

SHORT TAKES

Sonia attacks Centre over fuel price hike

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

Congress president Sonia Gandhi launched a scathing attack on the Centre over the “unprecedented” hike in fuel prices. In a statement she said: “I demand the government to keep the prices of petrol and diesel to that of the UPA era and give relief to the people and roll back all the three farm laws.” Taking on the government she said: “In independent India, the country is at crossroads as farmers are on the Delhi borders for 44 days for their genuine demands while the unbridled, insensitive government is breaking the backbone of the farmers and middle class.” She further added: “Due to Covid, all around the economy is already in shambles while the Modi government is putting money into their coffers and making out opportunity in pandemic.” She alleged that in spite of the price of the Indian crude basked being low the central government is not passing the relief to the end consumer instead it is indulging in profiteering. “In the last six years, the government collected ₹19,00,000 crore as excise duty from the people. Not only this, the rising costs of the domestic LPG has also disturbed the home budget.”

Smart meters in Punjab launched

Chandigarh: Punjab chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh dedicated smart meters to the people of Punjab here on Thursday. Launching the ₹75.64 crore 3-phase Smart Metering project, the chief minister said the consumer-friendly scheme will help reduce human error in manual reading through automatic uploading of data. From January 2021 to December 2021, a total of 96,000 meters will be installed across the state by PSPCL under the project, which will also help to curb the malpractice of reading concealment/theft of electricity and improve the reading/billing efficiency and quality, he said. These meters will enable consumers to view instantaneous/live data as well as the last bill data via PSPCL Consumer App, besides maintaining and regulating power consumption. They will have the option to change meter to prepaid or post-paid. Rebate in tariff is admissible to the consumer under prepaid option and the same meter can be used as a bidirectional meter for solar net metering, said the chief minister. Consumers will not need to visit Discom offices to register complaint of wrong meter readings now, he added.

Skoda to launch series of vehicles

AGE CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 7

Skoda Auto India has said that its latest offering, a mid-sized SUV, Skoda Kushaq, will be the first in a series of vehicles tailored to meet the needs and demands of customers from the domestic market as well as those in emerging economies the world over. The roll-out of these vehicles will happen over the next 18 months, the company said in a release. The Kushaq, Skoda said, is the first vehicle designed and developed under the company's 'India 2.0' project. According to Zac Hollis, brand director, Skoda Auto India, the Kushaq offers a combination of the “brand's timeless design ideals, unmatched performance, superior build quality, exemplary value proposition, and enhanced safety and security.” It is deemed to be the best seller in its class, setting the benchmark for functionality, practicality, spaciousness, and convenience, Hollis said. The name of the Skoda's latest entrant into the Indian auto market is derived from Sanskrit: The word ‘Kushak’ denotes a king or an emperor, the company said. The powerful vehicle, the company said, not only personifies its moniker, but also reflects upon Skoda's 125 years of history and heritage, a legacy that substantiates the brand's claim, “Driven by inventiveness and clever ideas — since 1895.” The name, starting with a K and ending with a Q, “also resonates the virtues of the Skoda SUV family — Kodiaq, Karoq, and Kamiq,” the automaker said.

Kejri: Extend ban on UK flights till Jan. 31

‘Step necessary due to very serious Covid situation in UK’

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday urged the Centre to extend the ban on flights between India and the UK till January 31 in view of the “extremely serious” Covid situation in that country. “The Centre has decided to lift the ban and start UK flights. In view of the extremely serious situation in UK, I would urge the Central government to extend the ban till January 31,” Mr Kejriwal said on Twitter.

Aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri had said on Saturday flights from India to the UK will resume from January 6, while services from that country to here would resume January 8 onwards.

Mr Puri had tweeted: “30 flights will operate every week. 15 each by Indian & UK carriers. This schedule is valid till 23 Jan 2021. Further frequency will be determined after review.”

India had suspended all passenger flights connecting the two countries from December 23 to January 7 as a new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus emerged in the UK.

According to the standard operating procedures issued by the health ministry, all passengers coming from the UK between January 8 and January 30 would be subjected to self-paid Covid-19 tests on arrival.

Moreover, each passenger arriving from the UK would have to bring his or her Covid-19 negative report from a test done 72 hours prior to the journey, it said. —PTI



Union health minister Harsh Vardhan reviews dry run of Covid-19 vaccine in New Delhi. —PTI

Delhi medical colleges to re-open in phases

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Amid an improvement in the Covid-19 situation here, medical colleges under the Delhi government have been ordered to re-open, but physical classes will resume in a phased manner for different academic batches, officials said on Thursday.

These institutions, which include the Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC) attached

to the LNJP Hospital and the University College of Medical Sciences (UCMS) linked to the GTB Hospital, are closed since March in view of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, students will be allowed to resume physical classes in a phased manner, the officials said. “In the first instance, first-year MBBS/BDS batch will be called in a staggered manner.” —PTI

Delhi records 486 Covid cases, 19 fatalities in last 24 hours

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

Delhi recorded as many as 486 fresh coronavirus cases on Thursday. With this, the tally of Covid-19 cases in the state has reached over 6.28 lakh, while the death toll mounted to 10,644.

Nineteen fatalities have been recorded in the last 24 hours.

According to a health bulletin issued by the Delhi government, 77,522 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours, including 43,347 RT-PCR tests and 34,175 rapid antigen tests.

2 ‘Made in India’ Covid vaccines get govt’s approval: PM

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that India has approved two “Made in India” coronavirus vaccines, while listing several new projects unveiled by the Centre in the past few days, which he claimed heralded a new era that will give a fresh momentum to the country's infrastructure growth.

“A few days back India has approved two ‘Made In India’ vaccines (Kuchch din pehle Bharat ne Corona ki do Made In India vaccine bhi swikrit ki hain),” Mr Narendra Modi said while dedicating the 306 km long new Rewari-new Madar section of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) via video conferencing.

Referring to the emergency clearance given to Serum Institute of India's (SII) Covishield and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin a few days back, Mr Modi said that both were Indian made vaccines, though Covishield is basically a local version of the Corona virus vaccine which has been developed by the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca (a



Narendra Modi

British-Swedish drugmaker). SII has the licence to produce the local version of this vaccine which has been named Covishield.

On the other hand, Covaxin, which has been produced by Bharat Biotech, is the country's first indigenous vaccine.

Incidentally though, none of the two vaccines have completed the crucial third phase trials in India.

Meanwhile speaking about the dedicated freight corridor project, Mr Modi said that it is being seen as a game changer for India in the 21st century.

The New Rewari-New Madar section of the WDFC is situated in Haryana (approximately 79 km in Mahendragarh and Rewari districts) and Rajasthan (approximately 227 km in Jaipur, Ajmer, Sikar, Nagaur and Alwar districts).

RTI activist gogoi denied bail again by Gauhati HC

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, JAN. 7

The Gauhati high court on Thursday rejected the bail plea of RTI activist and Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) leader Akhil Gogoi. He is lodged in Guwahati Central Jail since his arrest in December 2019 for his alleged role in the violent anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests.

A division bench of the high court comprising Justices Kalyan Rai Surana and Ajit Bathakur rejected the bail petition of the RTI activist.

He was arrested on December 12, 2019, as a preventive measure while protests against the CAA in the state



Akhil Gogoi

speaking to the media, said: “We are not sure on what grounds the bail was rejected as we are yet to receive the judgement copy.”

“The hearing started at 10.30 am and the judgement came against Mr Gogoi. Now we are waiting for the judgement copy,” he added.

The leader was challenging his conviction based on a case related to the CAA riots which took place in December 2019.

aged and resulted in violence at several places.

Gogoi's lawyer, advocate Krishna Gogoi,

Distressed over violence in US: Modi

‘Peaceful transfer of power must continue to upcoming Biden administration’

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

In a significant comment following the horrifying rioting and violence on Capitol Hill, in Washington DC, by mobs supporting US President Donald Trump that reportedly resulted in a few deaths and shocked the entire world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was “distressed” over the turn of events and pointed out that an “orderly and peaceful transfer of power must continue” to the incoming Biden administration,

adding that “the democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests.”

According to media reports from Washington, just hours after the violence, the US Congress certified Democrat President-elect Joe Biden as the next US President following which President Trump virtually conceded the elections finally by assuring an “orderly transition on January 20.”

President Trump now has less than two weeks left in office, after which he will be succeeded on January 20 by Mr Biden who defeated him in the US Presidential polls held

last November.

PM Modi's tweet, meanwhile, significantly came just a fortnight after President Trump conferred the “Legion of Merit” award—the highest military decoration of the US—on three leaders of the Quad countries, including PM Modi.

On Thursday morning, PM Modi tweeted, “Distressed to see news about rioting and violence in Washington DC. Orderly and peaceful transfer of power must continue. The democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests.”

‘It’s a baby boy’: Army carries pregnant J&K woman to hospital

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

As continuous heavy snowfall cut all road connectivity in Kashmir, Indian Army troops carried a pregnant lady undergoing labour pain for about 2 kilometres to hospital, in knee-deep snow in a village in Kupwara.

As Kashmir Valley was under a spell of heavy snow fall, Indian Army on Tuesday midnight received a distress call for help from a resident in Pharkian village in Kupwara about his wife who was undergoing labour pain and needed to be evacuated to the hospital immediately.

Due to heavy snowfall and inclement weather neither community health service vehicle nor civil transport was available and same was only possible after the snow was cleared from the



The woman was not able to get to the hospital because of heavy snowfall in the Kashmir Valley.

road. “The family and the civil administration thanked the unit for its humanitarian efforts and recognised Army as the true friend of people at the time of distress,” said the official.

The father came to the COB to distribute sweets to all troops in after being blessed with a healthy boy.

The Block Medical Officer (BMO) Mr Shafi also called up the army camp to thank and inform, “Thank you, Army! It's a baby boy!”.

Truck hits two-wheeler from behind, driver flees from spot
Home guard dies, cop hurt in hit-and-runAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

In a suspected case of hit-and-run, a 33-year-old Delhi home guard was killed and a police head constable was injured after their two-wheeler was hit allegedly by a speeding truck in Northwest Delhi's Mahendra Park area, police said on Thursday.

The deceased, Bharat Singh, along with Delhi Police head constable Kuldeep of Bhalswa Dairy police station were on highway patrolling duty when the two-wheeler was hit allegedly from behind by a truck and fled from the spot, they said.

Police said that Bharat was riding the motorcycle and Kuldeep on pillion when the accident took place on late Wednesday night at Karnal bypass near Mukarba Chowk.

On reaching the spot, a

government motorcycle of Bhalswa Dairy police station was found lying in accidental condition. The injured Delhi Home Guard was taken to BJRM hospital where Bharat Singh was declared brought dead, said Vijayanta Arya, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest).

The other injured head constable Kuldeep was admitted to BSA hospital. He sustained fracture in his right leg and has been discharged from hospital after treatment, the officer said.

Witnesses told police during enquiry that the two-wheeler was hit by a truck from behind, police said, adding an intensive search of the offending vehicle is underway. The police are scanning through multiple CCTV footages to trace the routes taken by the offending vehicle and nab the accused driver, police said.

Constable attacked with knife, critical

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

A Delhi Police constable was severely injured after a man allegedly attacked him with a knife in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar area on Wednesday.

According to a senior police official, the incident took place when constable Mukesh and his colleague Deepak, both posted at Tilak Nagar police station, were on checking duty in the Chaukhandi area.

“Around 7.30 pm, a person, identified as Sagar, declared as a “bad character” of Tilak Nagar police station, arrived at the spot and allegedly attacked Mukesh with a

knife and stabbed him in the right hand and left abdomen,” said the senior police official.

“The accused also tried to snatch Mukesh's service pistol. However, Mukesh, in self-defense, fired shots in the air. A bullet “accidentally” hit Sagar. Sagar was taken to a nearby hospital and his condition is stated to be stable,” he said.

“Constable Mukesh is being treated for grievous injuries at a hospital. Sagar had been released on bail around 15 days ago and has been previously found involved in cases of robbery and cases under the arms act,” said the senior police official.

Nadda to launch campaign to reach out to Bengal farmers

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

BJP president J.P. Nadda will launch “ek muttho chaal (one handful of rice),” a farmers' outreach campaign in poll bound West Bengal during his visit to the TMC ruled state on January 9.

The BJP, which has been carrying out “Krishak Suraksha Yatra” in the state, will also be holding “Krishak Suraksha Gram Sabhas” and is aiming to reach out to 74 lakh farmers in the 48,000 villages across the state through these events ahead of the crucial assembly polls.

The BJP is hoping to counter the Oppositions' allegations against the Narendra Modi government of being anti-farmers, especially at a time when some farmer unions have been protesting on Delhi borders for over a month now against the three recently passed legislations.

