till 6.26 am (Sunday)

Star: Anuradha till 5.18 pm
Variyam: 10.39 pm to 12.11 pm
Durmuhurtam: 6.50 am to 8.21 am

Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HILARI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhir 23,1442 AH

PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.48 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM
MOONSET 01.16 PM
MOONRISE 02.36 AM

COUNTER POINT



Now, the phone is mightier than the pen and the gun!

SHORT TAKES

Cong plans ISF alliance in WB

Kolkata: Desperate to reclaim its Muslim votebank from the ruling Trinamul Congress (TMC) in the West Bengal Assembly elections, the state Congress leaders have sought UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi's permission to include a third party in their alliance, Indian Secular Front, floated by influential cleric of Furfura Sharif, Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui. The Congress already has an alliance with the Left Front and the two parties.

■ Reports on Page 4

RBI lets investors buy govt securities

SANGEETHA G. | DC CHENNAI/MUMBAI, FEB. 5

In a structural reform that would put India among a group of a select few countries, the Reserve Bank has now allowed retail investors easy access to government securities. Projecting 10.5 per cent growth for the next fiscal, the nation's central bank has kept the record low repo and reverse repo rates unchanged while continuing its accommodative stance. "It is proposed to pro-

vide retail investors with online access to the government securities market -- both primary and secondary -- directly through the Reserve Bank." RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said Friday, as he announced the monetary policy committee's decisions. Further, to revive growth on a "durable basis", the MPC left the repo rate unchanged at four per cent, which was slashed by 115 basis points since March last year.

■ Reports on Page 7

due to laxity on the part of law enforcement agencies.

As a result, people continue having access to SLT and are becoming more prone to the habit as time passes. This is resulting in an increase in oral cancer cases every year.

According to a population-based survey by the National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR), on average, more than one in every five Indians used SLT products. As many as 20 crore adults, one-seventh of the population, use SLT. Prevalence among men is higher. More than one among every three

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SC grants interim bail to Faruqui

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Biden calls out Russia, China

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Captain Root leads England with a century



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Ramayapatnam port orphaned

No takers for port construction contract, AP postpones last date

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, FEB. 5

Ramayapatnam port continues to be jinxed with contractors shying away from taking up the job of constructing the port. This has forced the Andhra Pradesh government to postpone the tender thrice so far.

AP Maritime Board had floated the tender for constructing the first phase of the port with four berths and allied activities like dredging in November. However, it extended the last date of filing tenders thrice and the latest deadline is February 15.

With regard to the two other ports - Bhavanapadu and Machilipatnam - APMB decided to change the location for the first

● **THE TELUGU DESAM** government had put all the three port projects in the backburner apparently under the influence of the existing private port operators.

● **CHIEF MINISTER Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy**, however, wanted the officials to fast-track these projects.

● **HE ALSO** asked officials to explore the possibilities of launching operations in the defunct Machilipatnam, one of the oldest ports in India.

one and scope for the second as a result of which the two port projects will face more delays than Ramayapatnam, sources said.

The Telugu Desam government had put all the three port projects in the backburner apparently under the influence of the existing private port operators.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, how-

ever, wanted the officials to fast-track these projects. While he cleared ambiguity over the location of the port by finalising Ramayapatnam, he asked officials to explore the possibilities of launching operations in the defunct Machilipatnam, one of the oldest ports in India.

Sources said the government had chosen to build the Ramayapatnam port at its own cost instead of

going in for the PPP mode and called for tenders.

"Megha Engineering India Limited initially showed keen interest to build the port in joint venture with companies having experience in constructing ports," sources said adding that they raised several queries also. However, it developed cold feet, sources added.

Tata group also raised queries in response to the bid document and at one stage even proposed to take up the project under PPP mode but the government did not respond.

Aurobindo Group, which recently acquired majority stake in Kakinada Deep Water Port, is said to have been in consultation with potential partners.

CM orders 3 IT concept cities, Net in all villages

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday directed officials to establish three IT concept cities in Visakhapatnam, Tirupati and near Bengaluru in Andhra Pradesh, apart from providing internet facility at every village in the state.

Reviewing a meeting of officials on electronic policy at his camp office in Tadepalli, the Chief Minister said an integrated technology park will be established at Visakhapatnam, under which High-End Skills University, incubation centre, laboratories, state data centre, IT towers and other facilities would come.

At the same time, he said it is important to provide strong internet network at all villages of the state within three years to develop the IT industry. A building must be constructed in each village for an internet library. All facilities required for "Work from Home" should be made available in it. Further, secretariats and RBKs in every village



AP and Telangana General Officer commanding R.K. Singh calls on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the camp office on Friday.

must be connected with internet.

Jagan Mohan Reddy wanted setting up of an Emerging Technologies University also in Visakhapatnam for carrying out research in fields of robotics, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, block-chain technologies, data analytics, advanced electronics, education, health, agriculture, water resources and so on.

Officials informed the CM that experts from various technological institu-

tions, including IITs, will submit a report on this university soon, which will be very useful for engineering and other technical students in honing their skills.

The Chief Minister instructed officials to set up IT concept cities over at least 2,000 acres in three places near Visakhapatnam, Tirupati and nearer to Bangalore but within AP limits.

■ **Page 2: CM calls for high quality infrastructure**

HC applies brakes on SEC's eWatch

Asks AP Technology Services to check app

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Andhra Pradesh High Court, through an interim order on Friday, to the State Election Commission (SEC) to keep aside the newly launched software application called 'eWatch'.

The app developed by a private agency on demand from the SEC, was meant to keep a watch on poll-related irregularities. The court posted the next hearing to February 9.

A division bench of Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and Justice Ch. Praveen Kumar heard a batch of petitions challenging the SEC decision to introduce its own app to receive complaints from citizens on irregularities in the gram panchayat polls and detect any violation of the model code of conduct.

The petitioners contended that an app developed by the Election Commission of India and another by the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj department were available but surprisingly did not find acceptance with the SEC.

They argued that the app developed for the SEC by a private firm did not having the security certificate required under the Andhra Pradesh Cyber Security Policy, 2017. "Also, this app is not in compliance with several GOs issued on security aspects."

Moreover, the petitioners contended that the SEC did not approach the Andhra Pradesh Technology Services for the conduct of a security audit vis-à-vis this app and for issue of a security certificate.

The petitioners also raised apprehensions on security features of the app and whether personal information of com-

Unanimous results barred in 2 districts

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

State election commissioner, N. Ramesh Kumar directed collectors of Chittoor and Guntur not to declare unanimous results as a large number of gram panchayats were found elected unanimously.

In a statement issued here on Friday, he stated that reports of a large number of unanimous elections in gram pan-

chayats in the two districts was not consistent with the current trend in the state and he directed both the collectors to put the declaration of results on hold pending examination of the reports. He also directed them against declaring the results of such unanimous elections until they get clearance from the State Election Commission.

■ **Page 2: SEC calls for detailed reports**

GRAM PANCHAYATS SEEK FUNDS TO HOLD ELECTION

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Gram panchayat secretaries have appealed to the SEC for funds to make arrangements for holding gram panchayat polls.

These officials pointed out that it is their responsibility to make all arrangements at polling booths, like erection of barricades for voters to wait in a queue before voting, pitching up tents to provide them protection from sunlight. As polling officials arrive at polling booths the day before polls, they have to arrange for their accommodation, food at night, tea, breakfast, lunch and dinner on the day of polling from 6.30 a.m. In addition, lights, fans, chairs, and voting chambers must be organised.

■ **Page 2: Basic amenities missing at booths**

Fiery outbreak



Firefighters try to douse a major fire that broke out in a warehouse at Mankhurd in Mumbai on Friday.

— PTI

HEALTH | HAZARD Clandestinely sold in various towns, cities villages due to lax law enforcement agencies

Banned smokeless tobacco easy to get in AP

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC TIRUPATI, FEB. 5

Despite the ban on import, manufacture, transportation, stocks and sale of Smokeless Tobacco (SLT) or chewable tobacco and the like, they are available aplenty in markets across Andhra Pradesh.

The state government imposed a complete ban on chewable tobacco products on January 9, 2013 with the aim to save the society from such health hazards. But SLT products are clandestinely being sold in various towns, cities and villages,

due to laxity on the part of law enforcement agencies.

As a result, people continue having access to SLT and are becoming more prone to the habit as time passes. This is resulting in an increase in oral cancer cases every year.

According to a population-based survey by the National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR), on average, more than one in every five Indians used SLT products. As many as 20 crore adults, one-seventh of the population, use SLT. Prevalence among men is higher. More than one among every three

● **PEOPLE CONTINUE** to have access to SLT and are becoming more prone to the habit as time passes. This is resulting in an increase in oral cancer cases every year.

● **AS MANY** as 20 crore adults, one-seventh of the population, use SLT.

● **PREVALENCE AMONG** men was found to be higher in the study

males use SLT in some form. The NICPR data shows that over 14 crore men and almost six crore women use



SLT. There is an overall high prevalence of 35.6 per cent in males and an overall prevalence of 18.4 per cent

among females. Also, a survey by the Anti-Tobacco and prevention society (ATPS) showed that the addicts are showing a disinterest in kicking the habit due to its strong aromatic and chemical flavours.

A visit to different areas in Tirupati revealed that chewable tobacco products are being sold in shops and consumed by people of all ages, especially youth. SLT products are sold in shops on the Tirumala bypass road, the Hare Krishna road, the Korlagunta-Karakambadi road, the Prakasam road and the Alipiri road. Shopkeepers are now earn-

ing more money despite the ban on SLT products, as the black market quotes hefty prices. A packet of Khaini with MRP ₹10 is sold for ₹25 and a gutkha packet with MRP of ₹8 is sold for ₹15 to known hands. Mostly, labourers, hawkers and even children consume tobacco products.

Enforcement agencies often apprehend small-time shopkeepers but big players in the racket remain untouched. Certain loopholes in the act are said to be of help to them. Officials are aware of the actual scene but are not keen on acting tough for obvious reasons.

SHORT TAKES

AP TEAM STUDIES TOWN PLANNING IN GUJARAT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

A high-level delegation of the Andhra Pradesh government met various officials, town planners and experts during their three-day tour of Gujarat to study the implementation of town planning schemes and their impact on planned urban development.

The study tour comes in the wake of Andhra Pradesh government's plans to implement town planning schemes in urban local bodies.

The delegation, led by Y. Srilakshmi, principal secretary, municipal administration & urban development department, and comprising senior government officials, municipal commissioners, town planners, and housing and urban development authorities, the 25-member delegation had a meeting with officials of the Institute of Town Planners India (ITPI) in Ahmedabad.

N.K. Patel, the national president of ITPI said, "The town planning model has been very successful in Gujarat, and has contributed to planned development in the state. However, it is also elaborate and quite a technical process. The Andhra government team is here to understand how the town planning model works. We made presentations about various aspects of integrated town planning with the delegation."

The delegation made a field visit to a site in Ahmedabad to get a first-hand experience of a town planning scheme and conducted discussions with officials and town planners of Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority on reconstitution of town planning schemes. Further, the delegation visited the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to study the system of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), Slum Improvement Scheme, and Transit-Oriented Development.

EX-MLA, HUSBAND RESIGN FROM THEIR POSTS IN TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 5

Former MLA of Kakinada Rural P. Anantha Lakshmi and her husband and TD senior leader Pilli Satyanarayana Murthy have resigned their posts in Telugu Desam party.

The couple told the media here on Friday that the Telugu Desam party had given them a political birth and also chance for five times to contest the assembly polls. Anantha Lakshmi noted she won twice as MLA.

Satyanarayana Murthy, a strong leader from a backward community, said the recent developments in the TD and the "high-handed" involvement of former home minister and Peddapuram MLA Nimmakayala China Rajappa in Kakinada Rural constituency, as also several other factors like insults, have deeply hurt both of them.

Murthy said he had given an advice to the party high command to give the constituency in-charge post to former MLA Boddhu Bhaskara Ramarao, in the hope that this would strengthen the party. But, Rajappa ignored this. "Rajappa was also trying to damage my image," Murthy said.

He said Rajappa was involved in selection of candidates for the Grama Panchayat polls. "The TD cadre and my followers were exerting pressure on him against the wrong tendencies in the party in my constituency."

YSRC NOW TARGETING STATUES: LOKESH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Telugu Desam general secretary Nara Lokesh has alleged that "after the temple desecrations", the YSR Congress was now targeting statues of great leaders.

He condemned the demolition of the statue of TD founder NTR at Dosakayalapalli village in Korukonda mandal of East Godavari district and held the YSRC responsible for this. "The legacy left behind by NT Rama Rao can never be wiped out by acts of vandalism."

He said it was obvious that YSRC gangsters and vandals were now targeting the statues of great personalities after they could no more continue with their "attacks on temples".

YSRC against SEC decision on unanimous poll

One who does not even know the basics is functioning as our Election Commissioner, says MLA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

The ruling YSR Congress has objected to the decision by the state election commission to freeze all Gram Panchayat results of Chittoor and Guntur districts. YSRC MLA Jogi Ramesh said "there is no provision in the law" to nullify unanimous elections.

Ramesh challenged SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar to go and file a petition in the court along with TD chief Chandrababu Naidu if they felt unanimous elections were undemocratic.

Ramesh said Chandrababu Naidu staying in Hyderabad was doing dirty politics in Andhra Pradesh. "Naidu had appointed an incompetent person as the State Election Commissioner (SEC)," he alleged.

Noting the failure of SEC Ramesh Kumar to transfer his vote from Hyderabad to his native place, Duggirala in AP, Ramesh said, "One who does not even know the basics is functioning as our Election Commissioner." He did not even know "vote can be done only at a place where one resided for 6 months."

The MLA said the unanimous results will depend on how the people of a village think. He questioned why at all should the SEC be freezing the results.

"Presidential, MP, MLA and MLC elections are done at times in a unanimous manner. Then, how the SEC should oppose unanimous polls in the gram panchayat elections, he asked.

He said more than 90 per cent of the YSRC-backed candidates will win the elections. "Was there any complaint that the YSRC ever forced anyone not to file nominations," he asked.

Ramesh said Chandrababu was leading politics on to the wrong direction by fighting the government with the help of the SEC. He demanded that the SEC cancel TD's election manifesto. The SEC should take disciplinary action against Chandrababu Naidu for violation of norms, he said.

