

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 7 | JANUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 28°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: 0.5 mm

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Margazhi 23
Tithi: Navami
Star: Chithirai
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
Yamagandam: 6 am to 7.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.18 am
Zohar: 12.20 pm
Asar: 3.31 pm
Maghrib: 5.57 pm
Isha: 7.12 pm

SUNSET TODAY 5.57 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.33 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.34 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 12.47 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+12,583)	(+121)
1,03,88,061	1,50,272

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+811)
TN: 8,23,181 12,188

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

8,72,15,449

DEATHS

18,83,304

218
worldometers.info

TN minister tests positive

Chennai: State food minister R Kamaraj tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday, according to sources. He has been admitted to a private hospital. Doctors said the minister was asymptomatic and under observation.

India provides ₹19.21 cr to Nepal as part of post-quake aid

Kathmandu: India on Wednesday provided a grant assistance of 30.66 crore Nepalese rupees (nearly INR 19.21 crore) to Nepal as part of its commitment towards reconstruction of educational institutions damaged during the 2015 earthquake. With this, India has reimbursed an amount of Nepalese rupees 819.8 million to Nepal towards educational sector reconstruction projects.

COUNTER

POINT



Let's invite Trump... he never supported our farmers agitation!

CITY | 2

HC to TN: Ready roadmap for tackling dengue menace



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Trump orders ban on 8 more Chinese apps

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Rohit and India ready to change Sydney script



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BIRD FLU

Centre deploys teams to Kerala, Haryana

Poultry industry in TN in a quandary

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Union health ministry has deployed multi-disciplinary teams to the Avian Influenza affected Alappuzha and Kottayam districts of Kerala, and Panchkula in Haryana. The move comes shortly after the department of animal husbandry notified detection of Avian Influenza (H5N8), also known as bird flu, in the samples of dead poultry ducks from Alappuzha and Kottayam districts in Kerala, and from poultry samples from Panchkula in Haryana.

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

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

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

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

They added the measures suggested to the affected states to contain the dis-

Kerala’s decision to declare the outbreak of bird flu in Kuttanad region as state disaster has shock waves among poultry farmers in the state especially in Namakkal Zone, which has already been devastated by the pandemic Covid-19.

The outbreak in Kerala, fourth time in the past six years, had brought heavy distress in the state’s poultry farmers and traders especially West Tamil Nadu, from where huge consignments of eggs and meat are being transported to Kerala daily. ■ **P3**

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

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

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



Isro scientist says he was poisoned with deadly mix

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 6

Making a startling revelation through a Facebook post, Odisha-born space scientist Tapan Misra has alleged that he was poisoned with a deadly chemical arsenic trioxide on May 23, 2017 at the headquarters of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) at Bangalore when he had gone there to attend a promotion interview.

“I was poisoned with deadly arsenic trioxide on May 23, 2017, during a promotion interview. Fatal dose was probably mixed with chutney along with dasai, in snacks after lunch. What followed was a nightmare lasting for almost two years. I suffered from severe loss of blood to the tune of 30 to 40 per cent through anal bleeding. I barely could come back from Zydzus Cadila Hospital in Ahmedabad. It was followed by severe breathing difficulty, unusual skin eruptions and skin shedding,” the scientist said in his January 5 Facebook post. “It was followed by loss of nails on feet and hands, terrible neurological issues due to hypoxia, skeletal pain, unusual sensations, one suspected heart attack and arsenic depositions and fungal infections on every inch of skin and internal organs,” he added. ■ **P4**

State told to open theatres with 50 per cent occupancy Centre strikes down TN’s order

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 6

Tamil films ‘Master’ and ‘Eeswaran’ are unlikely to have grand openings with full house audiences during the Pongal week, as their lead actors Vijay and T.R. Silambarasan have aspired for, with the Union home ministry directing the state government to withdraw the permission given to cinema halls for screening movies with 100 per cent occupancy.

The state government’s order allowing 100 per cent occupancy amounted to dilution of the December 28 order of the ministry of home affairs’ issued under the Disaster Management Act of 2005, a letter to chief secretary K. Shanmugham from Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla on Wednesday said.

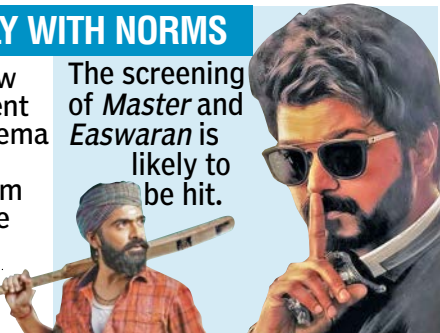
The letter urged the state government to issue necessary orders to bring its Covid-19 guidelines in line with the MHA guidelines that allow for only 50 per cent occupancy in cinema theatres and multiplexes and inform compliance to

CENTRE TELLS TN TO COMPLY WITH NORMS

TN government order of Jan. 4 allowing 100 per cent occupancy is violative of the Centre’s guidelines

Govt must allow for only 50 per cent occupancy in cinema theatres
TN is told inform compliance to the Centre.

The screening of Master and Eeswaran is likely to be hit.



Govt took the decision to safeguard the livelihood of employees of the film industry”
D Jayakumar, fisheries minister

No recommendation to open the theatres to full capacity was given by the medical professionals. We only recommended the opening of some classes in schools after Pongal.’
— Dr P Kuganathan, member of the expert committee

the ministry.

The letter also referred to a Supreme Court order on state governments enforcing strict compliance of guidelines and standard operating procedures on Covid-appropriate behavior.

Earlier, Dr P Kuganathan, member of the expert committee in the state, told the media that no recommendation to open the theatres to full capacity was given by the medical professionals. “We only recommended the opening of some classes in

schools

after Pongal,” he said. Fisheries minister D. Jayakumar defended the government decision saying that it was taken with a long term vision to save the livelihood of the employees of the film industry while revenue minister R.B. Uhayakumar said that strict action would be taken against those who violated the prescribed safety norms.

The government had told theatre owners to allow 100 per cent occupancy from January 10 by following the regular protocols like checking the temperature of movie-goers with thermal scanners, making the wearing of facemasks mandatory and ensuring that maximum distance was maintained between people.

The government order issued on January 4, amending the GO dated December 31, said: ‘Based on the decrease in Covid-19 cases day by day, the Theatre Owners Association has represented to the government to increase the seating capacity of cinemas/the-

atres/multiplexes.’ However, the talk of the town was that the government that had issued the GO on December 31 for 50 per cent occupancy in theatres had a change of heart in four days after actors Vijay and Silambarasan made an appeal for allowing full house.

While the theatres were not getting enough viewers after they opened to 50 per cent capacity, the film industry feels that it was because no big ticket movies had hit the theatres after the lockdown. So they eagerly appeal the release of Vijay’s ‘Master’ and Silambarasan’s ‘Eeswaran’ to revive the industry itself. That is why they want to have 100 per cent capacity for the opening weeks.

Meanwhile, release of the trailer for ‘Master’ trended on Twitter under the hashtag ‘Mudinjaa Thoda Solara Paapom’ (I dare them to touch me), announcing that the film was releasing worldwide on January 13. The release of Eeswaran was also announced through #EeswaranPongal, proclaiming the arrival on January 14.

SC to hear pleas on farm laws on Jan. 11

PARMOD KUMAR & SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Expressing concern over the deadlock between the agitating farmers and the government, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday that all petitions challenging the three new agricultural reform laws will be heard together on Monday, January 11.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde observed that “there is absolutely no improvement in the situa-



tion” regarding the farmers’ protest. The bench also said the court’s intention was to encourage and facilitate talks between farmers and the government.

The protests at Delhi’s borders have been going on for over five weeks, with union leaders saying their agitation against the three farm

laws will intensify in the coming days. The farmers will also hold a tractor march on Thursday in protest over the farm laws.

Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, however, expressed hope that the protesters will understand that the idea behind the laws was to bring reforms in the agricultural sector and arrive at a solution after discussions.

In the Supreme Court, the bench initially indicated all pending matters regarding the legal challenge to the farm laws, as well as the agi-

tation now going on, will be taken up on Friday. But solicitor-general Tushar Mehta and attorney-general K.K. Venugopal objected to this.

Mr Venugopal told the court “there is good chance that parties may come to some conclusion in the near future”, as another round of talks was to be held on Friday. Mr Mehta argued that since “healthy talks are going on between the farmers and the Centre, it would not be advisable to take up the matters immediately” ■ **P4**

Democrats win one Georgia senate seat, lead in the second

Washington, Jan. 6: Democrat Rev. Raphael Warnock on Wednesday secured a crucial win in the senatorial race, becoming the first Black senator from Georgia and bringing his party within the reach of a majority in the US Senate ahead of President-elect Joe Biden’s inauguration.

Multiple news outlets on Wednesday morning projected 51-year-old Warnock, a senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, winner against Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler in the Georgia Senate runoff. He is the first African-American to represent Georgia in the US Senate.

