

SHORT TAKES

YSRC GO AHEAD WITH PLANS FOR CM'S TOUR

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 9

Notwithstanding the announcement of schedule to the Panchayat Polls in the state from February 5 and the election code, the YSRC leaders are going ahead with the arrangements for the visit of Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to Nellore to launch the second round of Amma Vodi programme on Monday.

Sources in YSRC said the state government had approached the High Court on Saturday through a house motion petition against the scheduled polls for the local bodies from February 5.

Though there were some doubts about the programme in view of the election code, the CM's Programme Coordinator Talasila Raghuram set aside the doubts.

On Saturday, he came to Nellore and told the Ministers M. Goutham Reddy and P. Anil Kumar to go ahead with the arrangements to launch the scheme on Monday since it is an existing scheme. Officials were also taking an active part in the arrangements for the programme since Saturday evening. Minister for Education A. Suresh also announced on Saturday in Vijayawada that they are going ahead with the launching of the scheme to transfer Rs 6,612 crore to the bank accounts of 44,08,921 beneficiaries across the state.



JAGAN SHOULD HONOUR HIS PROMISE: PK

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN 9

Jana Sena Chief K. Pawan Kalyan said that the Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had promised people during the election campaign that he would submerge the proposed Divis Unit in Thondangi Mandal of East Godavari into Bay of Bengal. He alleged Jagan who gave kisses is now is turning back from his promise and has booked cases against the farmers. He demanded that Jagan should lift the criminal cases on farmers and stand firm over his promise on the pharma unit issue.

Pawan Kalyan visited the proposed pharma unit area and addressed the public meeting at Kothapakalu village in Thondangi mandal on Saturday evening. He came to the spot with huge procession from Madhurapudi airport near Rajamahendravaram. He showed a video of Jagan, where he was seen promising people during his election campaign.

He also clarified that his party was not against industrialisation, but eco-friendly industrial units should be set up and the livelihood of local people should not be adversely affected. He said that Divis Company was given more than 680 acres of land and promised 1500 jobs.

He questioned Jagan asking whether it was right to destroy thousands of lives and hatcheries industry, by giving permissions to the pharma unit. He said that the RAMKY Group has conducted Environment Impact Assessment Report and the group was close to the ruling YSRC leaders and therefore, it's integrity was open to question.

Women and the farmers of the Thondangi Mandal complained to the Jana Sena Chief K. Pawan Kalyan that false cases have been filed against their family members and they were finding it difficult to eke out a livelihood. They appealed to Pawan Kalyan to exert pressure on the government to lift the cases.

In the meeting, the women said that Divis has given rift in the area in proposing Pharma Unit. They said that the police created a havoc in the area and booked cases against 160 persons and sent 60 persons to Jail. The police also torn the garland on Dr Ambedkar on the day.

Govt employees decide to boycott poll duties

Employees would be infected with Covid-19: APNGO

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

The State Election Commission is experiencing hurdles in conducting local body elections in AP due to the opposition from the government employees, who decided to boycott election duties if the State Election Commission remained adamant on conducting the elections. AP government employees associations joint action committee and APNGO Association (APNGOA) leaders lamented that 150 government employees died due to Covid-19, and thousands of employees turned Covid-19 patients due to infections. They objected to the issuing of elections notification by State Election Commission in the present scenario when the whole world fears Corona strain and sought elections to be conducted after completing the vaccination process.

APNGOA president and JAC chairman N. Chandrasekhar Reddy stated that the decision of SEC to conduct the election in the present scenario shocked the government employees as earlier SEC Ramesh Kumar postponed elections when there were only a few countable cases in the state without consulting anybody but now decided to conduct elections amid the continuation of the surge in Covid-19 cases. He lamented that government employees would be infected from pandemic Covid-19 with the conducting of election and further common people also would turn victims to Corona hence the SEC should postpone elections till vaccination process. He expressed fear that the Covid-19 strain is also swiftly spreading, and with the bird flu spreading, it would surely put a huge impact on the public, including government staff.

Chandrasekhar Reddy warned that if SEC continues to be adamant on conducting the local body elections, the government employees will boycott election duties. He said that recently the polling percentage was hugely dropped in Telangana during the GHMC election and many government employees were infected from Covid-19 due to election duties.

He questioned who is responsible for the lives of government staff and affirmed that they would knock the doors of the Court seeking justice if SEC adheres to its decision of conducting elections. He lamented that SEC issued the notification to create fear among the government, people and government employees.

APJAC secretary and STU president Ch. Joseph Sudhir Babu warned that if SEC fails to withdraw its election notification then government employees and teachers would boycott elections duties and stated that they would go to the Court to save the lives of employees and people. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Police Officers' Association said they cannot risk the lives of the police personnel and the general public by conducting elections haste. APPOA president J. Sreenivasa Rao lamented that 109 police personnel lost their lives and 14,000

KIDNAP | DRAMA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 9

Already facing kidnap charges, former minister Akhila Priya has been slapped with dacoity charges in the alleged kidnap of shuttler Naveen Rao. This will further dampen her hopes of getting a bail.

Bhuma Jagath Vikhyat Reddy, the younger son of Bhuma Nagi Reddy, said the whole case is vitiated as on the day of the

● The State Election Commissioner is playing to the tunes of opposition leader Chandrababu Naidu and thus released a schedule for local body elections, despite the prevalence of Covid pandemic and the state preparing for vaccination, says Ambati Rambabu.



Ambati Rambabu

SEC conduct biased, working for TD: YSRC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

YSR Congress MLA and party official spokesperson Ambati Rambabu alleged that State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar worked for Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu's interests hence announced election schedule amidst risk of Covid-19. Addressing a press meet on Saturday, he alleged that SEC Ramesh Kumar was obstructing the Covid-19 vaccination process.

Rambabu stated that as many employees and government machinery would be deployed for administering the Covid vaccine conducting polls is highly impossible, as it also poses a high risk for the transmission of the virus.

He further stated that even employees are also opposing the elections as they do not need the hour, unlike vaccination. He said that Chandrababu Naidu and Lokesh also did not step out of their

homes for nine months fearing Covid.

Terming the conduct of SEC as biased, Rambabu said that he is playing to the tunes of opposition leader Chandrababu Naidu and thus released a schedule for local body elections, despite the prevalence of Covid pandemic and the state preparing for vaccination. He said that SEC took a unilateral decision even after the government officials explained that state machinery would be busy in administering the Covid vaccination for the entire population for the next few months beginning from January.

He stated that although the Chief Secretary Adityanath Das and other top officials, clearly informed that elections could be held after completing the vaccination programme, the SEC has adamantly announced the poll schedule without considering the state government's views and that he is desperate to hold the polls before his retirement.

CM should confine to home: Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

Telugu Desam Party Chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu, on Saturday, stressed the need for conducting the local body elections in Andhra Pradesh in a fair and peaceful manner under the security provided by the central armed forces. He demanded that the State Election Commission accept nominations online considering the previous experiences of intimidation and threats. He further demanded that the grama volunteers not be involved in any aspect of the election and polling process in view of the severe political influence on them.

Naidu asserted that he would himself come to the field if required to counter the attacks of the YSRC leaders in these

elections. The TD chief launched a scathing attack, saying that Jagan was suffering a split personality as this CM would not do what he says and would not say what he does. He alleged that Jagan was running a maniac's rule.

Naidu asked how the CM could make Adityanath Das the Chief Secretary of AP when he was also involved in the assets cases. He demanded that Jagan Reddy confine himself to his Tadepalli residence until the election code was lifted. He stated that there was no need for anybody to fear the YSRC leaders and no need to surrender to the ruling party's intimidation. He sought that it was high time for the police and officials to carry out their duties impartially.

police personnel infected from Covid-19 in the state.

He said, "The police department is crucial during Covid-19 vaccination for frontline workers, senior citizens and the general public. During the vaccine transportation and bandobast at vaccine storage centres and during vaccination process police personnel presence is very

important. All the police personnel should undergo vaccination and attending election duties even before vaccination is done will push the lives of frontline workers into risk. In view of this, the police personnel cannot attend the election duties before the vaccination process is completed risking the family members".

SEC IGNORED GOVT TO ANNOUNCE POLLS

FROM PAGE 1

However, the SEC had decided to go ahead with the conduct of polls without taking into consideration the opinion of the state government and also showing no respect to the process for consultations. The SEC announced the poll schedule in a gap of a few hours after consulting a team of three government officials led by Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das. The petition mentioned that based on the circumstances leading to announcement of the schedule, the consultation process by the SEC appeared to be a farce as it had already prepared the schedule for conduct of polls in four phases.

The government also said in the petition that the SEC did not take into consideration even as it informed about the importance of taking up Covid-19 vaccination programme besides the Centre's direction to involve the entire government machinery for vaccination programme and also the scheduled video conference to be addressed by the Prime Minister with the Chief Ministers from several states on January 11.

The government also said in the petition that it would never interfere in the conduct of polls in a democratic manner as it was having utmost respect in the process of conduct of elections. However, it further said that as it was the responsibility of the state government to protect the health of the people and also the state machinery, it wanted the interference of the court on SEC's decision to go ahead with conduct of polls in the state.

SEC NOT TO OBJECT SCHEMES IN URBAN AREAS

FROM PAGE 1

Accordingly, as the State Election Commissioner announced the schedule for conduct of the said polls on January 8, and would be issuing a notification for the first phase of election on January 23, the MCC had come into force from Saturday onwards in compliance with the stipulation made by the Supreme Court in a judgment issued earlier in a case.

Referring to the guidelines of the MCC, the SEC said as the ordinary polls were notified to rural local bodies in the entire state, the MCC would be applicable to the rural areas only and not applicable to the urban areas in the state.

He clarified that there would be no objection to organise programmes in urban areas to extend benefits to the beneficiaries strictly belonged to the urban areas only and cautioned that no programme to be organised in the urban areas to benefit the people belonging to the rural areas as it would amount to clear violation of the MCC as such programme might influence the voter preference.



Children and Citizens of all the religions take out Sadbhavana Yatra against the attacks on Temples in Vijayawada on Saturday.

-DC

TD resorting to attacks on temples to defame govt: Jogi

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

YSRC alleged opposition TD leaders are resorting to temple attacks to defame the government with jealousy, as they are unable to face the government directly which is gaining popularity by welfare schemes. Addressing a press conference on Saturday, MLA Jogi Ramesh said that Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had been relentlessly working to ensure that Dalits, tribals, weaker sections, and minorities lead better lives. He claimed that like never before the state government had taken the initiative of providing housing to 31 lakh poor people across the state and unable to digest this, Chandrababu is conspir-

● Chandrababu Naidu had become mentally weak, so he has been falsely accusing the government only to save his party, which seems to be on a ventilator, says Jogi Ramana

ing to divert people's attention by using religion.

MLA stated that Chandrababu Naidu had become mentally weak, so he has been falsely accusing the government only to save his party, which seems to be on a ventilator. He claimed that humanity is the religion of Chief Minister while the entire state is celebrating the distribution of house site pattas, Chandrababu and his son Lokesh is trying hard to get people on their side. To get attention from

the public, Naidu started Amaravati protests and dragged them for a year with paid artistes, paid media, and paid publicity. Since it failed miserably, Chandrababu had started another campaign using the religious card, he added. The MLA said that the opposition had become a useless party in the state and now by bringing the religion they are inciting religious hatred in this state. He criticised Chandrababu Naidu for caste politics while in power and using religion for politics in opposition.

Speaking on local body polls, MLA said that people need a vaccine, not elections. While all other states are making arrangements for vaccination, holding it for the sake of local body polls is not the right call.

CM SHOULD GIVE ONE REASON TO CELEBRATE: LOKESH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

Telugu Desam Party National General Secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh, on Saturday, asked the YSRC government to explain how the state's farmers could celebrate the festival season with joy and happiness when CM Jagan Mohan Reddy has not fulfilled any single election promise until now.

Lokesh said that even for the food grains already purchased by the government, no payments were being made to the farmers as there were a whopping Rs 2,574 crore pending dues to the paddy farmers. He slammed the CM's regime for 'its indifferent attitude' towards the issues concerning the cultivators and their crops from the beginning of its rule. He stated that a raw deal was given to the farmers even in the crop insurance, input subsidy and all such benefits. Mr Lokesh demanded that the CM should clarify whether the farmers had any reason to celebrate the festival with their families.

Lokesh mockingly said that the festival celebration was being seen abundantly in the Jagan Reddy family media but not in the farmers' eyes. In the name of every programme, multi-crore public funds were given to the YCP media through advertisements, but no remunerative prices were given to crops.