MLA Ramesh alleged: "SEC Ramesh Kumar has taken the decision to hold the unanimous results in abeyance as he wants to help TD. Chandrababu belongs to Chittoor and the SEC hails from Guntur district."

SEC directs govt to repaint PDS vehicles

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

State Election Commission directed the civil supplies department to repaint the vehicles meant for door delivery of essential commodities under public distribution system, with any neutral colour of the choice of the government to launch the scheme in rural areas.

The State Election Commissioner in an order issued on Friday said that the vehicle was inspected personally by him and found that the colour scheme contained the party colours of the ruling YSRC. He said that the vehicle was also having images of both the present Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and former chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy being displayed prominently together. He said that usage of images of both the present CM and the former CM was against the earlier judgment of the AP High Court. He further said that the vehicle was also having display of 'Navaratnalu' scheme.

The Election Commissioner said that the SEC was not going to impose a particular colour other than imposing a caveat not to adopt the party colours in any manner. He asked the civil supplies department to paint one vehicle with neutral colour and put it up for inspection of the SEC to get its



Officials dispatch ballot papers and boxes from the District Panchayat Office for the upcoming gram panchayat elections in Visakhapatnam on Friday. — K. MURALI KRISHNA

YSRC seeks action against TD chief for poll code violation

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Meanwhile, the YSR Congress lodged a complaint against the Telugu Desam chief, saying he violated the Model Code of Conduct in the ongoing gram panchayat elections. YSRC state general secretary Lella Appireddy has submitted the complaint to SEC Ramesh Kumar here on Friday.

Appireddy said Chandrababu Naidu violated the election norms by releasing an election manifesto for grama panchayat polls. The GP polls are conducted on a non-

party basis under the democratic system but Naidu made a laughing stock out of himself by releasing the TD manifesto, he said.

He said the TD manifesto is largely circulated among the masses through TD cadres, newspapers, the electronic media and through numerous social media platforms. There is no use with the SEC's action of suspending the TD manifesto five days after the lodging of a complaint against it.

Appi Reddy said the "simple" action of the SEC, of suspending the manifesto without taking

any serious action against Chandrababu Naidu, was ridiculous and it shocked people. He recalled that the SEC wrote letters to the governor with "objectionable" comments and allegations against YSRC ministers and CM Jagan.

He also noted that while the SEC initiated action against higher officials, he did not take any action against Chandrababu Naidu despite clear evidence the TD chief violated the Model Code of Conduct for the elections. Appireddy demanded that the SEC take stern action against Naidu by registering criminal cases against him.

Basic amenities missing at booths

FROM PAGE 1

A senior member from AP Panchayat Raj Secretaries Association said, "The onus for making all requisite arrangements at polling booths for conduct of polls lies with us. With no funds available, we have to meet expenses from our pockets. Senior officials issue instructions only on arrangements. But they never tell us about the source of funds. We appeal to SEC to release funds in advance. This will enable us make arrangements for conduct of polls without facing hardships for arranging money."

Though, majority polling booths are in government schools in villages, a good

number of them are yet to get basic amenities, like clean washrooms despite the Nadu-Nedu programme. This is forcing gram panchayat secretaries to make makeshift arrangements for polling staff.

Gram panchayat secretaries complain that senior officers inspect arrangements and pull them up for not being up to mark, without bothering about the source of funds for hiring wooden poles, tents, lights, fans, benches, desks, buckets, mugs and other requisites. For example, a gram panchayat secretary working at Kolakaluru village of Tenali mandal in Guntur district was placed under suspension by then joint

collector for the reason that there was water logging at a polling booth following heavy rainfall before the polling day during 2014 assembly polls. The secretaries say though the panchayat secretary spent ₹1 lakh from his pocket for making arrangements at the polling booth, he was still punished.

To avoid recurrence of such incidents, gram panchayat secretaries have sought ₹50,000 to ₹1 lakh in advance for each gram panchayat depending upon the number of wards, which range from 10 to 16. This will help them make all necessary arrangements for conduct of polls without any trouble, either to voters or polling staff.

SEC CALLS FOR DETAILED REPORTS

FROM PAGE 1

Ramesh Kumar called for detailed reports from both of them and said that it was only after examining such reports would the SEC decide the next step. He said that they would take action in case of any failure on the part of any poll functionary.

On the other hand, the state election commissioner complimented the government servants and the police personnel for their commitment and dedication in performing poll duties with the highest civil services norms and added that as he completed touring of all 13 districts in the state, poll arrangements were satisfactory. He said that the atmosphere in the districts was conducive for conducting polls in a free and fair manner and added that there were no visible instances of forced unanimous elections in any part of the state.

He said that the Covid-19 situation was under control and added that all the safety precautions were taken up. He stated that the district administration was confident of getting high poll percentages.

AP WITHDRAWS SERVICES OF TTD JT. EXECUTIVE DIR.

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 5

The state government withdrew the services of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Joint Executive Officer (Tirupati) P. Basanth Kumar, from the revenue (endowments) department and asked him to report to the General Administration Department for further posting.

However, the order released late on Thursday stated that Basant Kumar will continue to be on deputation with the State Election Commission amidst the ongoing panchayat elections. The 2007-batch IAS officer will be continued as the Nellore district's election observer.

Ahead of GP polls, TD withdraws manifesto

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Telugu Desam on Friday announced that the party is withdrawing its panchayat election manifesto titled "Palle Pragathi Pancha Sutralu" in accordance with instructions of the State Election Commission (SEC). At the same time, senior TD leader and former MLA Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar maintained that the party is exploring legal options in this regard.

Addressing a press conference here, Dhulipalla Narendra asserted that it is the right of any political party to declare its people-friendly policies during the times of elections. The TD would explore all legal and other options available to it for protecting this right.

It may be recalled that the SEC, on complaint of ruling YSRC, cancelled TD's manifesto for gram panchayat polls.

The senior TD leader claimed that many parties had released their manifestoes in Karnataka, Sikkim and other states. Manifestoes are a natural part of elections, wherein parties state their policies. He said it is still beyond

SEC WILL FACE CONSEQUENCES FOR SUPPORTING TD, WARNS MINISTER

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 5:

Panchayat Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy said that the State Election Commissioner (SEC) Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar would eventually face the consequences for supporting the Telugu Desam Chief Nara Chandrababu in the Panchayat Raj elections.

"The SEC was dancing to the tunes of Chandrababu Naidu. He was not only trying to blackmail the ruling party leaders, but also the state government officials", the minister alleged while addressing a press conference in Tirupati on Friday.

Launching a scathing attack on the SEC Ramesh Kumar for putting unanimous panchayat elections on hold in Chittoor and Guntur districts, Mr

anybody's guess why the YSRC complained to SEC against the TD manifesto.

"Just because YSRC has no manifesto of its own, it should not mean other parties should not release the same. The ruling party complained to SEC only out of fear that TD manifesto will receive a positive response from people," Dhulipalla Narendra remarked.

He accused the Jagan Mohan Reddy government of resorting to unconstitutional measures. This is clear from how TD AP president Atchannaidu has been jailed without any prima facie charges against him. He alleged that YSRC leader Duvvada Srinivas came from a far-away place and created terror in Atchannaidu's Nimmada village, but no action was taken against him. The senior TD leader charged DGP Gautam Sawang with being a silent spectator while democracy is being murdered in every possible way in broad daylight in the middle of the road. He alleged that YSRC activists in guise of "grama volunteers" are threatening voters that they would lose their pensions if they did not vote for YSRC-supported candidates.

Peddireddy questioned the authority of the SEC have to put on hold unanimously elected Panchayats.

"The SEC Ramesh Kumar is deviating from the rule book and is behaving unlawfully. We will retaliate against his unlawful behaviour, and we will move the privileges motion through the assembly speaker to initiate an action against him", the minister added.

Alleging that the SEC had launched an eWatch app developed by the TD, Mr Peddireddy welcomed the AP High Court's decision to stop using the eWatch until February 9. "Every single action of the SEC is intended to benefit the TD. He is hoping that Naidu will reward him with an MLC or some other post. But Naidu is an expert in using and dumping people."

CM CALLS FOR HIGH QUALITY IT INFRASTRUCTURE

FROM PAGE 1

He said infrastructure in these concept cities should be of high standards and their architecture should be unique. He pointed out that "Work from Home" concept has immensely developed due to the Covid pandemic. The same should be promoted towards cost saving. He directed officials to prepare a policy including government support to IT sector that encourages work-from-home concept. He asked officials to focus on bringing as many industries as possible at Kopparthi Electronic Park to increase employment opportunities.

Information technology minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy, higher education special chief secretary Satish Chandra, chief minister's principal advisor Nilam Sawhney, finance principal secretary S. S. Rawat, IT principal secretary G. Jayalakshmi, IT special secretary B. Sundar, energy principal secretary Nagulapalli Srikanth, technical education commissioner M. M. Nayak, AP State Fibernet Limited managing director M. Madhusudan Reddy and other senior officials were present at the review meeting.

● CM POINTED out that "Work from Home" concept has immensely developed due to the Covid pandemic.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy congratulated NCC cadets at the camp office on Friday, who won the Prime Minister's Championship during the Republic Day celebrations recently. — BY ARRANGEMENT

CM gives ₹2L each to NCC winners

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has congratulated the NCC contingent that won the Prime Minister's Trophy at last month's Republic Day Parade and announced a cash reward of ₹2 lakh to each winner.

The contingent that won the PM Trophy called on the chief minister at his camp office here on Friday.

The contingent of the NCC Andhra Pradesh, Telangana Directorate that won the PM Championship Banner showed the winning trophies to the CM. Jagan profusely congratulated them.

The cadets who received cash incentive were Shreyasi Bhakta, A. Sri Sai Priya, Rongali Bhargavi, Chilakapati Jyotsna, A. Hari Prasad, B. Bharat Nayak, D.D. Naga Suresh, V. Ram Prashant, P. Satish Kumar Reddy.

Youth services and sports

DGP appreciates humane gesture of woman cop

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

BEST CRIME DETECTION:

AP DGP Gautam Sawang presented awards for the best crime detection to 66 police personnel for the second and third quarters of Year 2020 during a programme at the state police headquarters here on Friday. The DGP presented a certificate of appreciation to Kasibugga police station sub-inspector Kotturu

Sirisha for performing the funeral to an orphan.

Gautam Sawang said, "It gives me immense pleasure in recognising the good work done for the humanity by these worthies. He asked the police force to work with both dedication and a human touch, "which will make the AP police more people's friendly." The DGP presented the ABCD awards to police officials and policemen of Disha women police station in Gu-

ntur Urban, Vuyyuru Town PS, Mudivedu PS in Chittoor, Kovur PS in Nellore district, Nagari PS Chittoor district and Kurichedu PS in Prakasam district.

Praising the efforts of police officials and the police teams in resolving mysterious cases, he said "resort to technology is need of the hour" and asked the police to update their technology according to the needs of the department.

principal secretary Ramgopal, AP Telangana NCC directorate DDG Air Commander T.S.S. Krishnan, director Colonel S. Pankaj Gupta, army officers

(Kakinada) Colonel K.V. Srinivas, station commander (Vijayawada) Colonel Nitin Sharma, commanding officer Group Captain

Colonel Nalin Mohan, Colonel K. Nair, Lieutenant Colonel Bobin, Lieutenant Colonel P.V.N. Reddy and NCC cadets were among those who met the CM.

SHORT TAKES

VIZAG-CHENNAI
CORRIDOR WILL
CREATE 1.1CR JOBSDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 5

The proposed Vizag Chennai Industrial Corridor will impact the industrial development and employment potential, creating 1.1 crore new jobs in the southern region.

Industry sources said VCIC would jack up the GDP by six times and manufacturing output by seven times. It will be a real driver of growth for Andhra Pradesh, the sources added. The corridor is part of the East Coast Economic Corridor and the first coastal corridor in India.

VCIC is aligned with the golden quadrilateral and poised to play a critical role in driving India's Act East Policy and Make in India campaign.

AP TO HOST 29TH
MEETING OF OUTH
ZONE COUNCILDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

AP to host the 29th meeting of the Southern Zonal Council in Tirupati on March 4.

Union home minister Amit Shah and chairman of the Southern Zonal Council (comprising the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Puducherry as Members and UTS of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep as Special Invitees) has now fixed the 29th meeting of the Southern Zonal Council on 4 March 2021 in Tirupati.

The chief ministers/ lieutenant governor/ administrators of eight states/UTs in the southern zone will participate along with their respective chief secretaries, advisers and other senior officers in keeping with important agenda items. On the whole, approximately 90 to 100 dignitaries/officers are expected to participate in this meeting.

ILLEGAL MINING
THRIVES IN
BANAGANAPALLEDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 5

Illegal transport of mineral wealth without paying royalties continues in Banaganapalle circle despite cancellations of leases. About 12 tipplers have been seized carrying major minerals. Mining Assistant Director Venugopal said cases had been booked and vigilance has been stepped up. Illegal mining was found near Yaganti, Veerabramham temple area, and Ravvalakonda besides quarries for gravel, said Veeranjanyulu, a social activist. The Mines department had cancelled 12 leases some time back. However, still, people having affiliation to local leaders in the ruling party continued the trade without let or hindrance, he said.

Banaganapalle circle has rich deposits of limestone, gravel, quartz, feldspar, and other precious minerals. Maha Cement, Ultratech, Ramco, and other cement companies depend on

BUDGET ALLOCATES ₹1,300 CRORE TO
WALT AIR DIVISION FOR ONGOING WORKSDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 5

Waltair Division of the East Coast Railway was allocated a budget of ₹1,300 crore for the new and ongoing development projects.

There has been a significant increase in outlay for road safety works, the road under-bridge and over bridges and passenger amenity works. The ongoing doubling and new line work was given priority with the allocation of ₹871 crore. Jagdalpur-

Koraput (110.22 km), Koraput-Singapur Road (164.56 km), Jeypore — Malkangiri (130 km), Jeypore — Navarangpur (38 km) are included in this funding.

Towards traffic facility works of ₹20.9 crore has been allocated, including Gopalapatnam-Vizianagaram provision of auto signalling including Simhachalam bypass line, converting line four into the longer loop with common loop status for python trains at Chipurupalli.

