

DECCAN Chronicle

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KARIMNAGAR | WEDNESDAY | 10 FEBRUARY 2021



NATION | 4

Sena slams Shah over CM's post issue



WORLD | 5

Iran warns of building nuclear weapons

SPORTS | 8

India lost first Test to England



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WEATHER

Max: 31.7°C
Min: 14.6°C
RH: 28%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 32/14 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES (+11,158)
DEATHS (+108)
1,08,58,300 1,55,280

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+149) (+1)
TS: 2,95,831 1,612
(+70) (+0)
AP: 8,88,555 7,160

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,71,49,317
DEATHS 23,40,719
COUNTRIES WITH CASES 219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula Chaturdasi till 10 am (Thursday)
Star: Uttarashada till 2.13 pm
Variyam: 6.12 pm to 7.48 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.07 pm to 12.52 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Akhir 27, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.44 am
Zohar: 12.40 pm
Asar: 4.39 pm
Maghrib: 6.21 pm
Isha: 7.29 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.15 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.44 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 5.35 AM
MOONSET TODAY 4.59 PM

COUNTER POINT



Also tweet there is no pressure from anyone. All tweets are my own!

SHORT TAKES

Banks call for a two-day strike

New Delhi: The United Forum of Bank Unions, an umbrella body of nine unions, on Tuesday gave a call for a two-day strike from March 15 to protest against the proposed privatisation of two state-owned lenders. The government has already privatised IDBI Bank by selling its majority stake in the lender to LIC in 2019.

Bill on crypto currencies soon

New Delhi: The government will soon bring a bill on crypto currencies as existing laws are inadequate to deal with issues concerning them, MoS (finance) Anurag Thakur told Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. He said regulatory bodies like RBI and Sebi do not have any legal framework to regulate crypto currencies as they are not currencies, assets, securities.

No insurance for vaccine sideeffects

New Delhi: There is no provision of insurance for recipients of Covid-19 vaccine against any kind of side effects or medical complications that may arise due to the inoculation, Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday. The COVID-19 vaccination is entirely voluntary for the beneficiary, minister of state for health Ashwini Choubey said.

New bars to fetch over ₹135 crore for state govt

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

The cash-starved government of Telangana will be richer by over ₹150 crore with the setting up of 159 new bars across the state. The revenues earned through application fees and licence fees to set up the new bars is expected to cross ₹135 crore in a week. Of this, the government has already earned over ₹73 crore through application fees alone.

As per norms, the applicants need to pay ₹1 lakh (non-refundable) deposit

to the government to submit applications. Such was the rush to set up new bars that the government received 7,360 applications for setting up 159 bars, when the deadline to submit applications ended on Monday.

Of this, 5,311 applications came on the last day alone. Following the huge response, the government late on Tuesday issued orders extending the application deadline by a week until February 16. The government hopes to earn nearly ₹100 crore towards application fees.

The government had on January 25 issued a notification seeking applications to set up 159 bars.

Of this, 55 will be permitted in GHMC limits, while 19 in GHMC periphery and the rest in districts. Telangana already has 800 bars and 27 clubs that serve liquor besides 2,144 liquor shops that sell various liquor brands.

The licence fee varies from ₹30 lakh to ₹49 lakh, depending on the population in municipalities and municipal corporations.

■ Page 2: Liquor revenue in TS doubled since 2014

Expansion mode



Y.S. Sharmila greets her supporters at her Lotus Pond residence in Hyderabad on Tuesday. — R. PAVAN

■ Reports on Page 2

TS papers down sop for wedding

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Families from the economically-backward sections that hoped to get financial aid for weddings under the Shaadi Mubarak and Kalyana Lakshmi schemes are finding that the schemes are now limited to just one beneficiary from a family.

The government orders pertaining to the eligibility criteria for these two schemes are silent about the restriction on the number of beneficiaries from a family.

In the past, there were instances of more than two young women from

GOS PERTAINING to the eligibility criteria for these two schemes are silent about the restriction on the number of beneficiaries from a family.

the same family receiving the schemes' benefit. Shaadi Mubarak and Kalyana Lakshmi schemes provide beneficiary families with a financial aid of ₹1,00,116 in the form of a grant from the state government to cover the costs of the wedding.

■ Page 2: Officials in dark over changed criterion

ARMY USES DOGS TO SNIFF OUT COVID INFECTION

New Delhi, Feb. 9: The Indian Army is using its dogs for quick detection of Covid-19 to cut down time delays associated with regular diagnostic techniques.

Two dogs — two-year-old cocker spaniel Casper and one-year-old Jaya, a 'chippiparai' from Tamil Nadu — have been trained to detect Covid-19 by sniffing samples of sweat and urine, an official said.

Lt. Col. Surinder Saini, instructor at the Dog Training Facility of the Remount Veterinary Corps Centre in Meerut, said that the dogs from December are being deployed at the transit camp in Chandigarh from where troops move to large areas, including the Ladakh region. — PTI

■ Full report on Page 4

DEEP SIDHU ARRESTED FOR RED FORT MESS

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Punjabi actor-turned-activist Deep Sidhu, who was allegedly involved in the violence and vandalism at Red Fort during the farmers' tractor rally on January 26, was arrested by the Delhi police special cell late Monday night.

■ Full report on Page 4

DEATH TOLL IN GLACIER BURST RISES TO 32

Dehradun/Tapovan, Feb. 9: The death toll in the Uttarakhand disaster rose to 32 with six more bodies being recovered, officials said on Tuesday as multiple agencies trying to reach 30 workers trapped inside a tunnel at a power project site.

■ Full report on Page 4

NORMALCY RETURNS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 9

Nearly eight months since the Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirumala reopened its doors for devotees — after being closed for two-and-a-half months due to Covid-19 — the hill town is once again witnessing serpentine queues. This is also signifying a sharp rise in income from 'Srivari Hundi'.

When the hill shrine was reopened for pilgrims on June 11 last, TTD had

allowed 6,000 people for darshan. However, the temple gradually increased the darshan quota which now stood at 50,000 a day. This is roughly more than 60 per cent of pre-Covid devotee turnout.

Curiously, despite a low pilgrim footfall and the Covid-19 induced financial stress, the hundi collection is registering a steady increase. Devotees are generously offering Kanukas (cash) in the 'Srivari Hundi'.

The hundi income was

■ WHEN THE HILL SHRINE was reopened for pilgrims on June 11 last, TTD had allowed 6,000 people for darshan. However, the temple gradually increased the darshan quota which now stood at 50,000 a day. This is roughly more than 60 per cent of pre-Covid devotee turnout.

■ DESPITE A LOW pilgrim footfall and the Covid-19 induced financial stress, the hundi collection is registering a steady increase.

relatively high in the last one month as compared to the collections in the corresponding period last year. According to official statistics, the daily hundi col-

Teary-eyed Modi praises Azad, will take his advice

PM says difficult for successor to match Azad's standards

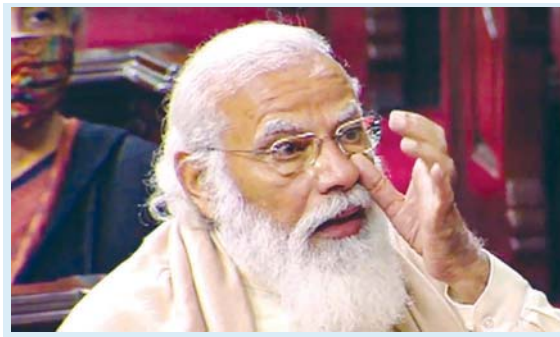
DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday bid a tearful farewell to Congress veteran and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, saying that he respects the Congress leader as a "true friend" and will not let him retire, and will continue taking his advice.

Mr Modi said it would be difficult for Mr Azad's successor in the Rajya Sabha to match him as he has set very high standards as an MP and as the Leader of the Opposition.

Calling himself a "proud Hindustani Muslim" who did not go to Pakistan, Mr Azad recalled how he learnt a lot from Parliament, late PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and got inspired from former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee, and prayed that militancy should end in the country.

Praising the PM, Mr Azad said Mr Modi never mixed personal context



Prime Minister Narendra Modi gets emotional during his farewell speech for Ghulam Nabi Azad in the Rajya Sabha in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

At a personal level, I would request him to not believe that he is not in the House. My door is always open for all of you. I will always expect and value your inputs.

— NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister

and his party's responsibilities and used to be among the first ones to wish him on festivals and birthdays.

"One thing I would like to say about Mr Azad that the next LoP will have a difficult time in matching

his work because he was not only concerned about his party but also about the country and the House," said the PM, and revealed how it was the Congress leader who had suggested to him to call a meeting of all party lead-

YSRC-backed candidates win most AP village polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

The ruling YSRC won 1,383 gram panchayats in its favour out of 3,249 that went for polling to the gram panchayat in phase-1 on Tuesday.

District-wise gram panchayats won by the YSR Congress supported candidates for the positions of sarpanches and ward members include: Anantapur 101, Kurnool 118, Chittoor 289, Kadapa 126, Prakasam 93, Nellore 50, Guntur 178, Krishna 51, West Godavari 63, East Godavari 67, Visakhapat-

BASED ON reports, voters cast their vote in favour of the contestants supported by both the ruling YSRC, Telugu Desam and other parties even though the election was held on a non-party basis.

nam 83 and Srikakulam 164, as per the reports available at 10 pm.

As the elections were held for 2,723 positions of sarpanchs and 20,157 ward members in the gram panchayats located in 12 dis-

tricts with an exception for Vizianagaram district in the state, a large number of voters turned out to exercise their franchise.

Based on reports, voters cast their vote in favour of the contestants supported by both the ruling YSR Congress, Telugu Desam and other parties even though the election was held on a non-party basis.

Out of a total number of 3,249 positions of the sarpanchs, 525 were unanimously elected and out of 32,502 positions of ward members, 12,185 were elected unanimously earlier.



An elderly woman casts her vote during the gram panchayat elections at a polling booth under Anakapalli Division in Visakhapatnam district on Tuesday. — DC

ers during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the PM was holding a meeting of the floor leaders.

Mr Modi had tears as he recalled the 2007 terrorist attack on a tourist bus carrying Gujaratis in J&K when both him and Mr Azad were chief ministers. The PM recalled how Mr Azad was the first one to call him, all teared up, and took care of the pilgrims from Gujarat as they were like his family members.

"Posts come and go but how to remain sane... is something one should learn from him. It was a very emotional time for me... I respect him as a friend. I am sure that his nature and his zeal to work for the nation will never let him rest," said the PM, while adding that his door will always remain open for Mr Azad and the other retiring members.

"I would not let you retire, will continue taking your advice," Modi said in a tearful farewell to Mr Azad in the Upper House.

TIKAIT TO TAKE PROTESTS ALL OVER COUNTRY

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait declared on Tuesday that he will take the ongoing farmers' agitation against the three controversial agricultural laws to the far corners of the country.

Addressing thousands of farmers at a mahapanchayat in Haryana's Kurukshetra, Mr Tikait said: "We will go to the far corners of the country to raise awareness over the farm laws. Ours is a mass movement and we will make it successful. We won't return home till these laws are repealed."

As Kurukshetra is also known as "Dharmakshetra" (holy place) and the "Land of the Bhagavad Gita", Mr Tikait said he was sure farmers will get justice from this land. After Haryana, he said that mahapanchayats will also be held in Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

■ Full report on Page 4

CENTRE PLANS GUIDELINES FOR OTT PLAYERS

New Delhi, Feb. 9: The government will soon issue guidelines for regulation of OTT (over the top) platforms that will address issues such as sensitive content, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

Replying to a Zero Hour mention, information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said a lot of suggestions and complaints on the regulation of OTTs have been received.

"Guidelines and direction are almost ready. It will be soon implemented," he said in his brief submission. Earlier, raising the issue through a Zero Hour mention, Mahesh Poddar of the BJP said objectionable content on OTT platforms includes sexual discrimination and abusive language.

There are at least 40 OTT platforms, including global ones. — PTI

OTHER STORIES

GIVE QUOTA ON PERCENTAGE OF CITIZENS: BC LEADER

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

National Backward Classes Welfare Association president R. Krishnaiah demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi give reservation as per percentage of the population.

On Tuesday the BC leader wrote a letter to the Prime Minister objecting to the EWS reservation for nine per cent of the population with 10 per cent reservation. He appealed to the Prime Minister to increase the BC reservation percentage from 27 to 56 with the population of the BC community. He alleged that several political parties including national parties neglected the BC community and asked how the Union government passed the 10 per cent reservation in two days in Parliaments in an emergency manner.

He also demanded the Union government implement the reservation in the Assembly and Lok Sabha election with population percentage. Added that should apply the same logic to the High Court and Supreme Court Judges appointment. Mr Krishnaiah demanded the political parties should fight for BC people rights and build the pressure on the Union Government to apply the reservation as per population ratio, otherwise it will take massive agitation against union government and political parties.

FINANCE PANEL EXPOSED TS GOVT: CONG

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Former minister Mohammed Ali Shabbir has demanded a high-level probe into observations made against Telangana government by 15th Finance Commission, whose report was placed in Parliament last week.

Addressing a press conference at Gandhi Bhavan on Tuesday, Shabbir Ali said the commission has exposed several financial irregularities committed by the TRS government headed by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao. "The 15th Finance Commission has made serious comments about issues, including the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project. These observations vindicate Congress party's stand that Kaleshwaram is not financially viable and would not benefit farmers in the long run," Shabbir Ali maintained. He pointed out that though the first State Finance Commission (SFC) was constituted in 2015 after formation of separate Telangana, its report is yet to be submitted. Meanwhile, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee president and Nalgonda MP N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Tuesday said "reckless and indiscriminate" borrowing by the Telangana state government will result in the state getting into a debt trap. The Congress leader asked for more details of the Finance Commission study and their adverse comments on Kaleshwaram project being unviable should be sent to him. He made these statements while attending a briefing and interactive session by members of 15 Finance Commission in Delhi in Parliament. Reddy asked the state governments to immediately transfer the designated funds immediately to local bodies. The senior Congress leader asked that state governments should not impose their own conditions on spending of finance commission funds by sarpanches, Finance Commission should ensure adequate funds allocated to mandal and zilla parishads.

Hyacinth spreads its tentacles



Water hyacinth engulfs houses in Uma Maheswar Colony which is still submerged due to last year's monsoon floods in the Fox Sagar lake, on Tuesday. The civic authorities are yet to clear the stagnant water. — R. PAVAN

Sputnik V jab may get nod for emergency use

Russian firm partners with Dr Reddy's; phase-III trials underway

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Emergency use authorisation (EUA) for Sputnik V vaccine might be granted in India by February end or March, according to Russian Direct Investment Fund.