When reports came last, Democrat Jon Ossoff was leading Republican David Purdue by securing 50.2 per cent votes when 98 per cent of the total votes were counted. — *Agencies*

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Pitching for an “inclusive political outlook that encourages ethnic harmony” in a clear message to Colombo, visiting External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday said it “is in Sri Lanka’s own interest that the expectations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace and dignity within a united Sri Lanka are fulfilled”, adding that “India has been strongly committed to the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka”. EAM Jaishankar who is currently on a three day visit to Sri Lanka that began on Tuesday referred to the “commitments made by the Sri Lankan Government on meaningful devolution, including the 13th Amendment to the



Sri Lankan foreign minister Dinesh Gunawardena stands for a photograph with his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar (left) after addressing a joint media briefing in Colombo on Wednesday. — *PTI*

Constitution”, pointing out that the “progress and prosperity of Sri Lanka will surely be advanced as a consequence”.

Seeking to reassure India, the Sri Lankan Government meanwhile reiterated during the visit

Modi earned his prime ministership: Pranab

New Delhi, Jan. 6: The decisive mandate the BJP got in two consecutive general elections in 2014 and 2019 indicated voters’ preference for political stability, according to former president Pranab Mukherjee, who said Narendra Modi “earned and achieved: the prime ministership.

Mukherjee also said in his memoir that Narendra Modi became prime minister “through popular choice” unlike Manmohan Singh “who was offered the post by Sonia Gandhi”.

Every general election has its “importance because the issues that are debated during the polls reflect the various views and perceptions of the electorate”, Mukherjee wrote in his memoir “The Presidential Years, 2012-2017” which he completed before his death last year.

“... The 2014 verdict was historic for two reasons. First, after three decades, a contesting political party received a decisive mandate instead of a fractured one,” he wrote. The second reason, he said,



is that the BJP emerged with a simple majority on its own in the Lok Sabha for the first time and was thus able to form the government, though it still did so by co-opting its allies.



“But the real winner was the electorate that came out in large numbers and voted decisively, thus indicating its preference for political stability, which it believed would

result in development-oriented politics,” the former Congress stalwart and union minister wrote in the book, which was released on Tuesday.

Mukherjee said he was also of the belief that people were dejected with coalitions and the behaviour of political parties changing sides for parochial gains. “Coalitions are often formed with the only common agenda of blocking a particular party or individual from coming to power.” — *PTI*

Kerala high court orders re-trial in Walayar case

Kochi, Jan. 6: The Kerala High Court on Wednesday ordered a re-trial in the Walayar case in which two minor sisters were found dead in their hut in 2017 after allegedly being sexually assaulted.

A Division Bench of Justices A. Hariprasad and M.R. Anitha allowed the appeals filed by the state government and the mother of the children

and set aside a Special Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Court order acquitting five accused in the case.

The court directed the accused to appear before the trial court on January 20.

It observed that there were serious lapses in the investigation and that the entire matter needs fresh consideration. — *PTI*

SHORT TAKES

Chitra's death case transferred to Central Crime Branch

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 6

Chennai City Police Commissioner Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal on Wednesday transferred the alleged suicide case of actor and VJ Chitra to the Central Crime Branch of the Chennai police. This move comes a day after VJ Chitra's husband Hemnath was arrested in another case of alleged medical seat fraud on Tuesday. He has allegedly swindled money from students on the promise of getting them medical college seats.

Snake on bike leaves rider shocked

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 6

A biker in Chennai got the shock of his life when he found a snake crawling on his hands while he was riding his two-wheeler.

The incident occurred near Mappedu village near Selaiyur and the biker, Kannan (35) was helped by the locals who were frightened too.

Kannan, a resident of Mappedu village had parked his bike outside his house on Tuesday, and it was during the time the snake made the vehicle its home. Around 1 pm on Wednesday, he started his bike and was riding to his workplace.

Within a few minutes into riding, Kannan spotted a snake crawling on his hands. Scared Kannan, lost control and fell down on the road. However, the snake silently coiled inside the headlight near the speed meter. Other motorists who witnessed the incident helped Kannan to get rid of the snake. There was a mass panic when the snake slithered into the crowd. However, people then realised that it was a non-venomous snake. When one of the motorists poked the snake, it fell on the ground and escaped from the area.



Employees of Government Connemara Public Library Egmore wear dhotis to celebrate International Dhoti Day on Wednesday.

— DC

Kerala man connected to SSI Wilson murder case held at airport

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 6

A 40-year-old man allegedly connected to the murder of Special Sub Inspector Wilson in Kanyakumari on January 8, 2020, was held at the Chennai airport on Wednesday.

The accused identified as Syed Alavi(40) a native of Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala arrived at the Chennai Airport from Dubai in a special flight in

the early hours of Wednesday.

According to the sources, Syed Alavi was involved in several criminal cases in Thiruvananthapuram and he reportedly absconded from the state. Later after his escape, the Thiruvananthapuram city commissioner issued a lookout circular against him. Upon landing at the Chennai Airport on Wednesday, the immigration officials here con-

firmed him to be accused passed on the information to the police.

On investigating the accused, he gave in serious information about the murder of Special Sub Inspector Wilson in Kanyakumari on January 8, 2020, and allegedly confessed his connection in the case. Subsequently, The NIA were alerted by the Chennai Police. Syed Alavi was handed over to the officials from NIA, the Airport sources said.

Pondy adds 34 new coronavirus cases, tally touches 38,334

Puducherry, Jan. 6: Puducherry registered 34 new infections on Wednesday pushing up the total caseload to 38,334.

However, no fresh deaths were reported. As many as 35 patients were discharged during the last 24 hours after

recovery, Director of Health and Family Welfare S Mohan Kumar said in a release.

Puducherry region accounted for 22 cases out of the total 34 identified after screening of 3,557 samples followed by Karaikal 8 and Mahe 4.

— PTI

HC to TN: Ready roadmap for tackling dengue menace

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, JAN. 6

Dealing with the matter pertains to the spread of dengue in the metropolis of Chennai and the perceived failure of the authorities to arrest such spread, the Madras high court on Wednesday said, "It is necessary for the health department of the state to convene a meeting of all municipal bodies, at least those of the principal towns in the state. In the wake of the pandemic and the use of technology, such meeting can be conducted on the virtual mode and a roadmap prepared to deal with the menace that is dengue".

The First Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy was passing further interim orders, on

"It is necessary for the health department of the state to convene a meeting of all municipal bodies, at least those of the principal towns in the state. In the wake of the pandemic and the use of technology, such meeting can be conducted on the virtual mode and a roadmap prepared to deal with the menace that is dengue"

a Public Interest Litigation filed by advocate A. P. Surya prakasam, which sought a direction to the state government to appoint an expert committee of health and other experts in the field of public safety and communicable diseases to consider the efficacy/adequacy of the measures taken by the authorities in tackling the dengue menace in Tamil

Nadu.

In his petition, Surya-prakasam also sought a direction to the state government to provide free and immediate medical treatment to all the dengue affected people in private hospitals of their choice at the cost of the government and also pay a sum of Rs 10 lakh to all the dengue affected death cases in Tamil Nadu in the year 2019.

In its present order, the bench said indeed, the matter need not be confined to Chennai and may be seen to cover the entire state, including the other towns and cities, where migration leads to the additional people living in poor and unhygienic conditions, allowing stagnant water to remain and creating the breeding grounds for the larvae.

The bench said the secretary in the health

department should file a report when the matter appears next eight weeks hence. The Corporation of Chennai should also file a report to indicate the steps taken, particularly in clearing railway platforms in and around the city and other areas, where vehicles are parked and there may be stagnant water as a result thereof. Particular attention should be paid to areas occupied by fishermen since such areas have a tendency of larger collection of stagnant water. "Efforts may be made by the research body respondent (authorities) to explore the possibilities of developing a vaccine and a paper to indicate the measures to prevent the further spread of disease", the bench added and posted to March 3, 2021, further hearing of the case.

Lakes in Kanchi, Chengalpattu reach maximum capacity

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 6

For the first time in five years, most of the lakes in Chengalpattu and Kanchipuram districts have reached their maxi-

mum capacity. Among the 909 lakes, only 83 have clocked in 75 per cent water. Five lakes store 50 per cent, while the other 821 reservoirs are brimming. But, the partially filled lakes are

expected to get filled with a few more days of rainfall. The largest Madurantakam lake also reached its capacity twice in a short time and hence, officials had to divert the surplus water to

Kiliyaaru. Officials from the Public Works Department are positive that there would be enough water for agricultural activities this summer and there will not be any water shortage.

PIL to make mandatory PCR test for intl passengers

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 6

In the wake of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2 virus detected in United Kingdom, a PIL has been filed in the Madras high court to direct the authorities to conduct RT-PCR test compulsorily to all the international passengers and staff of the Aircraft

and Vessels coming from any country at the arrival port in India.

In his PIL, advocate B.Ramkumar Adityan also sought a direction to the authorities to announce it mandatory 7 days institutional quarantine for all the asymptomatic passengers arriving from any country at their own cost and conduct RT-PCR test

between 5th and 7th day after their landing at the cost of the quarantined passengers and sent home if the test results in a negative with the advice of 7 days of mandatory home quarantine.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy before whom the

PIL came up for hearing on Wednesday, has asked the Union government to take an expert opinion on institutional quarantine for all international passengers landing in the country to prevent the spread of new strain of Covid-19 and report to the court by January 18, 2021.



COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Today is about growth and learning. Short travels are profitable and easy. Speculation yields bountiful results. Students' academic performances improve.



Taurus: Expect minor troubles and losses. Wait for some days before starting new ventures, or expect lots of trouble. Communicate slowly with your boss.



Gemini: You're grateful for a spiritual intervention. Circumstances cause completion of a cycle, bringing you good financial news. You will reach your goals.



Cancer: Take time to respond; it'll save many problems. Expect social invitations, but past failures make you wary of repeating them. Expect bad news about your work.



Leo: Expect some complications soon. You'll get angry with many people, which will lead to losses in contacts. Deal tactfully and diplomatically in situations.



Virgo: You find happiness in little things; spread it around. A close pal's support helps you through many upheavals. A parent's health improves. Stay positive; enjoy family time. Your career races ahead.

You share your b'day with

Bipasha Basu is an Indian film actress. She is known for her roles in the films like *Raaz*, *Raaz 3D*, *Dhoom 2*, *Race*, *Alone*, *Aatma*, *Creature 3D*, *Bachna Ae Haseeno* amongst others.



Libra: People are irritable; be patient. Looking at the bigger picture brings surprises. What you sow, so you reap. Some have necessary but beneficial travel.



Scorpio: Revisit business contracts. Work's challenging; positive results take time. Unexpected money's a blessing. You'll take on many works and may not complete it.



Sagittarius: Colleagues love and accept your ideas. Action-oriented plans take a while, but you're on track. Those in long-term relationships enjoy a trip.



Capricorn: Work brings good offers. Investments pay rich dividends. Avoiding gossip enhances your chances of a good reputation at work. You're impulsive in your speech and create waves wherever you go.

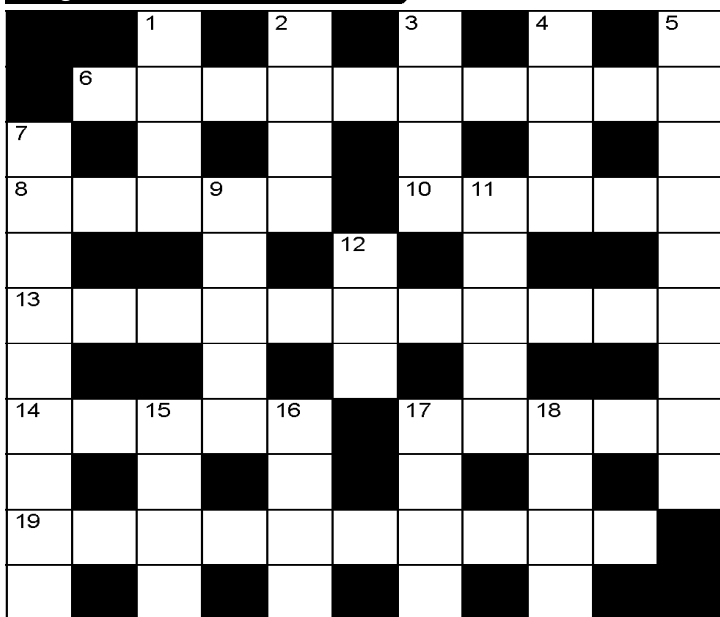


Aquarius: Be diplomatic and caring. Balance out work and play. Do old work-related things newly to break monotony. You'd spend more than you make today. The wheel of fortune turns against you for a while.



Pisces: Your outlook determines the success you attract. You manage differences without despair and use innovative ideas. Parental health requires extra attention. Postpone big financial deals. Testing times at work brings forth hidden talent.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across
6. Claim (10)
8. Passé (5)
10. Venomous African snake (5)
13. Magician's shout (11)
14. Slightly inebriated (5)
17. Drive forward (5)
19. Warranted (10)
Down
1. Secretly conspire (4)
2. Blend, combine (4)

3. Soothing ointment (4)
4. Capture on camera (4)
5. Unable (9)
7. Edge (9)
9. Students' tests (5)
11. Frighten (5)
12. Retch (3)
15. Reach maximum (4)
16. Time period (4)
17. Ninth Greek letter (4)
18. Jetty (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Saying, 3. Plus, 7. Pine, 8. Subdue, 10. Density, 13. Courage, 16. Thorns, 17. Once, 18. Crux, 19. Potato.
Down: 1. Sips, 2. Yonder, 4. Lids, 5. Sleuth, 6. Custard, 9. Astound, 11. Septic, 12. Agenda, 14. Tofu, 15. Memo.

Word Mine

B
A A I
N R D G E

TODAY'S RATINGS: 55 AVERAGE: 60
GOOD: 65 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used only once. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

Dealer: South
Vulnerable: Neither
Deal: 2H
Pass: 2H
Pass: 2H
Pass: 2H
Opening lead: A

jumble

GUCHO
ATGIN
GYTIZL
DOLCED

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Yesterday's Jumbles: WEARY DRAFT MISHAP GLOOMY
Answer: Val was silent when Holly called her by her first name, even though — "MOM'S" THE WORD

at least a six-card suit. Also, the follow-ups are more complicated. Only use them if you play with a regular partner whose memory is nearly as good as yours!

There is a temptation to take the diamond finesse, hoping to get eight tricks via five spades and three diamonds. But that puts the contract in jeopardy. If the finesse loses, a diamond back will force you to win a club trick, which is unlikely. (The



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs

bridge
PHILLIP
ALDERAVOIDING
TEMPTATION
FROM A
TEXTBOOK

Mark Twain said, "There are several good protections against temptations, but the surest is cowardice." Bridge, though, is not a game for cowards. In today's deal, there is a tempting play that declarer must bravely avoid. What is it?

After a straightforward transfer auction, South is in two spades. West leads the heart ace, cashes the heart king and shifts to a trump.

After drawing trumps in two rounds, how should South continue? Transfers into the majors are such a good idea. In particular, they allow responder to show a game-going two-suit below three no-trump. The only drawback is that they give the opponents more options. In this deal, if East had good hearts, he could double two hearts. (Transfers into the minors occur much less often because you need

North
♦ J 5 4 3
♥ J 3
♦ J 2
♠ J 2
South
♦ A K Q 6
♥ J 2 5
♦ A 5 3
♠ 6 4 4
Dealer: South
Vulnerable: Neither
Deal: 2H
Pass: 2H
Pass: 2H
Pass: 2H
Opening lead: A

IN BRIEF

Sexagenarian trampled by jumbo

Erode, Jan. 6: A 64-year-old man was trampled to death by a wild elephant in anthiyur forest range in the district, forest officials said on Wednesday.

Arumugam of Ennamangalam forest area was tending to his cattle on Tuesday afternoon when the pachyderm suddenly emerged out of the bushes and attacked him, resulting in his death, they said.

Farmers in the area noticed the body of Arumugam and informed the forest officials who visited the spot and conducted a preliminary enquiry.

A case has been registered by the forest officials and investigation is on. —PTI



The Consul General of Japan in Chennai, TAGA Masayuki, called on the Prince of Arcot, Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali, at his ancestral home, Amir Mahal, in Chennai, on Wednesday, 6 January, 2021.

Pollachi arrest, a jolt to AIADMK

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 6

The arrest of AIADMK's student wing office-bearer K. Arulanandam by the CBI, in connection with the sensational Pollachi sex scandal that broke out in February 2019, has come as a setback to the ruling party, particularly when campaigning for the Assembly elections has picked up momentum with the DMK and AIADMK trading charges against each other.

Just as the news of 34-year-old Arulanandam's arrest, along with T. Herine Paul (29) and P. Babu (27) broke, photographs of the Pollachi town student wing secretary with local administration minister S. P. Velumani started flooding social networking sites, pointing an accusing finger at the AIADMK in general.

Arulanandam was mentioned as a protégé of Velumani in social media posts. It was alleged that the former was running a couple of bars in Pollachi with the blessings of the latter. Though the AIADMK acted quickly and expelled Arulanandam from the primary membership of the party, the arrest trended on Twitter under the hashtag #Pollachirapists. Angry tweekers gave vent

to their feelings by asking the government and court to hand over the 'rapists' to them so that they could be lynched in public while DMK supporters joined the bandwagon targeting the AIADMK for attack.

Political leaders too reacted strongly to the development. DMK President M K Stalin said that the wails of a young woman calling her tormentor as brother and pleading with him not to beat her were still ringing in the ears of the people, referring to the leaked videos that shook the collective conscience of the State in March 2019.

Giving a rundown of the scandal, Stalin said that more digging would bring to light the connections of AIADMK leaders with the culprits. All of them should be arrested with the view to ensuring the safety of women in the State, he added.

TNCC President K S Alagiri said the taint the scandal brought to the image of the State could be wiped out only by punishing the culprits and that the Madras High Court should monitor the investigations. It should be ensured AIADMK leaders did not interfere in the investigations and the accused are reportedly close to AIADMK leaders like Deputy Speaker Pollachi Jayaraman and Velumani,

Arulanandam removed from party

From P1

The shocking scandal came to light in February 2019, after a 19-year-old woman lodged a complaint with the police.

