





## SHORT TAKES

## SP INSPECTS POLLING ON TWO-WHEELER

FROM PAGE 1

He went around some villages on a two-wheeler and took stock of the poll procedures.

Meanwhile, in view of the second phase of polls in 14 mandals, comprising 213 panchayats with 467 polling locations (Hyper Sensitive-126, Sensitive-179, Normal-162), he appointed an ASP-level officer as special officer for each zone by dividing 14 mandals into three zones.

He visited Addanki circle office and interacted with police officers for first-hand information about the situation and directed them to work towards peaceful elections. He went around some villages on a two-wheeler and took stock of the poll procedures.

During his visit to the polling station at Dharmavaram village in Addanki mandal, he urged on-duty para-police personnel, anganwadi and other election personnel to remain vigilant and strictly enforce the election code. He asked them to inform the concerned police officers whenever they receive information about any breach of security or disturbance to peace.

Additional SP (Admin) B. Ravichandra, Kandukuru DSP K. Srinivasa Rao, SB-I Inspector V. Surya Narayana, Addanki CI Anjaneya Reddy were among those present.

## YSRC LODGES COMPLAINT OVER FAKE WEBSITE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 13

YSRC Congress lodged a complaint with CBCID about creating a fake website on the line of YSRC website spreading false information on the internet about panchayat election results.

YSRC state general secretary Lella Appireddy in his complaint said that YSRC started [www.ysrcpolls.in](http://www.ysrcpolls.in) giving information about the results of gram panchayat elections and further putting the details about the winning of YSRC supported candidates. He said that some TD supporters registered a fake website mimicking their party website with [www.ysrcpolls.com](http://www.ysrcpolls.com) through godaddy.com on February 12 and showing fake information displaying TD winning majority seats and YSRC supporters winning a few seats only. He said that TD is trying to create confusion among masses through fake information in the fraudulent website.

Mr Appireddy said that TD social media vastly campaigned about the fake website and TD supporters circulating fake information on most social media platforms to damage YSRC reputation. He said that Telugu Desam political wing, Neeeli media dache nijalu, jaffa jagannadham, TDP leader Kolli Durga Varaprasad and others gave false information through the fake website [www.ysrcpolls.com](http://www.ysrcpolls.com) and sought the CID officials to take measures for the closure of the fake website.

## ELECTRIC BUS PROJECT MOVING AT SNAIL'S PACE

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, FEB. 13

The electric bus manufacturing unit proposed near Gudipalli village in Somandepalli mandal of Anantapur district on national highway 44 is yet to take off despite the state government entering into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) four years ago with Veera Vahana Udyog Private Limited.

Presently, the prestigious unit is only a compound wall as against the MoU for completing all works within one year. Sources reveal that the company has spent its entire time in building a compound wall around the 120-acre land, which it has levelled.

Veera Vahana was actually asked to complete construction work within one year and start manufacturing electric buses soon thereafter. But the situation on the ground is entirely different.

While this is so, the second biggest vehicle industry in state - KIA Motors - has begun production of cars at its Erramanchi unit in Penukonda Assembly segment. Vehicles of this unit are in huge demand.

As per Veera Vahana's agreement with the state government, the firm was to invest at least ₹1,000 crore on the electric bus manufacturing plant during the first phase of producing 3,000 buses per year.

## Steely resolve



TD leaders stage a sit-in protest during their protest against the central government's move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant at GVMC Gandhi Statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

## SEC directs Krishna SP to file case against minister

Police are taking legal opinion before proceeding further against Nani

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 13

The State Election Commission (SEC) on Saturday directed Krishna superintendent of police to file a case against civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkateshwara Rao for making derogatory remarks against the election commissioner and lowering the esteem of SEC.

The case against the minister is to be filed under sections 504, 505 (1) and 506 of IPC for threatening the SEC and violating the poll code. As these sections deal with non-cognisable offences, police are taking legal opinion before proceeding further.

State election commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar was not satisfied with explanation given by Kodali Nani denying making derogatory remarks against SEC as well as the election commissioner.

The civil supplies minister has also filed a privilege notice against the state election commissioner with assembly speaker Thammineni Seetharam

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 13

YSRC Congress has asked courts to take up suo motu action against the anarchist activities of Telugu Desam AP president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu and his brother in their native village Nimmada.

YSRC Tekkali constituency in-charge Duvvada Srinivas alleged that Atchannaidu and his brother have restrained

people from casting their votes in 10-15 gram panchayats in Tekkali constituency for past 40 years through acts of anarchy. Srinivas asked courts to conduct a suo motu investigation into the Nimmada issue. He went on to say that he also would file a petition with proofs against the two leaders.

Addressing media at the YSRC party office here on Saturday, he said he is ready to provide evidence

on Atchannaidu's atrocities. Atchannaidu had threatened ruling YSRC supported candidate K. Appanna not to file his nomination for the post of Nimmada sarpanch. Atchannaidu and his brother Kinjarapu Hari Prasad, along with 500 people, attacked Appanna with weapons when he went to file his nomination for gram panchayat polls.

Srinivas listed out clash-

es and murders in which Kinjarapu family is involved and alleged it is the nature of this family to suppress anyone who rises against them. He maintained that despite this, YSRC-backed candidates bagged 90 per cent of seats in the first phase of panchayat elections. The results are a reflection of welfare schemes being implemented by the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government, he added.

