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WINDOWS



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena stand for a photograph after a meeting in Colombo on Wednesday

Democrats win 1 Senate seat in Georgia, lead in another

NEW YORK: In the runoff elections from Georgia that will determine the future of the US Senate, a Democratic Party candidate won one of the two seats on Wednesday morning and another had a with a razor-thin lead in the other. A Christian priest, Rafael Warnock, who is the Democratic Party's candidate, defeated the Republican incumbent Kelly Loeffler by 1 per cent of the votes in the elections held on Tuesday.

Central team in Kerala to review Covid situation

NEW DELHI: The Centre on Wednesday said that a high-level team has been deployed to Kerala to review the public health interventions in management of Covid-19 by the state government and support the health authorities in these measures. The team will be headed by National Centre for Disease Control Director, Dr S.K. Singh. Kerala has been reporting very high daily new coronavirus cases since the past few days. A total of 35,038 new cases were logged during the last seven days.

BUSINESS



Services sector hits slow lane in Dec

P6

SPORTS



'Ashwin's knack for learning new things'

P8



DEADLOCK OVER FARMERS' STIR

SC EXPRESSES CONCERN, TO TAKE UP MATTER ON JAN 11

NEW DELHI

EXPRESSING its concern over the deadlock on farm stir, the Supreme Court on Wednesday pointed out to the Union government that there had been no breakthrough in the impasse between the Centre and thousands of farmers standing firm on their demands to repeal three controversial agricultural laws and to provide legal backing for minimum support price (MSP).

"The situation has no improvement at all," Chief Justice of India Sharad A Bobde told Attorney General K K Venugopal and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, the two top law officers of the country, during a virtual court hearing.

The Apex court said it will hear on January 11 a batch of pleas challenging the new farm laws as well as the issues related to the ongoing farmers' protest at Delhi borders.

The Attorney General said there is a good chance that parties may come to a conclusion in the near future and filing of response by the Centre on the pleas challenging the new farm laws might foreclose the negotiations between the farmers and government.

While informing the bench that talks are going



on between the government and farmers in a "healthy atmosphere", Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said that these matters should not be listed for hearing on January 8.

After hearing Venugopal and Mehta, the top court ad-

journd the matter for Monday. "We understand the situation and encourage consultation. We can adjourn the matters on Monday (January 11) if you submit the same due to the ongoing consultation process," the bench said. **Continued on P5**

Wisconsin Assembly Speaker backs farmers' protests

NEW DELHI: Voicing his support for the farmers' protest in India, the Speaker of Wisconsin State Assembly has urged the Indian government to reconsider its decision on the three farm laws and listen to the concerns of the affected farmers. Robin J Vos expressed his support through a letter to India's Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu.

Continued on P5



Youths from the farmers families raising slogans during farmers protest against the new farm laws

Braving rain, farmers threaten to intensify stir

NEW DELHI

CAMPING at protest venues near Delhi borders for around 40 days, braving severe cold and sporadic rain, farmers have asserted that their stir against the farm laws will intensify in the coming days, even as they deferred Wednesday's proposed tractor march over a bad weather forecast.

The deadlock continues as the seventh round of talks with the Centre remained inconclusive, with the farmer groups sticking to their demand for the repeal of the three new laws,

and the government listing out various benefits of the new Acts.

The national capital, meanwhile, reels under a spell of harsh winter. The city woke up on Wednesday to the rumble of thunder and the sound of hailstones hitting rooftops and windows as it received rain for the fourth consecutive day.

The rain, caused by a strong western disturbance, comes on the back of a "severe" cold wave that gripped Delhi in the run-up to New Year. On Friday, the mercury had plummeted to 1.1 degrees

Celsius, the lowest in 15 years for January.

On Tuesday, the protesting farmers said they were deferring their proposed tractor march from January 6 to January 7 due to a bad weather forecast.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana and some other parts of the country have been camping at several Delhi border points since November 28, demanding repeal of the farm laws, a legal guarantee on minimum support price for their crops and other two issues.

Continued on P5

Schools told to implement new school bag policy

PURNA SINGH
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi government has directed the schools in the national capital to implement the new school bag policy to reduce the weight of school bags and the burden of students as per the guidelines issued on December 3, 2020. As per the suggestions,

which are in line with the new National Education Policy (NEP), the weight of school bags for students between classes 1-10 should not be more than 10 per cent of their body weight. "Heavy school

bags are a serious threat to the health and well-being of school students. These have adverse physical effects on the growing children which can cause damage to their

vertebral column and knees. "Moreover, in the schools which are functioning in double or multi storey buildings, children have to climb the stairs with heavy school bags which further aggravates the problem," the Directorate of Education (DoE) said in a letter to school principals.

Continued on P5

BIG BOOST TO DRDO

India, Israel successfully test air defence system

NEW DELHI

IN a major push to India's defence capabilities, India and Israel have successfully tested a Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) defence system. This missile defence system, developed jointly to deal with airstrikes by enemy countries, was tested last week.

The new development by the DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) is unique in itself and will



greatly improve the combat capabilities of the two countries.

MRSAM is an air and missile defence system that provides imprecise

defence cover to a variety of aerial platforms. According to defence experts, MRSAM can destroy enemy aircraft from a distance of 50 to 70 km.

Developed in partnership with Israel and India, MRSAM will be used in all three wings of the Indian Army. Israel's security forces will also use it. The high-tech radar, mobile launcher, interceptor, and the advanced RF seeker present in it utilise new technology. The command

and control system of the defence system is also excellent.

Taking to Twitter, the Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) wrote: "IAI and DRDO successfully test launch the MRSAM air defence system last week at a test range in India. The MRSAM is an advanced path-breaking air and missile defence system that provides ultimate protection against a variety of aerial platforms."

Continued on P5



A medic conducts the dry run of Covid-19 vaccine on North Delhi Municipal Corporation Mayor Jai Prakash, at Hindu Rao Hospital in New Delhi on Wednesday

Second dry run of Covid vaccine at 2 Delhi hospitals

PURNA SINGH
NEW DELHI

SECOND dry run of coronavirus vaccine was undertaken on Wednesday at Hindurao and Kasturba Maternity Hospitals of North Delhi Municipal Corporation. As many as 34 employees took part in the Wednesday's vaccination drive. For this, preparations by the municipal corporation were completed on Tuesday itself.

The central zone of the district administration has to run dry run on more than 60 centres on Wednesday. Northern Corporation Mayor Jayaprakash said that the Corporation's hospitals are fully prepared for the Corona vaccine.

He said that the guidelines issued by the Union Health Ministry in the dry run of the Corona vaccine are being fully followed. In this process, the process of applying vaccine to the people is being adopted in the same way that the procedure is prescribed for the actual vaccination.

Significantly, even before this, Hindurao Hospital was declared as Covid Hospital. However, the hospital was later restored to normal services in view of the low number of patients.

Another nationwide vaccine dry run tomorrow

NEW DELHI: Ahead of the roll-out of coronavirus vaccine in few days, another dry-run will be conducted across the country on January 8.

On January 2, almost

all states and Union Territory conducted dry run at 285 session sites spread across 125 districts to assess ability and readiness of

authorities to administer shots to hundreds of millions of people, including many in remote corners of the country. It was conducted to test the end-to-end planned operations and the mechanism that has been set up to ensure smooth conduct of the Covid-19 vaccination.

On December 28 and 29, the first dry run was conducted in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, Rajkot and Gandhinagar district of Gujarat, Ludhiana and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar of Punjab and Sonitpur and Nalbari districts of Assam.

The Central government plans to vaccinate nearly 30 crore people in the first phase of drive. It will be offered to one crore healthcare workers, along with 2 crore front-line and essential workers and 27 crore elderly, mostly above the age of 50 years with co-morbidities.

The Health Ministry on Tuesday announced that vaccination drive will be rolled-out by January 13.



Heavy rain, hailstorm hit several parts of Delhi

PURNA SINGH
NEW DELHI

MANY parts of Delhi and NCR witnessed heavy rains and hailstorm on Wednesday. This information was given by the India Meteorological Department (IMD). It said heavy rains and wind are likely to continue for some time in Delhi-NCR.

"Hailstorm was witnessed in several parts of the city

around 7.30 am on Wednesday," an IMD update read. Delhi and parts of NCR have been receiving rain over the past three days because of the impact of a passing Western Disturbance. Scientists said that this Western Disturbance was the most intense one to have crossed the city over the past few months.

Continued on P5

Punjab to reopen schools from today

CHANDIGARH: Punjab School Education Minister VijayINDER Singla on Wednesday said the state government has decided to reopen all government, semi-government and private schools from Thursday.

From Jan 11 in Gujarat

GANDHINAGAR: Taking a brave and according to some a hasty decision, the Gujarat government on Wednesday announced that it has decided to reopen schools for classes 10th and 12th and colleges in the state from January 11.

From Jan 18 in Rajasthan

JAIPUR: As the number of Covid patients continued to take a downward shift, the Rajasthan government has announced to open the schools, colleges and coaching centres in the state from January 18.

Allowing 100 per cent occupancy in theatres

Centre asks TN to revoke order

NEW DELHI

THE Union government on Tuesday shot off a stern letter to the Tamil Nadu government, asking them to revoke their move of allowing 100 per cent occupancy in theatres. The State government made the move after a meeting between Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami and actor Vijay recently.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), in its letter to the Tamil Nadu government, has directed them to

revoke the order. The Union Home Secretary wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu, which reads that states cannot dilute the Centre's guidelines under the Disaster Management Act 2005. The Centre reminded the Tamil Nadu government that states need to strictly adhere and enforce the government guidelines which have been effective since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a lockdown announced on March 24 last year.

Continued on P5

Womenia

PICKLES: THE SUPERHERO OF YOUR MEAL

While the rest of the world has just awakened to the miraculous benefits of pickles, our ancestors had perfected this art of preservation, centuries ago



Naini Setalvad



Who knew that a little bit of spice, salt and sunshine could result in one of the most delicious condiments. While the rest of the world has just awakened to the miraculous benefits of pickles; our ancestors had perfected this art of preservation, centuries ago. Though I enjoy these fermented goodies all year round, summer and winters are the two major seasons for pickling. As we are right in the midst of winter, it is time to bring out your jars, clean up your produce and read along as to why you should be pickling away.

Firm about fermentation - I am a firm believer that fermented foods need to be part of our daily diet. In our gut reside numerous

microbes that feed and grow on the food we eat. A healthy population of good microbes fight off infections and gastric disturbances. Constipation, flatulence and other such issues can be attributed to poor levels of good bacteria. Fermented foods have these microorganisms in abundance and that is precisely why they are a staple on my table.

Veggie delight - Even my fussiest clients, young nieces and nephews cannot say no to pickles. Pickles are a great way to get in those vegetables that you are usually reluctant to have. Cauliflower, carrots, turnips beetroot, lemon, radish with fresh turmeric root, ginger as well as green chilli etc. can be made into delectable pickles

Gut - brain connection - Ever felt irritable when you

have had an upset stomach? It is probably because the gut and the brain are connected. An imbalanced gut micro-biome can hamper your mental peace. In fact, it is one of the factors that lead to depression, anxiety and other mental disorders. Wondering how to cure this? One of the cures may be your pickles add them at every meal.

Spice and herbs - Pickles are often seen as condiments that enhance flavour and rightfully so. Full of spices like turmeric, cumin, asafoetida, chilli, coriander seeds, mustard etc. these give the much needed anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory dose.

I like to accompany turmeric, ginger and chilli pickle along with my meals. These act as digestive aids. No wonder they are traditionally

paired with flatulence inducing whole pulses.

Eat it right - I know you are now abreast with why pickles are wonderful but are you eating them right? I prefer the homemade variety where I can control the amount of oil. Cold pressed oils are the best carriers for all the phytochemical compounds. Pickling in lemon with sea salt is the easiest way to ferment food.

Chutneys and podis - Too give that extra anti-oxidant boost to your pickles, add on the numerous chutneys and podis that we have at our disposal. I love my haldi - amla chutney and my neem - sesame podi.

Don't think of your condiments as the sidekicks. They pretty much are the superheroes of your meals.

Style your best with turtleneck sweaters

When it comes to a winning marriage of chic and cozy, nothing beats the turtleneck. The versatile basic is without a doubt the unsung hero of our cold-weather wardrobes. Whether you opt for a thick, chunky sweater or a tissue-thin form-fitted turtleneck to layer, they unquestionably add an air of sophistication to every outfit. A simple black turtleneck is striking in its simplicity; when worn in a colorful print or color, it can add a bold statement to your outfit.

trousers and do not forget to latch on a big buckle belt. Put a charismatic blazer on and witness the

chic outcome of the turtleneck which is embraced beyond the collars of your regular formal shirts. You can also try the same with a 2 piece suit.

Courageous cargos

A turtleneck sweater's versatility can be stretched up to great extent. Combine your day-in cargo pants with a solid turtleneck sweater, wrap a fanny pack around your waist and finish off with solid Chelsea/Lita or Combat boots to get a trendy & hip look.