Lokesh recalled how the Chief Minister criss-crossed the whole state promising a massive price stabilisation fund but ignored the same after coming to power. The CM's statement that a good price would be given to every grain produced by the farmers had finally become an airy nothing and an empty promise. He deplored that the meaningless rules and scanty purchases by the government had dealt a severe blow to the cultivators of almost all crops in the state. He further deplored that the government regulations and guidelines had only become a curse for farmers and a blessing for the middlemen.

Former Anglo-Indian MLA Philip quits TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

It has been a blow to the Telugu Desam, with the resignation of its nominated MLA, in protest against the TDP chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu for being against the Christian community. Former Anglo-Indian MLA of Andhra Pradesh Phillip C. Tocher resigned from the TDP on Saturday. Philip, who was nominated during the TDP rule, has sent his resignation letter to the TDP state president K. Atchannaidu informing him about his resignation. He stated, "I am pained to inform you that I am resigning from the TDP's active membership with immediate effect from this day (referring to 9 January) due to the sudden out blast remarks made by Chandrababu Naidu against the Christian community of the state. Please accept my resignation as I am put to grave questioning by the Christian community of

our state by large," he reasoned.

Philip said that he was in TD from its formation in 1983 and worked hard and dedicatedly for the party. He said that he was pained to view TDP's and Chandrababu Naidu's attitude towards the Christian community. He recalled that Chandrababu Naidu wearing a cross, read the Bible several times and expressed happiness to worship Jesus, but now he is carrying scathing attacks on Christian despite no connection to Christians in the Rama idol demolishing in Ramateertha temple. He condemned the immoral acts of Chandrababu Naidu dividing the society in the name of castes and religions. He claimed that TD came into power with the votes of all communities, including Christians during elections. Philip affirmed that he is leaving TDP unable to bear the opportunistic hate politics of TD Chief Chandrababu Naidu.

BJP CHIEF APPEALS TO ELECTORATE TO SUPPORT THEIR CANDIDATE IN TIRUPATI

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 9

BJP State President Somu Veerraju appealed to the people to support his party in the ensuing by-election to Tirupati Lok Sabha seat.

Addressing the public during a colourful rally in Gudur on Saturday, the BJP senior leader demanded stern action against the people involved in damaging the temples. He alleged that Hindu tem-

ples are being targeted after YSRC came to power.

He alleged that Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is ignoring the welfare of Dalits while stressing that BJP is paying special attention to the community.

BJP leader and MLC Vakati Narayana Reddy, former Minister Ravela Kishore Babu, and BJP senior leader Bhanu Prakash Reddy was present among scores of party leaders and cadres.

aware of the issue and we have said clearly that we are ready for an amicable solution," Reddy said.

An advocate said that as per IPC Section 391 dealing with dacoity requires the participation of five or more people in any alleged offense. Akhila, named as A1, was not seen in the CCTV footage and there was no evidence whatsoever, implicating her by inserting dacoity to the alleged kidnap case, he said.

land was transferred to a special purpose vehicle (SPV) with several partners, including Naveena Rao brothers, A.V. Subba Reddy, and the Bhuma family. But the said company has been folded up. "Meanwhile, after the death of my father Nagi Reddy in 2017, Subba Reddy and Naveen Rao were trying to knock off the property.

"Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and his son K.T. Rama Rao are

● "My sister was not treated well at the hospital. She was not provided a wheelchair", claims her brother, Bhuma Jagath Vikhyat Reddy .

there was no relief for her. The doctors advised the police to take her, which was painful."

When asked about the genesis to the crisis pertaining to Hafeezpet lands, Reddy said that 60 acres of

Dacoity requires participation of five or more people in any alleged offence

Akhila Priya slapped with dacoity charges

alleged kidnap, his sister Akhila Priya was in Vijayawada taking oath as the TD general secretary.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, Reddy said, "The whole case has been built on allegations. The remand report also says 'may or may not be them'. The charges are baseless, concocted and fabricated," he said.

Following court directions, her medical examination was done at Osmania General

Hospital, including a sonogram as she pleaded that she was pregnant. But it is learnt that the medical examination report certified that she was healthy and does not warrant any medical treatment. Even claims of pregnancy were also not confirmed, a source said.

Jagath Vikhyat Reddy said, "My sister was not treated well at the hospital. She was not provided a wheelchair. She had seizures four times but

SHORT TAKES

SEATS VACATED BY NON-LOCALS FOR TS STUDENTS

FROM PAGE 1

Once the TS students who were allotted seats in the local quota in the first phase of counselling are upgraded into unreserved open category based on their merit, the seats vacated by them in local quota would have to be filled exclusively with Telangana state students. Several Telangana state students either lost the opportunity to study medicine or study in better colleges.

THIEVES STEAL MONEY FROM TEMPLE HUNDI

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA JAN. 9

People are terrified by a series of thefts at temples. Thieves broke into the Mandaramma temple in Mandaram village in Rajampet mandal and stole money from the hundi.

Thieves dumped a broken hundi backside of the temple. Two days ago a similar incident took place in Hastavaram village of Rajampet mandal. The thieves broke the locks of the hundi in the Srirama temple and stole money. The police filed a case and are investigating.

PARUVETA UTSAVAM ON JAN. 15

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, JAN. 9

The Paruveta Utsavam will be celebrated on January 15 in Tirumala. The event is being held every year in connection with the Kanuma festival, a day after Makara Sankranti festival.

Sri Malayappa Swamy and Sri Krishna Swamy will be brought to Paruveta Mandapam at around 1 pm, where Archakas offer Aradhanas, Nivedana and Harati.

Sri Krishna Swamy will be offered puja first by Sannidhi Yadava where milk and butter are rendered as Naivedyam, and later he joins Sri Malayappa Swamy at Paruveta Mandapam.

Sri Malayappa Swamy is also offered milk and butter brought from Sannidhi.

Poultry farmers fear flu impact on exports

About 120 lorries carrying eggs move out from AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

As the Centre confirms the spread of bird flu in six states in the country, poultry farmers fear its impact on the export of eggs from Andhra Pradesh to several states causing financial loss to them.

AP produces nearly four crore eggs daily from about five crore layer chickens and out of them, nearly 65 per cent of eggs get exported to states like Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Himachal Pradesh and others while the remaining 35 per cent of eggs go for domestic consumption. Each egg fetches ₹4.50 to the farmers at present, unlike earlier

● AP produces nearly four crore eggs daily from about five crore layer chickens and out of them, nearly 65 per cent of eggs get exported to states like Odisha.

days of getting the highest price of ₹5.75 per egg from the traders. About 120 lorries carrying fresh eggs move out from AP every day to different states.

As the Centre confirmed bird flu in states like Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Gujarat to the birds like crows, ducks and migratory birds and not to the poultry birds so far and AP is

safe so far with no symptoms of avian influenza either among migratory birds or the poultry birds, the farmers' biggest worry is that if people stop consuming eggs apprehensive about getting infected with the virus, it becomes a big problem to them. They say that if people in the exporting states stop consuming eggs, traders will not lift stocks from their resulting in a huge loss to them as the eggs are highly perishable unless they are secured in cold storage facilities.

Farmers say that as they have to spend a lot of money to feed the birds and maintain the poultry farms, any cut in the export of eggs will badly affect the poultry

industry.

Farmers say that they had already suffered a huge loss of income during the imposition of lockdown due to Covid-19 during April, May and June last year and maintain that as their trade is picking up slowly, they can no longer afford to incur loss again.

AP Poultry Farmers Federation secretary Padala Subba Reddy said, "We want the concerned authorities to bring out awareness among the people that consumption of boiled eggs and cooked chicken meat will not affect the consumers with the virus that causes bird flu so that people will continue to eat them to help our trade survive."

State records 199 new Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

Andhra Pradesh registered 199 new Covid-19 cases and one death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities issued Covid-19 bulletin here on Saturday reporting that out of 50,445 samples tested, 199 persons were infected with the Covid-

19. Out of a total number of 1,22,74,647 samples tested so far, 8,84,689 persons were found infected with Covid-19 and of them, 8,74,954 were recovered while 2,607 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily cases of Covid-19, Guntur and Krishna registered 35 each followed by 23 in Chittoor, 21 in

Visakhapatnam, 20 in East Godavari, 15 in Anantapur, 14 in West Godavari, 12 in Kurnool, 11 in Nellore, seven in Kadapa and two each in Prakasam, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram.

The UK returnee woman infected with the mutant strain of Covid-19 tested negative to the virus in the RTPCR test. The woman who has

MLC INFECTED WITH COVID SECOND TIME

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, JAN. 9

MLC and TD district unit president Beeda Ravichandra was tested positive for Corona on Saturday. It is the second time, the senior TD leader becoming a victim of Covid-19. He had undergone treatment for Covid a few months back. In a statement, he said he gave his swab sample for testing on Friday and the results confirmed.

Red sanders smuggler arrested

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA JAN. 9

The Kadapa police arrested international red sanders smuggler, Bhaskaran, and 16 other smugglers. The district additional superintendent of police (Operations) M. Deva Prasad held a press conference at the District Police Office on Saturday morning and explained the details. Bhaskaran was earlier arrested in 21 illegal red sanders transportation and customs cases. He and interstate smug-

● The district additional superintendent of police (Operations) M. Deva Prasad held a press conference at the District Police Office on Saturday morning and explained the details. Bhaskaran was earlier arrested in 21 illegal red sanders transportation and customs cases.

glers Raghavendra Reddy of Kadapa town, two smugglers from Piler of Chittoor district, three smugglers

from Nellore district, two Tamil labourers and six local smugglers were arrested by the police. They have seized 55 red sanders logs along with two cars, two motorcycles, 300 grams of gold ornaments, seven cell phones and registered three cases against the smugglers. Under the directions of SP Karur Karunapathi Nagendra Kumar Anburajan, Kadapa police kept close vigil. The Rayachoti, Kadapa, Rajampet, Railwaykodur police involved in this operation.

Ban on fishing in sea imposed in Vizag

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 9

Visakhapatnam district administration imposed a ban on fishing in the sea until further orders following a dispute between two groups of fishermen on the usage of ring nets for fishing with effect from Saturday.

A meeting was arranged with the fishermen elders

comprising operators of gill nets and ring nets in the wake of law and order issues by the police.

According to DCP (law and order) Aishwarya Rastogi, the police heard both the parties of the operators and were asked to follow the norms.

Following tension in fishing villages, the district collector issued proceedings for the promulgation of

Section 145 of CrPC and imposed a ban on fishing.

The police informed the fishermen not to defy the norms. They were even cautioned that criminal action would be initiated if they failed to help the police maintain law and order.

The fishermen were advised to reach out to the local police in case of any grievance and report to them.

FORMATION OF AHTUS IN ALL DISTRICTS SOUGHT

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

Anti-trafficking activists and survivors of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation have demanded that the government of Andhra Pradesh set up and activate Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) in all districts as per the advisory by Union Ministry of Home Affairs. The Women Safety Division of MHA had issued an advisory in July 2020 asking all States and Union Territories to immediately set up of new

Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) and upgrade the infrastructure of existing AHTUs in all districts to prevent and combat human trafficking during the period of Covid-19 pandemic.

S. Meharuneesa State Convener of VIMUKTHI on Saturday said that many sex workers, who are earning members for their families, especially their children, have been forced to take loans under exorbitant interests during this lockdown period, because they have not had access to free rations or Jan Dhan funds from the government. She lamented that the local loan sharks, who are not registered under the Money Lenders' Acts, especially operating in red light areas, are poaching women with adolescent girls and encouraging them to take loans under high interest. She said that the local police stations do not have the expertise, time or resources to take anti-

STARS students get free laptops

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 9

VIT AP University presented laptops to students for free of cost under STARS (Support The Advancement of Rural Students) programme to provide opportunities to underprivileged rural students to pursue quality higher education. The scheme is implemented in the 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Dr Sekar Viswana-than, vice-president VIT AP University said that through this scheme, since the academic year 2017-18, one male and one female student from government junior colleges in the rural areas in each district is

selected and offered complete free education inclusive of hostel facilities to pursue their education at VIT-AP. He said that every year 26 students from 13 districts are benefited under the exclusive VIT-AP STARS scheme. He emphasised on hard work and urged the students to focus on their education to be the first in their chosen areas.

Dr S.V. Kota Reddy, Vice-chancellor, VIT AP University said that Support The Advancement of Rural Students (STARS) aims to provide opportunities to underprivileged rural students to pursue quality higher education. He firmly believes that education is for emancipation.