TD LEADERS SEEK POLICE SUPPORT FOR
FAIR AND PEACEFUL ELECTIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 5

Led by Telugu Desam politburo member Reddeppagari Srinivasa Reddy, party leaders on Friday lodged a complaint with district police chief Nagendra Kumar Anburajan over the problems the party is facing during the panchayat election campaign. Srinivasa Reddy later told the media that the delegation has sought help from the police for peaceful conduct of the elections. "We urged the SP to check

attempts to unleash violence and spread anarchy in the run-up to the elections." The team also urged the police to check acts of coercive consensus, threats from police officers, tearing up of nomination papers, and rejection of nominations without sufficient ground. "There should be no anarchy, unlike what happened in the elections in February and March last year." The team also urged the police to ensure that no outsider is allowed into any grama panchayat when the polls take place.

Steel plant employees
take out massive rally

MPs and MLAs of all parties protest proposed privatisation

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 5

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant employees and 16 trade unions continued to protest against the privatisation of the steel plant for the second day on Friday. The employees took out a massive motorcycle rally from the steel plant to the Gandhi statue at RTC Complex which later culminated into a dharna and public meeting.

Vizag and Anakapalle Lok Sabha members attended the dharna members M.V.V. Satyanarayana and K. Satyavathi, Gajuwaka MLA Tippala Nagi Reddy TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishnababu. State president of CITU Ch Narsinga Rao, CPI State joint secretary J.V. Satyanarayana Murthy and president of the recognised union of the steel plant Steel Employees Union J. Ayodhyaram.

Addressing the gathering, Lok Sabha member M.V.V. Satyanarayana said YSRC was opposed to the privatisation of Vizag Steel Plant, and the issue would be taken to the notice of chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

"We will stage dharna at the main gate of the steel plant and block the privatisation in the Parliament," the MP said and added that the elected representatives would support the agitation programme of trade union and steel plant employees.

Lok Sabha member from Anakapalle Dr K. Satyanvati said the steel plant had been the pride of Andhra Pradesh her party would not allow the central government's privatisation move.

Gajuwaka MLA Tippala Nagi Reddy said the privatisation of steel plant would spell doom for the BJP at the centre.

Jana Sena leader Kona Tata Rao said his party would take the issue to the national capital and fight until the privatisation move was dropped. CITU State president Ch. Narsinga Rao said the PM would not privatise the Vizag Steel Plant. He said the centre, which failed to extend financial support during losses, has no right to privatise the steel plant.

"People sacrificed to get the steel plant, and now more will come forward to repeat the same for its protection," Narsinga Rao said.

Union president J. Ayodhyaram said the steel plant has been providing ₹42,000 crore annually in dividends and taxes to the central and State government. For expansion, the plant spent ₹18,000 crore and created 5,000 new jobs. It is a conspiracy to privatise the steel plant, the biggest factory in AP, he added.



Employees of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant take part in a bike rally in big numbers in protest against the privatisation move by the central government on Visakhapatnam Steel Plant on the national highway in Visakhapatnam on Friday. — DC

State should buy
Vizag plant: TDDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Telugu Desam national general-secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Friday demanded that the YSRC government oppose the privatisation of the prestigious Visakh Steel Plant. "It is a matter of pride for all Andhras." He proposed that the ruling YSRC pass a resolution in the assembly that the state government should buy the steel plant. "When a similar situation arose in Chhattisgarh, its government passed a unanimous resolution in the assembly to buy the Nagarnar Steel Plant, he said.

In a letter sent to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Lokesh said the Visakh Steel was incurring losses because it had no captive iron ore mine of its own.

The state government should immediately ask the Centre to allot an iron ore mine exclusively for the Visakh Steel."

He said the YSRC government is doing a historic injustice to the people of North Andhra by playing a 'dubious role' vis-a-vis the Visakh Steel. "This is yet another betrayal by the ruling YSRC leaders to have set their sights on the steel plant's costly lands. The steel plant was saved only after over 32 people sacrificed their lives in an agitation. During his tenure, former chief minister Chandrababu Naidu fought against its privatization and forced the central government to withdraw the move in 2000," he said.

Lokesh said over 40,000 employees were dependent on the steel plant and lakhs of people were having indirect employment.

"The TD would not keep silent, it would protect the steel plant," he said and appealed to all to fight this out by chanting the slogan 'Visakh Ukku Andhrula Hakku' (Visakh Steel a right of Andhras).



Visakhapatnam Steel Plant employee displays placards during a protest near GVMC Gandhi Statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Friday. — DC

WITHDRAW
PRIVATISATION
MOVE: GANTADC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 5

Former minister and Visakhapatnam North MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao has appealed to the central government to withdraw the privatising proposals of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Taking to the social media, the senior TDP functionary from north coastal Andhra, Ganta Srinivasa Rao asked the public and trade unions to oppose the central government's move strongly.

"Steel Plant should not be seen as a mere factory but as the pride of the people of Andhra Pradesh," he said and added that the central government should look for alternative sources for income but not Vizag Steel Plant.

He said Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is the only factory in the country that was operating without captive mines. The plant was incurring ₹5,000 crore additional funds annually for production. The former minister warned that the agitation would be intensified and would be more serious than the present farmers agitation being held in New Delhi.

Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishnababu said the Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy should lead an all-party delegation to New Delhi and pressurise the central government on the privatisation.

He also suggested that the CM pass a resolution in the Assembly opposing the privatisation move.

Cultivation drops significantly

from page 1

He urged political leaders in the district to work for the re-opening of Chennuru Sugar Factory.

Sugarcane was formerly cultivated on thousands of acres in the Chapadu mandal. Now the acreage of crop cultivation has been significantly reduced.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy assured that steps will be taken to reopen the Chennur sugar

industry. No decision has been taken so far except for a committee appointed by the government to look into the matter.

With the Chennur Sugar Factory remaining shut, farmers in the district have been moving sugarcane to a private industry in Podalakuru for the past few years. However, they are not getting payments.

Ambati Krishna Reddy told Deccan Chronicle that he has taken the issue to

the issue of Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The factory management is in a financial crisis, but they assured to settle all pending bills, he said.

Assistant cane commissioner John Victor, speaking to Deccan Chronicle, said that he has already discussed the payment of dues with factory management. They have promised him to pay half of the dues within a week and the remaining is to be paid after a month.

AP RECORDS 97
COVID CASES,
ONE DEATHDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 5

Andhra Pradesh registered 97 fresh cases of Covid-19 and one death on Friday. According to state health authorities, out of 33,876 samples tested, 97 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of 1,32,76,678 samples tested so far, 8,88,275 people were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,80,046 were recovered in the course of treatment while 1,071 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of confirmed Covid-19, Chittoor topped the state with 25 cases, followed by 11 in Krishna, 10 in Visakhapatnam, eight in East Godavari, seven each in Guntur and Nellore, six each in Anantapur, Kadapa, West Godavari, five in Srikakulam, three in Prakasam, two in Vizianagaram, one in Kurnool.

Krishna continues to lead the state by registering the highest number of cumulative Covid active cases with 260 followed by 126 in Chittoor, 124 in Guntur, 116 in East Godavari, 97 in Visakhapatnam, 71 in West Godavari, 62 in Nellore, 58 in Kadapa, 55 in Prakasam, 43 in Kurnool, 34 in Anantapur, 14 in Vizianagaram and 11 in Srikakulam.

HPCL, VISAKHA
VIMALA IN RINL
SIGN MoUDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 5

The Visakh Refinery of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) signed an MoU with the Diocese of Vizagapatnam Society (responsible for running two Vishakh Vimala Vidyalayams supported by RINL) for infrastructural development in Vishakh Vimala Vidyalayams at RINL.

A release on Friday said RINL has been extending the financial support to these two schools providing quality education to children coming from underprivileged sections of the society.

SEVEN SUFFER FROM AEFI AFTER SHOTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 5

Seven nursing students, who were administered the Covid-19 vaccine in the government-run hospital in Tirupati, developed minor complaints as part of the Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) on Friday. According to the officials, seven nursing stu-

dents, studying General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) at S.V.R. Ruia Government General Hospital in Tirupati were admitted in the same hospital after they reported AEFI following the jab they took on Friday morning. Dr E.B. Devi said that the seven nursing students had developed vomiting, headaches, and other mild symptoms.

JAGAN TO ATTEND ANTARVEDI LAKSHMI
NARASIMHA SWAMY KALYANOTSAVAMDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 5

Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy celestial marriage (Kalyanotsavam) will be conducted from February 19 to 28 at shrine Antarvedi in Sakshinetipalli mandal of East Godavari District. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will attend the first day of the programme.

On September 2020, the Chariot of the temple was gutted, and the government has made a new chariot. Now, district administration is making arrangements for the shrine programme.

On February 19, the auspicious Ratha Saphthami festival, the Kalyanotsavam programmes will begin.

Cashew to be purchased
from Vandan-Vikas centresDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 5

The Rampachodavaram ITDA has made arrangements to purchase cashew directly from the cashew garden farmers through Vandan-Vikas Centres, sponsored by the central government in summer. It will avoid the role of mediators in the sale and purchase transactions of cashew nuts from tribal people.

ITDA project officer C.V. Praveen Adhithya told the officials to inspect the Broiler Automatic machines which process the 320 kilos capacity of cashew nut.

He also proposed organic cashew nuts and said that at present there is more demand for organic cashew nut. He said there are 61 Vandan-Vikas centres in agency area and a cashew nut processing unit will be set up in Pandirimamidli village.

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001 GURU HARGOBIND THERMAL PLANT, LEHRA MOHABBAT DISTT. BATHINDA (PUNJAB) - 151 111 e-tendering website- http://eproc.punjab.gov.in NOTICE INVITING TENDER (Through E-tendering) Tender Enquiry No.: 65/CHP/OP-305/GHTP/2021-22 Dated 04/02/2021 SHORT DESCRIPTION: To provide support at the vital location/equipments for operation of coal handling plant as per scope of work on Stage-I & II at 2x210 MW + 2x250 MW, CHP, GHTP, Lehra Mohabat Distt. Bathinda. EMD: Minimum Rs. 7,00,000/- Last Date & Time for bid submission : 03/03/2021 upto 11:30 hrs. Date & Time of opening of Fee stage bid : 05/03/2021 upto 11:30 hrs. Detailed NIT and tender specification can be downloaded from PSPCL website http://eproc.punjab.gov.in from dated 05/02/2021 onwards. Note: 1. The prospective bidders can obtain clarification regarding tender specifications from this office. For registration of digital signatures and uploading of tender, information may be sought from http://eproc.punjab.gov.in 2. It is informed that in case the tender process is not completed due to any reason, no corrigendum will be published in newspapers. Detail regarding corrigendum may be seen on PSPCL official website i.e. https://pspc.in . Superintending Engineer, Mechanical Mtc. Circle-II, O&M, GHTP, PSPCL, Lehra Mohabbat, Distt. Bathinda (Pb.)-151111. GHTP-06/21 RO: 6155/12/78/2021/1324
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SHORT TAKES

FOREST GUARD
KILLED BY
POACHERS IN MP

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, FEB. 5

A forest guard took on the poachers in a Madhya Pradesh jungle 'singlehandedly' and shot video of his attack by them in his mobile before his death.

Blood-ridden body of Madanlal Verma (52), a forest guard posted in Ratanpur beat of Punjapur forest range in Dewas district, was found on the bank of a water body inside the jungle on the intervening night of Thursday and Friday.

His cell phone, recovered near his body, has led to disclosure of the attack on him by the poachers and his subsequent death.

"We have recovered the footage of the video showing his attack, shot by the slain forest guard himself in his cell phone. The accused were not captured in the video", Dewas divisional forest officer P.N. Mishra said.

POLICE TOLD TO
FILE REPORT ON
KANGANA'S CASE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 5

A magistrate court in Mumbai on Friday directed the police to submit a progress report on the inquiry it had ordered into a complaint against actor Kangana Ranaut and her sister for posting alleged hateful messages on social media.

On Friday when the matter came up for hearing, the Amboli police sought further time to file their report on the complaint filed by advocate Ali Kaashif Khan Deshmukh alleging that the sisters tweeted hateful contents against a particular community.

Initially the magistrate in Andheri had ordered an inquiry in October, 2020 and asked the police to file their report by December 5, 2020 into the sisters' tweets from April 2020, but the police sought more time to complete the inquiry. Even though the magistrate had given a final chance to file their report during the last hearing on January 5.

However, the police sought further time on Friday.

INDIA-U.S. TO
JOINTLY CONDUCT
'YUDH ABHYAS'

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

Indian and US armies will conduct exercise 'Yudh Abhyas' from Monday at Mahajan Field Firing Range (MFFR) in Rajasthan.

Some 500 soldiers (250 from each side) will participate in the exercise to be conducted from February 8 to 21.

This annual training exercise enhances combined interoperability capabilities through training and cultural exchange, which foster enduring partnerships.

"Yudh Abhyas provides excellent opportunities for professional and cultural exchanges that strengthen partnership between Indian and US military through shared learning and training," said US embassy in a statement.

Training commences with expert academic exchanges and professional development workshops that focus on training at the corps-level and below; combat against conventional, unconventional and hybrid threats; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Government ready to listen to protesting farmers: Tomar

Says govt's offer to amend the farm laws does not mean they are flawed

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

Asserting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Centre are committed to the welfare of farmers, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Friday said neither the Opposition members who criticised the three new farm laws, nor the farmers' unions, which had held more than 10 rounds of discussions with the government, have been able to point out what is "kaala" (black) in the laws which they are claiming are "kaala kanoon" (black laws).

Intervening in a discussion on the motion of thanks to the President's address in the Rajya Sabha, Tomar reiterated that the new laws are aimed at boosting farmers' incomes and the government's offer to amend them to assuage the farmers' sentiments does not mean they are flawed. As the government continued its defence of the laws, the Congress, which is supporting the farmers' unions protests against the laws, sought a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the Republic Day violence, when a protesting mob turned violent and unfurled a Sikh religious flag at the Red Fort.

While the Rajya Sabha saw the agriculture minister strongly defending the laws, the Lok Sabha witnessed sloganeering by Opposition members who demanded the repeal of the laws. The Lower House saw multiple adjournments before it was adjourned for the day till Monday.