She had mentioned that four men forcibly removed her clothes in a car and video-graphed the act. Her complaint led to the unearthing of a major sex and extortion racket. The gang, comprising rich youth, used to befriend young girls on

he said.

Makkal Neethi Maiaam founder Kamal Haasan tweeted that the silent screams of over 200 women caught in the Pollachi sex scandal has not subsided and added that the arrests of ruling party men should lead to justice for the victims and not be used for anything else.

AMMK leader T T V Dinakaran said the CBI that has arrested three more persons after two years should act fast and bring to book the rest of those involved in the crime. An AMMK supporter referred to the newspaper advertisement issued by the government describing the State as a safe place for women to highlight the

social media and lured them to their farmhouse, where they sexually assaulted and video-graphed the victims to blackmail them later.

The Pollachi police had registered a case on February 24, 2019, based on the woman's complaint against four accused who had assaulted her.

A month after their arrest, a fifth accused was arrested and was said to have confessed to raping 'a few women' along with the

irony.

The latest arrest of the three persons is seen as a new turn to the case that was taken up for investigation by the CBI in April 2019. Apart from the four persons arrested by the state police after the crime came to light — Sabarirajan, M Satheesh, K Thirunavukkarasu and T Vasan Kumar — CBI had arrested R Manimaran in May 2019.

Though it was believed that the chargesheet had been filed, the latest arrest may lead to the uncovering of more ground in the crime, which primarily involved a group of men luring over 50 women to their nests, videographing them in intimate

other four.

On April 28, 2019, the case was transferred to CBI, after several women organisations and political parties demanded a CBI inquiry.

In a joint statement, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and deputy chief minister O. Paneerselvam, said Arulanandam was removed from the membership of the party and asked the party cadre not to be in contact with him.

The mobile phones of the accused, who were picked up after a woman filed a complaint with the police, had several video clips of the victims being assaulted, exploited and threatened.

Initially several names of AIADMK leaders were banded about in the case but there was no definite evidence to nail any of them. Now, the arrest of the AIADMK functionary has come as a jolt to the party particularly in view of the publication of photographs as clinching evidence.

Lankan navy detains four TN fishermen for smuggling

DC CORRESPONDENT THOOTHUKUDI, JAN. 6

Four fishermen from Thoothukudi and Ramanathapuram districts, along with their boat, were detained by the Sri Lankan navy for smuggling turmeric and cardamom on Wednesday.

The four fishermen, Ranjith Kumar (40) of Thoothukudi, Santhosh (42) of Manapadu in Thoothukudi, Lourdu (42) from Lourdhampuram in Thoothukudi and Dharmar (64) of Pamban in Ramanathapuram district who ventured into the sea for fishing from Therespuram shore in Thoothukudi district on Tuesday evening were intercepted by the Sri Lankan navy in Jaffna peninsula for illegally crossing into the Sri Lankan waters.

The detained fishermen were reportedly taken to the Delft island (Neduntheevu) for further investigation. It is to be noted that on last Sunday (January 3), the Thoothukudi police seized 1,000 kilogram of turmeric from a country craft from Therespuram shore in Thoothukudi district and arrested two for attempting to smuggle turmeric to Sri Lanka.

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The detained fishermen, handed over to the intelligence unit of the Sri Lankan navy, were reportedly taken to the Delft island (Neduntheevu) for further interrogation.

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Nilgiris on high alert to tackle bird flu

DC CORRESPONDENT OOTY, JAN. 6

As an outbreak of bird flu in Kerala has triggered a scare of sorts amidst the Covid-19 fear, the Nilgiris is on high alert. The district administration has swung into action with precautionary measures as a team of officials is monitoring the entry of vehicles from Kerala and Karnataka into Nilgiris. The district administration suspended transport of chicken and other poul-

try products from Kerala and Karnataka to Nilgiris.

The Gudalur and Pandalur taluks on the western Nilgiris bordering Kerala and Karnataka have a tradition of good inter-state trade including transport of chicken, egg and ducks and related poultry products.

The team of officials including the veterinarians, revenue officials and cops began to man the entry of vehicles from Kerala and Karnataka sides into these two taluks

to monitor if somebody tries to transport poultry products clandestinely into Nilgiris. Disinfecting the vehicles crossing the inter-state borders has already begun.

Ms. J. Innocent Divya, the Collector of Nilgiris, said the district is on high alert in the aftermath of the bird flu outbreak in Kerala. She said special teams are monitoring the entry of vehicles in eight check-posts along the Nilgiris-Kerala border and Nilgiris-Karnataka bor-

der. The poultries in Nilgiris are instructed to adhere to the norms prescribed to prevent the spread of bird flu.

The poultry farmers are advised to contact the animal husbandry department if they come across any ailment to chicken and other avians in the farms. The hill residents should take adequate precautions to avoid spread of bird flu from avians to human beings. As of now the situation is normal in Nilgiris, she added.

Namakkal supplies 1.25 cr eggs with tight checks

From P1

V. Balasubrahmaniam, AGM, National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC), Namakkal zone, said they supply 1.15-1 to 1.25 crore eggs every day. The officials are now allowing the products to cross borders with tight scrutiny. If the situation spreads it would certainly be a concern for the poultry farmers as almost half of Kerala's poultry product demand is supplied from Tamil Nadu. Our total daily egg production now is 3.9

crore,' he said.

"Currently, poultry farms here have not been affected. If the transport of products is banned, the fear is that overseas buyers will not be location-specific while banning the products. They will stay away from our shipments until the World Organisation for Animal Health declares the zone avian flu-free," he added.

Shanmugam, a poultry trader, said the bird flu reports came at a time when the sector is already reeling

under the Covid-19 outbreak. "Most of the farmers are doing business with the support of hatcheries in Kerala. So the development in Kerala will disrupt the business of Tamil Nadu farmers further," he added.

As per the data available with the AHD, Kerala, with a per capita consumption of 10.8 kg poultry meat, consumes 875 tonnes per day against a production of 321 tonnes. Kerala's daily requirement is at least 5,000 tonnes of meat. It is one of

the highest consumers of meat in the country. Close to 80 per cent of the state's population is non-vegetarian. The domestic production of meat including beef, mutton and chicken is around 264.31 tonnes. Tamil Nadu is a major supplier to fill the gap between production and demand.

Dr. K.M. Dileep, Director, AHD, said that transportation of poultry products has been banned only within the affected districts.

CITU men held for protest against privatisation

DC CORRESPONDENT PUDUKKOTTAI, JAN. 6

The police arrested hundreds of CITU volunteers across the central districts of Pudukkottai, Tiruchy, Karur, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Tiruvavur, and Nagapattinam on Wednesday, when they attempted to lay siege to various central government offices, to condemn the privatisation policy of the central government.

At Pudukkottai the CITU volunteers led by their district president K.Mohamad Ali Jinnah and 50 others were arrested by the police when they attempted to lay siege to the head post office. He told the media that the agitation was organised in support of the nationwide farmers' agitation and to give Rs 7,500 per month as relief and also supply 10 kg rice to the people in view of Covid-19. In the evening all of them were freed, police added.

Stop 100% occupancy in theatres, ask Citizens' forum

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUCHY, JAN. 6

The Citizens Forum, Tiruchy has appealed to the Tamil Nadu Government to suspend its order allowing cent per cent occupancy in cinema halls till the lifting of the lockdown totally, in view of Covid-19.

In a letter to Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, a copy of which was made available to the press release here on Wednesday, forum chairman M. Selaran pointed out that the government's order had created a lot of confusion among the general public as the second wave of the Covid-19 is spreading across various countries, it is necessary for the government to suspend its order.



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami gives chocolate to a child and cuddles her when she waved at him when he was on his way to Sathyamangalam from Andhiyur in Erode district for election campaign. —DC

Tiruchy farmers taken into custody

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUCHY, JAN. 6

A section of farmers belonging to the Desiya Then India Nathigal Inaipu Vivasayegal Sangam were taken into custody by the police when they attempted to lay siege to the All India Radio office in Tiruchy on Wednesday in support of the nationwide farmers' stir on Delhi borders. The agitators raised slogans against the central government and Modi.

P. Ayyakannu, state president of the Sangam, who led the agitation, condemned the union government's lethargic attitude towards the farmers, who were agitating for more than a month.

He appealed to Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to see that the farm laws are withdrawn immediately, otherwise, the farmers' stir will be intensified and the farmers will teach a lesson to the ruling AIADMK as well as the BJP in the forthcoming elections to the TN assembly.



Tiruppur District Collector K. Vijayarathikar takes a look at farm machinery exhibition on collector office premises in Tiruppur. —DC

Road workers association stages demo in Tiruchy

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUCHY, JAN. 6

A section of members of the Tamil Nadu highways department road workers association of Tiruchy, Thanjavur, Pudukkottai, Tiruvavur, and Nagapattinam districts staged a zonal level demonstration dem-

anding to treat the suspension period as duty period, near Tiruchy Collectorate on Wednesday.

Shanmugaraja, association's state president who led the demonstration, told the media that they demanded that the 41 months suspension period should be treated as a duty period, to dis-

solve the employee's reconstruction panel, uniform washing allowance, accidental and cycle allowance, and to give the job to more than 200 family members of the road workers who died while at work, etc.