Farmer ends life

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA JAN. 9

Chandramohan Reddy, 43, a farmer living in Pulivendula town, committed suicide by drinking pesticide in the fields of Chinnarangapuram village of Pulivendula mandal on Friday night. The family members found his body on Saturday morning and informed the police. The farmer is currently doing

agriculture activities in Cherlopalli village in Simhadripuram mandal. The police sub-inspector Haji Valli said that he had committed suicide by drinking pesticide and the case was registered as per the family members' complaint. He said that the police were inquiring if he is committed suicide for debts or any other reason. The case was registered and the investigation is under progress.

GIRL'S NECK STRANGULATED WHILE PLAYING IN SWING, DIES

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, JAN. 9

In a tragic incident, a seven-year-old girl Moshika breathed her last when her neck was strangulated while playing in swing at Cherlopalli on Saturday.

Mother of the child arranged the swing with a sari but she failed to notice when the rope tied to pull the swing tightened around the neck of the child. Moshika was declared as brought dead when the parents rushed her to hospital.

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MEDICAL HOSPITALS

IN BRIEF

MP ENFORCES 'LOVE JIHAD' ORDINANCE

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 9

Madhya Pradesh government on Saturday brought into force the contentious Freedom of Religion ordinance, known in political parlance as 'Love Jihad' law, providing a maximum jail term of 10 years for forcible marriage of a girl for the purpose of changing her religion.

The ordinance was enforced 2 days after the governor Anandiben Patel gave her assent to it on Thursday.

Earlier on December 29, the state cabinet gave a nod to the ordinance in the wake of suspension of the winter session of the state assembly, scheduled to commence on December 28.

The state cabinet had last month given approval to the Freedom of Religion Bill, 2020, which was scheduled to see passage in the state assembly in the now-suspended winter session.

The ordinance has provided a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment for forcible marriage of a girl for the purpose of changing her religion.

It has been made mandatory for the bride and the groom to notify the local district magistrate 2 months ahead of their conversions, failing which the marriage would be nullified.

The ordinance has provided 5 years' jail term for the religious leaders and priests involved in the forcible marriages. Onus would be on the accused to prove his or her innocence.

MODI OPENS PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

The 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention - the flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs that provides an important platform to engage and connect with "the 31 million strong Indian diaspora" was held on Saturday.

The PBD convention — the theme of which was "Contributing to Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) — was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and featured a keynote address by the President of the Caribbean nation Suriname Mr. Chandrikapersad Santokhi who was the chief guest at the event.

Modi hailed the contributions of Suriname President as "a shining example" of the service of the Indian diaspora to the world.

On the occasion, 30 individuals and organisations were conferred the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award - the highest honour for overseas Indians/persons of Indian origin- by President Ram Nath Kovind in recognition of their outstanding achievements both in India and abroad in various fields.

FARMER ENDS LIFE AT PROTEST SITE

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

As stalemate continues over farm laws, with both government and farmer refusing to blink, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court on Saturday seeking removal of farmers from protest sites on Delhi border on the grounds that the protesters were blocking roads causing inconvenience to people.

The petitioner has also mentioned that violent protests have taken in place in some places and they have destroyed telecom towers causing inconvenience and financial loss to the public. The Supreme Court is expected to hear a bunch of petitions relating to the new Farm laws on January 11. The next round of talks between the farmers and government is to be held on January 15.

Meanwhile, a 72-year-old farmer allegedly died due to suicide at a protest site in Ghaziabad. "The deceased was found hanging at one of the mobile toilets at the protest site. He has also left behind a note which is written in Punjabi," said a police officer. Shamsher Rana of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) said that the farmer had blamed the union government for not accepting the demands of the protesters.

BJP LAUNCHES FARMERS OUTREACH DRIVE IN WB

Katwa (WB), Jan. 9: Amid ongoing protests over the new farm laws, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Saturday launched a new campaign to woo the farmers of West Bengal and said the BJP government at the Centre has increased the agricultural budget six-fold and the Minimum Support Price by 1.5 times.

Nadda, who launched the *Krishak Suraksha Abhiyan* and 'Ek Mutti Chawal' (a fistful of rice) to woo farmers in the poll-bound state, said the Modi government has worked more for the farmers community than the previous governments at the Centre.

He also mocked at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for agreeing to implement the PM Kisan Yojna only after realising that her party is fast losing ground among the farmers in the state.

Nadda, said it is "too late" for the TMC government to agree to implement the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi.

"Since coming to power, the Modi govt has increased budget on agriculture by six times. In 2013-14, the budget on agriculture was only ₹22,000 crore. Today, it stands at ₹1,34,000 crore," Nadda said here.

Nadda said its Prime Minister Narendra Modi who implemented the Swaminathan Committee report on Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops.

"MSP according to Swaminathan Committee has been implemented only by PM Modi, increasing it nearly by 1.5 times," he said.

Later in the afternoon Nadda launched 'Ek Muthi Chawal' (a fistful of rice), a programme under which he would collect rice from farmers' homes and brief them about the benefits of the new agri legislations, as part of efforts to blunt the opposition "anti-farmer" allegations against the BJP-led Central government following farmers protests.



Charred remains of furniture and other equipment inside the new born babies care unit of the Bhandara District General Hospital after a fire which broke out in the wee hours, in Bhandara district on Saturday. - PTI

Soot and smoke telltale signs of fire that claimed 10 lives

Bhandara, Jan. 9: The families of some of the 10 infants killed in a hospital fire here had complained about power fluctuations but no action was taken, alleged a former minister, as the blackened walls and charred furniture inside the ward told their own story of the ferocity of the blaze that broke out early Saturday.

Access to the Bhandara district hospital was barricaded to keep the media away and restless crowds milled around outside, anxious for any information on the deaths of the 10 infants, aged between one and three months, inside the Special Newborn Care unit.

The scale and nature of the incident left the people of this east Maharashtra city shaken and condolences poured in from various sections of society.

While politicians, including current and former ministers, were allowed inside the build-

● A NURSE first noticed smoke coming out from the neonatal section of the hospital and alerted doctors and other staff who reached there in five minutes

ing, scarcely anybody else was. Hospital authorities were tightlipped, refusing to divulge any information on the tragedy that had made national headlines.

As anxiety mounted, speaking to those allowed inside was the only way for reporters to get information and try and piece together a narrative.

Former Maharashtra energy minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule of the BJP claimed that relatives of the infants had complained about power fluctuations in the ward for the last week.

"I spoke with relatives of the deceased infants. They told me that power fluctu-

ations had been happening in the hospital ward since the last seven days. The relatives had asked the hospital staff to check electric switches etc, but apparently no action was taken," Bawankule said.

Demanding a high-level inquiry, he also alleged that the hospital didn't have proper fire safety and electrical equipment in place. According to him, a proposal to purchase fire safety equipment worth over ₹1 crore at the hospital sent to the principal secretary, health, and the director of health, in the state government is pending for approval.

While most people were not allowed inside, photographs from the ward gave an indication of intensity of the fire and its aftermath of soot and smoke.

The walls were blackened, only the occasional patch of yellow showing through, the floor was thick with ash and dust and much of the furniture

was charred. The metal stretchers and a few other accoutrements of a special hospital care unit such as the drip stand survived the fire, which broke out around 1.30 am.

In the midst of the gloom shone a bright blue and white sign saying LED.

State health minister Rajesh Tope told reporters that at least three of the 10 infants died of burn injuries while seven were suffocated to death because of the smoke.

District civil surgeon Pramod Khandate said there were 17 babies in the unit and seven were rescued.

A nurse first noticed smoke coming out from the neonatal section of the hospital and alerted doctors and other staff who reached there in five minutes, he said. Fire brigade personnel rescued seven babies from the 'inbound ward' of the unit but could not save the 10 other babies, he said. - PTI

Vaccination set to begin from Sat

World's biggest inoculation drive to curb Covid to begin

DC CORRESPONDENTS NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Putting an end to the long wait for the Covid-19 vaccination, the union government on Saturday announced that the nationwide inoculation drive will begin from January 16.

The date has been decided keeping in mind the forthcoming festivals like Lohri, Makar Sankranti, Pongal, Magh Bihu etc.

India till date has over 1.04 crore cases and over 1.50 lakh fatalities due to Covid-19. In the last 24 hours 18, 222 fresh cases and 228 new deaths have been recorded. The total number of people with the new mutated strain of UK virus has now reached 90.

India is ready to protect humanity with not just one but "two made in India Corona vaccines" and the world "is also eyeing how India runs the world's largest vaccination programme", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday while addressing the 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.

"Today, India is ready to protect humanity with not one but two Made in India vaccines. Being the pharmacy of the world, India has done the work of delivering essential medicines to every needy in the world and is still doing it today. Today, the world is not only waiting for India's vaccine, but it is also eyeing how India runs the world's largest vaccination programme," he said.

"In this era of pandemic, India again showed what our potential is. ... Be it PPE kits, masks, ventilators, testing kits, all these were (earlier) sought from outside India. India has today not only become self-reliant in them but has started

● MORE THAN 61,000 programme managers, 2 lakh vaccinators and 3.7 lakh other vaccination team members have been trained for the drive.

● EMERGENCY USE Authorisation has been granted for Covishield (by SII) and Covaxin (Bharat Biotech).

exporting many of these products as well. Today India is one of the countries with the lowest Fatality Rate and Fastest Recovery Rate in the world," he added.

Emergency Use Authorisation or Accelerated Approval has been granted by the Drug Controller General of India for Covishield (by SII) and Covaxin (Bharat Biotech).

Central government is in the process of procuring the vaccines that will be delivered to main hubs in each zone and taken to different parts of the country from there. Priority will be given to the healthcare workers and the frontline workers, estimated to be around 3 crores in number; followed by those above 50 years of age and the under-50 population groups with co-morbidities numbering around 27 crore.

According to officials, the vaccination exercise will be conducted utilising experience of elections (booth strategy) and Universal Immunization Program without compromising of existing healthcare services, especially national programs and primary health care.

The PM was also apprised about the Co-WIN Vaccine Delivery Management System that will provide real time

PDP leader released on bail

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, JAN.9

People's Democratic Party (PDP) youth leader Waheed Ur Rehman Parra was on Saturday released from over six week long detention after a special court of National Investigation Agency (NIA) at Jammu granted him bail.

The NIA had arrested Mr. Parra on November 25 for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh in January last year.

Since the arrest had come merely two days after Mr. Parra's filing his nomination papers for J&K's maiden District Development Council (DDC) elections, the PDP

● THE NIA HAD arrested Parra on November 25 for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh.

had termed the NIA's action as a political blackmail of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Mr Parra subsequently won this election with a significant margin of votes from a segment of home district Pulwama while still in NIA custody. However, he wasn't allowed to take the oath as a member even via online mode despite a directive from the court.

The NIA had, however, maintained that Mr. Parra was arrested by it "in con-

nection with the Naveed Babu-Davinder Singh case for supporting Hizb-ul-Mujahideen in conspiracy with the other accused persons."

Mr. Parra was on December 20 sent to a 30-day judicial remand by a special judge of the NIA. A team of Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK), a wing of J&K police, carried out a raid at his home in Pulwama on December 30.

Late Saturday night, PDP president and former chief minister, Mehbooba Mufti, informed that Mr. Parra has been detained by an Intelligence wing of the J&K police now and while questioning it's legality she sought Lt. Governor; Manoj Sinha's intervention in the matter.

She tweeted, "Despite NIA Court granting bail to @parawahid after thorough court proceedings, he has now been detained by CIK in Jammu. Under what law & for what crime

has he been arrested? This is brazen contempt of court. Request @manoj-sinha_ ji to intervene so that justice is served."

Earlier this week, the NIA had sought the details of his properties in Srinagar from the J&K police.

According to the agency, during the investigations into Singh's association with the Hizb militants, it came across phone records of Mir which showed that he was in close contact with Mr. Parra. The NIA sources had added that Mir had claimed during questioning that Mr. Parra sought his support during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for his party candidate Mehbooba Mufti.

Singh who last served as Deputy Superintendent of Police at the Anti-Hijacking Squad at the Srinagar International Airport is facing charges under various anti terror laws for helping separatist militants back home.

Idea of forming anti-BJP alliance in Assam fades

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, JAN. 9

The idea of forming a grand alliance of anti-BJP parties by Congress in Assam has started fading with two newly formed regional parties rejecting the offer and a month after contesting the Bodoland Territorial Council elections together the Congress has denied having any tie up with the All India United Democratic Front for assembly polls in April.

Confusion over the proposed alliance between Congress and AIUDF started after AICC general secretary and party's state in-charge Jitendra Singh said that the Congress high command will not bypass the opinion of ground level workers before finalising an alliance with AIUDF for the 2021 Assam elections. "There is nothing

regarding the alliance. I have not met Mr. Badruddin Ajmal and nobody is in touch (regarding the alliance with AIUDF)," Mr. Singh told reporters. "I don't think there have been any talks between the Congress high command and AIUDF leaders. Any discussion on alliance politics has to go through the general secretary in-charge for the state," said Mr. Singh

The remarks of the AICC general secretary came soon after AIUDF supremo Badruddin Ajmal said that an alliance between the two parties was going to be finalized soon.