"The farmers unions, the Opposition parties have failed to point out a single flaw in three new farm laws. We are not standing on prestige. We have been



Farmers plant flowers near the spikes fixed by the police during their protest against the new farm laws, at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Friday.

—PTI

asking what is black in this law, and no one is answering," said Tomar in the Rajya Sabha, where he also attacked the Congress, that is leading the protest in Parliament, as indulging in "khood ki kheti".

Amid the uproar in Parliament, the Prime Minister held a strategy meeting with Union home minister Amit Shah, parliamentary affairs minister Prahlad Joshi and B&B minister Prakash Javadekar on how to tackle the ongoing protests by the farmers and the Opposition campaign.

Insisting that the protests over farm laws are limited to only "one state (read Punjab)" and that the farmers are being "instigated", Tomar said, "I made it clear that the government is ready to

make amendments but it doesn't mean there is any problem in the farm laws. People in a particular state are misinformed. Farmers are being misled that others would occupy their land if these laws are implemented. Let me know if there is a single provision in the contract farming law which allows any trader to snatch away the land of any farmer," said the minister.

In an apparent reference to a booklet released by the Congress recently against the laws, the minister hit back, "The world knows water is required for farming. Only the Congress can do farming using blood."

He also said the government had not "defamed" the farmers, as alleged by the Opposition parties.

Shivraj, Nath hold closed-door meet

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, FEB. 5

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday held a closed-door meeting with his predecessor and veteran Congress leader Kamal Nath here sparking speculations on 'track 2 talks' to end the impasse over the ongoing farmers' stir.

The one-to-one meeting, held in the Chief Minister's official residence here, lasted about 20 minutes. Neither the Chief Minister nor Nath spoke to the media to detail what

transpired in the meeting. Congress spokesman here Narendra Saluja, however, indicated that the two leaders discussed the farmers' issues.

"Farmers' issues cropped up in the meeting", Saluja told reporters giving credence to the speculations on track 2 talks to end the impasse over the over 2-month-long farmers' stir in Delhi.

Incidentally Nath left for Delhi after the meeting on a week-long visit to the national capital where he was scheduled to meet several senior leaders of Congress.

WB MLA told to leave or get killed

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, FEB. 5

Two weeks after his defection to the BJP from the ruling Trinamul Congress in poll-bound West Bengal, Shantipur MLA in Nadia Arindam Bhattacharjee has been asked to leave his Assembly constituency within a week or else he will be murdered.

The threat was issued to Bhattacharjee, who won as a Congress MLA for the first time in the 2016 Assembly election before defecting to the TMC next year, in posters which came to light on Friday morning at many parts including Bagdebipur and Karamchapur of the town, a day before the first Rath Yatra of the BJP is scheduled to be launched by party president J.P. Nadda from Nabadwip in the district.

Written in blue and Bengali, one of the posters states, "Agami saadiner modhye Arindam Bhattacharjee tumi Shantipur chharo, nahole tomar khuner daay tumi nije" (In next seven days, you leave

Shantipur, otherwise you will be responsible for your murder").

Bhattacharjee who joined the BJP in presence of its national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya in New Delhi on January 20 accused the TMC of threat on his life.

"It is the handiwork of the ruling party. Similar posters surfaced in my name earlier also. This time threat of my murder has been given. I accept the challenge of those who gave it to me. I will go nowhere, leaving Shantipur," he said.

Only three days ago, posters targeting the young MLA were circulated in his constituency. One of them stated, "The evil has gone. TMC has already won it. Only the celebration is left. Flee from Shantipur, Arindam."

Local TMC leader Ajoy De, however, claimed, "Our party does indulge in such shameful activities. Bhattacharjee's allegations are baseless. TMC is not involved in it."

Later the police removed the posters.

WB Cong seeks alliance with ISF to win Muslim votebank

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 5

Desperate to reclaim its Muslim votebank from the ruling Trinamul Congress in the forthcoming West Bengal Assembly elections, the state Congress leaders have sought UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi's permission to include a third party in their alliance, Indian Secular Front, floated by influential cleric of Furfura Sharif, Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui.

The Congress already has an alliance with the Left Front and the two parties are in the middle of seat-sharing talks.

On Thursday, leader of the Opposition in the state, Abdul Mannan, wrote to the Congress president, "Amidst the dialogue process with the Left Front on electoral alliance, I would like to add a possibility of a grand alliance in Bengal to target more winnable seats. You are aware that Congress party in West Bengal stood in the state for the support of minority votes since many years. But the result of the last Lok Sabha election shows

● DR MANNAN'S move came after month-long talks with Siddiqui following AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi's visit to Siddiqui last month.

that minority vote has shifted from the party. Best example is the district of Murshidabad where Muslim population is not less than 70 per cent, Congress is far behind in every Muslim dominated Assembly segments. The same picture is in Malda and we have been uprooted completely in all Muslim dominated segment of the district of Uttar Dinajpur."

Dr Mannan's move came after month-long talks with Siddiqui following AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi's visit to Siddiqui last month and his pledge to back him, apparently to split the Muslim votes to help the BJP.

Slamming him, BJP IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya tweeted, "The true nature of 'secular' politics is nothing but Muslim appeasement and here Abdul Mannan, Congress leader in Bengal, in a letter to Sonia Gandhi,

can't even hide his desperation to consolidate their Muslim votebank. Reading the letter it seems as if Hindus don't matter!"

Dr Mannan observed, "Out of 30 per cent Muslim population in Bengal, the percentage of Bengali-speaking Muslim is 90 per cent which had been the traditional votebank of Congress. We have failed to hold that support for various reasons. Introduction of a new political entity in the name of Indian Secular Front (ISF) is a threat for all secular parties. They have made a concept paper (attached) to target Muslims, dalits, tribals and all unprivileged masses within the secular fabric of the country."

The president of the ISF is a Hindu but the person behind the front is a Muslim religious leader named Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui who belongs to the Eminent Religious Family of Furfura Sharif, Hooghly. He is not only popular for his oratory skill among Muslims but among dalits and rribals also. Lakhs of people gather in his meeting in dalit and tribal areas."

Centre to give 1 more chance to UPSC aspirants

New Delhi, Feb. 5: The Centre on Friday told the Supreme Court that it is agreeable to give an extra chance as a one-time relaxation to UPSC civil service aspirants, who had appeared in their last attempt in the 2020 exam amid the Covid-19 pandemic and are otherwise not age-barred.

"Relaxation, only to the extent of providing one extra attempt for Civil Service Examination (CSE), specifically limited to CSE-2021, may be granted to only those candidates who appeared for CSE-2020 as their last permissible attempt and are otherwise not age-barred from appearing in CSE-2021," the Centre told a bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar.

In a note filed in the apex court, the Centre said that no relaxation shall be granted for CSE-2021 to those candidates who have not exhausted their permissible number of attempts or to those who are otherwise age-barred from appearing in CSE-2021 as per the prescribed age limits of different categories, or to any other candidate for any other reason whatsoever.

"This relaxation for the candidates and to the extent as prescribed above, shall be a one-time relaxation only and shall apply only for appearing in CSE-2021 and shall not be treated as a precedent," it told the bench, also comprising Justice Dinesh Maheshwari.

The Centre said that the

relaxation "shall not create any vested right whatsoever or any other purported right on ground of parity or otherwise, in favour of any other set/class of candidates at any time in the future."

"As per the suggestion of this court, the Union of India is agreeable for the following ex-gratia, one-time, restricted relaxation to be granted to the prospective candidates, subject to the same being part of a consent order, disposing off the petition," the note, filed by Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, said.

The bench told Raju to circulate the note and asked the petitioners to file their responses to it. The top court said it would hear the matter on February 8.

The bench is hearing a plea seeking grant of one more chance in the UPSC's civil services exam to those aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in 2020 due to the pandemic.

On February 1, the Centre had told the top court that it cannot grant an extra chance to civil services aspirants who could not appear or prepare well for their last attempt in the UPSC civil service exam in 2020 due to the pandemic, while reiterating that it would amount to extending "differential treatment" to similarly placed candidates. However, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta had on February 1 sought time to discuss the issue once again. —PTI

After 18 months, 4G back in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, FEB. 5

High speed 4G internet services were restored in entire Jammu and Kashmir late on Friday evening, exactly after a gap of 18 months.

The authorities said that the decision to this effect was taken after the review of the security situation in the Union Territory and in view of the recommendations of a committee set up by the government to look into the issue some time ago.

The announcement was made by Principal Secretary Information, Rohit Kansal, who is also government spokesperson, through a tweet. It said, "4G mobile internet services being restored in entire J&K @diprjk"

A formal order signed by Shaleen Kabba, principal secretary (home), said that in view of the advice of the special committee constituted on the directive of Supreme Court and upon "careful review" of the overall security scenario the restrictions on mobile data services and fixed line Internet connectivity is revoked "except to the extent that the pre-paid SIM card holders shall be provided excess to the Internet connectivity only after verification as per the norms applicable for post-paid connections".

In August last year, the J&K authorities had restored high-speed 4G internet service on

● THE ANNOUNCEMENT was made by Principal Secretary Information, Rohit Kansal, who is also government spokesperson, through a tweet.

'experimental basis' in two districts of the erstwhile state-Udhampur and Ganderbal, more than a year after a complete communication blackout was enforced in both Jammu region and Kashmir Valley regions ahead of the Centre's abrogating Article 370 and bifurcating the state into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019.

Though the landline and mobile phone and 2G bandwidth internet services were restored in a phased manner across what is now called the UT of J&K earlier, 18 out of 20 of its districts continued to be deprived of the high-speed 4G internet.

A series of judgements given and observations made by the Supreme Court in the past had failed to end what the critics called was J&K's "digital siege".

Welcoming the government's decision to end the ban on high speed internet services after 551 days, former chief minister and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah tweeted "4G Mubarak! For the first time since Aug 2019 all of J&K will have 4G mobile data. Better late than never."

Pfizer pulls out of vaccination race

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agencies input
NEW DELHI, FEB. 6

Vaccine firm Pfizer on Friday announced its decision to withdraw its application for Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) of its Covid-19 vaccination in India.

Pfizer was the first pharmaceutical firm to seek an emergency use authorisation from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for its Covid-19 vaccine in the country, after it secured such clearance in the UK and Bahrain.

"In pursuance of the Emergency Use Authorisation

of its Covid-19 vaccine, Pfizer participated in the Subject Expert Committee meeting of the Drug Regulatory Authority of India on February 3. Based on the deliberations at the meeting and our understanding of additional information that the regulator may need, the company has decided to withdraw its application at this time," a company spokesperson said in a statement.

Pfizer will continue to engage with the authority and resubmit its approval request with additional information as it becomes available in the near future, the statement said.

New Delhi, Feb. 5: In a relief to comedian Munawar Faruqui, arrested in a case for allegedly hurting religious sentiments by passing objectionable remarks about Hindu deities during a show, the Supreme Court on Friday released him on an interim bail.

The top court also stayed the Madhya Pradesh High Court order of January 28, which had refused to grant him bail noting that to "promote harmony" is one of the constitutional duties.

It also stayed the produc-

tion warrant issued against Faruqui by a trial court in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh in connection with the FIR lodged in the state.

A bench of Justices R.F. Nariman and B.R. Gavai said issued notice on two petitions filed by Faruqui seeking bail in a case lodged in Indore in Madhya Pradesh and clubbing and quashing of FIRs lodged for the same alleged offence in different states.

The top court sought response from Madhya Pradesh government on

both the pleas filed by Faruqui and from Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra governments on the plea seeking clubbing and quashing of FIRs.

This being the case, we issue notice in both the petitions, and stay the Judgment of the High Court. The petitioner is released on ad-interim bail on conditions to the satisfaction of the trial court. In the meantime, there shall be stay of the production warrants as well, the bench said.

At the outset, advocate Saurabh Kirpal, appearing for Faruqui said, This is a case of victimisation.

He said that allegations made in the FIR are vague in nature and procedure of arrest laid down by the court in its 2014 verdict was not followed.

The bench noted the submission and said, The counsel has pointed out to us that quite apart from the fact that the allegations made in the FIR are vague that the procedure contained in Section 41 CrPC as adumbrated by

our Judgment in Arnesh Kumar Versus State of Bihar and others has not been followed before arresting the petitioner.

Faruqui and four others were arrested on January 1 following a complaint by a BJP MLA's son that alleged objectionable remarks about Hindu deities and Union home minister Amit Shah were passed by him during a comedy show at a cafe in Indore on New Year's day. One more person was arrested subsequently.

The high court, in its

order passed on January 28, had refused to grant him bail noting that to "promote harmony" is one of the constitutional duties. It had also turned down the bail plea of another accused in the case.

In its order, the high court had said it would not comment on merits of the case, but based on the material seized, the witnesses' statements and considering the fact that probe was going on, no case was made out for grant of bail.

—PTI

BIG | RELIEF

Apex court stays MP High Court order, production warrant issued against Faruqui

SC grants bail to comedian Munawar Faruqui

SHORT TAKES

GAS EXPLOSION IN S. GERMANY, MANY HURT

Berlin, Feb. 5: Several people were injured in a gas explosion on Friday in or near a building in the southern German town of Memmingen. The explosion occurred at about 6 am and damaged the building used by the Bavarian Red Cross, which also had apartments above, authorities told the dpa news agency. Five people were injured, one seriously, police said. The source of the explosion was a defective gas line that ran under the street in front of the building, dpa reported. Authorities warned that other explosions were possible and evacuated the area. The building was seriously damaged, police said.

COPS CHARGE PAIR OVER SEX SLAVE RING

Brisbane, Australia, Feb. 5 : A man and woman in Australia were charged with drugging several women and forcing them into prostitution on Friday, with police alleging girls as young as 17 were tattooed as property and held in “sexual servitude”. A 35-year-old Brisbane man is accused of giving at least four victims “stupefying drugs” and along with a suspected female accomplice faces multiple charges relating to unlawful prostitution. Police said raids at two properties in Brisbane’s southern suburbs uncovered four female victims and authorities believe more have yet to be found. “The investigation is still ongoing however the women are now safe thanks to the information from members of the public and the diligence of our officers,” Queensland Police Service Detective Inspector Juliet Hancock said in a statement. “We believe there are other victims who have been exploited by the man, and I encourage them to come forward and contact police.”