Skirt consort

Winter styling can be challenging given the tough love of the weather. To overcome the hesitant sensation of wearing skirts in winter, buy skirts online to style a solid colored turtleneck with a printed skirt or vice versa. Brace the whole outfit with stockings or thongs which will not only help you combat the cooling chills but will keep you classy as well!

Women's turtleneck sweaters have become a game changer in today's fashion domain. The ways you can pour out the style artist in you by styling clothes today is beyond limits. So go on, push yourself and create a tasteful masterpiece today!

Here's a list of trendy ways you can style your turtleneck sweater

Summer thang

Reusing your summer clothes can be a grand favor to the environment and your wardrobe space as well. So take out your summer slip dress and get ready to ignite the power of winter knitwear. Wear a contrasting solid colored turtleneck sweater beneath it.

Blazer flavour

In places of cardigans today, turtlenecks are proving to be more in vogue. How? It's pretty simple actually. All you gotta do is put your turtleneck on and tuck in the bottom wear say tapered



Trisha Krishnan on how she manages a work-life balance

PUJA GUPTA

Trisha Krishnan, one of South Indian cinema's most popular and sought-after heroines, says she is fortunate to have reached a position where she chooses the kind of work she does.

"Hence, I make sure to take few days off every month to travel, rest and recuperate. These days off give me time to come back home and rejuvenate for my next shoot," she reveals.

In an interview, Trishna, who recently collaborated with Britannia Toastea to star in its latest TVC campaign alongside Bollywood

For women, workload and responsibilities have increased further in the last nine months, believes the Tollywood actress

veteran Neena Gupta, shares more about her day-to-day life, her diet and fitness regime. Read on:

What is your daily diet ?

My daily diet includes fruit bowl and vegetables. I also believe in intermittent fasting. I occasionally enjoy a cheat meal but also make sure to compensate every time. A good-clean-healthy-moderated-balanced diet is my mantra.

What's your fitness regime?

I manage to work-out regularly despite having a hectic schedule. Yoga, functional fitness and cardio are my favourites as they calm my mind from the stress of hectic shoots.

How do you ensure a work and personal life balance?

I work while I work, play while I play. In this kind of profession, we lead hectic and erratic lives. I'm fortunate to have reached a position

where I choose the kind of work I do. Hence, I make sure to take few days off every month to travel, rest and recuperate. These few days off give me time to come back home and rejuvenate for my next shoot.

Tell us about your collaboration with Britannia for this campaign.

This is my first association with Britannia Toastea and I am very excited to be a part of this

campaign. Britannia Toastea is the perfect tea-time companion and gives a jump start to our day, which is exactly what we have attempted to show through this new campaign. For me and many our women across the country, the first cup of tea with a Britannia Toastea busts hunger and gives our day a "Karari Shuruwat".

The new campaign is fun, quirky that also features (Gupta) Neena

Ma'am playing a lively and understanding sassu maa in the film and I am her daughter-in-law tackling multiple tasks through the day. The TVC showcases the many roles a woman plays in the household, a PT teacher to her son, manager to her husband and a doctor to her in-laws and to give her the "Karari Shuruwat" every morning, Britannia Toastea becomes the perfect hunger buster with her morning tea.

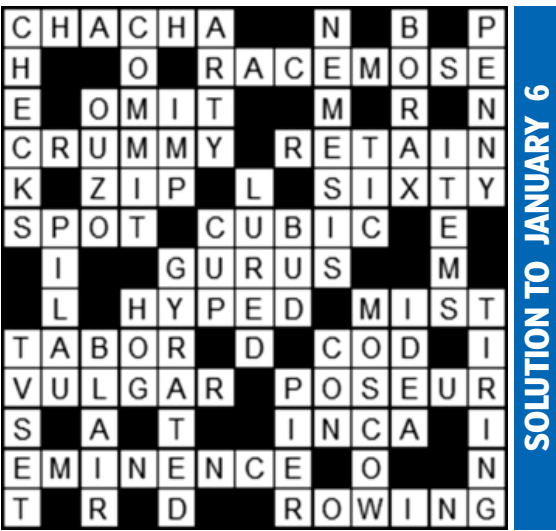
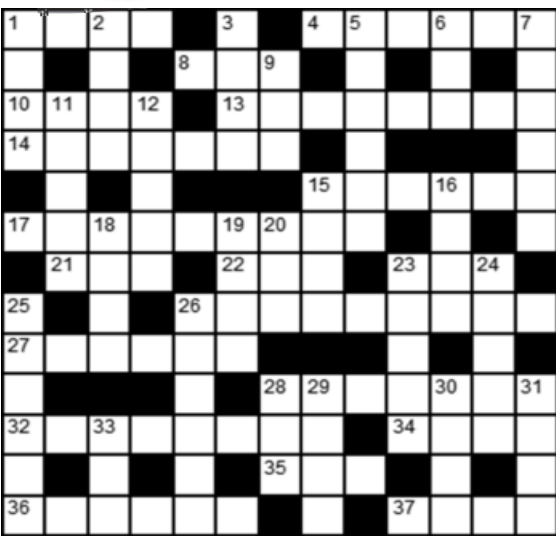
How was it working with Bollywood veteran Neena Gupta?

It was lovely working with Neena ma'am, she is humble and down to earth.

We had a great time shooting together.

What advice do you have for working women?

As a woman, we have multiple roles to play through the day. The workload and responsibilities have increased further in the last nine months. Most women start their day on an empty stomach letting the morning hunger define the tune of their day. All the superwomen of every home need a 'karari shuruwat' - which should be a perfect balance of taste and wholesome goodness with their morning cup of tea to handle all the roles they play perfectly.



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 6

CROSSWORD

Across

- Type of pastry (4)
- Reviled (6)
- Anatomical pouch (3)
- Slanting (4)
- New Year's Eve (8)
- Burdensome (7)
- Timed out (6)
- Fourth day of the week (9)
- Pull laboriously (3)
- Piece of advice (3)
- Staff (3)
- Harshly ridiculed (9)
- Knapsack (6)
- Ponderous (7)
- Drive faster! (4,2,2)
- Mirthful sound (2-2)
- Staying power or pluck (3)
- Sift flour, say, with these (6)
- Copies slavishly ? (4)

Down

- Mexican coin (4)
- Run off (4)
- Island of Hawaii (4)
- Mumbai's old name ? (6)
- Moral offence (3)
- Wood nymphs (6)
- Lettuce variety (3)
- Get down to pray (5)
- Mistaken (5)
- North European (4)
- The city of Jerusalem (4)
- Allergy irritant (4)
- Doe's mate (4)
- Not bright (3)
- Coarse (5)
- Demise (5)
- Tsarist edicts (6)
- Pakistani city (6)
- Hairpiece (3)
- Needle-case (4)
- Musical instrument (4)
- Asian oxen (4)
- Needle feature (3)

SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 6

NEWS ROUNDUP

Deepika Padukone: Journey has been nothing short of incredible

Bollywood star Deepika Padukone is thankful for the wishes she got on her 35th birthday recently. She says the journey has been nothing short of incredible.

Deepika, who celebrated her birthday on January 5, posted a video collage on Instagram, with a collage capturing her childhood days, modelling stint, debut as an actor, and marriage to Ranveer Singh among other events of her life.

"The journey has been nothing short of incredible and for that I've got my family, friends and all of you to thank!" Deepika captioned the image. The actress entered Bollywood with a double role in Farah Khan's 2007 Diwali blockbuster 'Om Shanti Om' starring Shah Rukh Khan.

Ranveer and Deepika reportedly started dating in 2012. The two have starred together in films such as "Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela", "Bajirao Mastani" and "Padmaavat". In 2018, the couple tied the knot in November at Lake Como, Italy.

Deepika has just concluded shooting Shakun Batra's upcoming yet-untitled next. The film also stars Siddhant Chaturvedi and Ananya Panday. She will also be seen in an untitled film with Amitabh Bachchan and Prabhas, and she appears in "83" starring hubby Ranveer.



69,000 birds culled in Kerala; MP bans chicken import

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/BHOPAL/
THANE/CHANDIGARH/JAIPUR

OVER 69,000 birds including ducks and chicken were culled in the districts of Alappuzha and Kottayam to contain the H5N8 strain of bird flu, Kerala Animal Husbandry Minister K Raju said on Wednesday.

The Minister said 19 Rapid Response Teams have been engaged in culling birds in both the districts and the regions suspected to have infected the birds will be sanitised on Thursday.

However, it's possible that the virus may mutate. So we have to remain alert," Raju told reporters. He said the ban on sale of bird meat and eggs in these regions will continue.

"The state cabinet which met today has decided to compensate the farmers for culling their birds. Culled birds which are over two-month-old will be given Rs 200 each and those under the age of two-months will be compensated at Rs 100 each," the minister said.

He also said eggs destroyed due to avian flu will be given a compensation of Rs 5 each. The minister said 61,513 birds including ducks and chicken have been culled in Alappuzha while 7,729 were culled in Kottayam.

Culling of ducks, hens and other domestic birds in and around one km radius of the affected areas in Alappuzha and Kottayam districts will be conducted as per the guidelines issued by the government.

Madhya Pradesh will not allow entry to



chicken consignments from Kerala and other southern states for next 10 days in view of the bird flu scare in MP, State Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said.

Chouhan also said his government was issuing directives to ban the transportation of chicken consignments from these states to the border districts of Madhya Pradesh.

The Centre said Avian Influenza, or the bird flu outbreak, has been reported at 12 epicentres in four states -- Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh -- and advisories have been issued to contain further spread of the infection in poultry ducks, crows and migratory birds.

Other states have been asked to keep a vigil on any unusual mortality amongst birds. The current bird flu outbreak is reported barely a few months after India in

September 30, 2020 declared the country free from the disease.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot instructed officials to maintain special vigil in view of death of crows and other birds due to avian influenza.

Four birds were found dead at Sukhna Lake and its surrounding areas of Chandigarh, officials said on Wednesday.

As many as 15 pond herons were found dead under mysterious circumstances at a housing complex in Maharashtra's Thane city on Wednesday, a civic official said. The birds were found dead at Vijay Vatrika Housing Complex in Waghbil area of Ghodbunder Road around 3.24 pm, said Santosh Kadam, chief of the regional disaster management cell of the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC).

69% INDIANS HESITANT TO TAKE CORONA VACCINE

NEW DELHI

The Drugs controller General of India (DCGI), on Sunday, announced approval of two vaccines -- Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin -- against coronavirus infection for restricted emergency use.

The survey conducted by 'LocalCircles' in January has concluded that Indians' hesitancy over Covid-19 vaccines remains unchanged in November and December 2020, with 69 per cent maintaining that they will not rush to take it. To the question that received 8,723 responses, only 26 per cent of citizens said that they will get it as soon as it becomes available via private or any healthcare channels, while five per cent said they are for health or frontline workers and will get themselves vaccinated on priority through government channels.

The survey result indicated that the hesitancy of citizens remains unchanged at 69 per cent unwilling to take it despite two vaccines receiving the regulator's green signal for vaccination. India's drug regulator has reportedly given the green signal to Bharat Biotech's Covaxin for administration on children above 12 years old. When LocalCircles asked parents: "If the Covid-19 vaccine is made available for school children, would you consider giving it to your child or grandchild?" Only 26 per cent Indian parents approved of their children receiving the vaccine if it is made available by April 2021, or before school session.



WHO team probing virus denied entry to China

LONDON

A World Health Organisation (WHO) team due to investigate the origins of Covid-19 in the city of Wuhan has been denied entry to China. Two members were already en route, with the WHO saying the problem was a lack of visa clearances. However, China has challenged this, saying details of the visit, including dates, were still being arranged. The long-awaited probe was agreed

upon by Beijing after many months of negotiations with the WHO.

The virus was first detected in Wuhan in late 2019, with the initial outbreak linked to a market.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was "very disappointed" that China had not yet finalised the permissions for the team's arrivals "given that two members had already begun their journeys and others were not able to travel at the last minute".

4 workers die due to gas leak in Rourkela Steel Plant

BHUBANESWAR

AT least four workers died on Wednesday and a few others fell ill after inhaling a toxic gas leaked from a unit at Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) of the state-run SAIL in Odisha, official sources said. The mishap took place at a coal chemical department facility in the morning when 10 workers were on duty there, they said.

"The four contractual workers, engaged by a private company, felt unwell at 9 am, following which they were taken to a health facility of the plant and later admitted to the ICU of the Ispat General Hospital where they died," the RSP officials said.

The four deceased were identified as Ganesh Chandra Paila (55), Rabindra Sahu (59), Abhimanyu Sah (33) and Bramhananda Panda (51). According to a preliminary report, the four workers died due to carbon monoxide gas leak from the unit, the officials said, adding that some others, who also fell ill after inhaling the toxic gas,

Anganwadi worker gang-raped, killed

BUDAUN

A 50-year-old anganwadi worker was gang-raped and murdered allegedly by a priest and his two accomplices in Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh, triggering an opposition's outcry and a comparison with Delhi's 2012 Nirbhaya case.