"Talks on Congress and AIUDF ties are at the final stage," said Mr. Ajmal. In fact the idea of forming a grand alliance of all the anti-CAA forces was floated and stitched by late chief minister Tarun

Gogoi. Two newly formed regional political parties - Assam Jatiya Parishad and Rajior Dai have also rejected the idea of grand alliance with the Congress party.

"Since the beginning, our stand is clear. We will try to unite all regional forces and maintain distance from the national parties. We are firm on this and so we have decided to form an alliance with Rajior Dai. An agreement in this regard will be signed very soon," AJP president, Lurinjoyoti Gogoi told reporters.

Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) led by Lurinjoyoti Gogoi, former All Assam Students' Union (AASU) leader and Rajior Dai led by jailed farmers' leader Akhil Gogoi came into being following the anti-CAA agitation in December 2019, which turned violent.

SECURITY | MATTERS

Army says the apprehended soldier is being dealt with as per laid down procedures

Amidst stand-off, Chinese soldier captured in Ladakh

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Indian Army apprehended a Chinese soldier on Friday morning in South bank of Pangong Tso lake in Eastern Ladakh where India and China are involved in a tense military stand off for last eight months.

The soldier was caught near Gurung Hill, which is one of the peaks in Kailash range, which Indian Army had pre-emptively occupied in August in tit for tat action against Chinese aggression on North bank of Pangong Tso. The move meant that

Indian soldiers dominated peaks in the area and had choked PLA movement in the sector.

The Indian Army move had caught Chinese by surprise and they had made several unsuccessful attempts to occupy these peaks. The area had also witnessed firing incident for the first time in four decades between the two armies as tensions had escalated.

"The PLA soldier had transgressed across the LAC and was taken into custody by Indian troops deployed in this area," said Indian Army on Saturday.

In a strong statement Indian Army said that troops from either side are deployed along the LAC since friction erupted last year due to unprecedented mobilisation and forward concentration by Chinese troops.

"The PLA soldier is being dealt with as per laid down procedures and circumstances under which he had crossed the LAC are being investigated," said Indian Army.

Sources said the Chinese soldier is being questioned to know whether he accidentally crossed over or was trying to spy.

Earlier in October Indian

Army had apprehended a Chinese soldier in Demchok sector of Eastern Ladakh, who was returned.

Chinese state owned media *Global Times* said that China has called for an immediate return of the soldier, who it claimed went missing due to "darkness and complicated geography".

It further claimed that China had informed India as soon as the incident occurred, and sought help from the Indian side.

The incident has happened at a time when there has been no breakthrough in talks on disen-

23 SAILORS STUCK IN CHINA TO RETURN ON JAN. 14

New Delhi, Jan. 9: Twenty-three Indian sailors stuck in China will return on January 14, Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Saturday.

The cargo ship MV Jag Anand is set to sail towards Chiba in Japan, Mandaviya said.

"Our seafarers stuck in China are coming to India. Ship MV Jag Anand, hav-

ing 23 Indian crew, stuck in China is set to SAIL toward Chiba, Japan, to carry out crew change, will reach India on 14th January," the ports, shipping and waterways minister said in a tweet.

He said this could be made possible only due to the strong leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mandaviya also acknowledged "the

humanitarian approach of the Great Eastern Shipping Company towards the seafarers and standing by them in this crucial time!"

On December 30, 2020, he had said that Indian sailors stuck in China will be brought back soon as diplomatic talks are on with the neighbouring country.

been no further rounds of Corps Commanders meeting since November 6.



SHORT TAKES

English course for teachers launched

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia launched TESOL Core Certificate Programme for Delhi government school teachers. The programme is conducted by the US Embassy's Regional English Language Office. The program will enhance English language teaching competency of the participant teachers which will improve English teaching in government school classrooms. The current batch is of 50 teachers. "It is important for the teachers to keep enhancing their skills. We want our teachers to do the things they already know differently. This course will bring more creativity in classrooms," said Mr Sisodia. Regional English Language Officer Ruth Goode from the US Embassy in India was also present during the launch. She acknowledged the long association of the US Embassy with the Delhi government and appreciated the efforts taken by the deputy chief minister in ensuring that Delhi government teachers learn from the best. "We really value our relationship with the Delhi government. We have trained around 800 teachers in the past and will continue to support more in the future," She said. The Regional English Language Office of the US Embassy has trained around 800 teachers from Delhi government schools since 2017. They have worked on creating a pool of master trainers who have subsequently trained primary and secondary school teachers on innovative English teaching in classrooms. "We will provide all kinds of support to the teachers for learning new ways of teaching," Mr Sisodia added.

Javadekar launches digital calendar

New Delhi: Union minister for information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar on Saturday launched the digital calendar and diary of Government of India. In a ceremony held at National Media Center, Mr Javadekar, with the click of a button unveiled the Android and iOS mobile applications of the calendar and diary. On the occasion, the minister said that the government calendar that adorned the walls in the past will now adorn mobile phones. Highlighting the features of the app, Mr Javadekar said: "The app was free and will be available in 11 languages from 15th January, 2021. The app will do away with the need for a new calendar every year". He further added: "Each month will carry a theme and an accompanying message and will feature one famous Indian personality. The app will also inform people about the timeline of launch of various government programmes so far". Speaking on the diary feature of the app, the minister said "because of the diary feature the calendar is more advanced, more feature laden and easier compared to other digital calendar apps". The Digital Calendar of Government of India is in line with Prime Minister's Vision of "Digital India" and can be accessed at click of a button on any smart phone. The app is available for download on both Google Play store and iOS app store. The app has been designed and developed by Bureau of Outreach and Communication, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in collaboration with National Informatics Centre (NIC). The application is currently available in Hindi and English language, and will be soon made available in 11 other Indian regional languages.

Decomposed body of woman found

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has recovered a highly decomposed body of a woman from near a drain in east Delhi's New Ashok Nagar area, officials said on Saturday. The age of the woman is around 25 to 30 years, they said. On Friday at 2.45 pm, information was received regarding a body of a woman near Chilla Regulator drain. In the garbage lying near the drain, a highly decomposed body of a woman, height about 5'2" has been found. There was no physical injury seen on the body, a senior police officer said, adding that investigation is underway to identify the body.

Import of live chicken into city banned in view of bird flu scare

Ghazipur poultry market in Delhi closed for 10 days

New Delhi, Jan. 9: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Saturday, announced a ban on import of live birds in the national capital and closure of Ghazipur poultry market for the next 10 days in view of the bird flu scare.

Noting that there is no confirmed case of avian influenza in Delhi so far, the chief minister said samples have been sent to Jalandhar laboratory.

He also said that a 24-hour helpline has been set up for the assistance of people.

"In the last few days, there have been several cases of bird flu across various parts of the country, which is a cause of worry. Cases of bird flu have been registered in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

"No confirmed case of bird flu has been registered in Delhi until now. We have collected around 104 samples until now,

which have been sent to Jalandhar for testing and examination in a laboratory," Mr Kejriwal said at a press conference.

He said Delhi is taking several steps to control the spread of bird flu as a precautionary measure.

"Upon receiving the results on Monday, the Delhi government will take all decisions and measures based on the results. The import of live birds is being completely banned from Saturday onwards. Secondly, the Ghazipur poultry market in Delhi will remain shut for the next 10 days," Mr Kejriwal added.

He said the Delhi government is following all guidelines and directions issued by the Central government with regard to bird flu.

"Rapid response teams have been formed in every district to contain the spread and conduct proper surveillance.

"They will function under the district magistrates. Our veterinary offi-

No confirmed case of bird flu has been registered in Delhi until now. We have collected around 104 samples, which have been sent to Jalandhar for testing and examination in a laboratory.

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM



cers are conducting proper surveys in all bird markets, wildlife establishments, and water bodies across Delhi.

"The special focus of the teams is Ghazipur poultry market, Shakti Sthal Lake, Bhalswa Lake, Sanjay Lake, Delhi Zoo, and DDA Parks situated at Hauz Khas village, Pashchim Vihar, and Dwarka," Mr Kejriwal said.

The chief minister said that the news of birds dying is also coming from across Delhi and the rapid response teams of those districts are conducting adequate inspection of the situation.

— PTI

10 ducks die at Sanjay Lake, 24 crows found dead in Jasola park

New Delhi, Jan. 9: Three recreational parks and famous Sanjay Lake in Delhi were closed by authorities on Saturday amid an avian flu scare in the city as several birds were found dead on their premises in the last couple of days, officials said.

Besides, the popular Hauz Khas Park in south Delhi, which is a huge water body and attracts a large number of crowd every day, has also been shut, they said.

At least 24 crows have been found dead at a district park in south Delhi's Jasola in the past three days and 10 ducks have died at the famous Sanjay Lake, officials said on Sunday.

The DDA, which owns a large number of parks in the city, said authorities are monitoring the situation closely.

"The samples of ducks found dead have been taken by the veterinary department authorities to ascertain if the cause of death was bird flu or not," a senior DDA official said.

On the death of crows, the DDA has informed the Delhi government's forest department, he said.

"We are monitoring the situation very closely as DDA owns a large number of public parks many of which have water bodies," the official said.

— PTI



Ducks at Sanjay Lake in New Delhi on Saturday. Amid a bird flu scare, ten ducks were found dead in the lake.

519 Covid-19 cases, 12 deaths in city in 24 hours

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Delhi recorded as many as 519 fresh coronavirus cases on Saturday.

With this, the tally of Covid-19 cases in the national capital has reached over 6.29 lakh while the death toll mounted to 10,666. Twelve fatalities have been recorded in the last 24 hours.

According to a health bulletin issued by the Delhi government, 80,275 Covid-19 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours.

The case tally stands at 6,29,801 in the national capital, including 6,15,452 patients who have either been discharged or have migrated or recovered.

The number of active cases is 3,683, of which 1,652 are in home isolation.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Saturday, appealed to the Centre to provide free Covid-19 vaccine to everyone.

Delhi govt school teachers in frontline workers list for Covid vaccine rollout

New Delhi, January 9: Teachers of government schools in the national capital engaged in Covid-19 duty will be placed in the category of frontline workers and will be vaccinated on priority.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Saturday.

Sharing an article from a newspaper Sisodia tweeted, "Teachers of Delhi have played a role in the fight against Corona, step by step with the government.

Quarantine centers, Containment zones, Surveys, Mask checking duties and online studies they have been ahead."

"This is why the government has also placed

NDMC starts drive to remove hoardings from public places

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

New Delhi Municipal Council's (NDMC) enforcement department has initiated an intensive drive to remove posters, banners, and illegal hoardings or advertisements installed at public places and busy markets in areas falling under the civic body.

"The team has conducted an intensive inspection of the area around Gole Market, Connaught Place, Janpath, Shivaji Stadium, Regal, Rivoli, Shankar Market, K.G. Marg, Barakhmbha Road, and Bengali Market and removed all types of defacement of property items," a senior NDMC official said.

"The civic agency officials are also creating awareness by meeting several market associations and asking them to immediately remove unauthorised advertisements, self-signage, flexes, and hoardings that have been erected in violation of the Delhi Outdoor Advertising Policy, 2017,

40% drop in vector-borne diseases, claims SDMC

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

The South Delhi Municipal Corporation has claimed a 40 per cent drop in vector borne diseases.

Leader of house, SDMC, Narendra Chawla said that due to timely action taken by the Corporation there was a sharp drop reported in the number of cases of Dengue, Malaria and Chikungunya in the 2020.

According to Mr Chawla, the field staff, despite Covid-19 pandem-

ic and lockdown, visited every household and public place for prevention of control of vector-borne diseases in the SDMC area.

"During a year, a total of 41,73,769 house visits were done by the field staff out of which 24,528 houses were found positive for breeding of mosquitoes. Even our staff used PPE kits besides taking other precautionary measures when found mosquito breeding in houses/areas where Covid-19 cases were reported," said Mr Chawla.

and the Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, 2007," the official added.

As per the Outdoor Advertisement Policy, prior permission of the chairman of the NDMC is required to display any advertisement to public view in any manner.

"Self-signage will not be allowed beyond the length of the shop or exceeding 2.5 square meters as per the policy. In case self-signage is beyond the total area of 2.5 square metres, the same requires prior permission from the chairman of NDMC," the official said.

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

The body of a 10-year-old boy was recovered from a mosque in northeast Delhi's Khajuri Khas area, police said on Saturday.