Among others including association's district presi-

dents, Saravanan, Nagaraj, Senguttuvan, Sattaiyappan and Tiruchy district treasurer Ramakrishnan participated.

Later, a delegation led by Association 'Tiruchy district secretary Rajendran met Tiruchy Collector S. Sivarasu and submitted a memorandum in this connection.

Alliance with AIADMK is intact: BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT THOOTHUKUDI, JAN. 6

The BJP-AIADMK alliance in Tamil Nadu is intact without any confusion, said K. Annamalai, state vice-president of BJP, here on Wednesday.

Giving half gram gold coin to 100 children in the Kantha Sashti Kavassam recitation competition organised by KINS Academy, Thoothukudi, Mr Annamalai said that his party is continuing in the AIADMK alliance in the

state. He said the BJP has not proposed any of its leaders for the chief ministerial candidate for the 2021 assembly election.

The former IPS officer, welcoming the arrest of three more accused including an AIADMK functionary in the

Pollachi sex scandal case, said that all the accused involved in the crime should be severely dealt with and the CBI is doing a good job.

Founder president of Thoothukudi KINS Academy S. Petchimuthu too was present at the function.

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SHORT TAKES

EX-CONG MLA SAYS
11 OF 19 MLAS
MAY JOIN JD(U)

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

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

INDIA COMMITTED
TO TERRITORIAL
INTEGRITY: EAM

SRIDHAR
KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

Pitching for an "inclusive political outlook that encourages ethnic harmony" in a clear message to Colombo, visiting External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday said it "is in Sri Lanka's own interest that the expectations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace and dignity within a united Sri Lanka are fulfilled", adding that "India has been strongly committed to the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka".

EAM Jaishankar who is currently on a three day visit to Sri Lanka that began on Tuesday referred to the "commitments made by the Sri Lankan government on meaningful devolution, including the 13th Amendment to the Constitution", pointing out that the "progress and prosperity of Sri Lanka will surely be advanced as a consequence".

Seeking to reassure India, the Sri Lankan government, meanwhile, reiterated during the visit that it considered the welfare and progress of all its citizens including Sinhals, Tamils and Muslims to be important.

DOVAL TO LEAD
INDIAN TEAM FOR
ANNUAL TALKS
WITH FRANCE

SRIDHAR
KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

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

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

The last edition of the Strategic Dialogue was held in February 2020 in Paris."

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

India is a major strategic partner of France and has close defence ties with it. India is also currently in the process of acquiring 36 state-of-the-art Rafale fighter aircraft from France, with a few of these aircraft already inducted into the Indian Air Force.

It may be recalled that India had in October last year too come out vociferously in support of strategic and defence partner France, and had "strongly deplored the personal attacks in unacceptable language on (French) President Emmanuel Macron in violation of the most basic standards of international discourse", amid an international row over a remark made by the French President following the beheading of a teacher near Paris by an extremist then.



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

— PTI

MP may bar hotels from
serving non-veg food

State prohibits import of chicken from southern states

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
With agency inputs
BHOPAL, JAN. 6

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

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

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan convened an emergency official meeting here to take stock of the situation in

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

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

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

chicken imports from southern states would be taken after reviewing the bird flu situation in these states after 10 days.

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

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

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

Purohit wants charges dropped

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 6

Lt Col Prasad Shrikant Purohit, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case, on Wednesday through his lawyer claimed that he was collecting intelligence for the Indian Army as part of his duty by attending conspiracy meetings for

the 2008 blast.

The high court was hearing Purohit's application seeking that all charges against him in the case be dropped because the prior sanction to prosecute him was not taken. He has claimed that the court could not take cognisance of charges against him because he is an army officer. Hence all

charges against him should be dropped.

Neela Gokhale, Purohit's counsel in the high court claimed before the division bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and M.S. Karnik that he had been meeting conspirators and attending secret meetings in a bid to gather information and pass it on to the Army.

Gokhale cited documents from the Indian Army, and former Mumbai joint commissioner of Mumbai Police, Himanshu Roy, commending Purohit for the inputs and information he had allegedly shared with them over the years.

Relying on these documents she claimed that he was discharging his duty.

SNOW HAS KASHMIR CUT OFF
FROM REST OF THE COUNTRY

Srinagar, Jan. 5:

Kashmir was cut off from rest of the country for the second consecutive day on Tuesday as the arterial Jammu-Srinagar national highway and Mughal road remained closed, while air traffic was suspended due to snowfall across the valley.

Nearly 4500 vehicles, mostly trucks carrying essentials to the valley, are stranded along the highway. "The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway

is closed due to accumulation of snow at many places, especially around Jawahar Tunnel," an official of the traffic control department said. He said snow clearance operations were in full swing and efforts were on to restore movement of stranded vehicles along the 260 kilometre road. Mughal Road, which connects the valley to Jammu division through Shopian-Rajouri axis, has also been closed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"On Sunday, the 50-year-old woman, who had gone to a temple, was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Family members of the woman have accused the temple mahant (priest) and his accomplices of raping and murdering her. Based on this, a case was registered against the accused. Two of the accused persons were arrested on Tuesday night, while the mahant is still absconding," he said.

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

The case was registered on Tuesday after the post-mortem report came.

"Based on complaints of the family members and the post-mortem report, a case has been registered under section 376D (gang-rape) and

302 (punishment for murder) of IPC," the SSP said.

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

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

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

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

Budaun District Magistrate Kumar Prashant said, "Whatever help can be given from the department, it will be given. She was an anganwadi sahayika. We are also paying attention towards the security of the family." He too shared the CMO's opinion.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is the Congress' general secretary incharge of Uttar Pradesh, hit out at the Yogi Adityanath government, alleging that there was something wrong in the intentions of the Uttar Pradesh administration on the issue of women's security.

Tagging a media report, Gandhi tweeted, "In Hathras, the government administration did not listen to the voice of those pleading. The government saved officials and suppressed the victim's voice."

"In Budaun, the police station officer did not listen to the one pleading and did not even examine the place of the incident. There is something wrong in the UP government's intentions on women's security," she added.

Party spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala termed the incident "horrific" and "shameful for humanity". — PTI

SC to hear pleas
on farm laws

From Page 1

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

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

When the attorney-general wanted Mr Sharma's petition thrown out, saying no state had objected to the 75-year-old amendment, the

CJI quipped that the lawyer petitioner feels otherwise, that the Centre and the states are in collusion for the last 75 years.

CJI Bobde said Mr Sharma is in the habit of filing "startling petitions", and the "startling" point in this petition is the challenge to the 1954 amendment and issued a notice to the Centre to file its response.

The Supreme Court is also hearing petitions seeking the removal of farmers from the protest sites in the Delhi-NCR border areas on the ground that they are causing hardship to the public due to the blockade of roads.

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

Mr Misra said he had learnt that this poison is given in molecular level suspension (crystal level is harmless) just after a heavy meal. "It is a colourless, odourless, tasteless suspension and hence cannot even be suspected. It gets absorbed through the stomach during food ingestion, kills RBCs (red blood cells) immediately to such a large extent that the fine blood vessels are clogged, leading to heart attacks and strokes within two to three hours and the victim can easily be passed off as heart attack death," he said.

ISRO scientists alleges he was
poisoned at its headquarters

From Page 1

The scientist said he came out in public as he feared for his life post retirement after retirement this month.

According to Dr Misra, treatment was received in Zydus Cadilla, TMH-Mumbai and AIIMS-Delhi over a period of two years.

"Famed forensic specialist, Dr Sudhir Gupta told me that in his whole career, for the first time he was seeing a live specimen of a survivor of assassination attempt with fatal dose of assassination

grade molecular As2O3. Otherwise his experience was limited to cadavers," he said.

According to Dr Misra, one of the directors of ISRO centres had told him on June 5, 2017 of the possibility of poison given to me. "Probably, I guess, he witnessed poison mixing in my food."

"On 7th June, MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) security agency personnel met me and alerted me of Arsenic poisoning. I am thankful to them, as their info helped doctors to focus on exact remedy instead of scratching their heads with unusual signatures of my

VIRUS | BLUES

Delhi govt conducts dry run for Coronavirus vaccine

Steady decline in Coronavirus cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

Schools to reopen
in Punjab today

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

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

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

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

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

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

management for vaccine delivery in each district of all states/UTs. Each district will identify three types of session sites, similar to the previous dry run including a public health facility (District Hospital/Medical College), private health facility and rural or urban outreach sites,"

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Union health ministry officials said.

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

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

ODISHA RECORDS
NO DEATHS DUE TO
VIRUS AFTER 6-MTHS

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

IN BRIEF

Indian hacker jailed for 11 years in UK

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

Rare white tiger born in Nicaragua

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

Kim admits failures as congress opens

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

GRAMMY AWARDS POSTPONED TO MARCH OVER VIRUS

New York, Jan. 6: The Grammy music awards slated for January 31 in Los Angeles have been postponed until March over Covid-19, which has been rapidly spreading in California. The Recording Academy released a statement saying it rescheduled the show to March 14, a week earlier than the date briefly listed on its website. "The deteriorating Covid-19 situation in Los Angeles, with hospital services being overwhelmed, ICUs having reached capacity, and new guidance from state and local governments have all led us to conclude that postponing our show was the right thing to do," organisers said.