While the priest is on the run, his two accomplices were arrested on Tuesday night after the post-mortem report confirmed rape, police said on Wednesday, adding the woman's leg and a rib bone too were found fractured and there were injuries in her private parts.

Taking cognisance of the incident, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered "strongest possible action" in the case even as opposition parties attacked his government, terming the incident "horrific" and "shameful", with the Congress comparing it to the Nirbhaya incident of 2012.

The National Commission for Women too took note of the incident and de-

cided to send a team of its members to probe the incident.

About the incident, Badaun's Senior Superintendent of Police Sankalp Sharma said, "The post-mortem report confirms rape and there are injuries in

her private parts and a fracture in the leg." The Congress has attacked the Uttar Pradesh government. As per reports, the crime was committed when the woman had gone to a temple to offer prayers.

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi said on Twitter: "In Hathras the government machinery did not listen to the victims, saved offi-

cers and suppressed voices... in Badaun the Station Incharge of the police did not listen to the victim's plea, did not visit the crime scene. There is something wrong in the UP government's intentions on women's security".



Beware of fake 'CoWIN' apps, warns Centre

NEW DELHI

THE Union Health Ministry on Wednesday asked people not to download or register on several fraudulent applications named 'CoWIN' which are available on app-stores.

"Some apps named 'CoWIN' apparently created by unscrupulous elements to sound similar to the upcoming official platform of the government are on app-stores," the Health Ministry alerted.

The ministry added, "Do not download or share personal information on these. The MoHFW official platform will be adequately publicised on its launch."

Short for 'COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network' application, the CoWIN app will be used to manage and scale up the massive vaccination drive which is soon to be rolled out in the country.

The application will not only help the government coordinate the massive inoculation process, but also come to the aid of health authorities monitor coronavirus vaccines in real-time.

It is slated to be launched for the public soon. Beneficiaries would be able to register themselves after uploading identification documents like Aadhaar card, driving licence, PAN and bank passbook, among others.

Top court to examine validity of 'love jihad' law in UP, U'khand

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday declined to stay the provisions of an Uttar Pradesh Ordinance and an Uttarakhand law, brought to checking unlawful religious conversions for inter-faith marriages.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S. A. Bobde agreed to examine the validity of legislations, 'The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion Of Religion Ordinance, 2020' and the 'Uttarakhand Freedom Of Religion Act, 2018', and issued notice to the two state governments. The top court has sought response within four weeks.

The counsel petitioners - Vishal Thakre and others, and NGO Citizens for Justice and Peace - during the hearing stressed for a stay on these 'love jihad' laws and termed the provisions as "oppressive" and "obnoxious".

Senior advocate C.U. Singh, representing one of the petitioners, submitted that it is obnoxious to put burden of proof on the married couple to establish that the motivation for the marriage is not conversion. Singh cited that several incidents have come on record where mobs have disrupted inter-faith marriages and also cited the severe punishment under these laws. Another counsel for a petitioner cited that similar legislation is on the way in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana. Singh alleged that several innocent persons had been arrested based on UP Ordinance against 'love jihad'. He cited that the offence under this law has a sentence of up to 10 years and it is also non-bailable offence. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submitted that the Allahabad High Court is already seized of the matter.



Covid-19: Grammy Awards postponed to March 14

LOS ANGELES

THE Recording Academy and broadcaster CBS have issued joint statement to announce that the 63rd Grammy Awards ceremony

will now be held on March 14. Earlier, the ceremony was scheduled to be held on January 31. The decision to reschedule the award ceremony was taken due to coronavirus concerns in Los An-

geles. The Recording Academy and CBS released a joint statement on Wednesday said that the Grammy Awards stands delayed after a discussion with the health experts and musicians.

TRP scam: 'BARC's ex-CEO guilty'

MUMBAI

A Mumbai court, while rejecting the bail plea of Broadcast Audience Research Council's (BARC) former CEO Partho Dasgupta, has observed that he played a "vital role" in the alleged Television Rating Points (TRP) manipulation scam. The court passed the order on January 4 and a copy of it was made available on Wednesday.


Dasgupta was arrested by Mumbai Police last month. Chief metropolitan magistrate Sudhir Bhajipale on Monday rejected his bail plea. In his order, the magistrate said the material available on record shows involvement of the accused in the alleged crime.

"The present applicant (Dasgupta) played the vital role in the commission of offence," he observed in his order. As per the court



order details, Dasgupta was the CEO of BARC from June 2013 to November 2019. The material collected by the investigating officer shows that Dasgupta manipulated TRP for particular channels by using his office as-

the CEO of BARC, the court observed. The Mumbai Police on Wednesday told the Bombay High Court that it has found more evidence against Republic TV in the Television Rating Points (TRP) scam.



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Approval for Covaxin raises eyebrows

INDIA is getting ready for mass vaccination drive on January 13, dry runs have been conducted across several States, centres have been identified and a total of one crore health workers along with two crore frontline and essential workers and 27 crore elderly, mostly above the age of 50 years with co-morbidities are eagerly waiting for the big day. Ironically, a survey conducted by an organisation reveals that 69 percent of Indians are reluctant to take the vaccine. It may be recalled that two vaccines - Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin - against coronavirus infection for restricted emergency use have been approved by India's regulatory authority for medical products, the Central Drug Standards Control Organization (CDSCO) on January 2. It is of course

a huge success of our scientists, research institutes and pharma companies to bring to the forefront indigenous vaccines like Covaxin in less than a year, and they deserve honour abundantly for their outstanding works. Unfortunately, the government and CDSCO seem to have together seriously diluted the hopes of a large number of people, and also dented confidence in vaccines against Covid-19, in particular concerning Covaxin, due to lack of evidence and unsatisfactory scientific basis, non-transparency and concerns around possible political pressure. A majority of people who participated in the survey said they would wait for another three months and then consider based on date or findings. Many eyebrows are being raised about the Health Ministry's announcement of an extended gap of up to 12 weeks between

the first and second doses, whereas the SEC is understood to have recommended the original protocol of 28-days. The members of the Subject Expert Committee (SEC) of the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had called for additional data from Phase-III trials, but it seems the committee was pressured overnight into reconsidering its decision and giving approval the next day, albeit hedged in by many conditions. It is ironic that while CDSCO's statement shows that the approval was based only on Phase-I and Phase-II data on safety and immune response, but without any efficacy data from Phase-III trials. Pen pushers in the corridors of power and the ICMR have been doggedly defending this decision by stressing safety and arguing, without any evidence, that the design of Covaxin might make it more

effective against the new UK mutation. The ICMR, which incidentally is a co-developer of Covaxin, appears to be a tad biased in its opinion shows a conflict of interest. Even as many health experts, scientists and others are expressing doubts about the efficacy of these vaccines, the government is steamrolling the decision, and is attacking all critics, terming them as opponents of Indian science who should instead be upholding "national pride" over the indigenously developed vaccine. The achievement of Indian researchers and vaccine manufacturers will undoubtedly be hailed as a major Indian scientific achievement once efficacy data are released but, by the hasty approval without evidence, has shown the Centre in poor light. If anything goes wrong, whatever prestige India may gain abroad for an indigenously developed vaccine will be outweighed and it will come as a huge blow to the country's science, research and regulatory institutions.

PART-II

Disparity in development is all-too pervasive

TALKING OF MANY THINGS



Dr Mohan Kanda

ANOTHER dimension in which injustice and inequality, sometimes leading to persecution, can perpetuate themselves is neglecting or ignoring the interests of people belonging to a race, community or subscribing to a religious faith, by those dominating the instruments of political and administrative control. History is replete with such instances.

While, in some cases, it stopped with neglect, it also took the shape of persecution in many cases. And, strangely enough, the perpetrator at one place and time, turned the victim at others. The Jews, the Christians the Hindus and the Muslims have all, from time to time, been either one or the other at various times in history.

The history of anti-Semitism, defined as hostile actions, or discrimination, against the Jews as a religious or ethnic group, goes back many centuries, with anti-Semitism being called "the longest hatred". It is a phenomenon that goes back a long way into past history. Pre-Christian anti-Judaism, in ancient Greece and Rome, was primarily ethnic in nature, Christian anti-Semitism, in the Middle Ages, was religious in nature, and extended into modern times. Muslim anti-Semitism arose from a perception that the Jews were a protected class. And the racial anti-Semitism which arose in the 19th century finally led to Hitler's Nazism leading to the Second World War.

Christians have been the victims of similar treatment from as long ago as the 1st century BCE. Missionaries and converts were, targeted in particular. Christians belonging to one sect were also persecuted, on account of the perception that the doctrine they subscribed to was characterised as heresy.

Hindus have suffered discrimination, sometimes leading even to a violent and cruel manifestation, at the hands of the Muslim rulers as well as the colonial rulers from Europe, primary the British. In more recent times, especially after independence, Hindus, a minority in Pakistan, have been subjected to discrimination and ill-treatment, which has also spread, sporadically, to different parts of the world.

There have been several instances of religious violence against Muslims since the Partition of India in 1947, frequently in the form of violent attacks especially post the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York City.

Several countries in the world have undertaken programmes and projects to create access to basic human needs, opportunities of employment, and educational facilities, largely in order to compensate for the adverse impact of discrimination suffered by certain sections of Society over long periods in the past. The constitutional safeguards providing for reservations in India is a significant example. It is different matter that such interventions can sometimes be overdone and create a counter-productive sentiment.

Somewhat similar are the safeguards provided by the Constitution makers as well as the development programmes and welfare measures undertaken by central and State governments for mainstreaming the scheduled tribes, mostly living in the hilly and forested areas of the country.

Here, again, social scientists as well as environmentalists have viewed with distrust, and suspicion, the benefits of the intervention when weighed against the damage to the culture of the people and the natural resources that natural habitats are endowed with. It has also been argued that 'happiness' is a state of being which is much more than merely provision of basic requirements, good education, remunerative employment and health/medical care.

The unacceptability of the degree of disparity, between the higher echelons of society and those at the lower rungs, can be seen by the fact that the world's richest one percent own 44 per-



The unacceptability of the degree of disparity, between the higher echelons of society and those at the lower rungs, can be seen by the fact that the world's richest one percent own 44 percent of the wealth which, estimates show, increases by \$2.5 billion every day. A new billionaire is also created every two days. Just contrast this with the fact that more than half the population of the world subsists on an income of less than \$5.5 per day. And a child under 15 dies every five seconds mainly on account of malnutrition

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All efforts to address these divisive cleavages have, so far, succeeded only in leaving a considerable residual agenda which includes battling the 'five giants' described by Lord Beveridge, namely want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. Another concern needing to be addressed is the fact that women, generally, are given a raw deal in the process of development and growth, almost everywhere in the world, earning, as they do, much less than men do.

Governments around the world need to understand, and appreciate, the importance of immediate and purposeful steps towards the goal of building a new and humane dispensation, in terms of social, political and economic values that truly matter to society, rather than standing by those driven only by motives of profit or self-interest.

In the process of addressing this concern, two seemingly

contradictory forces normally emerge, namely, the sustainability of the process of growth and development, and the compelling need for ensuring social justice. Proponents of sustainability frequently emphasise the importance of adding social justice to the effort, while social justice advocates are emphasizing, increasingly, on the incorporation of the ideas of sustainability into their own agendas.

Clearly the time has come for the situation to change; and to change dramatically. Not only have the social economic and political inequalities to be put an end to, but also, the effort aimed at achieving that objective has to be inclusive and gender-sensitive, while the benefits are made available evenly over all regions and classes of people. Programmes and projects aimed at social justice and welfare should be undertaken side by side with the process of social transformation and development gaining strength and becoming self-sustaining through a system of integrated and inclusive governance.

What India needs is a revolution in which all stakeholders, including the central and state governments, civil society based organisations, non-governmental organisations and individu-

als, perform their duty towards fulfilment of the Constitution-makers' dreams of ensuring an ethos of economic and political justice to all citizens.

So far as women are concerned, for example, what is needed is the putting in place of an environment that promotes and protects, the rights of women. The effort should include the passage of a Uniform Civil Code to provide equal rights in divorce, inheritance across all religions, entry into temples etc.

Mankind needs to be able confidently look forward to a world that values the individual, and appreciates the importance of putting in place an environment that enables human beings to live in comfort, happiness and with a sense of security. A world, in other words, that promotes, and supports, effort aimed at justice, equity and the welfare of its members - a realm that works for everyone and not just the fortunate few.

The alternative is to reconcile to humanity facing a future where economies are irreparably damaged, and Society is irretrievably torn apart by the hiatus between different sections.

As the war currently being waged against the unprecedented Covid - 19 virus is beginning to show signs of success, we must not forget that there are many other threats to the continued well-being of mankind, and the sustained growth and development of the world's economy. Phenomena such as climate change, terrorism, food and nutritional in security are only some of them. We can, however, derive solace from the fact that the human race, has, in its history, faced, and overcome, many such threats.