Police have arrested two juveniles — 17-year-old and 12-year-old — for killing the victim. The accused wanted to extort money from the deceased's father by kidnapping him, they said.

According to police, one Shamim, a resident of Shri Ram Colony, lodged a missing report of his 10-year-old son at Khajuri Khas police station on Friday.

The minor boy was missing since the intervening

night of Thursday and Friday. Shamim said that on Thursday around 6:50 pm, his son went to Madina Masjid of Shri Ram Colony, but did not return, police said.

During investigation, joint search was conducted by police and the parents of child in the nearby areas of their house.

Police found the body of a boy buried under the debris in a corner on the second floor of the Madina Masjid. Shamim identified him as his son Farhan, they said.

Police analysed the CCTV footages of the area. All the persons present in the Madina Masjid at the time of 'Isha nama' around 7.15 pm were



Farmers during their month-long protest against the new farm bill at Tikri border in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. JHA

Plea in SC seeking removal of farmers from protest sites

'Protesters blocking roads, causing inconvenience to people'

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

As stalemate continues over the farm bill, with both government and farmer refusing to blink, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court of India on Saturday seeking removal of farmers from protest sites on Delhi border on the grounds that the protesters were blocking roads causing inconvenience to people.

The petitioner has also mentioned that violent

protests have taken place in some places and they have destroyed telecom towers causing inconvenience and financial loss to the public. The Supreme Court is expected to hear a bunch of petitions relating to the new Farm Bills on January 11. The next round of talks between the farmers and government is to be held on January 15.

Meanwhile, a 72-year-old farmer allegedly died due to suicide at a protest site in Ghaziabad. "The deceased was found hang-

ing at one of the mobile toilets at the protest site. He has also left behind a note which is written in Punjabi," said a police officer. Shamsheer Rana of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) said that the farmer had blamed the union government for not accepting the demands of the protesters.

Congress party has decided to stage protests outside all Governor Houses across the country on January 15, in support of farmers' agitation against farm laws.

Man killed in knife attack by drunken duo in Noida

Noida, Jan. 9: A man was killed in a knife attack allegedly while trying to protect his sister from a drunken duo after a scuffle on a Noida road, police said on Saturday. One of the accused has been arrested while searches are underway to nab the other, the police said.

The deceased, in his twenties, and his sister were returning home from a factory in Sector 8 where they work around 8.30 pm on Friday when the incident took place, according to officials.

"The brother-sister duo were walking on the road when the accused, both of whom were drunk, stumbled on the woman, leading to a scuffle in which the woman slapped one of the accused, additional deputy commissioner of police, Noida, Ranvijay Singh said.

In the melee, the accused, who were probably carrying knives, took them out and tried to attack the woman. Her brother tried to stop the attackers and got stabbed on his thigh in the action, Singh said.

He said the local police immediately reached the spot on being alerted and rushed the man to a hospital where he subsequently died due to excessive bleeding.

One of the accused has been arrested and the other is absconding. Searches are underway to nab the other also and an FIR has been lodged at the local Sector 20 police station, Singh added.

— PTI

Cop suspended in Noida for assaulting, looting 2 persons

DC CORRESPONDENT
NOIDA, JANUARY 9

A policeman deployed in Noida has been suspended for "indecent" after being accused of assaulting and looting two people, who had given him a lift in their car, officials said on Saturday.

A senior police official said the accused head constable, who is attached with the Dadri police station, has been suspended for "indecent" as the allegations of loot and assault have not been proved.

According to the complainant, he and his brother were headed to Bulandshahr from Noida around 3 pm on Friday when Head Constable Ombir Bhati hitchhiked a ride in their car.

The complainant has alleged that during the ride, the policeman threatened them with his firearm and took away some documents and cash from them.

"Head constable Ombir Bhati has been found guilty of indecent and has been suspended from service. A departmental inquiry has been initiated into the matter. Other allegations, including firing and loot, have not been confirmed," deputy commissioner of police, Greater Noida, Rajesh Kumar Singh said.

Around a dozen policemen have been shunted or suspended for assaulting, manhandling or harassing people across Noida and Greater Noida in Gautam Buddh Nagar district since May 2020.

11 men detained for defacing signboards in Lutyens Delhi

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Delhi Police on Saturday detained 11 people for allegedly defacing two Aurangzeb Lane signboards in Lutyens Delhi on Saturday.

According to a senior police official, a police control room (PCR) call received information at 5.40 AM that a few people have gathered at Aurangzeb Lane, Tughlaq Road following which a police team was dispatched for the spot.

"After reaching the spot, police personnel found that 11 people led by Anuradha Bhargav (30), a resident of Karnal and an advocate by profession, had defaced an Aurangzeb Lane signboard and pasted a poster saying Guru Teg Bahadur Lane, on another signage," said the senior police official.

"They were detained and taken to Tughlaq Road police station," the official said, adding that a probe into the matter is underway.

10-yr-old boy killed for ransom, 2 juveniles nabbed

Police found the body of a boy buried under the debris in a corner on the second floor of the Madina Masjid. Police analysed the CCTV footages of the area. All the persons present in the Madina Masjid at the time of 'Isha nama' around 7.15 pm were examined and it was found that the victim Farhan was last seen with his two minor friends.

examined and it was found that the victim was last seen with his two minor friends, they said.

"Both the juveniles were examined separately and contradictions were found in their versions. Later, they confessed to killing Farhan. On their confession, both the juveniles were apprehended," Deputy Commissioner of Police (northeast) Ved Prakash Surya said.

Interrogation revealed that the juveniles wanted to extort money from deceased's father by kidnapping him. They planned it some days ago that they will kidnap the child and will demand ransom from his father for his safe release, the DCP said.

To execute their plan, they gave the victim water laced with sleeping pills around 10 days ago, but nothing happened to Farhan and their plan got failed, police said.

On Friday, the 17-year-old boy gave money to another accused and asked him to bring momos from a nearby vendor at about 7 pm. On the pretext of eating momos, they took Farhan to the first floor of the Madina Masjid where they ate the snack and thereafter, took the deceased to the roof of the mosque, police said.

On reaching the roof, the 17-year-old juvenile pulled down Farhan and strangled him while the other accused held his legs.

When Farhan died, they hid his body in the debris at the corner of the second floor of the mosque and put a plastic bag containing sand over it, Surya said.

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Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Off the beaten track

C-virus funk? Relax, and respect the kids

Parenting is a thankless job except when your child flashes you an admiring look of appreciation and love or envelopes you in a warm, spontaneous hug. But most of the time, you — the parent — are under scrutiny, by your children, your parents and relatives, society and indeed the law — with everyone expecting you to trip up.

The job comes with perks. You get to make the rules — mostly. But more commonly parents are running up the down escalator — coping with their own personal disasters and ghosts, pretending to be in control of the situation or just making do with paying the daily bills.

The most challenging scenario is when “special children” are born. So steeped are most of us in the quicksand of the “norm” that anything out of that spectrum imposes extreme stress. The wonder is that most parents do eventually cope with the daunting task of loving and serving unconditionally.

But parenting is never easy. Nor does one fall automatically into it — at least not well enough. It is fairly straightforward to make babies. Sadly, it is never straightforward to nudge them to grow up to be humane, empathetic, caring siblings, mothers or fathers, responsible citizens and productive members of society.

Even in ordinary times, parenting is a formidable task. It becomes much harder in extraordinary times. Think long wars or extended violence — there are fifty-five such events happening across the globe. Add to that periodic drought, famine, economic distress or the pandemic we are struggling through.

What should parents do if carefully formulated plans collapse into mere physical survival? Look back to the “hunter-gatherer” age for role models? Is it even sensible to bring up a child believing in the “nice” social lessons of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, learnt over the last century, when society itself seems to be hurtling back to where we began?

More than 90,000 people died in 2020 in continuing conflicts across the globe — some of these started as early as 1947 and continue glowing like the embers of a major fire. Covid-19 has devastated human life and social norms more decisively than any other calamity and more confusingly so since there is no one to blame but ourselves.

Perhaps there is a lesson there for us and our children. An old one. Just one rotten apple destroys an entire pile. We should change our rotten ways if our children are to identify and shun rot. The maxim of survival of the fittest is the “learnt knowledge” born out of uncaring times. If society thrives so do, we. The impending disaster from climate change illustrates this truism.

The difficult part is how to embed these noble notions into a workable social ethic which preserves the spirit of competition without impeding collaboration; recognises the human impetus for acquisition but tempers it with a notion of relative equality; acknowledges that humans are not saints but nor are they Hobbesian creatures of dystopia.

When faced with a conundrum, parents assume that role modeling will do the trick — being the person you want your child to be. This is an honest way to go — you can’t expect your child to be honest, fair and just if you aren’t. But even this doesn’t guarantee success. No child is a clone of their parents. And force fitting them into narrow roles has an even chance of success or disaster.

Parenting is a high-risk venture. There are so many moving parts, any of which could pitch the game against the parent or the child. Covid-19 is one such. It has also taken away the relief that external actors — teachers, friends, extended family — gave hard pressed parents via “me time”. “Family time” is all we have for those working from home. This is what most parents wished for. Many might now be having second thoughts. Possibly children too feel similarly. Too much of a good thing is never as good as when it is rationed out in dribbles.

Here are three survival strategies to get you through Covid-19 with your sanity intact.

First, quit role modeling. It’s stressful to keep up an act 24X7. Being yourself can bring surprisingly good results. Children are very resilient. They know that adults are fallible and can be surprisingly responsible when asked for help. It is we, adults, who force them into infantile irresponsibility well beyond the initial years when this assumption is valid.

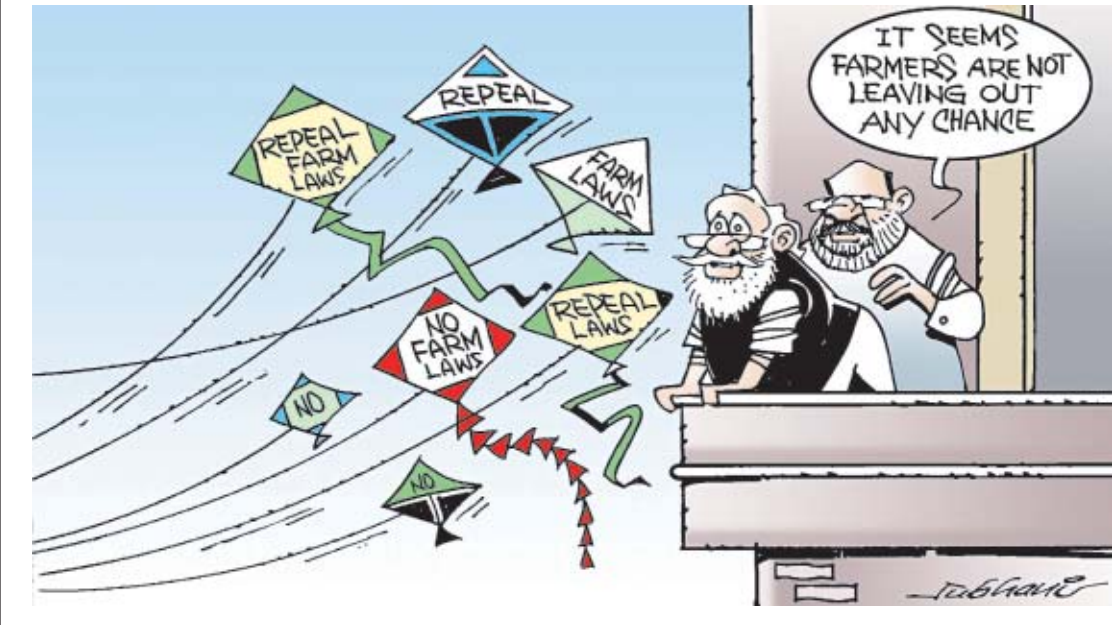
Second, imagine what you always wanted your boss to do — to quit micro-managing you. Become your ideal boss. Lay out fair rules on how your lives will run. Encourage your children to become equal partners in fleshing out what this means in practice — who does what, when and why. Things will probably not work like clockwork. The house will become messy. The kids may need time to discipline themselves about homework or time spent on social media. Your spouse might resent the change just as much as the kids. But in the end, there is a good chance everyone will sort themselves out per their natural inclinations and capacities.

Third, avoid dreaming of the future. “*Que sera sera*” remains the motto. The only thing real is the present — remain in it. This doesn’t mean that planning should be junked. But a future directed by you is as dead as the Planning Commission. Shape your children into commandos — street smart but equipped with the attributes for happiness and success — good health, a head for languages and code, music and art, digital capability and high social and human capacity. The rest will unfold as challenges and opportunities present themselves.