Fund CEO Kirill Dmitriev stated in an email interview with *Deccan Chronicle* that the company has partnered with Dr Reddy's in India and applied for EUA here. "Dr Reddy's is currently conducting phase III clinical trials of the vaccine on 1,500 subjects. We expect that permission will be granted as early as February or March. Following this, we will start the vaccine delivery to India." Sputnik V human trials have been categorized as safe and effective by the peer-reviewed

journal, *Lancet*.

Efficacy of Sputnik V against Covid-19 is reported at 91.6 per cent based on the analysis of 19,866 volunteers who received both the first and second dose of the vaccine. Efficacy in elderly group of 2,144 volunteers over 60 years was at 91.8 per cent.

Both these results show that the vaccine beneficiaries have developed 100 per cent cellular immune response for Covid-19.

RDIF states that they have submitted the mid-stage preliminary safety clinical trial data for review to India's drug regulator to commence the phase 3 trials. The Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) of India reviewed the safety data from the clinical trials of the vaccine and recommended the Phase 3

recruitment. No safety issues were identified in the report and the DSMB concluded that the study met all the prerequisite primary endpoints.

Dmitriev states that their Indian partner Dr Reddy's is in constant touch with the Indian government and regulators. "We have agreements in place with four pharmaceutical manufacturers in India to produce Sputnik V and negotiations are going on with several more."

This means that once the registration is granted, we will be able to start the mass vaccine rollout not only for the Indian population but to other geographies as well." RDIF is looking at Indian companies for mass production of the vaccine and also export this to other countries. Pharmacologists say the

hesitancy for the vaccination, noted in the first two months of 2021, will see a sea-change after March. A senior pharmacologist says, "By the time the second dose is administered in the beneficiaries in India, there will be live examples available. In the case of Covaxin, the total vaccinations were 84,375 while adverse events were 81; which is 0.096 per cent. In the case of Covishield, the total vaccinations were 43, 76,041 and adverse events were 8402; which is 0.192 per cent. This information was shared in the Rajya Sabha which indicates that there will be a mad rush from March onwards for the vaccine."

The emergence of more players in Indian market is expected to bring down the sale price of the vaccine.

37% VOLUNTEERS TAKE COVID-19 VACCINE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Tuesday saw 37 per cent of the volunteers being vaccinated in the state. There were 39,756 volunteers of which 14,638 were vaccinated.

There is still fear among the emergency employees about the adverse effects of the vaccine and for that reason they are not coming forward. There were minor adverse effects reported in five people on Tuesday. The cumulative number of beneficiaries in the state are 2,43,483. The vaccination drive will continue on Wednesday.

STATE REPORTS 149 NEW COVID INFECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

The state saw 149 new cases and one death taking the total number to 2,95,831 and deaths to 1612 on Tuesday.

There are 1,804 active cases in the state and those under home and institutional care are 694. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits saw 25 cases, Ranga Reddy 8 and Medchal Malkajgiri 9. Safety protocols of masks, hand washing and social distancing are important and the government is constantly and continuously reminding people of the same.

● **THERE ARE 1,804 active Covid-19 infections in Telangana and those under home and institutional care are as many as 694.** The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits saw 25 cases, Ranga Reddy 8 and Medchal Malkajgiri 9.

TS not keen on protecting its land: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Telangana High Court on Tuesday took a serious view of state government's failure in submitting counter-affidavits explaining its stand on petitions filed against it in a timely manner. The court cautioned that it will not show lenience if the government continues to seek more and more time to file its affidavits.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayes Reddy fumed when revenue authorities of Ranga Reddy district failed to file a counter affidavit explaining the situation in a petition filed in 2016.

The petition complained of inaction on part of the state government in protecting government lands from encroachments in survey numbers 143, 159 and 160 respectively in Kothapet village of Uppal mandal.

The Division Bench went on to impose costs of

₹10,000 on principal secretary (Revenue), Ranga Reddy district collector, RDO, apart from tahasildhar of Uppal. The court observed that the government is not keen on protecting its own land from encroachers.

Almost half-a-decade ago, on April 7, 2016; the then bench had sought contention of revenue authorities by issuing notices on encroachment of lands in Kothapet. But, till date, authorities concerned have failed in filing a counter affidavit.

When the government pleader once again sought more time on Tuesday to do so, the High Court expressed its ire, observing that it has become the habit of government counsels to seek more time for filing counters.

The court reiterated that it will not be lenient if there are continuing delays in filing counters from the government side. The court gave a last chance to authorities for filing the counter within four weeks.

Find effective mechanism to handle complaints: HC

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC
Hyderabad, Feb. 9

The Telangana High Court has directed the state government to take suitable steps to devise an effective, time-bound mechanism for monitoring complaints/grievances and fix accountability on officers in case of lapses.

Issuing the order, Justice Challa Kodandaram expressed displeasure over the piling up of cases at the high court, mostly alleging inaction of the state administrative machinery against complaints or grievances from the public and contempt cases arising out of apathy on the part of officials in implementing court orders.

Mentioning cases of administrative inaction, Justice Kodandaram said such cases are many and consuming the precious time of the court. "As a result, the court has no time to adjudicate substantial disputes inter se between private parties relating to their property and other rights, the rights of employees with respect to service matters, the rights linked to matrimonial disputes, the election petitions, company petitions etc."

The judge said such petitions about inaction of the authorities were coming before the court with the hope that at least under the threat of fresh court orders, the respondent authority would act on their complaints and redress their grievances. The state government

and higher officials who are required to have administrative control over their subordinates are either apathetic to the complaints they received or are indifferent, or have no courage to take action against their subordinate officers, the court noted.

Directing the government to take suitable steps to devise an effective, time-bound mechanism for monitoring complaints or grievances and fix accountability on errant officers, Justice Kodandaram directed the high court registry to circulate this order to the chief secretary and principal secretaries to highlight the huge burden that is being placed on courts on account of inaction and insensitivity of the authorities toward the complaints.

Officials in a fix over new criterion

From Page 1

Even until two weeks ago, people were able to file applications online at the state government portal for their second or third daughters. But, during the past fortnight, people have not been able to submit their applications online as officials said the portal was being upgraded.

On Tuesday, the portal was reopened for filing of applications.

But some families that sought to apply for the grant for the second time, for the marriage of their daughters, found that the system rejected their application.

Social activist Mohammed Khalid said

he had in the past helped poor parents in filing the online applications for the second or third girl from a family.

The synchronization of the Aadhaar numbers of the parents on the server of the portal may be creating this problem. It was possible these numbers could get automatically flagged as they were in the list of previous beneficiaries.

A senior official at the minority welfare department clarified that there has been no fresh communication from the government recommending any such restriction. "We will inquire into it with the Centre for Good Governance," the official said.

Liquor revenue in TS doubled since 2014

From Page 1

In the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits, the licence fee is ₹49 lakh. The excise department hopes to earn over ₹63 crore through licence fees alone, at an average of ₹40 lakh per bar.

The bars will be allocated through a draw of lots, organised by the collector concerned in districts on February 18, while the excise director will preside over it for the GHMC limits on February 19.

The state government's earnings through liquor have more than doubled since the formation of Telangana as a separate state in 2014. In the first year of formation of the state, the government earned excise revenue of

₹10,813 crore in 2014-15, an increase of ₹1,000 crore compared with ₹9,800 crore earned in 2013-14, a year before the formation of the state.

It further increased to ₹20,000 crore in 2018 and ₹25,000 crore in 2019. The figures for 2020 are yet to be released and it is expected that the excise revenue will touch ₹30,000 crore.

The excise revenue contribution to the overall state revenue was just 26 per cent in 2013-14 in undivided Andhra Pradesh, a year prior to formation of Telangana State. It rose sharply by 65 per cent after the formation of Telangana, clearly reflecting how the TS government was encouraging people to spend on liquor.

Inferior quality constructions turned dangerous in Indur

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC
NIZAMABAD, FEB. 9

Inferior quality construction of apartments has turned dangerous in Nizamabad district. Few builders had thrown the norms to the wind in Nizamabad and Armour towns. Mishaps occurred in several apartments.

In the latest incident, a lift in Podduturi Landmark apartment in Gangasthan-2 area in Nizamabad collapsed on Monday night. No one was injured in the mishap.

Mainly builders ignored to set up safety belts in lifts and neglected fire safety norms. According to norms, the fire engine could move freely in apartment premises, if any fire accident would occur. But few builders constructed shopping complexes at apartments and they would hurdle for fire engines movement.

Inferior quality material is also being used in construction result in cracks on buildings, leakages, stagnation of drainage pipelines and damage to floors. Flat owners were forced

to pay an additional amount to repair the leakages on walls. Residential association office-bearers have also neglected the problems in few apartments in Nizamabad. In view of skyrocketing land prices and increased construction costs, people preferred for flats in apartments. Presently, around 1000 flats are under construction in Nizamabad.

Either Municipal Corporation officials or fire and disaster management officials failed to initiate stringent action against errant builders for flouting of norms. If the residential associations are strong, where the civic problems are being resolved, otherwise it would persist for a long time. Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Association of India (CREDAI) Nizamabad unit president Satish Attal and general secretary Mooda Venugopal said that under Real Estate (Regulation) and Development) Act, 2016 norms will be strictly followed in construction of apartments.

Jagan distances himself from sister's political plan

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Ending varied speculations and conspiracy theories, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has wasted no time in distancing himself from his sister, Y. S. Sharmila and her plans to float a political outfit in Telangana.

The YSR Congress supremo made it clear that he was against expanding the party in Telangana as it would hurt the interests of people of his own state and give an opportunity to political forces in the neighbouring state to widen the gap among people by raking up sentiments.

"There is a difference of opinion between brother and sister on expanding the party in Telangana. The issue was discussed for the last three months. Both are firm in their

respective views and she has finally chosen her own path," said Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, advisor to Chief Minister on public affairs.

He, however, sought to underplay the divide in the family, by saying it was "only a difference of opinion" and it would "not harm or impact their personal relationship".

Sharmila Reddy, on the other hand, tried to retain ambiguity over her brother's stand vis-à-vis her political moves. Asked if Jagan Mohan Reddy was in approval of her moves, she shot back saying, "did he tell you (the reporter) the other way? He is my elder brother and I am of the view that I have his blessings."

It was evident from Tuesday's political developments in the YSR's family that Sharmila took a plunge into direct politics out of

anger at being neglected by her brother. She was forced to choose Telangana as she can't afford a direct confrontation with Jagan Mohan Reddy in Andhra Pradesh.

A rank outsider, to be more precise an "Andhrith", she seems to be unmindful of her success in Telangana as the real objective, it appears, is to put her brother in a tight spot.

"It seems more as an act of vengeance, which normally Jagan is accused of pursuing with rival politicians," a senior party leader said, adding that at the best, she might want to prove a point to Jagan by winning from a Lok Sabha segment in Telangana, which has lots of settlers' votes as a deciding factor.

Incidentally, the first salvo against Sharmila was fired by Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee work-

ing president A Revanth Reddy, who represents Malkajgiri Lok Sabha segment, which has considerable settlers vote. He dared Sharmila to implead in the ongoing legal battle against the proposed Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme to prove her sincerity towards Telangana.

He also demanded that she should offer an apology to families of several people, who sacrificed their lives for separate statehood, for the tough stand taken by both her father and brother against the division of AP.

Sensing such troubles in advance, Ramakrishna Reddy made it clear that it would be no more a family matter once she crossed the line and decided to pursue her politics.

"If anything arises in future, it is between two parties and two ideologies," he pointed out.

Sharmila meets followers, hints at floating party

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

YS Sharmila, younger sister of Andhra Pradesh chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, said on Tuesday that the people of Telangana "feel there is a dire need to bring back the Rajanna Rajyam" -- a 'keep-all-happy-welfare state' envisaged by her father and deceased chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Sharmila was speaking to the media at her Lotus Pond residence here at the end of the first round of consultations she has planned with fans and followers of YSR on her future course of action in politics. "It is my strong desire too to bring back the Rajanna Rajyam," she said, adding that farmers were unhappy and students could not pursue



studies free of cost.

Though Sharmila stopped short of announcing a new political outfit, she dropped enough hints to that effect. "I will let you know when we register a political party," she said, adding that she might visit a few districts to continue with her consultation process.

During the day, a few hundred people thronged the Lotus Pond residence. She made clear her intent to establish an identity for

● **A FEW hundred people thronged the Lotus Pond residence. She made clear her intent to establish an identity for herself in politics. None of the numerous billboards erected all over the area had photographs of her Chief Minister brother.**

herself in politics. None of the numerous billboards erected all over the area had photographs of her Chief Minister brother. The photographs of YSR's wife Vijayamma, who is honorary president of the YSR Congress, were also missing. The billboards had only YSR's image and that of her walking as part of a padayatra she undertook when Jagan was jailed years ago in a CBI graft case. Draped in a white saree

with green floral border, Sharmila came on to a makeshift dais to greet the people. Special arrangements were made obviously by her evangelist husband, "Brother" Anil, to welcome her with drumbeats and by showering of flower petals.

Sources close to Sharmila said about 1000 persons had been invited for the meeting and a majority of them took part in the consultations. She began her interaction sessions with her followers from erstwhile Nalgonda.

Sharmila had helped her brother in poll campaigns twice. She is believed to have fallen out with Jagan and decided to pursue her own career in politics after she was denied both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha nominations by the YSRC.

OTHER STORIES

CI, SI
SUSPENDED FOR
CASES PENDENCYDC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, FEB. 9

Dichpally police circle inspector G. Venkateshwarlu, Nizamabad rural police sub inspector Madhusudan Goud were suspended on Tuesday on the charges of pendency of cases. Hyderabad zone IG Stephen Ravindra and Nizamabad range IG N. Shivashankar Reddy issued separate suspension orders of both CI and SI. Police higher officials quoted pendency of cases in Indalwai, Jakranpally and Nizamabad rural police stations and issued suspension orders.

POLICE NAB LORRY
STEALING GANG IN
KARIMNAGARDC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, FEB. 9

Karimnagar police on Tuesday arrested a three-member gang of lorry and auto lifters and seized two lorries, apart from two autos from them.

The gang members have been identified as Md. Faheem Hussain (30) and Md. Rafiq Khan (32), residents of Khanapur, and Syed Yousuf (44), resident of Hussainipura in Karimnagar city.