2-YR-OLD INDIAN BOY BECOMES YOUNGEST DONOR

Dubai, Feb. 5: A two-year-old Indian boy has become one of the youngest donors of hair in the UAE, as part of a charity drive to help cancer patients, according to a media report. At two years and 10 months, Taksh Jain is one of the youngest children to have enrolled into the Friends of Cancer Patients’ (FOCP) hair donation campaign, the Gulf News reported. His mother, Neha Jain, a housewife, said Taksh was inspired by his older sister, who donated her locks for a similar cause in 2019. “My son used to listen to that and started telling us that he too wanted to give his hair like his sister. I was touched and started growing his hair.” Jain said they are going to wait for Taksh’s hair to grow a little longer, before it is finally donated. The FOCP launched the hair donation drive on Thursday, marking World Cancer Day. As of now, seven schools in the UAE are part of the initiative.

TALIBAN ATTACK KILLS 10 AFGHAN MILITIAMEN

Kunduz, Afghanistan, Feb. 5: At least 10 pro-government Afghan militiamen were killed in fierce overnight fighting after their checkpoint came under attack from Taliban fighters in northern Afghanistan, officials said on Friday. The attack on the local militia, many of which work with overstretched security forces, came as violence surges across the country despite peace talks between the warring Taliban and Afghan government. Insurgents attacked the checkpoint in the restive Kunduz province during the night, provincial governor Abdul Sattar Mirzakwal told reporters. “Their attack was repelled initially but the militiamen were attacked again by Taliban fighters which led to intense fighting,” Mirzakwal said. “Unfortunately, 10 uprising forces (pro-government militiamen) were killed,” Kunduz provincial council member Amruddin Wali confirmed the attack but said at least 15 militiamen were killed. There was no immediate comment from the Taliban.

Biden ends US role in Yemen war, calls out Russia, China

US Prez also freezes Trump’s plans to redeploy troops from Germany

Washington, Feb. 5: President Joe Biden ended US support for Saudi Arabia’s devastating war in Yemen and dramatically increased the welcome to refugees, ushering in a major reset in American foreign policy. In his first major speech on foreign affairs as president, Biden also froze former president Donald Trump’s plans to redeploy troops from Germany and vowed a tough approach against what he described as a rising authoritarian threat from China and Russia. Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris traveled together to the State Department in a symbol of a renewed focus on diplomacy after Trump’s tumultuous four years. “America is back. Diplomacy is back,” Biden told a socially distanced auditorium of diplomats. In a speech shortly afterward, Biden said the United States would end all support including connected arms sales for ally Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen, which he said “has created a humanitarian and strategic catastrophe.” He appointed a US special envoy for Yemen, veteran diplomat Timothy Lenderking, who Biden said would support UN efforts to reach a ceasefire and revive peace talks between the government and Huthi rebels who control much of the country, including the capital Sanaa. “This war has to end,” Biden said. Saudi Arabia reacted to Biden’s speech by reasserting its commitment to a political solution in Yemen, according to state media. Riyadh also welcomed Biden’s “commitment to cooperate with the kingdom to defend its sovereignty and counter threats against it,” the official Saudi Press Agency added. Trump — who argued arms sales were creating US defense jobs — viewed the war as a way to hit back at the Huthis’ ally Iran. Biden backs a return of diplomacy and a nuclear accord with Iran but, strikingly, he only indirectly mentioned Tehran in what was billed as a broad-brush speech on his international priorities. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said he will revisit Trump’s

ON AMERICA

Biden said the United States will welcome up to **1,25,000** refugees in the first fiscal year of his administration — far above the record-low **15,000** last approved by Trump, who was a vociferous critic of non-Western immigration.

ON GERMANY

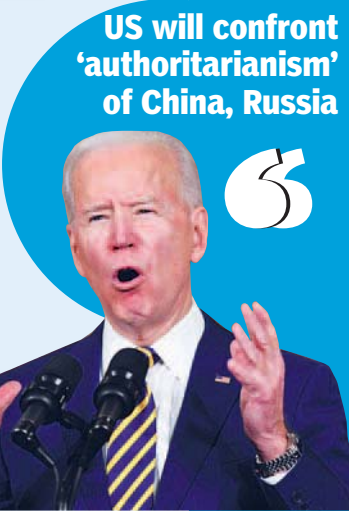
Putting on hold plans set in motion by Trump to reduce the US troop presence in Germany, a cornerstone of NATO security since the start of the Cold War.

ON RUSSIA

Biden said that he had warned Vladimir Putin that the US will no longer be “rolling over in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions.” “We will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia and defend our vital interest and our people.”

ON YEMEN

US President said that the war in Yemen “has to end”, pledging to terminate US support for Saudi-led offensive operations and to halt arms sales. “This war has to end,” Biden said.



last-minute designation of the Huthis as a terrorist group. In Yemen, senior political official Hamid Assem voiced hope that Biden’s plan will mark the end of a six-year war that has left tens of thousands dead. “The Biden administration saw that the war in Yemen carries a heavy cost and that America’s reputation has been tarnished by the killing of the people of Yemen,” he said. In another sharp reversal, Biden said the United States will welcome up to 1,25,000 refugees in the first fiscal year of his administration — far above the record-low 15,000 last approved by Trump, who was a vociferous critic of non-Western immigration.

“The United States’ moral leadership on refugee issues was a point of bipartisan consensus for so many decades when I first got here,” said Biden, who was elected to the Senate in 1972. “We shine the light, the lamp, of liberty on oppressed people. And our example pushed other countries to open wide their doors as well.” Among groups seeking asylum, Biden said his administration would welcome LGBTQ people fleeing persecution over their sexual orientation. Biden also put on hold plans set in motion by Trump to reduce the US troop presence in Germany, a cornerstone of NATO security since the start of the Cold War. Trump’s decision was

seen as linked to his tense relationship with German Chancellor Angela Merkel — whose welcome to mostly Syrian migrants he belittled. Defense Secretary Austin Lloyd later said he had ordered a Pentagon review of US military “force posture” around the world in consultation with allies. Biden has pledged to keep up Trump’s hard stance on China — but also to toughen the US stance on Russian President Vladimir Putin, for whom the defeated US president voiced admiration. “I made it clear to President Putin — in a manner very different from my predecessor — that the days of the United States rolling over in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions, interfering with our elections, cyber attack and poisoning its citizens are over,” Biden said. Moments before the speech, the State Department said that Blinken spoke by telephone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and, among other issues, raised the purported poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny — who was arrested last month on his return to Moscow and has inspired thousands to take to the streets. Biden said the United States “must meet this new moment of advancing authoritarianism including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy.” — AFP



The *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) destroyer is moored in a dock at the Yokosuka Naval Base on June 01, 2019 in Yokosuka, Japan. — AFP file photo

Beijing warns off US warship near South China Sea

Beijing, Feb. 5: China on Friday warned off a US warship sailing near contested islands in the South China Sea, Beijing said, the first such encounter made public since the inauguration of President Joe Biden. The USS John S. McCain “broke into China’s Xisha territorial waters without the permission of the Chinese government,” Beijing’s military said in a statement, using its name for the disputed Parcel Islands. The People’s Liberation Army “organized naval and air forces to track, monitor and warn off” the warship, the Chinese military said, blasting the US for “seriously violating China’s sovereignty” and “harming regional peace.” The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer on Thursday also conducted a routine transit through the waterway separating the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, which Beijing says constitutes part of its territory. Washington has argued that such exercises are in line with international law and help defend right of passage through the region amid competing claims by China and other governments. China lays claim to nearly all of the South China Sea, including the Parcel Islands. Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all also claim parts of the region, believed to hold valuable oil and gas deposits. Further angering those countries, and the US, Beijing has moved to build reefs into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes. The US navy in late January sent an aircraft carrier group into the South China Sea on a so-called “freedom of navigation exercise,” its first routine operation in the region under the Biden administration. China has stepped up military, diplomatic and economic pressure on Taiwan since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen, who refuses to accept Beijing’s stance that the island is part of “one China.” — AFP

US House strips posts of ‘QAnon Congresswoman’

US Senate okays \$1.9 tn Covid relief

Washington, Feb. 5: The Democratic-led US House voted on Thursday to discipline a congresswoman who embraced QAnon conspiracy theories and endorsed violence, capping weeks of mounting turmoil over holding to account a lawmaker whose extremist rhetoric caused a rupture in Republican ranks. Conservative first-term congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, facing bipartisan opprobrium for a series of disturbing comments and support of social media posts advocating the assassination of Democratic lawmakers, was stripped of her two assignments on the House education and budget committees. The punishment was meted out in a modestly bipartisan vote of 230 to 199 which occurred hours after Greene, a fierce supporter of former president Donald Trump, took to the House floor to renounce the conspiracy movement and expressed regret for spreading misinformation. Eleven Republicans defied their party to join all voting Democrats in disciplining Greene, whose alarming actions before she ran for office included posting video of herself harassing a teen school shooting survivor and casting doubt on the September 11, 2001 attacks. “No member ought to be

permitted to engage in the kind of behavior that Representative Greene has and face zero consequences,” number two House Democrat Steny Hoyer told the chamber. “This vote can be a first step in correcting the error of those who so far have chosen to do nothing.” But Republicans blasted the action against one of their own as shattering congressional precedent, with members of leadership warning of potential political payback should they regain power. Number three Republican Liz Cheney, fresh from surviving a challenge to her leadership after she voted to impeach Trump last month, said that while Greene’s comments were reprehensible, Democrats “have no business determining which Republicans sit on committees.” — AFP

returns to the House, where it will have to be approved again due to the changes made by the Senate. Final passage will unlock the next phase in drafting of the virus relief bill, with the work divided among several congressional committees. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer D-N.Y., called passage of the resolution the “first big step to putting our country back on the road to recovery.” By moving on a fast track, the goal for Democrats is to have Covid relief approved by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires. — AP



Indonesian protesters release pigeons during a protest against the military coup in Myanmar, outside the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta on Friday. — AFP

Key Aung San Suu Kyi aide held

Yangon, Feb. 5: A key aide to ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi was arrested on Friday, days after a coup that has sparked outrage and calls by US President Joe Biden for the generals to relinquish power. The arrest came after the streets of Myanmar’s biggest city filled for a third night with people banging pots and honking car horns, voicing their opposition to Monday’s coup. On Friday dozens of teachers at Yangon’s Dagon University staged a rally where displayed a three-finger salute borrowed from Hong Kong and Thailand’s democracy movements, and sang a popular revolution song. The military detained de facto leader Suu Kyi and president Win Myint early Monday, ending the country’s 10-year dalliance with democracy that had followed decades of oppressive junta rule. Win Htein, considered Suu Kyi’s right-hand man, was arrested at his daughter’s house, said Kyi Toe, a press officer for the National League of Democracy. The 79-year-old NLD stalwart has spent long stretches in and out for detention for campaigning against military rule. Ahead of his arrest, Win Htein told local media that the military putsch was “not wise”, and that its leaders had taken the country “in the wrong direction”. — AFP

“Everyone in the country should oppose as much as they can the actions they are seeking to take us back to zero by destroying our government,” he told Frontier Myanmar in the coup’s aftermath. Suu Kyi has not been seen in public since Monday. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a Yangon-based group that monitors political arrests in Myanmar, more than 130 officials and lawmakers have been detained in relation to the coup. — AFP

GREEN PROJECT

Unveils \$43 billion deal, involves 33 different entities

Korea plans biggest offshore wind farm

Seoul, Feb. 5: A \$43 billion deal was signed Friday to build what the South Korean government said will be the world’s biggest offshore wind power complex, as it seeks to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. South Korea has few energy resources of its own and relies on imported coal — a cheap but dirty fuel — for around 40 percent of its electricity. President Moon Jae-in declared the carbon neutrality goal last year but at the same time is looking to

phase out nuclear power, leaving the country depending on renewables to square the circle. Moon oversaw the signing of the 48 trillion won (\$43 billion) agreement to build the complex off Sinan in the country’s southwest, which he said would be seven times bigger than the world’s current largest offshore wind farm. With a maximum capacity of 8.2 gigawatts, the government is banking on it being the equivalent of six nuclear power stations.

● **MOON WARNED** it could take more than five years to start construction, although the government will try to accelerate the process. ● **SOUTH KOREA** also plans to cut its existing nuclear power plants — currently the country’s only significant low-carbon energy source — from 24 to 17 by 2034, reducing the sector’s energy output by nearly half. Moon said that the country’s position on the Korean peninsula gave it a geographical advantage. “We have the infinite potential of offshore wind power to the sea on three sides, and we have the world’s best technology in related fields,” he added.

take more than five years to start construction, although the government will try to accelerate the process. Seoul last year announced a target of becoming one of the world’s top five offshore wind energy powerhouses by 2030. South Korea also plans to cut its existing nuclear power plants — currently the country’s only significant low-carbon energy source — from 24 to 17 by 2034, reducing the sector’s energy output by nearly half. — AFP

RUSSIA EXPELS EU DIPLOMATS OVER NAVALNY ROW, TIES AT ‘LOW POINT’

Moscow, Feb. 5: Moscow said on Friday it was expelling diplomats from Poland, Germany and Sweden for participating in unsanctioned demonstrations last month in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. The move comes hours after the European Union’s top diplomat Josep Borrell met Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow and described the bloc’s ties with Russia as at a “low point” over Navalny’s jailing. Borrell “strongly condemned” the action, a spokesman said, while Sweden branded it “completely unfounded”. The Russian foreign ministry said in a statement that an unspecified number of diplomats from the three EU countries took part in “illegal demonstrations” on January 23 and had been declared persona non grata. “They were ordered to leave Russia in the near future,” the ministry said, adding that Moscow expects diplomats from the countries to “strictly follow the norms of international law” in the future. Russian police have arrested more than 10,000 people at mass demonstrations. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

6 FEBRUARY 2021

US remarks a wake-up call Delhi can't ignore

The American government's statement on Thursday — in which the right of peaceful protest, free speech, and unhindered access to the Internet were flagged as signs of a "thriving democracy" — is a straightforward response to the egregious steps of the Narendra Modi government in recent days. These are the first substantive public observations on India by the two-week-old Biden administration. The message — in the backdrop of the farmers' agitation in the country, and the comments by journalists and other public figures in that context — accords with the sentiments of millions of Indians, and millions worldwide, who are surprised by the turn of events and processes in India for some time. President Joe Biden's administration has underlined first principles in a neutral, moderate voice. Also, the US state department's cautionary observations — which was reiterated by the US embassy in India — was in response to a question by the American newspaper *The Wall Street Journal*, not off its own bat. This is a useful device suggestive of an official criticism, but not quite.

