

SHORT TAKES

PLEA IN HC TO QUASH 129-ACRE DDA-DLF DEAL

New Delhi, Jan. 6: A PIL has been moved in the Delhi high court seeking to quash DDA's agreement with real estate major DLF transferring to the company around 129 acres of land in west Delhi which was taken over from various industries purportedly to develop a green belt. The petition was listed before a bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh on Wednesday, but could not be taken up for hearing via video conferencing as the internet connection of the petitioners' lawyers was not stable. The court, thereafter, listed the matter for hearing on January 27. During the brief hearing, the DDA said that the third party cannot interfere in its agreement with DLF, whose lawyers also opposed the plea. The plea by NGO All India Bhrashtachar Virodhi Morcha and Rashtrowadi Janhit Sabha, a society, has claimed that the entire land in question at Shivaji Marg in west Delhi was handed over to DLF by Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 2015 under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) after a park was inaugurated in 24 acres of the site in 2013. It has said that under the MoU, the maintenance and development of the DDA park and the cost thereof would be borne by DLF with which the land will remain for eight years and the same can be extended in installments of three years. — PTI

DIP IN AIR QUALITY, NOIDA, GURGAON IN 'MODERATE' INDEX

Noida, Jan. 6: The average air quality stayed "moderate" in Noida but dipped to "poor" in Greater Noida, Ghaziabad and Faridabad, while it dropped to "moderate" from "satisfactory" in Gurgaon, according to a 24-hour data issued by a government agency on Wednesday. Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 although remained prominent in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Wednesday was 234 in Ghaziabad, 239 in Greater Noida, 200 in Noida, 203 in Faridabad and 175 in Gurgaon, as per the CPCB's Sameer app. On Tuesday, it was 148 in Ghaziabad, 120 in Greater Noida, 149 in Noida, 138 in Faridabad and 83 in Gurgaon. On Monday, it was 168 in Ghaziabad, 134 in Greater Noida, 152 in Noida, 179 in Faridabad and 65 in Gurgaon. The CPCB states that an AQI in the moderate may lead to breathing discomfort to the people with asthma and heat diseases, while poor may cause breathing discomfort to most people on prolonged exposure. — PTI

PRISONER DIES IN NOIDA HOSPITAL AFTER CHEST PAIN

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

A 63-year-old inmate of a jail died at a hospital where he was taken following breathlessness, chest pain and shivering, officials said on Wednesday. Munawwar was sentenced to life imprisonment in a murder case in 2012 in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district and was transferred to the Laksar jail in 2018, prison officials said. "The inmate complained of chest pain, breathlessness and shivering around 11.30 pm on Tuesday," according to an official note. He was taken for preliminary treatment to the jail's doctor, who referred him to a hospital in Noida and he was taken there by two jail warders at 11.40 pm, it said. Around 12.50 am, one of the warders informed jail officials that Munawwar was examined and declared dead by the doctor at the hospital, the note said. The family of the deceased has been informed and district officials have been asked to start the inquest proceedings and judicial inquiry in the case, prison authorities said.

Looking into options to open schools: Sisodia

Students will return to classes after vaccine is out

New Delhi, Jan. 6: The Delhi government is brainstorming on how early schools here can be reopened and the future strategy to resume classroom studies will depend on when a Covid-19 vaccine is available to the public after frontline workers are inoculated, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on Wednesday. Schools in the national capital are closed since March last year in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. While a few states have partially reopened schools, the Delhi government had announced that schools will not reopen till a vaccine is available.

"Brainstorming is on for how early schools can be reopened in Delhi, especially for board classes as the dates for exams have already been announced," Mr Sisodia said while addressing the media. He also said that "our future strategy (on reopening schools) will depend on how early a Covid-19 vaccine is available for public after frontline workers are vaccinated".

Mr Sisodia announced that the Delhi government is organising an international education conference from January 11 to 17 on how should the education sector be in a post-Covid world. "We need to plan about our schools in a Covid era, just as we are planning about the Covid-19 vaccination. For this, we are organising an international



Manish Sisodia

al conference where 22 education experts from India, Finland, England, Germany, Singapore, Canada and Singapore will join panel discussions on different themes of school education," he said. The pandemic has created an unprecedented situation for children. Therefore, schooling and learning in a post-Covid era cannot be business as usual, Sisodia said, adding that the Delhi government is organising the conference to also brainstorm on future of school education. The conference will reflect on Delhi's education reforms, learn from global best practices and explore the possibilities of collaboration with other stakeholders as a way forward. "The seven-day long conference has three components. The conference would start where an independent study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) on the process and achievements of Delhi's education reform over the last five years will be released. This will set the context of the conference," Mr Sisodia said. — PTI

DU grads move HC over delay in JNU results

New Delhi, Jan. 6: Three students, whose graduation results were declared by Delhi University (DU) with a delay during the COVID-19 pandemic, have urged the Delhi high court to direct JNU to give them admission in post-graduate courses.

The students claimed that despite achieving a higher score in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) entrance examination, the varsity was not granting them admission due to delay in publication of their graduation results by the DU.

Responding to the submissions of the students, the JNU's counsel said that admissions are still going on for several courses and if the seats are available in the relevant courses for which the petitioners have applied in their respective categories, and if they qualify on merit for admission in those courses, their cases will also be considered sympathetically by the university.

In the hearing held on Tuesday, Justice Prateek Jalan accepted the statement made by JNU counsel Monika Arora. — PTI

Man held for beating up calf in East Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

A man has been arrested for allegedly thrashing a calf in East Delhi's Mandawali and leaving the animal wreathing in pain, the police said on Wednesday.

A CCTV footage of the incident has been doing the rounds on social media and the police has identified the man as Kamal Singh, a resident of the locality.

The police said after they received information regarding the incident, they rushed to the spot and found the calf in injured condition.

It was taken to the Sanjay Gandhi Hospital for medical examination and a proper treatment was given to it, a senior police officer said.

The CCTV footage of the incident shows the man passing through a road with some documents in his hand when the calf, standing near to a cow, charges towards him and just about hits him.

The man gets unnerved as his documents fell on the ground, leaving him angry. The video then shows the man spanking and kicking the animal before he collects his documents.

Traffic hit due to waterlogging at key roads



Vehicles move through waterlogged Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway after rains in Gurugram on Wednesday. — PTI

Snow in parts of North India; air, road traffic hit in J&K Hailstorm, heavy rain hit Delhi-NCR

New Delhi, Jan. 6: Parts of north India witnessed snowfall or rain on Wednesday affecting air and road traffic in Jammu and Kashmir, while the national capital woke up to the pitter-patter of hailstones as the city's spell of wet weather entered its fourth day.

The India Meteorological Department, however, said dry weather is expected over entire Northwest India from Thursday, but dense to very dense fog is very likely in many pockets of the region due to favourable weather conditions.

While Jammu and Kashmir received rain and snow, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Lakshadweep, Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and Delhi witnessed rain or thundershower at most places during the 24 hours ending at 8.30 am Wednesday.

"We had 28 arriving

flights and 28 outgoing flights and all of them were cancelled," said a Srinagar airport official, citing snowfall and poor visibility.

An official of the traffic control room in Jammu said, "No traffic was allowed on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway due to accumulation of snow and landslides at many places."

South Kashmir's Kulgam district received highest snowfall with five to six feet of snow accumulated at some places. Anantnag district has also received heavy snowfall. This also led to power supply disruptions in many areas across the Valley.

In Delhi, meanwhile, people woke up to the rumbles of thunder and the sound of hailstones hitting rooftops and windows as the city received rainfall for the fourth consecutive day.

The IMD said parts of

THE IMD said parts of South Delhi reported hailstorm around 7.30 am. Dark clouds lowered visibility, and a short spell of heavy showers inundated key stretches of major roads in the city, affecting traffic

South Delhi reported hailstorm around 7.30 am. Dark clouds lowered visibility, and a short spell of heavy showers inundated key stretches of major roads in the city, affecting traffic movement.

Residents in neighbouring Gurgaon also shared video clips of hailstorm there.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded 6 mm rainfall between 8.30 am on Tuesday and 8.30 am on Wednesday.

At Safdarjung, the minimum temperature settled at 13 degrees Celsius, six

notches above normal, as a result of the cloud cover over the city.

Meanwhile, moderate rains and thundershowers were observed over isolated places in western Uttar Pradesh while very light rains and thundershowers occurred at some places in the state's eastern parts on Wednesday, the Met department said.

State capital Lucknow recorded a minimum temperature of 12.7 degrees Celsius, while Allahabad recorded 14.6 degrees Celsius. The lowest minimum temperature in the state was 6.2 degrees Celsius, recorded in Etawah and Banda.

Night temperatures were above normal across most of Rajasthan, barring Mount Abu, the state's only hill station, where the mercury dipped to minus 3.4 degrees Celsius, weather department officials said in Jaipur. — PTI

6 from Rajasthan held as cops bust extortion racket

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Six members of an alleged extortion gang have been arrested from Rajasthan for allegedly duping people after be-friending them on social media and later threatened to upload their morphed chat videos online

THE MEMBERS the gang allegedly duped people after be-friending them on social media and later threatened to upload their morphed chat videos online

Offensive videos of more than 40 victims have been recovered from the mobile phones of the accused persons, they added.

The accused have so far allegedly cheated people to the tune of ₹25 lakh, a senior police officer said, adding 10 bank accounts linked to the gang have been identified and frozen.

A probe was initiated by the Cyber Cell Unit of the Delhi police after multiple complaints were received in the last few weeks against an online extortion racket, he said.

"As per the complaints, the victims were contacted over social media platforms such as Facebook through profiles of attractive individuals. The victims were engaged in a

brief chat and guided to a video call over Messenger or WhatsApp. During the call, the victims were shown an adult clip and their video call was simultaneously recorded.

"After sometime, they got extortion calls in the name of the offensive video made from the captured video chat. Amounts ranging from ₹2,000 to 30,000 were demanded and some of the victims succumbed to those demands before reporting it to the police," said DCP (Cyber Cell) Anyesh Roy.

Using technical help, the location of the accused was zeroed in to Bharatpur, Rajasthan. Later, in coordination with the Bharatpur police, the hideouts of the gang were identified and early on Monday morning, raids were conducted and six accused arrested, he said.

During the course of investigation, it was found that the accounts in which money was transferred were of Alwar.

SC acquits man facing death sentence

New Delhi, Jan. 6: A man, who was awarded death sentence for his alleged involvement in a case in which four persons, including two minor children, were killed has been acquitted by the Supreme Court, which said it was not safe to rely on the version of a minor witness who was five-year-old at the time of incident.

The apex court referred to certain inconsistencies from the record and said it is difficult to place reliance upon the testimony of minor child, who was the son of one of the victims, and his version cannot be made the basis of conviction of accused who was awarded capital punishment for the 2008 case.

A bench headed by Justice U.U. Lalit also acquitted two other accused, who were facing life term in the case after their conviction by the trial court was upheld by the Allahabad high court, giving them the benefit of doubt.

The bench, also comprising Justices Indu Malhotra and Krishna Murari, sets aside the orders convicting these three accused in the case for the alleged offence under Section 396 (dacoity with murder) of the Indian Penal Code.

A trial court had in July 2015 awarded death penalty to Hari Om after convicting him in the case. Later, the high court had affirmed his conviction and death sentence imposed upon him.

The high court, in its judgment delivered in March 2017, had also affirmed the conviction and life term awarded by the trial court to two other accused.

It, however, had acquitted the other three accused who were convicted by the trial court. — PTI

Preparations underway to ensure effective rollout in Delhi

Covid vaccine may arrive early next week

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

The Covid-19 vaccine is likely to arrive in Delhi by early next week and robust preparations are underway to stock it in the required thermal environment and ensure effective roll-out of the inoculation exercise, sources said on Wednesday.

The city government is creating a massive storage facility at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital (RGSSH) and the police administration has been informed about the imminent arrival of the vaccine lot. "We are making robust preparations for the roll-out, and 621 cold chain facilities have been set up. The storage facility at RGSSH can stock about 50,000 vac-



A medic conducts the dry run of Covid-19 vaccine at Kasturba Hospital in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

cines. All arrangements being made there to keep it in temperature-controlled environment," a senior official said.