Given consensual effort by the countries of the world, and the creation of an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual goodwill, one feels confident that the billions that inhabit this wonderful planet can look forward to a future that will be safe, comfortable and happy. It is in that situation that the important question, namely, whether the benefits of future developments will be shared equitably and justly, can be answered in the affirmative.

(The writer is former Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)



Sales went down but books survived in 2020

ZAFRI MUDASSER NOFIL

PUBLISHING in India saw several challenges in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic but focus on online sales and making best use of various digital platforms helped in promotion of books and keep authors in the public eye, say publishers. With zero sales for almost three months, many had to trim their publishing list drastically.

However, publishers adapted and actively looked for trends to cater to the subjects their readers would find useful and engaging. New and innovative ways of marketing and selling books also became a part of the year gone by which saw people reading more.

Millie Ashwarya, publisher at Ebury Publishing and Vintage Groups, Penguin Random House India, says 2020 was also the year when the power of digital transformation was felt in publishing like in other industries. "While some bookshops shut down, some new ones opened and online sales saw a surge. All in all, 2020 was full of learnings and got us more focused on our business," she told PTI.

HarperCollins India CEO Ananth Padmanabhan says 2020 was unprecedented in every way - and specifically to the business of publishing - one when in India printed books were declared non-essentials. "The entire value chain had zero sales for almost three months. This did teach us all many valuable lessons about the way we conduct our business but even more importantly about the way readers will buy books in the future - formats, retail, genres and how often too," he says.

"We continued our publishing program - beginning with digital first, E-books through April and May and by late June our new books in print had also started to go out - depending on how unlock rules

Since the pandemic took the publishing industry by storm, at least during the complete lockdown in India, acquiring editors were compelled to be more selective than ever as publishing lists were tightened, says Rajdeep Mukherjee, managing director of Pan Macmillan India. "Publicists adapted promotional campaigns to suit a world moved online as on-the-ground activities stood cancelled, sales representatives found it highly challenging to convince brick-and-mortar bookstores, already struggling due to the growing predominance of online retailers, to place significant orders," he says

impacted retail," he adds. According to Padmanabhan, sales in 2020 were at higher double digit rates over 2019, both by value and volume.

The single most impactful change, he says, has been innovative digital marketing that can bridge the discoverability gap, considering physical stores are shut. Chiki Sarkar, publisher at Juggernaut, says its "list was cut drastically, so revenues fell but the books we did publish pretty much performed as they would on any year and a large number of our books have gone into reprint".

Westland publisher Karthika VK too says there was a direct impact at every level as "we couldn't publish at all for three months, apart from the sheer logistical difficulties of getting books to readers even after the lockdown had lifted, due to disruptions in the distribution and retail chain".

According to Thomas Abraham, Managing Director, Hachette India, the publishing experience was fairly bad with the battering brick and mortar stores had to take and they're just about recovering slowly. "Online did really well in holding up lists, but new books and the lesser known title which needed the discoverability at curated stores lost out badly."

Hachette India editor-in-chief and publisher Poulomi Chatterjee adds they had to reschedule many key new releases in the local list keeping in mind a slow and erratic market. "Physical bookstores, when they reopened, saw low footfall so offline visibility of new books too was affected. Releases of the select list of books that were published in 2020 were meticulously planned so they would get adequate attention and visibility," she says.

As publishing schedules were drawn up well in advance, editors continued working on books as planned even while lockdown impacted sales quite severely in the early months. "The early months were particularly difficult for everyone as we were trying to get used to working from home amid much uncertainty regarding what lay ahead," says Himanjali Sankar, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster.

For Renuka Chatterjee, VP Publishing at Speaking Tiger, "Overall sales may have gone down but we survived. We focused on online sales and made best use of the various digital platforms that opened up to market and promote our books and keep our authors in the public eye." The impact of the pandemic was also strongly felt by educators and the learning community, especially young learners who needed engagement and handholding in a remote learning environment.

"Responding with agility, we at OUP India added extensively to our vast repository of digital and online resources and combined them with our print books while constantly engaging with teachers on remote teaching methodologies," says Oxford University Press India managing director Sivaramakrishnan Venkateswaran.

"Whether it was providing free access to resources on Covid-19 to researchers and medical professionals, offering free access to our education platforms, supporting professional development for teachers, or sharing guidance on home learning, we made our valuable content available to the widest audience during these challenging times," he says.

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Baskar Roy, CEO of Palimpsest Publishing House, says though publishing has suffered badly for close to a year now and lockdown drastically reduced footfalls in bookshops, people read more as they remained in their homes. "Also, now that outings are unfashionable, book ideas shelved for years are being dusted off and turned into texts. Some of them are sure to figure in publishers' lists in the New Year," he says.

Trisha De Niyogi of Niyogi Books thinks the year forced publishers to reinvent and innovate. "During the lockdown, we realised more and more people were reading, which has always been music to our ears. The importance of ebooks and audiobooks cannot be ignored, more so now. The rollercoaster ride of 2020 is bound to continue into 2021, but we feel more prepared. I am confident that we will find a (or a few) way out," she says.

LETTERS

A gifted lyricist is gone

IN the death of Vennelakanti, our Telugu film industry has lost a great, gifted lyricist and dialogue writer. In his 34-year long writing career Vennelakanti proved his mettle, by working in about 350 films and writing around 2500 songs. His songs like Chiru navula varam isthava, chiti nuchi lesivastha showcased his strong penchant for using the figures of speech like oxymoron, and alliteration. As a dialogue writer and lyricist in dubbing movies, Vennelakanti was a force behind the success of many films of Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan in their Telugu versions. Even as a human being, Vennelakanti lived by certain principles, and loved his friends and their advice. May his soul rest in peace.

M Somasekhar Prasad, Hyderabad

Build consensus on new Parliament building

THIS refers to the news item "In 2:1 verdict, SC nod for Central Vista Project", (The Hans India, January 6). The apex

court's green-light to the controversial Central Vista revamp project clears the way for new parliament building - envisaged to be ready by August 2022, when the country celebrates 75th Independence Day.

On the matter of conservation heritage, the Supreme Court wants clearances to be sought. Also in its to-do list is the setting of smog towers. The project proponent has been asked to ensure these as an integral part, with the directions to the ministry of environment and forests to install smog towers in future projects.

The ground-breaking ceremony last month was boycotted by the Opposition and frowned upon by the Supreme Court since the case was pending. Now the project that has been approved, the Centre needs to reach out across the political spectrum and be mindful of apprehensions. It claims the project will take care of the deficiencies of the existing Parliament building like inadequate space, structural weaknesses and security problems, and save the public exchequer crores paid as rent for offices. That may be sound logic but building an edifice for a forum meant for informed discussion and debate while giving these the go-by is a false start.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

Dubious games of Pakistan

PAKISTAN pretends to be determined to getting rid of terrorism and creates an impression that it will leave no stone unturned in its attempts to put an end to terrorism every time the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meets to review the degree Pakistan has adhered to a FATF action plan. Anti-terrorist activities are undertaken and symbolic arrests are conducted before every FATF meeting. The year 2021 also witnessed such eyewash by Pakistan.

The news about Pakistan's arrest of Zaki-Ur-Rahman Lakhvi, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operations commander and mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks before the next meet of FATF was received with great scepticism by India. A similar pretence was made by Pakistan when Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Sayeed was arrested just before FATF meet in October last year. The Sindh high court's order to release Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and three accomplices convicted for the murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl demonstrates that Pakistani anti-terrorism is only a gim-

mick and it is not at all concerned about terrorist operations in the country.

Venu G.S. Kollam

Do we need a new Parliament?

CENTRE might have succeeded in getting approvals from the apex court to the vista project but it should not forget that such a multi crore mega scheme is contrary to Modi government's catchy slogan "more governance, less government" (In 2:1 verdict, SC nod for Central Vista Project, January 6). Big constructions are needed for industries, airports, railway stations, hospitals, malls and other commercial establishments but not for Parliament, which is meant to serve the people. In this digital age big buildings are not necessary and parliament proceedings can be carried out virtually. Government many also consider the idea of door step service to people like many service sectors do. The bottom line is people want service but not bothered about the size of buildings.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao, Hyderabad

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AP gets ₹4,500 cr loan for road projects

NEW DELHI

THE Union government and the Andhra Pradesh government on Wednesday signed a loan agreements of up to \$323 million (around Rs 2,260 cr) each with the New Development Bank (NDB) for two road sector projects.

The first project, the Andhra Pradesh Roads and Bridges Reconstruction Project, comprises widening of 1,600 km of state highways to double lane and reconstructing dilapidated bridges on the state highway network. The second project, the Andhra Pradesh Mandal Connectivity and Rural Connectivity Improvement Project, comprises widening 1,400 km of district roads to double lane and reconstructing dilapidated bridges on the district road network.

The state government will implement the projects through the roads and buildings department.

The two projects are expected to improve mobility and connectivity to the socio-economic centres, enhance transport efficiency, improve road safety and riding quality, and provide all-weather accessibility for the state's road users. The projects would

Centre, State govt sign agreements with New Development Bank

Both projects will be implemented by the State govt through R&B



The loan will be used for two road projects, one for development of 1,600-km State highways and another 1,400 km district roads

increase the roads' daily traffic capacity to 15,000 passenger car units, which is expected to meet the projected traffic growth over the next 20 years.

"NDB funding shall help to bridge the funding gap for road infrastructure development and will support the Government of Andhra Pradesh in its goal to enhance connectivity between socioeconomic centres," said Xian Zhu, vice-president and chief operations officer of the NDB.

The NDB was established based on the Inter-Governmental agreement among the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) signed on July 15, 2014. The Bank's purpose is to mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging market economies and developing countries. The tenor of each loan is 32 years, including a moratorium period of 5 years.

DESECRATION OF IDOLS

Pawan accuses CM of skirting responsibility

■ Takes a dig at the 'power of Jagan' saying he can get CJ of HC transferred with a single letter

AMARAVATI

JANA Sena Party president Pawan Kalyan condemned the comments of Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy that the opposition leaders were resorting to 'political guerrilla warfare' in the state by destroying temples.

The Jana Sena chief said that over 100 incidents of attacks on temples were reported in the past two years and several idols were desecrated. The Chief Minister trying to escape from his responsibility by throwing the blame on opposition, he said adding people very well know the power of Chief Minister, who can get the Chief Justices of High Courts transferred with a single letter.

He expressed surprise over the failure of the state govt to nab the culprits of in desecration of idols so far though the ruling party has 151 MLAs, 22 MPs in addition to the police force. The government harassed Dr Sudhakar by foisting cases but failed to nab the culprits of the present chaos so far. He said even seers also came out to raise their voice against the desecration of idols indicating the severity of the situation.

The Jana Sena chief appealed to the Chief Minister to try to bring the culprits to book as early as possible.

WHAT INDUSTRY WANTS FROM UNION BUDGET?

There is no due encouragement for small industries from state and Central governments. I appeal to the Union Finance Minister to tell public sector banks to sanction us loans liberally at lower costs of credit. We need subsidised raw material and reduction in excise duty. We want GST exemption so that small and medium scale of industries will flourish.



M R Chandra Reddy, industrialist, tiles industry, B Palyam, Chittoor.

Industrial sector has not recovered from the Covid pandemic in India so far. Now the new strain in UK and other countries seems to be spreading to other countries. In this back drop, the industrial sector may face problems in 2021 too. The Central government should announce one more package for the MSME sector to help the small and medium entrepreneurs and the industrial sector. The impact of Covid was very severe across the country and it will take many years to recover from the losses. I wish that the Union government understands the problems of the industrial sector and announce one more package.



Potluri Bhaskara Rao, general secretary, Andhra Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vijayawada

First of all, the purchasing power of consumers has to be increased which can restart the economic cycle. The incomes of several sections have adversely affected during the last nine months. Though the incentives announced by the government are good, there was much to be done. The interest on industrial loans has to be waived off completely whereas the government has only postponed its payment. It has become a burden on the industry and borrowing rates are to be reduced.



D Damodar, Ravands Plastech, Puthalapattu, Chittoor district.

A reduction of interest rate, which is on the higher side ranging from 11 to 15 per cent, is he need of the hour for us. The government saw the rate of lending to agriculture, housing, education and even vehicle purchase becoming cheaper but not to the small and medium industries. The measures bring down interest rates in the budget will sure give a new lease of life to the entrepreneurs. This apart, government should monitor the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Entrepreneurs (CGTMSF) for its effective functioning for the benefit entrepreneurs.



Vasireddy Murali, chairman of Cee Chemicorp, Tirupati



Sudhir Mulagada, Chairman of AP Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation, Vizag

There should be an easy procedure for obtaining loans to the entrepreneurs and the rate of interest on loans should be reduced. GST should also be reduced considering their financial status. If possible, easy online permissions for industries in a short span of time as part of encouragement need to be facilitated. Subsidies should be given for purchasing machinery. With this, more employment can be generated. Deposits for new industries for various prerequisites like power, water, and others should be reduced due to the pandemic.