During his visit, Mr Nadda will visit farmers in Katwa area of the Burdwan district and collect one fist full of rice from five farmers' families and will also eat meal with them. While visiting the farmers, the BJP president will also counter propaganda against the Modi government over farmers issue.

Doctors perform emergency surgery, save new mother

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

Doctors at a city hospital performed emergency surgery to save a new mother from pregnancy induced brain haemorrhage. The team of doctors saved the 35-year-old new mother from intracerebral haemorrhage (ICH), a type of stroke which can lead to death or severe disability in a majority of survivors.

According to doctors, Shruti was eight months pregnant and reported an emergency with drowsiness and right-sided paralysis (weakness of one entire side of the body) and dangerously elevated BP levels. She had been taken to hospi-

tal, where she underwent an emergency caesarean surgery and delivered a preterm baby.

Elaborating on the condition of the patient, the senior director and head of neurosurgery at BLK Super Speciality Hospital, Dr Anil Kansal, said: “Multiple blood transfusions were given to correct her thrombocytopenia, a condition characterised by abnormally low levels of platelets. After stabilising her condition, she was taken for left frontal craniotomy to treat the hematoma or the blood that had collected outside the blood vessels.”

The patient is recuperating well and is able to take good care of her child now.

1 killed, 3 injured as roof of house collapses in Delhi

New Delhi, Jan. 7: One person was killed and three others were injured after a portion of the roof of a house collapsed in southeast Delhi's Sarita Vihar area on Thursday, police said.

The house was located on the third floor of a building. The incident took place when welding work was being carried out on the terrace of the three-storey building, they said.

Four fire tenders were also rushed to the spot, according to fire department officials.

The police said they received information at 12.05 PM that a portion of the roof of the house had collapsed. After reaching the spot, it was found that some welding work was underway on the terrace of the building when a part of the roof collapsed, a senior police officer said.

“Three injured persons — Harish Rotella (owner), Khalil and Shivam — were rushed to AIIMS Trauma Centre. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

CONG IRKED AS CMO TWEETS SENA NAME FOR AURANGABAD

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 7

The relations within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government over the renaming of Aurangabad were further strained as the Congress took a strong objection to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's official social media account referring the city as Sambhajinagar. Maharashtra Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat has warned the allies to avoid playing politics on the renaming issue.

"The directorate of information and publicity should not rename cities on its own. It should remember that official government work is a legal document," said Mr Thorat after Maharashtra CMO in one of the tweets about Cabinet decisions mentioned Aurangabad as Sambhajinagar.

"Approval has been granted to additional 165 beds and creation of 360 new posts at the government medical college and cancer hospital in S a m b h a j i n a g a r (Aurangabad)," said the CMO tagging minister for medical education Amit Deshmukhof Congress.

Reacting strongly, Mr Thorat, who is also a revenue minister, said that renaming cities is not part of the MVA's common minimum programme. "We again want to reassert that we are opposed to renaming any city to ensure that social harmony prevails," he added.

Despite Congress' threats, the CMO made two more tweets Sambhajinagar. Giving information about a decision to regularise lakhs of gunthawari constructions across state, the CMO quoted Mr Thackeray saying, "It will help realise the dreams of common people to buy homes in a city like Sambhajinagar." Gunthawari is a traditional method used to measure land in the state.

'WOMEN SHOULD NEVER GO OUT AT ODD HOURS'

Budaun (UP), Jan. 7: The brutal gangrape and murder of a 50-year-old woman in Uttar Pradesh's Budaun district could have been avoided if the victim had not gone out in the evening, said a member of the National Commission for Women (NCW) on Thursday while expressing her dissatisfaction with the police action in the case.

"I tell women again and again that they should never go out at odd hours under anyone's influence," said NCW member Chandramukhi Devi after meeting the woman's family members.

"I think if she had not gone out in the evening or was accompanied by any child of the family perhaps this incident could have been avoided. But this was pre-planned as she was called through a phone call. She went (out) and then returned in such a state," she told reporters at the victim's village in the district.

On Sunday, the 50-year-old anganwadi worker who had gone to a temple was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Her family members have accused the temple priest and his aides of raping and murdering her. A case has been registered against the accused and two of them were arrested on Tuesday night, while the priest is still absconding. — PTI

POLICE SEEKS COURT WARRANT AGAINST ARNAB

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, JAN. 7

The police requested Raigad court to issue warrant against journalist Arnab Goswami after he failed to appear before the court in connection with an abetment to suicide case registered against him.

When the matter came up for hearing before the court in Alibagh on Thursday none of the three accused i.e. Goswami, Giri Sheikh and Nitish Sardar were found to be present in the court.

Though Mr Goswami's lawyer requested the court to grant his client exemption from personal appearance and the judge allowed it. However, special public prosecutor Pradeep Gharat had opposed this plea and had taken objection on accused remaining absent from court proceedings.

He had contended that the accused should have been present for identification because is was first date after the court has taken cognisance of the chargesheet filed against the accused.

381 bird deaths in HP, Central team reaches Kerala

New Delhi, Jan. 7: More bird deaths were reported from several states, including those of 381 migratory species in Himachal Pradesh, amid cases of avian flu in parts of the country, while a central team reached Kerala on Thursday to assess the situation in two districts where thousands of chickens and ducks were culled following an outbreak of the influenza.

With many states of north India on high alert following cases of the influenza, the Delhi government has asked its officials to keep a close watch on poultry birds coming in from "neighbouring states" to prevent any infection.

The Centre said bird flu has been confirmed only in Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh so far, but all states should be prepared for any eventualities.

States have been told to ensure sufficient stock of PPE kits and accessories required for culling operations. They have also been asked to create awareness among public that it is safe to consume poultry products after following boiling and cooking procedures.

The number of dead migratory birds at the Himachal Pradesh's Pong wildlife sanctuary in Kangra district has reached 3,409 as 381 more

were found dead on Thursday, an official said, adding that 64 crows have also been found dead in the past few days in areas near the sanctuary.

Crows were also found dead in Bilaspur district, officials said, adding that their samples have been collected for testing.

The birds are believed to have died due to an outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza.

Experts from the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India is on a visit to the Pong wetland to assess the situation and give advice to contain the outbreak, Chief Wildlife Warden Archana Sharma said.

She said 10 rapid response teams are working in nine beats of the sanctuary area for the collection and safe disposal of dead birds. Fifty-five people have been deployed for daily surveillance operations.

Besides, a control room has also been set up at Nagrota Surian to receive and disseminate all bird flu outbreak-related information, she said.

In Karnataka, which shares borders with Kerala, six crows died in Dakshina Kannada district.

Bird flu has been reported in parts of Alappuzha and Kottayam districts of Kerala, prompting officials to cull over 69,000 birds, including ducks and chickens. — PTI

Shiv lauds Rahul, says 'rulers in Delhi' fear him

Mumbai, Jan. 7: Calling Rahul Gandhi a warrior for standing up against the Modi government, the Shiv Sena said "rulers in Delhi" are afraid of the Congress leader.

An editorial in Sena mouthpiece *Saamana* also said it was a good thing that Rahul Gandhi is becoming the Congress president. "The rulers in Delhi fear Rahul Gandhi. Had it not been so, campaigns to discredit the Gandhi family would not have been carried out," the editorial said.

"A dictator is afraid even if one man is against him, and if this lone warrior is honest, the fear increases by a hundred times. The Delhi rulers' fear of Rahul Gandhi is in this category," editorial said.

It is a good thing that Rahul is becoming the Congress president again, the Sena mouthpiece said. "One must accept that BJP has no alternative to Narendra Modi and Congress has no alternative to Rahul Gandhi," the Sena said. — PTI

Shah, Tomar meet ahead of talks with farmers

Centre was keen to find an early resolution

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

There is a growing view among the highest quarters in the government that states could be given the choice to implement the contentious farm laws rather than making it mandatory.

States like Punjab and Rajasthan have already refused to implement the new Bills. Union home minister Amit Shah has been holding a series of meetings with agriculture minister Narendra Tomar and other senior government functionaries ahead of a crucial meeting with farmers unions on Friday.

Sources claimed that Centre was keen to find an early resolution to the

ongoing farmers agitation. Thus, the home minister has been playing a very active role even though formal talks are being led by the agriculture minister. Mr Shah has held several rounds of discussions with Tomar, railway minister Piyush Goyal and senior BJP leaders from Punjab.

The home minister had also held one round of discussion with the farmer leaders about a fortnight ago. However, the deadlock continues as farmers are adamant on their two demands that the three laws are repealed and a new law be framed to assure the Minimum Support Price.

Now ahead of the next round of talks Centre is keen to find a way of for-

Govt announces ₹28K crore industrial package for J&K

Package to remain in force for 17 years, aims to create 4.5 lakh jobs

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, JAN. 7

The government on Thursday announced a ₹28,400 crore industrial package for Jammu and Kashmir and said that it would help towards creating as many as 4.5 lakh jobs besides paving the way for ₹20,000 crore investments in the Union Territory.

"The package approved by the Centre will give boost to J&K's industrial potential and will remain in force for 17 years," said UT's Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, at a press conference in Jammu.

Called 'Industrial Development Package-2021', the scheme aims at providing a huge boost to the existing industrial sector, he said asserting that the Government of India "has once again showed its commitment towards sowing the seeds of growth, prosperity and employment in J&K".

He said, "This is a historic industrial package that will give a boost to the industrial sector in J&K, create employment and pave way for outside investments as well." He added that the package will act as a big relief to the existing industries



Trucks stranded on Jammu and Kashmir national highway in Jammu on Thursday after heavy snowfall and landslides in the Kashmir Valley.

— PTI

and will cover the manufacturing units as well as the service sector that includes the Tourism and Information Technology. "This will give J&K's economy a new boost and lead the UT towards growth and sustainable development," Mr. Sinha said.

He stated that the administration headed by him was working on a long and short term strategy for streamlining the power infrastructure in J&K. He said, "J&K has earned the first slot on road connectivity front and in the near future, every village will be connected through a better road. In 2023, people of J&K will travel in Metro for the first time."

Elaborating on the new

industrial package, he said its main purpose is to generate employment beyond government jobs in both manufacturing and service sectors which directly leads to the socio-economic development of the region.

"The scheme is being implemented with the vision that industry and service led development of J&K needs to be given a fresh thrust with emphasis on job creation, skill development and sustainable development by attracting new investment and nurturing the existing ones. It will provide a major support to local industry, besides creation of new business opportunities", he said.

Sonu Sood lands in trouble for running eatery 'illegally'

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 7

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has filed a police complaint against actor Sonu Sood for allegedly converting his residential building into a hotel without necessary permission. According to the civic officials, apart from converting the six-story Shakti Sagar building in Juhu, Sood has also carried out illegal constructions thus violating the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act (MRTP Act).

"It was found that accused Sonu Sood and

Mrs Sonali Sonu Sood have instituted/commenced/un der taken/carried out development or changed the user of land as detailed below: Unauthorised addition/alteration beyond approved plans and unauthorised change of user from residential to residential hotel building without taking technical sanction from competent authority," the BMC's complaint read.

As per the BMC, Sood was first served a month-long notice on October 27 last year and was asked to respond by November 26. However, there was no reply from him, the civic officials said.

The BMC added that despite two rounds of inspections, Sood has not made any alterations, and therefore they had to send a written complaint to the Juhu Police Station, requesting them to immediately file an FIR against him in the matter.

Following the complaint by the BMC, the police said they would investigate the case and take necessary steps. However, the BJP has alleged that the Shiv Sena-led BMC and the state government are targeting Sood as his humanitarian work during the coronavirus pandemic did not go down well with them.

Centre has lost trust of farmers: Harsimrat

New Delhi, Jan. 7: A day before the government's eighth round of talks with protesting farm unions, former Union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal said the Centre has lost the trust of the entire farming community and Prime Minister Narendra Modi should directly talk to agitating farmers.

Expressing her anguish over the pain of farmers, Ms Badal said, "It is strange that farmers are spending nights in open during the chilling winters and even then their demands are falling on deaf ears."

Ms Badal, who quit the Union Cabinet in

September last year, said what farmers have gone through in last six-seven weeks, is the same what she went through when she was a Union minister.

"...To avoid the situation which has arisen now and the protest, I kept pleading for months, whether it was in cabinet meetings or in direct meetings with top leaders of the central government that please listen to farmers before bringing these three bills as they are 'annadaatas' of the country, otherwise it would lead to agitations and protests. But my all pleas fell on to deaf ears," she said. — PTI

US Congress confirms Biden's win

■ Continued from Page 1 if it took all night. Mr Pence reopened the Senate and directly addressed the demonstrators: "You did not win".