## CHITTOOR DISTRICT: 77.2 PER CENT POLL RECORDED

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 13

The second phase of Panchayat polls in Chittoor district went off peacefully with only stray incidents reported at a few places. About 77.20 per cent polling was registered at the end of polling by 3.30 pm on Saturday. The first phase of PR polls

in the district saw a polling percentage of 83.47.

In the second phase, elections were conducted in 215 panchayats located in seventeen mandals under the Madanapalle division. The polling has commenced early in the morning in several villages, where voters formed in long queues, adhering to

Covid-19 guidelines to cast their vote.

The district administration officials have made elaborate arrangements for the polling at as many as 1,751 polling centres. Elderly and physically challenged persons were assisted, and wheelchairs were arranged to enable them to exercise their franchise.

## TD WINS IN FEWER SEATS IN SEEMA

FROM PAGE 1

SP Satya Esubabu said polls were held in free and fair polls with no untoward incidents. An average of 84 percent recorded at all panchayats.

As the Opposition TD succeeded in fielding candidates for majority of gram panchayats, YSRC supported candidates won in more than 150 gram panchayats while TD was confined to a few seats.

## DGP APPRECIATES KADAPA POLICE

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, FEB. 13

The police have taken strong measures to prevent any minor incident during the second phase of polling in the panchayat elections.

The district police also

received praise from the state DGP Electoral security functions were successfully performed. District SP Karur Kumarapati Nagendra Kumar Anburajan visited the polling stations, reviewed the situation, and gave the staff instructions.

## RIVAL GROUPS OF YSRC RESORT TO FISTICUFFS

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 13

The second phase of panchayat elections in Nellore district had passed off smoothly at several panchayats under Atmakur division, except a few sporadic instances reported from AS peta mandal on Saturday.

Two groups from the ruling party, who initially had heated arguments, have exchanged fisticuffs in AS peta mandal, while few other places in the Atmakur division remained undisturbed.

The ruling party leaders who were involved in the clashes were from Chiramana village in this mandal.

Candidates from two groups were competing for the Sarpanch position as there was no agreement between them. When a member of one group was loitering in the polling station, members from the rival group raised objections. The disagreement triggered clashes between the two groups.

During the exchange of heated arguments, at one point in time, people from both groups started quarrelling with each other and exchanged fisticuffs.

However, police intervened and managed the situation with a slight lathi charge. No one was hurt in the incident, according to the police.

## BORDER | DISPUTE Koraput collector Akhtar had written to his Vizianagaram counterpart

## AP holds gram panchayat polls in Kotiya region

DC CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 13

Despite a request by the Odisha government, the Andhra Pradesh government on Saturday held gram panchayat elections amid tight security in the disputed Kotiya region in Odisha's Koraput district.

In presence of AP electoral officials, voting began at 6 am in five villages, Madkar, Daliamba, Barnapadu, Patuseri and Konadara. The voters were seen in long queues to cast their votes despite efforts by the Potangi block development officer (BDO) and tahsildar to convince the villagers not



People stand in queue to cast their votes on Saturday.

to participate.

According to sources, polling continued till 3 pm.

On Friday, Koraput collector Abdaal Akhtar had

written to his Vizianagaram counterpart appealing not to conduct the elections in the disputed region of Kotiya

as the matter is currently with the Supreme Court.

"I am to bring to your attention that in Contempt Petition No. 172/2021 aris-

ing out of Original Suit No. 10/1968 (The State of Odisha Vs. M.Hari Jawaharlal and Others), the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has been pleased to issue notice to the State of Andhra Pradesh and post the case to Friday, the 19th February, 2021. In its oral observations, the Court has also observed that should the State of Andhra Pradesh go ahead with its plans as regards the subject mentioned above, necessary consequences will follow. The same was pronounced in the presence of counsel for the State of Andhra Pradesh. A copy of the

associated case documents have been handed over to the counsel for the State of Andhra Pradesh," the Collector wrote in the letter.

Meanwhile, lashing out at the Odisha government for taking "lackadaisical" approach over the AP government's election exercise in Kotiya, Odisha state BJP unit president Samir Mohanty on Saturday questioned its intent on safeguarding the border.

Mohanty said the border villages not only in Kotiya but also in districts like Ganjam, Rayagada, Malkangiri and Gajapati were "unsafe".



## SHORT TAKES

## AP RECORDS 54 COVID-19 CASES, NO DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 13

Andhra Pradesh registered 54 fresh cases of Covid-19 and no deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Saturday that out of 33,415 samples tested, 54 were infected with Covid-19.

Out of a total number of 1,35,17,440 samples tested so far in the state, 8,88,814 persons were found infected with confirmed Covid-19 and of them, 8,80,855 were recovered in the course of treatment while 797 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Visakhapatnam recorded nine followed by eight in Krishna, seven each in Chittoor and East Godavari, six in Kadapa, five each in Guntur, Nellore and Srikakulam, two in West Godavari and zero cases were reported in Anantapur, Kurnool, Prakasam and Vizianagaram.

With regard to the cumulative Covid-19 cases, Chittoor continued to lead the state with 166 followed by 138 in Krishna, 84 in Kadapa, 79 in East Godavari, 62 each in Guntur and Nellore, 55 in Prakasam, 46 in Visakhapatnam, 42 in West Godavari, 22 in Anantapur, 19 in Kurnool, 13 in Vizianagaram and nine in Srikakulam.