Children are born pure and unsullied. It is we who contaminate them with backward looking limitations. Now is a good time to shed the patrimonial legacy of parenthood and discover the joy of surviving together — the good news being — no one is watching, excepting you.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



Why J. Khanna dissented from Central Vista ruling



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya’s View

The Supreme Court (SC) has in a two-against-one judgment given a conditional green signal to the government’s plans to massively rebuild the central core of the capital of the Republic. We have no option but to accept the view of the highest court of the land, but the dissenting judgment of Justice Sanjiv Khanna raises issues which, if brushed under the carpet, would sanctify the government’s predilection to rule by law rather than that by rule of law.

The old saying, the way to hell is paved with good intentions, has a new resonance to the manner in which our current government acts. The end goal is often good, but the manner in which it is sought to be achieved is sorely wanting. The recent farm laws provide an illustrative example. No one can question the proposition that the agricultural sector needs reforms. But there is something inherently undemocratic if the reforms are pushed through without adequate consultations.

The farm bills were passed by blatantly violating every procedure and protocol of Parliament; they were hurriedly cleared on a Sunday, without sufficient discussion, by a voice vote, and without referring them to a Select Committee where the views of stakeholders could be taken on board in an organized and transparent manner. The farmers massed on the borders of Delhi are basically saying that there was no conversation with them.

This is precisely what a great many concerned citizens, members of civil society, architects,

town planners, environmental experts, landscapists, conservationists, and heritage specialists are saying about the rebuilding of New Delhi. Justice Sanjiv Khanna, in his dissenting judgment, used a very telling expression to describe the undemocratic opacity of the government. He said that there was a lack of “adequate and intelligible disclosure”. A project of this nature, he went on to elaborate, must involve the public as they are the real stakeholders of national heritage; the public must be given an informed voice; it should have had “fair participation” in deliberations, and given appropriate information and details.

This was especially important, Justice Khanna said, because the proposed changes to the heart of New Delhi’s heritage core are not only massive, but irreversible. Physical construction or demolitions cannot be undone, and have permanent consequences. The argument, it must be reiterated, is not against change. Cities are not fossilised in the past. The government is within its rights to make changes. Nor is Lutyens’ legacy writ in stone. In any case, as a person,

Why was an open design competition not held? On what criteria did the government’s in-house committee decide that a Gujarat based firm, which may have done the redevelopment of the Sabarmati river front, had the best design even when its bid was the most expensive?

Justice Sanjiv Khanna, in his dissenting judgment, used a very telling expression to describe the undemocratic opacity of the government. He said that there was a lack of ‘adequate and intelligible disclosure’.

Lutyens was an incorrigible racist, with a deep sense of contempt for Indians and all things Indian. But the city he designed with Herbert Baker has been part of our history for the last seven decades and more. If we wish to change our architectural past, should not that process be fully transparent, and informed by adequate and intelligible information put out in the public realm?

The answer, of course, is yes. But was this done? Many questions hang unanswered in the air. Why was the original brief for the project marked by such uncommunicative brevity? Why were all the drawings, layout plans and explanatory memoranda, inviting suggestions and objections, not put on a public website? Why was an open design competition not held? Why was a public jury of well-known non-governmental experts along with government nominees not constituted to decide the best bid? On what criteria did the government’s in-house committee decide that a Gujarat based firm, which may have done the redevelopment of the Sabarmati river front, had the best design even when its bid was the most expensive? Why have the criteria for this subjective and secretive selection not been made public even now? Why was the permission of the Heritage Conservation Committee not obtained? Why was the environment clearance granted by the Expert Appraisal

Committee not a speaking order, clearly giving reasons, and as Justice Sanjiv Khanna observed, showing application of mind? Why was a detailed report showing why our current Parliament needs to be junked, and is beyond all retrofitting to suit future needs, not made public? Since the changes involved building a new Parliament, could not there have been a discussion in Parliament, rather than merely briefing representatives of political parties?

The BJP may have an absolute majority in Parliament, but that does not mean that the process of democratic consultation, and the imperative of transparency, can be dispensed with. When governments behave as if they know best what is good for the people, and treat the views of the people themselves as unimportant, the consequences lack credibility and legitimacy. On a TV debate the other day, Mohandas Pai said that democracy cannot mean checking out every decision with all the people. My only response to him is not to trivialise the democratic process. Obviously, not everyone can be consulted, but there are standard and institutionalised ways in which the government can attempt to gauge what is best for the people. When this is not done through intelligent and adequate disclosure, and a transparent process of consultations, the result is contentious and counter-productive. This is what the angry farmers are saying, and this is what those who are distressed at manner of the remaking of New Delhi, are reiterating. Their views are best summed up in this couplet: *Yun dikhata hai aankhen mujhe baagbhaan, jaise gulshan pe kuch haq har-mara nahin*. The caretaker of the garden looks at me such, as though I have no say in the well-being of the garden.

The writer, an author and a diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

LOCAL BODY POLLS

State Election

Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar has taken the right decision to hold the gram panchayat polls from February 5 to 17 in four phases (*SEC calls 4-phase local polls in Feb, AP objects, DC, Jan. 9*). The state government’s objections are not reasonable and it is better to proceed with the polls. Even if the government goes to Supreme Court, it won’t benefit the government but spoils its reputation.

P. Govardhana Rao

Kankipadu, Krishna district

The SEC’s decision to issue the election notification will be futile and ineffective. To conduct the polls smoothly, the SEC and the ruling dispensation need to be on the same page. It calls for coordination and consensus which is not there. By not taking the stakeholders into confidence, the mess that has been created with the new farm laws is a case in point.

Dr C. Ghanshyam

Visakhapatnam

FARMERS’ PROTEST

The failure of eighth round of talks between farmers and the Centre on the three farm laws is disappointing. With both the parties refusing to budge from their stand, the chance to find an amicable solution has become nearly impossible. Anyway the government has more responsibility to break the deadlock in the interest of farmers and the nation. Why can’t the well-intended government step back and win the hearts to find a solution with double benefits? The farmers’ income and the reformers’ image may improve.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao

Vizianagaram

BENGAL ALLIANCE

The Congress-CPM electoral alliance for WB elections will only help the BJP split the TMC vote bank. The only way to checkmate the BJP is by following MVA example of SS-NCP-INC alliance — no less. Mamata must leave her ivory tower and take on the BJP juggernaut by aligning with her traditional adversaries.

K. Nehru Patnaik

Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Abdullah externed from J&K

NEW DELHI, JANUARY. 9

AN order of externment was served on Sheikh Abdullah early today for bidding him from entering the State of Jammu and Kashmir for a period of three months.

Sheikh Abdullah is currently in Delhi. A similar order was served yesterday on Mirza Afzal Beg, Plebiscite Front Leader.

Sheikh Abdullah, it is clarified, is not under arrest. But, he cannot enter the State under the externment order issued under the Jammu and Kashmir Maintenance of Public Order.

The externment orders, under the Public Maintenance of Public Order Act of Jammu and Kashmir were served on the Sheikh and his son-in-law G. M. Shah, who is General Secretary of the Plebiscite Front, at the Sheikh’s New Delhi residence No. 3 Kotla Lane.

The order was served on Mirza Afzal Beg, President of Front, last evening while he was proceeding from Jammu to Srinagar by car.

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Divide and win Sikh farmers; artist’s mighty snub to govt

The Akali Dal-controlled Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee has announced that it will not be inviting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Sikh centenary events in protest against the Centre’s “anti-farmer” stand but it has not stopped informal contacts between the government and Akali Dal leaders as both sides attempt to resolve the ongoing farmers’ stir. Akali Dal’s Rajya Sabha MP Naresh Gujral is said to have called up urban development minister Hardeep Puri recently to draw his attention to the number of Sikh farmers who have died in the last month and urged him to find an early solution to the protests. Mr Puri apparently showed no remorse and instead asked the Akali MP to ensure that the Leftists are kept out of the picture. The BJP is convinced that the protests are being led and managed by Left-leaning activists and cannot countenance dealing with or yielding to their demands. In any case, Mr Puri is also said to have told Mr Gujral that the Modi government has no intention of

repealing the farm laws but is willing to tweak certain clauses to provide a face-saver to the farmers.

As the only Sikh minister in the Modi government, Hardeep Puri has been fielded in the media regularly after farmers from Punjab and Haryana began their protest at the Delhi border. On his part, Mr Puri is doing his bit to appease and mollify the angry Sikh community. It was, therefore, not surprising that the minister made time last week, despite his hectic schedule, to release a coffee table book on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, authored by Harminder Kaur. Mr Puri later posted photographs of the release function held in his office with a short message mentioning the author’s name and that the paintings in the book were by artist Arpana Caur. However, Arpana Caur was missing from Mr Puri’s photographs. According to the grapevine, Ms Caur refused to attend in protest against the Modi government’s Central Vista redevelopment plans. Arpana Caur is among the large number of

artists, architects and conservationists who have petitioned the Centre against the demolition of the buildings housing the National Museum and the Indira Gandhi Centre National Centre for the Arts.

Stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui, who was arrested recently in Indore for allegedly making indecent remarks against Hindu deities, seems to have fallen victim to longstanding rivalry between BJP leaders. Mr Faruqui was taken into custody following a complaint by Eklavya Singh Gaur, son of local BJP legislator Malini Laxman Singh Gaur, who is a camp follower of Sumitra Mahajan, former Lok Sabha Speaker and former Indore MP. Ms Mahajan is known to be a long-time rival of BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, also from Indore. According to reports from Madhya Pradesh Eklavya Gaur had been chafing ever since Kailash Vijayvargiya’s son and BJP legislator Akash grabbed headlines last year when he beat up a civic body officer with a cricket bat,

Not only did he get away with it but the incident enhanced Akash’s political profile. Eklavya Gaur is hoping Mr Faruqui’s arrest will win him brownie points with the BJP bosses.

It would seem that the BJP is playing a cat-and-mouse game with former Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia, who joined the saffron party last March. After making him wait for nearly two months, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan finally expanded his Cabinet last week and re-inducted two Scindia loyalists — Tulsiram Silawat and Govind Raju — in the ministry. While appeasing Mr Scindia, the chief minister was also quick to send out a message that the former Congress leader cannot dictate terms to him. Two days after the Cabinet expansion, the Chouhan government ordered the transfer of Commissioner, Gwalior Municipal Corporation, Sandeep Makin, known to be close to Mr Scindia. In fact, Mr Scindia has been so protective about Mr Makin that even Kamal Nath could not touch the officer despite several

attempts to move him out.

Though the election for the Congress president’s post is yet to be announced and there is no formal word from Rahul Gandhi about his future plans, it is being assumed that the Nehru-Gandhi scion will return as party chief again. Word to this effect is doing the rounds in the Congress. Consequently, everyone, including senior Congress leaders, has started courting Rahul Gandhi’s team members. There is no “Ahmed Patel” in his office but Kaushal Vidyarthi is among those who is said to be a member of the Congress leader’s core team. It is, therefore, not surprising that he is much in demand with the Congress leaders who vie to get a word with him. One leader went as far as to suggest that Mr Vidyarthi’s role in Rahul Gandhi’s office can be compared to that of R.K. Dhawan and V. George in the offices of Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, respectively.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

EASTER ATTACKS:
U.S. CHARGES 3
SRI LANKANS

Washington, Jan. 9: The US has charged three Sri Lankan nationals for allegedly being part of a group of ISIS supporters responsible for the 2019 Easter attacks. Mohamed Nufar, Mohamed Anwar Mohamed Riskan and Ahamed Milhan Hayathu Moahmed are currently in custody in Sri Lanka. The criminal case was filed on December 11, in the US District Court in Los Angeles. Nufar, the "second emir" for the group of ISIS supporters that called itself "ISIS in Sri Lanka" who allegedly led the group's propaganda efforts, recruited others to join ISIS and led a series of multi-day military-type trainings. Riskan allegedly helped manufacture the IEDs used in the Easter Attacks; and Moahmed allegedly executed a police officer in order to obtain the officer's firearm, shot a suspected informant, and scouted a location for a separate terrorist attack.

INTEL OFFICIAL
'HURT' AFTER
OUSTER BY DON

Washington, Jan. 9: The ousted inspector general of the intelligence community says he is "disappointed and saddened" that President Donald Trump fired him, but he also encouraged other inspectors general to continue to speak out when they are aware of wrongdoing. Trump notified Congress late Friday evening that he intended to fire Michael Atkinson because he had lost confidence in him. On Saturday, Trump made it clear that the move had been retaliatory, telling reporters that Atkinson was a "disgrace" and had done "a terrible job" because he had provided an anonymous whistleblower complaint to Congress — a move that was required by law. Atkinson was required by law to notify Congress of the complaint, which was written by an anonymous intelligence official and detailed Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democrats.