"Nothing is more important than the health and safety of those in our music community and the hundreds of people who work tirelessly on producing the show."

The ceremony's delay comes less than a month before it was set to take place in the shadow of the pandemic, which has dealt devastating blows to the music industry.

The organization had said the show set for late January would be mostly virtual, but had not released specific plans.

Beyonce, Dua Lipa, Taylor Swift and rapper Roddy Ricch are the top nominees at the normally star-studded gala. Comedian Trevor Noah was set to host the 2021 show, and it wasn't immediately clear if that was still the plan.

Democrats win first seat in battle for US Senate runoffs

Democrat Warnock becomes Georgia's first African-American Senator

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

President-elect Joe Biden on Wednesday hailed his Democratic Party's likely takeover of the Senate as a sign that Americans want action and made an appeal for bipartisanship.

"It's time to turn the page. The American people demand action and they want unity. I am more optimistic than I ever have been that we can deliver both," Biden said in a statement that congratulated Democratic candidates on their likely wins in Georgia.

Democrat Rev Raphael Warnock on Wednesday secured a crucial win in the senatorial race, becoming the first person of colour enator from Georgia and bringing his parity within the reach of a majority in the US Senate ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration.

Multiple news outlets on Wednesday morning projected 51-year-old Warnock, a senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, winner against Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler in the Georgia Senate runoff. He is the first African-American to represent Georgia in the US Senate. He is also the first Democrat to win the Senate race from Georgia in 20 years.

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



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

— AFP

President-elect Joe Biden control of the US Senate.

"Georgia, thank so much for the confidence you have placed in me. I am honoured by your support, by your confidence, by your trust and I will look forward to serving you," Ossoff said in a televised statement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

is usually just a formality.

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

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

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

— AFP/PTI

53 arrested in HK crackdown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—AP

China blocks entry for virus experts, says WHO

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

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

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

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

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

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

Despite the hail of criti-

EU WATCHDOG GIVES GREEN LIGHT FOR SECOND CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

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

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

Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted.

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

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

— AFP

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

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

— AFP

Trump orders ban on 8 more Chinese apps

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEIJING SLAMS DON OVER ORDER AGAINST APPS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UK denies bail for WikiLeaks Assange

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

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

"As a matter of fairness the United States must be able to challenge my decision. If Mr Assange absconds during this process then they will have lost the opportunity to do so." Outside court, lawyer Stella Morris, Assange's fiancée and the mother of two of his children, called the decision "a huge disappointment" and urged the US Justice Department to drop the charges.

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

WOMAN | POWER

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

Germany to require women on large firms' boards

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

Listed companies with four executives or more must appoint at least one woman to their boards, according to a draft law to be voted on by parliament.

The legislation sends "a very strong signal", Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht told reporters, urging corpo-

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

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

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

The women's quota is "overdue" and the time for voluntary measures is "finally over", he added. Europe's largest economy fares relatively poorly

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

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

The boss of her CDU party's economic council, Astrid Hamker, last year called the idea of a quota system "completely counterproductive", and diversity should be "not according to gender, but rather competence".

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

Included in the new legislation, companies in which the government holds a majority stake — such as the rail group Deutsche Bahn — will have stricter rules, with at least one woman on management boards with more than two members, and a 30-percent quota to come in the future.

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

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

— AFP

GREATER CHENNAI CORPORATION PARKS DEPARTMENT				
P.D.C.No.P2/1279/2020				
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Tenders are invited by the Superintending Engineer / Parks for the following work as per details furnished below:				
Engaging Degree/Diploma in Agriculture/Horticulture (10 Nos.) for daily basis for a period of one year in Park Department				
Approx. value of work in Rs. 37.10 Lakhs - E.M.D.: Rs.38,000/-				
For more information see www.intenders.gov.in and www.chennaicorporation.gov.in				
Due Date and Time for Submission of tender: 27.01.2021 upto 3.00 pm				
Tender opening date and time : 29.01.2021 @ 3.30 pm.				
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Sealed Tenders are invited by The Managing Director & Commissioner, Thanjavur City Municipal Corporation from the Registered Contractors E-submission is also permitted for the following work upto 3.00 PM on 22.01.2021. The Tenders will be opened by the Corporation Commissioner (or) his authorized official in the Corporation Office on the same day at 3.30 P.M. If the office happens to be closed on the date of receipt of the tender specified, the tender will be opened on next working day. The Contractor who wish to participate in the tender may download the Tender documents through https://intenders.gov.in by using E.Token / Digital Signature Cards on or before 21.01.2021 up to 3.00 P.M. Any other information's may be obtained from the Corporation Executive Engineer, Thanjavur at the above office during office hours. The Managing Director & Corporation Commissioner has every right to cancel / postpone the tender in view of Administrative reasons.				
Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Estimate Cost (Rs.in Crore)	Earnest Money (Rs.in Lakhs)	Contractor Class
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DIPR/407/Tender/2021 Managing Director, Thanjavur Smart City Ltd.				

DECCAN Chronicle

7 JANUARY 2021

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

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

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

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

The catch, however, lies in the openness of the government. In our country, laws, especially those that have an implication for large sections of people, are passed after an elaborate process, which includes discussions in Parliament, parliamentary committees and even outside. This process, though painstakingly slow, ensures that the safeguards necessary to protect the interests of the stakeholders are not overlooked or omitted.

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

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

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

Scale down the parade

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

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

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

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

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

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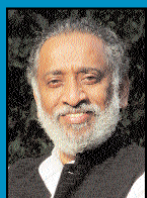
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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEW TRANSFER POLICY FOR POLL-BOUND TAMIL NADU

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

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

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

A THORNY ISSUE

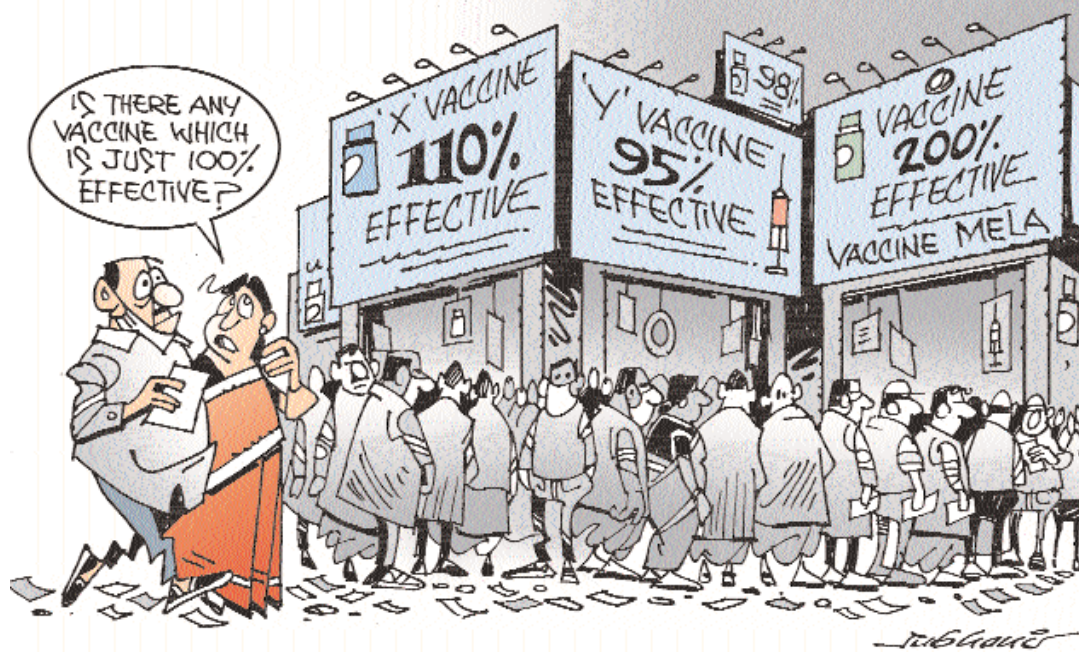
The Punjab government has appointed 1995-cadre IPS officer G. Nageswara Rao as secretary in the department of home affairs and justice, a post that has traditionally

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

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

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

Subhani



Why trust needs to be the key word in 2021



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

part in a clinical trial.

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

Till date, there is no convincing answer.

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

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

How do we restore trust?

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

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

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

Ms Menghaney cites the example of the European Medicines Agency (EMA), that has set a minimum level of transparency for itself.

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

A trust deficit can arise due to multiple reasons, acting independently and together. There is a lesson from India's victory in the battle against polio. Then too, there was a trust deficit in some quarters, though due to different reasons.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Opacity in decision-making, attempts to gloss over mistakes or polarise the populace on any count will punch holes in the trust narrative.

We must not let that happen in 2021.

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

LETTERS

WAR OF VACCINES

Apropos the editorial (*Vaccines spell hope, but govt must clarify doubts*, Jan. 5), it dwells at length the use of vaccines by both Oxford University and the Pune-based institute — leave alone both vying with each other to claim popularity for launching the vaccines. But it is a million-dollar query whether the vaccines have undergone a comprehensive load of clinical trials before launching the inoculation. As the editorial opined, unless evidence-based medicine is guaranteed, using it may spell disaster. As advocated, patience is the need of the hour.

