

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | WEDNESDAY | 6 JANUARY 2021



**NATION | 4**

**Trinamul Congress minister resigns**



**WORLD | 5**

**Georgia poll to decide Biden Presidency fate**

**SPORTS | 8**

**India have pace problem ahead of Sydney Test**



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## WEATHER



**Max:** 31.0°C  
**Min:** 18.0°C  
**RH:** 73%  
**Rainfall:** NIL

**Forecast:** Mostly Cloudy.  
Max/Min temp.  
31/18 °C

## COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+16,538)	(+228)

1,03,74,102 1,50,114

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+253)	(+3)
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TS: 2,87,993 1,554

(+377)	(+4)
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AP: 8,83,587 7,122

### CASES AROUND THE WORLD

8,64,19,682

### DEATHS

18,67,379

218

worldometers.info/  
coronavirus

## ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana

**Tithi:** Margasira Bahula Ashami till 2.05 am (Thursday)

**Star:** Hasta till 5.07 pm

**Variyam:** 12.39 am to 2.09 am (Thursday)

**Durmuhurtam:** 11.59 am to 12.44 pm

**Rahukalam:** 12 noon to 1.30 pm

### HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 21, 1442 AH

**PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)**

**Fajar:** 5.30 am

**Zohar:** 1.30 pm

**Asar:** 4.15 pm

**Maghrib:** 5.38 pm

**Isha:** 8.30 pm

**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM**

**SUNSET TODAY 5.43 PM**

**MOONRISE TODAY --- PM**

**MOONSET TOMORROW 00.29 AM**

## COUNTER POINT



**He will flag off the vaccination drive, but on one condition. Don't force him to take it first!**

## SHORT TAKES

### Indo-US ties need redlines: US envoy

**New Delhi:** Noting that the US and India are laying the foundation for a stronger Indo-Pacific architecture, outgoing American envoy Ken Juster on Tuesday said the two countries should focus on giving further “substance” to it by developing guidelines and if necessary, even “redlines” as he outlined various security threats including from those choosing “suicide vests or military incursions”. In a farewell address days before he relinquishes his post, Juster extensively talked about key bilateral issues.

### Big RTGS transfer needs 20-digit LEI

**Mumbai:** Entities making transactions of ₹50 crore and above using the Reserve Bank-run centralised payment systems RTGS and NEFT will have to quote the 20-digit unique Legal Entity Identifier from April 1 this year. The Legal Entity Identifier (LEI) is a 20-digit number used to uniquely identify parties to financial transactions worldwide. It was conceived as a key measure to improve the quality and accuracy of financial data systems for better risk management post the global financial crisis. LEI has been introduced by the Reserve Bank in a phased manner.

## Cool ride



People enjoy during a speed boat ride while splashing the waves at Rushikonda Beach in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

— K. MURALI KRISHNA

# British PM cancels R-Day visit, cites UK Covid crisis

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 5**

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cancelled his planned India visit later this month to be chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations due to the grim Covid-19 situation in Britain. The British government said Johnson had already spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi “to express his regret”. Mr Johnson hopes to visit India by June this year.

India is now expected to invite another foreign leader as chief guest for the January 26 parade.

New Delhi said Tuesday evening that in a phone conversation with Mr Modi, Mr Johnson “regretted his inability to attend ... in view of the changed Covid-19 context prevailing in UK”, but said he was keen to “visit India in the near future”.

New Delhi said “Prime Minister (Modi) expressed his understanding of the exceptional situation in the UK, and conveyed his best wishes for the quick control of the pandemic spread”, adding “he looked forward to receiving Prime Minister Johnson in India at the earliest opportunity after normalisation of the situation”.

The invitation to Mr Johnson was announced during British foreign secretary Dominic Raab’s visit to New Delhi last month.

**PG 5 | BRITAIN TO FACE TOUGHEST LOCKDOWN**

**KALOJI | MESS**

# Weaker sections lose seats to AP

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 5**

Gross injustice was done to students belonging to Scheduled Castes, Tribes and Backward Classes in the MBBS admissions in Telangana. At least 93 eligible students from the reserved categories were denied seats by the Kaloji Narayana Rao Un-iversity of Health Sciences.

The university had already drawn flak for accommodating less meritorious students from Andhra Pradesh at the cost of local students. This time, the university virtually converted the Open Category in local quota into a reserved category for students belonging to forward castes (OCs) at the cost of SC, ST and BC

# Centre ready to roll out jab in 10 days

**VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 5**

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said on Tuesday that the ministry is ready to roll out vaccines within 10 days of the Drugs Controller General of India’s approval though the final decision is with the government to announce the dates.

“Based on the feedback of the dry-run, the health ministry is ready to introduce Covid-19 vaccine within 10 days from the date of Emergency Use Authorisation,” he said. Niti Aayog member Dr V.K. Paul said all scientific and statutory requirements have been met.

■ More reports on Page 4

# Bharat Bio, Serum bury vaccine hatchet

**DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 5**

The Serum Institute of India and the Bharat Biotech have jointly released a pledge on Tuesday for a smooth roll-out of the Covid 19 vaccines for India and the wider world. This after some confusion arose in public mind about the efficacy of their vaccines.

Bharat Biotech’s Dr Krishna Ella had, in an emotional outburst, created a stir just as the clinical trials of Covaxin were going on. Social media played around with this and added to the confusion in people’s minds.

To clear the air, Adar Poonawala, CEO of Serum and Dr Krishna Ella, CMD of Bharat Biotech, issued a joint statement asserting their

intent to jointly develop, manufacture and supply vaccines both in India and for other nations too.

The most important task before them, they said, was to save the lives and livelihood of the people. Vaccines are a good public health material and they have the power to save lives and accelerate economic growth. With Emergency Use Authorisation having come for India, the focus now is to manufacture, and distribute the vaccines among people that needed them the most.

High-quality, safe and efficacious vaccines are needed. The statement said both firms respected the work being carried out individually between them, and they will work together to provide global access to vaccines.

## SC, ST, BC students lose 93 MBBS seats in TS

# Weaker sections lose seats to AP

**OUT OF 147 seats under local-open category, 139 (95%) were allotted to OCs and the remaining eight to different BCs.**

An in-depth analysis by *Deccan Chronicle* revealed that the university filled 147 seats under the quota of “local-open category” in phase 2 counselling. Out of these, 139 seats (95 per cent) were allotted to OCs and the remaining eight to different categories of BCs. Not a single seat was allotted to SCs and STs.

As per the guidelines of counselling, if followed properly by the university, only 54 OC students (37 per cent) out of 139 are eligible while five seats

would have gone to SCs, 11 to STs and 77 seats to BCs. Among BCs, students of sub categories of BC-A are eligible for three seats, BC-B 38, BC-D 23 and BC-E 13 seats. In Phase 1 counselling, the cut-off rank for the “local-open category” was 60668 which means that seats were allotted to students till that rank in the particular quota. The cut-off rank for the same quota was 80206 in Phase 2 counselling. In between these two ranks, there are 658 Telangana students from all categories out of whom the top 147 meritorious students fit into the local-open category. But, the university allotted seats to SCs, STs and BCs from among 147 in respective categories and filled the quota with OCs.

If the 93 meritorious reserved category students were allotted seats in accordance with the rules, an equal number of seats would be vacant in the respective categories which have to be exclusively filled with the respective category students down in the order.

Now, their dream to pursue medicine was shattered. “In every phase of counseling, the open category seats should be filled first followed by the reserved categories. This is because several students from the reserved categories get seats by virtue of their merit. The same procedure was followed in Phase 1 but a deviation was made in later phases,” a senior university official said.

■ Page 3: Nearly 7 lakh birds migrate to AP

## AP ALERT FOR BIRD FLU AS STATES GET HIT

**SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5**

Following the outbreak of bird flu in states including Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, the AP government has sounded an alert, asking officials to keep a close watch on migratory birds and poultry for any symptoms of the disease. Any unusual mortality is to be immediately reported to authorities concerned for initiating necessary action.

Forest authorities are keeping close watch on migratory birds in all protected areas regions where birds congregate in large numbers, like Kolleru, Coringa, Pulikat, Telineelapuram, Telukunchi, Nelapattu, Uppalapadu and other places. They are particularly watching out for symptoms like tilting of head, paralysis and tremors.

As avian influenza spreads fast, forest authorities have directed all divisional forest officers to keep a close watch on bird sanctuaries, wetlands and other places where birds gather in large numbers.

■ Page 3: Nearly 7 lakh birds migrate to AP

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# Centre plans Union Budget on Feb. 1

**PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 5**

The Supreme Court on Tuesday by a majority judgment of 2:1 gave its nod to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ambitious ₹20,000-crore project for the construction of a new Parliament building and the redevelopment of the Central Vista.

In his dissenting verdict, Justice Sanjiv Khanna held the project was “bad in law” in terms of land use for two reasons. “There is no intelligible disclosure of public participation and no prior approval of the heritage conservation committee,” the judge said.

In their 432-page majority judgment, Justice A.M. Khanwilkar speaking for himself and also Justice Dinesh Maheshwari said that the government’s decision to change the land use for the project and the environment clearance by the ministry of environment and forests (MoEF) was “just, proper and in

accordance with law.”

A batch of petitions had challenged the plan for demolition of old structures and new construction, including a new Parliament building in 86 acres of land in the heart of the national capital.

According to the Committee’s recommendation,

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Part 1 of the Budget session would be held from January 29 to February 15, and Part 2 from March 8 to April 8. President Ram Nath Kovind would address the joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament on January 29, and the Union Budget would be presented on February 1, sources said. The Economic Survey would be tabled in the Lok Sabha on January 29.

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## SHORT TAKES

## HC TO GOVT: TAKE STEPS ON HOUSES ALLOTMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

The Andhra Pradesh High Court suggested that the state government initiate measures to allot houses built for cyclonic storm Hudhud-affected fishermen under NTR Hudhud Housing Scheme in Visakhapatnam.

A division bench, comprising justices Joymalya Bagchi and Ch. Praveen Kumar, held a hearing on Tuesday on a public interest petition filed by Telugu Desam MLA (Visakhapatnam East) Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu challenging the state government's move for not allotting the houses to the eligible beneficiaries even after completion of their construction under the Assembly segment limits represented by him and urged the court to issue directions to the state government to allot houses.

The court asked why the state government did not allot houses even after completing their construction to the beneficiaries and instructed it to file a counter-affidavit on the issue with the details and posted the next hearing to February 16.

## HC REFUSES TO INTERFERE IN TEMPLE RITUALS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has refused to interfere in conducting religious rituals in the temples in the state and struck down a petition filed seeking direction to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams to follow Agamasashtra for conducting rituals.

A Division Bench, comprising justices Joymalya Bagchi and Ch. Praveen Kumar, held the hearing on Tuesday on a petition filed by Srivari Dhadha hailing from Prakasam district last year.

The court asked how the courts could decide on conduct of religious rituals in the temples and made it clear that it would not interfere in religious practices and traditions being adopted in the temples unless such practices affect the people's secular and civil rights.

The court observed that some temples adopt different modes in conducting religious rituals and ruled out any chance of applying Article 226 to adjudicate such issues. The court also made it clear that religious activities being adopted in the temples would not fall under the category of public duty to enable the courts to interfere.

## AP POLICE SIGN MoUs WITH IIT AND APSSDC

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JAN. 5:

DGP Gautam Sawang described the memorandums of understanding (MOUs) signed between the police department and premier institutes as a milestone in the state police department's history.

On the second day of the IGNITE-2021, the AP state police duty meeting being held in Tirupati, the DGP signed the MoUs with Indian Institute of Digital Technology (IITD) represented by its general-manager Dr Mallikarjuna Reddy and Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) led by ED Dr M.D.V. Ramakoti Reddy.

The DGP said that the MoUs signed between the police department and the premier institutes would help the police personnel to improve their professional skills and help them in crime pattern analysis and capacity building.

"Police personnel should be trying to adopt ever-advancing technologies - be it the Internet of Things (IOT) or other new technologies to enhance their crime investigation techniques. This zeal to use new technologies will improve governance and serve people more efficiently", he said.

Meanwhile, the AP Police have signed an MoU with APSSDC concerning both the parties' roles and responsibilities in imparting training to unemployed youth in driving and computer-related skills.

The department also signed an MoU with IITD to improve the effectiveness of the criminal investigation, securing the police department's critical infrastructure and developing capabilities in predictive policing.

## Temple vandalism has political motive: Sajjala

Says culprits behind these attacks would be severely punished

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

The vandalism of temples is an act by people with extreme ideology who want to eke out political gains by creating such unrest, said Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy.

He said that the temples were being vandalised according to a plan with clear political interests. Neither Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy nor the YSRC would gain anything from such incidents and they do no good to the government but will make things worse. In such a scenario, it is obvious as to who is going to gain from these attacks. It has to be Oposition TD leaders, who are desperately trying to find their position in the state or the BJP, which has religion in their political agenda, he said and appealed to distance politics from religion.