GOOGLE BANS
PARLER FROM
PLAY STORE

Washington, Jan. 9: Internet giant Google has suspended US-based microblogging platform Parler — where most of the supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump are shifting their base — from its app store, citing posts inciting violence and demanding "robust" moderation for "egregious" content from the social networking service. Simultaneously, Apple also warned Parler on Friday that it will ban the service from its app store if it doesn't start to moderate its content better. The move by the two Silicon Valley companies came the day when Twitter permanently suspended Trump's account due to "risk of further incitement of violence". "In order to protect user safety on Google Play, our longstanding policies require that apps displaying user-generated content have moderation policies and enforcement that removes egregious content like spots that incite violence," Google said in a statement.

FBI SEARCHES
LAWMAKERS'
OFFICES, HOMES

Nashville, Jan. 9: Federal prosecutors in Tennessee have said that FBI agents have searched the homes and offices of several state lawmakers. US Attorney's Office of Middle Tennessee spokesman David Boling on Friday confirmed the searches included the homes of former GOP House Speaker Glen Casada, state Rep. Robin Smith and Casada's former chief of staff, Cade Cothren. The office of Republican Rep. Todd Warner also was searched, according to House Speaker Cameron Sexton. Boling declined to provide any further information regarding the nature of the searches and how many lawmakers were involved. A spokesman for the FBI referred all questions to the US Attorney's Office. Republican Gov. Bill Lee told reporters Friday that he had spoken to Sexton, a Republican from Crossville, about the searches, describing them as "FBI raids." "It's certainly very concerning. I know very little about that. There's been no FBI outreach to us," Lee said.

15 charged over
Capitol violence

Legal action against Trump demanded

Washington, Jan. 9: The US Justice Department announced Friday that it has charged 15 people involved in the assault on Congress, including one man accused of possessing bombs made to act like "homemade napalm." But Ken Kohl, a federal prosecutor with the Washington US attorney's office, said they did not expect to charge anyone with "incitement" or "insurrection" in Wednesday's violence, amid calls for legal action against President Donald Trump, his lawyer Rudy Giuliani and others for encouraging it. The department unveiled the cases against 13 people, including Richard Barnett, a Trump supporter who invaded the office of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Lonnie Coffman of Alabama, who was found carrying two handguns and had 11 Styrofoam-enhanced Molotov cocktails in his truck.

Others whose charges were unsealed include Christopher Albert of Maryland, who allegedly entered the US Capitol with a loaded handgun; and Mark Leffingwell, charged with punching an officer. Most of the 13 were charged with illegal entry into restricted buildings of Congress, and violent or disorderly conduct. They were also charged with impeding government functions after forcing the shutdown of a joint meeting of Congress to officially certify that Trump rival Joe Biden had won the November 3 election, which Trump had until Thursday refused to accept. Barnett, famously photographed with his feet on a desk in Pelosi's office, was charged with theft of stationery. "The lawless destruction of the US Capitol building was an attack against one of our nation's greatest institutions," said Acting US Attorney Michael Sherwin in a statement.

Kohl said that not all the charges filed over Wednesday's violence had been unsealed, and that more were in the pipeline as the FBI investigates. "This investigation has the highest priority," he said, with "hundreds" of Justice Department investigators working the case. Around 40 people were arrested and charged by

Don impeachment
is for Congress to
decide: Biden

Wilmington, Jan. 9: President-elect Joe Biden on Friday strongly indicated he does not back moves to impeach President Donald Trump, saying the quickest way to get him out of office is through the transition in two weeks. "The quickest way that will happen is us being sworn in on the 20th," said Biden, who will take the oath of office on January 20. "What actually happens before or after, that is a judgment for the Congress to make. But that's what I am looking forward to: him leaving office." The President-elect was addressing reporters in his hometown of Wilmington two days after Trump encouraged a mob of supporters to march on Congress. Democratic leaders in Congress have growing momentum for attempting to impeach Trump for the second time in his

The lawless destruction of the US Capitol building was an attack against one of our nation's greatest institutions.

— MICHAEL SHERWIN
Acting US Attorney

Washington police, mostly for curfew violations, weapons offences and unlawful entry. But the charges announced by Kohl Friday were on the federal level and potentially carry heavier punishment. He said the FBI was not investigating anyone on possible "incitement" or "insurrection" charges. Some people have called for Trump, Giuliani, Trump's son Donald Jr. and others to be charged with incitement for openly encouraging the president's supporters to take action just hours before the mob stormed the Capitol. "We don't expect any charges of that nature," Kohl said.

— AFP

presidency. There is little support so far among Republicans, although they too have loudly condemned Trump's behaviour. This was Biden's first extended reaction to the talk of impeaching Trump or trying to persuade Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th amendment removing the president from office. Biden's hesitancy to support his party on impeachment reflects the fact that he already faces a mammoth task in working to heal divisions in US society. "We're going to do our job and Congress can decide how to proceed," Biden said. "The idea that I think he shouldn't be out of office yesterday is not an issue. The question is what happens with 14 days to go, 13 days left to go?"

— AFP

POLICE UNION
HEAD SORRY FOR
DEFENDING MOB

Chicago, Jan. 9: The president of the Chicago Police officers' union apologised for defending the pro-Trump mob that stormed the US Capitol and downplaying this week's violence that left four people dead. In a statement posted on Facebook on Friday, John Catanzara, called his "poorly worded" comments made during an interview with WBEZ, Chicago's public radio station, a lapse in judgment. "I certainly would never justify any attacks on citizens, democracy or law enforcement," he wrote. In the initial comments, he characterised participants as supporters of the president who believed that the election had been stolen.

— AP

Indo-American Sabrina
is Harris' Dy Press Secy

Washington, Jan. 9: Indian-American Sabrina Singh would serve as Deputy Press Secretary to the Vice President in the White House, according to an announcement made by the Biden-Harris Transition. Singh was Press Secretary to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on the Biden-Harris campaign. Prior to her role on the campaign, she served as senior spokesperson for Mike Bloomberg's presidential campaign and National Press Secretary for Cory Booker's presidential campaign. She previously served as deputy communications director for the Democratic National Committee, spokesperson for American Bridge's Trump War Room and Regional

Communications Director on Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. Singh has also worked at SKDKnickerbocker, served as Communications Director for Representative Jan Schakowsky and worked at various Democratic committees, said the Biden-Harris Transition as it announced additional members of the Vice President's Office at the White House. Prominent among them being Yael Belkind, Assistant to the Chief of Staff to the Vice President; Vincent Evans as Deputy Director of the Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs; Michael Fuchs as Deputy Chief of Staff; Kate Childs Graham as Director of Speech Writing and Dr Ike

Irby as Policy Advisor to the Vice President. Deanne Millison has been named Deputy Policy Director to the Vice President; Rachel Palermo as Assistant Press Secretary; Mike Pyle as Chief Economic Advisor; Peter Velz as Director of Press Operations; and Herbie Ziskend as Deputy Communications Director. These diverse, experienced, and talented individuals will join the Office of the Vice President. The appointments demonstrate that the president and vice president-elect are building an administration that looks like America and is ready to deliver results for the American people on day one, the transition said.

— PTI

WINTRY | WEATHER

Storm Filomena leaves many areas under a white blanket
Spain sees heaviest snowfall in 50 yrs

Madrid, Jan. 9: Heavy snow continued to fall across much of Spain on Friday, causing chaos on the roads, particularly in the centre of the country, with the capital Madrid seeing its heaviest snowfall in 50 years. By nightfall, the extreme weather brought by Storm Filomena had left many areas under a deep blanket of white in a rare bout of wintry weather not seen in decades to the Iberian peninsula. As the snow showed no signs of letting up, Madrid's

d's Barajas airport halted all incoming and outgoing flights. "For safety reasons, operations have been stopped at #Airport AS #Madrid-Barajas, until visibility is improved. The work to clear the runways continues in order to resume operations as soon as possible #BorrascaFilomena," it tweeted. The blizzard also caused havoc on the roads, with nearly 400 affected across Spain and hundreds of vehicles stranded in the snow and ice. The worst-hit regions

were Castilla La Mancha, Valencia and Madrid, with the capital seeing its heaviest snowfall since 1971, Spain's public television said. Hours of intense snow which was still falling by 2100 GMT cut off the city's two main ringroads, the M30 and the M40, and a red alert was declared in the city centre where police struggled to help people stranded in vehicles. The transport authority said the snow had disrupted traffic on almost 400 main roads, where in

Twitter permanently bans Don

San Francisco, Jan. 9: Twitter said Friday it has permanently suspended President Donald Trump's account, citing the risk of further violence following the assault on the US Capitol by his supporters.

"After close review of recent Tweets from the @realDonaldTrump account," Twitter said in a blog post explaining its decision, "we have permanently suspended the account due to the risk of further incitement of violence." Twitter — Trump's favourite megaphone — blocked him for 12 hours after the deadly attack on the US Capitol on Wednesday and threatened permanent suspension if he continued breaking its rules.

Trump returned to Twitter late Thursday, posting a video message that seemed aimed at calming tensions after the mayhem

MY SUPPORT BASE, MYSELF WON'T
BE SILENCED: TRUMP AFTER BAN

Washington, Jan. 9: Outgoing US President Donald Trump has slammed Twitter for permanently suspending him, vowing that he and his support base would not be silenced. The unprecedented move by the California-based microblogging site on Friday comes after Trump tweeted that he would not attend the inauguration of his successor Joe Biden on January 20. At the time of suspension, Trump had 88.7 million followers and followed 51 people. In a statement

after he was banned, Trump said: "I predicted this would happen. We have been negotiating with various other sites, and will have a big announcement soon, while we also look at the possibilities of building out our own platform in the near future. We will not be SILENCED!" "Twitter is not about FREE SPEECH. They are all about promoting a Radical Left platform where some of the most vicious people in the world are allowed to speak freely.

— PTI

caused by his supporters. He acknowledged his presidency was ending and promised a smooth transi-

tion to Joe Biden, although he did not go so far as to congratulate or even say the name of his successor.



People queue for being tested for Covid-19 outside a municipal building on Saturday in Bagneux, a southern suburb of Paris, where a risk cluster of the mutant Coronavirus variant have been detected.

— AFP

China WHO trip: No timeline

Beijing, Jan. 9: China is ready to receive a WHO expert team to probe the origin of Covid-19 and has reached a consensus with the UN's top health agency, a senior Chinese official said on Saturday, but gave no specific timeline for the visit.

The exact time on when the WHO expert team will arrive in Wuhan, where the virus emerged in December last, and investigate into the coronavirus origin is still under negotiation, Zeng Yixin, deputy head of the National Health Commission, said. China and the World Health Organisation have reached a consensus on specific arrangements of the investigation with four video conferences, Zeng was quoted as saying by state-run *Global Times*.

Chinese experts are waiting for their WHO counterparts, he said. Once the WHO experts complete their procedures and finalise the schedule, Chinese experts will go to Wuhan with them to conduct the probe, Zeng was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

Zeng stressed that China's position on the WHO investigation is positive, open and supportive, and the country hopes such joint efforts would help deepen the understanding of the virus and better prevent infectious diseases in the future. In a rare instance of criticism from the global body, WHO chief

'Act like you have
got it' drive in UK

London, Jan. 9: The UK government on Saturday began rolling out a series of stark advertisements as part of a new awareness drive that warns people to "Act like you've got it" because anyone can spread coronavirus, especially the new highly transmissible variant that has seen hospitals being overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients. The campaign — made up of television, radio and newspaper adverts as well as a social media blitz — comes as the latest daily death toll from the deadly virus hit a new peak of 1,325 deaths and infections rose to 68,053 cases. Around one in three people infected with the virus do not have any symptoms and could therefore be passing it on without realising, according to the government's messaging.

UK PM Boris Johnson took to social media to urge people to strictly follow the stay-at-home lockdown as the disease continues to spread at an "alarming rate". "Our hospitals are under more pressure than at any other time since the start of the pandemic, and infection rates continue to soar at an alarming rate," he said in a Twitter statement. "The vaccine rollout has given us renewed hope, but it's critical for now we stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives," he said. The warnings come a day after London Mayor Sadiq Khan declared a "major incident" in the UK capital because the coronavirus cases are "out of control" as latest figures revealed the infection rate in London has exceeded 1,000 per 100,000 people.

— PTI

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, often accused of being pro-China, in a media conference in Geneva on Tuesday had expressed disappointment over China not finalising the necessary permissions for the experts team's arrival. "I'm very disappointed with this news, given that

two members had already begun their journeys and others were not able to travel at the last minute, but had been in contact with senior Chinese officials," he said. Tedros said he "made it clear" that the mission was a priority for the UN health agency.