Republican Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell said the "failed insurrection" underscored the legislators' duty to finish the count. Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Congress would show the world "what America is made of" with the outcome.

The President gave his supporters a boost into action on Wednesday morning at a rally outside the White House, where he urged them to march to the Capitol. He spent much of the afternoon in his private dining room off the Oval Office watching scenes of the violence on television. At the urging of his staff, he reluctantly issued a pair of

tweets and a taped video telling his supporters it was time to "go home in peace" — yet he still said he backed their cause.

Hours later, Twitter for the first time locked Mr Trump's account, saying he should remove tweets excusing violence and threatened "permanent suspension". Later on Thursday, Facebook announced that it was banning Mr Trump "indefinitely".

A somber President-elect Biden, two weeks from being inaugurated, said American democracy was "under unprecedented assault", a sentiment echoed by many in Congress, including some Republicans. Former President George W. Bush said he watched the events in "disbelief and dismay".

The domed Capitol building has for centuries been the scene of protests

and occasional violence. But Wednesday's events were astounding both because they unfolded at least initially with the implicit blessing of the President and because of the underlying goal of overturning the results of a free and fair presidential election.

Tensions were already running high when legislators gathered early Wednesday afternoon for the constitutionally mandated counting of the Electoral College results, in which Mr Biden defeated Mr Trump, 306-232. Despite pleas from Senator McConnell, more than 150 GOP legislators planned to support objections to some of the results, though lacking evidence of fraud or wrongdoing in the election. Mr Trump spent the lead-up to the proceedings publicly hectoring Mr Pence, who had a largely

ceremonial role, to aid the effort to throw out the results. He tweeted: "Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!"

But Mr Pence, in a statement shortly before presiding, defied Mr Trump, saying he could not claim "unilateral authority" to reject the electoral votes that make Biden President.

On Wednesday, protesters had fought past the police and breached the building, shouting and waving Trump posters and American flags as they marched through the halls, many without masks during the Covid-19 crisis. The legislators were told to duck under their seats for cover and put on gas masks after teargas was used in the Capitol Rotunda. Some House members tweeted they were sheltering in place in their offices.

Rep. Scott Peters, D-

Calif, told reporters he was in the House chamber when rioters began storming it. Security officers "made us all get down, you could see that they were fending off some sort of assault".

He said they had a piece of furniture up against the door. "And they had guns pulled," Mr Peters said. Glass panes to a House door were shattered.

The woman who was killed was part of a crowd that was breaking down the doors to a barricaded room where armed officers stood on the other side, the police said. She was shot in the chest by the Capitol police and taken to a hospital where she was pronounced dead. The city police said three other people died from medical emergencies during the long protest on and around the Capitol grounds. — AP

4G likely to be restored in remaining 18 districts

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, JAN. 7

Jammu and Kashmir's lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday gave hints on restoration of high speed 4G internet services in the remaining 18 districts of the Union Territory soon.

"I know 4G is working in just two districts of J&K. There is a committee examining the issue. Hopefully, there will be good news soon in the coming days," he said while replying a question at a press conference in Jammu.

J&K witnessed a complete communication blackout for weeks after the Centre stripped it of its special status and split it up into two UTs on August 5, 2019. Though landline and mobile phone services have been restored fully, the high speed internet services continue to remain suspended in 18 out of the 20 districts of the UT. Even 2G bandwidth serv-

ices are frequently suspended at places on the pretext of law and order issues, causing huge inconvenience to people particularly students, traders and media persons. 4G services were restored in two districts - Udhampur and Ganderbal - a few months ago "on experimental basis" following Supreme Court's observations on the issue.

Replying another question, Mr. Sinha said that he was aware of the conflicting versions put forth by the Army and J&K police and the families of three Valley youth on purported encounter that took place in Srinagar's Lawaypora last week and that he will come up with facts on it at appropriate time.

He said, "Let me tell you that J&K is a very sensitive place. I have noted all versions including that of the (security) forces and the families (of the slain youth). I will come up with facts before you at an appropriate time."

Plea seeks bar on leaders' re-election to same House

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

The Supreme Court on Thursday sought response from the Centre and the Election Commission on a petition seeking to debar the lawmakers from re-contesting election during the term of the same House (assembly/parliament) after quitting it or being disqualified under 10th Schedule of the Constitution — anti-defection law.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde also comprising Justices A. S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian gave the Centre and the ECI four weeks time to respond to the plea that any member of the House giving up the membership of a political party and resigning from the legislature should also come under the purview of 10th Schedule of the Constitution and attract the consequences of disqualification under the anti-defection law.

The petitioner Madhya Pradesh Congress general secretary Jaya Thakur has sought the implementation of the Article 19(1)(e) of the Constitution, read with para 2 of the tenth Schedule.

"Once a member of the House incurs disqualification under the Xth Schedule, he cannot be permitted to contest again during the term for which he was elected. Article 172 makes a membership of a House co-terminus with the term of 5

THE PETITIONER has highlighted the instances of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Manipur to buttress her contention

years of the House except in circumstances mentioned therein," Jaya Thakur has stated in her petition.

She has pointed to the recent trend across the country by the political parties rendering the 10th Schedule redundant as the ruling party MLAs resign to make the government collapse and then they are given the ministerial posts in the new government and given the ticket to re-contest in the by-elections.

The petitioner has highlighted the instances of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Manipur to buttress her contention seeking to extend the provisions of disqualification even to those lawmakers who quit State assemblies for political gains.

"In the state of Karnataka, 17 MLAs who resigned/were disqualified by the Speaker for anti-party activities, sought reelection and 11 of them got re-elected. Ten of them got ministerial berths in the new government that was formed after the earlier government fell. Recently, in the State of Madhya Pradesh MLAs elected to the Assembly from one party resigned and defected and were immediately made ministers without being MLAs," the petition says.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of rail passengers that the timings of the following special train has been revised as under :-

Revised Timings of 06083 Thiruvananthapuram Central-Hazrat Nizamuddin Superfast Special (Weekly)

STATIONS	Existing Timing		Revised Timing	
	ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.
Vasai Road	04:50	04:55	04:40	04:45
Dahanu Road	05:48	05:50	05:40	05:42
Vapi	06:20	06:22	06:11	06:13
Surat	07:40	07:45	07:30	07:35
Bharuch Jn.	08:20	08:22	08:09	08:11
Vadodara Jn.	09:14	09:24	09:06	09:16

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

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

Integrated Helpline No. 139

Security Helpline No. 182

Follow us on :-

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Your Convenience - Our Concern

Visit us at : www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

49/2021



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
aSensex	48,093.32	-0.17
Nifty 50	14,137.35	-0.06
S&P 500*	3,803.45	1.48
Dollar (₹)	73.31	-0.25
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.68	0.07
Euro (₹)	89.97	0.26
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,335	7.14
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	54.51	0.21
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.892	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.073	0.031

* As of 8:30 PM IST

State Bank raises \$600 mn at 1.8% coupon

State Bank of India raised \$600 million by selling bonds to international investors at a coupon of 1.80 per cent. The issue, oversubscribed by 2.1 times, is part of the bank's \$10 billion medium-term note programme, the ratings of which were withdrawn by Moody's on Wednesday. The 5.5-year issue denominated in US dollars was priced at 140 bps over the US treasury, which is the lowest pricing for any Reg S/144a issue in India, SBI said.

PM to interact with economists for Budget views



Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with economists and sectoral experts on Friday to deliberate on measures that may be included in the upcoming Budget. The virtual meeting is being organised by Niti Aayog. It will also be attended by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Participants include Arvind Panagariya, K. V. Kamath, Rakesh Mohan, Shankar Acharya, Shekhar Shah, Arvind Virmani and Ashok Lahri.

Oyo launches equal partner policy to win trust

Oyo Hotels & Homes said it has launched an equal partner policy (EPP) to strengthen trust and increase transparency with its asset owner community. It said the EPP is aimed at creating a collaborative ecosystem for business improvements. Under EPP, Oyo has laid out seven guidelines—communication, respect, availability, transparency, recognition, technology and togetherness, to create a collaborative ecosystem.

LIC provides another chance to revive policies

LIC has launched a Special Revival Campaign starting from January 7 till March 6 for its customers to revive their lapsed individual policies. It has authorised its 1,526 satellite offices to revive policies where special medical tests are not required. "Policies of specific eligible plans can be revived within five years from the date of the first unpaid premium subject to terms and conditions," LIC said.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

■ Manufacturing could contract by 9.4% NSO sees 7.7% dip in growth in FY21

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 7

As a part of its first advance estimates of the economic growth, the government, on Thursday, said that its economy could shrink by 7.7 per cent in the current financial year 2020-21 (FY21) as compared to 4.2 per cent growth in FY20. The government said the contraction was because of the nationwide lockdown imposed in March 2020 to counter the coronavirus pandemic.

"The Real GDP or GDP at constant prices (2011-12) in the year 2020-21 is likely to attain Rs 134.40 lakh crore levels, down 7.7 per cent as compared to Rs 145.66 lakh crore in 2019-20," said the National Statistical Office (NSO) in its advance GDP estimates. The Reserve Bank of India's estimate for the current fiscal is 7.5 per cent contraction.

The Real GVA (gross value added) at basic prices is estimated at Rs 123.39 lakh crore for 2020-21 as against Rs 133.01 lakh crore in 2019-20, showing a contraction of 7.2 per cent. According to NSO estimates, nominal GDP, or GDP at current prices, in the current fiscal is likely to be Rs 194.82 lakh crore as against Rs 203.40 lakh crore in year 2019-20. The growth in nominal GDP during 2020-21 is estimated at -4.2 per cent.

As per the estimate, there was contraction in almost all sectors, with the exception of agriculture. The manufacturing sector is

ESTIMATES POINT TO SUSTAINED V-SHAPED RECOVERY: FINMIN

New Delhi, Jan. 7: The finance ministry said the latest GDP estimates suggest a continued resurgence in economic activity in second half of the current fiscal and point at post-lockdown sustained V-shaped recovery. The ministry was commenting on the first advanced estimates

(AE) of the national income. "The AE (advance estimates) of 2020-21 reflect continued resurgence in economic activity in Q3 and Q4 which would enable the Indian economy to end the year with a contraction of 7.7 per cent," it said in a statement. —PTI

likely to see a contraction 9.4 per cent against flat growth of 0.03 per cent in the previous year. The NSO estimates significant contraction in mining and quarrying, and trade, hotels, transport, communication and services related to broadcasting.

Reacting to the government's advance estimate, economists and industry captains are of view that the recovery momentum seen in the last few months will need to be further sustained in the coming months.

While Chandrajit Banerjee, director general, CII, said, "The advance estimate for the full year pegged the contraction in GDP at 7.7 per cent, showing a much shallower decline than earlier expected. Government spending did much of the heavy lifting in supporting growth along with a healthy agriculture performance, which was aided by a good

monsoon. In the last few months, there has been a strong economic recovery which will require to be nurtured especially in supporting the critical pillar of consumption."

Aditi Nayar, principal economist, Iera, said, "While the advance estimates of GDP for FY2021 have been based on data that is available for only the first six to eight months, the modifications made in the extrapolation process seem to have captured the impending upturn expected in the remainder of this extremely tumultuous year."

The GDP growth rate contracted by 7.5 per cent in the second quarter (July-September), after shrinking by an unprecedented 23.9 per cent in April-June. Last month, the Reserve Bank of India had predicted the growth rate may enter the positive territory in the October to December quarter.

India to have 50-plus unicorns in 2021: Nasscom

New Delhi, Jan. 7: India saw 12 new unicorns being created in 2020, the highest ever addition in a single year, and is on track to have a 50-plus strong 'unicorn club' in 2021, a Nasscom-Zinnov report said.

Unicorns are companies having valuation of more than \$1 billion.

The report said the Indian tech start-up base is witnessing a steady growth of 8-10 per cent year-on-year, and over 1,600 tech start-ups were added in 2020.

Although cautiously optimistic, the report said 2021 promises a return to normalcy for the Indian tech start-up ecosystem and deep-tech, and new start-up hubs will continue to grow at 40-45 per cent CAGR.

India is on track to have a 50-plus strong 'unicorn club' in 2021 (from 38 in 2020), and M&A deals and IPO pipeline are also expected to accelerate in 2021, said the report, titled Indian Tech Start-up Ecosystem on the March to Trillion Dollar Digital Economy.

It said over 2,100 start-ups are leveraging deep-tech, up from over 1,600 in 2019, and 20 per cent of the deep-tech start-ups are based outside known start-up hubs.