Ramakrishna Reddy said that the YSRC, even while in Opposition, has never made any irresponsible allegations on religion or held any such protests that could disturb sensitive issues like religion. "Religion is purely personal, and everyone should have respect towards other religions. The government has the responsibility to respect and protect the religious shrines," he said.

Ramakrishna Reddy claimed that Chandrababu Naidu had no such respect towards God or religion and never took off his shoes while offering prayers. He said that Naidu was responsible for the death of 29 people during Godavari Pushkaralu and even demolished temples in Vijayawada city, while the then endowments minister was associated with the BJP earlier. Naidu tried to hand over Sadavarti lands to his close associates and never showed any respect for God in his 14 years of ruling, he said.

"Would the Chief Minister like to get publicity on a noble cause of distributing 31 lakh house sites to the poor or get publicity by encouraging the desecration of temples," he asked. He assured that the culprits behind these attacks would be severely punished as the state government has been taking enough measures to control these incidents and nab the accused. He requested the seers to cooperate with the government and give suggestions.

● Ramakrishna Reddy said that the YSRC has never made any irresponsible allegations on religion or held any such protests that could disturb sensitive issues like religion.



Visakha Sri Sarada Peetham seer Swatmanandendra Saraswati Swami met Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the Camp Office on Tuesday. The Seer said he conveyed the suggestions of Seer Swaroopnandendra Saraswathi on the protection of temples. He said they asked the CM to initiate security measures at private temples. — By arrangement

## Chinna Jeeyar to visit temples from Jan. 17

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

Seer Tridandi Chinna Jeeyar Swamy will undertake a yatra from January 17 to temples that were vandalised in the recent past and seek protection for Hindu religious places. He demanded that those who vandalised the temples recently are given severe punishment and sought a committee of intelligence department officials to conduct a transparent inquiry.

Addressing a press meet here on Tuesday, the seer lamented that attacks on temples were continuing and said over 50 temples were attacked in the recent past. He recalled that in a temple in Singarayakonda, the Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy idol was damaged and asked authorities to ensure that there will be

no such attacks in the coming days. Chinna Jeeyar Swamy said that he will meet local leaders to finalise future plan of action. He will hold talks with the village elders, Hindu religious leaders and temple associates. He lamented that CCTVs were not being set up in all temples despite orders. He said that security flaws were exposed at temples in the recent attacks and urged the government to provide a strong security system.

The seer said he cannot be silent when there is a threat to the very existence of temples. He said that if churches or mosques were attacked, there would be a worldwide retaliation and deplored the lukewarm reaction to temple attacks. He objected to political parties involving themselves in religious matters.

## BJP leaders claim only they are barred

from page 1

Despite the huge deployment of police and restrictions, Veerajulu along with BJP's MLC P.V.N. Madhav and few others reached Ramateertham junction on Tuesday morning but were denied permission to climb the hill. After heated arguments and tussle with police personnel at Ramateertham junction, Veerajulu and others were arrested.

BJP president Veerajulu said that TD chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu and YSRC leader V. Vijaya Sai Reddy and few other YSRC's ministers visited the Sri Kodanda Ramaswamy Temple, but the AP government prevented

their visit to the temple. The AP government is adopting double standards, he said and sought the immediate resignation of minister for endowment Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao for his failure to protect the temples, he added.

The sentiments of Hindus is badly affected as the head of the Lord Rama idol was broken but no concrete steps were taken so far in apprehending the culprits, he pointed out.

The Vizianagaram police said that in view of the prevailing situation at Ramateertham, it has imposed Section 30 of the Police Act to prevent public meetings and protests.

## AVANTI TO BJP, JS: DON'T FALL INTO NAIDU TRAP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 5

Minister for tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao (Avanti) advised the BJP and Jana Sena leaders not to fall into the trap of TD president Nara Chandrababu Naidu.

Talking to reporters here on Tuesday, Avanti Srinivasa Rao said Naidu has been the main conspirator behind Ramateertham temple's attack and egging on other parties to join him in his deed.

He said the BJP should focus more on the implementations of promises made under the AP Reorganisation Act and special status for the state instead of joining the Naidu bandwagon.

"Naidu did not react to attacks on other temples but very specific on Ramateertham which indicated that he wanted to divert the attention of the people from the houses and house site pattas distribution organised at Nellimerla, about 10 km from Ramateertham temple," the minister said.

He said Naidu himself is not a devout Hindu but branding the YSRC as a Christian party. The party, led by Jagan Mohan Reddy, has more than 90 per cent Hindus, he pointed out.

The Bala Vikas Foundation for Peace and Harmony appealed to the CM to form peace committees in every district to prevent any retaliation to attacks on temples. Chairman of the foundation Narava Prakasa Rao said it was heartbreaking to note so many idols being damaged in different parts of AP and held the government responsible to prevent such incidents.

## Distribution of house site pattas extended till Jan. 20, says Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said the distribution of house site pattas and commencement of construction of housing programme is extended to till January 20 and 39 per cent of house site pattas were distributed across the state.

During a review meeting on the distribution of house site pattas and commencement of construction of houses, as a part of Spandana video conference held here on Tuesday, the Chief Minister said house site patta distribution was completed in 9,668 YSR Jagananna Colonies out of around 17,000 colonies and the rest should be completed in due course. He directed the district collectors to ensure pending cases related to house sites distribution are resolved as soon as possible and said the cases which were booked with malicious intention should be resolved expeditiously. He said that governance is at its peak in AP as the state government has promised to allot house sites within 90 days to eligible beneficiaries who apply afresh and this was displayed in Village/ Ward Secretariats as well. He said the government promised to resolve the applications seeking ration card and pension in 10 days, Aarogyasri Cards in 20 days, and Housing applications in 90 days.

He said collectors should ensure that the formalities are completed in the stipulated timeline. Every eligible beneficiary should receive house site, he said and added that the applications should be examined carefully and pattas should be distributed in the fixed timeline.

The CM said the construction of houses in the layouts is one aspect while developing infrastructure in those layouts is another. He said that basic infrastructure facilities such as roads, electricity, and drinking water should be provided. Other social infrastructure facilities such as schools, anganwadis, parks, village, ward secretariats, and village clinics should come up depending on the area of the layouts. He directed the officials to prepare SOP regarding the same. He said once the works are started in a layout, all of them should be completed and any additions should also be done in full.

The Chief Minister said that YSR Jagananna Colonies should have a pleasant atmosphere, roads should be built in an innovative way, elevation should be good and innovative methods should be

## ₹2,000-cr for road repairs in AP: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday announced that tenders for repairing roads at a cost of ₹560 crore will be finalised by January 10. He also went on to state that the second round of Amma Vodi scheme will be implemented on January 11.

Participating in the Spandana video conference, the CM said emphasis is on repair of roads this year as many of them have been damaged due to heavy rains throughout the state. Repairs will be carried out on a war footing for 45 days from January 10 at an overall cost of ₹2,000 crore.

He said there are 31 national highway projects involving 915 km of roads at a cost of ₹9,571 crore are in progress in the state. He directed that land acquisition for these be completed as soon as possible.

He said new road works worth about ₹12,000 crore have been sanctioned. Land acquisition for these projects too has to

## QUALITY RICE DISTRIBUTION AT THE DOORSTEP TO START ON FEB. 1: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

The chief minister said quality rice will be distributed at the doorstep of beneficiaries from February 1 across the state. Special vehicles will be arranged for home delivery of essential commodities to BC, SC, ST, EBC, Muslim and Christian minorities.

He said at least half an acre to one acre of land will be required near RBKs with multiple facilities, including warehouses, cold storages, drying platform, collection cen-

tre, primary processing and assaying.

Identification of these lands should be completed by January 31. Five cents of land also needs to be procured at the centre of each village for setting up Janatha Bazaars, he said. All these will require about ₹10,235 crore.

Mr Reddy directed district collectors to ensure that insurance is paid to tenant farmers by April, provided crop cutting is completed in January and Planning Department submits its report in February.

Mr Reddy directed district collectors to ensure that insurance is paid to tenant farmers by April, provided crop cutting is completed in January and Planning Department submits its report in February.

applied in setting up street lights and electric poles. Precautions should be taken while constructing colonies to ensure they turn out to be beautiful colonies and not slums. Sophisticated bus stops should be set up at every colony and the entrance of colonies should also be built in an innovative way. Good saplings should be planted in a definite pattern in the colonies. The focus should be laid on providing facilities like underground drainage from now itself. He said options should be taken from beneficiaries

on the construction of houses and it should be completed by January 20. He said he has already made some suggestions on designs, and collectors should take it as a challenge and prove their efficiency.

Panchayati Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, municipal and urban development minister Botsa Satyanarayana, education minister Adimulapu Suresh, housing minister Cherukuvada Sri Ranganatha Raju and other officials participated.

## Attacks on temples to defame govt, CM: Anil

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, JAN. 5

Water Resources minister Dr P. Anilkumar Yadav alleged that the Opposition was creating hurdles to every development programme proposed by the Chief Minister because of vested interest.

He alleged that attacks on temples just before

launching welfare programmes are indicators for the prevailing situation.

Addressing a gathering during his visit to 13th Division in Nellore on Tuesday, the minister observed that vandalising of idols and temples is meant to defame the chief minister.

Their main intension is to prevent the launch and

implementation of welfare schemes being introduced by the state government to benefit the poor, he added.

Dr Anilkumar claimed that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has been fulfilling his poll promises one after another and the latest being the distribution of house sites to 30.75 lakh poor people across the state.

END OF | AN ERA

He has penned more than 2,000 songs and popular as dialogue writer for dubbed films

## Famous lyricist Vennelakanti dies of heart attack at age 63

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC  
NELLORE, JAN. 5

Famous lyricist and dialogue writer Vennelakanti Rajeswara Prasad, 63, passed away at his residence in Chennai following a massive heart attack on Tuesday afternoon.

A native of Nellore City, he is survived by his wife Prameela and sons Shashank Mouli and Rakendu Mouli.

Popular as Vennelakanti, he had penned dialogues for hundreds of successful Tamil films, which were

dubbed into Telugu. He had also contributed to a few Hindi and English movies.

The lyricist and dialogue writer began his career as a songwriter for Anna Chellelu and Sri Ramachandrudu, but came to limelight with Murali Krishnudu (1988), produced by S. Gopal Reddy.

He has more than 2,000 songs to his credit, including hit numbers, such as Maatarani Mounamidi (Maharshi), Mavayya Anna Pilupu (Muddula

Mavayya) and Raasaleela Vela (Aditya 369).

Vennelakanti, however, became more popular as a dialogue writer for super-hit films of Kamal Haasan in Tamil, which got dubbed into Telugu, like Dasavataram, Pancha Thanthram, Bhamane Sathya Bhamane, apart from Jurassic Park in English and Hum Aap Ke Hai Kaun in Hindi.

A close friend of the late playback singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam, the lyricist and dialogue writer used to attribute his



success in tinsel world to SP. His reverence towards Balu was such that he broke down while sharing with Deccan Chronicle information about his

relationship with the late playback singer.

Vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu made Vennelakanti even pen a song on Nellore. Balu was supposed to sing it while noted director Kodandarami Reddy was entrusted with the job of filming the song. "Without Balu, I don't know what we will do with the project now," Vennelakanti told DC then.

Both his sons are lyricists, with Rakendu even acting in films, such as Kirrack Party and

Sahasame Oopiriga Sagipo.

Vennelakanti Rajeswara Prasad's close friend in Nellore, Y. Sessa Girisam, said the departed lyricist and dialogue writer had inherited his writing skills from his father Koteswar Rao, who worked as production chief of Prathibha Films, belonging to famous producer of bygone era, Gantasala Balaramaiah.

"Vennelakanti started his career as an officer with the State Bank of India. He moved to the film

world with the help of Balu. He used to write songs and I used to tune them in our younger days" Girisam recalled.

Vennelakanti was closely associated with Vijetha Arts, a cultural association, which has been holding state-level drama competitions every year at Nellore since decades.

Lamenting over the demise of his close friends Balu and Vennelakanti, Girisam said the two deaths are a great loss for all Nellorians.



## SHORT TAKES

FOUR MEMBERS  
OF FAMILY SET  
ON FIREDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, JAN. 5

Four family members were set on fire by a financier at Bhimalapuram village of Achanta mandal of West Godavari District on Tuesday. According to Achanta Circle Inspector Ch. Rajasekhara, the financier Nekkanti Naresh gave a loan to Kandregula Balaji. But, the family did not repay the loan to him. Naresh went to their house in a frustrated mood and poured petrol on Kandregula Balaji, his wife Nagalakshmi and mother Veeralakshmi and the daughter Durga and set on fire. In the process, Naresh also got burn injuries along with the four members. The four members were admitted in a private hospital, and the accused, Naresh, was admitted in a government hospital in Palakollu.

FINANCIER  
SURYANARAYANA  
MURDEREDDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, JAN. 5

A financier Medapati Suryanarayana Reddy, 35, was murdered in Gollalamidada village of Pedapudi mandal, 15 km from Kakinada on Tuesday. According to Pedapudi Sub-Inspector T. Kanthi Kumar, some miscreants entered into his house on Tuesday and threw chilli powder in his eyes and stabbed with knives. Suryanarayana Reddy died on the spot when the police reached the spot. He was accused in a murder case of Kovvuri Indra Reddy in last year March.