Among the daily of Covid-19 deaths, no death was reported and the death toll remained unchanged at 7,162.

The state health authorities discharged 71 Covid-19 patients after recovery while undergoing treatment from several hospitals in the state.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on samples of 2,53,136 per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.58.

## 80.76% POLL RECORDED IN KURNOOL DIST

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, FEB. 13

The second phase of the gram panchayat polls went off peacefully in 183 GPs in both Nandyal and Kurnool Revenue division in the district on Saturday, barring a few minor incidents. The poll percentage has been recorded as 80.76 with 3,52,577 polled votes against 4,36,565 voters in total 13 mandals. Guduru mandal has the highest percentage, at 87.79 per cent, and the Koilakuntla mandal has the lowest percentage at 71.83 per cent. The police officials house arrested a few political activists including former TD MLA BC Janardhan Reddy in Banagapalle.

TD and YSRC cadres clashed at Pesaravai village in Gadivemula mandal and Kammavari Palle village in Kolimigundla mandal over small issues during polling and counting progress. However the policemen brought the situation under control, except for a couple of minor incidents there is no violence across the 13 mandals where second polling was organized, the police said.

On the other hand, district collector G. Veera Pandian and SP K. Fakeerappa inspected the polling process at various villages by visiting several polling centres. They checked the voters' ID cards at a few polling stations and directed the staff to check on bogus votes.

## VRA DIES AFTER EPILEPTIC SEIZURE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 13

As the second phase of Panchayat Raj elections is underway, a Village Revenue Assistant (VRA) was deployed at a polling booth in Kosuvaripalli panchayat in Thamballapalle mandal of Chittoor district, has died after suffering an epileptic seizure.

According to the district administration, VRA Narasimhulu, 65, belonging to Kosuvaripalli panchayat, has died due to a sudden epileptic seizure, occurred while he was performing his poll duties at a polling booth this morning.

A poll officer said that Narasimhulu had complained of some pain and uneasiness. He immediately suffered an epileptic seizure, and the paramedic staff were alerted. However, he died on the spot though the staff tried hard to rescue him. The body has been sent for a post-mortem and the officials have recommended the authorities to ex-gratia

## Cops file case against Hyd driver for Araku mishap

Driver claimed that brake failure and low visibility had led to tragedy

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 13

The Vizag agency police on Saturday registered a case against Gurrampalli Srisaillam, who was driving the bus that met with an accident in which four persons were killed and 22 injured on the Araku ghat road late Friday night. Cases were registered under Sections 304 A 338 and 337 of IPC.

The bus plunged into a gorge about 80 feet deep between Damuku and Tyda villages under Anantagiri police station limits.

Superintendent of police, Vizag Rural, B. Krishna Rao, said that the deceased were identified as Kottam Saritha, 38, Kottam Satyanarayana, 50, Kottam Nitya, 8 months, and Kottam Latha, 45.

The injured include Kottam Chandrakala, Naresh Kumar, Swapna, Sivani, Devansh, Aravind Kumar, Maniswini, Sanvi, Vihan, Mounika, Ayush, Sailaja, Hithish, Muthum Saitha, Munna, Jyothi, Kalyani, Abhiram, Anitha and L. Nanda Kishore. Driver Srisaillam was also injured in the incident.

The SP said members of a joint family in Hyderabad had hired the bus from Dinesh Travels on February 10. They visited Kanakadurga temple in Vijayawada and later reached Annavaram the next day. After a night halt at Visakhapatnam, they visited Simhachalam temple, Borra Caves and Araku Valley on Friday. The mishap occurred when they were returning from Araku



Health minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas along with tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivas interact with the patients who were injured in the Anantagiri bus accident at King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

## Araku ghat tragedy leads to blame game on safety

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 13

The death of four tourists from Hyderabad and injuries to 23 others on Friday evening has once again compelled road transport authorities to focus on the condition of roads and vehicles and the experience of drivers using them.

RTA officials said the driver of the ill-fated bus did not take adequate rest, and had long spells of driving from

Hyderabad to Vijayawada, Simhachalam and various places in the Visakhapatnam agency, before starting off to Hyderabad.

Like the 2018 mishap at Chinutur in East Godavari district, which killed eight pilgrims from Karnataka, officials squarely blamed the driver for the ghastly incident.

But road engineering experts pointed out that authorities always blame drivers either for drunk

en driving or working without rest but never point an accusing finger at agencies responsible for maintaining the quality of roads.

A senior police officer said that the roads connecting Paderu, Chintapalle and Anantagiri in Vizag district and Maredumilli, Chinturu, Rampachodavaram and other areas in East Godavari district have been identified as the most dangerous stretch-

cle to ascertain the exact reasons for the accident," said G.C. Raja Ratnam, deputy transport commissioner, Vizag.

## Five arrested for ganja peddling

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 13

On Saturday, the Taskforce officers in Vijayawada nabbed five persons on charges of peddling banned ganja and recovered five kgs ganja and 510 gms liquid ganja from them worth ₹1.52 lakh.

Among the five ganja peddlers, the police found that two were B.Tech students, and one was an ITI student. The accused in ganja peddling were identified as K. Venkata Suresh and K. Sai Kumar are BTech students, Y. Hemanth an ITI student, K. Durga Karthik and M. Ganesh alias Pandu.