Faheem had accumulated debts. He decided to steal lorries and autos to make some money and roped in Rafiq and Yousuf. The three started lifting lorries and autos from various places in Karimnagar district, dismantled their parts and sold them to one Shaik Feroz Mohammad of Hyderabad.

They succeeded in their venture for five months till complaints started pouring in with the district police, following which a special team was formed to investigate. The team studied video footage of CCTVs installed at various locations. Finally, they nabbed Faheem, Rafiq and Yousuf at Rekurthinagar. Two lorries and autos each were seized from them.

It is learnt two others Shaik Khadeer (40) resident of Mustafanagar, Hyderabad, and Mohammad Asif Nawab (42), resident of Basrathnagar, Hyderabad, are also involved in the racket. A manhunt has been launched for them.

Police commissioner V. B. Kamalasan Reddy appreciated inspector T. Srinivas Rao, sub-inspector T. Vivek, constables Md. Basheer, V. Srinivas, A. Anjaneyulu, K. Krishna Reddy and A. Ravinder Reddy of Karimnagar rural police station and constables G. Ashok, E. Sudhakar Reddy of Kothapally police station, apart from task force inspector R. Prakash for cracking the case.

● **THE THREE** started lifting lorries and autos from various places in Karimnagar district, dismantled their parts and sold them to one Shaik Feroz Mohammad of Hyderabad.

TRS CADRE INSIST
ON DISCIPLINE AFTER
WARNING FROM KCRDC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, FEB. 9

TRS leaders have begun insisting on discipline in the party meetings and programmes ever since party MLAs and MPs returned to their bases after attending the party state executive meet in Hyderabad recently.

At the meeting, Chief Minister KCR had used harsh language against party leaders crossing their limits and making irresponsible political statements.

He warned party MLAs and ministers of strong action if they failed to act in a disciplined manner. The same message was carried down to cadres and second-rung leaders in districts by TRS MLAs, MPs and other leaders on their return from the meet.

Notably, senior leader Jogu Ramanna had expressed his dissatisfaction over party leaders not wearing Party Kanduvu while participating in a press conference two days ago. Ramanna asked party leaders to wear this at meetings and press conferences and said discipline is must in the party.

Ramanna also asked the second-rung leaders to occupy their chairs before his arrival so that the meeting will continue in an orderly manner. "Avoid making noise by pulling chairs and attending phone calls while the meeting is on," he said.

No scope for opposition
in Telangana: Gangula

Parties that were started earlier have no address today, says Min.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, FEB. 9

The announcement by Y. S. Sharmila, daughter of former chief minister late Rajashekar Reddy, on Tuesday about possibility of starting a new political party in Telangana has created waves in political circles of erstwhile Karimnagar district.

Addressing a media conference here, backward classes welfare minister Gangula Kamalakara mentioned that there is no scope for any other party in Telangana, except the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS).

"If anyone is interested in establishing a new political party, they should remember that parties that were started earlier have no address today in Telangana. No party can survive before TRS," the minister remarked.

Speaking about Sharmila's entry into Telangana politics, Kamalakara maintained that Seemandhra factional politics will not run in Telangana. Separate Telangana movement was itself



CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka arrives on a bullock cart to the launch programme of 'Rythu Poru Bata' at Bheemsari village of Adilabad mandal in Adilabad on Tuesday.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

Bhatti slams KCR for
his remarks on CM postDC CORRESPONDENT
BHEEMSARI
(ADILABAD), FEB. 9

Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Tuesday demanded that Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao step down from CM's post for comparing the post with his left slipper.

Launching the "Rythu Bata Poru Bata" programme with

"Rythulatho Mukhamukhi" (face-to-face interaction with farmers) at Bheemsari village in Adilabad rural mandal, Bhatti Vikramarka said the CM's post is not hereditary and it has been given to him by the people. Equating it with a "chappal" is an insult to democracy, he said, demanding that KCR resign from the CM's post.

Former minister and present Manthani MLA Sridhar Babu said that TRS leaders, MLAs and ministers have proved that they have no self-respect. They have remained silent even after KCR used abusive language and scolded them.

TPCC state general secretary Gandrath Sujatha and in-charge DCC president Sajid Khan also spoke.

CLP leader calls Modi,
KCR as "bada, chota KDs"DC CORRESPONDENT
BHEEMSARI
(ADILABAD), FEB. 9

Congress Legislature Party leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Tuesday described Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao as "bada and chota KDs" (known delinquents). He accused both of trying to exploit farmers.

Speaking on the occasion of launching "Rythu Bata Poru Bata" programme at Bheemsari in Adilabad district, Bhatti Vikramarka said farmers will become slaves of a handful corporate companies and MNCs if central government is allowed to implement its three farm laws in the country.

He announced that Congress will announce an action plan on February 24 when its "Rythu Bata Poru Bata" programme concludes on February 24.

The CLP leader said KCR has insulted people of Telangana, especially farmers, by taking a U-turn on TRS

● **BHATTI VIKRAMARKA** said farmers will become slaves of a handful corporate companies and MNCs if central government is allowed to implement its three farm laws in the country.

● **KCR HAS** insulted people of Telangana, especially farmers, by taking a U-turn on TRS stand on the farm laws.

stand on the farm laws after his meeting in Delhi with Narendra Modi, who is trying to sell the country to Ambani and Adani. He asserted that farmers will not tolerate any move of the central and state governments to close purchasing centres of IKP, CCI, and market yards.

Former MLC K. Premsagar Rao criticised both the BJP and TRS. He appealed to people, especially youth, not to get attracted towards BJP, which is only promoting religion while neglecting development and creation of employment opportunities.

Congress party ST wing national vice-pres-

ident Bellayya Naik said the three farm laws will badly affect farmers and make them depend on corporate companies for their livelihood.

He pointed out that many government purchasing centres have already closed down in Bihar, where companies are into contract farming.

TPCC state general secretary Gandrath Sujatha alleged that both TRS and BJP have failed in getting ₹500 crore payable to farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana in Adilabad district alone.

Congress party Kisan Cell president Anvesh Reddy, senior Congress leader Naresh Rathod, Konda Gangadhar, Sanjeev Reddy, Narasinga Rao, Digambar Patil and Mallepula Narsiah and others were present. A similar farmers' meeting was also held at Dhanora in Boath mandal, which were attended by CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka, MLA D. Sirdhar Babu and other Congress leaders.

Sattupalli MLA distributes
saris along with KL chequesDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 9

The beneficiaries of Kalyana Laxmi and Shadi Mubarak of nine villages in Penuballi mandal thrilled over the additional gift along with cheques on Tuesday.

The additional gift is a new sari with psupu and kunkuma (turmeric and Saffron powder). The Sattupalli MLA Sandra Venkata Veeraiah distributed the cheques in person to the beneficiaries and a

sari. 45 cheques were distributed to the 45 beneficiaries in nine villages including Lingagudem, GURARAM, Chaudavaram, Bayyannagudem, Yadla Banjara, V. M. Banjara, Lankapalli, Mandalapadu, Ramachandrapuram and Yerrugandla. Sandra Venkata Veeraiah said that he started distributing the cheques to the door steps of beneficiaries.

"There is no need for them come to the mandal parishad office", he said.



Sattupalli MLA Sandra Venkata Veeraiah presents a saree along with kalyana laxmi cheque in Penuballi mandal in Khammam district on Tuesday.

AJAY CARRIES
BIER OF HIS
PA'S MOTHERDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 9

Minister for Transport Puvvada Ajay Kumar carried the bier his personal assistants' mother. As per the details, Chirumamilla Damayanthi, mother of C. Kiran, working as personal assistant of Ajay Kumar died on Tuesday. After hearing the news, Ajay visited the house of Kiran and looked after all the funeral activities. The Minister carried the bier of her and participated in the rituals.

TEACHERS STAGE PROTEST IN NIZAMABAD

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD/KAMAREDDY,
FEB. 9

Teachers staged dharna in front of collectorate offices in Nizamabad and Kamareddy on Tuesday. In response to a call given by Progressive Recognised Teachers Union (PRTU), hundreds of teachers took part in the agitation. Speaking on

the occasion, PRTU leaders said that Pay Revision Commission recommendations should benefit the teachers as per cost of living. It is unfortunate to propose 7.5 percent PRC, they lamented. State government should declare the PRC and clear the promotions, they demanded. Earlier, teachers also conducted rally in Kamareddy town.

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SHORT TAKES

TIGER FOUND DEAD
IN TADOBA-ANDHARI
RESERVEBHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 9

A tiger was found dead in a buffer range of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra on Tuesday. This is the seventh death of the big cats recorded in Maharashtra since the beginning of the new year.

The carcass of the male tiger, aged around three years, was recovered from Mudholi beat of Moharli buffer range of the reserve, field director of TATR Jitendra Ramgaonkar said.

The carcass was intact, but bore signs of external injuries, said the officials. According to them, the death might have been caused due to a fight with another tiger.

The actual cause of death will be ascertained after post-mortem. All procedures are being carried out as per the standard operating procedures of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, said officials.

In 2021, seven instances of tigers' deaths have been registered in Maharashtra, which is the highest in the country. In two separate incidents, a tiger and a tigress with her three cubs were poisoned by the locals in Umred-Karhandia-Paoni Wildlife Sanctuary (UKPWS) early this year.

According to officials, a local has admitted that he had poisoned the carcass of his cow when he found that his livestock was killed by the tigress. The feline was a resident of the sanctuary and was about 4-5 years old while the cubs were about 5 months old.

On January 27, a tiger was found dead under Bhadravati forest range of Chandrapur district. In the last two years, 40 tigers have died in Maharashtra.

PRO-KHALISTAN
TERRORIST'S AIDE
ARRESTED IN U.P.

Lucknow, Feb. 9: A joint team of Punjab and UP police has arrested an accomplice of pro-Khalistan terrorists here, police said on Tuesday.

Jagdev Singh alias Jagga was arrested from Vikas Nagar area of the city on Monday, they said.

The accused is linked to pro-Khalistan terrorists Paramjit Singh Pammah and Maltani Singh, they said, adding, Paramjit is currently in the UK while Malatani is in Germany.

Both of them are accused of carrying out anti-national activities in Punjab and trying to promote terror and harm peace and religious tolerance, police said.

According to the police, Paramjit and Maltani were allegedly preparing Jagdev Singh to carry out anti-national activities and with the money provided by them, he along with his partner Jagroop Singh bought guns and cartridges from Madhya Pradesh.

Punjab Police had arrested Jagroop on Sunday. Jagdev, who hails from Ferozepur district of Punjab, was arrested earlier in 2019 and 2020.

SENA SLAMS
SHAH OVER
CM'S POST ISSUESONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 9

The Shiv Sena on Tuesday slammed Union home minister Amit Shah over his remarks that he never made any closed door promise to share Maharashtra CM's post with the Uddhav Thackeray-led party.

The Sena said that the BJP leader is making such comments only because his party failed to form the government in Maharashtra. It also argued that Shah had himself stated in his previous "sponsored interviews" that it is not his sanskar (culture) to reveal what was decided in the closed door meeting.

In an editorial in its mouthpiece *Saamna*, the Shiv Sena claimed that the BJP is misleading people. It advised Shah to focus on matters like the Uttarakhand flash floods and the farmers' agitation against contentious three farm laws.

Referring to the statements by Shah that he does everything openly, the editorial said, "There is a similarity in style of functioning between Amit Shah and Shiv Sena. The Sena also does everything openly.... if this was not the case, the Sena would not have openly joined hands with the Congress and NCP and formed the government with them."

In Uttarakhand, it's a race against time

ITBP deploys drones, dogs to detect 170 people missing since disaster struck the Chamoli region

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency input
NEW DELHI/LAKHIMPUR
KHERI (UP), FEB. 9

Ten years back, Nathu Lal's elder son Subhash drowned. Now, he is waiting for news on the fate of his younger son, missing since Sunday after the deluge in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district.

Dharamendra, a labourer at the Tapovan power project, had called their home in Bhulanpur village here last Friday, just two days before the flash flood that was possibly triggered by a glacial burst or an avalanche.

The death toll in Uttarakhand's glacier burst tragedy reached 31 as security agencies were racing against time to pull out more people from slush and two blocked tunnels where construction workers are trapped. ITBP has deployed drones and dogs to detect about 170 people still missing since the disaster struck the Chamoli region on Sunday.

"A joint team of ITBP, NDRF, SDRF and other agencies conducting rescue operations used drone cameras to see feasibility to enter beyond the cleared site inside Tapovan tunnel. They have not been successful so far. Machines have been deployed to clear slush," an ITBP official said.

Uttar Pradesh relief commissioner Sanjay Goyal said about 70 of the total missing people are from the state, most of them from Lakhimpur Kheri district.

This includes 34 from Lakhimpur Kheri, nine from Saharanpur followed by five from Shravasti," he said on Tuesday. Nathu Lal, who has three married daughters, told visitors that Dharmendra decided to try his luck in Tapovan as a labourer when he saw his fellow villagers earning a decent wage there.

He left home on January 6 or 7 to begin work there.

In Ichhanagar, another village in Lakhimpur Kheri district, three families hover between hope and despair. There has been no contact since the calamity with 15 people, all of them workers at the same hydel project.

At least five of them are related Shrikrishna (50), his son Raju (22), close relative Jagdish (40) and his son Umesh (21), and another relative Ramtirtha (35).

Tears rolled down the face of Shrikrishna's wife as she told media persons that Raju had talked to the family on the phone just hours before the calamity.

Raju's marriage is scheduled in April and his mother and three younger sisters now pray for his return.

Ichhanagar's Azim told his family that he survived as he had left the Tapovan site for a higher location on Sunday to get the refill for an LPG cylinder. Muzeem from Mirzapur had also come with him.

But there is no news of their co-worker Bhalbhal, also from Mirzapur.

Eighteen people from Bhairampur village worked at the Tapovan project. Ten of them had stayed away from work on Sunday and are safe. There has been no contact with the remaining eight, villagers said.

Santosh Bhargava, head of Maanjha panchayat, which incorporates Ichhanagar and Bhairampur villages, rushed to Tapovan when reports of the tragedy came in.

He talked with the managing director of the private construction company, which had recruited labourers from the area. Bhargava said that the MD has assured all help possible for the victim's families.

"All the Kheri people were engaged as casual labourers at the Tapovan project and most of them worked at a depth of nearly 40 metres at the site, he said.



Neema Devi, wife of Mithilesh Mahato, a worker at Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project who went missing after the glacier burst in Chamoli district, and her children sit outside their house waiting for his return in Chaunkad village in Ramgarh district on Tuesday. Mahato along with four other villagers from Ramgarh district are missing since the glacier burst at Joshimath in the Dhaul Ganga river on Sunday.