One vial of the vaccine has about 4.6-5 ml capacity and contains on an average 8-10 doses, another official said.

"We are expecting that the vaccine will arrive by next week, possibly by Tuesday. But which vaccine will come, we have not been told. Our storage can keep it at 2-8 degrees Celsius, so either of the two approved vaccines can be stored," a source said.

A total of 1,000 vaccination centres will be set up in Delhi. About 600 centres will be set up in the first phase, for which work is underway in full swing, the officials said.

Delhi on Wednesday recorded as many as 654 fresh coronavirus cases on Wednesday. With this, the tally of Covid-19 cases in the state has reached over 6.28 lakh, while the death toll mounted to 10,625.

Sixteen fatalities have been recorded in the last 24 hours, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. The positivity rate stood at 0.88 per cent, authorities said.

According to a health bulletin, 74,650 tests conducted in the last 24 hours, including 39,623 RT-PCR tests and 35,027 rapid antigen tests.

DTC Board okays fund to buy 1,000 new buses

New Delhi, Jan. 6: The Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) Board on Wednesday approved the fund for procurement of 1,000 low floor air-conditioned CNG buses which will boost public transport in the national capital.

The Board, in its meeting on Wednesday, also approved increasing the ceiling of gratuity for DTC employees from present Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh, according to a statement.

The meeting chaired by Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot approved funds for procurement of 1,000 air-conditioned low floor CNG (BS-VI compliant) buses, the DTC statement said. Funds for annual maintenance of

buses up to 7.5 lakh km per bus covering 12 years comprehensive maintenance insurance were also approved in the meeting, it said.

The new low floor CNG buses would be equipped with state-of-the-art facilities including real-time passenger information system, CCTVs, panic buttons, GPS and other features besides being friendly to differently-abled passengers.

"We have approved funds for the procurement of 1,000 low floor CNG Buses as well as for comprehensive annual maintenance of these buses for their entire life time. This will help in reducing down time of buses and increase overall user experience," Gahlot said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

EX-CONG MLA SAYS
11 OF 19 MLAS
MAY JOIN JD-UNAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, JAN. 6

Former Congress MLA Bharat Singh has created a flutter in the political circle by predicting a major split in the party.

According to him around 11 MLAs of the party are in touch with the JD(U) leadership and may quit the Congress soon. He also alleged that Congress state president Madan Mohan Jha and senior party leader Ajit Singh are among those who may also defect to the JD(U).

Talking to reporters Singh said that, "Most of the candidates who contested Assembly elections on Congress ticket were outsiders. They got tickets by paying huge money and now after winning elections they are planning to quit and join hands with the ruling JD(U)".

He added that, "The MLAs who are planning to join the JD(U) are being guided by Madan Mohan Jha and other senior leaders. We tried to raise the issue earlier also but nothing was done and tickets were distributed to those who had nothing to do with the party or its workers".

The development comes a day after the party's Bihar in-charge Shakti Singh Gohil was relieved from the post and Bhakt Charan Das was appointed in his place.

4 DIE AT ROURKELA
STEEL PLANT DUE
TO TOXIC GAS LEAKAKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
ROURKELA, JAN. 6

Four contractual employees at the Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) reportedly died on Wednesday after inhaling toxic fumes that leaked at the coal chemical unit of the plant on.

According to reports, around 15 employees are on duty in the morning at the site when the incident took place. Ten of them fell ill following the leakage of toxic gas from the plant. All were initially admitted to the dispensary on the plant premises.

Later, four of them were shifted to the Ispat General Hospital (IGH) after their condition deteriorated. While two were declared brought dead, two more succumbed during treatment in the ICU of the hospital where they had been admitted in a critical condition, reports said. The deceased were identified as Ganesh Chandra Pahil (55), Rabindra Sahu (59), Abhimanyu Sah (33) and Bramhananda Panda (51).

Six more employees have been discharged from the plant dispensary after preliminary treatment. Soon after the incident, fire service personnel of the steel plant cordoned off the area after evacuating all the employees who were on duty.

12 epicentres in four states
report bird flu cases: Centre

Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh advised to stay alert

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Union health ministry has deployed multi-disciplinary teams to the Avian Influenza affected Alappuzha and Kottayam districts of Kerala, and Panchkula in Haryana.

The move comes shortly after the department of animal husbandry notified detection of Avian Influenza (H5N8), also known as bird flu, in the samples of dead poultry ducks from Alappuzha and Kottayam districts in Kerala, and from poultry samples from Panchkula in Haryana.

Besides, advisory has been issued to Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh where two cases of Avian Influenza have been detected, to avoid further spread of the infection.

According to the Union government, at present there are 12 epicentres of bird flu spread in four states.

In Rajasthan dead crows were found in Baran, Kota and Jhalawar; in Madhya Pradesh samples of dead crows were positive to avian influenza in Mandsaur, Indore, and Malwa; while in Himachal Pradesh samples of dead migratory birds tested positive in Kangra. Officials said in Kerala there are four epicentres in Kottayam, and Allapuzha.

"As per the report received, Kerala has already initiated control and containment operations from January 5, at epicentres and culling process is in operation," officials in Union ministry of animal husbandry said.

They added the measures suggested to the affected states to contain the disease and prevent further spread as per the Action Plan on avian influenza include strengthening the biosecurity of poultry farms, disinfection of affected areas, proper disposal of dead birds/carcasses, timely collection and submission of samples for confirmation and further surveillance, intensification of surveillance plan as well as the general guidelines for prevention of disease spread from affected birds to poultry and human.

Besides, coordination with forest department



A worker sprays disinfectant inside a poultry farm in view of Avian influenza, in the outskirts of Bhopal on Wednesday. — PTI

for reporting any unusual mortality of birds has also been suggested to the states. The other states were also requested to keep a vigil on any unusual mortality amongst birds and to report immediately to take necessary measures.

In India, the disease spreads mainly in winters through migratory birds.

India notified its first outbreak of avian influenza in 2006.

So far infection in humans is yet reported in the country though the disease is zoonotic.

"There is no direct evidence that avian influenza viruses can be transmitted to humans via the consumption of contaminated poultry products. Implementing management practices that incorporate bio security principles, personal hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection protocols, as well as cooking and processing standards, are effective means of controlling the spread of the AI viruses," officials asserted.

They, however, said secondary spread by human handling (through fomites) cannot be ruled out.

MP may bar hotels from
serving non-veg foodRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
with agency inputs
BHOPAL, JAN. 6

Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday imposed a ban on chicken imports from southern states for 10 days in view of avian flu scare in the state.

Official sources here said the state government was seriously considering to bar hotels and restaurants in the state from serving non-vegetarian food if the bird flu took the form of an epidemic form in the state.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan convened an emergency official meeting here to take stock of the situation in the wake of the reports of death of at least 400 crows and some other avian species in various parts of the state in the last couple of weeks.

"Avian flu has been detected in chicken in Kerala and some other

● **SOURCES SAID** a decision to resume chicken imports from southern states would be taken after reviewing the bird flu situation in these states after 10 days.

southern states. We have taken a decision not to allow transportation of chickens from these southern states to MP for 10 days", Chouhan told reporters here.

Official sources said a decision to resume chicken imports from southern states would be taken after reviewing the bird flu situation in these states after 10 days.

Chouhan said there was no cause for worry in MP since random inspections of poultry in the state has indicated that H5N8, called in common parlance as bird flu, has not been detected in chickens in the state so far. "We are keeping a strict vigil on the situation", he said.

Earlier at the review

meeting, the Chief Minister ordered the authorities concerned to take precautionary measures to protect the poultry from the avian flu and step up vigil to prevent bird flu from taking epidemic form in the state.

He also directed the district collectors to remain in touch with poultry farm owners in their respective areas to ensure that they enforced guidelines issued by the Centre in their farms in view of outbreak of the disease.

Meanwhile, presence of H5N8 virus (a variant of avian influenza or bird flu) was found in the carcasses of crows in Mandsaur and Agar Malwa districts, an official said, citing test results of samples sent for laboratory analysis. A total of 155 dead crows in Indore have been found with the H5N8 virus since the pathogen was first detected in the state's commercial hub a week back.

India, France
to hold annual
dialogue todaySRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Strategic partners and close friends India and France will hold their annual strategic dialogue on Thursday in New Delhi, with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval leading the Indian delegation while the French delegation will be led by Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Advisor to French President Emmanuel Macron.

In a statement, the MEA said, "India and France will hold their annual Strategic Dialogue on 7 January 2021 in New Delhi. Ajit Doval, National Security Advisor will lead the Indian delegation while the French delegation will be led by Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Advisor to the French President. The two sides will hold discussions on wide-ranging bilateral and global issues. Bonne will also call on other Indian dignitaries. The last edition of the Strategic Dialogue was held in February 2020 in Paris."

It may be recalled that a month ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken to French President Emmanuel Macron during which PM Modi "reiterated India's full support to France in the fight against terrorism, extremism and radicalism" and expressed his condolences in the wake of the terror attacks in France that took place last year.

India is also currently in the process of acquiring 36 state-of-the-art Rafale fighter aircraft from France, with a few of these aircraft already inducted into the Indian Air Force.

It may be recalled that India had in October last year too come out vociferously in support of France, and had "strongly deplored the personal attacks in unacceptable language on (French) President Emmanuel Macron, after a row over his remark following the beheading of a teacher near Paris.

50-year-old in UP
gangraped, killed
by priest, aides

Budaun (UP), Jan. 6: A 50-year-old anganwadi worker was gangraped and brutally murdered allegedly by a priest and his two accomplices in Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh, police said on Wednesday.

Two of the accused were arrested on Tuesday night after the post-mortem report confirmed rape while the priest is on the run, they said, adding that the woman's leg and a rib bone were fractured and there were injuries in her private parts.

The incident, which triggered an instant hue and cry in the political circles, took place on Sunday and the matter came to light when her body was brought home at night. The FIR was registered two days later following which the duo was nabbed.

Opposition parties attacked the BJP government in the state and termed the incident "horrific" and "shameful", with the Congress comparing it to the Nirbhaya incident of 2012.

"The post-mortem report confirms rape and there are injuries in her private parts and a fracture in the leg," Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sankalp Sharma said. She suffered from a rib fracture too, he said, citing the autopsy report.

He said the station house officer (SHO) of Ughaiti police station has been suspended for "delay in informing higher authorities, laxity in taking action, dereliction of duty and failure in taking speedy action".

"On Sunday, the 50-year-old woman, who had gone to a temple, was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Family members of

the woman have accused the temple mahant (priest) and his accomplices of raping and murdering her. Based on this, a case was registered against the accused. Two of the accused persons were arrested on Tuesday night, while the mahant is still absconding," he said.

Four teams have been formed to nab the priest, the SSP said.

The case was registered on Tuesday after the post-mortem report came. "Based on complaints of the family members and the post-mortem report, a case has been registered under section 376D (gang-rape) and 302 (punishment for murder) of IPC," the SSP said.

He said that opinion on the post-mortem report is being sought from medical experts and after that only a conclusion can be reached.

To a specific question as to whether the case bore any resemblance to the horrific Nirbhaya rape case, the SSP said, "It will be wrong to link this incident to any previous incident. Let's wait for the medical examination report."

CMO Budaun Dr Yashpal Singh said the woman died of trauma and excessive bleeding. The victim's son said his mother had gone to offer prayers at the temple on Sunday but she did not return home within expected time. It was only around 11 pm that the temple priest and two of his aides came to their house and handed over her body, he said.

Before the family members could ask how she died, the accused left the house saying that she had fallen in a dry well and her body was pulled out and brought to her home. He said police was informed on Monday.

— PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE	
Sr. DEN/IMB acting for and on behalf of the president of India invites E-Tenders against Tender no. 131-DRM-MB-20-21 closing date 02.02.2021, 16:00 hrs. Name of work : Improvement of goods shed at HRI station in the section of SSE/W/HRI under ADEN/HRI-I. Tender closing date/time : 02.02.2021 at 16:00 hrs. Cost of work : ₹16,27,162.60 Earnest Money : ₹32,600/- Tender Code : RNIL. Bidding start date : 19.01.2021 and Period of Completion : 06 Months. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. For detail information please log into www.ireps.gov.in . Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money only through online payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payment through Demand draft, Bankers cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed.	
No., 139-DRM-MB-20-21 Date: 04.01.2021	26/21
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE	
The Dy. Chief Engineer/TMCLLine, S.E. Road, New Delhi, for and on behalf of the President of India invites open e-tender under Single Packet System for the under noted work:-	
1. Name of work and location	Hiring of Truck Model 207 or similar of minimum 1.0 Metric Ton capacity CNG fuelled for TMMD/TKD for leading of Railway material such as track machine spares, T&P, Oil and other Engg. Material of any length & breadth etc., for a period of 24 months for maintenance of Track Machines in jurisdiction of Dy.CE/TMCLLine, S.E. Road, New Delhi.
2. Completion period of the work	24 Months
3. Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 13.83 Lakhs
4. Cost of Tender Document	Nil
5. Earnest Money amount (to be deposited Online)	Rs. 27,700/-
6. Date & Time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender	Tenders bid may be uploaded upto 15.00 hrs. on 02.02.2021 on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in . The bidders can participate in the e-tender, the tender will be opened soon after 15.00 hrs. on 02.02.2021.
7. Detailed Tender Notice & Tender Document	The detailed e-tender notice and Tender Document is available on Railway website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in . Above tenders document will be available for submission of offer on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 19.01.2021 to 02.02.2021. The bidders who desire to participate against e-tenders, are advised to electronically register themselves on the above website for which, they would require to, obtain class III digital certificate (if already not obtained) issued by CCA under IT Act-2000. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tenders are given in tender document. The detailed tender notice also can be seen on the Notice Board of the above office.
Tender Notice No. : 1-W-DYCE/TMCL-TRK-07-20-21 Dated : 06.01.2021 38/21	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority	
noida Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.) Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com	
E-TENDER NOTICE	
E-Tenders are invited from firms/ contractors registered with for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com and https://etender.up.nic.in . Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.	
S. Job No./Work Name	Amount
1. 132/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2020-21, M/o Park (GH-01) with two year maintenance Sector-119	Cost Rs. 26.07 Lacs
2. 141/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2020-21, M/o Park with two year Maintenance (Near SD-144 and SH 51) Sector-63A.	Cost Rs. 10.43 Lacs
3. 137/D(H)/DD(H)-III/2020-21, M/o R.S.P. Sector-90, 138 (Dust free Zone) with two year maintenance.	Cost Rs. 9.69 Lacs
4. 138/D(H)/DD(H)-III/2020-21, Two year M/o Green Belt Express Highway 8.00 Km to 8.70 Km, LHS in front of Panchsheel School.	Cost Rs. 25.06 Lacs
Which can be uploaded by date 13.01.2021 upto 5.00 pm. Pre-qualification shall be opened / downloaded on date 14.01.2021 at 11.00 am.	
Office: Sector-39, Noida	Director (Hort.) Noida
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA	

VIRUS | BLUES

Delhi govt has conducted its own dry run for vaccine

Steady decline in coronavirus cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Thirteen more cases of new, mutated UK virus of Covid-19 have been detected in the samples of people who have travelled back from the United Kingdom taking the total number of cases infected with the new strain to 71.

India so far has reported 1,03,74,932 cases out of which 18,088 were detected in the last 24 hours. Till now 1,54,114 deaths have been recorded out of which 264 are fresh fatalities. The Union health ministry said there is a steady decline in the number of daily deaths in the country and less than 300 new deaths have been recorded in the country in the last 12 days.

The Delhi government conducted its own dry run for the vaccine on Wednesday. "The Central government is gearing up for the roll out of Covid-19 vaccine across the country. Union ministry of health has been pro-actively carrying out the preparations for roll out of the vaccine, in collaboration with states/UTs and all stakeholders, over the past couple of months to ensure that the preparations for roll-out of Covid-19 vaccine are on track.

"As a simulation of actual execution, another round of dry run/mock drill in all 700 plus districts of all states/UTs (except UP and Haryana who have already conducted/ will be conducting the dry run in all districts on 5th January and 7th January, respectively) is planned on 8th January 2021 to ensure efficient planning and

Schools to reopen
in Punjab today

Chandigarh, Jan. 6: The Punjab government on Wednesday decided to reopen all schools from January 7 for students of classes 5 to 12.

State education minister Vijay Inder Singla said following the persistent demand of parents, the state government has decided to reopen all government, semi-government and private schools from January 7 onwards.

In a statement here, Singla said the timings of the schools will be from 10 am to 3 pm.

The students only of classes 5 to 12 will be allowed to physically attend their classes, said the minister.

Singla said while giving his nod, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh directed the department to ensure the safety of the children, amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The minister said following the CM's directions, all school managements have been asked

to strictly comply with all anti-Covid precautions in schools.

The Cabinet minister also said that the education department had taken feedback from school heads.

Besides ensuring safety of the children, they also suggested the reopening of schools before the annual exams for final revision of the course, he said.

Meanwhile, the Gujarat government also on Wednesday announced that schools for classes 10 and 12, and colleges for the final year graduation and post-graduation students in the state would be reopened from January 11, months after remaining shut due to pandemic.

The decision was taken at the state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Vijay Rupani and Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel in Gandhinagar Wednesday.

— PTI

ODISHA RECORDS NO
DEATHS DUE TO
VIRUS AFTER 6-MTHSAKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 6

Even as the new strain of Coronavirus has begun to scare the countrymen, Odisha on Tuesday registered zero deaths due to the deadly virus for the first time after six months.

"There have been no Covid deaths in the state in the last 24 hours," the state health and family welfare department informed on Wednesday.

"Happy to share that after over six months, there are no Covid deaths reported in the state on 5th January 2021. We salute our Covid Warriors whose tireless efforts have made this possible," the department said.

With no Covid death in the last 24 hours, the toll stood at 1,887 in the state.

The first death due to Covid-19 was reported on April 7 last year in Odisha after a 72-year-old man of Jharpada area succumbed to the virus on April 6, 2020 while undergoing treatment at the AIIMS, Bhubaneswar.

The state has so far recorded 3,32,921 Covid-19 cases. While 3,27,008 cases have recovered, 1973 cases are still active. The government, however, did not mention the number of tests conducted in the past 24 hours.

Union health ministry officials said.

Two Covid-19 vaccines have been given emergency use authorisation by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) recently.

The roll out of Covid-19 vaccine is expected to begin soon.

SHORT TAKES

24 YRS ON, MAHA GOVT WAIVES OFF TAX ON MJ SHOW

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 6

24 years later, the Shiv Sena-led MVA government in Maharashtra has decided to waive off an entertainment duty worth ₹3.36 crore for the late American pop singer Michael Jackson's musical concert held in Mumbai. The event was organised by the Sena's youth leader and now its bete-noire MNS chief Raj Thackeray. The state Cabinet on Wednesday approved the proposal to release the amount to Wizcraft International, the event manager of the concert. The concert was organised on November 1, 1996, by Raj Thackeray-led Shiv Udyog Sena (SUS). Branding the event as a 'classical show,' the then Shiv Sena-BJP government had granted waiver of ₹3.40 crore in entertainment duty to them on grounds that the profit of the show will be used for charity by the SUS. However, the Mumbai Grahak Panchayat challenged the decision in the Bombay High Court arguing that pop music did not qualify for a waiver under provisions of the Entertainment Duty Act (1923). It also contended that the SUS was not registered as a charity organisation with the charity commissioner. The high court, in its decision on April 13, 2011, slammed the then government for 'non-application of mind' while setting aside the order regarding the exemption. However, with the Sena now back at power, the state has decided to grant a waiver.

MODI, MERKEL DISCUSS WAYS TO BOOST TIES

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Seeking to strengthen ties with Europe and its industrial powerhouse Germany, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a video-teleconference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday during which "the two leaders discussed key issues of mutual importance, including the response to the Covid-19, bilateral ties, regional and global issues, particularly India-European Union (EU) relations". In a statement, the MEA said, "The Prime Minister appreciated the long-standing role of Chancellor Merkel in providing stable and strong leadership at the European and global stage, and thanked her for guiding the growth of the India-Germany Strategic Partnership. The Prime Minister briefed Chancellor Merkel on the developments in India with regard to vaccine development and assured Chancellor Merkel of India's commitment to deploy its capacities for the benefit of the world. He conveyed his best wishes for early containment of the new wave of infections in Germany and other European countries."

Farm laws

■ Continued from Page 1
take up the matters immediately". This argument was backed by the A-G, who argued that "filing of response in court by the Centre could foreclose avenues of negotiations underway between the farmers and the Centre". The bench finally scheduled a hearing of all pending matters related to the farm laws on Monday.

The bench was hearing a petition by Delhi lawyer Manohar Lal Sharma, who injected a new element into the controversy by challenging a 1954 constitutional amendment that put agriculture in the Concurrent List, giving an advantage to the Centre to enact the farm laws on the subjects coming under the State List.

When the attorney-general wanted Mr Sharma's petition thrown out, saying no state had objected to the 75-year-old amendment, the CJI quipped that the lawyer petitioner feels otherwise, that the Centre and the states are in collusion for the last 75 years.

Besides the challenge to the farm laws, the Supreme Court is also hearing petitions seeking the removal of farmers from the protest sites in the Delhi-NCR border areas.

One of the petitions, filed by Delhi law student Rishabh Sharma, said it was necessary to remove the protesters as they were blocking the roads and disrupting emergency/medical services in Delhi, where Covid-19 cases were increasing rapidly.

Many farmers support agri laws: Tomar

'Protesting unions must understand sentiments behind farm reforms'

New Delhi, Jan. 6: Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Wednesday said a large number of farmers from across the country are coming out in support of three farm laws and urged protesting unions to understand the sentiments behind reforms brought through these legislations.

He also expressed confidence that the protesting unions will focus on farmers' interests and help the government reach a solution through constructive dialogue.

Speaking to reporters after meeting a group supporting the laws, Mr Tomar said the government is committed towards all farmers of the country and their interests.

"Therefore, we are meeting those farmers who are coming out in support of the three laws, in addition to a continuing dialogue with those opposing the Acts," the minister said.

He further said, "A large number of farmers from across the country are coming out in support of the laws. We are meeting them and also getting their letters and phone calls. We welcome and thank all of them."

Seven rounds of talks between the government and representatives of protesting farmers have failed to resolve a long-running agitation against the three laws enacted in September.

While the government has presented these new

laws as major reforms aimed at increasing farmers' income and improving their lives, the protesting groups see these legislations as pro-corporate and against the current MSP and mandi systems.

The next round of talks with protesting unions is scheduled for January 8, while the government has been also separately meeting various farm groups that have extended support to the laws.

"I am confident that protesting unions will also understand the sentiments behind the farm reform laws and will focus on farmers' interests and will surely help us reach a solution through a constructive dialogue," Mr Tomar said.

Earlier in the day, the minister met the All India Farmers Association (AIFA), headed by former Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson Sanjay Nath Singh, which submitted a representation in support of the new farm laws.

The group also some suggestions for the ongoing negotiations between the government and the protesting unions. — PTI

AAP accuses Capt. of implementing farm laws, demands his resignation

New Delhi, Jan. 6: Alleging that the Congress government in Punjab has implemented the contentious farm laws in the state, the Aam Aadmi Party on Wednesday demanded resignation of chief minister Amarinder Singh for "overt and open betrayal of the farmers".

Citing news reports about Punjab's minister of food and civil supplies Bharat Bhushan Ashu's comment that the Congress government has allowed farmers from

elsewhere to sell their produce in the state, AAP's Punjab co-incharge Raghav Chadha accused Singh of "lying to everyone".

"It is indeed sad to note that this year has begun on such a grim note with the biggest fraud and betrayal committed by the Congress and Amarinder Singh who have implemented the black farm laws in Punjab. The Aam Aadmi Party demands his resignation," Mr Chadha said. — PTI



An artist paints a mural ahead of the Kolkata International Film Festival on Wednesday.

— PTI

Serial-killer who lured victims on pretext of finding treasure held

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 6

An alleged serial-killer, who murdered six people in the last two decades after luring them to jungles on the pretext of finding a hidden treasure, was early on Wednesday arrested in a forest in Sagar in Madhya Pradesh.