On the instructions of Vijayawada Commissioner of Police B. Srinivasulu, a team lead by Taskforce ADCP K.V. Srinivas Rao, ACPs G.V. Ramana Murthy, V.S.S. Varma, Inspector P. Krishna Mohan and SI Raviteja and team conducted the checks.

On a tip-off, the team swung into action and conducted checks in a fertilizer shop in Srinivasa Colony in Kesarapalli village of Gannavaram Mandal,

Among the five ganja peddlers, the police found that two were B.Tech students, and one was an ITI student. The accused in ganja peddling were identified as K. Venkata Suresh and K. Sai Kumar are BTech students, Y. Hemanth an ITI student, K. Durga Karthik and M. Ganesh alias Pandu.

Krishna district.

The police said that K. Venkata Suresh, who runs a fertilizer shop in Kesarapalli village, was a ganja addict. K. Sai Kumar, Y. Hemanth, K. Durga Karthik and M. Ganesh alias Pandu were also ganja addicts and friends of Venkata Suresh. Venkata Suresh invested money and Pandu used to bring ganja from Chintapalli village in Visakhapatnam on the motorcycle and sell in Gannavaram. K. Sai Kumar and Y. Hemanth were earlier booked under NDPS, said the police.

The culprits were handed over to the Gannavaram police station, and a case was registered.

## LAWCET admission to start on Feb. 16

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 13

The process of LAW CET admissions in AP state would start from February 16. The LAW CET convenor and AP State Council for Higher Education Vice-Chairman Prof. K. Ram Mohan Rao released the counselling schedule to this effect on Saturday. He informed that the government has already finalised the fees structure for Law courses in various colleges

in the state hence the counselling schedule was announced.

Prof Ram Mohan Rao said that the registration for the admission into LLB and LLM courses would be held from February 16 to 18.

The certificate verification and web option registration will be done simultaneously.

He stated that the seat allotment would be done on February 20 and reporting at the college will be on February 22 and 23.

## Senior faculty loses promotions

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, FEB. 13

Senior teaching faculty with university colleges of engineering under Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Kakinada (JNTUK) are losing monetary benefits as well as position in academic circles due to the university delaying their promotions under the Career Advancement Scheme (CAS).

Teaching faculties of these colleges in Kakinada, Vizianagaram and Narsaraopeta are very disappointed and discouraged as a result. According to University Grants

Commission (UGC) norms, a faculty member having a Ph. D. who completes four years of service as an assistant professor, or six years service without Ph. D., is eligible for Assistant Professor Senior Scale. Then, once he has five years service, he can get Assistant Professor Selection Grade. After three years of experience, he can become Associate Professor. Thereafter, in another three years, he can get the Professor's post.

In addition, the faculty member must get additional marks through career development, like by presenting research

papers in seminars, national and international conferences, apart from publishing papers in prestigious journals. If the faculty member can meet all these criteria, he is eligible for further promotions. But, according to faculty of the university colleges, though they are having all the eligibility criteria, they have not got promotions for the past two years.

Teachers' Association of University College of Engineering, Kakinada, president K. Venkata Reddy said, "According to UGC norms, a faculty member can submit application three months before

he becomes eligible for the upgraded post. Following that, the university should give promotion through a notification within six months. But this has not happened for the past two years," he pointed out.

He said to avoid further delay under Career Advancement Scheme (CAS), the university or college must immediately initiate the process of screening or selection. But this process has not yet been completed by the administration. "It is very unfortunate that members who have applied are distressed both mentally and physically," he remarked.

## Doubts on third party involvement in murder

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, FEB. 13

In the gruesome murder of YSR Congress Corporator Kampara Ramesh during the wee hours on Friday, the relatives expressed doubts about another real estate trader T. Kiran. Ramesh was murdered by his friend G.Chinna, by running over by his car. The police registered a case against two accused namely G.Chinna and his brother Kumar. The relatives told the police that there were differences between Kampara Ramesh and T. Kiran related to land settlement issues. The Circle



Kampara Ramesh

Inspector of Sarpavaram Police Station Nunna Raju said that the rela-

tive's complaint is also considered in their investigation.

He said that three teams head by one Circle Inspector each has been deployed for nabbing the accused.

He said that the investigation was being done from all angles. He said that the police would question the third person Kiran on his involvement in the murder.

Meanwhile, the agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu and Kakinada MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy said that the police officials were urged to investigate the case impartially and punish the accused.

## ATMAKUR DIVISION REGISTERS 78.15%

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 13

The Atmakur division in Nellore district registered 78.15 per cent of polling at the end of the second phase of polling by 3.30 pm on Saturday. Polling was conducted for 158 sarpanch posts and 999 ward member posts.

According to the district administration, as many as 1,499 polling stations were arranged in the division and out of 2,55,841 voters about 1,99,935 including 1,27,714 men, 1,28,116 women and 11 others have cast their votes. Around 4,152 polling staff, 30 zonal officers, 73 route officers, 112 micro-observers, and 1,321 police personnel were deputed for the polls.

The polling officials arranged webcasting in 50 polling stations and video coverage was done in over 70 stations. More than 100 volunteers from the Red Cross were also deployed for assisting the elderly, and the physically challenged voters. A Monitoring and Control Room was set at Tikkana Bhavan in the Collectorate for observing the election process. Officials observed the situation at hypersensitive and sensitive stations from the Centre.