— PTI

In-depth safety audit of major infrastructure projects on cards

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

In view of the Uttarakhand glacier tragedy home ministry's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) will conduct a fresh "safety and security audit" of all major infrastructure projects in high altitude and hilly areas and suggest corrective measures.

Home ministry sources said there was considerable concern in the government regarding the safety of infrastructure being carried in hilly terrain particularly after the Uttarakhand glacier burst. So this incident is being used as an opportunity to do an in-depth safety audit.

Officials said all projects being carried in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and the North-Eastern states would be

● **HOME MINISTRY** sources said there was considerable concern in the government regarding the safety of infrastructure being carried in hilly terrain particularly after the Uttarakhand glacier burst.

● **EXPERTS FROM NDRF** and even external agencies like IIT, Indian Institute of Science and others would be roped in for this exercise.

thoroughly reviewed. A detailed report and analysis would be submitted within the next two months.

"As of now this survey would be conducted in hilly states as they are more vulnerable to such disasters as was witnessed in Uttarakhand," a senior

ministry official said. Experts from NDRF and even external agencies like IIT, Indian Institute of Science and others would be roped in for this exercise.

A number of power projects, dams, roads and bridges are being constructed in these states which would be examined. Ministry sources said NDRF teams with assistance from the SDRF would be deployed close to these infrastructure projects so that immediate relief and rescue operations can be carried out in case of any future disasters.

R-Day violence: SC stays arrest of Tharoor, Sardesai & others in FIRs lodged for tweets

New Delhi, Feb. 9: In a major relief to Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and six journalists including Rajdeep Sardesai, the Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed their arrest in connection with the FIRs lodged against them for their allegedly "misleading" tweets on the violence during the farmers' tractor rally here on the Republic Day.

The apex court, in the proceedings lasting five minutes, granted protection from any possible coercive action by police of states like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka to Tharoor as also Sardesai, Mrinal Pande, Zafar Agha, Paresh Nath, Vinod K. Jose and Anant Nath.

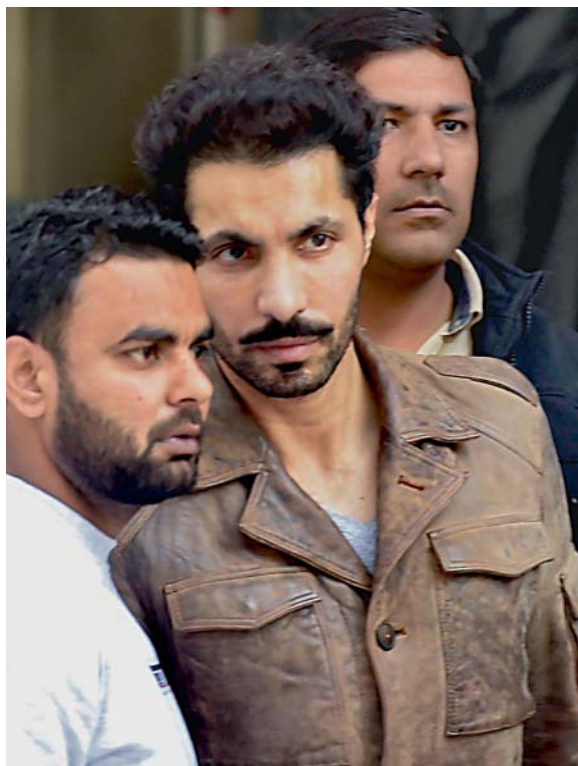
Issue notice returnable in two weeks. In the meantime, there shall be stay of arrest of the petitioners, the bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde noted in its order after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the lawmak-er from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, expressed the looming danger of danger arrest.

When the bench said it was issuing notice in the matter, Sibal vehemently pleaded that an order with an effect that no coercive action be taken against them in the meantime be also passed.

Nothing is going to happen. Where is the danger, said the bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian.

Sibal objected and said Solicitor General Tuhsar Mehta is appearing for Delhi Police and the cops of other states might knock at my doors and arrest me in the meantime. "Kindly protect us in the meanwhile," Sibal said, prompting the bench to ask the law officer whether the police was planning to arrest Tharoor and others.

Mehta, seeking to argue the case on Wednesday, alleged horrendous tweets



Actor Deep Sidhu, accused in the violence on Republic Day during a farmers tractor rally, arrested by Delhi Police special cell in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— PTI

have been made, the law officer said, adding, I can show you what horrendous effect these tweets have with such lakhs of followers.

The bench asked Mehta, Are you going to arrest them? The solicitor general said, I am before your lordships. Please hear it tomorrow.

The bench then asked Mehta whether he was appearing for all the concerned states. I will appear for all, he said.

Sibal, while arguing that petitioners should be protected, said, What prejudice will it cause if this protection is given? We will hear you after two weeks and stay the arrest in the meanwhile, the bench said.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for one of the journalists, said no religious sentiment has been hurt. — PTI

Sidhu remanded to 7 days custody

BHASKAR HARI
SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Punjabi actor-turned-activist Deep Sidhu, who was allegedly involved in the violence and vandalism at Red Fort during the farmers' tractor rally on January 26, was arrested by the Delhi police special cell late Monday night. On Tuesday, a Delhi court remanded Sidhu to seven days' police custody.

Sidhu was produced before metropolitan magistrate Prigya Gupta. The police alleged he was one of the main instigators of the violent incidents at the Red Fort. Sidhu's counsel, however, claimed that he had nothing to do with the violence and was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

According to Sanjeev

Kumar Yadav, DCP (Special Cell), he was arrested from the Karnal Bypass at 10.40 pm on Monday. "Sidhu was wanted in connection with the case of instigating the crowd at the Red Fort on Republic Day. The Crime Branch will investigate his role in detail," said the DCP.

Asked where he was hiding after the January 26 violence, Yadav said the investigation was in an initial stage.

A source said Sidhu was waiting for someone on the road when he was nabbed. "Meanwhile, it was also revealed that Sidhu was in contact with a woman friend who lives in California. He used to make videos and send it to her, and she used to upload them on his Facebook account," said the source.

SHIVRAJ GOVT
SHOWERS SOPS
ON FARMERSRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, FEB. 9

A week after declaring to waive interest on crop loans in Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan government on Tuesday decided to amend its revenue relief code to provide compensation to farmers for the damage of the crops by wild animals.

The state cabinet which met here under the chairmanship of chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan approved the proposal to change revenue relief code to release compensation to the farmers.

Briefing reporters after the cabinet meeting, state medical education minister Viswas Sarang said the farmers have hitherto been deprived of compensation for damage to their crops by wild animals due to the absence of the provision in the existing revenue relief code.

The state cabinet approved the proposal to make necessary amendments to the revenue relief code to remove the bottleneck in releasing compensation to the farmers for this, he said.

Mr Sarang said a necessary amendment to the revenue relief code has also been made to ensure compensation to the farmers for loss of their crops due to various natural calamities.

Earlier on February 2, the state cabinet decided to write off interest on crop loans taken by the farmers from the state cooperative banks.

The crop loan interest waiver decision comes in the wake of the release of ₹4,000 crore to 22 lakh farmers under the Chief Minister's Kisan Kalyan Yojana by the government.

COLLAPSE OF
ROCK MASS LIKELY
THE REASON,
SAY SCIENTISTS

New Delhi, Feb. 9: A rock mass, weakened due to years of freezing and thawing of snow, may have led to the creation of a weak zone, triggering its collapse that resulted in flash floods in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Sunday, initial observations by scientists of the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG) suggest.

The crashing rock mass also brought earth and mounds of snow with it. The friction may have resulted in heating, which could have caused the floods, the observations suggest.

Scientists from the institute conducted a helicopter survey of the area to find clues as to what led to the deadly flash floods that swept everything in its way.

Kalachand Sain, Director of the WIHG, said the glaciers where the incident occurred feed the Rishi Ganga river that ultimately joins the Dhaul Ganga.

"This region has a very steep gradient. Our observations suggest that the rock mass may have weakened due to freezing and thawing. This sometimes leads to the development of a weak zone and fractures.

"As the rock mass weakened, the glacier and snow came down crashing, it resulted in flash floods," he said.

The steep slopes of the mountains in the region further increased the intensity of the crash.

Two teams of the WIHG comprising five glaciologists left for Joshimath on Monday to ascertain the reason behind the incident. — PTI

AZAD HOPES FOR
RESTORATION OF
PEACE IN J&KDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Calling himself proud Indian Muslim, outgoing leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Ghulam Nabi Azad on Tuesday prayed militancy to end from the country and hoped for the restoration of peace in Jammu and Kashmir and the return of Kashmiri Pandits back to the valley.

In his farewell speech, Azad recalled his association with several leaders, including stalwarts from other parties, which helped him learn many things and got emotional while recalling the 2007 terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir and how it was one of those rare occasions that he could not stop himself from crying in the public. Earlier Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also teared up while recalling the incident when he was bidding farewell to Azad and three other MPs.

The former Union minister said he is among those "lucky" people who have never gone to Pakistan. "When I read about the state of affairs in Pakistan, I feel proud that I am a Hindustani Muslim," he said adding that Muslims in India should have pride for themselves as they have kept away from the evils that are there in the neighbouring countries.

However, he also added "The majority community should also take two steps forward."

Remembering his tenure as the chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, Azad said he had convened his first public meeting in the troubled Sopore district, which is unthinkable even today. "I had said my government would be a government of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and if any minister worked on the basis of religion and party, I would be ashamed," he said.

SHORT TAKES

MILITANT ATTACK
KILLS FOUR GOVT
STAFF IN AFGHAN

Kabul, Feb. 9: Militants shot dead four government employees in central Kabul on Tuesday, police said, in the latest rush-hour violence to rock the capital as Afghanistan's spy agency said it had busted a "terrorist cell" involved in targeted killings.

The Afghan capital has seen near-daily attacks during the busy morning commute, targeting prominent figures including politicians, journalists, activists, judges, and religious scholars.

Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz told reporters that gunmen had opened fire on a vehicle carrying staff from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, killing four.

SUPREMES
SINGER MARY
WILSON DIES

Washington, Feb. 9: Motown singer and the Supremes co-founder Mary Wilson has died, US media reported on Tuesday. She was 76.

She founded the US group aged 15 while living in a Detroit housing project, according to Variety, and continued with the band long after lead singer Diana Ross's departure, eventually going on to be inducted into the 1988 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

"Mary Wilson was extremely special to me. She was a trail-blazer, a diva and will be deeply missed," said Berry Gordy, founder of Motown records who were behind many of the band's hits.

She died at her Las Vegas home on February 8, her publicist Jay Schwartz told ET News.

Only two days ago Wilson uploaded a short clip to YouTube celebrating Black history month and announcing: "exciting news about The Supremes, Florence Ballard and unreleased materials." The circumstances around her death have not been released, her publicist said.

UK'S WINCHESTER
COLLEGE TO ADMIT
GIRLS FOR 1st TIME

London, Feb. 9: Winchester College, one of Britain's oldest and most prestigious private schools, will open its ancient doors to girls for the first time in its six-century history, it announced on Tuesday.

The school, founded in 1382 in Hampshire, southern England, said the move was part of "a new vision and significant programme of change".

Britain's other famous top fee-paying schools such as Eton and Harrow still only admit boys and have faced calls to change the policy.

Winchester, which counts finance minister Rishi Sunak among its former students, currently educates around 700 students who are so-called "boarders" living on-site.

Girls will only be admitted to the sixth form — the final two years of school, for 16 to 18-year-olds. They will be able to choose between sleeping on site or attending as day pupils.

The first female day pupils will arrive by September 2022, with boarders following by 2024.

NAVALNY AIDES
PUSH EU FOR NEW
RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Moscow, Feb. 9: Aides of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said they have pushed the EU to sanction prominent members of President Vladimir Putin's circle including business tycoons to ramp up pressure on Russia.

The move comes after the tit-for-tat expulsion of several European and Russian diplomats as tensions run high over the Navalny affair.

The head of Navalny's regional network Leonid Volkov and another associate, Vladimir Ashurkov, made the calls on Monday during a video conference with EU states dedicated to the bloc's "next steps" on Russia.

The call was hosted by Poland and included envoys from the United States, Canada, Britain and Ukraine, Poland's mission in the EU wrote on Twitter.

Volkov wrote on the Telegram messenger late Monday that he and Ashurkov had discussed "personal sanctions" against billionaires Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea football club, and Alisher Usmanov.

WHO fails to find source of Covid-19

Mission rules out Donald Trump's propagated Wuhan lab-leak theory

AstraZeneca shot should not be dismissed: WHO

Wuhan, Feb. 9: The WHO mission to China to uncover the origins of the Coronavirus has failed to identify the source of the pandemic but the team on Tuesday ruled out the Wuhan lab-leak theory propagated by Donald Trump.

Experts believe the disease — which has killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide — originated in bats and could have been transmitted to humans via another mammal.

World Health Organisation foreign expert Peter Ben Embarek said identifying the animal pathway remains a "work in progress", and the absence of bats in the Wuhan area dimmed the likelihood of direct transmission.

It was "most likely" to have come from an intermediary species, he said. He also backed up China's position that there was no evidence of "large outbreaks" in Wuhan before December when the first official cases were recorded.

Animals such as rabbits, ferrets and bamboo rats could be the intermediary,

Geneva, Feb. 9: The World Health Organisation insisted that the AstraZeneca vaccine was still a vital tool in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic, after South Africa delayed the start of its inoculation program over concerns about the drug's efficacy against a virus variant.

As concerns rose over the AstraZeneca shot, the United States said it had lost its first sitting member of Congress to the virus, 67-year-old Texas Republican Ron Wright, who had also been battling cancer.

President Joe Biden called Wright a "fighter who battled bravely against both cancer and Covid-19." His death came after a 41-year-old Republican House member-elect lost his life to the disease in December, just days before he was to be sworn in.

In South Africa, alarm was raised when a trial at Johannesburg's University of Witwatersrand concluded the AstraZeneca vaccine provided only "minimal" protection against mild to moderate Covid-19 caused

by the variant first detected in South Africa.

That was bad news for many poorer nations counting on the logistical advantages offered by the AstraZeneca shot.

But Richard Hatchett, head of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), said it was "vastly too early to be dismissing this vaccine." "It is absolutely crucial to use the tools that we have as effectively as we possibly can," he said, speaking at the WHO's regular bi-weekly press briefing on the pandemic. — *AFP*

another team member Marion Koopmans added, saying they might be an "entry point" for further investigations.