Fintech, health-tech, edtech, agritech and enterprise tech segments are witnessing rapid digital adoption, it said. —PTI

Real estate stocks rally on Maha incentive

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 7

Shares of real estate sector companies rallied after the Maharashtra government reduced construction premium by 50 per cent.

The BSE Realty Index rose over 3.5 per cent intra-day and closed the day up 1.23 per cent.

"With reduced cost of premiums, a developer can look to pay the entire approval cost upfront and potentially launch a new project at an attractive price owing to cost savings and drive higher sales bookings during the initial launch of a project," analysts wrote.

Currently, the various FSI (Floor Space Index, also known as Floor Area Ratio) premiums/fungible FSI and payments for other concessions account for 25-33 per cent of the overall project (including land) and the waiver may result in a 12-17 per cent saving on overall project cost, analysts said.

Earlier in August the state had reduced the stamp duty charges, which triggered a huge rise in real estate buying on pent-up demand.

The top gainers included Indiabulls Real Estate (14.28 per cent), Sobha (7.61 per cent), Brigade Enterprises (2.44 per cent), Mahindra Lifespace Developers (2.26 per cent), Sunteck Realty (2.20 per cent) and DLF (1.89 per cent).

"The Government of Maharashtra's Urban Development Department in a notification issued on January 6 has approved a



MAHA PREMIUM CUT TO BOOST DEMAND: CREDAI & NAREDCO

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Realtors' apex bodies Credai and Naredco on Thursday hailed the Maharashtra government's decision to cut premiums charged on realty projects, saying it will lead to reduction in construction cost and boost property demand.

On Wednesday, the state government cut premiums levied by the civic bodies on real estate development by 50 per cent till December 31, if the developers bear the homebuyers' stamp duty burden.

"The 50 per cent cut in various premiums levied by the Maharashtra government on construction

projects till December 31, 2021, is the first-of-its-kind step taken by the state government," Credai national chairman Jaxay Shah said.

"We hail the proactive and progressive measure as it will have a strong impact on investments in the affordable housing sector," Shah said.

Naredco president Niranjan Hiranandani said: This move will go a long way in expediting the project completion and the industry will witness new launches in the market. The industry applauds this booster dose making many projects viable. —PTI

50 per cent discount/concession on all the various premiums levied by the government on construction projects till December 31, 2021. This also includes concessions in the premiums levied by all planning authorities/local administrations in Maharashtra." ICICI Securities said in a note. "A rider is that develop-

ers availing the discount need to bear the stamp duty costs of 5-6 per cent of agreement value on behalf of buyers," it said.

"Developers with significant Mumbai exposure, including Oberoi Realty, Godrej Properties, Phoenix Mills, Prestige Estates and Sunteck Realty stand to benefit," ICICI Securities said.

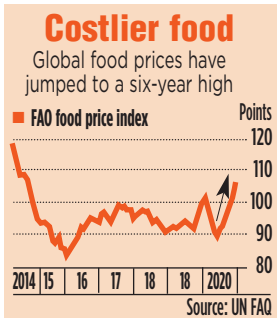
Global food prices at six-year high, set to go up further

AGNIESZKA DE SOUSA & MEGAN DURISIN JAN. 7

Global food prices reached a six-year high in December and are likely to keep rising into 2021, adding to pressure on household budgets while hunger surges around the world.

A United Nations gauge of food prices has jumped 18 per cent since May, as adverse weather, government measures to safeguard supplies and robust demand helped fuel rallies across agricultural commodities from grains to palm oil. Prices will likely climb further, the UN's Food & Agriculture Organization said.

The spike threatens to push up broader inflation, making it harder for central banks to provide more stimulus to shore up economies, while stirring memories of food-price crises a decade ago. It's bad news for consumers whose incomes have been hurt by the Covid-19 crisis, and adds to concerns about global food security



that's being affected by conflicts and weather shocks. That's especially true for the poorest countries having to contend with limited social safety nets and purchasing power, said the FAO.

"We do at this point see more factors pushing up global food prices," said Abdolreza Abbassian, an economist at the FAO. "Food inflation is a reality. While people have lost income, they are as we speak going through a tremendously difficult hardship."

Corn and soy futures rallied to six-year highs as drought threatens crops in South America at a

time of surging Chinese demand, while palm oil—used in about half of all supermarket goods—is near a 10-year high. Protectionist measures are also propping up markets, with Argentinian farmers planning a protest strike after the government suspended corn-export licences, while wheat giant Russia will curb grain exports from mid-February to tame food inflation.

Commodities priced in dollars should remain supported as the greenback falls further this year, Abbassian said. Plus, an economic recovery in some parts of the world will probably fuel consumer spending and food demand.

The FAO's food price index has risen for the past seven months, with annual prices capping the highest average in three years. Still, costs remain well below peaks in 2008 and 2011, when soaring prices caused political and economic instability around the world. —Bloomberg

WTO: India main user of anti-dumping duty

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 7

India has been cracking down on cheap imports from certain destinations in the last few years to safeguard domestic manufacturing. No wonder the country has emerged as the main user of anti-dumping duty under the WTO regime.

The average tariff rates levied by the country on imported goods have also increased in the last five years, as per India's trade policy review underway at the World Trade Organisation. "India continues to be an active user of anti-dumping measures; it is currently the main user of anti-dumping measures in the WTO," finds the trade policy review.

Between 2015 and 2019, India initiated 233 investigations on complaints of dumping of products. This was a sharp increase compared to the 2011-14 period when the number of initiations stood at 82. Most of the investigations initiated relate to products originating in China, followed by those

from the Republic of Korea and the EU-28. By the end of 2019, India had imposed 254 anti-dumping duties.

These duties were mainly levied on chemicals and products, which account for 40.6 per cent of all measures. The average length of anti-dumping measures in force as at December 2019 was 5.9 years. However, 58 measures, which applied mainly to imports originating in China, have been in place for more than 10 years.

During 2015-20, India initiated 20 countervailing investigations, and there were 11 measures in place. Most of the measures applied to imports originating in China. India is also an active user of safeguard measures and as of June 2019 India had initiated 46 investigations. These are 12 per cent of all the safeguard investigations initiated by WTO members.

Further, the review found that the average Most Favoured Nation tariff levied on imports by India has gone up from 13 per cent in 2014-15 to 14.3

per cent in 2020-21. MFN tariffs are normal non-discriminatory tariffs charged on imports, excluding preferential tariffs under free trade agreements and other schemes.

According to the review, there has been a decrease in the percentage of lower rate tariffs. As a result, while tariff rates continue to range from zero to 150 per cent, the share of tariff lines with rates between 0 per cent and 10 per cent declined from 79.1 per cent in 2015 to 67.8 per cent in 2020-21.

The share of tariff lines that bear rates between 10 and 30 per cent increased from 12.1 per cent in 2014-15 to 21.3 per cent in 2019-20 and to 22.1 per cent in 2020-21.

Further, those with rates above 30 per cent rose from 2.8 per cent in 2014-15 to 4 per cent in 2020-21. The highest rates—above 60 per cent—apply to products such as alcoholic beverages (150 per cent), followed by animals and their products, fruit, vegetables and plants, coffee and tea and certain motor vehicles, all with tariffs of 100 per cent.

MUNICH RE | REPORT

Six of the most expensive disasters happened in the US

Second-warmest year costs world \$210 bn

BRIAN K. SULLIVAN JAN. 7

The second-warmest year on record brought storms, fires and floods that killed at least 8,200 people and cost the world \$210 billion in losses, according to a report by Munich Re. The insurer is still calculating where 2020 ranks against other calamitous years but said damages last year exceeded those of 2019, which saw \$166 billion in losses.

"Natural catastrophe losses in 2020 were significantly higher than the previous year," Torsten Jeworrek, a member of Munich's board of management said in the report. "Record numbers for many relevant haz-



ards are a cause for concern, whether we are talking about the severe hurricane season, major wildfires or the series of thunderstorms in the

United States."

Six of the most expensive disasters happened in the US, including a destructive derecho in the Midwest, a record num-

ber of tropical storms and hurricanes strikes and an all-time high acreage burn in California. US damages totalled at least \$95 billion, with \$67 billion of that in insured losses, said Munich.

The disasters piled up as the world came within 0.01 Celsius of tying the warmest year on record set in 2016, Munich said. While it didn't draw direct link between 2020's disasters and climate change, the insurer said the ongoing issues caused by a warming world would raise the potential for more perilous years ahead.

"Even if the weather disasters for one year cannot be directly linked to cli-

mate change, and a longer period needs to be studied to assess their significance, these extreme values fit with the expected consequences of a decades-long warming trend for the atmosphere and oceans that is influencing risks," said Ernst Rauch, chief climate and geoscientist at Munich Re. The year's single worst disaster was flooding across China during its monsoon that amounted to \$17 billion, of which only about 2 per cent was insured, Munich said. Globally, 60 per cent of 2020's losses weren't insured. The growing Asian economies saw the least number of insured losses. —Bloomberg

BMW DRIVES IN MINI PADDY HOPKIRK

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 7

BMW on Thursday launched a special edition of Mini Paddy Hopkirk three-door hatchback priced at Rs 41.70 lakh at Delhi showroom. The German automajor will import only 15 completely built-up unit (CBU) units of the Mini Paddy Hopkirk Edition for the Indian market.



THE ASIAN AGE

8 JANUARY 2021

Trump’s ‘insurrection’ was the final straw...

The violence unleashed by an invading mob ransacking the citadel of modern democracy was unbelievably shocking not only because they took place on Capitol Hill in Washington DC. The insurrection was sparked by the President of USA, Donald Trump, who incited his hard-core supporters to riot against this highly regarded symbol of the free world. All this would have been unthinkable if not for it being too predictable, as it was triggered by one of the most quixotic men to occupy the White House.

A day of such chaos as to shake the core of American democracy proved so futile in the end that its mastermind Mr Trump conceded he would respect the results of the election. Joe Biden of the Democratic Party had indubitably won the Electoral College votes as well as the voice of the people by seven million and is set to succeed him, after his victory was formally certified by the Congress at four o’ clock in the morning. Reason as well as law and order had dawned again.

It would be extremely charitable of the Republican Party that Mr Trump belongs to if it were not to give greater force to the thought that he should be declared mentally unfit to rule and stripped of

It would be extremely charitable of the Republican Party that Mr Trump belongs to if it were not to give greater force to the thought that he should be declared mentally unfit and stripped of presidency less than two weeks before his term runs out

had, in the nick of time, upheld the highest traditions of democracy in carrying out the transfer of power, which is the very bedrock of democracy.

The scope allowed by the police forces in the Capitol for lumpen elements of the far Right to vandalise the Speaker’s office and lord it over the Senate chamber for a while was appalling. And while a tweeting Mr Trump acted out the modern version of Nero playing the fiddle, Mr Pence ordered in the National Guard to secure the Capitol and save it from a perfidious set of rogues set loose on the word of an obnoxious master.

It is no more a puzzle how blind loyalty can drive people as illustrated in an overzealous lady who had to be shot outside the door of the chambers into which lawmakers had been locked in for their safety. Of course, the greater is the responsibility among leaders to discipline their flock. Mr Trump’s biggest failure lay not in his buffoonery while in office and not even in his inability to lead when it came to personally dealing with an adverse poll result. His devilish goading of people to violence was responsible for the mayhem for which he will never be forgiven. He deserves his place in the dustbin of history.

Bird flu: Remain on alert

Most nations hit by pandemic Covid-19 are not in a position to face another health exigency but India has been called upon to pull up its socks against the avian flu which has till now killed thousands of migratory birds and poultry in four states and threatens to spread to more areas. The Union government has sent an alert to all states to monitor their avian stock especially in forest areas and in water bodies. As of now, 12 epicentres of the flu have been identified in four states — Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala.

It has been clarified that the flu this time is spread mainly through migratory birds that travel thousands of kilometres from the icy cold climes to their tropical destinations from October to February. The government’s attempt is to stop the secondary spread of the virus, and the state governments have already started addressing the issue. Thousands of infected ducks have already been culled in Kerala.

Economic activity on the ground has been halted for almost a year now, and a bird flu outbreak is a shock most poultry farmers would not be able to absorb, especially at a time when the markets have started slowly looking up. The government must work with the farmers to ensure that all the infected birds are properly dispensed with and that all the farmers who comply with the norms are compensated forthwith. The government must also think of extending financial help to encourage farmers to upscale their hygiene standards so that they do not fall prey to such outbreaks so easily. There must also be a mechanism to ensure that even the slightest of suspicions of the disease is scientifically addressed and acted upon without loss of time. All these measures call for close coordination among the state and central institutions and agencies. They could draw from the experience they have gathered while fighting Covid-19.

THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY
Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUBHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94



Mary Mitzy

Ensuring justice in virtual courts: Who controls the mute button?

On this day last year, people all over the world were nursing new resolutions. The coronavirus shattered their hopes and dreams in no time. It spared none — not even the most important pillar of democracy — the judiciary. After the initial onslaught, it is said to have partially resumed its duties. So how did the Supreme Court of India function during the pandemic?

The Court completely shut the entry of advocates into its premises. In an epoch-marking decision, it threw all its former reservations vis-à-vis digital operations to the winds, and finally went online. The Court revived the e-filing portal, introduced long back but not in use by advocates. And, only urgent matters were taken up for the “virtual hearing”. The platform used by the Court is the Vidyo app.

During the initial stages of this changeover, the registry gave instructions to advocates over phone on how to log into the Vidyo app, when to log in, and so on. This was almost nine months ago. Today, nine months on, the

Supreme Court still takes up only urgent matters for hearing. Its functional can at best be said to be partial. Most benches now have three judges sitting on alternate days for a few hours.

The online system is convenient for many advocates who returned to their hometown during the lockdown and don’t want to return to Delhi. Today we have lawyers appearing from various parts of the country before the Supreme Court as well as other courts. That aside, it has not been smooth sailing. Tech glitches and lack of Internet savvy plays a spoilsport in the day-to-day work of the court even after so many months have gone by.

Indian courts follow the system of an open court hearing. Everyone can watch the proceedings. But the Vidyo app has a limit in terms of the number of participants who can be admitted and the Supreme Court, too, came out with a notification restricting the advocates from sharing the link for appearance. It has affected mostly young advocates keen to learn court craft from watching the courts function.

But there’s been worse happening. Many a time, during hearing a case, the advocate was logged out at the relevant moment and was unable to log in. This resulted in the case being decided in their absence. It is with great difficulty that one gets one’s case listed for hearing and if it is decided in one’s absence then one’s entire effort becomes futile. On top of that, there is the pain of humiliation before one’s client.

The appearance of the advocates before the court is run by the control room, comprising a team of technical hands who are almost completely unfamiliar with the legal process. It is their job to identify the lawyers for each case as per the item numbers written before their names. The control room decides whose mic should be unmuted and whose video made visible.

Now, the cases heard by the Supreme Court have anywhere between two and 30 parties. Who decides who will be unmuted? A control room that has no idea about the proceedings of a case?

Advocates keep sending requests to be unmated or for the senior advocate to be allowed to speak. But only if they are lucky will their request be granted before the case is over. Or else, you just count yourself to be on the “unlucky list”. Besides, in a virtual court, there are limitations to the ways in which an advocate can try and persuade the bench to unmute them, once it has muted them to do which it has the powers. In a physical court hearing, the practice is to try and persuade the bench to hear them even if it puts the file down, and many do succeed in their efforts.

Then there is the interesting question of how come those who don’t want themselves to be visible appear on the screen when they are least expecting to be seen. The new practice is that, once the court starts hearing a case, the screen will show only those advocates who are arguing that particular case. But many a time, lawyers were caught on screen dressed casually and doing something else even when their case was not being

heard. It led to much embarrassment in legal circles. Such situations could have been avoided if the control room had been more careful.

But the larger question is this: Are we going to continue to function in such a handicapped manner, and for how long? There are a large number of cases needing proper disposal. Many litigants’ lives depend on the disposal of their long awaited cases. Some of them are languishing in jails, some are waiting for their salary, some waiting to be appointed to a job to sustain themselves and their families. Is it not time for the highest court of the country to resume physical functioning like every other organisation, observing strict social distancing rules?

If this anarchy continues, people may have to turn to other ways to redress their grievances and one fine morning we may find that we can do without the services of the judiciary.

The writer is a Supreme Court lawyer



Subhani

Hindus and patriotism: Why RSS chief is wrong



Karan Thapar

As I See It

We are all prone to saying foolish things. I do so quite often. In fact, it’s probably one of the qualities that makes us human. On the other hand, robots or creatures that work on artificial intelligence are never foolish, although they could be wrong. However, there’s a significant difference between the harmlessly foolish and the defiantly stupid. The latter, particularly when its acted upon, can be dangerous. I’m afraid that the comments made by the *sarsanghchalak* of the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh fall squarely into the latter category. I know my saying so will infuriate RSS members and the *sarsanghchalak*’s army of fans but that can’t be helped. I would have to call a spade a fruit fork if I opted for gentler terminology!

At a book launch last Friday Mohan Bhagwat said: “If someone is Hindu, he has to be patriotic, that will be his or her basic character and nature”. Just in case that wasn’t clear enough, he added: “A Hindu can never be anti-Indian”. Much as he might want that to be the case, it simply isn’t true.

First of all, our history establishes that there is no shortage of Hindus who have been traitors — it’s another matter that the country may not have been called India at the time. Amongst the earliest was Raja Aambhi of Taxila. Apparently, he had helped build the bridge cross the Indus river which enabled Alexander to invade the country. That was way back in 326 BC.

Jump a few centuries to Raja Jaichand. In

1192, he supported Muhammad of Ghor against Prithviraj Chauhan. It didn’t matter to him that Chauhan was his son-in-law. It’s said the desire for revenge because Chauhan had eloped with his daughter outweighed any qualms about assisting the Afghan invader.

However, don’t assume it’s only in ancient or medieval times that Hindus were traitors. Modern Hindus are really no different. We have several examples of Hindu treachery from the British Raj. One of the most striking is Jayajirao Scindia, the Maharaja of Gwalior, who in 1857 supported our conquerors. There are accounts that suggest his part in helping the British capture the Rani of Jhansi was by no means inconsequential.

And so to our own time. I’m not sure how one should think of the likes of Chhota Rajan, Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi or, even, Lalit Modi. I certainly wouldn’t accuse them of treason, but I would hardly call them patriots. And remember, every one of them is a Hindu.

However, I suspect that Mr Bhagwat would simply brush aside all the evidence of history that I have just marshalled. I believe his actual, but unstated, point is that India’s minorities cannot be as patriotic as its Hindu citizens. This, presumably, is what he means when he said a Hindu is patriotic by “his or her basic character and nature”, and “a Hindu can never be anti-Indian”.

Alas, even by this interpretation, the *sarsanghchalak* is simply wrong. And since it is acts of valour against the Pakistanis that are most likely to impress

him, let me gently remind him of the honours won by Muslim soldiers in battles against our western neighbour — although he has no business to have forgotten about them! Havildar Abdul Hamid won the Param Vir Chakra, India’s highest award for gallantry, in 1965. Brig. Mohammad Usman posthumously won the Maha Vir Chakra in 1947. Lt. Col. Salim Caleb in 1965.

If this fails to convince Mr Bhagwat, then let me add what should be the clincher. The Army Chief who defeated Pakistan in 1971 — a victory that the RSS holds in high esteem — was a Parsi. The general who by common consensus has been accorded the greatest credit for India’s military performance in 1965 was a Sikh. The chief of staff of the Eastern Command who left Pakistan’s Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi no option but to surrender in Dhaka in December 1971 was a Jew. None of the three would have been offended to be called a Hindu, but each of them would have considered the *sarsanghchalak*’s statement ridiculous.

Unfortunately, it’s a lot more than that. It’s dangerous. The *sarsanghchalak*’s statement divides us, the people of India, on the spurious grounds that Hindus are automatically and naturally patriotic whilst the rest of us are not. This is not just untrue, it’s also wicked. It seeks to sow the seeds of doubt, suspicion, distrust and, eventually, difference between Indians.

The undeniable truth is that patriotism is

defined by the love of one’s country, not by the character of one’s religion. And it’s important to remember the opposite is also true. Hindus are as capable of hating their country as an Indian of any another religion.

There is, however, a further, though tiny, question the *sarsanghchalak* hasn’t asked himself. What would patriotism amount to for the millions of Hindus who have left India to settle abroad and become citizens of another country? They carry British, Canadian or United States passports. Often their children don’t speak an Indian language. In fact, only in terms of origin do they accept their connection with India. In every other way they consider themselves British, Canadian or American. Does Mr Bhagwat realise and accept that for them patriotism would be love of the country they were born in, whose passport they hold and whose future will determine their own?

Let me make one last point. The *sarsanghchalak* has also said that “if one loves his country, that doesn’t only mean the land, it means its people, rivers, culture, traditions and everything”. Here I agree with him but only because this is a statement of the obvious. More importantly, it’s not something that applies only to Hindus who love India. It’s as true of the French and the Germans, Nigerians and Burundians, Austrians and Argentinians and even, dare I say it, the good folk of Lapland. I guess the point I’m making is simple. If we want our country to survive and flourish, let’s stop trying to define patriotism as a Hindu attribute and let’s discard the belief that Hindus are special or better. Otherwise, we could end up like Yugoslavia.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

COURT TO DECIDE NOW

January 11 has been fixed for hearing by the Supreme Court for all petitions challenging the three agro-laws against which farmers have been protesting at Delhi borders for more than a month. The government is unwilling to repeal the laws. Experts believe that the so-called reforms are ham-handed. Also, what was the hurry in bringing them about bypassing process? With the ball now in the Supreme Court, a scrutiny of the claims of all sides is expected. The end to this dispute is now in sight.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

DON’T TURN BLIND EYE

THE BRUTAL gangrape and murder of a 50-year-old Anganwadi worker in Badaun district of western Uttar Pradesh point to the state’s worsening law and order situation. What is shocking is that a temple priest and two of his accomplices perpetrated the crime. We must also hold the UP police culpable for their indifference shown in not reaching the crime scene even after the victim’s family complained and sending the victim’s body for post-mortem 18 hours after the incident. The incident comes on the heels of the gangrape and murder of a teen in Hathras, and the authorities would do well to get their act together soon.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

JAGAN IN CONTEMPT?

THE VICIOUS ATTACK on the judiciary by Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is totally unjustified. After targeting the judges of the Andhra Pradesh high court, Mr Reddy has gone to the extent of maligning the very reputed and unamenable Supreme Court Justice N.V. Ramana who is set to be the next Chief Justice of India on April 24. Is the ruling party at the Centre working in collusion with the Andhra CM to tarnish Justice Ramana’s image? CJI Sharad Arvind Bobde should hold the CM in contempt of court.

Aires Rodrigues
Ribander, Goa

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

SHORT TAKES

WOMAN SHOT DEAD IN CAPITOL A DON SUPPORTER

Washington, Jan. 7: The woman who died Wednesday of a bullet wound during the violent storming of the US Capitol was shot by police, authorities said. The only fatality tied to Wednesday's unrest was the woman, reportedly a dedicated Donald Trump backer and air force veteran who was among a throng of supporters of the president that invaded the US legislature.

Washington police chief Robert Contee said three other people, one woman and two men, had died Wednesday in the area around the Capitol, but did not link those deaths to the violence.

Each of the three "appeared to have suffered medical emergencies which resulted in their deaths," Contee told reporters.

HOST OF OFFICIALS RESIGN AFTER CAPITOL PROTEST

Washington, Jan. 7: US Deputy National Security Advisor Matt Pottinger, first lady Melania Trump's chief of staff Stephanie Grisham and White House Deputy Press Secretary Sarah Matthews have resigned following the violence at the US Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump.

Grisham, who previously served as the White House press secretary before making way for current White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany in April, was the first to submit her resignation on Wednesday. "It has been an honour to serve the country in the White House," Grisham said in a statement posted on Twitter. Matthews also tendered her resignation. "As someone who worked in the halls of Congress, I was deeply disturbed by what I saw today," she said.

Trump's deputy national security advisor Pottinger also resigned. White House social secretary Rickie Niceta also submitted her resignation.

2 CONVICTED IN CHINA'S #METOO MOVEMENT

Taipei (Taiwan), Jan. 7: In a potential blow to the #MeToo movement in China, a young man and woman were convicted of defaming a prominent Chinese journalist for publishing an account accusing him of sexual misconduct.

A court in the eastern city of Hangzhou ruled on Tuesday that the evidence provided by former journalists Zou Sicong and He Qian against Deng Fei was "not enough to allow someone to firmly believe without any hesitation that what was described truly happened."

The court ordered He and Zou to pay 11,712 yuan (\$1,813) in damages. The pair plan to appeal the ruling. The case was based on an article written by He that Zou published online in 2018, in which he alleged Deng lured her to a hotel room in 2009 to discuss story ideas, then took off her clothes while trying to kiss and grope her. He said that at the time, she was a 21-year-old intern at a news magazine where Deng was chief reporter.

SYRIA RESPONDS TO 'ISRAELI AGGRESSION'

Damascus, Jan. 7: Syrian air defence forces responded late Wednesday to "Israeli aggression" in the south of the country, the state news agency said.