## FAITH | MATTERS

## TTD has successfully taken up the Gudiko-Gomata campaign: Pontiff

## Foundation set for Sri Padmavathi temple in TN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, FEB. 13

The foundation stone was laid ceremoniously for the construction of Goddess Sri Padmavathi Amma- varu temple at G.N. Chettiyar Street in T. Nagar in Chennai on Saturday morning. The Kanchi Pontiff Vijayendra Saraswati Swamy Shankaracharya performed the rituals amidst Mangala Vadyams and

Vedic mantras by Archakas and pundits. The temple was being built in the 34 cents (six grounds) land worth ₹40 crore donated to TTD by yesteryear film actress Ms Kanchana, Girija Pandey, K.P. Pandey and Ravibhushana Sharma of Chennai.

Earlier, as part of Vishwakshena Aradhana and Ankurapranam's event, Pancha Sukta homam was conducted on February 11 and 12.

● The temple was being built in the 34 cents (six grounds) land worth ₹40 crore donated to TTD by yesteryear film actress Ms Kanchana, Girija Pandey, K.P. Pandey and Ravibhushana Sharma of Chennai.

● The Kanchi Pontiff in his anugraha bhashanam sought blessings of Goddess Padmavathi to eradicate poverty across the country and bestow prosperity on all.

On this morning, the Kanchi Seer performed the sacred Shankusthapanam, which included purnahuti and

foundation pylon installation at the site.

The Kanchi pontiff also launched the TTD's prestigious program of Gudiko-

Gomata campaign in Tamil Nadu wherein eight pairs of cows and calves with new clothes and harati were donated to eight temples in the state of Tamil Nadu.

The Kanchi Pontiff in his anugraha bhashanam sought blessings of Goddess Padmavathi to eradicate poverty across the country and bestow prosperity on all. He said the TTD has successfully taken up the Gudiko-

Gomata campaign as part of its agenda to propagate Sanatana Hindu Dharma.

TTD Chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, TTD EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy, Special Invitees of TTD board and TTD local advisory committee president Sekhar Reddy and MP Vemireddy Prabhakar Reddy, TTD board members Vemireddy Prashanthi, Dr M. Nishita, Kumaraguru and Govind Hari were present.



IN BRIEF

WOMAN'S SUICIDE: SENA MINISTER UNDER LENS

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 13

Maharashtra forest minister Sanjay Rathod from Shiv Sena has found himself in trouble as the BJP has demanded his arrest in connection with the death of a 22-year old girl in Pune. Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has said that a detailed probe will be carried out and those found guilty will be punished.

On February 8, deceased Pooja Chavan, hailing from Beed district, allegedly committed suicide by jumping off a building in the Wanwadi area of the city. Her death has stirred up a political storm in the state, as several audio clips of her purported conversation with two persons have gone viral linking the incident to Mr Rathod.

The opposition party BJP has become aggressive on the issue demanding the arrest of the minister and his sacking from the cabinet. BJP leader Kirit Somaiya said, “Mr Rathod should not only be sacked as a minister but also be arrested immediately. What is Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray waiting for as it clearly shows that the minister has a hand in Pooja Chavan's death.”

Mr Rathod has not commented on the issue yet. According to sources, he has sought time to present his case to Mr Thackeray, who has reportedly taken a serious cognizance of the matter. However, Mr Rathod and other party leaders have been advised not to speak to the media on the issue.

2 MAOISTS KILLED IN ENCOUNTER

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB 13

Two Maoists including a woman were killed on Saturday morning in an encounter with the police in tribal-dominated district of Mandla.

The encounter took place in the forested village of Lalpur.

The slain Naxals, identified as Pramila (25) and Mainu Uike (21), hailed from south Bastar district of Sukma in Chhattisgarh and together carried a bounty of ₹14 lakh, state home minister Narottam Mishra said.

They belonged to platoon number 3 of Vistar dalam of outlawed CPI (Maoist) functioning in south-western Madhya Pradesh districts of Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori.

Acting on a tip off on the presence of a dozen armed Maoists in Sala forest, security forces launched a search operation in the area, police said.

The Maoists opened fire on security forces when the latter zeroed in on the rebel camp, leading to a fierce gun battle between them that lasted 4 hours.

Bodies of the two slain Maoists recovered at the encounter site.

COVID: NATIONAL RECOVERY RATE STANDS AT 97.32%

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 13

In a significant development on the Covid-19 front, 17 states and union territories have not reported a single death in the last 24 hours while 13 states and UTs had deaths ranging between 1 and 5. Total fatalities due to coronavirus in the last 24 hours were 103.

The new cases too are on a decline as 12,143 fresh cases were detected in the last 24 hours. India's total active case-load currently stands at 1.36 lakh consists of just 1.25% of country's total positive cases.

A total of 1.06 crore people have recovered so far out of which 11,395 patients have got discharged in the last 24 hours. The National Recovery Rate at present is 97.32%.

Kerala, with highest number of positive cases (5,397) has also reported the maximum number of single day recoveries (5,332). In Maharashtra, 2,422 people recovered in the past 24 hours followed by 486 in Tamil Nadu. Kerala continues to report the highest daily new cases at 5,397. It is followed by Maharashtra with 3,670, while Tamil Nadu reported 483 new cases.