Liang Wannian, head of the China side of the joint mission, said animal

transmission remained the likely route, but "the reservoir hosts remain to be identified".

Ben Embarek quashed the theory that a leak from a virology lab in Wuhan could have caused the pan-

demic.

"The laboratory incident hypothesis is extremely unlikely," he said. It "is not in the hypotheses that we will suggest for future studies".

The mission was a diplo-

■ **AS NEW**, more transmissible variants of the coronavirus spread, experts say it's time to consider using a medical-grade respirator, or wearing a surgical and cloth mask together.

matically knotty one — presaged by fears of a whitewash — with the US demanding a "robust" probe and China firing back with a warning not to "politicise" the investigation.

The WHO experts spent a month in China including two weeks in quarantine.

Liang said studies showed the virus could be "carried long-distance on cold chain products", appearing to nudge towards the theory the virus was imported — an idea that has abounded in China in recent months.

Ben Embarek said "the virus can persist and survive in conditions that are found in these cold and frozen environments".

"But we don't really understand if the virus can then transmit to humans and under which

conditions this could happen," he said.

Beijing is desperate to defang criticism of its handling of the chaotic early stages of the outbreak. It has tried to refocus attention on its handling and recovery while floating the theory that the virus emerged abroad and was brought into China possibly via frozen foods.

Koopmans said the next steps could include searching for "earlier circulation" of the virus.

Reporters were largely kept at arms' length from the experts during their closely-monitored visit, but snippets of their findings crept out via Twitter and interviews.

Questions have been asked about the relevance of some of their activities to their stated aim of finding the virus source — including a visit to a propaganda exhibition celebrating China's recovery from the pandemic.

The group spent just an hour at the seafood market where many of the first reported clusters of infections emerged over a year ago. — *AFP*

FRANCE PATROLS
SCS, LIKELY TO
ANGER BEIJING

Paris, Feb. 9: A French nuclear attack submarine was among two navy ships that recently conducted a patrol through the South China Sea, its defence minister announced, in a move likely to anger Beijing, which claims most of the strategic waters as its territory.

The SNA Emeraude was accompanied by support ship BSAM Seine for the passage, Defence Minister Florence Parly said on Twitter.

"This extraordinary patrol has just completed a passage in the South China Sea. A striking proof of the capacity of our French Navy to deploy far away and for a long time together with our Australian, American and Japanese strategic partners," she tweeted along with a picture of the two vessels at sea.

China lays claim to nearly all of the South China Sea while Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all also claim parts of the region, believed to hold valuable oil and gas deposits. — *AFP*

Snow brings chaos to Germany



A man pulls his child on a sled in the gardens of the Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin on Tuesday. Freezing drivers were stranded for hours in traffic jams in Germany and Covid-19 vaccination centres were shut in Britain on Tuesday as Europe was pumelled by the heaviest snow in years. Some parts of Germany were cloaked in up to 50 centimetres (20 inches) of snow by Tuesday afternoon, according to local media reports.



Ren Zhengfei

HUAWEI CEO
HOPES FOR
'OPEN POLICY'
FROM BIDEN

Taiyuan, China, Feb. 9: The CEO and founder of Chinese telecom giant Huawei called on Tuesday for a reset with the United States under President Joe Biden, after the firm was battered by sanctions imposed by Donald Trump's administration.

In his first appearance before journalists in a year, Ren Zhengfei said his "confidence in Huawei's ability to survive has grown" despite its travails across much of the western world where it is maligned as a potential security threat.

The comments come as the firm struggles under rules that have effectively banned US firms from selling it technology such as semiconductors and other critical components, citing national security concerns.

Insisting that Huawei remained strong and ready to buy from US companies, Ren called on the Biden White House for a "mutually beneficial" change of tack that could restore its access to the goods. — *AFP*

Trump's impeachment trial begins

Washington, Feb. 9: The US Senate puts Donald Trump on trial for inciting insurrection on Tuesday, charging into unprecedented constitutional territory and laying bare the national trauma inflicted in the former president's attempt to overturn his re-election defeat.

The gavel will come down at 1:00 pm (1800 GMT) in the Senate, opening a trial expected to rivet much of the nation.

Inside the ornate building, Democratic prosecutors will lay out a case heavily supported by video evidence that Trump deliberately stoked rage over his election loss to Joe Biden in November, fed the country lies that the vote was rigged, then incited a mob to storm Congress on January 6.

It will make uncomfort-



Donald Trump

able viewing for senators, including the many Republicans making clear they will not convict Trump, but who had to flee to safety when the violent crowd surged through the Capitol that day.

Outside, thousands of National Guard troops deployed in the aftermath of the January 6 debacle

■ **DEMOCRATS HOLD 50 of the 100 Senate seats and Vice President Kamala Harris is able to cast votes to end tiebreaks. But it would take a two-thirds majority for a conviction, meaning at least 17 Republican senators would have to join.**

continue to patrol, while hastily thrown up fences barricade the area from ordinary Americans — visible proof that the aftershocks of the Trump era continue to rumble.

Trump becomes the first president ever to face two impeachment trials — he was acquitted in 2020 of abuse of office — as well as the first in history to be tried after leaving office.

For Democrats leading the case against the pop-

ulist real estate tycoon, Trump's crime is also a first — the "most grievous constitutional crime" in US history.

But his legal team is resting its case largely on the procedural argument that a former president cannot be tried, calling the Senate trial "absurd."

A second acquittal is all but certain for Trump, who is holed up in his luxury Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida and, after being barred from Twitter, has spent the weeks since leaving office in near silence.

Democrats hold 50 of the 100 Senate seats and Vice President Kamala Harris is able to cast votes to end tiebreaks. But it would take a two-thirds majority for a conviction, meaning at least 17 Republican senators would have to join. — *AFP*

Myanmar police
fire at protestors

Yangon, Feb. 9: Security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas at anti-coup protesters in Myanmar on Tuesday as demonstrators around the country defied a military ban on rallies.

Protests erupted for a fourth straight day against last week's coup to oust civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, as international condemnation of the putsch grew.

The rallies came despite a warning from the junta that they would take action against demonstrations that threatened "stability", and a new ban on gatherings of more than five people.

In Naypyidaw, the remote capital purpose-built by the previous military regime, witnesses

said police fired rubber bullets at protesters after earlier blasting them with water cannon.

"They fired warning shots to the sky two times, then they fired (at protesters) with rubber bullets," a resident said, adding that he saw some people injured. An *AFP* reporter on the ground confirmed that shots had been fired.

In Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, police fired tear gas to disperse protesters.

After watching hundreds of thousands of people rally in opposition to last week's coup, junta chief General Min Aung Hlaing made a televised speech on Monday evening to justify seizing power. — *AFP*

HEALTH | MORTALITY

Worldwide, air pollution shortens lives by more than two years on average

Fossil fuel causes one in five deaths globally

Paris, Feb. 9: Fossil fuel pollution caused more than eight million premature deaths in 2018, accounting for nearly 20 percent of adult mortality worldwide, researchers reported Tuesday.

Half of that grim tally was split across China and India, with another million deaths equally distributed among Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan and the United States, they reported in the journal Environmental Research.

The toxic cocktail of tiny particles cast off by burning oil, gas and especially

coal was responsible for a quarter or more of the mortality in half a dozen nations, all in Asia.

"We often discuss the dangers of fossil fuel combustion in the context of CO2 and climate change and overlook the potential health impacts," co-author Joel Schwartz, a professor of environmental epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said in a statement.

The potential to avoid millions of premature deaths should be a powerful additional incentive for

policymakers to drive down greenhouse gas emissions and hasten the global shift from brown to green energy, he said.

Worldwide, air pollution shortens lives by more than two years on average, earlier research has shown. Worst-hit is Asia, where average lifespan is cut 4.1 years in China, 3.9 years in India, and 3.8 years in Pakistan. In some regions of these countries, life expectancy is reduced by twice as much.

In Europe, it is shortened by eight months on average.

■ **HALF OF that grim tally was split across China and India, with another million deaths equally distributed among Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan and the United States, they reported in the journal Environmental Research.**

The new study nearly doubles previous estimates of the number of people killed by fossil fuel pollution.

The World Health Organisation says that air pollution — including indoors — kills seven mil-

lion people per year, with 4.2 million of those deaths due to ambient, or outdoor, pollution.

The most recent Global Burden of Disease study — the most comprehensive catalogue of why people die — advances roughly the same numbers.

Both of these estimates relied on satellite data and surface observations to determine concentrations of the smallest — and most deadly — calibre of pollution, known as PM2.5.

But they cannot determine whether these microparticles come from

burning fossil fuels or, say, dust and wildfire smoke, according to co-author Loretta Mickley, an expert in chemistry-climate interactions at Harvard.

"With satellite data, you're seeing only pieces of the puzzle," she said.

To get a more fine-grained picture of where particle pollution comes from and its health impacts, Mickley and colleagues used a 3-D model of atmospheric chemistry, known as GEOS-Chem, that divides Earth's surface into 50-by-60-kilometre (30-by-36-mile) blocks. — *AFP*

DECCAN Chronicle

10 FEBRUARY 2021

Sasikala the ‘X’ factor in TN’s soap opera politics

The red carpet reception was more like those given to pop singers in star-struck declarations of adulation. Ex-convict V.K. Sasikala, who came home after serving a four-year jail sentence under the Prevention of Corruption Act, was elevated to demigod status in a 22-hour car journey that was more a procession pandering to the blind loyalty of lumpen political party elements. As a social phenomenon, it defies decoding; as a person convicted of stealing from the government treasury is elevated to the status of a neta who can bring deliverance to the people. This is not restricted to cinema-obsessed Tamil Nadu as the phenomenon encompasses Lalu Prasad Yadav and many a charismatic netas suspected of being as corrupt.

Ms Sasikala’s impact on Tamil Nadu politics is not to be dismissed though she is ineligible to stand for election. Her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran’s disinformation campaign cannot change the law. Her role as a backroom manipulator in Jayalalithaa’s regime when she virtually picked people for plum Cabinet posts and even made or unmade chief ministers had made her a force to be reckoned within the AIADMK

Ms Sasikala’s role as a backroom manipulator in Jayalalithaa’s regime when she virtually picked people for plum Cabinet posts and even made or unmade chief ministers had made her a force to be reckoned within the AIADMK

The Dravidian major AIADMK, which has alternated in power after breaking away from the DMK in 1972, is feeling anxious about the return of the power of Poes Garden, which had housed two misanthropes who manoeuvred adroitly in a domain that was a distinctly male preserve before Jayalalithaa broke the chain. The party MGR founded and Jayalalithaa nurtured may face the biggest threat with Ms Sasikala claiming it as her own despite having been summarily removed on her going to jail in Bengaluru. Lengthy legal challenges to her being stripped of the post of general secretary may be in the offing but that does not change the electoral scene except that an AIADMK split by loyalty calls may be playing right into the hands of DMK, which pollsters are favouring to emerge victorious in the summer of 2021.

The people of a state, who were in such a thrall of cinema that they allowed it to play a larger-than-life role in the making of netas, are far more forgiving of corruption, which has historically been rampant in the 54 years of Dravidian regimes. Ms Sasikala, who has never been in electoral politics, can be expected to play only the role of a disruptor as she seeks the Jayalalithaa legacy and her party. Time is not on her side in her emergence too close to the Assembly polls to build anew her nephew’s breakaway AMMK party. Her journey to Chennai that occupied nearly 24 hours was stretched out to play to a television gallery in the highest traditions of the state’s soap opera politics. What happens from here is in the people’s court.

Pay heed to ex-judge’s plea

Justice Madan Lokur, who retired as a judge of the Supreme Court just over two years ago, has in public remarks expressed his “disappointment” with the manner the top court has conducted itself in the discharge of its constitutional functions, and has recently even called upon the apex court to adopt an “interventionist” approach to check the “rampant misuse (even abuse) of the country’s criminal justice system.

A hands-off approach by the Supreme Court in the matter of a spate of FIRs for the same presumed violation encourages those who take advantage of the law to trouble fellow citizens, the retired judge observed.

Making a direct reference in this regard to the growing tendency on the part of some to file multiple FIRs, Justice Lokur drew attention to the case of prominent journalists, including several well-regarded editors, and an MP, Shashi Tharoor, being subjected to harassment through the filing of near-identical FIRs in several states, accusing them of sedition and causing social harmony. In the case of Mr Tharoor and the journalists, their initial tweets on the cause of the death of a farmer in the course of the recent agitation had led to the spate of FIRs being lodged — clearly by the people of the same motivation or persuasion.

Justice Lokur contrasted the above case with those of two television anchors — Arnab Goswami and Amish Devgan. The case of the first was heard within 15 hours of the top court being approached. His prayer to club the FIRs was instantly heeded. The other anchor was also given some relief. But the senior journalists charged with sedition, and Mr Tharoor, have not had the same luck. The former judge has, therefore, urged the Supreme Court to be “interventionist” and “lay down the law” in the case of multiple FIRs with the same content.

Criticisms of Supreme Court judgments by retired members of the top judiciary are not unknown. Nor is the failure of the top court to take action, as in constitutional matters concerning Kashmir, CAA, and habeas corpus — issues on which Justice Lokur has also expressed himself. But urgings to be “interventionist” from a retired member of the top court bench do appear novel. In this lies their freshness and historical value.