E.S. Chandrasekaran, Chennai

CENTRAL VISTA PROJECT

THERE IS not even one per cent sense or substance in the criticism of M/s Anand Sharma and Randeep Surjewala that the proposed Central Vista scheme has been proposed to perpetuate the name of Narendra Modi in history. The much debated and criticised proposal of the Prime Minister has at last been granted judicial sanction though one judge in the three member Bench struck a note of discord. The Congress spokespersons should understand that all the heads of the governments do some construction work only for the benefit of posterity and future generations and they are well aware of the impermanence or limitations of human longevity. Hence their charge of craze for perpetuating his own memory on the part of NaMo is utterly meaningless, insensible and unwarranted.

Kooduthuraiyan, Chennai

DON MUST LEAVE GRACEFULLY

FROM THE moment the US presidential election was called in favor of the Democratic candidate Joe Biden, Trump's words and actions have raised apprehensions that he might refuse to leave the office. The recent revelation of the 'leaked phone conversation' wherein Trump literally begging Georgia's Secretary of State to 'alter' the votes result only underscores his desperation to cling on to power at any cost (*Trump must leave gracefully*, Jan. 6). A president, when his/her term is over, must make a dignified exit from office, else the country would face a constitutional crisis. Seemingly, when Biden is sworn into the presidency on Inauguration Day, Trump will become a civilian, and if he still attempts to remain in office, Biden, as the new commander-in-chief, will have the authority to order the military or Secret Service agents to physically remove him from the White House.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Services sector expands at a slower rate

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

DoT: Spectrum auction bidding to start in March



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

Housing sales decline in 2020: Knight Frank

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

SpiceJet to run 21 new flights from next week

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



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

SIDDHARTHA SINGH
JAN. 6

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



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

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

ers to protect them from a pandemic-induced slowdown. Citigroup Inc economists wrote last year that spending should be directed on infrastructure, rather than populist measures, to cushion the economy headed for the deepest slump among emerging nations.

Attracting foreign investment is also crucial to meet Modi's goal of spending \$1.5 trillion on new roads, rail links and other infrastructure over the next five years as public finances deteriorate.

The government pumped nearly Rs 1.7 lakh crore into public sector banks in the two years to March 2020. But a widening budget deficit and weak revenue growth put a brake on any further recapitalisation plans for the current financial year.

— Bloomberg

PFC plans ₹10,000-crore retail bond issue

DIVYA PATIL & RAJESH KUMAR SINGH
JAN. 6

India's biggest lender to the power sector plans to sell bonds to individual investors as it tries to attract savers dissatisfied with deposit rates at a 16-year low.

Power Finance Corp has filed a draft prospectus for a Rs 10,000-crore offering (\$1.4 billion), and plans to raise the entire sum this

quarter, according to Parminder Chopra, director (finance).

"We want to explore an alternative source of funds," Chopra said in a telephone interview. "Fixed deposit rates are quite low, so there could be interest from the public to get a bit better rate."

Unprecedented monetary stimulus to help cushion the economy from damage wrought by the Covid-19 crisis has

dragged down rates that households get on bank savings. The rate on term deposits maturing in three years at the country's largest lender, State Bank of India, is 5.3 per cent, the lowest since September 2004.

Power Finance has previously sold notes to retail investors, but those were tax-free infrastructure bonds, Chopra said. This planned offering would be the company's maiden tax-

able issuance to individual buyers, she said.

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

— Bloomberg

'Saudi oil output cut signals demand risks'

Jan. 6: Saudi Arabia's pledge to cut its oil output by more than required under its pact with other Opec+ producers points to weakening oil demand following new Covid-19 lockdowns and sets the stage for a tighter market in the second quarter, Goldman Sachs said in a note released on Tuesday.

"Saudi's action and the prospect for a tight market in 2021, as the rebound in demand stresses the ability to restart production, will likely support prices in coming weeks, leading us to reiterate our bullish oil view," the analysts wrote.

Benchmark Brent oil prices on Wednesday hit their highest level since February after Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, said it would cut by an additional, voluntary 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March.

Two Opec+ members—Russia and Kazakhstan—will bump up their output by a combined 75,000 bpd while other producers will hold production steady.

Producers are wary of the impact of new lockdowns on oil demand.



China on Wednesday introduced more restrictions near Beijing following tougher measures announced by Germany and Britain.

Goldman analysts said their updated first-quarter 2021 market balance outlook had weakened and that the latest Opec+ plans point to a surplus of 250,000 bpd versus a deficit previously.

The "Opec+ March production level will still be low just as global demand starts rebounding sharply driven by warmer weather and rising vaccinations. This points to the group potentially struggling to ramp-up output quickly enough," they wrote.

Goldman expects sustained backwardation and lower implied volatility and sees year-end Brent prices at \$65 per barrel.

— Reuters

UAE TO PRODUCE SINOPHARM VACCINE THIS YR

FARAH ELBAHRAWY
JAN. 6

The United Arab Emirates, which aims to inoculate half of its population in the first quarter, plans to start manufacturing Sinopharm Group Co's vaccine this year, according to *The National*.

The country is seeking to achieve herd immunity later this year by vaccinating as many as 70 per cent of its residents, the Abu Dhabi-based newspaper reported, citing an interview with Nawal Al Kaabi, chairwoman of the National Covid-19 Clinical Management Committee, and Ashish Koshy, chief executive officer of G42 Healthcare.

Sinopharm unit China National Biotech Group, which developed the vaccine, delivered 3 million doses to the UAE so far.

The UAE is offering vaccines free of charge for its residents. On Tuesday, a top health official said the Gulf nation administered more than 826,000 doses so far.

The UAE has approved the Pfizer Inc-BioNTech SE Covid-19 vaccine, along with the Sinopharm shot.

— Bloomberg

Sovereign debt rises by \$10 trillion in 2020

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 6

Global government debt is estimated to have increased by about \$10 trillion in 2020 to \$77.8 trillion, equivalent to 94 per cent of the world GDP, according to rating agency Fitch.

Nearly all governments have coped with the economic fallout of the pandemic similarly—by boosting spending on health sectors and providing support to households and businesses, while running up debt to pay for it.

Both the increase and level of debt will be records, Fitch said. The previous \$10 trillion tranche took seven years to build, from 2012 to 2019.

"The rapid and widespread increase in debt has had a significant effect on sovereign credit ratings, with a record 51 downgrades of 33 sovereigns in 2020, 27 of which are emerging markets. The sovereigns downgraded multiple times were all emerging markets," James McCormack, global head of sovereigns,



Fitch Ratings said.

There are three primary consequences of the high and rising emerging-market debt burden, all of which are already in play, according to Fitch.

First, there will be additional episodes of credit stress and default.

There were five defaults in 2020—Argentina, Ecuador, Lebanon, Suriname and Zambia—a record yearly high.

"We expect there to be more defaults in 2021, along with greater attention on debt-remedy initiatives," Fitch said.

"Second, some emerging markets that are not at risk of default and have well-developed local-currency debt markets will continue to explore unconventional monetary

policies."

"In emerging markets, government debt increased seven-fold to \$19 trillion, and interest payments jumped to an estimated \$680 billion in 2020 from \$220 billion in 2000. While the increase in interest payments did not fully keep pace with the increase in debt, there has been an uninterrupted rise," McCormack said.

Comparing 2010 with 2020, the median effective interest rate for developed-market sovereigns fell from just over 4 per cent to just under 2 per cent. For emerging markets, the rate went in the other direction, increasing from 4.3 per cent to 5.1 per cent.

The third consequence will be, if developed-market rates sink even lower, there may be a greater incentive for emerging-market sovereigns to turn to foreign-currency funding.

On current trends, Fitch forecasts interest payments by governments in developed and emerging markets will converge by 2022 at about \$860 billion.

NBFCs require ₹2.2 L cr extra funding next yr

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 6

NBFCs need additional funding of Rs 1.9-2.2 lakh crore in FY22, apart from refinancing of existing credit lines. This additional funding will help non-banks achieve assets under management (AUM) growth of 7-9 per cent in FY22 after a flatish performance in FY21, says Icra.

Growth would be contingent upon access to adequate funding lines. However, it has to be seen if banks will provide additional funding. Mutual fund exposures to non-banks have improved in the recent past, but their sustainability is critical. Other sources for funding could be securitisation and retail or overseas lenders/investors.

According to Motilal Oswal Research, while the cost of market borrowings has declined sharply, NBFCs have a lower share of market borrowings now as compared to two years ago. Post the IL&FS crisis, companies reduced their non-convertible debenture and commercial paper exposures. They focused on bank borrowings and alternative sources like sell-downs and external commercial borrowings to raise incremental money.

While most issuers expect to maintain or augment their on-balance sheet liquidity profile, most of the investors want to reduce it. This



divergence could pose challenges for incremental funding to the sector and has the potential to affect growth revival in FY22 and a sustained improvement in the subsequent years, says Icra.