The Pedapudi police registered a case and are investigating.

27 VILLAGES TO BE  
MERGED WITH  
MUNICIPALITIESDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, JAN. 5

As many as 27 villages have been merged with nearby Municipalities in East and West Godavari District. The state government has issued an ordinance with merging these villages along with 99 villages. The villages like Satellite City, Katheru, Hukumpeta, Bommuru, Dowleswaram, Pidimgoyi, Rajavolu, Thorredu, Venkatanagaram and Vemagiri will be merged with Rajamahendravaram Municipal Corporation in East Godavari District according to the ordinance. Five villages, Kontheru and Advaiapalem, Ullamparru, Palacole Rural, Poolapalli and Baggeswaram and Vardidhanam, will be merged with Palacole Municipality. Another five villages, Kondrupolu, L.Agraharam, Kuchanapalli, Prathiapadu and Padala, will be merged with Tadepalligudem Municipality. The three villages, I.Venkatarayapuram township, Paidiparru and Veerabhadrapuram, will be merged with Tanuku municipality, and the four villages, Kovvada Annavaram, China Amiram, Rayalam and Taderu will be merged with Bhimavaram Municipality in West Godavari District.

44 GVMC SCHOOLS  
TO BE SMART  
CAMPUSESDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 5

As part of the City Investments to innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS) programme, Greater Visakhapatnam Smart City Corporation Limited is developing 44 shortlisted municipal schools as smart campuses with a cost of ₹65 crore in similar lines of Mana Badi Nadu-Nedu.

GVMC commissioner Dr. G. Srijana said in the developmental process, stakeholders consultations on proposed designs were conducted in these 44 shortlisted schools. Conceptual designs are being modified and finalised as per the inputs and feedback from these consultations.

She said experts team from National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), Prasanna Desai (Global Mentor) and Swathi (domestic expert) visited and participated in various programmes with GVSCL over the last five days.

Study finds air-borne  
nature of Coronavirus

CCMB, IMTech in joint study find out Covid nature

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

Hyderabad-based Cellular and Molecular Biology and Chandigarh-based Institute of Microbial Technology have come up with a finding on air-borne nature of Coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2.

Scientists from both CCMB and IMTech have carried out a joint study in three hospitals each in Hyderabad and Chandigarh to find out if the Coronavirus particles could be found in the air samples in the wards of the hospitals. They used an air sampler that can collect the virus particles and looked for their presence using the RT-PCR.

The CSIR institutes in a statement issued on Tuesday stated that their study found that the virus was present in the air samples from the Covid-19 wards in the hospitals and no virus was found in the air samples from non-Covid-19 wards.

The study also pointed out that the chance of picking up SARS-CoV-2 in the air is directly related to the number of Covid-19 positive patients in the room, their symptomatic sta-

## AP RECORDS 377 COVID-19 CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 5

AP reported 377 new cases of Covid and four deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin on Tuesday reporting that out of 51,420 samples tested, 377 persons were found infected with confirmed Covid-19.

Out of a total number of 1,20,53,914 samples tested, 8,83,587 persons were found infected with Covid-19 and of them, 8,73,427 infected patients were recovered in the course of treatment while 3,038 infected patients are still active with Covid-19.

Among the daily cases of Covid-19, Chittoor reported the highest number of 82, followed by 66 in Krishna, 60 in Guntur, 41 in Visakhapa-

tnam, 27 in West Godavari, 21 each in East Godavari and Kadapa, 17 in Nellore, 11 each in Anantapur and Srikakulam, nine in Vizianagaram, six in Prakasam and five in Kurnool.

Krishna continued to lead the state with 529 cumulative active cases followed by 468 in Guntur, 448 in Nellore, 326 in East Godavari, 300 in Chittoor, 229 in Visakhapatnam, 195 in West Godavari, 171 in Kadapa, 116 in Anantapur, 80 in Prakasam, 70 in Srikakulam, 67 in Kurnool and 39 in Vizianagaram.

Among daily cases of Covid-19 deaths, Chittoor, Guntur, Krishna and Visakhapatnam reported one each taking the toll to 7,122.

With regard to the cumulative cases of deaths, Chittoor reported 845.

farther than two metres from their seating place. In case of asymptomatic cases, the study helped them notice that the virus does not spread farther from them when they are seated in a room without perceived air flow due to a fan or an

air-conditioner.

The study suggested that demarcation of hospital zones between Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 wards has become an effective strategy to contain spread of the virus.

IMTech director Dr Sanjeev Khosla said, "Till the Covid-19 vaccines are available, social vaccine called wearing a mask is the best prevention from getting infected with the virus."

CCMB director and corresponding author of the study Dr Rakesh Mishra said, "All the findings in their study show that the Coronavirus can stay in the air for some time. The findings also lay stress to strengthen the Covid-19 preventive guidelines that we have already in place to curb the spread of the virus. If we ensure to follow hygiene protocols like regular hand washing, wearing masks and preventing symptomatic people from mingling with the general public, we can get back to normalcy comfortably. Early detection and isolation of Covid-19 positive cases will help prevent its spread among the family members in the home."

Reacting on the decision of AP government to locate the KRMB office in Vishakhapatnam, Rayalaseema Saguneei Sadhana Samithi (RSSS) president Bojja Dasarath Reddy has a strong objection to the move. He demanded the KRMB state head office must be located in Kurnool as per Sri Bagh Pact. Addressing the media persons at his office in Nandyal town on Monday, the RSSS leader said Kurnool is the point of entry of Krishna River in Andhra Pradesh. Srisaillam reservoir is the first project on Krishna Waters, he added.

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SHORT TAKES

AFTER FIR AGAINST KHANS, MIN SAYS NONE ABOVE LAW

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 5

A day after Mumbai police lodged an FIR against celebrities Arbaaz Khan and Sohail Khan for allegedly violating the Covid protocol pertaining to institutional quarantine, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope said that nobody is above the law and everybody should follow the Covid protocols.

The Mumbai Police on Monday registered a case against Arbaaz Khan, his brother Sohail Khan and the latter's Son Nirvaan Khan for allegedly violating the Covid-19 institutional quarantine norms.

Speaking with the reporters in Mumbai on Tuesday, the minister said, "It is the duty of an ideal citizen to strictly adhere to the rules and regulations in the current pandemic situation."

After their return from Dubai on December 25, the trio had been asked to stay at a hotel in Bandra, but they went to their homes instead of staying at the said hotel.

When asked if the state health department would take any action against the actors, Tope said, "We will take measures against it." However, the minister did not specify any measures.

According to reports, all three have been again sent to a five star hotel where they will remain in quarantine for seven days and will undergo another RT-PCR test at the end of the quarantine period.

COPS TO INVOKE NSA IN ROOF COLLAPSE CASE

**Lucknow/New Delhi, Jan. 5:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday told officials to invoke the stringent National Security Act over the roof collapse in Ghaziabad that killed 24 people as the NHRC sought a report from the state government over the incident.

Meanwhile, police held two contractors, taking the number of arrests in the case to five. One of them alleged that he had paid ₹16 lakh to an official, who is also in custody.

Twenty-four people, most of them attending a funeral, were killed and 17 others injured when the roof of a shelter at the cremation ground in Ghaziabad's Murad Nagar collapsed on Sunday.

In a statement on Tuesday, the UP government said, "Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed that the National Security Act be slapped against the accused persons. He also directed that loss of public money during the construction work be recovered from the contractor and engineers."

The CM also announced an aid of ₹10 lakh to the kin of each deceased. Meanwhile, the NHRC issued notices to the UP Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, seeking a detailed report about the incident within four weeks.

"The report must contain review of all crematoriums, burial grounds and other such buildings, which are used by the general public for community activities in the state and maintained by the local administrative authorities. The authorities concerned must ensure proper maintenance of such places to avoid any untoward incidents in future posing danger to human lives," the statement issued by the commission added.

Avalanche warning issued



Vehicles move slowly on a snow-covered road during heavy snowfall in Srinagar on Tuesday. Disaster Management Authority issued fresh medium-level avalanche warning has been issued for the higher reaches of Poonch, Rajouri, Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar, Anantnag, Kulgam, Kupwara and Bandipora districts, besides the Waltengu Nad, south and north portals of the Jawahar Tunnel, Verinag, Kapran, Chowkibal-NC Pass, Gurez, Dawar and Neeru areas.

— PTI

Vaccine to be rolled out within 10 days of DCGI nod

India registers fresh 16,375 Coronavirus cases, 201 casualties

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said on Tuesday that the ministry is ready to roll out vaccines within 10 days of the Drugs Controller General of India nod though the final decision is with the government to announce the dates.

"Based on the feedback of the dry-run, the health ministry is ready to introduce Covid-19 vaccine within 10 days from the date of Emergency Use Authorisation (EAU)," said Mr Bhushan.

The DCGI on Sunday approved restricted emergency use to Oxford-AstraZeneca-SII's Covishield and Covaxin by Bharat Biotech. Niti Aayog member Dr V.K. Paul said all scientific and statutory requirements have been met and regulatory norms followed while giving permission to the two vac-

cines.

Mr Bhushan clarified that healthcare and front-line workers will not need to register for vaccination while all others require registration. He added that the new digital system 'Co-WIN' will have a provision to create a unique health ID which can be stored in digi-lockers and accessed easily. He added that any adverse event will be recorded on a real-time basis.

"The system electronically allows session allocation. The beneficiary has been vaccinated — this will also be digitally captured and he will be given this information digitally when he has to come for the next dose. They will also get an acknowledgement, a unique health ID would also be generated," he said. The health secretary added that India is ready to offer its 'Co-WIN' system to the world. The system will be for database

● **ON TUESDAY,** 20 more persons were found to be infected with the new mutated virus of the United Kingdom, taking the total number of such people to 58.

integration for vaccination etc.

India on Tuesday recorded 16,375 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 201 deaths. On Tuesday, 20 more persons were found to be infected with the new mutated virus of the United Kingdom, taking the total number of such people to 58.

"Let's hope this trend (of low fatalities and reducing cases) will continue. In terms of the new UK mutant issue, this mutation has entered this country and 71 have been isolated, which shows our capacity to mount that kind of a scientific investigation. But at the same time we have not seen the emergence of any untoward cluster in the coun-

try as of now which is reassuring," Dr Paul said.

The government believes that upon receiving a complete schedule of the anti-coronavirus vaccine the body will build a strong immune response against the disease.

The Health ministry has also outlined that after receiving the second dose of the vaccine on a protective level of antibodies generally develops in 14 days while answering several questions on its website with connection to the vaccination drive in December.

"Vaccination for Covid-19 is voluntary. However, it is advisable to receive the complete schedule of the vaccine for protecting oneself against this disease and also to limit the spread of this disease to the close contacts," the health ministry said.

All Indian vaccines being developed against the coronavirus will have to be stored at 2-8 degrees Celsius as the logistics

have been worked out while considering temperature as a factor, Department of Bio-technology Secretary Renu Swarup said on Tuesday.

Swarup said Bharat Biotech's Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin and Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield have robustly undergone immunoassay lab tests.

(For) all our vaccines, we are looking at right now.(we) are targeting 2-8 degree because our logistics are worked out on that basis and we are working on that, Swarup said at a press briefing.

She said the DNA vaccine candidate being developed by Zydus Cadila, and the Biological E's mRNA vaccine work at storage temperatures of 2-8 degrees Celsius.

Unlike the Pfizer and Moderna which requires a minus 70 degree Celsius (cold) chain, this (the Biological E's vaccine candidate) is basically at the 2-8 degree Celsius, Swarup said.

PM discusses ways to end farmers protests

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

A day after three Central ministers failed to convince the farmers' union leaders to call off their agitation against the new farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday discussed with agriculture secretary Sanjay Agarwal measures that could put an end to the 41-day long protests at Delhi's borders.

It is reliably learnt that

Mr Modi has told the top agriculture ministry officials to suggest changes which can be effected in the farm laws so that the protesting farmers call off their agitation.

The meeting also deliberated upon the legal options to keep the new laws in abeyance till all the issues are sorted out with the protesting unions. The modalities of the legal guarantee which the government could offer to the farmers on the MSP were also dis-

cussed. The government is likely to make fresh offers to the union leaders during the next round of talks on January 8. The Prime Minister has been a strong advocate of the new farm laws. But he seems to be keen to end the stalemate with the protesting farmers.

Earlier he had said he was ready "with folded hands" to discuss every issue with farmers to allay their fears. He had also said that any talk about the new laws doing

away with MSP "is the biggest lie ever." BJP leaders Surjit Kumar Jyani, who is also a former Punjab minister, and Harjit Singh Grewal also met the Prime Minister at his residence on Tuesday.

Mr Jyani was chairing the BJP's Kisan Coordination Committee for interacting with farmers in Punjab last year on the three farm bills which at that time had not been passed by Parliament.