S Sirish Kumar, proprietor, Sri Nandadeep Packaging Industry, Nellore

A separate budget should be allotted to uplift the sick industries. This apart, tax exemptions should be facilitated to return to normalcy in times of the pandemic. Centre should creach out to the industries through various subsidies where the state govt finds it tough to afford power subsidy.



VV Krishna Rao, director, Simhadri TMT, Vizag

AP CM to lay stone for temples demolished during TDP rule

AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy will lay foundation for those temples, which were demolished for road widening during the previous TDP rule, on January 8.

Minister for endowments Vellampalli Srinivas said that Chief Minister will lay foundation for temples demolished in Vijayawada, including Dakshinamukha Anjaneyaswamy, Sittamavari padalu, Rahu-Ketu, Bodubomma, Krishna temple and Gosala on January 8 at 11 am

The minister said the Chief Minister will lay foundation for Rs 70 crore developmental works of Sri Kanaka Durga temple. He said that the state government has made arrangements for reconstruction of 40 temples in the state.

Srinivas alleged that Naidu was trying to create differences between religions for political gain.

Women safety top priority, says DGP

Addressing a session on Disha Act, Sawang says the State govt provided all the infrastructure for Disha special police station to ensure speedy investigation of crimes against women

HANS NEWS SERVICE
TIRUPATI

DIRECTOR general of police (DGP) Gautam Damodar Sawang said that safety of women was the top most priority for the police department which was acting fast in investigation of cases involving crimes against women. Addressing women and students on the subject of Disha Act on the third day of IGNITE (Police Duty Meet) here on Wednesday, the DGP said Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy had given clear direction to act tough against the culprits who indulge in crimes against women.

As part of efforts to speed up cases, he said the government had set up three forensic labs in Vizag, Tirupati and Vijayawada adding that safety of women was possible when all sections of society play their role actively.

"AP police department signed an MoU with Sri Padmavathi



DGP D Gautam Sawang addressing a meet on Disha Act at AP Police Duty Meet in Tirupati on Wednesday

Mahila University for preventing crimes against women. We are happy to work with the university over women's issues and their safety related matters," he said.

Sawang advised university vice-chancellor Prof D Jamuna to work at field level over women issues with practical knowledge and called upon the people to understand the issues of women as only then it would be possible to sort out their problems.

He said the government posted one DSP, one Inspector and five SIs in every Disha police station and provided required vehicles, technical equipment and infrastructure. Police are trying to file charge sheets within 21 days by using advanced technology. AP state law

department has appointed special prosecutors to speed up the trials of Disha cases in local courts.

Later, women and child welfare secretary A R Anuradha said that the government was continuously monitoring the women and child welfare issues through Chief Minister's Office (CMO). SPMV vice-chancellor Prof Jamuna also addressed the meeting.

The DGP later went around the galleries and interacted with girl students and took selfies with them in the duty meet arena.

Additional DGs Sridhar Rao, Disha SP Deepika Patil, CID SP Radhika, women trainee IPS officers Gauthami Shali, Ajitha, Prerana and girl students took part in the programme.

SC expresses concern, to take up matter on Jan 11

Continued from P1

On Monday, talks between the Centre and farmer unions remained inconclusive over two key demands — repeal of the newly enacted laws and provision of legal guarantee on the minimum support price — with the two sides drawing the hard line on their respective positions. The talks will resume on January 8 when the two sides sit across the table for what will be the eighth round of negotiations ever since the protests that brought farmers from Punjab and Haryana to the gates of Delhi on November 26.

Emerging from the meeting with the unions Monday, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told reporters, "We wanted a clause-wise discussion on the laws, so that we could proceed on the way forward. The discussion was mainly centred on this. We discussed the issue of MSP briefly, but could not arrive at a decision. Therefore, the government and the unions decided to meet again on January 8 to take the discussions forward." Meanwhile, farmer unions protesting against the new agriculture laws have said they would hold a "tractor march" on the Eastern and Western Peripheral Expressways on Thursday, as a "rehearsal" for January 26 rally.

Braving rain, farmers threaten to intensify stir

Continued from P1

Last week, the government agreed to exclude farmers from penal provisions of the Air Quality Management ordinance and not to pursue the draft Electricity Bill.

Since the farmers arrived at the national capital's borders, the Delhi Traffic Police has been posting alerts on its official Twitter handle to inform commuters about road closures across the city. In a series of tweets on Wednesday, it said Singhu, Auchandi, Piau Maniyari, Saboli and Mangesh borders were closed for traffic movement.

"The Chilla and Ghazipur borders are closed for traffic coming from Noida & Ghazi-

abad to Delhi because of farmer protests. Please take alternative route for coming to Delhi via Anand Vihar, DND, Bhopra & Loni Borders," the traffic police said. It said Tikri and Dhansa borders are also closed for traffic movement. "Jhatikara Border is open only for LMV (Cars/Light Motor Vehicles), two-wheelers and pedestrian movement," another tweet read.

According to the traffic police, people travelling to Haryana can take the routes via Jharoda (only single carriageway), Daurala, Kapashera, Badusarai, Rajokri NH-8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar and Dundaheera borders.

Centre asks TN to revoke order

Continued from P1

The review of which has been done from time to time.

The Centre also reminded the State about its last guidelines issued on November 25, 2019, which allows for 50 per cent capacity in theatres outside the containment zones. The order is

in effect till January 31.

The MHA asked the Tamil Nadu government to bring its new guidelines, allowing 100% occupancy in theatres/cinemas/multiplexes, in line with the SOPs issued by the Home Ministry that permit only 50% occupancy.

Schools told to implement new school bag policy

Continued from P1

The Ministry of Education had notified the new school bag policy last month which is in line with the new National Education Policy (NEP). From no textbooks for pre-primary classes to single notebook for classes 1 and 2, frequent checks of school bags to ensure students do not carry heavy weight, informing the students and parents regarding appropriate kind of school bags and encouraging students to use both straps of bags, are among the recommendations made by the government.

"The load of school bag is increased by bringing textbooks, guides, homework or classwork notebooks, rough work notebooks, water bottles, lunch box, and sometimes the heavy weight of the school bag itself. The number of textbooks in different classes should not exceed the number prescribed by the statutory bodies.

Wisconsin Assembly Speaker backs farmers' protests

Continued from P1

He also wrote a similar letter to US Ambassador to India Ken Juster. "One thing Wisconsin and India may have in common is our large agricultural economies. The farmers of our state are a very large part of our overall economy. It would be unfathomable to me that we would make law changes that

affect them without taking their input into account, or by shutting them down as they exercised their right to peaceably assemble," he wrote in his letters dated January 4.

"Hopefully, the Modi government will reconsider its decision and sit down with the affected farmers to listen to their concerns," Vos said.

India, Israel successfully test air defence system

Continued from P1

A press release by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) on Tuesday said, last week the test was conducted at an Indian facility and validated all components of the weapons system.

According to Boz Levy, CEO of Israeli defence company IAI, the MRSAM defence system was designed keeping in mind the challenges of today's era. "This success found in the trial is very

important. It is a matter of pride for us to work with DRDO. We are committed to walking ahead on this path of success," Levi said. According to the response from the Israeli defence industry, the test was successfully conducted in the presence of our experts and Indian scientists. During this time, various references of flight tests were assessed which was successful on every standard.

Heavy rain, hailstorm hit several parts in Delhi

Continued from P1

IMD recordings show from 4pm on Monday to 8.30am on Tuesday, the Safdarjung observatory recorded 4.7mm rainfall, while at the Palam and Lodhi Road observatories 4mm and 4.8mm rainfall was recorded respectively. At the Aya Nagar observatory, 8mm rainfall was recorded till 8.30 am on Tuesday.

Light rain was also recorded across the city on Tuesday, with the Safdarjung observatory recording 1.2 mm rainfall while at the Palam observatory, 5.3 mm rainfall was recorded.

Due to continuous rains, the air of Delhi-NCR has been cleared.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi's average air quality index was recorded at 140. At the same time, the air of Gurugram was the cleanest recorded with just 83 points.

TODAY'S QUOTE

Large number of farmers supporting agri laws

“A large number of farmers from across the country are coming out in support of three farm laws. The protesting unions need to understand the sentiments behind reforms brought through these legislations and focus on farmers' interests
— Narendra Singh Tomar, Agriculture Minister



INFRA

FM reviews progress of ₹3.6 L cr projects

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday reviewed the progress of projects worth ₹3.6 lakh crore under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), an official statement said. The projects are being implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	77.52	South	
Euro	94.69	African Rand	5.6
UAE Dirham	21.9	Hong Kong Dollar	10.85
Thai Baht	2.81	Japanese Yen	0.82
British Pound	103.71	New Zealand Dollar	56.05
Australian Dollar	59.89	Saudi Riyal	21.44
Canadian Dollar	60.62	Swedish Krona	10.31
Swiss Franc	86.7	Singapore Dollar	58.31

DELHI THURSDAY 7 JANUARY 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

BoB, SIDBI sign MoU

BANK of Baroda signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) to support MSME enterprises with an online facility of submitting their loan restructuring proposal. The Government of India and RBI has come up with several measures to extend relief to MSMEs and RBI has extended the One-Time Restructuring (OTR) window till March 2021 to provide relief to MSMEs. In this backdrop, Bank of Baroda has entered into MoU arrangement with SIDBI for a web-based platform. “As a bank, we are continuously working towards digitization and consumer friendly processes,” the bank said.

IDFC MF's campaign

IDFC Mutual Fund announced the launch of its latest pan-India investor awareness campaign #PaisonKoRokoMat nudging savers to become investors. The company took a fresh, non-conventional approach with its creatives for the campaign, shifting the conversation regarding wealth creation from the traditional to the contemporary. Vishal Kapoor, CEO, IDFC Asset Management Company Limited (AMIC), said: “While India has an enviable savings culture, a large portion of our savings are still sitting idle in traditional investment vehicles. With rising aspirations and standards of living, there is an opportunity for savers to upgrade their investment choices. Our latest campaign #PaisonKoRokoMat deploys unique characterisation and an innovative storyboard to urge savers to overcome their inertia and explore the smart and modern mutual fund vehicle for their investments.

Lupin gets nod for new drug

Homegrown pharma major Lupin Ltd on Wednesday said it has received approval from the US health regulator to market its generic version of sulfamethoxazole and trimethoprim oral suspension used to treat bacterial infections. The approval by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) is for the strength of 200 mg/40 mg per 5 mL, a generic equivalent of Bactrim Oral Suspension, 200 mg/40 mg per 5 mL, of Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Inc, the company said. Sulfamethoxazole and trimethoprim oral suspension, 200 mg/40 mg per 5 mL, is indicated for the treatment and prevention of a wide variety of bacterial infections, and certain type of pneumonia (pneumocystis-type).

Oreo's new initiative

Oreo launched campaign #OreoPlayPledge with the aim to inspire people to snooze away from their busy lifestyles and take a pledge to create and cherish the much-needed moments of fun with their loved ones. This sentiment is brought alive by father-daughter duo, former team India Cricket captain MS Dhoni and his daughter Ziva Dhoni. Sudhanshu Nagpal, Associate Director Marketing (Biscuits), Mondelez India, said, “As one of the country's most loved brands, Oreo has always strived to spark playfulness and inspire connection moments in our consumer's lives. We are launching this new campaign called #OreoPlayPledge in month of January. Oreo's endeavour through this campaign will be to infuse positivity and inspire our consumers to create more play-connect time with their loved ones in times ahead.”

Services sector hits slow lane in Dec

NEW DELHI

INDIA's services sector activity expanded at a slower pace in December as rates of growth in sales eased to a three-month low and staff hiring came to a halt amid weak business optimism, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell from 53.7 in November to 52.3 in December. The index was above the critical 50 mark that separates growth from contraction for the third month in a row during December, but pointed to the slowest pace of expansion in the three-month sequence.

“Although the news that the service sector remained in expansion mode during December is welcome, the fact that growth lost momentum yet again shouldn't be disregarded,” said Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at IHS Markit.

Companies indicated that growth was supported by the securing of new work, though curbed by competitive pressures and the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey noted. Global Covid-19 restrictions, particularly travel bans, reportedly restricted international demand for Indian services at the end of 2020. New export business decreased sharply, but at the slowest pace since March.