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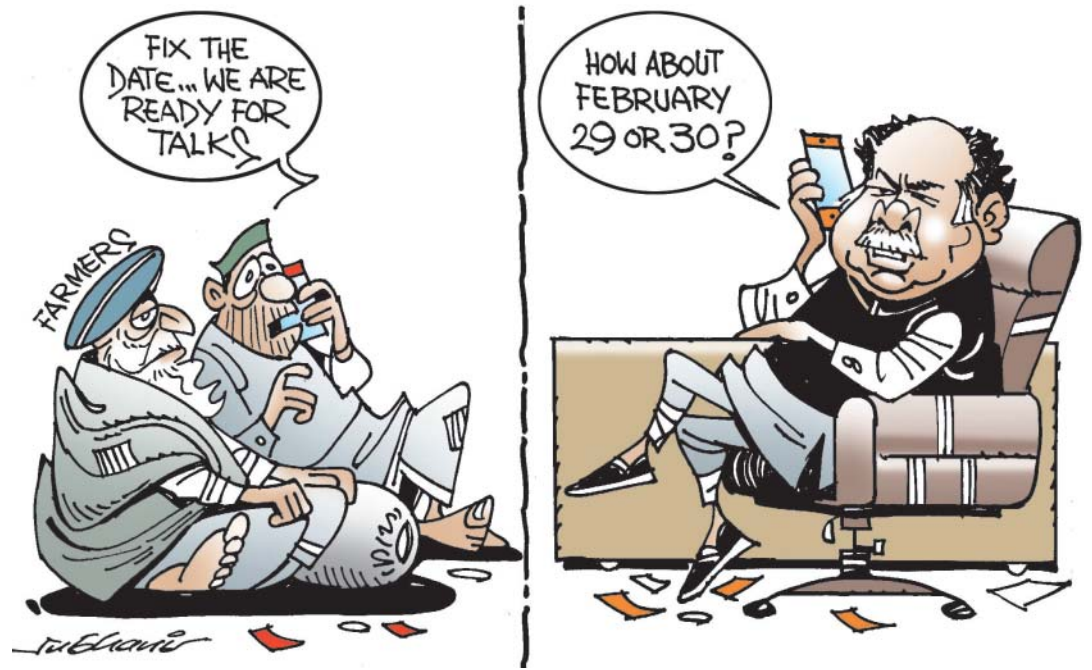
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Subhani



Playing with God’s world: ‘Growth’ has a high price



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Senior BJP leader Uma Bharati’s first reaction to the terrible news of the Chamoli glacier break/avalanche disaster on Sunday — “I told you so” — fully aligns with the reservations of all those who put a higher value on conservation than on the development of natural resources for economic growth.

On Sunday, a part of the Nanda Devi glacier broke off and avalanched down, causing a flash flood in the Rishiganga and Dhauliganga — the upper riverine stretches of the Alakananda, which feeds into the mighty Ganga — washing away back-to-back dams diverting water into a privately-owned hydro project on the Rishiganga stretch and seriously damaging an under-construction government-owned power generation project at Tapovan.

As minister for water resources in the first BJP government of Narendra Modi, Ms Bharati had dragged her feet on the development of the upper reaches of the Ganga in Uttarakhand — much to the dismay of gung-ho advocates of development and growth. Conservationists cite the “fragile” structure of the Himalayas to caution against over-exploitation of the riverine system for electricity generation.

Others go so far as to blame the recent much-publicised widening of the highways connecting the Char Dham — the four pilgrimage shrines in Garhwal — Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamnotri. Construction of roads is still done the old way, by simply carving additional road width out from the mountain side, causing significant soil erosion both above and below the road. Measures to bind the exposed mountainside using nets or by planting fast-growing

ground cover are only a sideshow, rarely given prominence, in already overloaded road construction budgets.

But then, isn’t it always “the growth-wallahs” who stick their necks out by measuring risk versus rewards, even in the playground of the gods — as the Himalayas are believed to be. On the other hand, it is “safe” to be a conservationist, simply because there are so few downsides to the belief that only the sparing use of natural resources is sustainable. Multiple alternative sources of growth do remain unexploited, like higher productivity in the use of existing resources or the use of alternative “clean” technologies for power generation, like solar or offshore wind.

At times like the present one, in the immediate aftermath of a human tragedy, calculating the trade-off between lives cruelly snatched away from loved ones and the potential economic gains from development seems particularly pointless.

It is also unclear to what extent the disaster is the outcome of over-exploitation of resources in the back-to-back construction of dams to divert water into tunnels to run turbines for electricity generation. The shearing-off of glaciers, causing an avalanche and a flash flood in downstream riverine systems, is a natural calamity. After all, avalanches do happen, and lives are lost.

Doubtless, lessons must and will be learnt, with respect to continuous monitoring of the higher reaches for signs of fragility. Assessing the geological safety of hill development — extending road access, urban sprawl and related projects — is no longer a choice. Coupled with the depredations of climate change, already fragile ecosystems could tumble over the edge much faster if the rate and style of

intrusive development is not carefully regulated.

How much of a say should local communities have in large projects being created in their midst is another vexed question — on which there are no clear answers. The “wisdom and public interest orientation” of NIMBY (not in my backyard) communities varies and is often romanticised. In comparison, centralised planning is easy to vilify as representing the cruel, uncaring impositions of rules made by “outsiders”. Ultimately, help must come from science in guiding the government on project site selection and regulations for risk minimisation and occupational safety for project workers.

In 2013, PM Narendra Modi made history as chief minister of Gujarat by arranging transport for Gujarati pilgrims stranded in the Kedarnath flash floods. In a similar vein, within a day of the incident, R.K. Singh, Union minister for power, visited the damaged NTPC-owned Tapovan hydro generation project.

VIP visits are a tradition, albeit a much-reviled, device for speeding up the release of funds for relief work and energising those engaged in the onerous on-site task of rescue, relief distribution and rehabilitation. But it is a tradition that a politician ignores only at his peril — after all “we are like that only”. Happily, the minister, previously a civil servant who retired as India’s home secretary — did more than just that.

He was on the button when he commented that the structural safety of glacier formations around large project construction sites in mountainous regions should be monitored for geological stress, much more so than they are done now. Early advan-

ce warnings of incipient trouble can enable the evacuation of workers, at the very least.

Adroit operational steps to minimise the downstream damage also mitigated the scale of the disaster. Reportedly, emergency measures to release water stored in downstream dams at Rishikesh and Srinagar helped create the required space to absorb the upstream water shock. All these actions speak to our improving capacity for the safe operation of large water systems. To the credit of the civil administration, households along the affected stretch of the river, potentially under threat from flood waters, were reportedly evacuated as a precaution, though the waters subsided subsequently.

National Disaster Management Authority personnel were also visibly in attendance, although it is unclear whether more boots on the ground, in an area chock-a-block with the security forces, is of additional value. The NDMA, sadly, remains a neglected cousin of the military and the police in terms of their technical capacity, rescue equipment and surge capacity for assisting the local civil authorities.

The bulk of the casualties are of on-site contract workers — mostly migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Hopefully, once these two hydro projects are completed, the memories of those who laid down their lives during their completion will be commemorated in a suitable manner.

The CM of Uttarakhand announced ₹4 lakhs as relief for the families of each of the victims. An additional ₹2 lakhs each would be given from the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund.

The question which remains unanswered, however, goes far beyond the welfare of the families of the deceased. The jury is still out on what is an acceptable societal trade-off between the risk of mortality and morbidity and the compulsions of economic development.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

LETTERS

THIRD PARTY

The presence of a third party is compulsory for meaningful talks between Central government and farmers. As so many rounds of talks between the two parties have ended in a stalemate, it is time that experts as a third party can bring freshness or new dimension to the issue.

Madhav P. Secunderabad

KCR AND BJP

A win by the BJP against the TRS has caused commotion in the Telangana state political system (*KCR on backfoot against BJP, hints ‘all set’ at top, DC, Feb. 8*). As far as the ruling government is concerned, the BJP has always criticised and suggested alternative policies. As a result, the TRS has become a responsible government in the state. We would like a government that we can trust and a strong Opposition that we can rely on.

Mansoor Dashti Secunderabad

NEW REVENUE ACT

When New Revenue Act was passed by Telangana Legislature in 2020 people of the state especially pattadars like me had great expectation of justice in getting back lands which are occupied by land-grabbers with the help of corrupt revenue staff by means of tampering the records. But till date the problem exists with pattadars like me still suffering as checking of records and physical survey has not yet started.

T. Kailash Ditya Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Apollo-14 splashes down

BOARD USS (NEW ORLEANS), February. 9

The Apollo-14 spaceship splashed down in the South Pacific at 2.35 a.m. from its flight to the moon. The spacecraft was in an upright position as the rescue helicopters circled overhead.

Millions of television viewers spotted the spacecraft with its three massive parachutes before it plummeted into the sea about eight kilometres from the recovery ship, “New Orleans”, reports DPA.

Skand Tayal



US-Russia ties, already rocky, get worse after Navalny jailing

The fraught relationship between the United States and Russia has come under further strain after the alleged poisoning and recent sentencing of prominent Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny. On Feb. 4, US President Joe Biden, in his first articulation of foreign policy after assuming office, had some harsh words for President Vladimir Putin. Mr Biden “made it clear that the days of the US rolling over in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions — interfering with our elections, cyberattacks, poisoning its citizens — are over”. Castigating Russia for “the politically motivated jailing of Alexei Navalny”, President Biden cautioned Moscow that the US “will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia”, alluding to possible additional sanctions.

Ignoring diplomatic niceties, President Biden said: “The politically motivated jailing of Alexei Navalny and the Russian efforts to suppress freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are a matter of deep concern. He should be released immediately and without conditions.”

On February 2, after Mr Navalny was sentenced to more than two years in prison on rather flimsy charges, new US secretary of state Anthony Blinken tweeted: “We reiterate our

call for the Russian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mr Navalny, as well as hundreds of other Russian citizens wrongfully detained in recent weeks for exercising the rights.”

Such public criticism is likely to deeply offend Mr Putin, the strong leader of a proud country. Russia would be loath to taking any action under outside pressure and the chances of the Russian State showing any leniency towards a high-profile dissident may have simply vanished.

Besides the persecution of Mr Navalny, the Biden administration takes office with a deep-rooted suspicion towards Mr Putin’s Russia. The Democratic Party holds Russia’s involvement in the leaking of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s emails responsible for her defeat in 2016 by Donald Trump. In a signed *Foreign Affairs* article in March 2020, Joe Biden had declared solidarity with “Russian civil society, that has stood up against President Vladimir Putin’s kleptocratic authoritarian system”. Laying down his future policy, candidate Biden wrote that “to counter Russian aggression, we must keep (Nato’s) military capabilities sharp”, and threatened to “impose real costs on Russia for its violation of interna-

tional norms”.

Incoming national security adviser Jake Sullivan added to the chorus by declaring that “unlike the previous administration, we will be taking steps to hold Russia accountable for the range of malign actions Russia has taken”.

America’s penchant for conducting critical bilateral relations in the full glare of media publicity may win the Biden establishment accolades from internal constituencies but are unlikely to lead to effective outcomes.

The United States is no longer the world’s undisputed economic and military power, with China snapping at its heels. Its grip on alliances like Nato has also weakened. In the backdrop of the Covid-linked economic downturn, much of the democratic world puts national interests first. In this dynamic and uncertain international environment, it is doubtful that other key powers will stand by the US if it tries to impose more punitive sanctions on Russia. The US, however, certainly has the capacity to impose unilateral sanctions isolating Russia from the global financial and banking network, that would adversely hit the Russian economy.

In his February 4 address at the state department, Mr Biden assured a wary

world that the US will act “not to meet yesterday’s challenges, but today’s and tomorrow’s” and to “take on directly the challenges posed... by our most serious competitor China”. Mr Biden declared that “we will confront China’s economic abuses; counter its aggressive, coercive actions; to push back on China’s attack on human rights, intellectual property and global governance.”

At his confirmation hearing, Mr Blinken had also clearly identified China as “posing the most significant challenge of any nation-state in the world for the United States”.

The Biden administration would be well advised to take a hard look at America’s declining influence in the world and prioritise adversaries and challenges. Russia now has a shrinking footprint on the global strategic map. It’s no longer an expansionist power. In 2008, Russia was severely provoked by Nato’s offer of membership to Ukraine and Georgia. Mr Putin had clearly warned at that time that Nato’s expansion towards Russia “would be taken in Russia as a direct threat to the security of our country”. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and action in Donbas, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were a riposte to the aggressive intentions of Nato.

President Putin had a career in the KGB in the days of the Soviet empire. He has firm control over all the levers of power in Russia and is popular among citizens. With Mr Putin at the helm, Russia is not an ideology-driven country, like the erstwhile Soviet Union. Russia is now obsessed with internal stability and external security. Outside support to vocal Opposition leaders is seen by the Kremlin as a West-inspired attempt to destabilise the country.

Russia poses no future challenge to the United States or the West, be it economic or technological. The West lacks any levers to soften the harsh internal system in Russia. Public criticism of a proud nation will only harden positions and genuine concerns are best conveyed behind closed doors.

For America’s own future primacy, the real challenge is from China and its demonising of Russia will only push the Kremlin into the Dragon’s embrace, immeasurably adding to China’s clout and aggression. The Biden administration needs a pragmatic foreign policy, overcome its prejudices and arrest the slide of US-Russia ties on this slippery slope.

The writer is a retired Indian diplomat and a former ambassador

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	51,329.08 -0.04
Nifty 50	15,109.30 -0.04
S&P 500*	3,915.38 -0.01
Dollar (₹)	72.89 0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.41 -0.39
Euro (₹)	87.99 -0.26
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,559.495 0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.11 0.91
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.074 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.146 -0.013

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Gross NPAs of PSBs decline to ₹6.09 L cr in Sept.

Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of public sector banks declined from Rs 8.96 lakh crore in March 2018 to Rs 6.09 lakh crore in Sept. 2020 due to various government measures, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur informed the Rajya Sabha. There was record recovery of Rs 2.54 lakh crore during March 2018-Sept. 2020 and 11 out of 12 PSBs reported profit in the first half FY21 amounting to Rs 14,688 crore.

IOB posts net profit of ₹213cr in Dec. quarter



Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) reported a net profit of Rs 212.87 crore for the December 2020 quarter as provisions for bad loans declined. IOB had posted a net loss of Rs 6,075.49 crore in the year-ago quarter. It had posted a net profit of Rs 148.14 crore in the Sept. quarter. Total income rose to Rs 5,786.51 crore from Rs 5,197.94 crore YoY. Gross NPAs fell to 12.19 per cent of gross advances from 17.12 per cent.

Govt to close two pharma PSUs, disinvest in three

The Centre has decided to close two pharma sector undertakings and disinvest in the other three. "The Department of Pharmaceuticals has five public sector undertakings. Out of the five PSUs, the government has taken a decision to close two pharma PSUs, namely Indian Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Rajasthan Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Ltd," minister of chemicals and fertilisers D. V. Sadananda Gowda said.

German exports see biggest dip since 2009

Germany's exports plunged by 9.3 per cent last year as the pandemic dragged down demand, the biggest drop since the financial crisis in 2009. Imports dropped 7.1 per cent. That also was the steepest decline since 2009, when exports fell by 18.4 per cent and imports by 17.5 per cent. The US remained the single biggest destination for German exports despite a 12.5 per cent drop, at 103.8 bn euros (\$125 bn).