Battling cold weather, unseasonal rain and

thunderstorms, the representatives of 41 farmers' unions held a meeting at Singhu border on Tuesday to discuss their future strategy. The farmers will take out their proposed tractor march from all protest sites to the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal on Thursday. The tractor march was deferred for a day due to bad weather forecast. The unions reiterated their stand to intensify their agitation if their demands are not met.

Chennai witnesses record rainfall

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Normal life was affected in Chennai and surrounding districts after incessant heavy rain on Tuesday, resulting in waterlogging and inundation in low-lying areas. The authorities also released surplus water from the city reservoirs, including Chembarambakkam lake.

According to weather expert Pradeep John, Chennai city has received a record rainfall in 100 years and it is the heaviest in January since 1915. He said "there is no cyclone, no depression and no low pressure. Yet we have seen heavy rainfall in Chennai and by January standards the rainfall is just 20 mm yet we have got over seven times in January rain in less than 15 hours."

Chennai and adjacent

regions witnessed heavy-to-very heavy rainfall under the influence of an easterly trough, a senior Regional Meteorological Centre official here said. On Tuesday, Chennai city recorded 6 cm of rain, much more than the expected 3.7 cm.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted cloudy weather with light to moderate rains in the next 24 hours. Moderate rainfall is likely in several northern districts on Wednesday with Villupuram, Cuddalore and other neighbouring districts expected to receive isolated heavy showers. The sudden downpour prompted officials to release surplus water from the reservoirs around Chennai. Initially, 500 cusecs of water were released from the Chembarambakkam dam and later stepped up to about 3,000 cusecs.

Sena woos Gujaratis ahead of civic polls

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 5

In a bid to woo the sizeable Gujarati community, which is the traditional vote bank of the BJP, the ruling Shiv Sena has started efforts ahead of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) polls. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party has decided to hold a meet of Gujarati people on January 10 in Mumbai.

The meet will be held under the tagline "*Mumbai ma Jalebi Fajda Uddhav Thackeray Aapda*" (Just as Jalebi and Fajda belongs to Mumbai, Uddhav Thackeray belongs to us).

Jalebi and Fajda are the favourite Gujarati snacks, which are also popular in Mumbai.

Hemraj Shah, Shiv Sena leader from the Gujarati community, has organised

the meet, which will be held at Navanit Gujarati Samaj Hall in Jogeshwari. The party has stated that the programme aims at creating awareness in Gujarati voters in Mumbai ahead of civic body polls.

The move to hold a meet of Gujarati people is in stark contrast to Shiv Sena's 'sons of the soil' politics. However, the Gujarati vote bank has a capacity to impact the result of sizeable number of seats in Mumbai.

The Sena campaign leaflet said that the BJP's Gujarati leadership is arrogant and narrow-minded, which denied an opportunity to a Marathi leader in Maharashtra. The BJP is upset over the fact that Uddhav Thackeray snatched the power from them in Maharashtra, the leaflet said.



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee waits in a queue to collect her Swasthya Sathi card from an outreach camp Duare Sarkar in Kolkata on Tuesday.

— PTI

TMC mantri quits on Didi's birthday

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 5

As West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee turned 66 on Tuesday, former cricketer Laxmi Ratan Shukla resigned from her government as minister of state for sports and youth services and also quit the Trinamul Congress, in a shocking birthday blow ahead of the Assembly elections.

Shukla is the second rebel minister after Shubendu Adhikari to quit Banerjee's Cabinet and party in less than two months. This left many in the TMC stunned, amid speculation about his switchover to the BJP.

The 39-year-old, one of the state's youngest MLAs, is among those from the rebel TMC camp with a clean image in Howrah who is likely to join the BJP in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah on January 12. Shukla, in his resignation letter, said he wished to leave politics to devote more time to sports. He also quit as TMC Howrah (Urban) district chief.

Shukla, who joined the TMC nearly five years ago, won from Howrah North constituency in the 2016 Assembly polls and became a minister, has not yet resigned as an MLA.

Accepting his resignation, Banerjee forwarded it to

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, and said, "Laxmi is a good boy. Seeking relief from politics, he resigned because he wants to return to cricket. That is what he wrote to me. I certainly want him also to play because he is from sports. My good wishes are with him. There is no misunderstanding in it."

Senior TMC MP Sougata Roy said, "I am sad to learn about Laxmi's resignation. He was a good cricketer and minister. He never shared his problems within the party. We urge him to withdraw his resignation. Let him be... though it's the CM's prerogative on who is in the Cabinet."

Standing by Shukla another rebel TMC MLA from Howrah, Baishali Dalmiya, alleged, "He faced obstacles in working freely and was hurt. There are some negative-minded people who once held posts in the party and are creating a disturbance. They don't allow anyone to work. They also belittle and oppose others."

The Bally legislator said, "Whenever we faced insults, it came from our own party leaders rather than the CPI(M), Congress or BJP. Tomorrow Laxmi may be called a traitor. But aren't those nibbling the party like termites the actual traitors? They should be thrown out first."

DEFINED | BOUNDARIES

Parl alone can debate policies, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that it was bound by the constitutional mandate and could not be called upon to govern as it has neither the powers nor the wherewithals and expertise in that regard.

"Courts operate within the boundaries defined by the Constitution. We cannot be called upon to govern. For, we have no wherewithal or prowess and expertise in that regard" said Justice A.M.Khanwilkar who authored the majority judgment upholding Modi's government's project for the construction of a new parliament building and the

redevelopment of Central Vista.

Besides Justice Khanwilkar, Justice Dinesh Maheshwari is the other judge in the majority judgment.

Justice Sanjiv Khanna gave a dissenting judgment in the case.

Pointing out that the role of the court was "limited to examining the constitutionality including legality of the policy and government actions".

Justice Khanwilkar said, "the constitutionally envisaged system of 'checks and balances' has been completely misconstrued and misapplied in this case. The principle of 'checks and balances' posits two concepts - 'check' and 'bal-

● **JUSTICE KHANWILKAR** said that the "political issues including regarding development policies of the government of the day must be debated in the Parliament, to which it is accountable."

ance". Whereas the former finds a manifestation in the concept of judicial review, the latter is derived from the well enshrined principle of separation of powers."

Making it clear that the courts should desist from venturing into the domain of the other organs of the state, Justice Khanwilkar said that the "political issues including regarding development policies of the government of the day must be debated in the Parliament, to which it is accountable. The role of the

court is limited to examining the constitutionality including legality of the policy and government actions."

The right to development, Justice Khanwilkar said is a "basic human right" and no organ of the State is expected to become an "impediment" in the process of development "as long as the government proceeds in accordance with law".

The court said this in a postlude while referring to the arguments by one of the petitioners urging

the court to ask the government to spend funds being spent on the central vista project for other pressing issues.

Referring to the arguments by the petitioners urging the court to venture into the "territories" that are way beyond the contemplated powers of a constitutional court, Justice Khanwilkar wondered, "We are compelled to wonder if we, in the absence of a legal mandate, can dictate the government to desist from spending money on one project and instead use it for something else, or if we can ask the government to run their offices only from areas decided by this Court, or if we can question the

wisdom of the government in focusing on a particular direction of development."

It further said, "We are equally compelled to wonder if we can jump to put a full stop on execution of policy matters in the first instance without a demonstration of irreparable loss or urgent necessity, or if we can guide the government on moral or ethical matters without any legal basis."

Making it clear that the constitutional courts can't cross the boundaries set by the constitution, Justice Khanwilkar in note of caution said, "In light of the settled law, we should be loath to venture into these areas."





## SHORT TAKES

## 20 migrants sink en route Panama

**Bogota:** Rescue workers in Colombia are trying to locate more than 20 migrants whose boat sank as it tried to reach Panama. The sinking was reported on Monday by officials in Acandí, a municipality along the Gulf of Uraba, an inlet of the Caribbean sea that is lined by dense jungle. Thousands of undocumented migrants cross the gulf each year on small boats. Migrants traveling through the Uraba region are mostly trying to make it to the United States. Many come from Cuba and Haiti. But it is also common to see migrants from Africa and Asia along this route. Colombia's navy confirmed the shipwreck and says it is still trying to determine how many migrants were on the boat, and how many survived the accident.

## Indian-American is Ohio senator

**Washington:** Niraj Antani has been sworn-in as Ohio's senator, making him the first Indian-American to serve in the state's Senate. Antani, 29, who was elected to the Ohio state Senate from the 6th District, was sworn-in on Monday. "I am so grateful to be able to represent the community in which I was born and raised as a State Senator," Antani said soon after being sworn-in. Antani will serve a full four-year term. "I will continue to work hard every day for each Ohioan so that they can have the opportunity to achieve their American dream. In this uncertain economic and health time, we must diligently strive to enact policies for the benefit of all Ohioans," Antani said. Antani formerly served as State Representative for the 42nd Ohio House District since 2014.

## Don-appointed US attorney resigns

**Atlanta:** The top federal prosecutor in Atlanta left his position Monday, a day after an audio recording was made public in which President Donald Trump called him a "never-Trumper." Byung J. "BJay" Pak, who was appointed by Trump, announced his resignation as US attorney for the Northern District of Georgia in a news release. The statement did not say why Pak was leaving or what he plans to do next. "It has been the greatest honour of my professional career to have been able to serve my fellow citizens as the US Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia," Pak said in the release. "I have done my best to be thoughtful and consistent, and to provide justice for my fellow citizens in a fair, effective and efficient manner. I am grateful to President Trump and the United States Senate for the opportunity to serve, and to former Attorneys General Sessions and Barr for their leadership of the Department."

## JIHADISTS KILL OVER 100 IN NIGER VIOLENCE

**Dakar (Senegal), Jan. 5:** More than 100 civilians were killed in Niger over the weekend by extremists who attacked two villages, as insurgent violence mounts in the West African nation.

The attacks on the western villages of Tchombangou and Zaroumdareye took place on the same day that Niger announced that presidential elections would go to a second round on February 21.

Nigers Prime Minister Brigi Rafini visited the two villages on Sunday. "We came to provide moral support and present the condolences of the president of the republic, the government and the entire Niger nation," he said. The villages in the insecure Tillabéri region were attacked on Saturday after residents killed two rebel fighters, local officials said.

The attacks are among the deadliest in Niger and come on the heels of several others, including one by the Islamic State West Africa Province in the Diffa region a few weeks ago in which dozens of people were killed. Niger and neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali are battling the spread of deadly extremist violence which is displacing large numbers of people, despite the presence of thousands of regional and international troops. A year ago, extremists staged mass attacks on Niger's military in the Tillabéri region, killing more than 70 in December 2019 and more than 89 in January 2020.

## UK enters tough lockdown

New rules to stay in place till mid-Feb with review based on infection rates

**London, Jan. 5:** The UK entered a tough new stay-at-home lockdown on Tuesday after Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it has been "both frustrating and alarming" to see the speed with which the new variant of the Coronavirus is spreading and declared that hospitals in the country are under more pressure from the deadly virus than at any time in the pandemic.

While Scotland's new rules, which involve school and business closures become legal from Tuesday, England's rules — akin to the stringent measures of the first wave of the pandemic in March 2020 — become law in the early hours of Wednesday. However, Johnson has urged the public to begin following the strict work from home rules right away.

The new rules are expected to stay in place until mid-February with a review planned based on vaccine rollout data and infection rates. "Our scientists have confirmed this new variant is between 50 and 70 per cent more transmissible — that means you are much, much more likely to catch the virus and to pass it on," Johnson said in his televised address to the nation on Monday night. "We must therefore go into a national lockdown which is tough enough to contain this variant. That means the government is once again instructing you to stay at home. You may only leave home for limited reasons permitted in law, such as to shop for essentials, to work if you absolutely cannot work from home, to exercise, to seek medical assistance such as getting a Covid test, or to escape domestic abuse," he said.

The devolved regions of Wales and Northern Ireland were already



The Trafalgar square is empty as Britain enters a national lockdown in London on Tuesday. England's six-week lockdown, which began at midnight, emulates the first national Coronavirus curbs in place from March to June — but goes further than another instituted in November when schools remained open. — AFP

● **ACCORDING TO** the latest data, in England alone, the number of Covid-19 patients in hospitals has increased by nearly a third in the last week, to almost 27,000.

under strict lockdown measures since the middle of last month.

According to the latest data, in England alone, the number of Covid-19 patients in hospitals has increased by nearly a third in the last week, to almost 27,000. That number is 40 per cent higher than the first peak of the pandemic in April. On December 29, more than 80,000 people tested positive for Covid across the UK — a new record — and the number of deaths is up by 20 per cent over the last week. — PTI

## France promises speedy virus vaccination process

**Paris, Jan. 5:** Amid public outcry, France's health minister has promised an "exponential" acceleration of his country's slow Coronavirus vaccination process.

After barely 500 people in France were vaccinated in the first six days, Health Minister Olivier Veran defended the government's strategy of giving the vaccines first to residents of nursing homes. But he vowed on Tuesday to simplify a bureaucratic consent process blamed in part for France's lagging

vaccinations. Veran said the government will expand the number of vaccination centres and categories of people eligible for early vaccines, and allow people to sign up for vaccinations on an app or by phone. The growth of vaccinations in the coming days "will be exponential, rest assured," he said on RTL radio. But he insisted that the government would not forego safety guidelines in a country facing broad vaccine scepticism.