Meanwhile, India has vaccinated 80.52 lakh healthcare and frontline workers with the first dose and the second dose to complete immunization against Covid-19 has started.



Rescue and restoration work at Raini village after a glacier burst on February 7 in Joshimath triggered a flash flood, in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on Saturday.

- PTI

Rescue hole at Tapovan tunnel being widened to reach workers

38 bodies have been recovered from affected areas while 166 are missing

**Joshimath, Feb 13:** Rescue teams on Saturday began widening a hole drilled into an approach tunnel on the way to the possible location of over 30 people trapped inside a sludge-choked tunnel of the NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project after a flash flood ravaged the area on Sunday.

“We are working under a three-pronged strategy to reach to those trapped in the tunnel. The hole we drilled on Friday is being widened to one foot so as to reach a camera and a pipe inside the silt flushing tunnel where the trapped are said to be located,” General Manager of the NTPC project, R P Ahirwar, said.

A hole with a diameter of one foot will help send in a camera to ascertain their location and a pipe to flush out accumulated water from the tunnel, Ahirwar said. The other two parts of the strategy are clearing the desilting basin of the NTPC barrage

through which muck is constantly flowing into the tunnels and restoring the flow of the Dhauliganga to the right which has tilted to the left after the flash flood hampering the sludge clearing operation, he said.

Describing the rescue of people as a priority, he said the NTPC has put more than 100 of its scientists on the job.

When asked whether an attempt could also be made to send rescue personnel to the possible location of those trapped inside the tunnel through the hole, the GM said it will need to be widened further for that and will be done if the need arises.

“More than 100 of our scientists are on the job. They are devising strategies and having them implemented,” Ahirwar said.

He said all resources and mechanical equipment required for the operations are available at the project site.

● **THE STATE** Emergency Operation Centre said scientists of the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing during an aerial survey of the Rishiganga found that the glacial lake formed due to the avalanche over it has begun to release water which reduces chances of its breaching or causing a fresh flash flood.

However, citing the conditions inside the tunnel, he said, “We can operate only with a few machines at a time. Rest of them have to be kept on standby because our strategy is to keep the operations under-way round the clock.”

If for some reason an equipment stops working, there are alternatives on the standby to ensure that the operations do not stop, he said.

He said many experienced workers of the project went missing in the calamity and those put on

the job are new people but still they are working with total dedication.

Talking about the biggest challenge being faced by the rescue team, the NTPC official said, “The rescue personnel are going to the tunnel where the men are likely to be trapped via HCC Adit where muck is constantly coming down from the NTPC barrage and its desilting basin to hamper the rescue efforts. The water of Dhauliganga too is coming into our tunnels through the desilting basin as it has tilted to the left after the avalanche.”

“Hence, restoring the flow of the Dhauliganga to the right is a big part of our strategy,” Ahirwar said. The sludge choked contours and conduits of the barrage's desilting basin can also be removed more effectively only if the flow is restored back to its earlier position.

The work on restoring the flow of Dhauliganga has begun already with

the help of heavy machines, he said. So far, 38 bodies have been recovered from the affected areas while 166 are still missing.

DIG Nilesh Anand Bharne said 11 of the dead have been identified. Eighteen body parts had also been recovered from the flood-hit areas, of which 10 have been cremated after taking their DNA samples so far, he said.

The State Emergency Operation Centre here said scientists of the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing during an aerial survey of the Rishiganga found that the glacial lake formed due to the avalanche over it has begun to release water which reduces chances of its breaching or causing a fresh flash flood.

The lake which has formed over the Rishiganga after the flash-flood had increased the concern of experts on Friday.

AIMPLB opposes uniform grounds of divorce petition

**New Delhi, Feb 13:** The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has moved the Supreme Court against a plea seeking “uniform grounds of divorce” for all citizens of the country, keeping with the spirit of the Constitution and international conventions.

The AIMPLB has opposed the plea filed by advocate and BJP leader Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay seeking uniform grounds of divorce on the basis that personal laws cannot be tested on the anvil of Articles 14, 15, 21 and 44 of the Constitution.

The applicant would like to submit that the expression and ‘Custom and Usage’ in Article 13 of the Constitution does not include faith of a religious denomination embedded in personal laws,” the plea said while seeking impleadment in the petition filed by Upadhyay.

The Constituent Assembly was aware of the distinction between ‘personal law’ and the ‘custom and usage’ and chose advisedly to exclude personal law and include custom and usage in Article 13 of the Constitution, it said.

The Board in its plea submitted that the laws relating to marriage and divorce amongst the Hindus themselves are not uniform and thus the customs and practices have been protected by the statute itself.

The top court on December 16 last year had issued notice to the Centre on the plea filed by Upadhyay. His plea sought directions to the Centre to take steps to

remove anomalies in divorce laws and make them uniform for all citizens, without any prejudice on the basis of religion, race, cast, sex or place of birth.

“The court may declare that the discriminatory grounds of divorce are violative of Articles 14, 15, 21 and frame guidelines for ‘Uniform Grounds of Divorce’ for all citizens,” it said.

While Article 13 of the Constitution deals with laws that are inconsistent with or in derogation of the fundamental rights, Article 14 guarantees equality before law to all citizens. Article 21 pertains to the protection of life and personal liberty whereas Article 44 talks about a uniform civil code for the citizens.