It will be obvious except to the dense that the present US administration's first public observations on India came immediately after the Narendra Modi government targeted some international icons, including the famous pop star Rihanna, the teen Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg (who is nominated for the Nobel Prize) "and others" for lending support to the farmers' stir (since it is being railroaded by a monstrous government, actions which have drawn considerable domestic criticism).

Through a tweet, the climate activist offered a "toolkit" to back protesters. This is standard mobilising tactic for activists everywhere with the use of "Twitter storm" and the like. Supporters of the ruling party in India do this routinely when playing polarising games at election time.

The so-called "toolkit" has moved the Indian government, including its normally staid external affairs ministry, and the ruling party, to smell an international "conspiracy", no less, to defame India. This is laughable, of course.

The Delhi Police, frequently a violent and communal force, has filed a FIR against international personalities without naming anyone. This is a fig leaf. It is clear that Ms Rihanna and Ms Thunberg, "and others" (including the US vice-president's lawyer-writer niece Meena Harris), are the principal objects of its ire.

These FIRs — the official call for investigation — by the Delhi police, which is directly controlled by Union home minister Amit Shah, are related to extremely serious criminal offences such as sedition and attempt to cause disharmony as between communities. Before the international celebrities, it had been the turn of journalists in India — last week six well-known editors, in a long string of journalists in recent times, and senior politicians like Shashi Tharoor — to face exactly the same official allegations. The US state department's remarks appear to have this figured.

In its sorry response, the India's external affairs ministry is self-congratulatory, calling India a "vibrant" democracy with "shared values" with the United States. In today's climate, is it? No amount of seeking to falsely equate the January 6 attack on the US Capitol and the January 26 move by infiltrators in the entirely peaceful farmers' movement to create chaos at the Red Fort, hides the ugly reality of our present.

Don't pardon Rajiv killers

Given the embarrassing task of granting clemency to seven life convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, the Tamil Nadu Governor, Banwarilal Purohit, has ducked the responsibility. He has passed the political football back to the President of India saying he is the appropriate authority to take the call though he may find it difficult to explain why he sat on it for two-and-a-half years before declining to decide. The prisoners for life, some of whose sentences were commuted to life and thus got a reprieve from the gallows, have been languishing in Tamil Nadu prisons for close to three decades. The question that arises is whether they deserve any sympathy.

Mercy may be a quality that is twice blessed, as the Bard of Avon put it, but sympathy for the conspirators of a heinous crime aimed at one who had been Prime Minister of India may be totally misplaced even if some of them may have, innocently or otherwise, contributed very little to the plot like buying a 9-volt battery to complete the circuit to blow up the explosives hidden in the body belt worn by the assassin Dhanu. The plot, hatched by LTTE's murderous chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, seemed to have come straight out of a Frederick Forsyth novel and was carried out on Indian soil near Chennai, killing 18 including Rajiv Gandhi and the assassin and injuring 43 bystanders on May 21, 1991.

Sympathy on humanitarian grounds for the surviving plotters has been built up in the strange political ambience in a state that once viewed a Tamil Elam in northern Sri Lanka as a desirable outcome. Rajiv Gandhi, confused by a welter of opinions on the Tamils issue, may have erred in judgment in sending a peace-keeping force to the island nation and paid the price. No government at the Centre could be seen as weak in pardoning the killers of a Prime Minister. The ball is back with the President even as the top court will continue to grapple with the legal challenges to lifetimes in prison.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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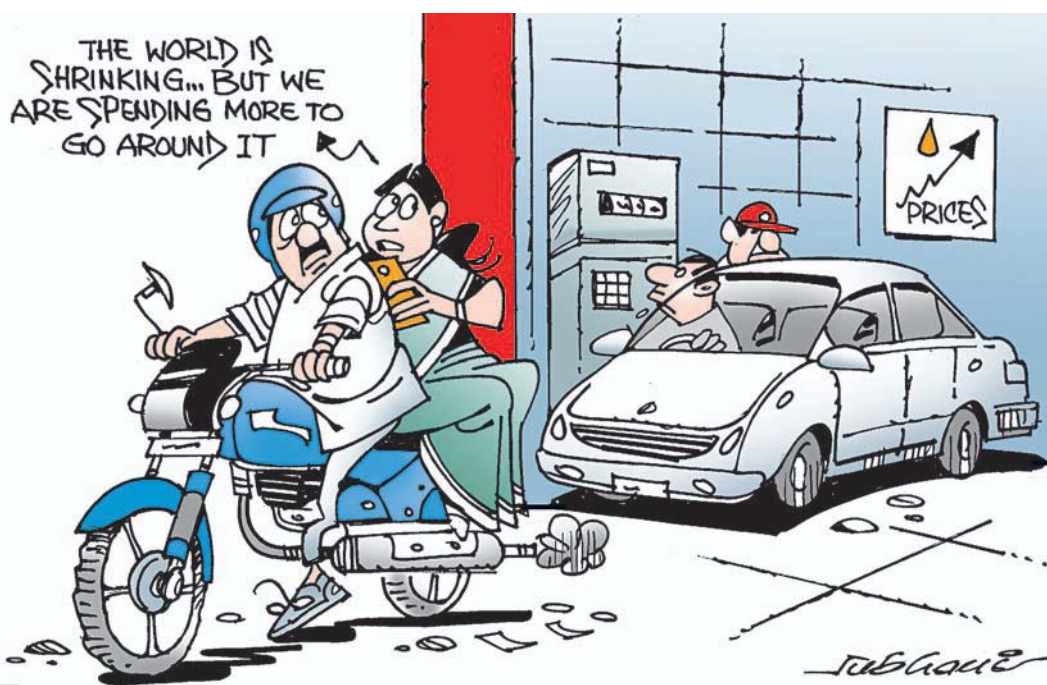
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Subhani



Yeh Rihanna-Wihanna, Greta-Vreta... kaun hai?

Shobhaa De

I was in salubrious Goa, desperately trying to dodge zillions of Dilliwallas who have as good as taken over this gorgeous state and established their own "klonies" across favoured villages and hamlets. Poor Goans, I thought to myself. First came the Israelis, then the Russians — and now these! Arpora has become a mini-Gurgaon, and the locals aren't amused. In such a surrealistic setting, it was a bit tough for me to focus on a single tweet posted by a Barbados-born singer and the havoc it generated across India. Well, I'm getting carried away — it was Dilli netas and assorted celebrities/influencers who jumped in, and boom! Rihanna went viral. Be honest — how many of you reading this column had even heard of Rihanna before this *hungama*? Okay — maybe, you had heard her. And even danced to her tracks, but did Rihanna and what she tweeted impact your life even remotely? No, *na*? I recall enjoying *Under my umbrella*, which brought Rihanna into the global stage way back in 2007. After that, I totally forgot all about her.

Now, I am unlikely to forget! The 32-year-old singer with a staggering 100 million followers on Instagram. No wonder our *netas* got sufficiently *hilaaoed* and obviously rattled, when she had the gumption to tweet in support of our protesting farmers. More than 226.3K retweets followed, with 490.3K users "liking" the tweet. Whoa! What was going on?

Uske baad, that opinionated Greta what's-her-face, got into the act and *lagaaoed* her own

tweet. Mayhem followed as all *desi* patriots scrambled to counterattack these impudent folks who had dared to question our official stand on the farmers' protests. People who had absolutely nothing to do with either the farmers or the government, jumped in feet first to damn and attack the global "influencers", accusing them of generating an international conspiracy designed to break up our vast country and hand it over to China! Stumped? So was I... as it is, the sultry Goan weather had started to play tricks with my mood and thinking (without feni, let me hastily clarify), *upar se*... I was going through *zabardast* tweets posted by super-patriotic Indians, basically asking Rihanna and Co to butt out of India's affairs. Someone brilliant called Sambit Patra (know him?) thundered on a bigoted/compromised television channel: "Why doesn't Rihanna tweet about the 1984 riots?" Excellent question, Shri Patra. But the singer was born in 1988 and Twitter started only in 2006. *Koi baat nahi* — loyalty game fully on, even if the goof-ups are totally embarrassing. So much for credibility. Hot air has its uses when the audience itself is grossly uninformed.

Confession: I am pretty clueless myself. But when I read accounts of two elderly *fauji* farmers (Jeet Singh, 70, and Gurmukh Singh, 80) being picked up by the Delhi police as suspects, charged with an act of violence (FIR No. 31) they were allegedly a part of... nothing makes sense! Lodged in Tihar Jail, the two men who had served the Army for over two decades in the

same Sikh Regiment, dealing with this strange situation that their traumatised families can do little about. Jeet Singh's son Veer works as a guard. He said: "Our fathers fought for India in their youth. The government has disrespected them by putting such veterans in jail." The two farmers own an acre of farmland each, on which they grow wheat. Today, they are languishing in jail and being called "Khalistanis" and "terrorists". Rihanna sang *Unapologetic* in 2012. You go figure who deserves an apology in this case.

Soon, everybody had jumped in to express their two bits' worth. I saved my *gyaan* and stayed out — savouring grilled calamari at a beach shack seemed a far more worthwhile pursuit. I thought lazily and idly to myself, trying hard not to get distracted by the overdressed Gurgaon crowd swigging beer at the next table: "Why is everybody frothing at the mouth and dissing Rihanna?" Then I remembered. If VVIP *Bharatwaasis* did not step up publicly and lecture us on our duty as citizens ("call out Rihanna, tell her not to meddle in India's affairs, let the world know we can handle our own internal matters..."), their bag of *sarkari* goodies would be snatched away. The more relevant counter question to all those big names who have passed the patriotic test with flying colours — did

even one of them understand the highly complex farmers' problem? Frankly, it beats most analysts. Without getting to the bottom of what is nothing short of an unfortunate impasse at the moment, why ignite more fires? Who is Rihanna to us? Had her tweet been ignored, we would not have attracted even more global scrutiny — it was as if the entire government machinery at the time was busy dealing with a famous foreign entertainer's tweet!

Most super celebrities hire PR teams to manage social media accounts and project a finely calibrated public image. Perhaps Rihanna does indeed possess remarkable understanding of complicated political, social and cultural issues in distant lands she may never ever set foot in (unless the money is good, of course). But the chances are, she goes along with whatever her alert and socially aware PR team places before her. In simple words, it is shrewd brand building. It shows her as a thinking star concerned with humanity. That's it! Yes, a tweet from such an individual does snowball into a bigger controversy, if it catches on — like it did this time. These are the expected repercussions in the age of celebrity — deal with them wisely, as a government. By falling into the trap, we fed the monster and kept the story alive. *Mogambo* is very *naraaz*, okay? Get smart, you guys. Focus on *asli* matters. Rihanna's other hit was titled: "*Bitch, better have my money...*" She has made hers. The "bitch" has delivered. Where does that leave us? Still roping in celebrities to counter Rihanna! Hello! She has moved on, okay? She is probably tweeting about saving endangered dolphins in some remote bay. Such *bewakoofi*, I tell you!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

Perhaps Rihanna does indeed possess remarkable understanding of complicated political, social and cultural issues in distant lands she may never ever set foot in. But the chances are, she goes along with what her PR team places before her.

LETTERS

DRIVING LICENCE

The driving licence requirement in MP is baffling (*MP makes character certificate must for DL, DC, Feb. 5*). The comical logic of this order is to curb crimes against women. Is there any connection between assault of women and men driving vehicles? Will a tee-totaler and spotless men be the future vehicle drivers in MP. Are women drivers exempt?

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

POLICE TACTICS

The police under MHA and BJP-ruled states seem to be emboldened due to Centre's unseemly tactics in dealing with the agitating farmers. The fortress-like barriers at Delhi borders, Bihar DGP's diktat against the agitations are the recent examples. It's time the PM steps in and creates a solution.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

ELECTION MEMORIES

Come elections, it is amusement time. All political rivals wash dirty linen in public. Far reaching allegations against each other go on air confusing the electorate about the bonafides of all the candidates in fray. All these years, the YSRC leadership remained silent and is now making hue and cry about the 'cash for vote' case against TD leaders. And soon TD will 'start' making fresh demands to speed up DA cases against Y.S.Jagan Mohan Reddy. It is a mutual bashing club active during elections only.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Astronauts land on moon

HOUSTON, FEBRUARY. 5 Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell today landed in the stark highlands of Fra Mauro on man's third expedition to the surface of the moon.

"We're on the surface. We made a good landing", said Ed Mitchell. The astronauts left lunar orbit at 1435 IST with a firing of their adjustable descent engine, and slid on their backs and feet first past hipparcos and ptolemaus crater and over the rim of the sea of clouds.

Then, at a point called "high gate" they rolled over rightside up.

Farrukh Dhondy
Of Cabbages & Kings



"Gratitude is an angel
With a very short memory.
Jealousy, a demon
With a stimulated long one
Indifference shrugs its shoulders
In dismissal whenever he
Encounters a strong emotion
Condemning it as the wrong one."
— From the *Opera Bheeda Pareeda*
Translated from Hungarian by
Bachchoo

It was a Greek called Aristarchus who in 200 BC first said that the earth was a globe. Galileo was certain of it and in later centuries the Portuguese Magellan added the decisive circumnavigating proof. An early definition of "globalisation" was born. Today "globalisation" means an exchange of culture and trade amongst most if not all nations of the world and it would certainly include the phenomenon of the spread of the Internet to every crook and nanny of the world.

A Marxist definition would concentrate on the international flow and exchange of capital and of labour — with American motor car manufacturing relocating to the Far East and Coca Cola being concocted and bottled and sold

from the Uighar districts of western China.

Its inevitability hasn't led to popularity. There are Canutes who wish to turn back the tide. The most boastful and vociferous of these in recent times was one Donald Trump, whose opposition to globalisation may not have included the conviction that the world was flat (though one can never be sure what neo-troglodytes believe). It certainly included a political programme that attempted to reverse the flow of capital out of, and labour into, the United States of America. It negated international treaties designed to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and was opposed to global action on climate change.