While neighbouring countries are imposing

strict new lockdowns amid surging infections, Veran said France is weighing its options and "cannot relax," but announced no new measures. Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer said on radio that he doesn't want to "deprive children of school." Veran said France has confirmed 10 or 15 cases of the new, more contagious virus variant identified in Britain, and that overall French infections and hospital rates are currently at a plateau. — AP

## Pak orders rebuilding of temple

**Islamabad, Jan. 5:** Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Evacuee Property Trust Board (EPTB) to start reconstruction of a century-old Hindu temple that was vandalised and set on fire by a mob in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province last week, saying the attack has caused "international embarrassment" to the country.

The apex court, which took notice of the attack and ordered the local authorities to appear before the court on January 5, also directed the board to submit in court details of all functional and non-functional temples and gurdwaras across Pakistan, *Dawn* newspaper reported. The attack on the temple in Terri village in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) Karak district on Wednesday by members of radical Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam party (Fazal ur Rehman group) drew strong condemnation from human rights activists and the minority Hindu community leaders.

During the hearing on Tuesday, a three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed also directed the EPTB to clear encroachments from

temples across the country and take action against officials involved in the encroachments. Justice Ahmed said that the Karak incident had caused "international embarrassment to Pakistan". The EPTB is a statutory board that manages religious properties and shrines of Hindus and Sikhs who had migrated to India following the partition.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief secretary, police chief, and Dr Shoab Suddle, the head of a commission on minorities' rights, were also present during the hearing.

Suddle, who visited the temple in Karak district and presented a comprehensive report in the case to the Supreme Court on Monday after it asked the one-man commission on the rights of minorities to probe the attack, told the court that the provincial EPTB "did not protect the shrine", the paper said. Justice Ijazul Ahsan then questioned the police chief on how the attack could have happened when there was a police check post next to the temple. "Where were your intelligence agencies?" the judge asked. — PTI

## HK judge warns on law reforms

**Hong Kong, Jan. 5:** Hong Kong's outgoing top judge said on Tuesday that calls for reform of the city's judiciary cannot be based on dissatisfaction with court rulings, as pro-Beijing figures and state-owned media step up criticism of the city's legal system.

"(The) judiciary's position has all along been the same. If there's any room for improvement, we will pursue it. We will consider it," Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma said at a news conference ahead of his retirement on Sunday.

"But it's not particularly satisfactory if there's a call for reforms simply on the basis of a result one doesn't like," he said. "It is certainly not a good starting point or acceptable to say 'I want reforms to ensure that I will always get the result which I want.'" — AP

## FINANCIAL | SCAM

Lai Xiaomin found guilty of bigamy after living with a woman outside his marriage

## China's ex-banker gets death for \$260 mn bribery

**Beijing, Jan. 5:** The former chairman of one of China's largest state-controlled asset management firms was sentenced to death on Tuesday for soliciting \$260 million in bribes, corruption, and also bigamy.

Lai Xiaomin, a former Communist Party member, gave a detailed televised confession on state broadcaster CCTV last January, which showed footage of safes and cabinets stuffed with cash in a Beijing apartment allegedly belonging to him.

Lai had abused his position in attempting to

obtain the vast sum, a court in the northern city of Tianjin said, describing the bribes as "extremely large" and labelling the circumstances "particularly serious".

He had shown "extreme malicious intent," the court ruling added.

The former chairman of the Hong Kong-listed China Huarong Asset Management Co. — a distressed debt group — was also found guilty of bigamy after living with a woman "as man and wife for long periods" outside of his marriage and fathering illegitimate children.



Lai Xiaomin

Huarong is one of four companies set up in 1999 to help clean up bad debt piles choking China's banking system, and the company later expanded into investment, loan and property businesses.

porting Islamist extremist groups and of having warm ties with Iran. The Saudi border, which Qatar relied on for the import of dairy products, construction materials and other goods, opened briefly during the past three years to allow Qataris into Saudi Arabia to perform the Islamic hajj pilgrimage. It was unclear what concessions Qatar had made or is promising to make regarding a shift in its policies.

Kuwait, which had been mediating throughout the dispute, was first to announce the diplomatic

## Georgia election to decide fate of Biden presidency

**Atlanta, Jan. 5:** Polls opened in the US state of Georgia on Tuesday in two runoff elections that will determine control of the US Senate and shape the first years of the new Democratic presidency — after a hard-fought campaign that pulled in Donald Trump and president-elect Joe Biden.

For nearly 20 years Georgia has voted reliably Republican in the presidential election and Senate contests.

But Biden pulled out a shock victory in Georgia in November, one of several states that he flipped to win the White House, and the races for the Senate have come down to the wire in the biggest, most expensive congressional runoffs in US history.

Polls opened at 7:00 am (1200 GMT) in the southern state. A record three million-plus people have voted early, election officials say, and final results may not be known for several days.

A staggering \$832 million has been spent on the two contests, including spending in the primary and general elections, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

"The future of the country is on the line here," one of the Republican

candidates seeking re-election in Georgia, David Perdue, said on Tuesday morning. "This is the last line of defense for our way of life, really." The Republican and Democratic parties have made Georgia their political ground zero, with thousands of volunteers leaving no door unknocked and current and future presidents and vice presidents barnstorming the state for every last vote.

If Democrats flip both seats they win back the Senate, effectively handing Biden all levers of political power in Washington and helping him enact his ambitious legislative agenda.

"One state — one state! — can chart the course, not just for the next four years but for the next generation," Biden told a rally in Atlanta where he campaigned Monday with the races' two Democrats. Republicans argue that keeping Senate control would serve as a check on the incoming Biden administration.

"The stakes in this election could not be higher," Trump told a raucous rally in Dalton, Georgia hours after Biden's Atlanta showing. "Make sure your vote is counted." — AFP

## Xi asks military to stay on high alert

**Beijing, Jan. 5:** Chinese President Xi Jinping has asked the military to strengthen training to hone its combat skills and remain on high alert as the new revised defence law expanding the powers of the armed forces came into force from this year.

The 67-year-old leader, who also heads the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) besides the Central Military Commission (CMC) — the overall high command of the two million strong military — signed the commission's first order for 2021, which listed priorities in the training of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police Force (PLAF), official media here reported on Tuesday.

The order instructed the armed forces to stick to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as their guiding principle and uphold Xi

Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military as well as military strategies in the new era. It said the CCP will enhance its guidance over the military's training, urging the armed forces to focus on improving their combat readiness and continuing to reform their training system. The first such order was issued in January 2018, when Xi addressed a massive training and commencement ceremony at a shooting range in northern China.

Xi has repeatedly stressed the importance of combat readiness training and joint operations to the armed forces since he became commander-in-chief in late 2012. In his order this year, he said the military must train their officers and soldiers in realistic combat scenarios, place more attention on research about war and military operations. — PTI

## Saudi to lift Qatar embargo

breakthrough through its foreign minister. Earlier on Monday, the foreign minister had reportedly traveled to Doha to deliver a message to Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. While the Saudi decision marks a major milestone toward resolving the Gulf spat, the path toward full reconciliation is far from guaranteed.

The rift between Abu Dhabi and Doha has been deepest, with the UAE and Qatar at sharp ideological odds. Following Kuwait's announcement, the UAE's Minister of State for

Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, tweeted that his country was keen to restore Gulf unity. However, he cautioned: "We have more work to do and we are in the right direction."

The lifting of the embargo by Saudi Arabia paves the way for Qatar's ruler to attend an annual summit of Gulf leaders on Tuesday that will be held in the kingdom's ancient desert site of Al-Ula. The summit would be chaired by Saudi King Salman, though his son and heir, the crown prince, may instead lead the meeting. — AP



DECCAN  
Chronicle  
6 JANUARY 2021  
Nod for Central Vista:  
SC gives govt latitude

In a 2-1 judgment, the Supreme Court on Tuesday approved the Modi government's deeply controversial Central Vista project, which is an egregious example of executive excess. This paves the way for the spending of ₹20,000 crore to build a new Parliament House, a new residence as well as a new office complex for the Prime Minister, a new residence for the vice-president, the demolition of some half-a-dozen fine standing buildings along the Rajpath lawns which house ministries, and their replacement along this majestic boulevard with new structures. The government has not offered cogent reasons for a new house for the PM and the vice-president, but if news reports are anything to go by, then the explanation for a fancy home for the PM may be thought to be embedded in the notion of vanity, like the idea of a special aircraft for the exclusive use of the PM (on the lines of Air Force One of the US President).

Why a new Parliament House? The government's answer is that the present structure is old, it is not spacious enough, and the building also has problems to do with age (it is less than a hundred years old). Were extensions, renovations, not possible as are routinely done with the centuries-old British Parliament?

**The Supreme Court was only too willing to see reason in the government's justifications, actions, and possible motives which have been ripped apart by the country's top experts in architecture, design, city planning, heritage professionals, environmentalists, besides retired top civil servants**

Why new government buildings? The official answer is that many departments of a ministry are scattered in the city and their being together will improve efficiency. No treatise of public administration or political science cites this as a reason for red tape and in-built deep inefficiencies in the Indian bureaucratic structure.

Either the top court did not sufficiently grill the government on these and related matters or the Supreme Court was too willing to see reason in the government's justifications, actions, and possible motives which have been ripped apart by the country's top experts in architecture, architectural design, city planning, conservationists, heritage professionals, environmentalists, besides retired top civil servants.

There is another important issue. Do we need to spend the officially estimated ₹20,000 crore on this blatantly futile venture when the economy is hovering around the negative growth territory? In the time of pandemic, is this the best use for the country's dwindling resources? Or, is this a foolish luxury the nation can ill afford? The Central Vista in New Delhi leads the gaze down from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate and is regarded as among the most majestic views among the world's principal cities, with green lawns on either side for public use. It is crowded with grand heritage buildings, including the Houses of Parliament. If there is a no-go area for urban destruction, redesign of spaces and change of land use in New Delhi, it is this. Major changes here are akin to changing the land use of the Taj Mahal complex in Agra or the Vatican in Rome.

From start to finish, the technically required official permissions — pertaining to change in land use, and heritage and environmental clearances — have been rushed through in record time, cutting corners, as if magically. Opaqueness of procedure was rampant. To deliberate over such a venture, which strikes at the root of history and heritage, the Parliament was never summoned. But the Supreme Court is unseeing. Maximum government, minimum judiciary, is a sorry maxim.

Trump must leave gracefully

The US President Donald Trump's never-ending effort to overturn the result of an election that he has lost has become much more than an embarrassment to sane elements in his Republican Party. Mr Trump may seem like a drowning man flailing when his fate has been sealed but such antics are posing a serious threat to the very foundational principles that have governed the world's oldest working democracy tracing its election history 200-plus years. The President's phone call to Georgia's Secretary of State, Brad Raffensburger, asking him to change the result by somehow finding close to 12,000 votes for him is the most brazen abuse of power by a White House occupant, which warrants criminal prosecution. There has also been a fleeting thought in Mr Trump's growing bank of critics that he should be impeached before January 20, which is the date Joe Biden should be taking over.

The US presidential election was long over with all 50 states certifying their results. Mr Trump's legal challenges aimed at sowing doubts over an election that drew a record number of voters have been summarily dismissed by judges right across the country. Under the circumstances, what the country's elected representatives must do in Congress on Wednesday is to formally declare Mr Biden as the winner and ask Mr Trump to go home. He can leave his task of disrupting future elections to young and eager mavericks, who are taking after him in mocking the system and trying to subvert the will of the voters.

Such events as witnessed after the poll on November 3 are more in keeping with authoritarian parts of the planet and banana republics than in the citadel of freedom that the Capitol Hill housing the Senate, the Houses of Representatives and the Supreme Court represents. It is important for every part of the free world that the clownish Donald Trump depart the White House and allow the likes of his Vice-President Mike Pence to retain his dignity while preserving democracy in its very form.

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Sanjiwan  
Sahni



India requires  
key structural  
changes in way  
it is governed

A view is gaining wider acceptability that the precondition for sustainable, all-round progress in India is structural change in our governance model.

To understand this better and more simply, let's listen to what three eminent thinkers, who have vast experience in governance, in the government and in the private sector, in think tanks and more, have to say:

Arun Maira, who among multiple achievements was mandated when in the Planning Commission to catalyse fresh thinking on solving this problem, says: "What is the solution then? Going back to the basics, to the ground, and to the people. There are some good ideas emerging and being applied in many parts of the world. The essence is, realising that solutions at the top are not working – and cannot work with the present framework, they are built on a different frame."

Wajahat Habibullah, who was part of former PM Rajiv Gandhi's team in developing the panchayati raj concept, states: "The answer lies in more closely ensuring people's participation in governance as conceived by the Mahatma who identified the panchayat as an instrument of self-governance. That is still in my view the only viable alterna-

tive, but not in the form as it exists even after the 73rd and 74th Amendment."