“A spike in Covid-19 cases was reported as a key factor restricting

Hiring comes to a halt amid weak biz optimism



growth of new work intakes among service providers, which in turn curbed the rise in output and led to increased business uncertainty about the outlook,” Lima noted. On the employment front, staff hiring came to a halt due to liquidity concerns, labour shortages and subdued demand, while business optimism faded. “Given the damaging impact of the pandemic on the service economy, some companies are facing a financial difficulty, which is preventing staff hiring, December saw the ninth round of job shedding in ten months,” Lima said. On the price front, a pick-up in input cost inflation was witnessed, the strongest since February, but a renewed fall in selling prices was seen as some firms sought to beat competition and secure new work, the survey said. Although private sector activity continued to increase at the end of the year, the upturn eased to a three-month low. The Composite PMI Output Index, which measures combined services and manufacturing output, fell from 56.3 in November to 54.9 in December. However, companies maintained

FALLING GROWTH

- Services PMI falls to 52.3
- Growth rate at 3-month low
- Rise in Covid cases takes toll
- Some cos facing financial hurdles

an upbeat view that output will increase in 2021. “It is clear that the early part of 2021 will continue to be challenging, but we're looking at a sustainable recovery and some return to normality once Covid-19 vaccines become available,” Lima said. India's economy recovered faster than expected in the September quarter as a pick-up in manufacturing helped the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) clock a lower contraction of 7.5 per cent and held out hopes for further improvement on consumer demand bouncing back. The GDP had contracted by a record 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2020-21 fiscal (April 2020 to March 2021) as the coronavirus lockdown pummelled economic activity.

PM Modi to interact with economists tomorrow

NEW DELHI

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi will interact with leading economists and sectoral experts on Friday to deliberate on measures that may be included in the upcoming budget for promoting growth, amid uncertainty on multiple fronts caused by Covid-19. The meeting, being organised by the government think tank Niti Aayog will be held virtually and will also be attended by Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar and Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant. “The Prime Minister will meet economists on Friday to seek their inputs for the next budget,” said a government official on condition of anonymity. The meeting assumes significance as according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), India's economy is projected to contract 7.5 per cent in the current fiscal ending March 31, 2021, while the IMF and World Bank estimates the contraction at 10.3 per cent and 9.6 per cent, respectively. (PTI)

DIGITAL PUSH

RBI's PIDF to create 30 L new touch points a yr

KUMUD DAS
MUMBAI

RBI has created Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF). PIDF is intended to subsidise deployment of payment acceptance infrastructure in Tier-3 to Tier-6 centres with special focus on North-Eastern States of the country. It envisages creating 30 lakh new touch points every year for digital payments.

An advisory council (AC), led by RBI a deputy governor, has been constituted for managing the PIDF. Initially, PIDF has become operational for a period of three years from January 01 and may be extended for two more years depending upon the progress. PIDF presently has a corpus of Rs 345 crore (Rs 250 crore contributed by RBI and Rs 95 crore by the major authorised card networks in the country. All stakeholders have been asked by RBI to co-operate in this endeavour by making their contributions to PIDF within the timelines, and deploying acceptance infrastructure and seeking reimbursement from PIDF. Welcoming the RBI move, Dilip Modi, founder, Spice Money said that the introduction of RBI's PIDF Scheme will provide a big boost to financial advancement in India's semi urban and rural economy, especially at a time when this segment needs immediate support to jump back into the economy.

Sensex snaps 10-day rising streak, skids 264 pts

INVESTORS BOOK PROFITS IN RIL, IT, FINANCE & FMCG STOCKS AMID MIXED GLOBAL CUES

MUMBAI

SNAPPING its 10-session rising streak, equity benchmark Sensex tumbled 264 points on Wednesday as investors booked profits in Reliance Industries as well as IT, finance and FMCG stocks amid mixed global cues.

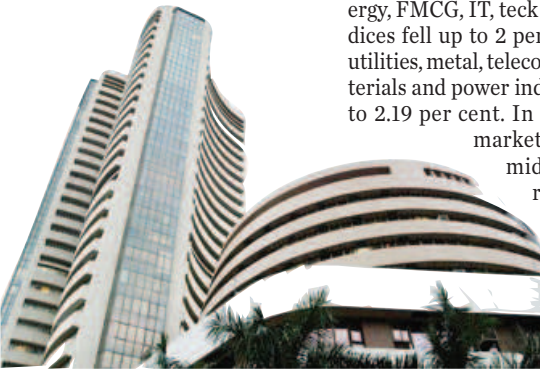
However, a recovering rupee and sustained foreign fund inflows restricted the fall, traders said. After touching its record intra-day high of 48,616.66 in early trade, the 30-share BSE index pared all gains to end 263.72 points or 0.54 per cent lower at 48,174.06. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty fell 53.25 points or 0.38 per cent to 14,146.25.

It touched a record peak of 14,244.15 during the day. ITC was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, shedding 2.86 per cent, followed by Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, HCL Tech and HUL. On the other hand, Power-Grid, Bharti

Airtel, ONGC, UltraTech Cement and ICICI Bank were among the gainers, spurring up to 4.34 per cent. Global equities were mixed as investors monitored a key election in Georgia which can give Democrats control of the US Senate.

A favourable outcome for Democrats will enable President-elect Joe Biden to go ahead with his plans of more stimulus and infrastructure spending, but can also result in higher corporate taxes and increased regulation. “Market is experiencing volatility due to weak Asian market and profit booking owing to rich valuation. Banking stocks are supportive, led by good loan growth data for Q3FY21, announced by key private banks.

“In the near-term, trend of the broad market will depend a lot on FII inflows while stock specific actions will be based on Q3 result, which is about to pick up,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. BSE energy, FMCG, IT, tech and auto indices fell up to 2 per cent, while utilities, metal, telecom, basic materials and power indices rose up to 2.19 per cent. In the broader markets, the BSE midcap index rose 0.39 per cent, while the small-cap gauge slipped 0.14 per cent.



Centre likely to bring natural gas into GST fold

Decision may be taken in next GST Council meeting

SUBHASH NARAYAN
NEW DELHI

WITH States coming on board over GST compensation issue, the Centre is gearing up to get their consent over inclusion of petroleum products under the new indirect tax fold.

Sources privy to the development said that based on Petroleum Ministry's suggestion, the Centre may take up with GST Council the issue of bringing natural gas under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime to begin with before entire oil and gas sector is brought under it. Though the dates for next GST Council meeting is yet to be finalised, Finance Ministry sources said its due and may take place anytime after the budget presentation. States have been reluctant to consider bringing high revenue generating petroleum products under GST fold. But the

dual tax treatment is affecting the sector and hampering government's plan to develop a gas-based economy in the country. Sources said that with this in mind, a phased approach to inclusion of petroleum products under GST may be adopted with natural gas falling first in the queue. Inclusion of gas would not pose a challenge for the GST Council as it is largely an industrial product where a switch over to the new taxation would not be difficult. “States are in fairly better position now with GST revenue hitting over Rs 1 lakh crore mark for past few months and Centre has also improved their liquidity position through additional borrowing schemes under Aatmanirbhar Bharat package. This should make phased inclusion of petroleum products under GST easier for the council,” said an official source in the oil ministry.

BETTING ON STOCK MARKET

Retail investors pump in \$12 billion

NEW DELHI

RETAIL investors in India directly bought stocks to the tune of \$12 billion (Rs 88,000 crore) over January-September as the post-Covid period has seen rising retail inflows similar to the global trend.

According to a report by foreign brokerage, Jefferies, the post-Covid period in India, similar to the global trend, has seen rising retail participation. The shareholding of small retailers has risen by 0.6 percentage points (ppt) over December 2019 to September 2020 while that for large retail has also gone up by 0.1 ppt during the period. MF's holding had declined by 0.1 ppt during the same.

“Indeed, we estimate that retail investors direct buying in the market had witnessed net inflows of \$12 billion over January-September 2020”, Jefferies said. Even as domestic equity MFs see an outflow, domestic investors continue to add equity market exposure directly. Overall market ownership has jumped by 50bps during calendar year 2020.

The report said that inflows into Indian equity funds has turned negative for the past six months. This is the first such reversal in the past six

The shareholding of small retailers has risen by 0.6 ppt over Dec 2019 to Sept 2020



years. “Our analysis, however, shows that retail investors are choosing to go direct v/s. through mutual funds. The cumulative ownership of MFs and retail investors continues to rise. With the market breadth now widening, MF outperformance should return drawing the investors back in. We continue to remain optimistic on the overall retail participation in the market”, it said.

Explaining the reason for reversal in direction of flows from mutual funds, the report said it could be the

change in direction of discretionary flows as investors possibly chased higher returns in individual stocks in the sharp market rally post Covid lows. The same is visible in SIP flows (monthly, automatic flows) where net inflows have declined 15 per cent since their March 2020 peak, but are still substantially positive, at \$ one billion. The MFs had tended to underperform in the early part of the rally as the high concentration nature of the same (select large caps) had made it tough

for MF's given concentration rules. The report said that the amount of net worth held in equities by Indian households is in low single digits (4 per cent as of December '20).

However, there is a case for both a) financialisation of savings and within that b) of rising allocation to equities with bank deposits, for example, already forming a high share of the household net-worth at 16 per cent. Nearly two-thirds of Indian savings continued to be deployed in physical assets (property and gold) and structurally, the case remains for a gradual shift of the same to financial savings.

For an economy which is in a technical recession, Indian markets are doing extraordinarily well and now even the macro numbers led by Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections are giving new evidence of a strong recovery. To add to the bullish fervour, Mumbai has seen record upswing in real estate transactions in December. According to foreign brokerage, Jefferies, “We maintain our positive stance on cyclical recovery in India, thanks to growing evidence that the housing cycle has bottomed out and is now set for a multi-year upswing”.

AMFI seeks parity in tax treatment of MFs, ULIPs

KUMUD DAS
MUMBAI

ASSOCIATION of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), the industry body of 45 fund houses in the country, has reiterated its long-standing demand to bring parity in tax treatment of Mutual Funds (MFs) and Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs), both of which are investment products. Currently, ULIPs which are being offered by life insurers enjoy more tax benefits when compared to mutual funds in various aspects including no capital gains on switching, no STT levied on the withdrawal proceeds and no income tax on the proceeds of insurance companies (including early surrender / partial withdrawals) subject to certain conditions.

To mitigate hardship to retail taxpayers, AMFI, in its recommendations for Budget 2021, has requested that the threshold limit for withholding tax (TDS) on income distribution (dividend) on mutual fund units be

BUDGET 2021



increased from Rs 5,000 to Rs 50,000 per annum, and a cap of 15 per cent on surcharge rate on income distribution on units from equity mutual fund schemes in the hands of non-corporate taxpayers.

AMFI, making a case for CPSE investment of surplus funds in mutual funds, in its pre-budget proposals to Finance Ministry, has asked to revise the current Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) guidelines, and permit the Maharatna, Navratna and Miniratna CPSEs to invest their surplus fund in any SEBI registered Mutual Fund, irrespective of whether it is a public sector mutual fund or a

private sector mutual fund; and enhance the current limit of 30 per cent of available surplus funds for investments in mutual funds by CPSEs to 50 per cent of available surplus funds.

The mutual fund body has also submitted that let there not be any stipulation on any minimum corpus size with respect to the debt scheme as a pre-condition for investments by CPSEs and also rating of only one SEBI-registered Credit Rating Agency be accepted as adequate, instead of existing requirement of any two separate Credit Rating Agencies.

AMFI also wants introduction of ‘Debt Linked Savings Scheme’ (DLSS) on the lines of Equity Linked Savings Scheme (ELSS) to channelise long-term savings of retail investors into higher credit rated debt instrument with appropriate tax benefits which will help in deepening the Indian Bond Market.

Office space consumption rose in Hyd in July-Dec

Office space transactions stood at 4 lakh sqft in last six months, says Knight Frank India report

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

OFFICE space transactions stood at 4 lakh sqft during the six months period of July to December (H2 2020), according to a study by real estate consultant Knight Frank India.

The office space consumption was 38 lakh sqft in the same period a year ago. However, these transactions registered a whopping 640 per cent quarter-on-quarter jump during October-December 2020 period, signalling revival in the commercial real estate sector in the City of Pearls.

On Wednesday, Knight Frank India launched the 14th edition of its flagship half-yearly report - India Real Estate: H2 2020 - which presented a comprehensive analysis of the office and residential market performance across eight major cities for the July-December 2020 (H2 2020) period.

In Hyderabad, BFSI sector office space absorption recorded a 248 per cent YoY growth in H2 2020, which is yet another sign of optimism on the Hyderabad's reality.

Samson Arthur, Branch Director-Hyderabad, Knight Frank India, said, “Hy-

derabad office market saw a significant revival in Q42020 (October-December). Despite pandemic impact, rentals remained resilient and office demand is now seeing a recalibration of size and design. With news of vaccine coming in, global companies have commenced execution of their lease plans. Managed-office operators are bridging the gap between developers and occupiers by offering bundled services which is likely to stimulate the office story further”.

He further added that the office segment got a booster with Goldman Sachs announcing its Hyderabad entry during Covid. “With the presence of Amazon's Data Centre, inquiries in this segment also have increased. Going forward, new sectors such as the automotive and electric vehicles segments show great promise. Ease of doing business in Hyderabad enabled by progressive governance added to availability of land and presence of institutional developers is encouraging existing enterprises to grow”. It is also the reason why city is attracting new investments, he said. Residential sales grew 127 per cent in Q42020 compared to Q32020, he added.