NBFC AUMs had registered a growth at a CAGR of 16 per cent between March 2016 and March 2020. The key segments which would bolster growth include gold loans, home loans, personal credit, rural finance and microfinance. Growth in vehicle finance, business loans including loan against property and other commercial lending segments, which are closely linked to the economic activities, are expected to take longer to see a reasonable revival.

"Non-bank exposures to the commercial real estate and other large corporate/wholesales exposures are expected to register a decline even in FY2022 after the decline of about 15 per cent in FY2020 and about 10 per cent expected contraction in FY2021," said A. M. Karthik, vice president of Icra.

Motown Buzz

Toyota Fortuner facelift launched

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JAN. 6

Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Wednesday introduced the 2021 Toyota Fortuner SUV with prices starting at Rs 29.98 lakh for the base petrol variant and going all the way up to Rs 37.43 lakh at Delhi showroom for the range-topping four-wheel drive diesel automatic variant.

The company has also launched a sportier variant called Legendar priced at Rs 37.58 lakh.

TATA SAFARI ALL SET FOR A COMEBACK

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

KIA MOTORS UNVEILS NEW LOGO, SLOGAN



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

AGRITECH | BLOOMING

Firm helps improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops

Startup CropIn bringing AI technology to farms

SARITHA RAI
JAN. 6

CropIn, an artificial intelligence and data-based agritech startup, has raised \$20 million in a funding round led by Temasek Holdings Pte-backed ABC World Asia, as the coronavirus pandemic accelerates the adoption of digital technologies in farming.

The Bengaluru-headquartered agricultural AI startup provides software-as-a-service, or SAAS, products to farms and development organisations globally to improve predictability, efficiency and sustainability of crops.

Additional new investors in the Series C funding include Infosys co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan's family office and a fund of the UK government, CDC Group.

CropIn has raised \$33.1 million so far. The company was set up in 2010 by Krishna Kumar, who hails from a family of farmers in central India and quit a career at General Electric Co to found the startup after being deeply affected by widespread rural suicides in his country.

The firm analyses data such as aerial imagery, ground scouting, hyper-local weather and market price fluctuations from 13



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

"Covid has brought

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

Backed by early investors, including the Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation and Singapore-based VC BeeNext, CropIn has customers and partners in 52 countries, including Basel-headquartered Syngenta Corp, the World Bank, Canada-based McCain Foods Ltd and Germany's BASF SE. The new funding will fuel further global expansion and help strengthen its technology.

India's agritech space is abloom, with dozens of startups sprouting up in the last few years to disrupted dating farming practices and bring more efficiency into a massive industry dominated by small land holdings. One in nine agritech startups

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

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Claire 1st female official in Tests

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

The 32-year-old from New South Wales has already earned the distinction of being the first woman on-field umpire in a men's ODI match in ICC's Division 2 league between Namibia and Oman played at the Windhoek in 2019.

As per ICC rules for Test matches, the fourth umpire is appointed by the home cricket board from their nominees to the International Panel of ICC Umpires and from the host country.

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

Indian shuttlers to start training

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

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

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

Woman footballer Alex catches Covid

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

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

Morgan is married to former Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder Servando Carrasco, and the couple have a seven-month old daughter, Charlie. — AFP

Kevin does well in Dakar's Wadi loop

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: After a fine stage on Tuesday, with a one-two for Joan Barreda and Ricky Brabec who claimed the top of the overall rally standings, Wednesday was the turn of Kevin Benavides. The Argentinean Monster Energy Honda Team rider finished the Dakar 2021 third stage in runner-up spot, just short of the leadership. The Wadi Ad-Dawasir loop, over 650 total kilometres, including 403 km against the clock, once again turned the Dakar standings on their head.

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

Big Bash League: Hobart Hurricanes vs Sydney Thunder from 12.40 pm; Brisbane Heat vs Melbourne Stars from 3.50 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Bengaluru FC vs East Bengal from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

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OPENING GAMBIT

Rohit and India ready to change Sydney script

Sydney, Jan. 6: Having touched nadir and zenith in a span of 10 days, Ajinkya Rahane's India will look to start afresh against Australia with the big-hitting Rohit Sharma's presence adding a new dimension to what promises to be an enthralling third Test starting here on Thursday. The Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), despite being witness to some extraordinary batting performances from the touring Indian sides over the years, has not exactly been a happy hunting ground with six defeats. The lone win came a good 42 years back.

If Rahane's side can go 2-1 up and ensure the retention of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, it will be one of the finest hours in the history of Indian cricket. Making it even more special is the fact that the side has been without two world class performers and a senior pacer against a nearly full-strength Australian team.

Seldom has an Australian batting unit, that boasts of a player of Steve Smith's calibre, looked so circumspect and literally intimidated by an Indian bowling unit, which isn't operating at full-strength.

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

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

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

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

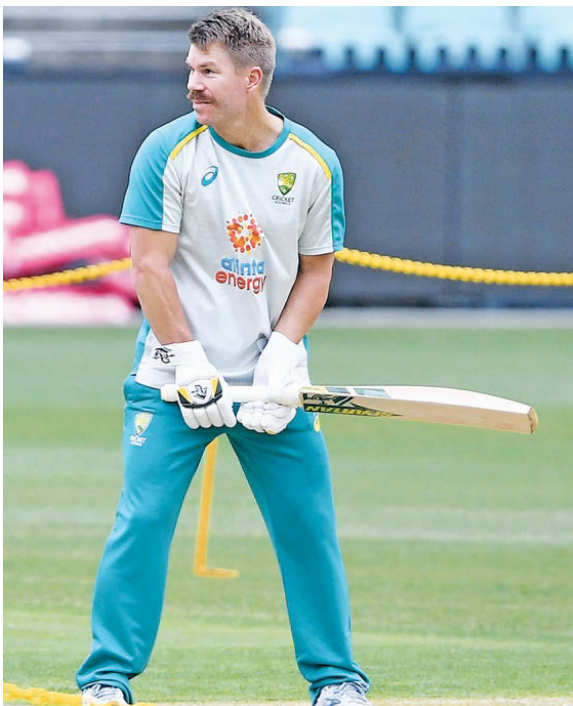
On the other hand, Australia need Smith to be back in form and someone like Travis Head to deliver as he has failed to get a hang of both pace and spin.

— PTI



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

— AFP



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

— AFP

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA HAVE WON JUST ONE TEST AT SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND

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

FOR THE RECORD

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

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

WE'RE A BETTER TEAM WITH WARNER: PAINE

Sydney, Jan. 6: David Warner's mere presence makes Australia a better side and fills the other 10 on the park with exuberance and energy, skipper Tim Paine gushed on Wednesday as the opener looks set for return to Test cricket when the third match against India begins here Thursday.

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

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

"He protects our middle-order a bit with Marnus (Labuschagne) and Steve coming in. Other guys coming when bowlers are a bit tired, it's an advantage. So David has got a huge role for us," the skipper said even as the senior opener is battling against time to get closer to full fitness.

"David has been awesome. Fills the guys with lot of confidence. He is a player you love having on your side. Always got plenty to say, really energetic, professional and I have always loved playing with him," he further added. Paine also admitted that "tension is boiling under the surface" after unnamed sources from the Indian camp expressed apprehensions about playing the final match of the series in Brisbane from January 15.

— PTI

Captain Jinks all praise for Ashwin and Jadeja

Sydney, Jan. 6: The ever inquisitive Ravichandran Ashwin, who has a knack for learning new things, and much-improved batsman Ravindra Jadeja have stood out for India in the first two Tests against Australia, skipper Ajinkya Rahane said on Wednesday.

While Ashwin is currently leading the wicket-takers' chart with 10 scalps, Jadeja's half-century and the hundred plus stand with Rahane in the second Test formed the cornerstone of India's eight-wicket win in Melbourne. Rahane said, "He is always looking to learn new things. He has good skills but is always looking to learn new things, and that's what makes Ashwin great."

He is always looking to learn new things. He has good skills but is always looking to learn new things, and that's what makes Ashwin great.

— AJINKYA RAHANE
India's stand-in Test captain

If Ashwin's improvisation has impressed Rahane, he is mighty pleased with Jadeja's Test match application which adds the necessary balance the team has often lacked.

"As a batsman Ravindra Jadeja has improved a lot and that is a massive point as a team's perspective," Rahane said. "When you know that your number seven can contribute with the bat, that becomes really easy for you to actually get that (decent) total and obvious-

ly in the field, you have seen him taking some brilliant catches.

"So yes his addition in the team helped us a lot and he has been really fantastic and it is really great for us," he said.

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

— PTI

Tottenham ride on Son's exploits

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE RESULTS

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

Bromwich Albion to reach their first domestic cup semifinal.

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

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

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

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

— AFP



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

— AP

MANCHESTER CITY GREAT BELL BREATHES HIS LAST

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

LeBron, Anthony star in Lakers win

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

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

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

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

A steal by Davis led to a

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

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

IRVING LEADS NETS

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

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

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

— AFP

Kiwis sweep series, are No.1 in Tests

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

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

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

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

and Daryl Mitchell (102 not out).

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

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

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

BRIEF SCORES

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



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

— AFP