Kiran Karnik brings a technology edge to the discussion: "To me a long-term solution is structural: we need to decentralise in a serious and substantial way. The framework exists in the constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) that create a formal third layer of government by devolving powers to panchayats and urban bodies. If this can actually be implemented, by ensuring the 3 Fs needed (finance, functions and functionalities), we will have more accountable, transparent and effective governance and be substantially liberated from the whims and tyrannies of the Centre (or even states). Such decentralisation may not be sufficient by itself, but it is a necessary condition."

As a solution, he also refers to the influence of technology: "What is exciting is that new technologies make such decentralisation of politics and manufacturing possible. Dispersal of factories and offices, jobs close to home, decongestion of cities, less pollution, lower crime: these and many other consequences make this almost utopia. The vector is important; while a slower speed will mean that we may not get there for long, the direction is clear."

Recent economic thought is also from

a different route coming to a similar broad viewpoint. Arun Maira said productivity, particularly labour productivity, increases encouraged by policy initiatives, similar to what Japan did in the 1970s. Dr Rathin Roy emphasised that economic growth will arise from meeting the needs of the currently poorer, deprived sections of society in contrast to the limited higher net worth segment. These include: Low-cost housing; Food – a balanced basket of nutrition; Affordable clothing; Education; Healthcare. All these for the masses.

This emphasis, changed from catering to middle class needs, is also in the direction of meeting the needs of "the bottom of the pyramid".

"Small is beautiful" and profit at the bottom of the pyramid are thought processes which converge with such proposed structural changes.

There is enormous management literature and practice which highlights the need of decentralisation for success, rather than control and giving directions from the top. In other words, even in the corporate world, there is recognition of the desirability of decentralised structures. Therefore, there is underlying congruence in this thought process at multiple levels but is cur-

**The disruption caused by Mr Trump, even in the Islamic world, has immediate implications for India on multiple counts, due to India having ridden the American wave rather than eke out an independent course**

*The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.*



Challenges for Modi as  
world faces Biden era



K.C. Singh

The new year brought some cheer for a Covid-infested world with several external vaccines – Pfizer, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Moderna – cleared to join battle to counter the pandemic, which cost the planet a year of social freedom, economic growth and mental peace. However, a second spike across Europe and the United States, a bitter American presidential election and clever repositioning by China have left international relations in an uncertain flux. Meanwhile, global stock markets have soared, reflecting more a sanguine assessment of the future than the troubled present. The lone black swan is Donald Trump and Iran settling scores in the dying moments of Mr Trump's presidency, with unforeseen consequences.

Otherwise, three developments will condition global geopolitics hereafter. One, the swearing-in of Joe Biden as the next US President on January 20. Two, China quickly spearheading two major agreements; the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trade agreement centred around the 10 Asean nations plus Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and China; and a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the European Union and China. Both were under negotiation for almost a decade. While the former was finalised in mid-November 2020, days after the US election, the latter followed a month later. India was part of the negotiating process of the former, but chose in 2019 to walk out, dissatisfied with the guarantees available in a playing field that appeared to be tilted towards the better positioned producers of goods in China, South Korea and Japan. Three, the suc-

cess of the vaccination programme in pushing back the pandemic in developed Western countries, especially the US, and reviving jobs, demand and growth. Normally, outgoing US Presidents lower their profile after their successor is elected and the two administrations create policy and implementation coordination through their transition teams. Mr Trump, who keeps repeating on the social media and whenever he's in front of a microphone that his win has been stolen, has undermined that seamless process, which undermines trust in the United States. Mr Biden's national security adviser (designate) Jake Sullivan tweeted on December 21 that they would "welcome early consultations with our European partners on our common concerns on China's practices". Despite that, the EU under the half-yearly presidency of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, 10 days later signed the CAI with China. This reflected both European concern that Mr Trump may have lost but Trumpism survives and can return the loser having polled 74 million votes, as indeed the European dependence on the Chinese market. While Chinese investment in Europe is 120 billion euros, European return investment in China is 140 billion euros. All but Ireland already had investment agreements with China, but these were to protect investments, whereas the CAI assures market access in goods and services and provides one set of rules for all 27 EU members. China has also promised to enter the International Labour Organisation (ILO) accords on labour protection and thus satisfy the common complaint about forced labour.

This undermines President-elect Biden's hope for a united front of democracies and like-minded nations against China. All may not have been lost yet as the agreement will take time to be implemented. Similarly, by finessing the RCEP, China negated Mr Trump's attempt to isolate and decouple trade and investment from it. If the CAI sends a signal to the Nato allies of the US abandoning it on economic and trade issues, the RCEP has showed that even in its immediate Asian neighbourhood, and despite its expansionist and aggressive conduct, China has managed to use the carrot to offset the stick.

After four years of being Trump *bhaks*, where does it leave the Indian government? The disruption caused by Mr Trump even in the Islamic world, by exacerbating the Shia-Sunni and intra-Sunni divisions, has immediate implications for India on multiple counts, due to India having ridden the American wave rather than eke out an independent course. For instance, the excessive chumminess with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, built on existing excellent relations, begot increased counter-terror cooperation and their distancing from Pakistan. But the cost has been India damaging its bridges with Iran, Qatar and Turkey. Thus, like the rest of the world, India is now running to cover the exposed ground as the sun sets on the Trump administration. India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar surfaced in Doha, Qatar, on December 27-28. This was not surprising as the last high-level visit was in 2016 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to Qatar. Since 2017, when Mr Trump began his foreign travel as President

by his visit to Riyadh, and the Saudis and Emiratis aligned against Qatar, India just followed their lead and ignored Qatar. Nearer home, without Iran, any independent Afghan policy becomes a non-starter as India lacks any land connectivity. That will start becoming more apparent as the Taliban, gradually consolidating their hold over more areas in Afghanistan, take their fight-and-talk to the next level. They are waiting for the exit of US troops and financial aid and air cover to diminish before moving to finish the game.

Therefore, as the Indian government repositions to counter the new reality, it has some advantages and two major domestic drawbacks. The advantage is that the US also has less space remaining for manoeuvre, increasing India's value as a quasi-ally. NSA designate Jake Sullivan had on Fareed Zakaria's CNN programme articulated the Biden administration's worldview, debunking notions of a US decline, as they have the capacity for correction, renewal and improvement. The notion of "foreign policy for the middle class" is hearkening to core values and obtaining positive results for the people and the world. Foreign and domestic policies are intertwined.

All this could also be valid advice for the Modi government, that is nearing its two-year mark in its second term. The drawbacks are mainly two. It must win the trust of farmers and stop minority baiting by its various state governments and using bigotry as ballast for its electoral machine. Otherwise, while the Chinese have redeployed geopolitically, keeping one foot on India's neck in Ladakh, the US shall not show Trumpian indulgence for its majoritarianism. Meanwhile, more and more Indians are beginning to ask whether the Modi government is all theatre or really a defender of the people and national interests.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

Strangely farmers from Punjab seem more agitated than their counterparts in the rest of the country. Farmers in AP do not seem to be bothered much. The Centre must dispel fears among farmers by implementing the laws in a few states as a pilot project to prove its point.

**Govardhana Myneedu**  
Vijayawada

LETTERS

PRICE ASSURANCE

The stand-off between farmers and the government is due to the MSP (No repeal of law, move SC: Centre tells farmers, DC, Jan. 5). If the government believes its farms laws will give more support to farmers but is unable to repeal the law on MSP, then at least it should address the distress sale and redressal mechanism for losses incurred by farmers by adopting quick and transparent insurance mechanism by bearing the insurance.

**S.S.N. Sarma**  
Visakhapatnam

Strangely farmers from Punjab seem more agitated than their counterparts in the rest of the country. Farmers in AP do not seem to be bothered much. The Centre must dispel fears among farmers by implementing the laws in a few states as a pilot project to prove its point.

DELIGHTFUL NEWS

It is extremely encouraging to read the rare incident at Ignite-2021 (CI father salutes DSP daughter, DC, Jan. 5). Further, she became a superior at an young age to her delighted father. Such real-life stories will certainly inspire and motivate young India amid Covid times.

**Dr C. Ghanshyam**  
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN  
DECCAN  
Chronicle

Statehood for  
Himachal from  
January 26

NEW DELHI, Jan. 5 Himachal Pradesh will be ushered in as the eighteenth State of India on the eve of the Republic Day, it is learnt. The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, is likely to inaugurate the State on January 25.

Parliament has already approved the elevation of the status of Himachal Pradesh, now a Union territory. The Act provides for a separate Governor for the State and also a separate High Court. The Union Government in the next few days will announce the appointments of the Governor and the Chief Justice. Himachal Pradesh has four seats in the new Lok Sabha. Delimitation work is already in hand and is expected to be completed well in time. —PTI.

Sundar Pichai at Alphabet and Google; besides many others. They are already champions but need to be persuaded and inducted to champion this cause.

Even in established business houses, control is going to the next generation — Roshni Nadar, HCL Technologies, Rishad Premji, Wipro. Several similar examples are available from the world of sports and entertainment. Some prominent names in the last category include Swara Bhaskar and Anurag Kashyap.

Diversified champions from amongst these need to be won over, who will highlight the underlying thought process in multiple domains and encourage its deployment. Their collective voice will have a better chance of making an impact. Therefore, there is a vital need for avenues and forums through which this can be exercised.

The key next steps, apart from the changes in the governing setup, without which nothing will happen, are winning over the younger generation, making champions from amongst them, and providing a collective forum to help make decentralisation a central artery.

*The writer is a management and economic adviser*



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,437.78	0.54
Nifty 50	14,199.50	0.47
S&P 500*	3,712.92	0.33
Dollar (₹)	73.18	-0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.34	0.49
Euro (₹)	89.81	-0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,969.335	0.65
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	53.12	2.03
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.850	-0.008
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.942	0.025

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

RBI imposes ₹2.5 cr penalty on Bajaj Finance

The RBI has imposed a penalty of Rs 2.5 crore on Bajaj Finance, for violation of directions, including on recovery and collection practices. "This penalty has been imposed... taking into account the failure of the company to ensure that its recovery agents did not resort to harassment or intimidation of customers as part of its debt collection efforts and thereby failing to adhere to the ...directions issued by RBI," the RBI said.

Google Cloud appoints Bajwa as Apac leader



Google Cloud announced the elevation of Karan Bajwa as its new leader for Asia Pacific. He currently leads Google Cloud in India. Bajwa will lead all regional revenue and go-to-market operations for Google Cloud, including on Google Cloud Platform and Google Workspace from Jan. 5, a statement said. He succeeds Rick Harshman. Bajwa is currently based in Gurgaon, but will relocate to Singapore in 2021.

Practically raises ₹28 crore from Series B funding

Hyderabad-based edutech firm Practically on Tuesday announced to have raised around ₹28 crore in pre-Series B funding round led by Siana Capital. Existing investors YourNest Venture Capital and Exfinity Ventures also participated in the funding round. Practically co-founder Charu Noheria said revenue generation for its platform has begun in AP and TS markets, which is in the run rate of upto ₹28 crore a year.

Renault to unveil compact SUV Kiger on Jan. 28

French automaker Renault said it will unveil its upcoming compact SUV Kiger in India later this month. Renault will be globally premiering the eagerly awaited Kiger in India on January 28, the automaker said. The company plans to launch the model in India first and then follow the same in other markets. Renault said Kiger will come loaded with several smart attributes and features.