Workers to be briefed on rights, concerns Wistron to restart riot-hit iPhone unit

SARITHA RAI FEB. 9

Apple Inc's manufacturing partner Wistron Corp will hire workers and restart operations in its Narasapura factory outside Bengaluru after a violent protest shut the iPhone-manufacturing facility last December. Apple's teams and independent auditors have been working with Wistron over the past eight weeks to put the necessary systems and processes in place, the Cupertino-based iPhone maker said in an emailed statement on Tuesday. However, the Taiwanese contractor will continue to face scrutiny. "A comprehensive set of corrective actions has now been completed and Wistron has restructured their recruiting team and



enhanced training and support for workers," Apple said in the statement. "Wistron remains on probation and we will monitor their progress closely." Apple had suspended new orders to Wistron in December after workers who had been hired on monthly pay of about \$200 stormed the factory and rioted over unpaid salaries, destroying furni-

ture and equipment leading to losses worth millions of dollars. All workers in the facility will undergo a new training programme to ensure they understand their rights and how to raise concerns, Apple said in the statement. Its representatives will remain on site to validate that the new processes are effective. —Bloomberg

Pak to seek debt relief from China

FASEEH MANGI FEB. 9

Pakistan plans to ask China for relief on payments for power projects Beijing financed over the past eight years, the latest developing nation that's struggling to repay debt under President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. In informal talks, Pakistan and China have discussed easing terms on the repayment of debt on about a dozen power

plants, according to a person with knowledge of the matter, who said Islamabad hasn't made a formal request yet. The parties have canvassed Beijing's willingness to stagger debt payments, as opposed to lowering equity returns, the person said, requesting anonymity as the plan is private. An enormous build-out of Chinese-financed power plants in Pakistan, which was originally intended to solve its electricity shortages, has

resulted in a surplus that Islamabad isn't able to afford. Infrastructure projects funded by China's initiative in other developing nations, such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia, have suffered issues ranging from heavy debt loads to corruption. China has denied US criticism that the initiative leads to debt traps, while acknowledging that countries have had difficulties repaying loans due to the pandemic-induced global recession. —Bloomberg

INDIA ENERGY DEMAND TO SEE FASTEST GROWTH, TO OVERTAKE EU

New Delhi, Feb. 9: India's energy demand will increase more than that of any other country over the next two decades, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday, forecasting that India would overtake the European Union as the world's third-largest energy consumer by 2030. An expanding economy, population, urbanisation and industrialisation will result in India's energy needs growing at three times the global average under today's policies, said the IEA's India Energy Outlook 2021. "India has arrived at the centre of the world energy stage," said Fatih Birol, the IEA's executive director. Energy use has doubled since 2000, with most of that demand met by coal and oil. This is set to grow about 35 per cent until 2030, down from 50 per cent before the coronavirus pandemic. India will see the addition of 13 new Mumbais in urban population, boosting demand for cement, steel, electricity, he said. IEA saw primary energy consumption almost doubling to 1,123 million tonnes of oil equivalent as the GDP expands to \$8.6 trillion by 2040. India at present is the fourth-largest global energy consumer behind China, the United States and the European Union. —PTI

LIC IPO to reserve 10% shares for policyholders

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Up to 10 per cent of the LIC IPO issue size would be reserved for policyholders, minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur said on Tuesday. The government will remain the majority shareholder and will continue to retain management control, safeguarding the interest of policyholders, he said. "In the Finance Bill 2021-22, it has been proposed to have a reservation on a competitive basis, to an extent of up to 10 per cent of the issue size, in favour of life insurance policyholders of LIC," Thakur said in a written reply to a query in the Rajya Sabha. In her Budget Speech 2021, finance minister



Nirmala Sitharaman said the initial public offering (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) would be launched in the next financial year, beginning April 1. The LIC Amendment Act has been made part of the Finance Bill, thereby bringing the required legislative amendment for launching IPO of the country's largest life insurer. The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management

(Dipam), which manages the government's equity in state-owned companies, has already selected actuarial firm Milliman Advisors for ascertaining the embedded value of LIC. Deloitte and SBI Caps have been appointed as pre-IPO transaction advisors. The Budget 2021-22 has set a disinvestment target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore, higher than the Rs 32,000 crore estimated to be garnered in the current fiscal. Of the Rs 1.75 lakh crore, Rs 1 lakh crore is to come from selling government stake in public sector banks and financial institutions, and Rs 75,000 crore would come as CPSE disinvestment receipts. —PTI

Market received Budget well: FM

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the stock market has received the Union Budget 2021-22 with "positivity" with an 11 per cent increase in equity indices over the past week. She said the Budget, which was presented in Parliament on February 1, has set the tone for greater play of the private sector, gave space for entrepreneurship, has come clean on the spending intent and unveiled a policy highlighting areas the government wants to stay away from. "We have now come over to the 10th day after the Budget was read out. Markets for the first time, I



Nirmala Sitharaman

understand, have completely for a whole full week kept the pace up with a sense of positivity. "Earlier markets being positive and going up for a few hours, would itself be a good message," Sitharaman said an Indian Chamber of Commerce

event. She said the government has taken steps to instill confidence in taxpayers. It has not put any additional burden on taxpayers by way of increasing taxes to fund the stimulus, Sitharaman said. "We are staying away from burdening the taxpayer any further, while simultaneously easing compliance, record keeping," the minister added. The minister said the time bar for reopening of past assessments has been cut down to three years in the Budget, from six years earlier, because the intent of the tax department is not to bother a regular taxpayer. —PTI

Teens drive civil behaviour online

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Microsoft on Tuesday said fewer people in India experienced negative online interactions or encountered online risks in 2020 compared to the previous year, thanks largely to positive interactions by India's teens. Unveiling results from its annual study, "Civility, Safety, and Interactions Online - 2020" along with findings from its 2020 Digital Civility Index (DCI), Microsoft said India's score in online civility had improved to 68 this year from 71 in 2019. The DCI survey covered 16,000 respondents. The survey found that the improvement in online experience was contributed by the positive approach of teenagers aged 13-16. The online experience among adults in 16 and above age group remained relatively poor. The measure of online civility among teenagers is 67 compared to a lower rank of 69 for adults. "It's heartening to see our next generation take the lead in driving posi-

Dos for safer internet

- Act with empathy, compassion and kindness. Treat everyone with dignity & respect
- Appreciate cultural differences. Engage thoughtfully & avoid personal attacks
- To pause and think before responding. Do not post anything that could hurt others
- Tell someone when feeling unsafe. Offer support to those who are targets of online abuse or cruelty

tive interactions online, and to witness digital citizens come together to uplift online communities during the pandemic," said Keshav Dhakad, group head & general counsel, Microsoft India. "Nonetheless, threats such as hate speech, together with other uncivil behaviours, continue to pervade society." Online risks such as hate speech doubled from 2016.

Murdoch Jr., Uday Shankar plan venture to acquire media firms

BAIJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY FEB. 9

James Murdoch's investment company Lupa Systems and Uday Shankar, former president of Walt Disney Asia Pacific unit, are weighing a plan to raise funds through a special purpose acquisition company (Spac), people familiar with the matter said.

Murdoch, former CEO of 21st Century Fox Inc, and Shankar are seeking a blank-cheque vehicle to acquire Asian companies in sectors, including media and technology, the people said. The joint venture is sounding out advisers as well as potential investors in the Spac. They are considering listing the vehicle in the US, one of the people said. Deliberations are at an early stage, and details of the potential Spac, including venue may change, the people said. Shankar and a representative for Lupa declined to comment. Lupa and Shankar announced a partnership in January to look for growth avenues across



Uday Shankar



James Murdoch

emerging markets. The 48-year-old son of billionaire Rupert Murdoch resigned from the board of News Corp in July last year, citing differences of opinion with the publishing company. Lupa entered India less than two years ago and has built a portfolio of technology investments, according to the statement. Murdoch and Shankar previously worked together at Star India, which became the country's largest media company before Walt Disney's takeover of a swathe of 21st Century Fox's assets, including Star, in 2019. Shankar worked for the Asia-Pacific unit of Disney after the deal, but left in December last year.

EQUITY MF REDEMPTIONS UNABATED IN JANUARY

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 9

The mutual fund industry's average assets under management (AUM) hit an all-time high of Rs 31.84 lakh crore in January. However, the net AUM fell to Rs 30.50 lakh crore in January on profit booking from Rs 31.02 lakh crore in December, monthly data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) showed.

Equity mutual funds continue to witness outflows as record gains in the equity market in January led retail investors to book profit, with equity-oriented schemes seeing outflows worth Rs 9,253.22 crore. Equity-linked savings schemes and other equity schemes also witnessed outflows worth Rs 2,940.96 crore. The hybrid schemes witnessed net inflows worth Rs 2,141.3 crore while the debt fund category witnessed outflows worth Rs 33,408.76 crore. Equity ETFs, index funds, gold ETFs and fund of funds investing overseas in total witnessed combined inflows worth Rs 7,966.82 crore. "Equity-oriented mutual funds continued to witness net outflows for the seventh month in a row. The continuation of net outflows from equity funds could be attributed to profit booking/portfolio rebalancing as markets continue to touch new highs," said Himanshu Srivastava, associate director-manager research, Morningstar India. "Though on an overall basis, the net outflow was lower than the previous month, yet in terms of absolute quantum, it continues to be on the higher side," he said.

AGGREGATORS | ON PROWL Mom-and-pop sellers being aided to scale up business

Wall St. investing billions to scale up Amazon sellers

SPENCER SOPER FEB. 9

Some of the biggest names on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley-JPMorgan Chase, Advent International, Khosla Ventures among them—are pumping billions of dollars into mom-and-pops selling everything from tea kettles to jock itch remedies on Amazon.com Inc. Investment banks, venture firms and private equity shops are backing so-called Amazon aggregators—often led by e-commerce veterans—that are betting they can take up-and-coming sellers, who often operate out of their garages, and transform them into global brands.

The aggregators say they have the expertise to select strong products and avoid faddish ones that flame out before they have a chance to grow. The latest entrant, Branded Group, said on Tuesday it had purchased 20 houseware and leisure brands. Formed last summer and flush with \$150 million raised by venture firm Target Global, Branded will be run by Pierre Poignant, who previously led the southeast Asian online marketplace Lazada, and Michael Ronen, who spent almost 20 years in mergers and acquisitions at Goldman Sachs and also worked for SoftBank's Silicon Valley venture division.



About 40 Amazon aggregators have emerged in the past few years, according to people following the trend, with most of them still quietly seeking deals behind the scenes. Eight have announced fundraising rounds totalling more than \$2.5 billion since 2019. Thrasio, launched in 2018, has the deepest pockets and has already purchased 90 companies with

\$1.75 billion in funding and debt from backers that include the PE firm Advent International. Perch, founded in 2020, has raised \$130 million and gobbled up almost 30 brands. Several PE firms have launched websites to court Amazon sellers. The demand for Amazon mom-and-pops reflects the maturation of the e-commerce giant's third-party marketplace, which accounts for more than half of all products sold on the site. The web store has grown so large that deep-pocketed investors can prospect for tomorrow's big hit among the millions of merchants competing on the site. "The emergence of these companies

reflects how selling with Amazon offers small businesses powerful opportunities to build their brands and reach millions of customers," an Amazon spokesperson said. Aggregators look for consistent money-makers with annual sales up to about \$10 million; they generally offer three to four times a target's annual profit, including the salary the owners pay themselves. The buyers don't focus on specific categories and are content to jam together a potpourri of brands. Perch, for example, sells maternity belts, auto upholstery tools, peppermint-based athlete's foot cures and virtual-reality headsets. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES



Kothuri Pranay shows the gold medal won in the Boys U-16 high jump on Monday.

Pranay on high after jump gold

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Hyderabad: Telangana's Kothuri Pranay followed up his bronze in the long jump on Monday with a gold in the Boys U-16 high jump on Tuesday at the 36th National Junior Athletics Championships being held in Guwahati, Assam. Pranay cleared 1.89 metres at the Sarusajai Stadium to take the pride of place on the podium, ahead of Atharv Shrikant Dhaj of Maharashtra who cleared 1.86m and Dhritisman Goswami of Assam, also 1.86m. This was Telangana's fifth medal of the meet that concludes on Wednesday.

Nurses probed in Maradona death

Buenos Aires: A psychologist and two nurses who helped care for football legend Diego Maradona before his death have been added to a widening involuntary manslaughter probe, a judicial source told local media on Monday. Maradona died of a heart attack outside Buenos Aires on November 25, weeks after undergoing brain surgery on a blood clot. His psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov and heart surgeon Leopoldo Luque are already under investigation, as they were treating Maradona before his death. — *AFP*

Live on TV

TENNIS

Australian Open: First round matches from 5.30 am on Sony Six, from 1.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

FOOTBALL

FA Cup: Fifth round — Swansea vs Manchester City from 11 pm; Leicester City vs Brighton from 1 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD; Everton vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.45 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

WWE

NXT: Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

CHECKMATE

Warhorse Anderson hands a rare home defeat to king Kohli's India

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 9

What started as an ambitious chase of 420 turned into mere survival in just about an hour. And the faintest of hopes to save the Test was dashed much before tea. The inevitable was delayed a little by a near-flawless innings from skipper Virat Kohli (72). A clinical bowling performance earned England a thumping 227-run win over India for a 1-0 lead in the four-match series. While it dented India's prolific home run — only their second defeat since 2012 — England continued their brilliant 'away' streak by making it six on the trot. Within a fortnight of the dizzying high of breaching the Gabbatoir, India slumped to their first defeat in the new millennium at fortress Chepauk.

Now, India need at least two wins and a draw in the remaining three matches to qualify for the World Test Championship final to be held at Lord's in July. Left-arm spinner Jack Leach, who had a forgettable outing in the first innings, broke open India's fancied batting line-up by removing Cheteshwar Pujara.

On a deteriorating fifth day pitch, where spinners were expected to pose the bigger threat, James Anderson produced an outstanding spell of fast bowling in the morning. Old warhorse Anderson is one of the finest exponents of swing bowling. He dug deep into his repertoire and used the reverse swing to his advantage to strike twice in a span of four balls. India were left reeling at 92 for four.