Britain's political position was paradoxical. On the one hand, Brexit caused the UK to leave one of the planet's largest trading blocs to go it alone, and on the other hand it trumpeted intentions to open Little England to an ambitious programme of international trade, an invitation to capital to come here with the promise of low taxes and Rishi Sunak's free ports, while at the same time stopping the import of even necessary labour. Welcome to "Free port and deport

England" — both policies perpetrated, ironically, by British ministers whose programmes are Indian and Indo-African.

Yet now, gentle reader, the most dreadful reminder that the tide of globalisation is upon us is not the rush of refugees from Africa to Europe or the determination of Japanese car manufacturers to relocate to countries where the promise of profit is the greatest. Independent of the will of capital and labour, nature has shown its near-apocalyptic hand. There have been plagues before, and Sars and Ebola did spread from one country to another, but Covid-19 and its menacingly developing variants is, after the very early spread of the ancestors of homo sapiens to all corners of the globe, the first truly fast-moving inhabitant of everywhere.

Earlier plagues hit single countries. Daniel Defoe wrote his *Journal of the Plague Year* as a novel covering events in London 1665. Then Shakespeare, it is said, wrote *Macbeth* and *King Lear* under lockdown in the early years of the seventeenth century. The Internet has alerted me to several literary efforts attempting to capture the ennui, isolation, change in shopping arrangements, etc during today's

Covid lockdowns. No doubt there will be whole novels about what Netflix programmes some scribbler watched, with photographs of the meals they cooked in these dreadful months. I myself have found time to complete two books which have nothing to do with how I spend my time or what I cook but are brilliant fictional... (*I've repeatedly told you that this space is not for your idiotic self-advertisements — Ed. Sorry yaar, iss mushkil vakht mey thhodee si publicity sey kya farak padhta? — fd*).

The globalist way of looking at these times is to see them as a battle between two species of evolved life — the mutating, deadly coronavirus strains and the scientifically analytical and creative genius of scientists and the ingenuity of political ordering.

The scientific effort of the geneticists, doctors, epidemiologists and others who have not only invented and deployed five developed vaccines, and with many more to come, but have found treatments to alleviate the symptoms of the infected.

The political efforts, subject to all manner of constraints and forces, including crass cronyism — as in Britain where jobs and public funds

are given to Tory friends and supporters — profiteering and fraud are confused and less laudable.

Here, gentle reader, are a couple of shameful statistics:

First: The International Labour Organisation estimates that the plague has cost the workers of the world a loss in earnings of \$3.7 trillion. According to Oxfam, the increase in wealth of the world's top billionaires in ten months of the plague has been \$3.9 trillion.

Next: As of January 23, 39 million people in the so-called "first world" had received an anti-Covid vaccination. The number of people who have been vaccinated in the continent of Africa, excluding South Africa, was 29. Yes, you read that correctly. No, I haven't missed out the words "thousand" or "million". There are reports, since that grim statistic, saying that subsequently other nations have allocated funds to get the vaccines across to Africa.

This isn't about generosity, it's self-preservation in a globalised world in which the enemy species has to be fought and subdued, if not annihilated altogether — through... err... globalisation?

To ensure safety
in a globalised
world, all must
get the vaccine...

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,731.63	0.23
Nifty 50	14,924.30	0.19
S&P 500*	3,886.96	0.39
Dollar (₹)	72.92	0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.84	0.72
Euro (₹)	87.35	0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,738▼163	0.34
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	59.57	1.24
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.071	-0.05
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.153	0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Forex reserves jump to record \$590.18 billion

Foreign exchange reserves rose \$4.85 billion to touch a record high of \$590.18 billion in the week ended January 29, according to RBI data. In the previous week ended January 22, the reserves rose by \$1.09 billion to \$585.33 billion. Foreign currency assets rose by \$5.03 billion to \$547.22 billion. The gold reserves declined \$164 million to \$36.29 billion. The SDRs with the IMF were down \$4 million to \$1.51 billion.

Brookfield India Reit gets 8 times subscription



The IPO of Brookfield India Real Estate Investment Trust (Reit) got subscribed 8 times on the final day of subscription on Friday. It received bids for 60,59,44,400 units against 7,62,78,200 units on offer. The category meant for institutional investors was subscribed 4.80 times and those of other investors 11.78 times. Brookfield India hit the capital market with its Reit public issue on Wednesday to raise up to Rs 3,800 crore.

Hero MotoCorp Q3 consolidated PAT rises 14%

The country's largest two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp has posted 13.7 per cent rise in its consolidated profit after tax at Rs 1,029.17 crore for the third quarter against Rs 905.13 crore in the year-ago quarter. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 9,827.05 crore from Rs 7,074.86 crore. On a standalone basis, the company reported a 23.17 per cent increase in its PAT at Rs 1,084.47 crore against Rs 880.41 crore.

Paypal to shut payment services within India

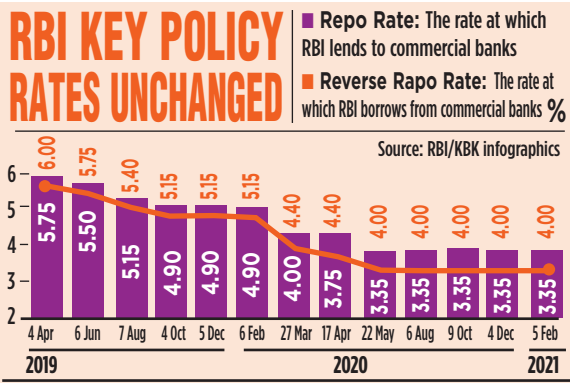
Digital payment solutions provider Paypal said it will stop offering domestic payment services within India from April 1. The US-based firm will instead focus on enabling more international sales for Indian businesses. "We will continue to invest in product development that enables Indian businesses to reach nearly 350 million PayPal consumers worldwide, increase their sales internationally," a PayPal spokesperson said.



RBI sees growth at 10.5% in FY22, inflation in 5-5.2% range in H1 Rate cut cycle seems over

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 5

In order to revive "durable" growth in the economy, the Reserve Bank of India kept the record low repo and reverse repo rate unchanged while continuing its accommodative stance to ensure enough liquidity in the system. The RBI has also projected a real GDP growth of 10.5 per cent for the next fiscal. The six members of monetary policy committee (MPC), which ended its three-day deliberations on Friday, unanimously voted to leave the policy repo rate unchanged at 4 per cent. The repo rate had been slashed by 115 basis points since late March last year when the pandemic hit the economy. The reverse repo rate stands unchanged at 3.35 per cent. This is the fourth time in a row that the MPC



has decided to keep the policy rate unchanged. "MPC also decided to continue its accommodative stance of monetary policy as long as necessary-at least through the current financial year and into the next year-to revive growth on a durable basis and mitigate the impact of Covid-19, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target going forward," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said. Finding inflation within the tolerance band, the RBI projected 10.5 per cent real GDP growth for 2021-22 in the range of 26.2 to 8.3 per cent in the first half (H1) and 6 per cent in Q3. Consumer Price Index inflation has been revised to 5.2 per cent for January-

March (Q4) of FY21 from 5.8 per cent predicted earlier. CPI inflation could be 5.2 per cent to 5.0 per cent in H1 of FY22 and 4.3 per cent for Q3 of FY22. "After breaching the upper tolerance threshold continuously since June 2020, CPI inflation moved below 6 per cent in December for the first time in the post-lockdown period, supported by favourable base effects and a sharp fall in key vegetable prices," the RBI said. "Today's upbeat policy statements on growth and inflation restate our view that the rate cut cycle is over. Even as headline inflation trends lower, with economic recovery being underway, services gradually starting to open up, and pricing power coming back in some segments, core inflation will likely see some upside pressure

through the year," said Suvodeep Rakshit, vice president and senior economist at Kotak Institutional Equities. Ensuring liquidity, the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate were left unchanged at 4.25 per cent. Further, signalling a rollback of pandemic-era policies, the RBI said it would gradually restore the cash reserve ratio (CRR) in two phases in a non-disruptive manner to 3.5 per cent from March 27 and 4 per cent from May 22, 2021. "CRR normalisation will open up space for a variety of market operations of the RBI to inject additional liquidity," Das said. CRR—the amount of deposits banks must set aside as reserves—of all banks was reduced by 100 basis points to 3 per cent for a period of one year ending on March 26, 2021.

Easier credit for micro units

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 5

Pandemic-hit micro units, which largely rely on informal channels for funds, have something to cheer, as the RBI has incentivised credit flow to new borrowers. In order to reach out to the stressed sectors, banks can now provide funds under the on-tap targeted long-term repo operation (TLTRO) scheme to NBFCs. The Reserve Bank of India also wants to come out with a regulatory framework for the micro lenders. "In order to incentivise new credit flow to the

micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) borrowers, scheduled commercial banks will be allowed to deduct credit disbursed to 'new MSME borrowers from their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) for calculation of Cash Reserve Ratio. New MSME borrowers' are those who have not availed any credit facilities from the banking system as on January 1, 2021. This exemption will be available for exposures up to Rs 25 lakh per borrower for credit extended up to the fortnight ending October 1, 2021, RBI said. "Banks can deduct credit disbursed to new MSME borrowers from NDTL for CRR calculation. This should give a boost to further lending to the MSME sector," said Padmaja Chunduru, MD and CEO, Indian Bank. However, Rs 25 lakh loans are largely meant for micro units and very few of such units have exposure to formal credit system. "The RBI could have been bolder by raising the borrowing limit to Rs 1 crore. This would have helped a lot of small and medium enterprises as well. There are several small and medium enter-

DEMAND NOW ACTUAL, NOT PENT-UP: DAS

Mumbai, Feb. 5: RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said demand in the economy has moved from being of pent-up nature to actual one, and the momentum is likely to sustain. "Demand has now moved beyond pent-up demand to actual demand coming up. I think the demand curve is expected to be now much more sustained," Das told reporters during the post-policy conference call. He said high-speed indicators are pointing towards a growth in demand. —PTI

Oil nears \$60 on growth hopes and Opec+ cuts

ALEX LAWLER LONDON, FEB. 5

Oil hit its highest in a year on Friday, closing in on \$60 a barrel, supported by economic revival hopes and supply curbs by producer group Opec and its allies. New orders for US-made goods rose more than expected in December, pointing to continued strength in manufacturing. President Joe Biden's drive to enact a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid bill also gained momentum on Friday. Brent crude was up 85 cents, or 1.4 per cent, at \$59.69 by 1438 GMT after hitting its highest since February 20 last year at \$59.79. US crude was up \$1.02, or 1.8 per cent, at \$57.25. "The conditions still remain supportive for oil markets," said Jeffrey Halley, an analyst at brokerage Oanda. "Oil should find plenty of willing buyers on any material dip." Brent is on track to rise more than 6 per cent this week. The last time it traded at \$60 a barrel, the

pandemic had yet to take hold, economies were open and people were free to travel, meaning demand for gasoline, diesel and jet fuel was much higher. The rollout of Covid-19 vaccines, however, is fuelling hopes of lockdowns being eased, boosting fuel demand. But even demand optimists such as Opec do not expect oil consumption to return to pre-pandemic levels until 2022. Oil also gained support from supply curbs by producers. Opec and its allies, collectively known as Opec+, stuck to their supply tightening policy at a meeting on Wednesday. Record Opec+ cuts have helped to lift prices from historic lows last year. "Opec+ discipline has been a real positive," said Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at CMC Markets. Further boosting the market, a weekly supply report showed a drop in US crude inventories to their lowest since March. —Reuters

KOREAN MINISTER DROPS WTO BID, CLEARS WAY FOR NIGERIAN CANDIDATE

SAM KIM FEB. 5

South Korean Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee withdrew her bid to lead the World Trade Organization, leaving former Nigerian Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the only remaining candidate for the job. Yoo made the decision after discussions with the US and other major nations, and took various issues into account "comprehensively" including the need to revitalise the multilateral organisation, according to a statement from Korea's trade ministry on Friday. The withdrawal comes after dozens of former US government officials urged President Joe Biden to endorse Okonjo-Iweala after the Trump administration blocked her selection. The opposition halted the selection process because WTO decisions are made on the basis of a consensus of its members. —Bloomberg

Centre to induct more pvt sector specialists in depts

New Delhi, Feb. 5: In a major move, the Centre has decided to induct more private sector specialists into different government departments at the crucial decision-making level of joint secretaries and directors. As per the requisitions received from the Department of Personnel & Training (DoP&T), talented and motivated Indian nationals willing to contribute towards nation building are being invited to join the government at the level of joint secretary on contract basis in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, a statement issued by the Personnel Ministry said. Private sector individuals would be appointed at the level of director on a contract basis in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Department of Financial Services, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Law & Justice, Department of School Education & Literacy, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Road

Transport & Highways, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ministry of Civil Aviation and in the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, it said. The detailed advertisement and instructions to the candidates will be uploaded on the Union Public Service Commission's website on 6th February, the statement said. Interested candidates can apply from 6th February to 22nd March, it said. Candidates will be short-listed for interview on the basis of the information provided in their online application, the statement said. —PTI

PNB clocks ₹506 cr profit in Q3

New Delhi, Feb. 5: Punjab National Bank (PNB) reported a standalone net profit of Rs 506.03 crore for December quarter 2020-21. It had posted a net loss of Rs 492.28 crore in the year-ago period. Total income during the

quarter rose to Rs 23,298.53 crore as against Rs 15,967.49 crore a year ago. On a consolidated basis, there was a profit of Rs 585.77 crore during the latest quarter. The lender had posted a net loss of Rs 501.93 crore in same period of 2019-20. Consolidated income rose to Rs 23,639.41 crore from Rs 16,211.24 crore. PNB said the current results are not comparable with the year-ago period since the previous figures are of pre-amalgamated period. —PTI

Soon, retail investors can directly buy gilts



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD with agency inputs MUMBAI, FEB. 5

The RBI on Friday announced online access to government securities for retail investors directly through the bank in a path breaking reform. It also sought to ease the worried bond market by extending statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) holdings under the held to maturity (HTM) category for one more year till March 2023. In a major move, the central bank opened an infinite source of lending to the government through the retail bond programme. The RBI said it will allow retail investors to directly buy government debt, making India the first Asian country to do so and among a handful globally. The central bank, tasked with managing Rs 12 lakh crore in government borrowing target next fiscal, hopes the move will allow greater depth to the gilt market in particular and the overall debt market in general, thus deepening the financial markets as lack of depth has been the biggest bane of the domestic debt market all this while. In effect the RBI has opened a long, endless tap

for the government to borrow from—just as is done in the domestic stock market now, with the only difference being this will be under direct the watch of the RBI. Currently, the RBI allows small investors to buy government bonds via the Gobid platform on BSE and NSE, but it has not gained any traction. While no country allows a direct retail participation as the RBI has done now, Britain, Brazil and Hungary allow small investors to buy/sell via third-party controls. This is the second major step that the RBI is taking to encourage retail investors to enter the gilt market after it had allowed entry through the stock exchanges a few years back but did not elicit the intended result. Further, the RBI allowed FPIs' investment in defaulted corporate bonds outside the short-term limit set from time to time. "In order to further promote investment by foreign portfolio investors (FPI) in corporate bonds, FPI investment in defaulted corporate bonds will be exempted from the short-term limit and the minimum residual maturity requirement under the Medium-Term Framework," RBI said.