A 51-day search by the police in the Rahatgarh forest in Sagar led to the arrest of the "serial killer" Maniram Sen (58) early on Wednesday morning, the police said.

According to the police, Maniram had fled to Manora forest in Vidisha district after killing Adil Khan in a jungle on the outskirts of Bhopal on November 8 last year.

He later slipped to Rahatgarh forest when police mounted a search for him in the jungle.

"Maniram claimed him to be a tantric. He

appears mentally unsound," Bhopal additional superintendent of police Rajesh Singh Bhadoria said.

He has literally cut off relations with his family since the last 3 years, the police said.

According to the police, during his interrogation, Maniram said he had borrowed ₹17,000 from the slain Adil. But Adil started bothering him by asking him to return the money.

Hence, he had taken him to the forest outside Bhopal by promising him to find hidden treasure and killed him in the forest by hitting him with a

heavy stone repeatedly, on November 8.

He then fled to the forest in Vidisha. He, however, shifted to Rahatgarh forest when police had searched for him in Vidisha forest.

He had shunned mobile phone to avoid detection by police and used to roam in Rahatgarh forest till his arrest.

According to Piplani police station in-charge Chain Singh Raghuvamsi, Maniram had killed 5 members of a family, including 3 women, in Manora forest in Vidisha district on July 7, 2000, by luring them to the jungle to find them a hidden treasure.

He had taken Sanno Harijan (50) and the latter's 4 other family members to the Manora forest one by one and killed them by hitting their heads with heavy stones. The skeletons of the five slain people were recovered a month later.



An elderly man distributes toffees among children at Singhu Border in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

ED calls Raut's wife again in PMC Bank case

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 6

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued fresh summons against Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut's wife Varsha asking her to appear before it on January 11 in connection with the ₹4,300 crore PMC Bank money laundering case.

Ms Raut had earlier appeared before the ED on January 4. She now has been summoned to appear for the second round of questioning.

The ED is probing her role in connection with the alleged transfer of funds worth ₹55 lakh from the accounts of Pravin Raut, an accused arrested in the case. Pravin Raut has been a director in an infrastructure company called Guruashish constructions and is stated to be a subsidiary of the HDIL (Housing Development Infrastructure Limited), an accused firm in this case.

SC refuses to stay laws against interfaith marriage

Agrees to examine validity of laws enacted in UP, U'khand

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to stay the laws enacted by Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh that aims to regulate inter-faith marriages and conversion while issuing notice in two pleas challenging the validity of the laws.

Refusing to stay the laws, a bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde said it can't decide which provisions of the two laws were oppressive unless it hears the concerned state governments.

The Uttarakhand government has promulgated an Ordinance regulating the inter-faith marriages and religious conversions and a similar was enacted by the Uttarakhand in 2018.

When advocate Pradeep Kumar Yadav pointed out that the BJP governments in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana are also bringing

the laws on the lines of the UP Ordinance and the whole society is affected, the CJI said the laws of only two states are under challenge and it won't expand the petitions' scope.

The bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian, however, agreed to examine the validity of the Ordinance and the laws.

The court was hearing two petitions, one by Delhi-based lawyer Vishal Thakre and another by Mumbai-based NGO Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), challenging the constitutional validity of the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 (Uttar Pradesh Vidhi Virudh Dharma Samparivartan Pratishedh Adhyadhes, 2020), was cleared by the state Cabinet in November and was signed by governor Anandiben Patel on November 28.

The ordinance lays down a detailed procedure to be followed before an individual can convert from one religion to another. Violation of the same entails criminal liability on the individual who undergoes conversion and the individual who converts the person.

The State to suppress an individual's liberty and the freedom to practice religion of one's choice.

The Uttarakhand law and UP ordinance essentially bar conversion to any other religion for the purposes of marriage.

The controversial ordinance titled, Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 (Uttar Pradesh Vidhi Virudh Dharma Samparivartan Pratishedh Adhyadhes, 2020), was cleared by the state Cabinet in November and was signed by governor Anandiben Patel on November 28.

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Nitish chuckles over 'Ratna' to Sonia

Congress could have done it when it headed UPA govt: Bihar CM

Patna, Jan. 6: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday chuckled over the demand for conferring Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian honour in the country, on Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

Mr Kumar remarked that the Congress could have done the needful while the UPA, led by it, ruled the country for two consecutive terms.

"All have the right to raise any type of demand," he said with a barely suppressed laugh when asked about the suggestion made by former union minister and ex-chief minister of

Uttarakhand Harish Rawat that Gandhi, besides BSP supremo Mayawati, be considered for the civilian honour.

Mr Rawat said in support of his demand that while the Congress president has taken the honour of Indian womanhood to new heights, the BSP chief had inspired millions of oppressed.

"I wonder why they did not do the needful when they were in power. No need for raising such a demand would have remained in that case," Kumar quipped.

The Bihar chief minister was talking to reporters



Nitish Kumar

outside the police headquarters which he had visited to take stock of the law and order situation in the state.

Mr Kumar, who is the JD(U)s de facto leader, however, chose to remain non-committal over specu-

India calls on Sri Lanka to address Tamil expectations

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Pitching for an "inclusive political outlook that encourages ethnic harmony", external affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday said it "is in Sri Lanka's own interest that the expectations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace and dignity within a united Sri Lanka are fulfilled".

Mr Jaishankar added: "That applies equally to the commitments made by the Sri Lankan government on meaningful devolution, including the 13th amendment of the Constitution. The progress and prosperity of Sri Lanka will surely be advanced as a consequence."

Seeking to reassure India, the Sri Lankan government, meanwhile, reiterated that it considered the welfare and progress of all its citizens, including Sinhals, Tamils and Muslims to be important. Lankan foreign minister Dinesh Gunawardena thanked India for construction of the Jaffna Cultural Centre, which is expected to be inaugurated soon, and also welcomed New Delhi's assistance towards conservation of Buddhist heritage.

Mr Jaishankar earlier called on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and held bilateral discussions with his counterpart, as part of his three-day visit that began on Tuesday.

The 13th amendment in Sri Lanka stands for devolution of power to the provinces there. India has been a supporter of the "reconciliation process" in the island nation between the majority Sinhals and the minority Tamils.

On the issue of the Indian Tamil fishermen recently apprehended by Sri Lankan authorities, Mr Jaishankar made it clear that "we naturally look forward to the early return of our fishermen", adding that he would also be meeting Lankan fisheries minister Douglas Devananda "to discuss this matter further".

Cook eggs & meat fully: Govt

■ Continued from Page 1
measures being undertaken by states. Currently states send tissue samples of birds suspected to harbour the virus to the ICAR-National Institute of High Security Animal Disease, Bhopal.

The animal husbandry minister's deputy Sanjiv Balyan said that five states have reported bird flu but there has been no case of transmission to humans in India. But the government said that secondary spread by human handling (through fomites) cannot be ruled out.

A circular issued by the Union environment ministry's wildlife division said, "Large number of migratory birds visit India in this season. Movement of birds to wetlands is also possible. It is requested to keep strict vigil on the wintering habits of migratory birds, including wetlands, for any mortality or disease outbreak signs."

The circular said that

the workers involved in culling operations should wear rubber gloves and protective clothing that can be disinfected or disposed of, use protective eyewear and ought to be taking an influenza antiviral drug daily for the time that they are in direct contact with infected birds or in a containment zone.

The bird flu outbreak has been reported a few months after India, on September 30, 2020, declared the country free from the disease which spreads mainly through migratory birds coming in during the winter months, September-October to February-March.

The Avian Influenza has already hit at least 10 European countries — Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Croatia, and Ukraine in the last few weeks. Cases have also been reported in South Korea and Japan. The United Kingdom has seen

disturbing scenes of swans spinning in circles and bleeding from their nostrils, a phenomena being investigated for its possible link to the bird flu.

India, which notified the first outbreak of Avian Influenza in 2006, has now reported Avian Influenza cases in Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Gujarat. Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu have also been put on a high alert.

Of the 12 epicenters in India, the bird flu has been reported in crows in Baran, Kota, Jhalawar region of Rajasthan as well as Mandasaur, Indore, Malwa areas of Madhya Pradesh. Whereas in Himachal Pradesh, the infection was found in migratory birds in Kangra region and in poultry ducks in Kottayam, Alappuzha in Kerala.

Kerala initiated control and containment opera-

tions on Tuesday at its epicenters, including the culling process of chicken and ducks. In Himachal Pradesh, another advisory was issued on Tuesday to avoid further spread of the infection. Madhya Pradesh government has banned chicken trade from the southern states for the next 10 days.

In Kerala, about 12,000 ducks have died due to the flu in Alappuzha and Kottayam where bird flu has been declared a state disaster. About 36,000 birds would be culled in the state. The trade of poultry meat and eggs has also been banned in the state's affected districts. In Kottayam district, 11,000 birds will be culled as bird flu was detected in the ducklings of farmers in Neendoor panchayat. The process to test humans to detect symptoms in them has also been started.

Haryana has reported the death of about 4 lakh birds in the past 10 days in Panchkula district.

THE ASIAN AGE

7 JANUARY 2021

Scrap laws, ask farmers, don't skip due process

The seventh round of talks between the government and farmers protesting against the three new laws regulating agriculture in India on Monday produced no immediate result other than fixing the date for a new round. However, two things have emerged after the talks ended in stalemate: the government has offered to sit with the farmers' unions and discuss the laws "clause by clause"; two; Prime Minister Narendra Modi is understood to have directed officials in the agriculture ministry to look for an amicable solution to the issue.

Given Mr Modi's initiative and the offer to discuss the laws threadbare, it looks like an open approach to the issue could solve it so that the lakhs of farmers could call off their agitation they are holding now braving the gripping cold and pouring rains on the outskirts of the capital city. It could allow them to drop the plan to take out a tractor rally on the Republic Day and spare the nation from having to watch the spectre of more of its *annadatas* dying on the streets and adding to the present toll of 50.

Given Mr Modi's initiative and the offer to discuss the laws threadbare, it looks like an open approach to the issue could solve it

ernment, especially its second edition, does not seem to believe in such democratic niceties. Laws that sought to alter the basic idea of India such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 and the virtual annulment of Article 370 of the Constitution were pushed through Houses of Parliament after a single day's discussion each.

As for the farm laws, the government has done too little to take the stakeholders into confidence. The government which is now willing to discuss the laws "clause by clause" had not bothered to persuade its own partners, resulting in the exit of the Shiromani Akali Dal, one of the oldest allies of the BJP, from the Cabinet and the NDA. The bill was not sent to the House committee either. Worse, there was no proper voting on the bill in the Upper House of the Parliament. The protesters have little reason to trust the government.

The NDA government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have spared no occasion to champion the farmers' cause. Mr Modi has long promised to double the income of farmers by 2022; Niti Aayog brought out an action plan in 2017 proposing to achieve it; and the first budget of the new government finance minister Nirmala Sitaraman presented in 2019 talked of promoting zero-based farming as a means to achieve the target. But the farmers saw little action on the ground. If the government is serious, and if farmers' welfare is its priority, then it should keep the laws in abeyance, sit with them and draft new ones that address their concerns.

Scale down the parade

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who had accepted India's invitation to be the chief guest for the Republic Day celebration this year, has had to back out unexpectedly on account of domestic compulsions caused by a renewed surge of Covid-19 infections in the UK. We sympathise with his situation. Since this is a last-minute problem, let us just be practical about it and not bother tearing our hair to find a suitable replacement at such a late stage.

There is no harm in saying pass this year. Since this is an unusual period for all of the world, the pandemic provides us a perfectly good reason to not go scouting for a dignitary after the British leader has been obliged to drop out.

Late in 2018, when US President Donald Trump informed us that he was unable to accept the invitation to be chief guest on account of scheduling difficulties, we were fortunate that President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa did not stand on ceremony and agreed to step in at a late hour. South Africa is a good friend and its President was most gracious. Nevertheless, the pandemic poses a problem for all and it is not fair to put friendly nations in a quandary by asking them when barely three weeks remain.

Although institutional memory may have faded in this regard, it may be recalled that in the years 1952, 1953, and 1966 no invitation was extended to an international dignitary to be chief guest. Of course, since then invitations have gone out each year. There have also been somewhat unusual situations. In 2018, for example, the ten leaders of Asean nations were collectively invited to be chief guest. In 1956, there were two chief guests — Britain's chancellor of the exchequer as well as the chief justice of Japan.