The way Anderson breached the defence of both Shubman Gill and Ajinkya Rahane seemed like an action replay. The cartwheeling off-stump, on both occasions, made for a spectacular sight. Before India could recover from the double blow, Anderson sent Rishabh Pant packing with a soft dismissal. Joe Root, at short cover, pouched a simple catch off a leading edge. Anderson's



England's James Anderson celebrates taking the wicket of Ajinkya Rahane on Day Five of the first Test in Chennai on Tuesday. — *ECB*

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: 578
India 1st Innings: 337
England 2nd Innings: 178
India 2nd Innings (overnight 39/1): Rohit Sharma b J. Leach 12, Shubman Gill b J. Anderson 50, Cheteshwar Pujara c Stokes b J. Leach 15, Virat Kohli b B. Stokes 72, Ajinkya Rahane b J. Anderson 0, Rishabh Pant c Root b J. Anderson 11, Washington Sundar c Buttler b D. Bess 0, R. Ashwin c Buttler b J. Leach 9, Shahbaz Nadeem c Burns b J. Leach 0, Ishant Sharma (not out) 5, Jasprit Bumrah c Buttler b J. Archer 4. Extras (b-8, lb-5, nb-1) 14. **Total (all out in 58.1 overs) 192.**
FOW: 1-25, 2-58, 3-92, 4-92, 5-110, 6-117, 7-171, 8-179, 9-179.
Bowling: Jofra Archer 9.1-4-23-1, Jack Leach 26-4-76-4, James Anderson 11-4-17-3, Dominic Bess 8-0-50-1, Ben Stokes 4-1-13-1.

astonishing spell read 5-3-6-3.

As Washington Sundar, caught behind off Dom Bess, followed suit for a five-ball duck, India were reduced to 117 for six inside the first session. Jofra Archer steamed in and unleashed a barrage of bouncers. R. Ashwin had to take blows on his head, fingers and body to see India through to lunch.

Kohli, who hasn't scored a Test century since November 2019, looked set to end the

drought. He smashed erring off-spinner Bess for three consecutive boundaries. Against Ben Stokes, Kohli punched through the covers elegantly and pulled with authority. However, a probing delivery from Stokes kept low and crashed into Kohli's off-stump.

England bowling coach Jon Lewis' prediction came true when Leach roared back from his first-innings thrashing to end with figures of 4 for 76.

INDIA SLIP TO 4TH SPOT

Dubai, Feb. 9: India on Tuesday slipped to fourth position in the World Test Championship rankings after their 227-run defeat to England in the opening Test in Chennai as the visitors kept alive their hopes of making the final of the inaugural event.

The victory lifted England to first place and 70.2 percentage points on the table and they have improved their chances of securing one of the three series results in their favour that could see them through to the final — 3-1, 3-0 or 4-0, the ICC said. India will now be looking to win at least two of the remaining three matches to secure a 2-1 or 3-1 result and a place in the final. — *PTI*

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Barty bagels, Rafael roars

Melbourne, Feb. 9: Rafael Nadal's injured back didn't slow his bid for a record 21st Grand Slam title on Tuesday, as women's world number one Ashleigh Barty romped to a 6-0, 6-0 'double bagel' at the Australian Open.

On a day when women's champion Sofia Kenin also reached round two, but two-time winner Victoria Azarenka lost after breathing problems, Nadal and Barty were the headline acts at the coronavirus-delayed Slam.

Spanish great Nadal, who pulled out of last week's ATP Cup with back problems, beat Serbia's Laslo Djere 6-3, 6-4, 6-1 in one hour and 52 minutes on a sun-kissed Rod Laver Arena.

After world number one Novak Djokovic eased through late on Monday, Russia's Daniil Medvedev extended his winning streak to 15 matches with an emphatic 6-2, 6-2, 6-4 victory over Canada's Vasek Pospisil.

Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev also contin-

ued his winning start to the year with a straight-sets victory over German Yannick Hanfmann 6-3, 6-3, 6-4.

And Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas made short work of French veteran Gilles Simon, winning 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 in 92 minutes.

ASHLEIGH'S PARTY ON

Barty also outclassed Montenegro's Danka Kovinic, losing only 10 points as she raced into round two in just 44 minutes. With the win Barty, last year's semifinalist who sat out most of the 2020 season, ramped up hopes of a first Australian women's winner in 43 years.

Women's champion Kenin was less convincing and she audibly vented her frustrations during her 7-5, 6-4 win against Australian Maddison Inglis, who is ranked outside the top 100.

Two-time major-winner Garbine Muguruza of Spain had little trouble beating Russia's Margarita Gasparyan 6-4, 6-0.

— *AFP*

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles first round: Andrey Rublev (RUS x7) bt Yannick Hanfmann (GER) 6-3, 6-3, 6-4; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA x31) bt Sam Querrey (USA) 7-5, 6-4, 6-4; Radu Albot (MDA) bt Roberto Bautista (ESP x12) 6-7 (1/7), 6-0, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5); Alexei Popyrin (AUS) bt David Goffin (BEL x13) 3-6, 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (8/6), 6-3; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Vasek Pospisil (CAN) 6-2, 6-2, 6-4; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) bt Gilles Simon (FRA) 6-1, 6-2, 6-1; Karen Khachanov (RUS x19) bt Aleksandar Vukic (AUS) 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Ricardas Berankis (LTU) bt Sumit Nagal (IND) 6-2, 7-5, 6-3; Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Laslo Djere (SRB) 6-3, 6-4, 6-1; Matteo Berrettini (ITA x9) bt Kevin Anderson (RSA) 7-6 (11/9), 7-5, 6-3; Fabio Fognini (ITA x16) bt Pierre-Hugues Herbert (FRA) 6-4, 6-2, 6-3.

Women's singles first round: Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Danka Kovinic (MNE) 6-0, 6-0; Olga Danilovic (SRB) bt Petra Martic (CRO x16) 7-5, 3-6, 6-4; Belinda Bencic (SUI x11) bt Lauren Davis (USA) 6-3, 4-6, 6-1; Elise Mertens (BEL x18) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN) 6-1, 6-3; Karolina Muchova (CZE x25) bt Jelena Ostapenko (LAT) 7-5, 6-2; Karolina Pliskova (CZE x6) bt Jasmine Paolini (ITA) 6-0, 6-2; Sofia Kenin (USA x4) bt Maddison Inglis (AUS) 7-5, 6-4; Jessica Pegula (USA) bt Victoria Azarenka (BLR x12) 7-5, 6-4; Samantha Stosur (AUS) bt Destanee Aiava (AUS) 6-4, 6-4; Coco Gauff (USA) bt Jill Teichmann (SUI) 6-3, 6-2; Elena Svitolina (UKR x5) bt Marie Bouzkova (CZE) 6-3, 7-6 (7/5); Garbine Muguruza (ESP x14) bt Margarita Gasparyan (RUS) 6-4, 6-0; Ann Li (USA) bt Shuai Zhang (CHN x31) 6-2, 6-0.

Anirudh, double Diamond shine

Vinmuk, Sathvik, Vignesh, Janardhan, Jairam, Raghava, Rahul, Shafi, Krishna, Pranay, Salman, Girish also do well

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Anirudh Balachander scored a century to emerge standout performer in the Hyderabad Cricket Association's A-1 Division one-day knockout tournament matches played on Tuesday.

Anirudh got 104 in 88 balls, hitting 11 boundaries and three sixes but could not save EMCC from going down to Evergreen, which successfully defending a modest total of 247.

There were a clutch of performers in the A-2 Division league matches with Wafi Diamond Kachchhi leading the list with an unbeaten double century. The Young Master opener belted 21 fours in his 270-ball knock to guide his side to 524 for 6 against Canara Bank. Teammate Krishna Patel contributed 112 while Aaron George chipped in 80.

Team Eklavya had two centuries who boosted the team total to 567 for 5 against SN Group. K. Vinmuk Raj made an unbeaten 159 which included 24 fours and two sixes while Sathvik Peddi got 104 with the help of 18 boundaries.

Team Visaka also threw up two performers. First, A. Vigneshwar scored 137 in the side's total of 190 and then K. Janardhan took 7 for 45 against Telangana, which won by two wickets.

In another match, Jairam Kashyap boosted Deccan Blues with a robust 154 that



B. Anirudh



Wafi Diamond



K. Vinmuk Raj



Sathvik Peddi



E. S. Rahul

contained 17 fours and eight sixes and came in 122 balls.

K. Raghava (6 for 37) of Agarwal Senior, E. S. Rahul (5/54) of Oxford Blues, Marrredpally CC's Shafi Ali (5/55), P. Pranay (107) of Sayi Satya, Salman (104) of Future Star and Yadav Dairy's K. Girish (103 n.o.) were the other performers.

Brief scores:

A-1 DIVISION ONE-DAY KNOCKOUT TOURNAMENT

■ Evergreen 247 in 47 overs (Rahul Buddhi 66, Prem Sikhwal 4/40) bt EMCC 196 in 37.2 over (**B. Anirudh 104 — 88b, 11x4, 3x6**, Vignesh Agarwal 3/55).
■ Ensconce 202 in 45 overs (P. Shiva 44, Mehdi Hasan 33, C. Abhinav Tej 3/43) lost to MP Colts 203/2 in 29.5 overs (Ashesh Singh 67 n.o., Mickil Jaiswal 68, A. Vaisnav Reddy 38).
■ Continental 183/9 in 50 overs (Y. Sai Varun 42, M. Samith Reddy 35, T. Aaron Paul 36 n.o., Vishesh 3/43) lost to Sporting XI 191/7 in 45.4 overs (Ankur Tiwari 43, Himalay Agarwal 91).
■ Income Tax 169 in 45.5 overs (MSR Charan 37, Harshavardhan Naidu 36, M. Radhakrishna 3/36) lost to Hyderabad Bottling 173/3 in 29.5 overs (Sai Pranay 84 n.o., Gaurav Reddy 40, Sree Charan 30 n.o.).
■ Secunderabad Nawabs 132 in 44.5 overs (B. K. Ranganath 38, P. Vishnu 3/33) lost to Gemini Friends 136 for no loss in 26.1 overs (Alankrit Agarwal 54 n.o., N. Thakur Tilak Varma 58 n.o.).
■ Balaaji CC 132 in 49.4 overs (B. Sudhakar 3/28, Md Basha 4/27) lost

to SCRSA 133/6 in 31.4 overs (Hemant Singh 43 n.o.).

A-2 DIVISION LEAGUE (TWO-DAY)

■ Young Master 524/6 in 90 overs (Aaron George 80, **Wafi Diamond Kachchhi — 234 n.o — 270b, 21x4, Krishna Patel 112 — 114b, 14x4, 1x6**, Aaron George 80, Pratap Reddy 41) vs Canara Bank.
■ Eklavya 567/5 in 90 overs (**K. Vinmuk Raj 159 n.o — 134b, 24x4, 2x6, Sathvik Peddi 104 — 146b, 18x4**, Khush Agarwal 42, Preetham Sangam 94, Dhruv Kumar 69, Medhu 52, M. Teja 30 n.o., Avinash Goud 4/97) vs SN Group.
■ Deccan Blues 387 in 76 overs (Srikant Naidu 30, Deepak 36, **Jairam Kashyap 154 — 122b, 17x4, 8x6**, Sriniketh 62, Ajay Yadav 31, Deekshit 3/73) vs Brother XI 95 for no loss in 21 overs (Likhith 58 n.o., Sunith 31 n.o.).
■ Visaka 190 in 53 overs (**A. Vigneshwar 137 — 104b**, Vanam Suri 3/45) lost to Telangana 192/8 in 36.2 overs (Vinay Kumar 66, Vanam Suri 51, **K. Janardhan 7/45**). **Points:** Telangana 5, Visaka 0.
■ PJLCC 100 in 32 overs (**K. Raghava 6/37 — 11-1-37-6**) lost to Aggarwal Sr 101/4 in 24.1 overs (K. Vishwa Teja 42, B. Ram Prakash 40 n.o.). **Points:** Aggarwal Sr 5, PJLCC 0.
■ Osmanlia 162 in 45.5 overs (Vinay Kumar 31, **E. S. Rahul 5/54 — 15-6-54-5**, Priyesh G 4/60) vs Oxford Blues 78/5 in 22.5 overs (Vinay 3/16).
■ Kosaraju 183 in 62.1 overs (Vikra Vardhan 42, **Shafi Ali 5/55 — 18-2-55-5**, Bhupender Kumar 3/20) vs Marrredpally CC 31 for no loss in 13 overs.
■ Sayi Satya 307 in 60.5 overs (A. Jitesh Reddy 61, **P. Pranay 107 — 109b, 15x4, 4x6**, A. Sai Krishna

Reddy 34, Prateek Sehgal 45, S. Ayaanuddin 3/55, Aditya Malhotra 3/59) vs Balaji Colts 91/4 in 25 overs (Md Saleh Amoodhni 36 batting).

■ Future Star 249 in 84.1 overs (**Salman 104 — 131b, 15x4**, Bardosh Khan 41, Sathvik 30, Md Vasiuddin Ahmed 4/40, Jatin Yadav 4/40) vs Saleemnagar.

■ Yadav Dairy 228/9 in 90 overs (**K. Girish 103 n.o. — 191b, 12x4**, Shyaam 31, CH Sai Krishna 4/72) vs Young Citizen 39/1 in 7 overs.

■ New Star 366/9 in 90 overs (Muddassir 89, Yash Raj 79, Vivek 4/60) bt Superstar 149 in 53 overs (Muddassir 3/14, Md Latif 3/7). **Points:** New Star 5, Superstar 0.

■ Nizam College 219 in 55.2 overs (Yashwanth 66, Rahul David 38) vs Khammam District 146/6.

■ New Blues 289 in 89.1 overs (Kunal Daswani 94, Eshwar S 67, Nadeem Khan 45) vs Postal.

■ Pasha Beedi 198 in 72.2 overs (Kush Jog 37, Faiz Ahmed 34 n.o., Raghava Pattapu 4/48) vs Deccan Wanderers 69/1 in 16 overs (Jawad Khan 42 n.o.).

■ Vijay Hanuman 182 in 68.1 overs (G Rayju 35, Vikas 36, P. Karthik 3/22, B Hishant 4/46, G Pavan Kumar 3/17) vs Medak Dist 105/4 in 27 overs (G Pavan Kumar 31, C Sainath 45 batting).
■ Sri Shyam 131 in 60.3 overs (Mohammed Afzal Ali 65, Karthik 4/26, Ghazi Abbas 3/23) lost to Hyderabad Wanderers 132 for no loss in 27.2 overs (Varun Vinod 59 n.o., Ghazi Abbas 63 n.o.). **Points:** Hyderabad Wanderers 5, Sri Shyam 0.
■ Vijay CC 132 in 34.5 overs (Shyam Reddy 43, Akash Kuwar 5/53, Sakshay 4/29) lost to Green Turf 133/4 in 30 overs (Md Sitwath Ullah 33 n.o., Gautam 33, Sudhir 3/60). **Points:** Green Turf 5, Vijay CC 0.

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