Israel launched missiles in the air attack from the disputed Golan Heights at around 11 pm (2100 GMT), SANA reported, citing a military source.

"Our anti-air defences responded, targeting most of the missiles," the source added. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) later said that the Israeli strikes caused "deaths and injuries" but did not give details.

SOHR said the Israeli raids targeted several positions south of Damascus and came two days after a delegation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard visited the area.

Israel has not commented on the incident.

Last month, Israel said it had hit about 50 targets in the neighbouring country in 2020.

The Jewish state has consistently vowed to prevent its arch-enemy Iran from gaining a foothold in Syria, where Tehran has backed President Bashar al-Assad throughout the nearly decade-long war.



Violent protesters, loyal to President Donald Trump, storm the Capitol on Wednesday in Washington. — AP/PTI



People stand around media equipment destroyed by Trump supporters outside the US Capitol in Washington DC on Wednesday. — AFP



Trump supporters face off with police and security forces in front of the US Capitol in Washington DC on Wednesday. — AFP

US riot: World leaders appalled

Some single out Trump for harsh criticism, say there should be a peaceful transfer of power

London, Jan. 7: Leaders around the world condemned the storming of the US Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump on Wednesday, expressing shock at the chaos unfolding in a country they once relied upon for global leadership. "Disgraceful scenes in US Congress," tweeted Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, a staunch ally of the United States over generations. "The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power."

Other allies were similarly appalled at what they described as an attack on American democracy, though some said they believed US democratic institutions would withstand the turmoil. Some leaders singled out Trump for harsh criticism.

"Trump and his supporters should finally accept the decision of the American voters and stop trampling on democracy," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas wrote on Twitter. "From inflammatory words come violent deeds." He added that "contempt for democratic institutions has disastrous effects." "The beauty of democracy" with a shrug emoji was the reaction tweeted by Bashir Ahmad, a personal assistant to the president of Nigeria, which has seen several coups since independence — including one led decades ago by President Muhammadu Buhari, who most recently entered the office via a vote.

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera and Colombian President Ivan Duque were among those in Latin America who denounced the protesters, but both also said they were confident that American democracy and the rule of law would prevail. "In this sad episode in the US, supporters of fascism showed their real face: anti-democratic and aggressive," tweeted Luis Roberto Barroso, Brazilian Supreme Court justice and the head of the country's electoral court. He said he hoped "American society and institutions react with vigor to this threat to democracy."

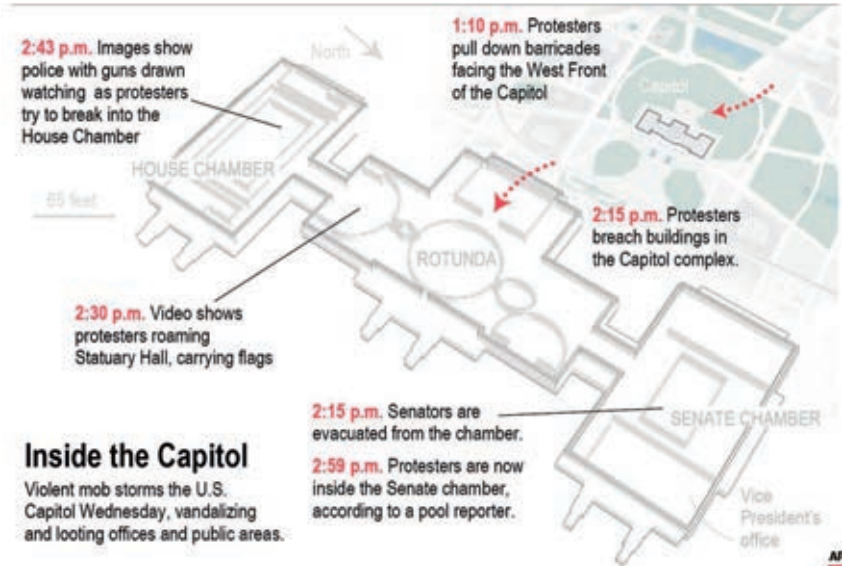
Venezuela, which is under US sanctions, said

the events in Washington show that the US "is suffering what it has generated in other countries with its politics of aggression." Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has survived US-backed opposition efforts to oust him despite accusations of human rights abuses, civil unrest and a humanitarian crisis that has forced millions to flee the oil-rich country.

In Puerto Rico, many people took to social media and joked that the US territory no longer wanted statehood. Independence, they said, looked appealing for the first time in decades. In fact, it was that pursuit of independence that marked one of the last times the US Congress was stormed violently. Four members of Puerto Ricos Nationalist Party opened fire on the House floor in March 1954, wounding five lawmakers. Italians watched the events with shock, having always considered the US to be the model of democracy and the country that rescued Italy after its fascist descent during World War II.

"This is the widely anticipated outcome of Trumpism," tweeted a retired Italian center-left politician, Pierluigi Castagnetti. "And unfortunately it wont end today. When politics is replaced by deception and fanaticism of the people the drift is inevitable." European Parliament President David Sassoli, who leads one of the largest legislatures in the world, also denounced the scenes at the Capitol.

The European Union has spent four cantankerous years dealing with the Trump administration, and its top officials have repeatedly said they are looking forward to a better relationship under President-elect Joe Biden. "This is insurrection. Nothing less. In Washington," tweeted Carl Bildt, a former prime minister of Sweden. Turkey, a NATO ally that has sometimes been at odds with Washington, expressed concern over the images of angry Trump supporters trying to thwart the certification of Biden as the new president. The chaos forced lawmakers to be rushed from the building. A Turkish Foreign Ministry statement urged all parties in



China goes online to mock 'beautiful sight' of US chaos

Beijing, Jan. 7: China's internet erupted in mirth at America's troubled democracy after supporters of President Donald Trump broke into the US Capitol, with Beijing criticising the "sharp contrast" between Washington's response to the chaos and the 2019 Hong Kong anti-government protests.

On Thursday morning, state media tabloid *Global Times* tweeted side-by-side photo comparisons of Hong Kong protesters occupying the city's Legislative Council Complex in July 2019 with Wednesday's Washington riots.

The latter saw hardcore Trump fans invade the US Capitol to protest the election defeat, taking selfies, scuffling with security and ransacking parts of

the building. "@SpeakerPelosi once referred to the Hong Kong riots as 'a beautiful sight to behold'," the *Global Times* said in the tweet, referring to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's June 2019 comment about Hong Kong's mass pro-democracy demonstrations, which at that time were mostly peaceful.

"It remains yet to be seen whether she will say the same about the recent developments in Capitol Hill," China's Communist Youth League also described the unrest as a "beautiful sight" on the Twitter-like Weibo platform.

Beijing's foreign ministry echoed those sentiments, saying "the reaction of some people in the US, including that of some media

outlets, is completely different." Speaking at a press briefing Thursday, ministry spokeswoman Hua Chinying said that the "sharp contrast (in reactions) makes one ponder, and deserves serious and profound reflection." The hashtag "Trump supporters storm US Capitol" pinned across China's Weibo on Thursday, racking up 570 million views, as users compared the global support for Hong Kong's protesters with the outpouring of condemnation for the pro-Trump mob.

"At present, all European countries' leaders have shown double standards and condemned it (Washington rioting)," read one Weibo comment which gained over 5,000 likes. — AFP

FB bans Trump till Biden inauguration

Washington, Jan. 7: Facebook will bar President Donald Trump from posting on its system at least until the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, the platform said Thursday. In a post announcing the unprecedented move, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said the risk of allowing Trump to use the platform is too great following the president's incitement of a mob that touched off a deadly riot in the US Capitol on Wednesday. Zuckerberg says Trump's account will be locked "for at least the next two weeks" but could remain locked indefinitely. Twitter on Wednesday began limiting the reach of tweets stoking an assault on the US Capitol by a mob intent on overturning the election results.

"We have been significantly restricting engagement with tweets labeled under our Civic Integrity Policy due to the risk of violence," the Twitter support team said.

Twitter on Wednesday began limiting the reach of tweets stoking an assault on the US Capitol by a mob intent on overturning the election results.

"This means these labelled tweets will not be able to be replied to, retweeted, or liked." Twitter and other social platforms were facing challenges amid the unrest after President Donald Trump, a fervent Twitter user, had rallied supporters in the capital city as Congress was set to certify the November election won by Joe Biden. — AFP

UN chief, UNGA Prez show concern

United Nations, Jan. 7: Top United Nations leadership expressed sadness and concern over the violence in Washington DC by pro-Trump demonstrators who stormed the United States Capitol as lawmakers gathered to certify the presidential election results.

"The Secretary-General is saddened by the events at the US Capitol in Washington, D.C.," on Wednesday, Stephane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, said in a note to correspondents.

"In such circumstances, it is important that political leaders impress on their followers the need to refrain from violence, as well as to respect democratic processes and the rule of law," the United Nations chief said.

President of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Volkan Bozkir, tweeted that as

president of the 193-member UN body, "I'm saddened & concerned by today's developments at the Capitol in #WashingtonDC. The US is one of the world's major democracies. I believe that peace & respect for democratic processes will prevail in our host country at this critical time."

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international organisation that promotes world-wide parliamentary dialogue and representative democracy, also denounced the violence. The IPU and the parliamentary community strongly condemn the violence and the assault on the US Capitol by protesters, it said in a statement.

"The integrity of this bastion of democracy and of the representatives of the people of the United States must be respected," IPU said. — PTI



Supporters of US President Donald Trump protest outside the US Capitol, in Washington, DC on Wednesday. — AFP



A demonstrator loyal to President Donald Trump, is removed by police, Wednesday, at the Capitol. — AP/PTI



Supporters of US President Donald Trump enter the US Capitol on Wednesday, in Washington, DC. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

WOMAN DIES IN NZ'S SUSPECTED SHARK ATTACK

Wellington, Jan. 7: A woman has died after an apparent shark attack at a popular New Zealand beach, police said on Thursday. Police were called to Waihi Beach on the east coast of the North Island in the early evening following reports a woman had been injured in the water.

"Initial indications suggest she may have been injured by a shark. Sadly she died at the scene a short time later," police said in a statement.

If confirmed, it would be the 25th shark attack fatality recorded in New Zealand and the first in seven years since a 46-year-old man died at Muriwai near Auckland.

Waihi Beach promotes itself as "one of New Zealand's safest surf beaches and home to a vibrant and friendly beachside community." However, there have been occasional shark sightings in the area in recent years including a 3.5 metre (11ft 5in) male last February.

100 TRAFFICKED ROHINGYAS HELD IN RAID

Yangon, Jan. 7: Nearly 100 Rohingya smuggled from Myanmar's conflict-scarred Rakhine state were arrested in a raid in Yangon, police announced on Thursday, with authorities saying they had been headed to Malaysia as part of a trafficking network.

The plight of the Rohingya captured international headlines in 2017 after a military crackdown in western Rakhine state sent almost 750,000 fleeing across the border to Bangladesh.

Members of the stateless minority group have long faced discrimination in Myanmar, where they are denied freedom of movement and citizenship, and lack access to work, healthcare and schools.

With the remaining languishing in camps that rights groups have described as "apartheid-like", many choose to embark on treacherous routes with human smugglers to reach Malaysia and Indonesia.

AFGHAN ATTACK KILLS AT LEAST 11: OFFICIALS

Kabul, Jan. 7: Separate attacks in southern Afghanistan left at least 11 civilians and security forces dead, officials said on Thursday, even as Afghan negotiators were in Qatar to resume talks with the Taliban aimed at finding an end to decades of conflict.

In southern Uruzgan province, a suicide car bomber detonated a vehicle full of explosives early Thursday near a military base, killing six security forces, said a provincial council member who was not authorised to speak with the media. Mohammad Karim Karimi, deputy head of the provincial council in Uruzgan, confirmed the attack on the military base in Tirin Kot, the provincial capital, but couldn't provide an exact death toll.

He said the explosion was so strong it sent shock waves through the city. In southern Helmand province, at least five civilians were killed and five others wounded in a suspected airstrike on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah.

-19.6 DEGREES IN BEIJING, COLDEST SINCE 1996

Beijing, Jan. 7: The mercury dipped to minus 19.6 degrees Celsius on Thursday morning in Beijing as a strong cold wave swept through the city, marking the coldest morning in the Chinese capital since 1966. The Nanjiao station, located in Beijing's Daxing district, is a national-level meteorological station founded in 1912.

Its data are used by experts to make historical comparisons. On early Thursday morning, half of Beijing's 20 national-level meteorological stations registered their lowest ever early-January temperatures, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported, quoting Lei Lei, chief forecaster of the Beijing municipal meteorological station.