“Alternatively, this court may direct the Law Commission to examine the laws of divorce and suggest ‘Uniform Grounds of Divorce’ for all citizens in the spirit of Articles 14, 15, 21, 44 within three months, while considering international laws and international conventions,” the plea said.

Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains have to seek divorce under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. Muslims, Christians and Parsis have their own personal laws. A couple belonging to different religions has to seek divorce under the Special Marriage Act, 1956,” it said. If either partner is a foreign national then that person has to seek divorce under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969.

Hence, the grounds of divorce are neither gender neutral nor religion neutral, the plea said.

SC ISSUES WARRANTS AGAINST NGO CHIEF FOR NOT DEPOSITING FINE

**New Delhi, Feb 13:** The Supreme Court has issued bailable warrants against the chairperson of an NGO for not depositing the cost of ₹25 lakh imposed on it for filing 64 PILs over the years without any success and “repeatedly misusing” the jurisdiction of the top court.

A bench comprising Justices S.K. Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy said the petitioner-Trust and its

chairperson Rajiv Daiya were playing “ducks and drakes” with the Court.

The top court on December 5, 2017, refused to modify its earlier order against NGO Suraz India Trust for filing 64 PILs.

It had dismissed the plea filed by the NGO to modify the apex court's May 1 order which also barred the organisation from filing any plea before any court across the country.

RECALL MAHA GOVERNOR: SHIV SENA

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, FEB. 13

The Shiv Sena on Saturday accused the BJP of using Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's shoulders to target the Maha Vikas Aghadi.

Accusing the governor of acting like a political puppet for the Centre, the Shiv Sena urged the Centre to recall him.

The Sena said that ever since Mr. Koshyari became the governor, he has been in controversy for several reasons. “He should behave like a mature person,” an editorial in *Saamana* said.

Militant accused of killing 3 BJP activists, policeman arrested

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, FEB. 13

The Jammu and Kashmir police on Saturday claimed that a ‘The Resistance Front (TRF)’ militant involved in the killing of three BJP activists and a policeman in southern Kulgam district last year was arrested from Samba area of Jammu region overnight.

Inspector General of Police (Jammu range), Vijay Kumar, said that a most wanted militant Zahoor Ahmed Rather alias Sahil alias Khalid was hiding in the frontier

district for some time and was arrested following receiving specific information about it from the Anantnag police.

TRF which the police insist is a front of outlawed Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) surfaced in J&K last year and has claimed responsibility for several violent acts that took place across the Valley over a period of time.

On the night of October 29, 2020, a group of militants had killed Fida Hussain Itoo, general secretary of the J&K unit of BJP Yuva Morcha, and two other party workers

Umar Ramzan Hajam and Umer Rashid Beigh in Kulgam's Yaripora village. Earlier in July last year, a police head constable Abdur Rashid Dar was shot dead from point blank range by gunmen outside his Kulgam's Furrah village.

A statement issued by the police here said that Rather, a resident of Anantnag's Jalkreeri Dooru village, who was involved in these killings was arrested from Teli Basti of Samba's industrial township Bari Brahmana during a “covert operation”

launched jointly by Samba police and Anantnag police.

“Besides involved in target killings in south Kashmir, he was instrumental in recruiting innocent youth into terrorist ranks and was along with another terrorist Abbas Sheikh running the LeT in the name of TRF,” the statement alleged.

The police said that Rather was earlier associated with Kashmir's indigenous militant organization Hizb-ul-Mujahideen but quit it in 2020 to join the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba.

LEGAL MATTER

Ganediwala faced flak for interpretation of sexual assault

Reduced term for controversial judge

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 13

Bombay High Court judge Pushpa Ganediwala, who delivered two controversial orders on sexual assaults in the recent weeks, on Saturday took oath as the high court's additional judge for one more year.

The decision to extend Justice Pushpa Ganediwala's fresh tenure by only one year, instead of two years as recommended by the Supreme Court collegium, was taken by the Centre. The government on Friday put out a notification on her

new term.

Justice Nitin Jamdar, the seniormost judge at the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court, administered the oath of office to her.

The oath-taking ceremony was attended virtually by the Bombay High Court's Chief Justice Dipankar Datta.

Additional judges are usually appointed for two years before being elevated as permanent judges. The decision was taken after the judge faced flak for her interpretation of sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

● **LAST MONTH**, the SC panel, in a rare instance, withdrew its recommendation to confirm the permanent status of Justice Ganediwala as a Bombay HC judge after two controversial orders were passed by her.

Justice Ganediwala's fresh term comes into effect from Saturday after her earlier tenure as an additional judge ended on Friday.

Last month, the Supreme Court panel, in a rare instance, withdrew its recommendation to the government to confirm the

permanent status of Justice Ganediwala as a Bombay High Court judge after two controversial orders were passed by her.

The collegium headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde, at a meeting held on January 20, had okayed the proposal for making Justice Ganediwala a permanent judge.

In a January 19 ruling, Justice Pushpa Ganediwala, 51, ruled that groping a minor's breast without ‘skin-to-skin contact’ cannot be termed as sexual assault as defined under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Days later, the Supreme

Court put that order on hold, allowing the government's top lawyer to file a petition against it.

The order was “disturbing” and would create a dangerous precedent, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal had said.