Hospitality being a part of diplomacy, Republic Day chief guests are chosen from countries that India may want to be especially solicitous toward for reasons of geopolitics or geo-economics in a given year. Not having one in a particular year just speaks of extraordinary circumstances.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Why trust needs to be the key word in 2021

Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

India has a good story to tell when it comes to vaccines — it produces more than 60 per cent of all vaccines sold across the globe.

Why then has India's final approval of two Covid-19 vaccines kicked up such a storm, with many respected health experts and scientists calling it a hasty decision?

Unless you have been living under the rock the past few days, you probably know the answer.

In brief, last weekend, India's drugs regulator gave the green signal for the emergency use of two coronavirus vaccines. One, called Covishield, is developed by AstraZeneca-Oxford University and is being made in India by Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine producer by the number of doses produced.

The controversy, however, is more about the drug regulator's emergency approval to the second coronavirus vaccine, the indigenously produced Covaxin, before critical efficacy data of the third phase of clinical trials are out. Covaxin is being made by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Virology. Bharat Biotech is a well-known vaccine maker and has a track record of clinical trials in 20 countries.

But Covaxin has completed only two of the three required phases of clinical trials. The vaccine is safe. The critical Phase 3 trial, meant to test efficacy, started last November. The company expects to release the efficacy data by March.

What further complicates the situation is the drug regulator saying that Covaxin would be administered in "clinical trial mode". This has led to questions about whether those being vaccinated with Covaxin in the immediate future will, in effect, be taking

part in a clinical trial.

Why could India's regulatory authorities not wait for a few more weeks for all the three phases of the clinical trial to be over and approved an indigenous vaccine of proven efficacy?

Till date, there is no convincing answer.

Perplexingly, over the past few days, we have also been witnessing bizarre incidents such as the Drugs Controller-General of India not taking any questions from journalists at a press conference, and the two companies which have got the green signal engaging in a temporary slanging match about the merits of their respective vaccines.

All this plays havoc with public trust in oversight mechanisms when there are signs of vaccine hesitancy in the country.

How do we restore trust?

"Transparency breeds trust, and trust is very important during a health crisis like a pandemic," says virologist Shahid Jameel, director of the Trivedi School of Biosciences at Ashoka University. "Science does not work on beliefs. Science works on data, and we still don't have data on the efficacy of one of the approved vaccines. Science does not say it has answers to everything but there should be clear communication about what is not known, and this has to be communicated openly and transparently."

"A common man who does not understand the difference between the different vaccines needs to be told what exactly is known and what is not known," Dr Jameel adds. "Otherwise, there is a risk of vaccine hesitancy spreading."

Leena Menghaney, South Asia head of the access campaign at humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, also points out that transparency is a key component to building trust. And it is important to adopt it as a public health strategy.

Ms Menghaney cites the example of the European Medicines Agency (EMA), that has set a minimum level of transparency for itself. In many areas, the agency has decided to go beyond what the law requires. During the pandemic, EMA is implementing exceptional measures to maximise the transparency of its regulatory activities on treatments and vaccines for Covid-19 that are approved or are under evaluation. This includes making public the detailed minutes of various committee meetings. In 2019, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on improving the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines and other health products in an effort to expand access. The resolution urges member states to enhance public sharing of information on actual prices paid by governments and other buyers for health products, and greater transparency on pharmaceutical patents, clinical trial results and other determinants of pricing along the value chain from laboratory to patient.

A trust deficit can arise due to multiple reasons, acting independently and together.

There is a lesson from India's victory in the battle against polio. Then too, there was a trust deficit in some quarters, though due to different reasons.

While researching a report on a sudden spurt of polio cases in parts of Uttar Pradesh in 2006, I saw firsthand how lack of trust could derail a public health intervention. Official explanations attributed the spike to rumours and fear among the Muslim minority. But a visit to Moradabad, one of the worst affected dis-

tricts in UP, offered nuanced insights into the reality of traditionally disadvantaged communities that have little contact with the healthcare system. Rumour mongers were exploiting grievances accumulated over years. This was among the most daunting challenges in the global battle against polio.

In a narrow bylane flanked by open sewers in Karula, in the outskirts of Moradabad, I met Muslim families who were convinced that a "geopolitical conspiracy" lurked behind the persistent attempts to give polio drops to their children. Many people told me they wanted to know why the government was so eager to protect their children against polio when it paid no heed to other ailments that struck them. There were rumours about the polio drop making male children impotent.

Frustration and rage at a dysfunctional healthcare system had morphed into irrational fear and distrust of "outsiders", including health workers and field operatives of international agencies. Muslim clerics in some local mosques in Uttar Pradesh had reportedly opposed the polio vaccine.

Distrust was dispelled through concerted trust-building efforts by civil society, universities like Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia, health officials and international agencies like Unicef, as Dr Jameel points out. Many respected Imams worked hard to build trust among communities resisting the vaccine.

Trust and transparency during a crisis mean that not only should the political and administrative leadership be decisive, it must also convincingly explain to all groups that whatever is being done is being done in their interest.

Opacity in decision-making, attempts to gloss over mistakes or polarise the populace on any count will punch holes in the trust narrative. We must not let that happen in 2021.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

COME TOGETHER

Covid vaccine manufacturers, Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech, have done well to make peace after getting into a slugfest earlier. In an unexpected development, the two Indian companies appeared to bury the hatchet as they jointly pledged for a smooth roll-out of vaccines in the country and the world. Karnal, Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata will receive the first lot, and 6.3 lakh health workers will get the first jab in mid-January.

N.J. Ravi Chandrer
Bengaluru

WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

THE WAY THIS government has shown its insensitivity and arrogance towards the *Annadaata*, it doesn't seem like we live in a democracy. Not only were the farmers not allowed to protest at their desired venue, either Jantar Mantar or Ramliila Maidan, but they were also showered with water cannons in this chilly weather. Roads were blocked and even vandalised by the authorities just to prevent them from reaching the capital. The other logical response would have been to repeal the three contentious laws and frame a new one in consultation with farmers. Pulling the issue like a chewing gum and then blaming everyone, from the Opposition to countries across the borders, simply shows a egotistical attitude. The fault pertaining to today's economic crisis lies at the government's doorstep.

Syed Abdul Monim
Navi Mumbai

WELL DONE!

SUBHANI'S CARTOON showing a full year calendar with dates for talks (Jan. 6) is hilarious. With no result forthcoming from the talks going on between the farmers and the Centre, it is well nigh possible that they will go on for ever. Though the farmers are very serious, it would appear that the government does not want to end the stalemate.

V.S. Jayaraman
Chennai

FAIT ACCOMPLI

THE APEX COURT putting its stamp of approval on the multi-crore Central Vista project may perhaps be a case of fait accompli. How can the judiciary have the gumption to overrule the PM of India who has already cast the die and performed the ground-breaking ceremony despite the case being sub judice? More is the irony when the same national capital is dotted with homeless people sleeping under flyovers in the biting cold.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



India's toppers no longer find civil services a dream career?

Is the civil service no longer a dream career for aspiring youngsters in India? The recent survey of national school board toppers over 20 years suggests that it may be so.

Of the 86 men and women who topped in their school board exams between 1995 and 2015, more than half live abroad, and most are working or pursuing advanced degrees in science and technology. Of those working most are in the tech sector, followed by medicine and finance. More than half grew up outside India's metros in Tier-II and Tier-III cities. No surprises there!

What is surprising is that only one of these toppers joined the civil service. Subhankar Mohapatra, who topped the Class X CBSE exam in 2006, chose to

become a civil servant (after studying at medical college). He cleared the IRS exam in 2016, the IPS in 2017 and finally the UPSC in 2018. The Odisha cadre officer is presently posted as sub-collector and SDM in Kandhamal, Odisha. Two others from the Toppers Club are preparing for the civil service exam. That's it.

Could it be that there are many more attractive alternative career paths available now that are more rewarding financially and career-wise than what the civil service can offer to our brightest? For decades, the civil services have enjoyed an unparalleled social standing. While there have always been officers who have quit the civil service for better opportunities outside the government in the private sector and even politics,

largely, the IAS and allied services have been a top draw, as seen in the lakhs of hopefuls who appear for the UPSC. But that seems to be changing now.

NEW TRANSFER POLICY FOR POLL-BOUND TAMIL NADU

The Election Commission has already started gearing up for the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections due in May 2021, starting with the babus who will be on election duty. In a recent letter to the state Chief Electoral Officer, Sathyabrata Sahoo, and chief secretary K. Shanmugam, the Election Commission has stressed the need for effective transfer of officers who have completed three years and to ensure that no officer is posted in their native district.

Officers who are retiring within

six months and those who are facing disciplinary actions recommended by the Election Commission for earlier poll duty lapses should not be designated for poll duty. Further, officials who will complete three years in an election-related post before May 31 should be transferred.

Sources say that the Tamil Nadu government has transferred more than 50 IAS and IPS officers, including district collectors and district superintendents of police of more than 20 districts in the last two months.

A THORNY ISSUE

The Punjab government has appointed 1995-cadre IPS officer G. Nageswara Rao as secretary in the department of home affairs and justice, a post that has traditionally

been held by the IAS cadre. The appointment is part of a larger reshuffle of officers effected by the Congress government of Captain Amarinder Singh.

The move is unlikely to help in the long ongoing tussle between IAS and IPS officers. The IAS officers are likely to see this as another encroachment on their turf, a trend that has become more pronounced at the Centre after the Modi *sarkar* came to power. The rivalry between the two elite services — be it at the Central or state level — is also over issues like pay parity, promotions, central empanment and avenues for deputation and training courses.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

IN BRIEF

Indian hacker jailed for 11 years in UK

London: An Indian-origin man who hacked into the computer accounts of over 574 girls and young women to exploit them has been sentenced to 11 years in prison for blackmail, voyeurism and cyber-crimes by a UK court. Akash Sondhi gained unauthorised access to hundreds of social media accounts, in particular Snapchat, and went on to commit blackmailing crimes between December 26, 2016 and March 17, 2020, the UK's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said. The 27-year-old from Chafford Hundred in Essex, south-east England, threatened his victims that if they didn't send him nude images of themselves, he would post intimate images of them to their friends and family. Some of the women complied and in at least six cases he went on to carry out his threats, it said.

Rare white tiger born in Nicaragua

Masaya: A rare white tiger, named "Nieve" (snow in Spanish) was born at the Nicaragua zoo, and is being raised by humans after its mother rejected it, the director of the zoo said. Nieve came into the world a week ago, weighing just under a kilogramme at birth, said director Eduardo Sacasa. Conservation group WWF describes white tigers as "a genetic anomaly", with none known to exist in the wild. There are several dozen in captivity. White tigers are Bengal tigers whose parents carry a recessive gene, according to The Wildcat Sanctuary in Minnesota which helps and studies felines. They are not albinos or a separate species. Some parks and zoos inbred white tigers, as white cubs draw more visitors, though this is often at the cost of malformations and other genetic problems, states the sanctuary website.

Kim admits failures as congress opens

Seoul, Jan. 6: North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un admitted the country's economic development plan had fallen short in "almost all areas" as he opened a rare congress of the ruling Workers' Party, state media reported on Wednesday. The gathering is the first of its kind in five years, only the eighth in the nuclear-armed country's history, and comes weeks before US President-elect Joe Biden takes office. Relations with Washington have been deadlocked since talks between Kim and President Donald Trump stalled over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return. At the same time the North is more isolated than ever after closing its borders last January to protect itself against the Coronavirus that first emerged in neighbour and key ally China. The congress opened on Tuesday in the capital, the official *Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA) reported.