The cold wave gripped Beijing since Wednesday, bringing drastic temperature drops and strong winds. As of Thursday morning, the city's weather authorities have maintained blue alerts for continuous low temperature and heavy winds, the lowest level in China's four-tier colour-coded warning system.

Cabinet members discuss Don ouster

Invoking 25th Amendment will need VP Pence to lead the Cabinet in a vote on removing him

Washington, Jan. 7: Members of President Donald Trump's cabinet on Wednesday discussed the possibility of removing Trump from office after his supporters stormed the Capitol, three US news channels reported.

The discussions focused on the 25th amendment to the US Constitution, which allows for a president's removal by the vice president and cabinet if he is judged "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office." Invoking it would require Vice President Michael Pence to lead the cabinet in a vote on removing him.

CNN quoted unnamed Republican leaders saying the 25th amendment had been discussed, saying they had described Trump as "out of control." CBS reporter Margaret Brennan said that "nothing formal" had been presented to Pence, and ABC reporter Katherine Faulders said "multiple" sources had told her that discussions took place on the unprecedented move.

Trump's encouragement of the protesters, his unfounded claims that he lost the November 3 presidential election due to massive fraud, and other bizarre behaviour have raised questions about his ability to lead.

While only two weeks remain before President-elect Joe Biden takes office, after the attacks on Congress Wednesday Democratic lawmakers called for invoking the 25th Amendment as well.

Democrats of the House Judiciary Committee sent a letter to Pence urging him to act to remove Trump, saying he had stoked an act of insurrection and "sought to undermine our democracy." Pointing to a rambling speech Trump gave Wednesday, it said he "revealed that he is not mentally sound and is still unable to process and accept the results of the 2020 election." Others blamed Trump for fuelling terrorism. "The President incited a domestic terror attack on the Capitol. He is an imminent threat to our democracy and he needs to be removed from office immediately," said Representative Kathleen Rice in a tweet.

"The Cabinet must invoke the 25th Amendment," she wrote.

The lawmakers' call was echoed by the influential



Police with guns drawn watch as protesters try to break into the House Chamber at the US Capitol in Washington on Wednesday.

— AP

Protest intolerable both at home, abroad: Pompeo

Washington, Jan. 7: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a staunch ally of President Donald Trump, on Wednesday condemned a pro-Trump mob for storming the Capitol, saying that the United States always condemned political violence.

"I have travelled to many countries and always support the right of every human being to protest peacefully for their beliefs and their causes," Pompeo wrote on Twitter.

"But violence, putting at risk the safety of others including those tasked with providing security

for all of us, is intolerable both at home and abroad."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Canadians are "deeply disturbed" by the storming of the US Capitol by thousands of supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump on Wednesday, calling it an "attack on democracy." "Canadians are deeply disturbed and saddened by the attack on democracy in the United States, our closest ally and neighbour," Trudeau said in a Twitter message.

"Violence will never succeed in overruling the will of the people. Democracy

in the US must be upheld - and it will be."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on Wednesday called on supporters of President Donald Trump to "stop trampling on democracy" after they stormed the US Capitol building in anger over his election defeat.

"Trump and his supporters should finally accept the decision of American voters and stop trampling on democracy," Maas tweeted. "The enemies of democracy will be pleased to see these incredible images from Washington DC," he added. — AFP

he retains the vast powers of the presidency is a threat to public order and national security," they said.

— AFP

National Guard activated to help quell protests

Washington, Jan. 7: National Guard troops are being mobilised in Washington and neighboring states after protesters supporting President Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol Wednesday, the White House and Pentagon said. White House spokeswoman Kayleigh McEnany said in a tweet that Trump had directed the callup of National Guard troops "along with other federal protective services" to deal with the unrest.

"We reiterate President Trump's call against violence and to remain peaceful," she said, after protesters with Trump banners shut down the US legislative to protest Joe Biden's election victory.

Pentagon Spokesman Jonathan said the entire 1,100-strong Washington DC guard had been called up to support federal law enforcement while neighbouring Virginia and Maryland announced they were deploying guard troops and state police.

"American democracy is 'limping on both feet' after the storming of the US Capitol by Donald Trump supporters, a senior Russian lawmaker said Thursday.

Konstantin Kosachyov, the chair of the Russian upper house's foreign affairs committee, said the stunning events in the US capital showed that Washington had no right to lecture other countries on democracy. — AFP

US Cong certifies Biden's over Don

Washington, Jan. 7: A Joint Session of the US Congress on Thursday formally certified the Electoral College victory of Joe Biden as the next US President and Kamala Harris as the Vice President in the November 3 election.

The formal certification by the Joint Session came in the wee hours of Thursday. The Joint Session resumed its meeting late Wednesday night after it was disrupted by hundreds of supporters of incumbent President Donald Trump who violently stormed the Capitol Hill.

Commenting on the certification, Trump said the decision "represents the end of the greatest first term in presidential history." He, however, said there will be an "orderly" transfer of power to Biden on January 20.

"Even though I totally disagree with the outcome of the election, and the facts bear me out, nevertheless there will be an orderly transition on January 20th," Trump said in a statement. "It's only the beginning of our fight to Make America Great Again," Trump said while repeating false claims about the election fraud.

Biden, 78, and Harris, 56, are scheduled to be sworn in as the President and Vice President of the country on January 20. The inauguration is going to be a low-key affair given the Covid-19 pandemic. The counting of Electoral College votes and its subsequent certification came after an ugly episode of violence inside the US Capitol, resulting in four

POMPEO SCARES SANCTIONS OVER HK MASS ARRESTS

Washington, Jan. 7: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday threatened sanctions against individuals and organisations involved in the arrest of dozens of Hong Kong democracy figures, voicing anger that an American was among those rounded up.

Pompeo said the 53 people arrested on Wednesday "should be released immediately and unconditionally." "The United States will not stand idly by while the people of Hong Kong suffer under Communist oppression," Pompeo said in a late-night statement after a day of political violence in Washington.

"The United States will consider sanctions and other restrictions on any and all individuals and entities involved in executing this assault on the Hong Kong people," Pompeo, who remains in office for two weeks, said the United States would also "explore restrictions" against the financial hub's trade representative office in Washington. — AFP

deaths, wherein Capitol Hill was brought under a lockdown, with lawmakers being taken to safe places, shots were fired inside the Congress and tear gas was used. Former US President, Barack Obama, described it as a moment of great dishonor and shame for the United States. — PTI

PAK COURT ISSUES ARREST WARRANT FOR Jem CHIEF

Lahore, Jan. 7: An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan on Thursday issued an arrest warrant for banned Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar on the charges of terror financing, days after another dreaded terrorist and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi was arrested here on similar charges.

The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Gujranwala issued the warrant against Azhar during a hearing in a terror financing case instituted by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab police against some members of the JeM. — PTI

Jaishankar discusses role of provincial councils with Lanka

Colombo, Jan. 7: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday met the Tamil leadership in Sri Lanka and discussed issues pertaining to the development and devolution and the role of provincial councils as part of national reconciliation.

The meeting assumed significance in the backdrop of moves by the ruling Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP) allies to mount a public campaign for abolition of the country's provincial council system.

The SLPP's Sinhala majority hardliners have

meeting assumed significance in the backdrop of moves by the ruling Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP) allies to mount a public campaign for abolition of the country's provincial council system.

been advocating a total abolition of the provincial council system established in 1987. There are nine provincial councils in Lanka. "Glad to meet the TNA delegation led by Thiru Sampanthan. Discussed issues pertaining to development & devolution and the role of Provincial Councils,"

Jaishankar tweeted after the meeting.

Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is the main Tamil party in the island nation. Jaishankar also met a delegation of the Tamil Progressive Alliance. "Pleased to meet the TPA delegation. Appreciate their positive sentiments about our development programmes. This will remain an important facet of India's commitment," he tweeted. Jaishankar is on a three-day visit to Lanka from January 5-7 on the invitation of Lanka foreign minister Dinesh Gunawardena. It is his first overseas

visit of the year. On Wednesday, Jaishankar spoke on the need to ensure aspirations of the minority Tamils are addressed within a united Sri Lanka.

Addressing a joint media interaction with Gunawardena, he underlined India's backing for Lanka's reconciliation process and an "inclusive political outlook" that encourages ethnic harmony. "As we promote peace and well-being in the region, India has been strongly committed to the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. — PTI

1 in 1L had reactions to Pfizer vaccine

Washington, Jan. 7: Roughly one in a hundred thousand people who received the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine have had severe allergic reactions, US health officials said Wednesday while stressing that the benefits of immunization greatly outweigh the known risks.

The data comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which documented 21 cases of anaphylaxis after administration of a reported 1,893,360 shots from December 14 to December 23.

"This averages out to a rate of 11.1 anaphylaxis cases per one million doses administered," senior CDC official Nancy Messonnier told reporters.

By comparison, flu vac-

cines cause about 1.3 anaphylaxis cases per million doses administered, and so the rate of anaphylaxis for the Pfizer vaccine is roughly ten times greater.

Messonnier added that anaphylaxis cases were still "exceedingly rare" and it remains in people's best interest to take the vaccine, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic that is a far greater danger to their health. "A good value proposition for someone to get vaccinated is their risk from Covid and poor outcomes from Covid is still more than the risk of a severe outcome from the vaccine," she said.

"Fortunately, we know how to treat anaphylaxis, and we've put provisions in place to ensure that at

immunisation sites, the folks administering the vaccine are ready to treat anaphylaxis." The 21 cases ranged in age from 27 to 60 years old, with a median age of 40, and all but two were treated with epinephrine. Nineteen of the cases (90 percent) occurred in females, and the median onset time of symptoms was 13 minutes, but ranged from two to 150 minutes.

Four (19 percent) of patients were hospitalised, including three in intensive care, and 17 (81 percent) were treated in an emergency department. All but one was known to have been discharged home or recovered at the time of the study, and there were no deaths.

— AFP

GLOBAL VIRUS DEATHS HIT RECORD HIGH, EU APPROVES SECOND VACCINE

Brussels, Jan. 7: The EU cleared a second Coronavirus vaccine for use on Wednesday bringing relief to European countries struggling with spiralling infections, as the world clocked up a record number of deaths in a single day. The Moderna vaccine is now set to join Pfizer-BioNTech's jab for use in the 27-nation European Union, where governments have been criticised for slow roll-outs of the doses already available.

"We'll have more than enough safe and effective vaccines for protecting all Europeans," promised Eu-

ropean Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen. The breakthrough came as a record 15,769 Covid-19 deaths around the world were registered in 24 hours. The United States, the world's worst-hit country, logged a record 3,936 deaths and Britain recorded its own record of more than 1,000 new deaths, leapfrogging Italy to become the fifth worst affected nation in the world.

Meanwhile, a high-profile mission to probe the origins of the pandemic was in disarray after Beijing denied entry to a WHO team at the last minute. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



BCCI president Sourav Ganguly waves as he leaves for his residence after being discharged from a hospital in Kolkata on Thursday.

— Pritam Bandyopadhyay

Dada discharged from hospital

Kolkata: Sourav Ganguly, the former test captain who is president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, was discharged from a hospital on Thursday after treatment for a mild heart attack. The 48-year-old Ganguly "suffered a blackout" while exercising at his personal gym last Saturday morning and was taken to a Kolkata hospital, where he underwent an angioplasty.

On the first day of the third test between India and Australia in Sydney, the BCCI posted an update on Twitter to say Ganguly had been released from the hospital.

"I thank the doctors at the hospital for the treatment," Ganguly was quoted as saying in the BCCI post. "I am absolutely fine. Hopefully, I will be ready to fly soon." Ganguly, a left-handed opening batsman, scored 7,212 Test runs with 16 centuries. — AP

IPL trade window to close on Feb. 4

New Delhi: The IPL's governing council has decided that the eight franchises will be allowed to submit the names of their retained players by January 21, league's chairman Brijesh Patel said on Thursday.

Patel and members of the IPL GC recently had a virtual meeting earlier this week where the planning and preparations of the next IPL was discussed at length.

"We will have the players' retention till January 21 and the trading window for the franchises closes on February 4," Patel, the former India Test batsman said while informing that the date of the auction is yet to be finalised.

It is expected that the mini auction that is supposed to be held this year for the existing eight teams will be held in the second or third week of February.

The eight IPL teams enjoy a players' purse of ₹85 crore and Patel said that there will be "no increase of purse" for the 2021 auction. — PTI

76ers pip Wizards despite Beal's 60

Los Angeles: Joel Embiid's 38 points and 28 from Seth Curry saw the Philadelphia 76ers withstand a 60-point performance from Washington's Bradley Beal in a 141-136 NBA win over the Wizards on Wednesday.