Pandemic impinges on education for special kids

SABYA SINGH
HYDERABAD

TEACHERS, parents and students are trying their best to navigate in the unprecedented crisis like the coronavirus pandemic. But for special education classrooms, including students with learning differences as well as developmental and physical disabilities, the challenges are even greater and sometimes insurmountable.

Currently, 800 special educators are present to teach children with special needs in Telangana. Nearly 45,000 special needs students are enrolled in government and in welfare organisations. Special educators are dealing with special needs children through telephonic services and other modalities. The parents have been assigned to oversee the activities for their wards thrice a week. The activities are unique to each child keeping in mind what suits them the best. The activities include graph motors, eye and hand motors activities related to limbs coordination, activities like walking, drawing lines straight and throwing and picking of vegetables.

Kalpagri, a special educator at Babbitha centre, a special school, said that the online mode has become a bane for children with special needs and most of them are going through behavioural changes. "Although telephonic services are being provided, the children aren't able to cope up as there are no outdoor sessions for physical education. While the pandemic affected the education of all the kids, however, special

About 800 special educators teaching 45,000 special needs students enrolled in government and in welfare organisations

- Children from poor financial backgrounds and their parents work to meet the ends, so, schools are managing schedules as per the convenience of parents
- Although telephonic services are being provided, the children are unable to cope up due to lack of outdoor physical sessions



kids are affected the most as they already have learning challenges and need close monitoring. Also, the children from poor financial backgrounds suffer a lot as their parents work to meet the ends. So, we are managing schedules as per the convenience of their parents," he added.

Dr Saibaba Goud, founder and chairman of Devnar school for blind, which conducts classes for visually impaired children from Class VIII to Class X, said, "With the help of teachers and right technology, we are trying our best to help students in their education. The children are also performing their level best and trying to adapt to new technol-

ogy. Additional support is being provided by teachers available after class hours. The only drawback here is that the children are not engaging in any physical interactions with friends and teachers, which plays a vital role. We thank donors for providing smartphones to children in need."

Neeraj Singh is a child with special needs who studies in a government school. His mother said that the boy is an intelligent kid. "Initially, he struggled to cope up with online classes. But now he's got used to the technology. Because of the pandemic, he's unable to meet his friends," she added.

Guv hosts lunch for homeless aged woman

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

MOVED by the plight of an aged woman, The Telangana State Governor, Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan hosted a lunch for 75-year-old Bandipelli Rajamma at Raj Bhavan on Wednesday. After learning about the tragic tale of the distressed aged woman, Rajamma, a native of Laxminarayanapuram village in Palakurthi mandal of Jangaon district, the Governor also extended a financial help of Rs 50,000 to the needy woman and supplied provisions for two to three months. She instructed Indian Red Cross So-

Tamilisai Soundararajan provides Rs 50,000 aid and 3-month essential goods

ciety and the local administration to look after the poor woman and her dependent son's wellbeing.

Rajamma had witnessed a series of tragedies in life including losing her daughter-in-law and granddaughter for not getting medical help at the hour of the need. Unable to take care of her dependant differently abled son, Rajamma, who hailed from a poor dalit family, was homeless and living on streets and sleeping under the trees.

Taking note of the plight of

the poor in need of medical help, Tamilisai directed the local authorities to ensure that no poor person should suffer for the want of medical help or from other needs and called for concerted action in this regard, especially in rural areas. She gave a call for making available all necessary medical facilities, including anti-venom injections, medical kits and trained personnel in all rural PHCs to prevent unfortunate deaths due to snakebites or other complications.

MA&UD denies use of Centre's Warangal Smart City funds

HYDERABAD

DENYING the allegations of diversion of funds released under the Smart Cities project, Municipal Administration Principal Secretary Arvind Kumar on Wednesday said that cent per cent funds released by the Union government for Warangal were given to it for development. In a statement released, he said that the Central government launched the Smart City Mission in June 2015 and Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation was included in the list of Smart Cities in May 2016. Disclosing the details, the Principal Secretary said total funds released by Centre were Rs 196.40 crore and the total amount was transferred to Warangal. The details of funds released to Warangal are as under Rs 2.50 crore in 2016-17, Rs 32 crore in 2017-18 and Rs

161.90 crore in 2020-21 financial years. Arvind Kumar said that the entire amount has been released to Warangal by the State government and no amount was diverted for any purpose other than the intended one. The number of works taken up was 63, value of works done as on date was Rs 46.67 crore, payments made/funds utilised were Rs 40.67 crore. The Principal Secretary further said that there were more than sufficient funds available with the Warangal Corporation to meet the expenditure for works up to May, 2021 under the project. While sufficient funds were made available to Warangal, there have been initial delays in undertaking the actual works and issues like land acquisition, preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) in the case of major projects.

Sravan criticises KCR on flood relief distribution issue

HYDERABAD

AICC Spokesperson Sravan Dasoju criticised Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao for not keeping his promise made in a public meeting just days before the GHMC elections that the government would continue to distribute flood relief funds to reach every beneficiary in Hyderabad from December 7. However, even after a month after the announcement, there is no such activity seen happening in that direction, he lamented.

Sravan alleged that the TRS government and the CM have betrayed the innocent Hyderabadis who have been devastated by the incessant rains that lashed two-thirds of the city of Hyderabad in October. Although the CM has

said that they have distributed Rs 650 crore to about 6.5 lakh beneficiaries and would further distribute relief compensation to over 1 lakh people, but nothing has been done so far, he criticised. He asked the government for a deadline to complete the flood relief funds distribution to the beneficiaries in Hyderabad. "How long should they wait for their turn?" he questioned. In the wake of receiving notices from the High Court of Telangana, the government, especially the Chief Secretary and the Commissioner of GHMC must immediately react on this important matter and put the division wise and ward wise list of beneficiaries who have already benefited and who are identified for further distribution of funds on the website for public audit, he added.

WHAT DOCTORS WANT FROM UNION BUDGET?

As the Union government intensified its preparation to present the budget 2020-2021 on February 1, doctors in the State have come forward to demand redressal of their grievances by earmarking sufficient funds in the new budget outlay

The budget should provide incentives for setting up more hospitals in smaller towns and cities. This can be done by either giving tax holiday or a lower rate of borrowing besides providing viability funding. On the public front, the government should encourage people to take medical insurance.

Dr Bollineni Bhaskar Rao, Managing Director, KIMS Hospital

I hope 2021 will witness enhanced allocation for the health sector. I want to see primary healthcare getting strengthened to ensure delivery of quality healthcare services to the needy. Let's not forget that better healthcare facilities will help India grow stronger as an economy.

Dr N Guru, Founder, Promoter & Director, Continental Hospitals

My suggestion is to focus more on skill development and training of the workforce for healthcare. With more funding, the preparedness in managing uncertain situations arising out of emergencies can be considered.

Dr Mervin, Cluster Chief Operating Officer, Global Hospitals Group

In this Covid-19 pandemic, the medical fraternity is expecting an increase in health department budget at 2% of GDP, increase in funding of health research to 10% of health budget as against previous 3%. Also, increased funding of Ayushman Bharat to accommodate its coverage.

Dr M Kiran, Associate Professor, GMC, Nizamabad

The Centre should concentrate mainly on three areas-infrastructure, healthcare, and sustainability. The budget should address two critical areas of boosting private investments and providing support for employment generation. A fine balance needs to be maintained between the economic recovery and the growth of the healthcare sector.

Dr Kishore, Associate Professor, NMC, Nellore

The Centre should set up a Senior Citizens Drone Department where senior citizens of the country are taken care of. By utilising their experiences (say medical retired teachers to teach, write books, bring health awareness), the government should pay them besides taking care of their health needs.

Dr P Aniruddh, Neurosurgeon, Hyderabad

Covid-19 has taught us the importance of the healthcare sector. Government should allocate more funds for the sector and improve the healthcare standards. Rural health should be given importance with the appointment of able doctors and deployment of required infrastructure.

Dr B Gopinath, Microsurgeon, Virinchi Hospital, Hyderabad

It is a known fact that India spends less on healthcare compared to many other nations. The inadequacies in our healthcare have been exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The lessons to be learnt from the pandemic are we need establishment of district-level epidemiology units and fully-equipped district-level centres which can provide good care.

Dr Srinivas Ramaka, Cardiologist, Hanamkonda

I being a healthcare professional request the Central government to decrease the tax slabs for a few years as Corona has affected the incomes. Also, encourage female professionals securing loans both at government and private banks at lower interest rates with easy documentation.

Dr G Sandhya Rani, Karimnagar

Due to Covid pandemic, the government and the public have realised the importance of healthcare. With this effect, the government should recruit only qualified doctors and improve the medical services and make sure that the services reach every needy person.

Dr Maliha Thappasum, Karimnagar

We call for creating awareness on Ayushman Bharat across the country in the upcoming budget and the extension of the scheme by adding some more diseases under it. It would be better to roll out 'One Nation, One Health' policy.

Dr K Pradeep, IMA Secretary, Khammam

The budget should focus on research and development. It should take measures to reduce the cost of medicines and surgical consumables so that poor and middleclass can afford. The budget should allocate more funds and ensure grants are spent judiciously.

Dr A Naresh, Consultant Rheumatologist, Hanamkonda

The budget allocation for healthcare in the country for financial year 2019-2020 was only 1.5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product, which is totally least compared to many developed countries. It's time for the Centre to increase the allocation to least 3% of GDP to set things right in the health sector.

Dr P Rohit, Orthopedic, OMC & JUDA President

As we are going through hard times, many marginalised societies and middle class have suffered a lot due to financial crunch. Also many private doctors suffered big with non-payment of salaries. It would be better if the Central government allocates funds to support such doctors.

Dr D Joya Rani, family medicine, private practitioner

Taxes paid is for the improvement of citizen services and border protection. Tax exemption should be according to changing times. In our country, tax system is complex and multiple taxes are being collected. I request the government to roll out One Time One Tax policy.

Dr Kiran Macha, Consultant Physician, Apollo Hospitals

People demand resumption of MMTS services

MEGHNA NATH
HYDERABAD

THE daily MMTS Train users are pressing for the resumption of services at the earliest, as minimum fares would help commuters who used to take the trains before lockdown.

Even as everything is returning to normalcy steadily and the public transport, including bus services and metro rails already started plying, the services of the Multi-Modal Transport System (MMTS) trains are yet to resume.

The passengers are eagerly awaiting the decision to resume MMTS services at least in the new year. Most of whom depend on MMTS services are finding it difficult to travel to their workplace and to reach other destinations. Now some of them have also started demanding openly. Many daily passengers and travelers associations have requested the South Central Railway (SCR) and the State government to resume the MMTS services as soon

- Around 121 MMTS trains serve passengers across the city with 25 local stations
- Around 1.60 lakh passengers use the MMTS services everyday
- The fare of the services were in three slabs Rs 5, Rs 10 and Rs 15
- While other public transports have been resumed, it is nearly 10 months that the MMTS is yet to resume its services
- In other States local trains have been allowed to operate, but not in Hyderabad
- Travellers associations make representations seeking resumption of MMTS services immediately



as possible.

SCR operates 12 rakes on Secunderabad-Lingampally, Hyderabad-Lingampally and Secunderabad-Falaknuma sections. Around 1.60 lakh passengers use the MMTS services every day and fare of the service is in three slabs Rs 5, Rs 10 and Rs 15. Around 121 MMTS trains serve various users across the city with 25

local stations apart from Secunderabad, Kacheguda and Hyderabad.

"As steadily the public transports have resumed, but it is nearly 10 months since the MMTS is yet to begin its services. In other States the local trains are on track. Although the buses and metro rails have resumed, many people cannot afford to travel through metro rails as these

do not cover every nook and corner of the city. It would be better if MMTS services resume," said J Ramu, a daily MMTS traveller, Secunderabad.

"The commuters of the twin cities are eagerly waiting for the resumption of MMTS trains services. Whereas the central and western railways have resumed the local trains services, in Hyderabad, SCR has not taken any decision to resume the MMTS services. Due to non-availability of MMTS services, the people who depended on these services are now forced to opt for other public transports," said Noor Ahmed, president for LT (longtrain) & MMTS Travelers Association.

On condition of anonymity a senior SCR officer said, "So far we didn't get any information and guidelines from Railway Ministry or Central government to resume the MMTS train services. Once we receive the order from the higher authorities, we would start the operations by following Covid guidelines."

TRS leaders' infighting comes to fore in RR dist

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

TWO public representatives of TRS, one MLA and another former minister and MLC are at loggerheads in the Ranga Reddy district. With both leaders wanting to have their say in the Tandur Municipality and conflicts on regular occasions, the issue reached the Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao as MLA complained interference of MLC.

Mahender Reddy lost to Rohit Reddy in 2018 Assembly elections. Rohit Reddy was in Congress then, but later joined TRS along with the other Congress MLAs. Since then there has been a battle of supremacy between both these leaders.