GRAMMY AWARDS POSTPONED TO MARCH OVER VIRUS

New York, Jan. 6: The Grammy music awards slated for January 31 in Los Angeles have been postponed until March over Covid-19, which has been rapidly spreading in California. The Recording Academy released a statement saying it rescheduled the show to March 14, a week earlier than the date briefly listed on its website. "The deteriorating Covid-19 situation in Los Angeles, with hospital services being overwhelmed, ICUs having reached capacity, and new guidance from state and local governments have all led us to conclude that postponing our show was the right thing to do," organisers said. "Nothing is more important than the health and safety of those in our music community and the hundreds of people who work tirelessly on producing the show." The ceremony's delay comes less than a month before it was set to take place in the shadow of the pandemic, which has dealt devastating blows to the music industry. The organization had said the show set for late January would be mostly virtual, but had not released specific plans. Beyonce, Dua Lipa, Taylor Swift and rapper Roddy Ricch are the top nominees at the normally star-studded gala. Comedian Trevor Noah was set to host the 2021 show, and it wasn't immediately clear if that was still the plan.

Democrats win first seat in battle for US Senate runoffs

Democrat Warnock becomes Georgia's first African-American Senator

Atlanta, Jan. 6: Joe Biden's Democratic Party took a giant step on Wednesday towards seizing control of the US Senate as they won the first of two Georgia runoffs, hours before Congress was set to certify the president-elect's victory over Donald Trump.

President-elect Joe Biden on Wednesday hailed his Democratic Party's likely takeover of the Senate as a sign that Americans want action and made an appeal for bipartisanship. "It's time to turn the page. The American people demand action and they want unity. I am more optimistic than I ever have been that we can deliver both," Biden said in a statement that congratulated Democratic candidates on their likely wins in Georgia.

Democrat Rev Raphael Warnock on Wednesday secured a crucial win in the senatorial race, becoming the first person of colour enator from Georgia and bringing his party within the reach of a majority in the US Senate ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. Multiple news outlets on Wednesday morning projected 51-year-old Warnock, a senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, winner against Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler in the Georgia Senate runoff. He is the first African-American to represent Georgia in the US Senate. He is also the first Democrat to win the Senate race from Georgia in 20 years.

Democrat Jon Ossoff also claimed victory in the second of two Georgia run-off votes, claiming a win that would give



People wait for a rally of supporters of US President Donald Trump challenging the results of the 2020 US Presidential election on the Ellipse outside of the White House on Wednesday.

— AFP

President-elect Joe Biden control of the US Senate. "Georgia, thank so much for the confidence you have placed in me. I am honoured by your support, by your confidence, by your trust and I will look forward to serving you," Ossoff said in a televised statement.

The US media have not yet called the race, and Ossoff's Republican opponent has not conceded.

Both President Donald Trump and President-elect Joe Biden had campaigned for their respective candidates. Biden congratulated Warnock on his historic win in Georgia. "I congratulate Reverend Warnock on his ground breaking win last

night and I am hopeful that when the count is complete, Jon Ossoff will also be victorious. I congratulate the people of Georgia, who turned out in record numbers once again, just as they did in November, to elect two new Senators, demand action, and call on our elected leaders to end the gridlock and move us forward as a nation," the President-elect said.

Donald Trump faced one of the darkest days of his presidency Wednesday with Congress poised to certify Joe Biden's White House victory and Democrats on track to take control of the Senate with a pair of stunning upset victories in Georgia.

Thousands of Trump supporters, fueled by his spurious claims of voter fraud, were flooding the nation's capital, meanwhile, to protest the certification.

With political tensions running at fever pitch, there was a heavy police presence in downtown Washington and many business owners, fearing clashes, have boarded up doors and windows.

"They stole our election," said Katherine Caldwell, a 61-year-old woman from Oregon wearing a white cowboy hat that read "Trump Is My President." Certification of the Electoral College vote at a ceremony presided over by the vice president

is usually just a formality.

Trump, 74, has refused to concede defeat in the November 3 election and has been ramping up the pressure on fellow Republicans and Vice President Mike Pence to back his baseless claims of election fraud.

"The Vice President has the power to reject fraudulently chosen electors," Trump tweeted on Tuesday. "If Vice President @MikePence comes through for us, we will win the Presidency."

The vice president has no legal authority to reject the results, however, and Pence has given no public indication of what he will do at the joint session.

— AFP/PTI

53 arrested in HK crackdown

Hong Kong, Jan. 6: Hong Kong police arrested 53 former lawmakers and democracy proponents Wednesday for allegedly violating the new national security law by participating in unofficial election primaries for the territory's legislature last year.

The mass arrests, including of former lawmakers, were the largest move against Hong Kong's democracy movement since the law was imposed by Beijing last June to quell dissent in the semi-autonomous territory.

"The operation today targets the active elements who are suspected to be involved in the crime of overthrowing, or interfering (and) seriously destroy the Hong Kong governments legal execution of duties," John Lee, Hong Kong's security minister, said at a news conference.

He said those arrested were suspected of trying to paralyze the government, via their plans to gain a majority of the seats in the legislature to create a situation in which the chief executive had to resign and the government would stop functioning. In a video released by former law-

● **MASS RESIGNATIONS and disqualifications of pro-democracy lawmakers have left the legislature largely a pro-Beijing body.**

maker Lam Cheuk-ting on his Facebook page, police turned up at his house and told him he was "suspected of violating the national security law, subverting state power."

Police told those recording the video to stop or risk arrest. The legislative election that would have followed the unofficial primaries was postponed by a year by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who cited the public health risks during the coronavirus pandemic. Mass resignations and disqualifications of pro-democracy lawmakers have left the legislature largely a pro-Beijing body.

Lee said the police would not target those who had voted in the unofficial primaries, which were held in July last year and attracted more than 6,00,000 voters even though pro-Beijing lawmakers and politicians had warned the event could breach the security law. —AP

China blocks entry for virus experts, says WHO

Beijing, Jan. 6: An expert mission to China to probe the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic was in disarray on Wednesday after Beijing denied entry to the World Health Organisation team at the last minute despite months of painstaking negotiations.

Ten experts were due to arrive in China this week for the delicate, highly politicised task of establishing how and where the virus jumped from animals to humans.

But with a number of the team already in transit, China denied them entry visas, prodding WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, to say he was "very disappointed".

China is determined to control the origin story of the virus, which has killed more than 1.8 million people around the world and laid waste to global economies.

The first cases of the Coronavirus were recorded in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, prompting accusations of chaotic, secretive handling by Chinese authorities which led to its spread beyond China.

US President Donald Trump called the pandemic the "China virus".

Despite the hail of criti-

EU WATCHDOG GIVES GREEN LIGHT FOR SECOND CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

The Hague , Jan. 6: The European Union's medicines watchdog on Wednesday approved a second Coronavirus vaccine, in a relief to struggling European countries as the world reached a grim new record of 15,700 deaths in 24 hours.

The Moderna vaccine is now set to join Pfizer-BioNTech's jab for use in the 27-nation EU, where governments are grappling with soaring case-loads and slow rollouts of the vaccines already available. "Good news for our efforts to bring more Covid-19 vaccines to Europeans!" European

cism, Beijing has so far resisted pressure for an independent probe and instead has seeded doubt as to whether the pandemic even started inside its borders.

Beijing foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying confirmed the WHO team had not been admitted as planned, and admitted it was "not just a visa issue". "The issue of origin-tracing is incredibly complicated," she said.

Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted.

The breakthrough came as more than 15,700 Covid-19 deaths around the world were registered in the past 24 hours, according to a count by AFP at 1100 GMT on Wednesday — a new record.

The United States, the world's worst-hit country, logged a record 3,936 daily deaths in a separate tally by Johns Hopkins university. Los Angeles ambulance workers have been told to stop transporting some patients with extremely low survival chances to overwhelmed hospitals.

— AFP

"To ensure the work of the international expert team in China goes smoothly, we have to carry out necessary procedures and make relevant arrangements."

Talks were continuing over "the specific date and specific arrangement of the expert group's visit," Hua added, despite the months of negotiations already spent on setting up the trip.

— AFP

Trump orders ban on 8 more Chinese apps

Washington, Jan. 6: President Donald Trump has signed an executive order barring transactions with eight Chinese apps including Alipay and WeChat Pay to protect America's national security, citing the steps taken by India to ban more than 200 Chinese connected software applications.

Trump's order said action is needed to "deal with the national emergency" caused by the "pervasiveness of the spread" of apps created and controlled in China. The ban against the eight Chinese apps — Alipay, CamScanner, QQ Wallet, SHAREit, Tencent QQ, VMate, WeChat Pay, and WPS Office — will come into effect in 45 days from on Tuesday.

"The pace and pervasiveness of the spread in the United States of certain connected mobile and desktop applications and other software developed or controlled by persons China, to include Hong Kong and Macau (China), continue to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," Trump said on Tuesday.

"At this time, action must be taken to address the threat posed by these Chinese connected software applications," Trump said in his executive order.

The orders follow two others Trump signed in August banning dealings with the popular video app TikTok as well as the main WeChat app.

Trump said that India has banned the use of more than 200 Chinese connected software applications throughout the country. In a statement, India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology asserted that the applications were "stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users' data in an unauthorised manner to servers which have locations outside India," according to the executive order.

The United States has assessed that a number of Chinese connected software applications automatically capture vast

BEIJING SLAMS DON OVER ORDER AGAINST APPS

Beijing, Jan. 6: Beijing accused the US on Wednesday of "bullying" after President Donald Trump ordered a ban on a series of Chinese apps in his last weeks in office, branding them a threat to national security.

Under the Trump administration Beijing and Washington have clashed repeatedly over trade, technology, human rights and the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic.

In the latest move to raise tensions, Trump ordered a ban on transactions involving Alipay, WeChat Pay and other apps linked to Chinese companies, saying they could route user information to the government in Beijing.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said on Wednesday the move was an example of "bullying" by the US, and accused Washington of "stretching the concept of national security." "This harms both itself and others." — AFP

swaths of information from millions of users in the United States, including sensitive personally identifiable information and private information, which would allow the Chinese Army and the Chinese Community Party access to Americans' personal and proprietary information.

"The United States must take aggressive action against those who develop or control Chinese connected software applications to protect our national security," he said.

Trump said that by accessing personal electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, Chinese connected software applications can access and capture vast swaths of information from users, including sensitive personally identifiable information and private information. — PTI

UK denies bail for WikiLeaks Assange

London, Jan. 6: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange must remain in custody in Britain, while the US appeals a court decision to block his extradition to face charges there for leaking secret documents, a judge in London ruled on Wednesday.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who on Monday refused to grant his extradition, told Westminster Magistrates Court that if released there were "substantial grounds" to suspect Assange would "fail to surrender" for future appeal hearings. "Mr Assange still has an incentive to abscond from these as yet unresolved proceedings," she said.

"As a matter of fairness the United States must be able to challenge my decision. If Mr Assange absconds during this

process then they will have lost the opportunity to do so." Outside court, lawyer Stella Morris, Assange's fiancée and the mother of two of his children, called the decision "a huge disappointment" and urged the US Justice Department to drop the charges.

A lawyer for the US government earlier urged Baraitser not to release the controversial Australian publisher, and detailed how it planned to challenge her decision to block his extradition on mental health grounds.

"We respectfully submit on behalf of the United States that there are insurmountable hurdles to Mr Assange being granted bail," Clair Dobbin said.

She added there were "no conditions that could guarantee his surrender" in future. — AFP

WOMAN | POWER

Legislators move to even up executive boards after voluntary efforts to close failed gender gap

Germany to require women on large firms' boards

Frankfurt am Main, Jan. 6: German listed companies must include women on executive boards as part of a landmark bill agreed by the country's coalition government on Wednesday after voluntary efforts failed to close a gender gap.

Listed companies with four executives or more must appoint at least one woman to their boards, according to a draft law to be voted on by parliament. The legislation sends "a very strong signal", Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht told reporters,

urging corporations to "take advantage of the opportunity presented by highly qualified women".

"We can show that Germany is on the way to becoming a modern society fit for the future," Family Affairs Minister Franziska Giffey added.

With the new legislation, Germany is "one step closer" to the goal of equal opportunities and equal rights, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said.

The women's quota is "overdue" and the time for voluntary measures is "finally over", he added.

Europe's largest economy fares relatively poorly in terms of representation of women in senior positions, particularly striking in a country led by the world's longest-serving elected female leader.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, in power since 2005, has spoken out at foot-dragging by business leaders, against the resistance of some in her own conservative bloc.