■ US treasury+145 bps bonds lapped up Exim Bank sells \$ bonds at 2.25%

Mumbai, Jan. 5: The Exim Bank has started the new year on a high note raising \$1 billion through a dollar-bond sale to international investors, offering just 2.25 per cent for the ten-year money, setting a new low in pricing. The issue was oversubscribed four times or worth \$4 billion as against \$1 billion on offer, managing director David Rasquinha said, adding that in Asia the issue was oversold within three hours of the launch with the order book hitting \$1.75 billion on Monday morning. "At 2.25 per cent (US treasury+145 bps), the coupon is a record low for any 10-year bond issuance out of the country," he said. The issue has many a firsts, Rasquinha said, pointing to the lowest coupon (2.25 per cent per annum) ever for a large USD bond offering by a domestic issuer and is also the first investment-grade dollar bond sale from Asia ex-Japan in 2021. Besides, this is the first EMBI (Emerging Market Bond Index) eligible 144a/RegS bond from Asia ex-Japan in 2021. Regulation S/144a bonds are issued by foreign issuers in the US debt market and are denominated in US dollars. I-bankers are expecting higher debt money to come to domestic shores this year given the record low interest rates. Companies will also be raising money



to meet the likely capex need or repayment demands as the economy returns to normalcy after the year-long pandemic. In January 2020, the Exim Bank had raised \$1 billion in 10-year dollar money offering US treasury plus 1.70 bps. Normally, the bank issues 5, 7 and 10-year debt to meet its project export needs. For Exim Bank, the current issue saw the largest order book and over-subscription (four times) for a RegS issuance. The Exim Bank, with a substantially dollarised balance sheet, is one of the largest domestic issuers of long-term debt in international debt capital markets and its paper is treated as quasi-sovereign as the bank is fully owned by the government. The funds from the sale will be used to support project exports, overseas investment by way of long-term credit and its export lines of credit portfolio, the bank said. Taking a cue from the massive over subscription in Hong Kong and

Singapore, the bank tightened the initial price guidance by 40 bps from T+185 bps. At close, with US investors chipping in, the issue was oversubscribed by over four times, the bank said. As much as 55 per cent of demand came in from Asia, 29 per cent from the US and 16 per cent from the EMEA (Eastern & Middle-eastern Africa) region and 68 per cent of the issue was snapped by fund managers, 17 per cent by sovereign wealth funds, central banks and insurers, 14 per cent by banks and the remaining 1 per cent by private banks, others. The issue is rated BBB- by Fitch and Moody's. Harsha Bangari, deputy managing director of the bank said this is the only 10-year sale by a domestic financial institution in the last one year. "The EMBIG index eligibility of the bonds has helped in price tightening by 40 bps, demonstrating strong confidence of investors in the India story and in Exim Bank," she said. —PTI

BEAUTY STARTUP NYKAA PLANS MEGA IPO THIS YEAR

BAIJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY JAN. 5

Nykaa E-Retail is planning an initial public offering this year that could value the online cosmetic retailer at a minimum \$3 billion, according to people familiar with the matter. The startup founded by Falguni Nayar, a former investment banker, is working with advisers to prepare for the share sale in Mumbai, the people said. Nykaa is leaning toward a domestic listing, though an overseas share sale is also under consideration, said the people. Deliberations are ongoing and details of the offering, including the size and timeline could change, the people said. A representative for Nykaa declined to comment. Founded in 2012, Nykaa's platform lists more than 1,200 brands ranging from makeup, skincare to health supplements and hair dryers, according to its website, which logs 55 million monthly visits. It has six warehouses across India and receives over 13 million orders each month. The company was preparing for an IPO in two years, its founder and chief executive officer Nayar said in 2018. Nykaa counts TPG and tycoon Sunil Munjal's family office Hero Enterprise among its backers. —Bloomberg

Anjan Dey chosen to head Oriental Insurance

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 5

Public sector general insurer Oriental Insurance Company (OIC) will get a new chief as the Banks Board Bureau (BBB) has recommended Anjan Dey, director and general manager (GM) of GIC Re, for the position of chairman-cum-managing director of OIC. Besides, the BBB has also kept Suchita Gupta, GM, GIC Re, as a standby candidate for the vacancy. The CMD post has been lying vacant since November after the then CMD S.N. Rajeswari was appointed as the member (distribution) of Irda. BBB, the official head-

hunting body for selecting CEOs of state-owned banks and insurance firms, conducted virtual interviews of five candidates on Monday to pick a CMD for the insurer. "The members of Banks Board Bureau interfaced with 5 candidates on January 04, 2021 for the forthcoming vacancy of CMD in OICL. Keeping in view their performance in the interface and their overall experience, the Bureau recommends Anjan Dey for the position of OIC CMD and Suchita Gupta as the candidate on the reserve list for the said vacancy," the BBB announced soon after the interview on Monday.

Though Rajeswari has been appointed as the member, Irda in November; she is yet to join the Hyderabad-based insurance regulatory body as the Ministry of Finance wants a new CMD to take charge of the company before she moves to the Irda, said a ministry source. The year 2021 is expected to witness large-scale top-notch vacancies in the PSU insurance companies, including Life Insurance Company and the Irda where Subhas Khuntia, chairman, will be completing his three-year tenure in May. There will also new CMDs in all the four PSU general insurers this year.

Brand ambassador penalised

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Celebrities who endorse consumer goods as brand ambassadors will have to be cautious hereon. A consumer redressal forum in Kerala has asked a film actor to pay compensation for promoting a hair cream brand. Malayalam actor Anoop Menon and Dathri Ayurveda, a Kerala-based manufacturer of personal care products, have been asked to pay Rs 10,000 each to a consumer for making "false promises" in an advertisement. Anoop Menon had featured in an advertisement of Dathri Hair Cream, which claimed "lush hair

growth within six weeks". The consumer, Francis Vadakkan, who had bought the product in January 2012 after watching Menon's advertisement, approached the District Consumer Redressal Forum in Thrissur seeking compensation of Rs 5 lakh. He alleged that there was no improvement despite using the cream and was humiliated after being ridiculed by family and friends for buying the product. Menon said he "never used the product". On this, the forum commented: "It is clear that the brand ambassador appeared in the advertisement without even using the product". The Consumer Protect-

ion Act, 2019 makes the endorser of a brand liable for a misleading ads. In another development involving brand ambassador, Adani Wilmar has paused all advertisements featuring former Indian skipper Sourav Ganguly, who has been endorsing Fortune Rice Bran Cooking Oil as a 'heart healthy oil'. Ganguly was recently diagnosed with heart ailments. Following criticism on social media, the company said Ganguly will continue as the brand ambassador. "We have only taken a temporary break in our TV commercial till we again sit with him and take things forward," a company official said.

Job postings up in select sectors

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 5

Though some sectors like textiles, telecom and IT and software services have indicated positive growth in new job postings on a month-on-month basis, only retail has seen a growth against last year, according to employment websites. Textiles and garments, telecom, paper, fertilisers and pesticides, IT and software services, tyres and healthcare reported positive growth in new job postings in November against the previous month, according to Naukri JobSpeak. As per the Monster Employment Index, a few more sectors, including FMCG, food and packaged products, retail, BFSI and



home appliances too have seen positive growth. Among them, tyres, paper and banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) indicated good growth over the previous month. However, a majority sectors continued to de-grow in terms of new job postings on a month-on-month basis. None of the sectors reported a year-

on-year growth, as per Naukri JobSpeak. However, Monster.com found retail to have seen some positive growth over the previous year. Defence & government was the worst affected in terms of job postings both in terms of yearly and monthly performance as this sector de-grew by over 30 per cent. The hospitality, airlines, restaurants and travel sector was down by 60 per cent on a yearly basis. However, compared to October, the November postings were less negative. Travel and tourism was the worst-hit in both the surveys. Industrial products and heavy machinery too was down over 30 per cent year-on-year. The unemployment rate,

meanwhile, rose sharply to 9.1 per cent in December 2020, the highest since the beginning of the recovery from the lockdown in June, according to CMIE, a private think-tank. The unemployment rate stood at 10.99 per cent in June 2020. It has been coming down in the subsequent months and had touched 6.5 per cent in November. "The influx of people looking for work swelled. The labour force increased from an estimated 421 million in November to 427 million in December. But, labour markets were not ready for this surge of six million people in the labour market. It thus left them largely unemployed," the report said.

Earnings outlook drives up IT, financial shares

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 5

Stocks from the IT and financial sectors lifted Sensex and Nifty higher, as the market gained for the tenth consecutive session on Tuesday. Despite early morning fall on global cues, the market shrugged off the news of the UK lockdown and the US market fall and recovered along with other Asian markets. The Sensex gained 261 points, or 0.54 per cent, led by financials and IT heavyweights to close at a new record high of 48,437 while the Nifty-50 closed at 14,199.50, gaining 66.60 points, or 0.47 per cent. "The short-term trend of Nifty remains positive. Though intraday profit booking is emerging from the new highs on a daily basis, the strong buying is also being witnessed on dips," said Nagaraj Shetti, analyst-technical research, HDFC Securities. The broader market outperformed; the BSE Midcap Index was up 1.38 per cent while the BSE Smallcap gained 0.71 per cent. The BSE Bankex gained

1.48 per cent, clocking most gain among the sectoral indices. The BSE IT Index gained 1.23 per cent while some sectoral indices registered humble gains of less than a per cent. Bank stocks gained on a positive third quarter business update by HDFC Bank and IndusInd Bank. Metal, auto, oil & gas and realty indices were the losers. "Markets are showing tremendous resilience on every dip but still lack decisiveness. We feel the global Covid situation and progress of the vaccine drive would remain in focus, at least in the near future. On the domestic front, the start of the Q3FY21 earnings season would hold importance as expectations are high this time around, especially for consumption names, as high-frequency indicators have pointed towards a healthy recovery in demand," said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking. Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers by Rs 986.30 crore, indicating a fall in inflows in the last few sessions.

DEEPAK ARM TIES UP FOR HOME DELIVERY OF FERTILISERS



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 5

Smartchem Technologies, a Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation subsidiary, has partnered with AgroStar, an agri-input e-commerce platform, to deliver value-added and differentiated fertilisers directly to the doorsteps of farmers. Under the partnership, farmers can order quality crop nutrition Mahadhan Products home delivered through AgroStar's digital agri-tech platform. "Home delivery of fertilisers can currently be availed by farmers in Maharashtra & Madhya Pradesh, with plans to extend the scope to other geographies in the future," said a joint release.

JEEP TO LAUNCH FOUR NEW SUVs IN TWO YEARS; COMPACT SUV TO FOLLOW

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 5

Jeep, the iconic American sports utility vehicle maker, is investing Rs 1,850 crore or \$250 million to produce four new SUVs over the next two years.

This investment is in addition to about Rs 3,289 crore or \$450 million that it has put in its India operations in five years. "Our new investment of \$250 million will give us a competitive edge in multiple segments with our new

Jeep SUVs rolling out of Ranjangaon factory near Pune," Partha Datta, MD at FCA India, said. He said the four new cars would be launched in India by the end of 2022. While the new Jeep Compass would be introduced on

January 7, the first ever mid-size three-row 7-seat Jeep, codenamed the H6, the iconic Jeep Wrangler and the nextgen Grand Cherokee SUVs would be assembled in Ranjangaon which would drastically reduce the prices.

Audi launches A4 sedan at ₹42.34 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 5

Audi, India's third biggest luxury car maker, has lined up a raft of product launches for this year, as part of its product offensive strategy to boost sales, with models such as the A3, Q3, Q5, Q7, in the Indian market. The German brand, which ruled the roost as numero uno, has its strategy in place for this year to take on rivals

Mercedes-Benz and BMW. Audi is set to launch a new car every other month, but will stick to a petrol-only line-up. On Tuesday it launched the new version of its popular sedan Audi A4 with prices starting at Rs 42.34 lakh. "The fifth generation new Audi A4 is a perfect blend of class, elegance and sporty appeal. The car is equipped with the latest technology," Balbir Singh Dhillon, head of Audi India, said.



GIVING BACK | TO PLANET

Amazon founder launched his Bezos Earth Fund last year

Bezos \$10-bn gift tops 2020 charity list

Silver Spring (US), Jan. 5: The world's richest person made the single-largest charitable contribution in 2020, according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy's annual list of top donations—a \$10 billion gift that is intended to help fight climate change. Amazon's founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos, whose real-time worth Forbes magazine estimates at roughly \$188 billion, used the contribution to launch his Bezos Earth Fund. The fund, which supports non-profits involved in the climate crisis, has paid out \$790 million to 16 groups so far, according to the Chronicle. Setting aside Bezos' whopping gift, the sum

total of the top 10 donations last year, at \$2.6 billion, was the lowest since 2011, even as many billionaires vastly increased their wealth in the stock market rally that catapulted technology shares in particular last year. According to the left-leaning Americans for Tax Fairness and the Institute for Policy Studies, from March 18 through Dec. 7, Bezos' wealth surged by 63 per cent from \$113 billion to \$184 billion. Phil Knight, who with his wife, Penny, made the second- and third-largest donations last year, increased his wealth by about 77 per cent over the same March-to-December period. Knight and his



Jeff Bezos

wife gave more than \$900 million to the Knight Foundation and \$300 million to the University of Oregon. Fred Kummer, founder of construction company HBE Corporation, and his wife, June, gave \$300 million to establish a foundation to support programmes at the Missouri University of Science and

Technology. Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, delivered the fourth-largest donation on the Chronicle's list: A \$250 million gift to the Center for Tech and Civic Life, which worked on voting security issues in the 2020 election. Zuckerberg, whose wealth nearly doubled to \$105 billion in the March-to-December period, according to Americans for Tax Fairness and the Institute for Policy Studies, has been widely criticised and been called to testify before Congress for his company's handling of disinformation in the runup to the 2020 presidential election. In the fifth spot was

Arthur Blank, co-founder of Home Depot, who gave \$200 million through his foundation to Children's healthcare of Atlanta to build a new hospital. Bezos and the Zuckerbergs made up the next spots on last year's top 10 list, with \$100 million donations Bezos for Feeding America to aid food banks across the country and the Zuckerbergs to the same election security group. They were followed by Stephen Ross, founder of real estate firm Related Companies; David Roux, co-founder of Silver Lake Partners, a private-equity firm, and his wife, Barbara and George and Renee Karfunkel, real-estate investors. —AP



## SHORT TAKES

## Saina lambasts badminton body

**Bangkok:** India's Saina Nehwal on Tuesday lashed out at Badminton World Federation for denying the athletes, among other things, access to trainers and physios ahead of the upcoming tournaments in Thailand and urged BWF to address the issues at the earliest.