TAXPAYERS TO BE INFORMED OF REVIEWS

New Delhi, Feb. 5: Taxpayers will be informed upfront about the reasons their I-T returns are getting reopened for scrutiny and only in case of non-satisfactory reply would the case get opened up again, CBDT chief P. C. Mody said on Friday. The 2021-22 Budget has lowered the time limit for reopening of tax cases to three years from six years. For serious tax fraud cases involving income concealment of Rs 50 lakh and above, 10-year old cases can be reopened. The chairman of Central Board of Direct Taxes said the rationalisation of reopening of cases announced in Budget would bring in more certainty to taxpayers. "What was a heavily litigated area, we have tried to rationalise it to the extent that it is no longer left to the discretion of assessing officer. It would be more of information-based attempt to reopen the cases," he said at a CII event. —PTI

MAHINDRA Q3 CONSOLIDATED PAT DOWN 6%

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 5

Mahindra & Mahindra on Friday reported 6 per cent drop in its consolidated profit after tax from continuing and discontinued operations at Rs 159.60 crore for the third quarter ended in December. It had posted a consolidated PAT of Rs 170.69 crore in the same period last year, the automaker said. The maker of Scorpio and Bolero models' consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 21,625.95 crore during the quarter against Rs 19,430.29 crore a year ago. Out of the net loss, M&M said Rs 563.84 crore is attributable to its bankrupt arm Ssangyong Motor Company.

COURSE TO SUCCESS If you're not loved and supported, you're not going to be very productive

Coursera CEO and the science of well-being

CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN NEW YORK, FEB. 5

Jeff Maggioncalda, CEO of online education provider Coursera, knows what it is like to put his professional life on pause. In 2015, Maggioncalda took a break from working in financial services and ended up travelling the world with his wife for two-and-a-half years, spending four weeks at a time in South Africa, China, Southeast Asia and more. "We drove from Berlin to Munich. We went through all the Indonesian islands. We went to Komodo and saw komodo dragons—it was really extraordinary," said Maggioncalda, 52, whose Mountain View,

California-based company has offered online courses and degrees from universities and experts to more than 75 million people. And what did he take away from the journey that is applicable now? "I realised I'm a learner," said Maggioncalda, who joined Coursera in 2017. "Adopting a growth mindset, being open-minded, being curious, being open-hearted to new people and new ideas and learning is important right now. The world is going to look fundamentally different—and that will help you become a pioneer in the new normal." Maggioncalda shared his thoughts on the course to success with



Jeff Maggioncalda Reuters. Edited excerpts are below.

What courses can help people the most professionally right now? If you don't feel centred, confident, loved and supported, you're not going to be very productive. Taking care of your men-

tal and physical health is the foundation for good performance and a strong career. On Coursera, I'd suggest "The Science of Well-Being," which is all about how we make choices that make us happier and mentally healthier, and "Finding Purpose and Meaning in Life," which is about how to find a centred, meaningful path in a chaotic life. And then I'd suggest "AI For Everyone," which teaches everyone with any background the basics of AI. What will help us stay ahead of the curve? Employers are going to be looking for employees who are well-balanced

and multidisciplinary—people who know about a number of different domains. Try to develop a balanced skill set. Make sure you can increasingly communicate visually, with data. Learn basic data fluency skills, math, statistics, computers—G Suite, Microsoft, the basics of programming. What work equipment is invaluable now? A wire Ethernet cable—I do not rely on Wi-Fi. I use it at home. When I've had to travel, I'll bring a 100-foot (30.5 m) Ethernet cable because you just don't know what the Wi-Fi is going to be like. What will work look

like once the pandemic is over? My dream in the new normal is to become a nomadic CEO, to travel with my wife everywhere around the world where we have offices—Bulgaria, London, India—and see our customers, our employees and partners. Rather than just be there for a few days, I'll stay there for two or three weeks. Also, in a world where we're not all tethered to offices, we can spend more time with people that we love. I'm really into creating family traditions where you don't have to take vacations in order to spend time with people you love. —Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Shastri pitches for break post IPL

Chennai: Indian cricketers must get a two-week break after this year's IPL to recover from fatigue since staying in bio-bubbles is "mentally draining", head coach Ravi Shastri said on Friday.

The Indian players have not taken a break since the IPL 2020 in September in the UAE. The IPL was followed by a challenging Australia tour comprising four Tests, three ODIs and three T20Is. With the final spot in the World Test Championships at stake, India is currently hosting England in a bilateral series consisting of four Tests, five T20Is and three ODIs. "I do believe you need a break from international cricket at some point. After the England series, yes they go into the IPL. Again after the IPL, a couple of weeks off is a must," Ravi Shastri told *Star Sports*. "Because in these quarantines, in these bubbles, it is mentally draining. You are a human, at the end of it all," he further added. The 14th edition of the IPL will be held between April and May this year. — *PTI*

Sthalekar in Oz Hall of Fame

Sydney: Former Australia women's cricket team captain Lisa Sthalekar has been inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame, the country's board (CA) announced on Friday. One of the world's elite spin-bowling all-rounders, the Pune-born cricketer has represented Australia in eight Tests, 125 ODIs and 54 T20Is in a career spanning 12 years from 2001-13, scoring almost 4,000 runs. Sthalekar was a member of four Australian World Cup-winning teams across the ODI and T20 formats and captained Australia in three ODIs against New Zealand in 2006. She was named Women's International Cricketer of the Year in 2007, and was awarded the Belinda Clark Medal recognising Australia's best women's international cricketer in 2007 and 2008. In August 2020, Lisa Sthalekar became the 27th Australian to be inducted into the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame. — *PTI*

Printed and published from Anantapur by K.Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Deccan Chronicle Press, Bye-Pass Road, Tapovanam, Anantapur - 515004 RNI Registration No. APENG/1999/401 Editorial : 276068 Phones : 276904, 276905 Editor: Kaushik Mitter

Sweeping success

Root sweeps his way to 20th Test ton, puts England on top

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 5

With a ringside view from behind the stumps, Rishabh Pant could easily see it. Shoulders drooped and heads bowed — the team's body language, at one time, was as flat as the surface. The wicket-keeper's constant egging, urging his teammates to lift themselves, summed up Team India's frustrating opening day on the field. Joe Root (128 not out) and Dom Sibley (87) gave a masterclass on how to play spinners in subcontinental conditions with a brilliant 200-run stand for the third wicket as England stole a march over India on a featherbed in the opening Test here. At stumps, England, who won the toss, were 263/3 for 89.3 overs. Opener Sibley was dismissed lbw by Jasprit Bumrah in the last over of the day.

While Root, playing his 100th Test, unleashed his most potent weapon, sweep, in all possible ways — reverse, slog and even switch hit — to slam his 20th Test hundred, third in as many matches, Sibley personified resilience and proved to be the perfect foil for his in-form skipper.

The pitch had little to offer the bowlers, but the England batsmen had to show a lot of patience. Sibley's marathon stay in the middle — 286 balls and 382 minutes — was significant as the 25-year-old not only absorbed the pressure early on, but also wore the Indian bowlers out with his dogged defence. With classic old-school technique, Sibley used his long strides effectively. He got closer to the pitch of the ball, didn't have any qualms in defending good deliveries and rotated the strike diligently to keep the Indian spinners at bay.

Root joined forces with Sibley after Rory Burns (33) and Dan Lawrence (five-ball duck) fell to R. Ashwin and Bumrah, respectively, before lunch. Burns, who made a solid opening stand of 63, plotted his own downfall when he played a reverse sweep to lob a simple catch to Pant. It was Ashwin's slowest ball of the first



England's Joe Root celebrates after scoring a century against India on the first day of their first Test match at M. A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday. — *PTI*

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: Rory Burns c Rishabh Pant b Ravichandran Ashwin 33, D. Sibley lbw b Jasprit Bumrah 87, D. Lawrence lbw b Bumrah 0, J. Root not out 128. Extras (LB-4, NB-11) 15. **Total (for 3 wickets in 89.3 overs) 263.**
FoW: 1-63, 2-63, 3-263.
Bowling: Ishant Sharma 15-3-27-0, Jasprit Bumrah 18.3-2-40-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 24-2-68-1, Shahbaz Nadeem 20-3-69-0, Washington Sundar 12-0-55-0.

session. When Bumrah trapped Lawrence with the help of a reverse swing, England were two down for 63. India had the visitors under the pump, but Kohli may be guilty of letting the guard down later. His decision to take both Ashwin and Ishant

off the attack post-lunch was inexplicable. The packed leg-side field which had proved effective against the Aussies couldn't stop the England batsmen from scoring.

Root who averaged more than 100 in the recent Sri Lanka Tests continued his

purple patch. The contest between Ashwin and Root was fascinating. The England skipper cleverly negated the offie by not employing sweep shot. As Root grew in confidence, the sweeps were a delight to watch.

More than three years after making his Test debut, Bumrah got to play his first match at home. He bowled just a three-over opening spell before Ashwin was introduced as early as in the eighth. Shahbaz Nadeem who made it to the side following a knee injury to Axar Patel couldn't trouble the batsmen and bowled a bunch of no-balls.

NUMBERS GAME

JOE ROOT SCORES HUNDRED IN 100TH TEST MATCH:

● Joe Root became the 15th Englishman and 69th player overall to complete a century of Test matches after appearing in the Chennai Test on Friday (February 5).

● The England skipper who made his debut in India, at Nagpur in 2012, also played 50th Test match on Indian soil, at Visakhapatnam, in 2016..

● After making an unbeaten 128 off 197 balls with 14 fours and one six in England's first innings, the right hand top-order batsman, also became the ninth batsman to score hundred in 100th Test match.

● Australian Ricky Ponting is the only batsman to make two hundreds in 100th Test match. England's Colin Cowdrey, Alec Stewart, South African Graeme Smith and Hashim Amla, Pakistan's Javed Miandad and Inzamam-ul-Haq and West Indian Gordon Greenidge also scored a century in their 100th Test match before Joe Root..

● The 200-run stand between Joe Root and Dom Sibley is England's second best third wicket stand in India and fifth best overall. Alastair Cook and Kevin Pietersen's 206-run stand is England's best third wicket stand in India.

● Anil Choudhury became the 63rd Indian umpire to officiate in Test cricket. He made his debut as a Test umpire after stood in 20 one day internationals and 28 Twenty-20 internationals.

● Nitin Menon and Anil Choudhury are the two Umpire in this Test match. The last time two Indian umpires stood in a home Test was in the Ahmedabad Test against Sri Lanka in February 1994, when Kapil Dev went past Richard Hadlee's record of most wickets in Tests. The umpires then were A.L. Narasimhan and V.K.Ramaswamy.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

Captain targets total of 600-700

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 5

Skipper Joe Root who scored a scintillating century in his 100th Test and guided England to a commanding position against India wants to make it count. England had made 477 in the first innings the last time they played a Test here in 2016, but eventually they lost by an innings. So, Root knows the importance of a big total.

"I think we have to try and get as many runs as we can. We want to bat the whole of tomorrow and possibly a bit into the third day, then things could fall in place. We will try and score 600-700," said Root.

Root knows it's not easy to bat long in the humid conditions here. "But, I am ready for more. We have to try and consolidate our position. It's an impressive start, but we have to make it count. That's the most challenging part for us," he added.

The flat surface had nothing for spinners on Friday, but Root expects the track to wear out. "It's an unusual looking surface but it played pretty well. I think it's going to spin as the game goes on. With a bit of reverse swing, it was a good contest against India's bowlers. I was just trying to get used to the

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— **JOE ROOT**
England Test captain

surface, get used to the bounce, and as I got in, I found it easier," added Root.

Root was all praise for his opener Dom Sibley. "It was a fantastic innings. He had a few question marks over his game after the Sri Lanka series. To go out there and put a performance early on in the series is amazing. It's a high quality attack and we had to deal with spin and reverse swing," he added. Root became only the third Englishman to score a century in his 100th Test, following in the footsteps of Colin Cowdrey and Alec Stewart.

"It was very special. I had a wonderful evening last night with the teammates, who had a little surprise for me and Ben Stokes in particular said some very nice words. So to turn up today and play the way we have, it's really important," Root added.

WE BOWLED WELL IN PATCHES: BUMRAH

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 5

It turned out to be a challenging 'home' debut for Indian speedster Jasprit Bumrah. Operating in short spells, Bumrah picked up two England wickets, but found the dry conditions difficult for a pacer.

"It was an interesting first match for me here. The pitch was on the flatter side and there was no lateral movement. The ball got scuffed up as the wicket was hard and dry. We are not trying to complain about the wicket. We are trying to figure out the options and resolve the issues," said Bumrah.

"When the ball becomes soft, it doesn't shine as well as we want it to. In India, the ball gets scuffed up easily. So to make the ball heavy, you have to shine one side sometimes, with sweat, and it doesn't really serve the purpose. You can't make one side heavy with sweat and it doesn't really work that way. But these are the rules and we have to make do with what we have at the moment," added Bumrah.

Bumrah said India bowled well in patches. "I felt we created a lot of pressure. We didn't give too many runs except in the last session. In the beginning of the last session, I think our body language was a bit down with not many wickets coming in. And also, it's not easy to keep yourself going in the searing heat," he added.

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