Tobias Harris and Shake Milton scored 19 points each and Ben Simmons added 17 points and 12 assists as the 76ers notched their fifth win in a row and pushed their league-leading record to 7-1.

The Sixers led by as many as 21 points in the third quarter, but the Wizards hung around and knotted the score at 131-131 with four minutes left to play.

In Orlando, Terrence Ross scored 20 points and Dwayne Bacon added 19 to lead the Magic to a 105-94 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

Big Bash League: Adelaide Strikers vs Melbourne Renegades from 12.40 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

UAE vs Ireland: First ODI from 11 am on Eurosport, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharalal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002, and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector-III, Noida-201301.
Editor — T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

Dry after drizzle

Oz recover from early blow on rain-hit day

Sydney, Jan. 7: Debutant Will Pucovski and Marnus Labuschagne smacked half-centuries as Australia recovered from an early setback to build a promising first innings in the rain-hit third Test against India Thursday.

Following David Warner's departure for five, the hosts recovered to 166 for two at stumps after more than three hours' play was lost due to persistent drizzle at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Labuschagne was not out 67 while Steve Smith, who has struggled for runs this series, hit an attacking unbeaten 31. Pucovski contributed 62 in an impressive maiden Test innings.

Fellow debutant Navdeep Saini and Mohammed Siraj, in only his second Test, shared the wickets in a clash both sides are desperate to win with the four-match series level at 1-1.

After captain Tim Paine won the toss and chose to bat in front of 8,692 socially-distanced fans, just under the quarter of capacity allowed, the rain started falling 35 minutes into the opening session.

It was enough time for Siraj to grab the key wicket of Warner on his return from injury, caught by Cheteshwar Pujara to put Australia on the back foot.

But a 100-run partnership between Pucovski and Labuschagne swung the momentum back in Australia's favour before the 22-year-old fell lbw to Saini.

The patient Labuschagne, who has been Australia's best batsman this series, survived an edge off Jasprit Bumrah on 11, which just failed to carry to slip, but was otherwise authoritative.

He brought up his ninth Test 50 with a boundary off Siraj, while Smith looked in ominous touch



Australia's Marnus Labuschagne plays a shot on way to his half-century against India on the first day of their third Test at Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday. — AP

at the other end after failing to reach double figures in his four previous innings.

Smith hit five boundaries in his 31 which came off 64 balls. Pucovski resumed on 14 and Labuschagne two when play finally restarted at

3pm after the lengthy rain delay. Australia have high hopes for Pucovski, who scored two double centuries in the Sheffield Shield this season but had been sidelined with a concussion, the ninth of his short career. India tried to unsettle him early on with

short balls and he rode his luck, being dropped twice. The first came on 26 when Ravi Ashwin enticed a thin edge, only for wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant to miss what should have been a simple catch.

Three overs later and Pant did it again. — AFP

SCORECARD

Australia 1st innings: Will Pucovski lbw b Navdeep Saini 62, David Warner c Cheteshwar Pujara b Mohammed Siraj 5, Marnus Labuschagne (batting) 67, Steven Smith (batting) 31. Extras (NB-1) 1. **Total (for 2 wickets in 55 overs) 166.**
Fow: 1-6, 2-106.
Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 14-3-30-0, Mohammed Siraj 14-3-46-1, Ravichandran Ashwin 17-1-56-0, Navdeep Saini 7-0-32-1, Ravindra Jadeja 3-2-2-0.

NUMBERS GAME

- Navdeep Saini became the 299th Indian Test player. The allrounder made his Test debut after playing 46 first class matches. He also played seven one-day internationals and 10 Twenty20 Internationals before making his debut in Tests.
- William Jan Pucovski became 460th Australian player to appear in a Test match. The right hand batsman from Malvern, Victoria, made his Test debut after playing 23 first class matches.
- The 100-run stand for the second wicket between Marnus Labuschagne and William Pucovski was Australia's 16th century stand for this wicket against India. It was 43rd time when over 100 runs were added for the second wicket at the Sydney Cricket Ground.
- Steven Smith became the 10th Australian and 48th batsman overall to hit 800 fours in Test cricket. The first four off fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah during his unbeaten 31-run knock was his 800th in 136 innings of 76 Test matches.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

Plan is to build pressure on Australia, says Siraj

Smith looks to overcome fear

Sydney, Jan. 7: India pacer Mohammad Siraj called the Sydney pitch a batting beauty but said the turn it is offering to spinners has given his side a lot of hope moving forward after Australia claimed day one honours in the third Test here.

"It is very a flat wicket. Our plan was to build pressure and not try too much as it is a very easy wicket for the batsman. Even the bouncers are not carrying as well it was in the earlier games," said Siraj.

"But Test cricket it is all about patience and we must keep that in mind," he added.

The odd short balls from the fast bowlers did not trouble the home batsmen on the opening day.

Trusting the truthness of the pitch, the likes of Smith and Labuschagne were not afraid to even step out against the spinners. But the turn late in



India's Mohammed Siraj celebrates after taking the wicket of Australia's David Warner during Day One of the third Test match at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday. — AFP

the day has given India encouragement for Friday.

"It is because of the easy nature of the surface that their batsmen stepped out but when they saw the ball turning sharply late in the day, they went back to the crease," Siraj observed.

"Let's see what happens tomorrow. The plan is to bowl in one tight channel and build pressure."

When the Indian national anthem was played out before the start of the game, Siraj got teary-eyed thinking about his father, who died in November. — PTI

Sydney, Jan. 7: Australian batting mainstay Steve Smith on Thursday said he was looking to put Ravichandran Ashwin under pressure after being at the receiving end of the India off-spinner's guile in the first two Tests.

Breaking his run of poor scores, Smith played some attacking shots and marched to an unbeaten 31 by the close of play on the opening day of the third Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

"I'm good, nice to spend a bit of time out there, nice to stitch in a partnership with Marnus. I wanted to put him (Ashwin) under a little bit of pressure which I haven't done this series," Smith said.

As he faced the Indian bowlers, Smith looked determined to make a statement after his uncharacteristic run of low scores in the first two Tests of the four-match series.

I'm good, nice to spend a bit of time out there, nice to stitch in a partnership with Marnus. I wanted to put him (Ashwin) under a little bit of pressure which I haven't done this series.

— STEVEN SMITH
Australia star batsman

"I was just trying to hold the grip a bit tighter, I've been struggling, so I was getting into good positions today. I was good to get a couple of boundaries early. Marnus played well, hopefully we go along well tomorrow," the star batsman added.

Smith and Labuschagne added 60 runs for the third wicket to help Australia regain some lost ground after the comprehensive defeat to the visitors in the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne. — PTI

Rider Santosh in coma after crash

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Renowned Indian motorcycle racer C. S. Santosh suffered a crash during the ongoing Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia and was put in a medically-induced coma after being airlifted to a hospital in Riyadh.

The 37-year-old Santosh, who was representing Hero MotoSports in one of the world's biggest rallies, suffered the crash on Wednesday.

"We are pleased to share that he has no major physical injuries except for the dislocated right shoulder and head trauma. The latest scans have also shown no major issue that could impact his full recovery," Hero MotoSports said in a statement.

"The medical team attending to him have decided that the best approach to manage the injury is to reduce the body functions to a minimum and keep him in a sedated condition or an artificial coma," it added.

"He is receiving the best possible medical care and will continue to be under constant observation for the next few days," the statement further added.

According to reports, he was conscious when paramedics arrived on the scene before he was rushed to Riyadh.

The incident occurred on the same stage where last year, Hero MotoSport rider Paulo Gonçalves died



C. S. Santosh

while competing in the Dakar 2020. Hero MotoSport withdrew from the rally after the death of Gonçalves.

Santosh crashed around 135km into the stage on a gravel track and had to forfeit the stage.

This was Santosh's seventh attempt at the Dakar Rally, considered the world's most gruelling off-road motorsport event.

He was the first Indian to complete the race in 2015, and replicated the effort in two further editions.

Santosh had a near-fatal accident during the 2013 Abu Dhabi desert challenge, suffering burns to his neck after his Suzuki MX450X caught fire.

The January 2-16 rally divided into 12 stages has competitors traversing 7646km. Stage 4 is, incidentally, the longest stage of the rally, spanning a total of 813km. — PTI

BARTY, SERENA FOR OZ

OPEN WARM UP EVENTS

Melbourne, Jan. 7: World number one Ashleigh Barty and 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams will spearhead the two WTA tournaments in Melbourne ahead of the Australian Open, with the top 32-ranked women split evenly across the simultaneous events, organisers said Thursday.

The onslaught of Covid-19 has forced a radical change to how the early 2021 tennis season will look, with the Australian Open pushed back three weeks to February 8.

Players will arrive in Australia from January 15 and undergo a mandatory two-week quarantine before two WTA 500 and two ATP 250 events are held alongside the ATP Cup, all at Melbourne Park.

Organisers have branded it the Melbourne Summer Series and named each tournament after areas of Victoria state.

That will see the women play the Gippsland Trophy and Yarra Valley Classic from January 31-February 6, marking Barty's first appearance in 11 months after opting out of the US and European swing last year over Coronavirus fears. As well as Williams, the likes of world number two Simona Halep, defending Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin and previous Australian Open winners Naomi Osaka, Victoria Azarenka and Angelique Kerber will take part. — AFP

Barcelona revive with Leo's brace

Madrid, Jan. 7: Ronald Koeman said Barcelona can still win La Liga after Lionel Messi scored twice on Wednesday in a 3-2 win over Athletic Bilbao.

Messi's double helped Barca reduce the gap behind La Liga's leaders Atletico Madrid to seven points, even if Atletico will be hard to catch, given they also have two games in hand.

Barca trailed to an early Inaki Williams strike but responded with a slick attacking performance that had Messi at the heart of it.

It was his cross that led to Pedri's equaliser and then the Argentinian could have had a hat-trick, only for VAR and the woodwork to intervene.

But this was a vintage display from the 33-year-old, perhaps his best of the season so far, at a time when his future at Barcelona remains up in the air.

Only a late mistake took some of the shine off Messi's night, a poor pass allowing Iker Muniain to finish and make the result look closer than it was.

Bilbao had scored in the third minute and the 90th, each time exposing Barcelona's defensive frailties that remain unsolved.

ATLETICO LOSE BADLY

La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid crashed out of the Copa del Rey on Wednesday after suffering a shock second-round 1-0 defeat by third-division Cornellà.

Cornellà sit seventh in their Segunda B division, Spain's third tier, but deserved a historic win

JUVE JOLT FOR MILAN

Federico Chiesa scored a brace as Juventus inflicted a first league defeat this season on Italian league leaders AC Milan, ending their 27-match unbeaten run with a 3-1 win on Wednesday.

Stefano Pioli's side maintained their one-point advantage over city rivals Inter Milan who missed a chance to go top with a 2-1 loss at Sampdoria.

PSG HELD IN FRANCE

Mauricio Pochettino's first match as Paris Saint-Germain coach ended in a 1-1 draw at Saint-Etienne on Wednesday as his new team slipped three points behind French league leaders Lyon.

The defending league champions fell behind early on to Romain Hamouma's strike before Moise Kean levelled soon after, but laboured in the second half and failed to find a winner. — AFP



John Stones (right) of Manchester City celebrates after scoring the opening goal of his team against Manchester United during their English League Cup semifinal at Old Trafford in Manchester, England, on Wednesday. Manchester City won 2-0. — AP

City sink United in Manchester Derby

Manchester, Jan. 7: Manchester City reached the League Cup final for fourth consecutive season as they inflicted more semi-final pain on Manchester United with a 2-0 win at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

John Stones and Fernandinho were the unlikely goalscorers for Pep Guardiola's men, who will face Jose Mourinho's Tottenham in the final at Wembley on April 25.

City great Colin Bell was remembered before kick-off after he died, aged 74, on Tuesday with his former teammate Mike Summerbee reduced to tears as he watched on from the stands.

Stones breathed a sigh of relief that Marcus Rashford was flagged for offside after the ball rebounded off the defender and into the net after Rashford's initial effort was saved by Zack

Steffen. At the other end Ilkay Gundogan thought he had continued his fine goalscoring form of late when he swept home Phil Foden's cross, but the German was also offside.

Steffen was deputising for Ederson, who was one of City's absentees due to Covid-19, and the American produced an incredible save to deny Bruno Fernandes his 16th goal of the season with a curling effort that was destined for the top corner.

City looked more like their old selves in a thrilling first-half performance to blow away Chelsea on Sunday and they were inches away from the opener thanks to a stunning move that started deep inside their own half and ended with Kevin De Bruyne smashing against the post from the edge of the area. — AFP