In a series of tweets, Olympic bronze-medallist Saina expressed her displeasure at the restrictions imposed by BWF as part of its Covid-19 protocols for the bio-security bubble.

"The physios and trainers cannot meet us during the entire tour after all (al) of us have tested negative? @bwfmedia @bwf.ac. 4 weeks of this how is it possible to maintain ourselves. We want to play the tournament in good condition. Please sort this @bwfmedia," Saina tweeted.

With March being the cut-off date for Tokyo Olympics qualification, Saina is worried that the lack of proper training might have an impact on her performance. Saina said she tried contacting the BWF, but to no avail. "Practice only for an hour everyday for the entire team? Gym timings the same... considering March being the important Olympic qualification period this is not good enough to be in good shape."

In another tweet, Saina wrote, "No Time for warm ups / taping / cool downs / stretches..we are talking about the best players in the world competing isn't it?"

"We've spent a lot of money getting the physios and trainers along with us. If they can't help us then why was this not told before?" she added. — PTI

## Djokovic, Nadal to return for ATP Cup

**Sydney:** ATP Cup champion Novak Djokovic and runner-up Rafael Nadal are set to return for the season-opening men's team tennis event starting February 1, but the United States will be missing because of a change in format that has halved the field.

The inaugural event last year featured 24 teams and was played in three Australian cities, with Djokovic's Serbia team beating Nadal and Spain in the final at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena. The second edition will involve 12 teams and be played entirely at Melbourne Park amid Covid-19 restrictions, along with WTA and ATP tournaments, in the week leading into the Australian Open. The draw will be held January 20, with teams divided into four groups. The winner of each round-robin group will advance to the semifinals. — AP

## Bajrang's camp in US gets extension

**New Delhi:** Olympic-bound wrestler Bajrang Punia's training stint in the USA has been granted a one-month extension and will now go on till the first week of February, the Sports Authority of India said on Tuesday. Punia, who qualified for the Tokyo Games in the men's freestyle 65kg category, has been training at Cliff Kean Wrestling Club in Michigan since December 4.

The additional one month training will cost ₹1.65 Lakhs and will be borne by the SAI.

"This decision was taken at the Mission Olympic Cell meeting that took place last week," a press release from SAI said. "All facilities here are available, there is a gym, moreover I am getting very good sparring partners. The college boys who train here are good as well. I am getting access to everything I need to improve my level," Punia said.

— PTI

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

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

**Big Bash League:** Perth Scorchers vs Sydney Sixers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six

## FOOTBALL

**Italian League:** Napoli vs Spezia from 10.30 pm; AC Milan vs Juventus from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

## WWE

**NXT:** Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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## PACERS' PUZZLE

## Shardul, Saini up for 3rd seamer's slot, Rohit replaces Mayank

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** The Indian team management is weighing its options for the third pacer's slot with Shardul Thakur and Navdeep Saini in contention but Rohit Sharma is certain to replace Mayank Agarwal at the top of the order against Australia in the third Test starting here on Thursday.

While Agarwal's axing was only a matter of time after seven failures in last eight Test innings, the choice for the third pacer's slot has got a bit tricky with divergent opinions emerging on who could fit the role best in absence of an injured Umesh Yadav.

A few days back, Mumbai seamer and useful lower-order batsman Shardul Thakur was considered a favourite but it is learnt that there are some senior players, who feel that Saini, India's fastest bowler by a distance, could be used to unsettle the wobbly Australian batting line-up with his raw pace.

The Indian team had a net session at the overcast Sydney Cricket Ground on the day and all eyes were on Rohit Sharma, who looked pretty comfortable against both pace and spin.

The decision on the third pacer has been primarily delayed because on Tuesday, the SCG centre strip was covered due to overcast conditions.

On Wednesday, a look at the strip and the conditions will probably help them make a decisive choice.

If the conditions are overcast and there is bit more moisture on the strip, then Thakur is expected to be preferred.

If the track is on the flatter side, Saini, with his pace and ability to reverse the old ball, could prove to be a handful against a batting order that is struggling to put up even 200 runs on the board.

If Saini plays, it will be his debut in the longest format while for Thakur, it would be like a debut as he couldn't even finish his first over when it was officially his debut two years back.

There is a third angle to



Indian pacer Mohammed Siraj (left) talks to teammate Navdeep Saini during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday, ahead of their third Test against Australia. — AFP

the pacer's debate and that is T. Natarajan, who has had a meteoric rise in the past four months.

— PTI

**India expected squad** (from 12 in batting order): Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane (captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Mohammed Siraj, Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur/Navdeep Saini.

## RAHUL OUT OF SERIES WITH SPRAINED WRIST

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** India batsman K.L. Rahul was on Tuesday ruled out of the remaining two Tests against Australia after sustaining a wrist injury during training in Melbourne, the BCCI said.

Rahul had not played any match of the ongoing series in which the third Test starts on Thursday here. "KL Rahul sprained his left wrist while batting in the nets at the MCG during Team India's practice session on Saturday," the BCCI said in a statement.

"The wicketkeeper-batsman will not be available for the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as he will need about three weeks time to recover completely and regain full strength," it added.

It has been learnt that the stylish right-hander suffered a sprain while facing one of the three throw-down specialists at the nets and had to call off his training session.

— PTI

## Langer hopeful of Warner return, Pucovski to debut

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** A 'warrior' that he is, David Warner has done everything to be ready and is likely to compete in the third Test against India, Australia head coach Justin Langer said on Tuesday and assured that lack of four-day cricket for the opener in the last few months is not a concern.

Langer also announced that young batsman Will Pucovski will make his Test debut on Thursday.

Both Warner and Pucovski, who was primed for Test debut in Adelaide, missed the first two Tests of the series due to a groin injury and concussion-related issues respectively.

"Very hopeful that David will be ready to go (for the third Test), he is a bit of a warrior, isn't he? I have said this since



Australia's David Warner (left) and Will Pucovski jog at a training session in Sydney on Tuesday. — AFP

day one that he is doing everything possible to be ready," Langer said at a virtual conference.

"He is moving pretty well. He is very determined to play. He loves the competition and he loves playing Test cricket.

— PTI

## Aussie coach lauds 'disciplined' India

**Sydney, Jan. 5:** The series is level for now but Australia coach Justin Langer on Tuesday said India have been distinctly well-planned and disciplined, especially in bowling, so far even as his side races to address their batting woes ahead of the third Test.

Asked about Australia's low-scoring in the current series and if that is a concern, Langer cited various factors, the biggest being India's lethal accuracy with the ball.

"...their greatest strength over the last couple of series has been their discipline. They (India) have been so well disciplined...I have loved the last two Tests because the wickets have been a contest between bat and ball and you have got to work a bit harder and that is what Test cricket is all about," Langer said.

According to Langer, a former opening batsman, India have taken a straighter line to couple of their batters and have accordingly placed their fields.

"So, I think, there is the factor of the wickets that we have played on, there is certainly some seam movement, there was a little bit of swing in both those wickets. India have (has) taken a straighter line to a couple of our batters and set the fields accordingly."

He also praised India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin for his performance so far saying it is difficult to score quickly against great bowlers.

"The great bowlers are the ones who are hard to score against and (Jasprit) Bumrah is certainly up there at the moment, Ashwin is up there at the moment, we are aware of it," he said. — PTI

## Saints add to leaders Liverpool's misery

**Southampton, Jan. 5:** Liverpool failed to win for the third consecutive Premier League game as Danny Ings's second-minute goal earned Southampton a 1-0 win at St. Mary's on Monday.

The English champions remain top of the table on goal difference over Manchester United, but have now played a game more than the Red Devils.

Southampton are only four points off the top as they moved up to sixth in a tightly bunched division with just seven points separating Liverpool from West Ham in 10th.

A famous win continued a fine season so far for the Saints.

A first league defeat in

three months may hasten Liverpool's search for a centre-back in the January transfer window.

Without the injured Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip, Klopp started two of his first-choice midfielders from their title-winning campaign, Fabinho and Jordan Henderson, together at the heart of his defence.

Southampton had not scored in their last three games to temper their hopes of a push for European football, but took just two minutes to break the deadlock in style through former Liverpool striker Ings.

Liverpool did not deal with James Ward-



Southampton's Danny Ings (right) celebrates after scoring against Liverpool in an EPL match on Monday. — AP

Prowse's angled free-kick into the box and Ings perfectly hooked his shot over Alisson Becker into the far corner. Southampton had key absentees themselves with goalkeeper Alex McCarthy missing due to a positive test for coronavirus, while Oriol Romeu, Jannik

Vestergaard and Che Adams were out injured.

Fraser Forster was making his first Saints appearance since May 2019, but the former England international was rarely tested to earn his clean sheet.

The visitors could easily have found themselves 2-0 down before the break when Southampton substitute Nathan Tella was inches away from his first senior goal with a curling effort from the edge of the area that flew just wide.

If Reds were too passive in the first-half, they started the second-half with the intensity they have made their trademark in recent seasons as Saints were pinned inside their own half. — AFP

## Kane's double ton puts Pak in shade

**Christchurch** (New Zealand), Jan. 5: Kane Williamson underscored his ranking as the world's premier batsman with a masterful double century as New Zealand took control of the second Test against Pakistan on Tuesday.

In between the showers at Hagley Oval in Christchurch, Williamson was in classic form, batting for nine hours 33 minutes for his 238 and leading New Zealand to an imposing 659 for six declared to lead Pakistan by 362.

At stumps on day three, the tourists were already in trouble at eight for one, with Kyle Jamieson adding to his five-wicket haul in the first innings by removing Shan Masood for a duck.

It was a relentless performance from Williamson, who became only the second New Zealander after Brendon McCullum to score four double centuries.

Daryl Mitchell, who wondered if he would ever get a bat while Williamson was at the crease, described his skipper as "a freak who's set us up with a chance to win".

Williamson delayed the declaration until Mitchell completed his maiden century and the all-rounder said despite his unbeaten 102 off 112 balls it remained a good pitch for the bowlers and should produce a result.

"If we put it in the right areas and bang those hard

● **It was a relentless performance from Kane Williamson, who became only the second New Zealander after Brendon McCullum to score four double centuries.**

lengths, there is a lot of pace there and hopefully we can put Pakistan under some pressure and see what happens," he said.

Williamson should have been out for 177 on the first ball after the first of two rain stoppages, but as has happened several times in the Test the chance was put down, this time by Azhar Ali, who earlier in the day had dropped Henry Nicholls short of his century.

Pakistan spinner Zafar Gohar, who went for an expensive 159 off 32 overs on debut, said the fielding errors hurt.

"The dropped catches cost us. There is no reason to drop catches but it happens in cricket," he said.

"Dropping Kane Williamson cost us a lot of big runs."

Williamson and Nicholls had rebuilt the innings after New Zealand were reduced to 71 for three on Monday's second day.

— AFP  
**Brief scores: Pakistan 297 & 8/1** (Abid 7 batting, Abbas 1 batting, Jamieson 1/1) trail **New Zealand 659/6 decl.** (Williamson 237, Nicholls 157, Mitchell 102 not out).



New Zealand's Kane Williamson en route to his 237 against Pakistan on Day Three of their second Test at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Tuesday. — AP

## SA clinch series as Lankans fade

**Johannesburg, Jan. 5:** South Africa beat Sri Lanka by 10 wickets inside three days in the second and final Test on Tuesday to clinch the series 2-0 and gain some revenge for a surprise loss to the Sri Lankans the last time they toured.

South Africa bowled Sri Lanka out for 211 in their second innings at the start of the day at the Wanderers, leaving the Proteas with a simple target of 67 to win.

South Africa got there without losing a wicket. Aiden Markram was 36 not out and Dean Elgar 31 not out.

Sri Lanka's hopes faded when captain Dimuth Karunaratne was out soon after making a century. Karunaratne led their resistance in the second innings with his 103 but he went less than five overs into the day, and with his exit Sri Lanka lost their last six wickets for 35 runs.

Pace bowler Lungi Ngidi finished with 4/44 for South Africa.

Sri Lanka started the day 150-4, with Karunaratne on 91, and had hopes of set-

ting South Africa a reasonably challenging target on a difficult Johannesburg pitch for batsmen.

The tourists weren't able to do that as Karunaratne fell early trying a pull shot off fast bowler Anrich Nortje. He succeeded only in looping a catch to Wiaan Mulder. His overnight partner Niroshan Dickwella was out four balls later and Lanka's resistance faded.

South Africa's run chase was relatively untroubled.

Markram was given out in the over before lunch to a catch in the slips by Kusal Mendis but that decision was overturned when video replays showed the ball touched the ground as Mendis took it low down.

South Africa completed a first Test series win in two years and since beating Pakistan in early 2019. A month later, they were shocked to lose 2-0 at home to Sri Lanka, who became the first Asian team to win a Test series in South Africa. — AP

**Brief scores: Sri Lanka 157 & 211** (Karunaratne 103, Ngidi 4/44) lost to **South Africa 302 & 67/0** (Markram 36 not out).