The boss of her CDU party's economic council, Astrid Hamker, last year called the idea of a quota

system "completely counterproductive", and said diversity should be "not according to gender, but rather competence".

Yet evidence suggests companies with women at the top outperform the average of Germany's blue-chip DAX companies by more than two percent, according to a report by the management firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

Included in the new legislation, companies in which the government holds a majority stake — such as the rail group

Deutsche Bahn — will have stricter rules, with at least one woman on management boards with more than two members, and a 30-percent quota to come in the future.

German research institute DIW said it welcomed the women's quota but noted that female participation in management boards continues to move at a "snail's pace".

The new regulations cover around 70 companies, of which about 30 have no women on their boards.

— AFP



German Chancellor Angela Merkel walks beside Federal Finance Minister Olaf Scholz and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, from right, prior the weekly cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,174.06	-0.54
Nifty 50	14,146.25	-0.38
S&P 500*	3,773.05	1.24
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.75	-0.43
Euro (₹)	90.21	-0.45
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	51,125▼71	0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	54.43	0.83
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.894	0.044
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.030	0.075

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Services sector expands at a slower rate

Services sector activity expanded at a slower pace in December as growth in sales eased to a three-month low and hiring came to a halt amid weak business optimism. The India Services Business Activity Index fell from 53.7 in Nov. to 52.3 in Dec. "Although the news that the service sector remained in expansion mode during Dec. is welcome, the fact that growth lost momentum yet again shouldn't be disregarded," IHS Markit said.

DoT: Spectrum auction bidding to start in March



Bidding for the sixth round of spectrum auction for radio-waves worth Rs 3.92 lakh crore will start from March 1, according to a DoT notice. The long-awaited spectrum auction is being held after a gap of four years and over two years after the Trai recommended the base price for the radio-waves. The DoT has fixed January 12 for the pre-bid conference. Telecos will need to submit their application by February 5.

Housing sales decline in 2020: Knight Frank

Housing sales in Delhi-NCR fell 50 per cent in 2020 to 21,234 units on low demand because of the pandemic, property consultant Knight Frank India said. The sales of residential properties fell 37 per cent to 1,54,534 units in 2020 across eight major cities versus 2,45,861 units. Mumbai saw 20 per cent decline at 48,688 units. The sales of residential properties in Hyderabad declined 38 per cent to 10,042 units from 16,267 units.

SpiceJet to run 21 new flights from next week

SpiceJet said it would operate 21 new domestic and international flights from January 12. It will introduce two weekly flights on the route from Mumbai to Ras Al-Khaimah in the UAE and increase frequency on the Delhi-Ras Al-Khaimah route to four weekly flights. The airline has launched new daily non-stop flights connecting Hyderabad with Visakhapatnam, Tirupati and Vijayawada. It will also connect Jharsuguda with Mumbai.

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IIFCL could be merged with new company Govt mulls infra bank with ₹1 lakh cr corpus

SIDDHARTHA SINGH JAN. 6

India is considering a proposal to create a bank to help fund port, road and power projects as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government aims to lift Asia's third-largest economy out of the recession. The new entity, likely to be part of the budget announcement in February, may have an equity capital of Rs 1 lakh crore (\$13.7 billion), people with knowledge of the matter said, asking not to be identified as the matter isn't public. The existing India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd, which has a Rs 2,000-crore corpus, will be merged with the bank, they said. Initially, the institution will be funded by the government, which will later invite investors, the people said. It could be on the



lines of state-run National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Ltd, which counts the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, Asian Development Bank and Abu Dhabi Investment Authority among its investors. The finance ministry has prepared a note for the cab-

inet to discuss the proposal. The spokesperson at the ministry declined to comment. India faces the challenge of boosting spending on productive assets that aid economic growth after being forced to direct the bulk of stimulus last year on the poor and the farm-

ers to protect them from a pandemic-induced slowdown. Citigroup Inc economists wrote last year that spending should be directed on infrastructure, rather than populist measures, to cushion the economy headed for the deepest slump among emerging nations. Attracting foreign investment is also crucial to meet Modi's goal of spending \$1.5 trillion on new roads, rail links and other infrastructure over the next five years as public finances deteriorate. The government pumped nearly Rs 1.7 lakh crore into public sector banks in the two years to March 2020. But a widening budget deficit and weak revenue growth put a brake on any further recapitalisation plans for the current financial year.

— Bloomberg

PFC plans ₹10,000-crore retail bond issue

DIVYA PATIL & RAJESH KUMAR SINGH JAN. 6

India's biggest lender to the power sector plans to sell bonds to individual investors as it tries to attract savers dissatisfied with deposit rates at a 16-year low. Power Finance Corp has filed a draft prospectus for a Rs 10,000-crore offering (\$1.4 billion), and plans to raise the entire sum this

quarter, according to Parminder Chopra, director (finance). "We want to explore an alternative source of funds," Chopra said in a telephone interview. "Fixed deposit rates are quite low, so there could be interest from the public to get a bit better rate." Unprecedented monetary stimulus to help cushion the economy from damage wrought by the Covid-19 crisis has

dragged down rates that households get on bank savings. The rate on term deposits maturing in three years at the country's largest lender, State Bank of India, is 5.3 per cent, the lowest since September 2004. Power Finance has previously sold notes to retail investors, but those were tax-free infrastructure bonds, Chopra said. This planned offering would be the company's maiden tax-

able issuance to individual buyers, she said. The New Delhi-based company has hired Trust Investment Advisors Pvt Ltd, A.K. Capital Services Ltd, Edelweiss Financial Services Ltd and JM Financial Services Ltd as lead managers for the offering. It plans to issue the AAA rated notes in one or more tranches, according to the draft prospectus.

— Bloomberg

'Saudi oil output cut signals demand risks'

Jan. 6: Saudi Arabia's pledge to cut its oil output by more than required under its pact with other Opec+ producers points to weakening oil demand following new Covid-19 lockdowns and sets the stage for a tighter market in the second quarter, Goldman Sachs said in a note released on Tuesday. "Saudi's action and the prospect for a tight market in 2Q21, as the rebound in demand stresses the ability to restart production, will likely support prices in coming weeks, leading us to reiterate our bullish oil view," the analysts wrote. Benchmark Brent oil prices on Wednesday hit their highest level since February after Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, said it would cut by an additional, voluntary 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March. Two Opec+ members—Russia and Kazakhstan—will bump up their output by a combined 75,000 bpd while other producers will hold production steady. Producers are wary of the impact of new lockdowns on oil demand.



China on Wednesday introduced more restrictions near Beijing following tougher measures announced by Germany and Britain. Goldman analysts said their updated first-quarter 2021 market balance outlook had weakened and that the latest Opec+ plans point to a surplus of 250,000 bpd versus a deficit previously. The "Opec+ March production level will still be low just as global demand starts rebounding sharply driven by warmer weather and rising vaccinations. This points to the group potentially struggling to ramp-up output quickly enough," they wrote. Goldman expects sustained backwordation and lower implied volatility and sees year-end Brent prices at \$65 per barrel.

— Reuters

UAE TO PRODUCE SINOPHARM VACCINE THIS YR

FARAH ELBAHRAWY JAN. 6

The United Arab Emirates, which aims to inoculate half of its population in the first quarter, plans to start manufacturing Sinopharm Group Co's vaccine this year, according to *The National*. The country is seeking to achieve herd immunity later this year by vaccinating as many as 70 per cent of its residents, the Abu Dhabi-based newspaper reported, citing an interview with Nawal Al Kaabi, chairwoman of the National Covid-19 Clinical Management Committee, and Ashish Koshy, chief executive officer of G42 Healthcare. Sinopharm unit China National Biotech Group, which developed the vaccine, delivered 3 million doses to the UAE so far. The UAE is offering vaccines free of charge for its residents. On Tuesday, a top health official said the Gulf nation administered more than 826,000 doses so far. The UAE has approved the Pfizer Inc-BioNTech SE Covid-19 vaccine, along with the Sinopharm shot.

— Bloomberg

Sovereign debt rises by \$10 trillion in 2020

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 6

Global government debt is estimated to have increased by about \$10 trillion in 2020 to \$77.8 trillion, equivalent to 94 per cent of the world GDP, according to rating agency Fitch. Nearly all governments have coped with the economic fallout of the pandemic similarly—by boosting spending on health sectors and providing support to households and businesses, while running up debt to pay for it. Both the increase and level of debt will be records, Fitch said. The previous \$10 trillion tranche took seven years to build, from 2012 to 2019. "The rapid and widespread increase in debt has had a significant effect on sovereign credit ratings, with a record 51 downgrades of 33 sovereigns in 2020, 27 of which are emerging markets. The sovereigns downgraded multiple times were all emerging markets," James McCormack, global head of sovereigns,



Fitch Ratings said. There are three primary consequences of the high and rising emerging-market debt burden, all of which are already in play, according to Fitch. First, there will be additional episodes of credit stress and default. There were five defaults in 2020—Argentina, Ecuador, Lebanon, Suriname and Zambia—a record yearly high. "We expect there to be more defaults in 2021, along with greater attention on debt-remedy initiatives," Fitch said. "Second, some emerging markets that are not at risk of default and have well-developed local-currency debt markets will continue to explore unconventional monetary

policies." "In emerging markets, government debt increased seven-fold to \$19 trillion, and interest payments jumped to an estimated \$680 billion in 2020 from \$220 billion in 2000. While the increase in interest payments did not fully keep pace with the increase in debt, there has been an uninterrupted rise," McCormack said. Comparing 2010 with 2020, the median effective interest rate for developed-market sovereigns fell from just over 4 per cent to just under 2 per cent. For emerging markets, the rate went in the other direction, increasing from 4.3 per cent to 5.1 per cent. The third consequence will be, if developed-market rates sink even lower, there may be a greater incentive for emerging-market sovereigns to turn to foreign-currency funding. On current trends, Fitch forecasts interest payments by governments in developed and emerging markets will converge by 2022 at about \$860 billion.

Motown Buzz

Toyota Fortuner facelift launched



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 6

Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Wednesday introduced the 2021 Toyota Fortuner SUV with prices starting at Rs 29.98 lakh for the base petrol variant and going all the way up to Rs 37.43 lakh at Delhi showroom for the range-topping four-wheel drive diesel automatic variant. The company has also launched a sportier variant called Legendier priced at Rs 37.58 lakh.

TATA SAFARI ALL SET FOR A COMEBACK

Pune, Jan. 6: Tata Motors on Wednesday announced that it is bringing back its iconic brand 'Safari' with its forthcoming flagship SUV codenamed the Gravitas. "Tata Safari introduced India to the SUV lifestyle, and glamourised the segment in India for other players to follow. For over two decades, Safari has represented prestige and performance, and in its new avatar, the Safari will carry forward this rich idea," the firm said.

KIA MOTORS UNVEILS NEW LOGO, SLOGAN



New Delhi, Jan. 6: Kia Motors on Wednesday said it has come up with a new corporate logo and global brand slogan signifying its transformation and all-new brand purpose. "Kia's new logo represents the company's commitment to becoming an icon for change and innovation," said president and CEO Ho Sung Song.

AGRITECH | BLOOMING

Firm helps improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops

Startup CropIn bringing AI technology to farms

SARITHA RAI JAN. 6

CropIn, an artificial intelligence and data-based agritech startup, has raised \$20 million in a funding round led by Temasek Holdings Pte-backed ABC World Asia, as the coronavirus pandemic accelerates the adoption of digital technologies in farming. The Bengaluru-headquartered agricultural AI startup provides software-as-a-service, or SAAS, products to farms and development organisations globally to improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops.