According to party leaders the former minister is unable to digest the supremacy of the MLA in the constituency. Now the issue started in the Municipal meeting held recently. Sources said that the former minister handed over the agenda of the meeting. However, after the minister and the MLA left from the meeting, the corporators tore the agenda copy given by the MLC. Apart from this, it is said that the Municipal Chairperson T Swapna, who is said to be from Rohit Reddy's camp has joined Mahender Reddy's camp. With the MLC having his say in the council meetings, the MLA is learnt to have complained to KT Rama Rao. It is learnt that the minister has asked both the leaders to forget differences and work for the development of the constituency.

TS tower density higher than natl average

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE Telangana State's tower density is 0.71 per thousand population, as against the national average of 0.42 per cent. This was revealed at the second meeting of the State Broadband Committee here on Wednesday.

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar, who chaired the meeting, reviewed the progress in the fiberisation of Base Station Towers (BTS). The National Broadband Mission has set the tower density target of 1.7 by 2024.

To extend necessary support for the better communication coverage in the State, the official

- Approvals to be given for 109 sites pending for erection of towers: CS
- Special focus on 140 uncovered Gram Panchayats



said that necessary approvals would be given for 109 sites pending for erection of towers. Telan-

gana currently has 24,961 towers. The balance target is 34,902 towers. A special focus would be given on 140 uncovered Gram Panchayats in the State.

He said that the State was having 35 percent fiberisation of BTS at present. It would reach the target of 70 per cent set by the National Broadband Mission soon. Somesh Kumar responded to representations from the Electricity and Panchayat Raj departments, saying the issues would be sorted out at the earliest.

Principal Secretary to Transport Sunil Sharma and IT secretary Jayesh Ranjan and other officials were present in the meeting.

Hit-man in playing XI

PACER NAVDEEP SAINI TO MAKE HIS DEBUT

SYDNEY

HAVING touched nadir and zenith in a span of 10 days, Ajinkya Rahane's India will look to start afresh against Australia with the big-hitting Rohit Sharma's presence adding a new dimension to what promises to be an enthralling third Test starting here on Thursday.

The Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), despite being witness to some extraordinary batting performances from the touring Indian sides over the years, has not exactly been a happy hunting ground with six defeats. The lone win came a good 42 years back. If Rahane's side can go 2-1 up and ensure the retention of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, it will be one of the finest hours in the history of Indian cricket.

Making it even more special is the fact that the side has been without two world class performers and a senior pacer against a nearly full-strength Australian team. Seldom has an Australian batting unit, that boasts of a player of Steve Smith's calibre, looked so circumspect and literally intimidated by an Indian bowling unit, which isn't operating at full-strength.

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

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

"He is energetic, professional, who could make an instant impact and fills guys with confidence," Paine's words on the eve of the match indicated their desperation. And in this backdrop, enter Rohit Sharma, whose last couple of months have been loads of off-field drama. First it was his absence from the initial part of the tour due to a hamstring injury sustained while playing the IPL.

The Sydney track has traditionally favoured the batsmen as Sunil Gavaskar, Ravi Shastri, Sachin Tendulkar and even Pujara and Rishabh Pant, who got centuries here during last tour, will vouch for. If Rohit and Shubman Gill can give the team a good start, the under-pressure Pujara will be much more relieved while playing his own defensive game. Rahane, after one of his more copybook hundreds constructed in adversity during the last

game, will enter the arena with more confidence while facing the Australian quartet of Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon.

KL Rahul's injury has given Hanuma Vihari one more chance despite his returns being as underwhelming as Mayank Agarwal, who has been forced to make way for Rohit.

The Squads:
Australia: David Warner, Matthew Wade, Will Pucovski, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Cameron Green, Tim Paine (captain and wk), Nathan Lyon, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Marcus Harris, Mitchell Swepson, Michael Neser
India (XI): Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane (captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant



Rohit Sharma

(wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Mohammed Siraj, Jasprit Bumrah, Navdeep Saini. Match Starts at 5am.

We are always better team when Warner plays: Paine

SYDNEY

DAVID Warner's mere presence makes Australia a better side and fills the other 10 on the park with exuberance and energy, skipper Tim Paine gushed.

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

"He protects our middle-order a bit with Marnus (Labuschagne) and Steve coming in. Other guys coming when bowlers are a bit tired, it's an advantage. So David has got a huge role for us," his skipper said

There were multiple adjectives used by Paine in praise of Warner, who is an enforcer, who can lift the other players with his impact performance.

"David has been awesome. Fills the guys with lot of confidence, he is a player you love having



on your side. Always got plenty to say, really energetic, professional and I have always loved playing with him," Paine couldn't stop raving about the man, who was hated by his countrymen after his role in the ball tampering scandal in South Africa came to the fore.



SYDNEY

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

'Ashwin's knack for learning new things'

leading the wicket-takers' chart with 10 scalps, Jadeja's half-century and the hundred plus stand with skipper Rahane in the second Test formed the cornerstone of India's eight-wicket win in Melbourne.

Asked about the hallmark of Ashwin's greatness, Rahane said, "He is always looking to learn new things. He has good skills but is always looking to learn new things, and that's what makes Ashwin great." The captain couldn't be more happier with the Tamil Nadu tweaker's success. "I hope that he continues for next two Test matches and do the job for us," said Rahane. If Ashwin's improvisation has impressed Rahane, he is mighty pleased with Jadeja's Test match

application which adds the necessary balance the team has often lacked. "As a batsman Ravindra Jadeja has improved a lot and that is a massive point as a team's perspective," Rahane said. "When you know that your number seven can contribute with the bat, that becomes really easy for you to actually get that (decent) total and obviously in the field, you have seen him taking some brilliant catches. "So yes his addition in the team helped us a lot and he has been really fantastic and it is really great for us," he said. Happy with Rohit Sharma's addition to the playing XI, the skipper informed that his deputy has had some seven to eight sessions as he gears up for his first Test in 13 months.

SMITH IS A CAGED LION READY TO BURST OUT: MOODY

NEW DELHI

STEVE Smith is a "caged lion ready to burst out," said former Australia all-rounder Tom Moody on Wednesday, backing the star batsman to come good in the third Test against India after struggling in the first two games.

Smith, considered one of the best batsmen in international cricket, could managed just 10 runs in the four innings he has played so far in the series and Moody said he is overdue for a big score. "You have to look at his record, he is overdue, that doesn't give you any guarantees but what it tells us that there is a caged lion ready to burst out and there is no one more determined than him to make sure that he is scoring runs in the new year," Moody told ESPNcricinfo. "There is always that talk between Williamson, and Kohli and Smith, so he will be very keen to make sure he remains in that conversation regularly."

Claire 1st female match official

SYDNEY

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



The 32-year-old from New South Wales has already earned the distinction of being the first woman on-field umpire in a men's ODI match in ICC's Division 2 league between Namibia and Oman played at the Windhoek in 2019. In the India-Australia Test match, the on-field umpires will be two former pacers Paul Reiffel and Paul Wilson while the TV Umpire will be Bruce Oxenford. The match referee is David Boon of Australia. As per ICC rules for Test matches, the fourth umpire is appointed by the home cricket board from their nominees to the International Panel of ICC Umpires and from the host country.

Pitch will be lively: Curator

SYDNEY

THE pitch for the third Test between India and Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground will be lively like the one dished out last year against New Zealand, SCG curator Adam Lewis has said.

"It is going to be similar...I think we will have a bit of pace in it. We always start off with a little bit of pace in it. It naturally then turns into the traditional SCG wicket. My worry was the weather this week. We just try to get the best wicket we can for Day One. After that it is taken out from my hand," Lewis told the media in a virtual interaction on Wednesday morning.

Off-spinner Nathan Lyon took 10 wickets in the Test against New Zealand last summer though the Aussie seamers also got plenty of help, taking eight wickets. "Every year is different with the weather. We try to give them the hard surface with a good amount of grass. Once the first ball is bowled that is taken out of my hand. Then the weather takes over," said Lewis.

Not at all annoyed by strict quarantine rules: Rahane

SYDNEY

STAND-IN skipper Ajinkya Rahane on Wednesday said that the Indian cricketers on tour in Australia are not annoyed by the strict quarantine rules and are abiding by them while focusing on the third Test which begins Thursday at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG).

He, however, added that it is a challenge for the team to be locked inside the team hotel while witnessing people in Sydney carry on with normal life outside.

The Indian players have been asked by the Indian cricket board (BCCI) to not go outside their hotel premises during their stay in the city. This strict quarantine will be followed by another hotel-ground-hotel routine

in Brisbane that hosts the fourth Test at The Gabba.

"We are not at all annoyed. We are here to play cricket. That is our priority...Being in quarantine has its own challenges. But as a team we are just focusing on the game. We know that outside life in Sydney is pretty normal but the players are we are in quarantine. That is a challenge. We have to face it. As a team we are focusing on the tomorrow's game, not complaining about anything," said Rahane on the eve of the third Test.

There has been speculation that India might not play the fourth Test in Brisbane since the quarantine rules are very strict. The stand-in India skipper, however, said they are leav-

ing the scheduling to the government and the board.

"The BCCI and the team management will take the decisions but for us as players, it is about giving our best on the field. The Test match is starting tomorrow. We are just focusing on the Test. We just want to do well as a team and win the Test match," said Rahane.

He also said that the players are prepared to abide by the strict quarantine laws and just want to play good cricket.

"We all are prepared. We just want to play good cricket... especially in Sydney the life is normal, the players are stuck in the room which is okay. But we know how to handle it. We are prepared for any kind of situation as a team. We just



want to do well starting tomorrow. Be in the moment and play some good cricket.

So that is what we are focusing on," added India's No. 4 batsman.

Kapil Dev turns 62: Sachin, Virat lead wishes

NEW DELHI

SACHIN Tendulkar and Virat Kohli led wishes for 1983 World Cup-winning skipper Kapil Dev who turned 62 on Wednesday.

"Happy birthday @therealkapildev paaji! Wishing you a year full of happiness & health," Tendulkar said in a tweet.

"Happy Birthday @therealkapildev. Wishing you happy times ahead for you and your family. Have a wonderful and a healthy year ahead," wrote Kohli.



Yuvraj Singh tweeted: "Wishing a very happy birthday to the legendary champion & greatest all-rounder @therealkapildev paaji. May you continue to be blessed with good health and success. Looking forward to teeing-off with you real soon! Have a wonderful year ahead. Best wishes."

"W a r m birthday wishes to a man who has touched and inspired so many lives with joy. Wishing you a blessed, healthy, fruitful, and eventful year @therealkapildev

paaji," said VVS Laxman.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and International Cricket Council (ICC) also took to their official Twitter handles to extend wishes for Kapil.

He held the world record for most Test wickets (434) for over six years until it was broken by Courtney Walsh of the West Indies. The other big achievement of Kapil was to lead India to World Cup triumph in 1983, when the team was considered minnows in limited-overs cricket. He played 131 Tests and 225 ODIs between 1978 and 1994.

The former India captain had suffered a cardiac arrest in October last year and subsequently underwent an angioplasty surgery in the national capital.

NZ no. 1 in Tests for 1st time

SEAL SERIES SWEEP AGAINST PAK BY INNINGS WIN

CHRISTCHURCH

FOR the first time ever, New Zealand have scaled the ICC Test team rankings to become the sixth country in the past ten years to be ranked number one in the longest format of the game. England, South Africa, India and Australia have all enjoyed a year at the top of ICC Test rankings in the last 10 years.

New Zealand achieved the feat following a dominant win by an innings and 176 runs against Pakistan in the second and final Test at the Hagley Oval on Wednesday.

The Kane Williamson-led side now have 118 points and are lead-

ing the charts. Australia are at the second spot with 116 points, followed by India (114), England (106) and South Africa (96).

The seventh country ever to hold the number one position in the Test rankings, the Black Caps spent much of the last couple of years in second place on the table with an impeccable home record recently.

With impeccable results against West Indies and Pakistan, both of whom were defeated in successive Tests by an innings each, New Zealand have proven they are now the most in-form Test team in world cricket.

In the ongoing inaugural World Test Championship, New

Zealand currently stand third in the points table with 0.700 percentage points won, the factor that determines the final placings rather than total points won, following a change to the points system owing to the Covid-19 disruption. Pakistan are on 0.307 percentage points.

Earlier, spearheaded by new sensation and Player of the Match Kyle Jamieson, who took 6/48 in Pakistan's second innings to returned with brilliant match figures of 11/117, the Black Caps cruised to victory inside four days to sweep the two-Test series and reach the top spot in the ICC Test rankings for the very first time.

Resuming their second innings

at 8/1 on Day Four, Pakistan had no answer against the New Zealand pacers, in particular Jamieson as they bundled out for mere 186.

None of the Pakistani batters crossed the 50-run mark, with Azhar Ali and Zafar Gohar top scoring with 37 each. Apart from Jamieson, Trent Boult also picked three wickets while skipper Kane Williamson also tried his hands at bowling and picked the wicket of Shaheen Afridi.

Jamieson, who has just played six Test and hasn't played away from home yet, has already taken 36 wickets (including four five-wicket bags) at a remarkable average of 13.28.