— PTI

Twitter said at the time it was continuing to watch Trump's social media activity to determine whether further action was needed. The decision to suspend Trump's account came after a pair of tweets on Friday, according to the one-to-many messaging platform. In one of the tweets, Trump vowed that none of his supporters would be "disrespected," and in another, he said he would not be attending Biden's inauguration on January 20, as is customary. "These two Tweets must be read in the context of broader events in the country and the ways in which the President's statements can be mobilised by different audiences, including to incite violence, as well as in the context of the pattern of behaviour from this account in recent weeks," Twitter said.

— AFP

U.S. RECORD:
NEARLY 2.9 LAKH
CASES IN 24 HRS

Washington, Jan. 9: The United States hit a new record for coronavirus cases Friday, notching nearly 290,000 in a span of 24 hours, according to a real-time tally by Johns Hopkins University. The country, the hardest-hit in the world by the Covid-19 pandemic, also recorded 3,676 virus deaths in the same day, the Baltimore-based university said. The day before, the US had recorded a record of nearly 4,000 deaths in 24 hours. Some 131,000 people are currently hospitalized in the US for Covid-19, according to the Covid Tracking Project.

The world's largest economy has recorded 21.8 million coronavirus cases and more than 368,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

The country, where health restrictions vary drastically between localities, is ultimately counting on a massive vaccination campaign begun in mid-December to bring the health crisis to an end. But the effort is running behind, with just under six million people having received the first of two injections in the country of 330 million.

— AFP

Court: Nab Masood
Azhar by Jan. 18

Lahore, Jan. 9: UN designated global terrorist Masood Azhar, chief of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), should be arrested by January 18 in connection with a terror financing case, an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan has asked the Punjab Police, a court official said on Saturday. The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Gujranwala issued an arrest warrant against Azhar in the terror financing case instituted by the CTD in the previous hearing on Thursday. ATC Gujranwala

judge Natasha Naseem Supra during the case hearing on Friday directed the CTD to arrest JeM chief Masood Azhar by January 18 and present him in the court. In case of failure (to arrest him), the court may begin proceedings to declare him a proclaimed offender. Following the Palwama terror attack in February 2019, Pakistan's Punjab police had launched a crackdown on terrorism financing and arrested six militants of the JeM in Gujranwala, some 130 kms from Lahore.

— PTI

SLOW & UNSTEADY

Pujara's slowest Test 50 derails visitors momentum

Sydney, Jan. 9: Cheteshwar Pujara's singular lack of intent pushed an injury-ravaged India into a deep hole as Australia tightened the noose with a substantial 197-run lead on a forgettable on Saturday for the visitors in the third Test here.

Pujara's slowest Test half-century, a painstaking 50 off 176 balls, was soon followed by India being bowled out for 244 on the third day with the other batsmen feeling tremendous pressure of a dormant scoreboard.

A first-innings lead of 94 runs provided by the bowlers and some good fielding did help Australia's cause.

By stumps, Steve Smith (29 batting) and Marnus Labuschagne (47 batting) gave an exhibition of how to bat on slow tracks with Australia reaching 103/2.

Labuschagne, in particular, showed how to bat positively on a dead track hitting six boundaries in 67 balls.

As Shane Warne pointed out during commentary, it would be very difficult to chase any score in excess of 250 with variable bounce and the odd balls keeping low.



India's Jasprit Bumrah (right) is run out as Australia's Will Pucovski watches during play on the third day of their third Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Saturday. — AP

Pat Cummins (4/29 in 21.4 overs) was brilliant on an unresponsive track with some effective short-pitched bowling and got good support from Josh Hazlewood (2/43 in 21 overs) and Mitchell Starc (1/61 in 19 overs), having set up a leg-side trap.

To make matters worse for India, there were run-outs and two batsmen — Rishabh

Pant and Ravindra Jadeja — were hit on the left elbow and left thumb respectively.

While both might come into bat in the second innings, Jadeja, with a swollen left thumb, will find it difficult to even grip the ball.

Earlier, Pujara's ultra-defensive approach put tremendous pressure on his colleagues and India never

quite got the momentum going as Cummins, Hazlewood and Starc continuously attacked the batsmen — first with a leg-side field and short-ball strategy and then on the corridor of uncertainty.

Pujara doesn't play the pull or hook shot well and he wasn't allowed room to either cut or drive.

While he never tried to

rotate the strike, the likes of Ajinkya Rahane (22 off 70 balls) and Rishabh Pant (36 off 67 balls) felt the urge to break the shackles in the absence of any such intention from the other end.

"It may have looked like a flat pitch but it wasn't easy to score runs," Pujara told host broadcasters *Channel 7* during post match snap interview. — PTI

SCORECARD

Australia 1st Innings 338
India 1st Innings (overnight 96/2): Rohit Sharma c and b Hazlewood 26, Shubman Gill c Green b Cummins 50, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 50, Ajinkya Rahane b Cummins 22, Hanuma Vihari run out 4, Rishabh Pant c Warner b Hazlewood 36, Ravindra Jadeja not out 28, R. Ashwin run out 1, Navdeep Saini c Wade b Starc 3, Bumrah run out 0, Mohammed Siraj c Paine b Cummins 6. Extras (lb-2, w-5, nb-2) 9. **Total (all out in 100.4 overs) 244.**
FoW: 1-70, 2-85, 3-117, 4-142, 5-195, 6-195, 7-206, 8-210, 9-216.
Bowling: Starc 19-76-1-1, Hazlewood 21-10-4-3-2, Cummins 21.4-10-29-4, Lyon 31-88-70-0, Labuschagne 3-0-11-0, Green 5-1-11-0.

Australia 2nd Innings: David Warner lbw Ashwin 13, Will Pucovski c (sub) Wrridhiman Saha b Siraj 10, Marnus Labuschagne batting 47, Steven Smith batting 29. Extras (lb-1, nb-3) 4. **Total (for 2 wks in 29 Overs) 103.**
FoW: 1-16, 2-35.
Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 8-1-26-0, Mohammed Siraj 8-2-20-1, Navdeep Saini 7-1-28-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 6-0-28-1.

Bumrah & Siraj racially abused

Sydney, Jan. 9: The BCCI on Saturday lodged a formal complaint with ICC match referee David Boon after Indian team players, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj, were allegedly racially abused by a drunk spectator here during the third day of third Test against Australia.

According to BCCI sources, Siraj was allegedly referred to as a "monkey" by a drunk spectator in one of stands at the Sydney Cricket Ground, reliving the infamous Monkeygate episode of the Indian team's tour of Australia in 2007-08.

"BCCI lodged a formal complaint with ICC match referee David Boon about two of their players Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj being abused by a drunk spectator," a Cricket Board source said.

Incidentally, the Monkeygate episode also took place during the Sydney Test when Andrew Symonds claimed Harbhajan Singh called him a monkey multiple times. But the Harbhajan was cleared after a hearing on the matter. It is learnt that a long discussion was

JADDU INJURES THUMB, IS OUT OF FOURTH TEST

Sydney, Jan. 9: Depleted India's injury woes worsened on Saturday with Ravindra Jadeja sustaining a left thumb dislocation and fracture which is likely to rule him out of the final Test in Brisbane.

"Ravindra Jadeja has suffered a dislocation and fracture on his left thumb. It will be very difficult for him to wear those gloves and bat," a senior BCCI source said.

However, Rishabh Pant's elbow injury is not serious and he will probably be available when India bat to save the Test match. — PTI

held between the senior players of the visiting contingent, including Ajinkya Rahane, the umpires and security officers at the end of the day's play.

The abuses were directed at the Indian duo while they were fielding. — PTI



Agnes Keleti, former Olympic gold medal winning gymnast, blows out the candles on her birthday cake in Budapest, Hungary, on January 4. — AP

Oldest living Oly champ turns 100

Budapest, Jan. 9: For Agnes Keleti, the oldest living Olympic champion, the fondest memory of her remarkable 100 years is simply that she has lived through it all. The Holocaust survivor and winner of 10 Olympic medals in gymnastics including five golds celebrates her 100th birthday on Saturday in her native Budapest, punctuating a life of achievement, adventure, tragedy and perseverance which, she says, passed by in a flash.

"These 100 years felt to me like 60," she said at a celebration in Budapest on the eve of her birthday.

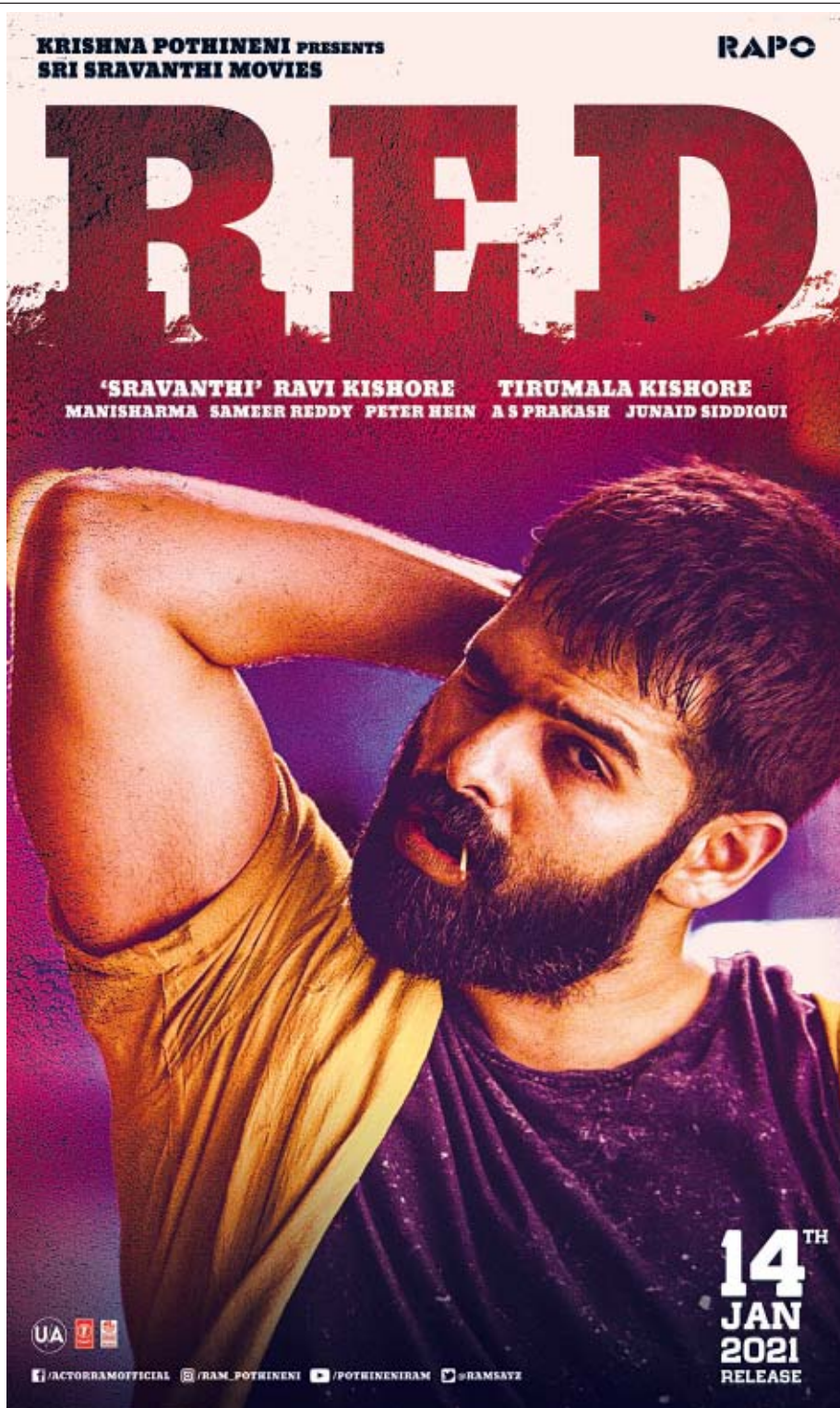
Leafing through a copy of a new book about her life

"The Queen of Gymnastics: 100 Years of Agnes Keleti" her trademark modesty was on full display.

"The queen of gymnastics," she said, switching to English. And in Hungarian: "That's an exaggeration."

Keleti, who was born Agnes Klein in 1921, had her illustrious career interrupted by World War II and the subsequent cancellation of the 1940 and 1944 Olympics.

Forced off her gymnastics team in 1941 because of her Jewish ancestry, Keleti went into hiding in the Hungarian countryside where she survived the Holocaust by assuming a false identity and working as a maid. — AP



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