Additional new investors in the Series C funding include Infosys co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan's family office and a fund of the UK government, CDC Group. CropIn has raised \$33.1 million so far. The company was set up in 2010 by Krishna Kumar, who hails from a family of farmers in central India and quit a career at General Electric Co to found the startup after being deeply affected by widespread rural suicides in his country. The firm analyses data such as aerial imagery, ground scouting, hyper-local weather and market price fluctuations from 13



million acres across 4 million farms worldwide to predict productivity and monitor risks for thousands of variants of crops. That allows the company to provide warnings to small farms on what disease will hit a particular crop or when to expect an adverse climate event such as morning frost. "Covid has brought

home for countries the risks of disrupted food supply chains, food safety and food security," Kumar, also the startup's chief executive officer, said in a phone interview. "Every country and every agribusiness wants to remotely monitor and safeguard the supply chain." Backed by early investors, including the Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation and Singapore-based VC BeeNext, CropIn has customers and partners in 52 countries, including Basel-headquartered Syngenta Corp, the World Bank, Canada-based McCain Foods Ltd and Germany's BASF SE. The new funding will fuel further global expansion and help strengthen its technology. India's agritech space is abloom, with dozens of startups sprouting up in the last few years to disrupt dated farming practices and bring more efficiency into a massive industry dominated by small land holdings. One in nine agritech startups

globally are from the South Asian nation, which had 450 such businesses in 2019, according to a report by the Indian trade body Nasscom. That's piqued the interest of investors such as Tiger Global and Accel, which have plowed tens of millions into early-stage companies. Though much of the focus has been on supply chain improvements through practical approaches like aggregating farm produce and renting farm equipment, deep tech startups like CropIn working in areas like crop diagnostics and farm automation are also earning recognition.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Claire 1st female official in Tests

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. 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.

Polosak, who is a resident of New South Wales's Goulburn city, has also had the distinction of being the first female match official in a men's List A game in Australia. — PTI

Indian shuttlers to start training

New Delhi: The entire Indian badminton contingent cleared the Covid-19 test on Wednesday and is set to begin training ahead of the Yonex Thailand Open, starting next week. The Indian team, part of the Green Zone, consisting of players and all stakeholders such as umpires, line judges, personnel from BWF, Badminton Association of Thailand, medical staff, and TV production crew, were tested after arrival in Bangkok.

The Asia leg in Bangkok consists of two Super 1000 events — Yonex Thailand Open (January 12-17) and Toyota Thailand Open (January 19-24) followed by the \$1,500,000 HSBC BWF World Tour Finals (January 27-31).

"The Asian Leg in Bangkok received a boost with all 824 participants in the Green Zone quarantine bubble testing negative for Covid-19," BWF said in a statement. — PTI

Woman footballer Alex catches Covid

Los Angeles: Alex Morgan, a two-time World Cup winner with the US women's football team, has tested positive for Covid-19, the star striker said on *Twitter* on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately, my family and I closed out 2020 learning that we had contracted Covid while in California over the holidays," Morgan, 31, said in a Tweet. "We are all in good spirits and recovering well. After our isolation is completed, I will follow US Soccer's return to play guidelines to ensure my body is fully recovered and I can join my teammates back on the field soon," the tweet added.

Morgan is married to former Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder Servando Carrasco, and the couple have a seven-month old daughter, Charlie. The family returned to California from London, where Morgan had appeared in five matches for Tottenham in the Women's Super League before announcing her intention to return to the US to play in 2021. — AFP

Kevin does well in Dakar's Wadi loop

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: After a fine stage on Tuesday, with a one-to-five for Joan Barreda and Ricky Brabec who claimed the top of the overall rally standings, Wednesday was the turn of Kevin Benavides. The Argentinean Monster Energy Honda Team rider finished the Dakar 2021 third stage in runner-up spot, just short of the leadership.

The Wadi Ad-Dawasir loop, over 630 total kilometres, including 403 km against the clock, once again turned the Dakar standings on their head. Second place at the end of the first looping stage went to Kevin Benavides. The rider, hailing from Salta, Argentina, got off to a strong start, hoping to clinch a partial victory, but eventually had to settle for the second best time of the day.

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

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OPENING GAMBIT

Rohit and India ready to change Sydney script

Sydney, Jan. 6: 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.

And in this backdrop, enters Rohit Sharma, whose last couple of months have been loads of off-field drama.

But, his mere presence has added spring in the strides of the team and the youngsters in this current set-up swear by him.

On the other hand, Australia need Smith to be back in form and someone like Travis Head to deliver as he has failed to get a hang of both pace and spin. — PTI



India's Rohit Sharma prepares to bat in the nets during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday, ahead of the third Test against Australia.

— AFP



Australia's David Warner bats during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday.

— AFP

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA HAVE WON JUST ONE TEST AT SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND

- The third Test match of the series between India and Australia will be played at Sydney Cricket Ground from Thursday (January 7).
- Australia have a good record at this ground. They have won 60, lost 28 and drew 20 in 108 previous Test matches played here. India, on the other hand, have won just one, lost five and drew six in 12 previous Test matches.
- Australia have won six, lost one and drew three of their past 10 Test at this ground, the only loss having come against England in the disastrous 2010-11 Ashes series. The only team to have beaten Australia in Sydney Tests in the past 18 years was England, who did it in 2003 by winning the match by 225 runs and in 2011 by an innings and 83 runs.
- India's only victory at this ground came in 1977-78 when they beat Australia by an innings and two runs. The last Test match at this ground between the two teams in 2018-19 ended in a draw.

FOR THE RECORD

- Nathan Lyon who took 394 wickets at an average of 31.63 in 187 innings of 98 Tests, needs six wickets to become third Australian and 16th bowler overall to reach the 400 mark in Test cricket.
- Cheteshwar Pujara, who scored 5,903 runs at an average of 45.80 in 132 innings of 79 Tests, is 97 runs short of the 6,000 mark in Tests. He will become the 11th Indian and 69th batsman overall to reach this landmark.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

WE'RE A BETTER TEAM WITH WARNER: PAINE

Sydney, Jan. 6: 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 on Wednesday as the opener looks set for return to Test cricket when the third match against India begins here Thursday.

Warner missed a lot of action since India arrived as he sustained a groin injury during the second ODI.

"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," the skipper said even as the senior opener is battling against time to get closer to full fitness.

"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," he further added. Paine also admitted that "tension is boiling under the surface" after unnamed sources from the Indian camp expressed apprehensions about playing the final match of the series in Brisbane from January 15. — PTI

Captain Jinks all praise for Ashwin and Jadeja

Sydney, Jan. 6: 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 leading the wicket-takers' chart with 10 scalps, Jadeja's half-century and the hundred plus stand with Rahane in the second Test formed the cornerstone of India's eight-wicket win in Melbourne. 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."

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.

— AJINKYA RAHANE
India's stand-in Test captain

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 obvious-

ly 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.

Also, Rahane tried to douse the quarantine controversy, stating that his team is "not annoyed" with strict bio-safety protocols but conceded that it was "challenging" to be confined when life outside their five-star facility here seems to be "normal". — PTI

Tottenham ride on Son's exploits

London, Jan. 6: Jose Mourinho urged Tottenham to kick on after Son Heung-min fired them into the League Cup final with the decisive goal in a 2-0 win against Brentford on Tuesday.

Moussa Sissoko put Mourinho's team ahead in the semifinal at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

But Tottenham were still searching for the knockout blow against spirited second tier Brentford until Son netted with 20 minutes remaining.

Tottenham will face Manchester United or holders Manchester City, who meet in the second semifinal on Wednesday, at Wembley on April 25.

It will be the club's first domestic final since losing the 2015 League Cup showpiece against Chelsea, and their first final in any competition since the 2019 Champions League defeat against Liverpool in Madrid.

"The final is now in a pocket for three months, we have to wait for the final so we have to focus on what we have coming up," Mourinho said.

Mourinho, appointed in November 2019, is hoping to lead Tottenham to their first major trophy since the 2008 League Cup.

Brentford had already beaten four Premier League clubs in Southampton, Newcastle, Fulham and West

● **Son Heung-min and Moussa Sissoko of Tottenham Hotspur scored one goal each to blank Brentford 2-0.**

THE RESULTS

Tottenham Hotspur (Sissoko 12, Son 70)	2
Brentford	0

Bromwich Albion to reach their first domestic cup semifinal.

But Tottenham needed just 12 minutes to take the lead as Sergio Reguilon's pin-point cross from the left evaded Brentford defender Ethan Pinnock and found Sissoko, who finished his burst into the six-yard box with a powerful header into the top corner.

Tottenham pressed hard for a second goal and Son's long-range drive forced a good save from David Raya, who had to stretch to tip away Lucas Moura's deflected header just before half-time.

When Pinnock's header was clawed away by Hugo Lloris, Toney stabbed in the rebound from close-range, only for the Brentford striker's celebrations to be curtailed when his knee was seen to be in an offside position.

That tight decision proved the crucial moment as Son struck in the 70th minute. — AFP



Son Heung-min (right) of Tottenham Hotspur controls the ball during the EFL Cup semifinal against Brentford at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on Tuesday. Tottenham carved out a 2-0 victory. — AP

MANCHESTER CITY GREAT BELL BREATHES HIS LAST

London, Jan. 6: Former Manchester City and England midfielder Colin Bell has died aged 74 following a short illness, the club announced Tuesday.

Bell scored 152 goals in 492 appearances for City during a 13-year career with the club after joining from Bury.

"Colin passed away peacefully this (Tuesday) afternoon after a short, non-Covid related illness, aged 74. He leaves behind wife Marie, children Jon and Dawn and grandchildren, Luke, Mark, Isla and Jack," said a club statement.

Bell was a member of the City side that won the old First Division title in 1967/68 and the FA Cup in 1969.

He also helped City win two trophies in the 1969/70 season — the English League Cup and the European Cup Winners' Cup. In addition to his City honours, Bell won 48 England caps and was in the squad for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. — AFP

LeBron, Anthony star in Lakers win

Los Angeles, Jan. 6: LeBron James and Anthony Davis picked up the pace when the Los Angeles Lakers needed them most, coming up big in the waning minutes of a 94-92 NBA victory over the Grizzlies in Memphis on Tuesday.

James and Davis scored 26 points apiece as the reigning NBA champions escaped with a victory that kept them unbeaten in four road games this season and improved their record to 6-2 overall.

James scored 21 of his points in the second half to make sure Los Angeles came out on the right side of the ledger on a night when both teams struggled shooting.

The Lakers trailed 79-77 with 5:18 remaining. Davis drained a three-pointer to put Los Angeles ahead, and he and James took over. A steal by Davis led to a

James jumper, and a block by Davis kept the momentum rolling as they combined for 15 straight Lakers points.

Each had a turnover in the closing span, but Kyle Kuzma's layup, off a feed from James, pushed a three-point lead to five with 3.5 seconds left and Devin Brooks' three-pointer for the Grizzlies wasn't enough.

IRVING LEADS NETS

In Brooklyn, Kyrie Irving carried the load for the Nets in the absences of Kevin Durant, scoring 29 points on 12-of-19 shooting in a 130-96 romp over the Utah Jazz.

Irving made his first nine shots as the Nets raced to a 21-point lead at the end of the first quarter.

Meanwhile, San Antonio Spurs got better of Los Angeles Clippers 116-113. — AFP

Kiwis sweep series, are No.1 in Tests

Christchurch (New Zealand), Jan. 6: Towering paceman Kyle Jamieson completed an 11-wicket match haul on Wednesday as New Zealand thrashed Pakistan in the second Test to become the world's top-ranked team.

Jamieson was near unplayable in Pakistan's second innings, finishing with six for 48 after his five for 69 in the first innings, to give New Zealand victory by an innings and 176 runs.

The win inside four days in Christchurch, which completed a 2-0 series sweep, also confirmed New Zealand had overtaken Australia to be the world's number one Test side for the first time.

New Zealand batted Pakistan out of contention with a first innings 659 for six, with Williamson's masterful 238 supported by Henry Nicholls (157)

and Daryl Mitchell (102 not out).

But there was still a chance Pakistan could force a draw until Jamieson took the ball.

Pakistan resumed the day at eight for one, needing to bat for the better part of two days to salvage a draw, but they were never in the hunt.

Trent Boult had nightwatchman Mohammad Abbas out for three in the fifth over and after that the day was mainly about Jamieson, who recorded his best match performance. After Abbas departed, Abid Ali and Azhar Ali looked to be laying the groundwork for a solid third-wicket stand and moved the score to 46 when Jamieson removed Abid for 26. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 297 & 186 in 81.4 overs (Zafar Gohar 37; Jamieson 3/48) lost to New Zealand 659/6 decl.



New Zealand players pose for a team photo with their trophy after defeating Pakistan to claim series 2-0 at Hagley Oval in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Wednesday. — AFP