In another case last month, Justice Ganediwala ruled that “the acts of ‘holding the hands of the prosecutrix’ (female victim), or ‘opened zip of the pant’...does not fit in the definition of ‘sexual assault’,” and quashed the conviction of a man under child sexual assault laws. The survivor in this case, was a five-year-old minor.





## SHORT TAKES

FED AGENTS  
FATALLY SHOOT  
MAN IN FLORIDA

Coral Gables (Florida), Feb. 13: Federal agents investigating a financial scheme fatally shot a man in South Florida on Friday, authorities said.

The shooting occurred in Coral Gables and involved agents from the US Department of Homeland Security, the Miami Herald reported. Coral Gables is located just southwest of Miami.

During a large-scale financial investigation, an individual brandished a weapon at special agents with Homeland Security Investigations, as a result agents fired at the suspect, agency spokesman Nestor Yglesias said in a statement. The agents were treated at a local hospital for injuries that were not life-threatening, Yglesias said.

Investigators recovered a weapon at the scene, Yglesias said. Florida state law enforcement officials were investigating the shooting.

The man wasn't immediately identified.

BROKER TO BE  
EXTRADITED TO  
VENEZUELA

Madrid, Feb. 13: Spain's National Court has approved the extradition of a financial broker wanted in Venezuela on charges of fraud and embezzlement of funds.

The ruling on 40-year-old Ernesto Quintero triggered protests Friday among the Venezuelan community in Spain and Venezuelan opposition representatives.

Protesters, including Quintero's wife, demonstrated near the court in Madrid, calling for Spain to stop the extradition given the political instability in the Caribbean country. Quintero worked in a stock exchange in the western Venezuelan city of Maracaibo that was seized by authorities in 2010 owing to alleged fund-management irregularities, the unauthorised sale of client investments and for funneling money to Britain's Virgin Islands. He was arrested in Spain early in 2019 but released with conditions while his extradition was studied. He was detained again this week.

The court's three-judge panel rejected Quintero's argument that there were political motivations behind Venezuela's extradition request and that he would be in physical danger if handed over.

Antonio Ecarri, a Venezuelan politician designated as ambassador to Spain for the parallel government of Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó, claimed that any extradition now was a virtual death sentence given Venezuela's human rights record. Spain has previously rejected other extradition requests.

1 PEACEKEEPER  
HURT IN MALI  
HAS DIED: UN

United Nations, Feb. 13: One of the 28 UN peacekeepers wounded in an attack on a temporary United Nations base in central Mali has died from his injuries, the United Nations announced Friday.

Mali remains the deadliest of the UN's 12 far-flung peacekeeping missions and the peacekeeper from Togo was the sixth killed just since January in hostile acts in which 46 peacekeepers were also injured.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, who announced the peacekeeper's death, extended the UN's deepest condolences to his family and the people and government of Togo and wished a speedy recovery to the 27 other peacekeepers.

The UN has condemned Wednesday's complex attack using direct and indirect fire against the temporary base in Kerena, near Douentza. There have been no claims of responsibility for the attack, but Islamic extremists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have staged regular attacks on UN peacekeepers and soldiers. Dujarric said the Kerena base was set up recently to better protect the local population, bring back calm in areas impacted by intercommunal violence, as well as to reduce the threat of improvised explosive devices.

Mali has been in turmoil since a 2012 uprising prompted mutinous soldiers to overthrow the president. The power vacuum that resulted ultimately led to an Islamic insurgency and a French-led war that ousted the jihadists from power in 2013.

The country has also been plagued by a series of coups, the latest in August that overthrew President Ibrahim Boubacar.

7 injured in fuel tanker blast  
at Afghanistan-Iran border

The blaze consumed more than 500 trucks carrying natural gas and fuel

Herat (Afghanistan), Feb. 13: A fuel tanker exploded Saturday at the Islam Qala crossing in Afghanistan's western Herat province on the Iranian border, injuring at least seven people and causing a massive fire that consumed more than 500 trucks carrying natural gas and fuel, according to Afghan officials and Iranian state media.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the blast. Wahid Qatali, Herat's provincial governor, said Afghan first responders did not have the means to put out the fire and had requested support from Iran in the form of fire-fighting aircraft.

"For the time being, we can't even talk about the casualties," Qatali told The Associated Press.

The intensity of the flames meant ambulances were having trouble reaching the wounded or getting

**07** people injured by the fire have been admitted to the hospital so far, said Mohammad Rafiq Shirzy, spokesman for the regional hospital in Herat's provincial capital.

**02** explosions, around half-an-hour apart, at the border crossing were powerful enough to be spotted from space by NASA satellites.

**75** miles is the distance of the Islam Qala border crossing from the city of Herat. It is a major transit route between Afghanistan and Iran.

close to the site of the blast, said Mohammad Rafiq Shirzy, spokesman for the regional hospital in Herat's provincial capital, also named Herat.

Seven people injured by the fire have been admitted to the hospital so far, he said.

Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency quoted truck drivers as saying more

than 500 trucks carrying natural gas and fuel have been burnt so far.

Two explosions at the border crossing were powerful enough to be spotted from space by NASA satellites. One blast erupted around 1:10 p.m. Afghan time (0840 GMT), the next around a half hour later at 1:42 p.m. local (0912 GMT). The fire continued to

burn after nightfall, and forced Afghanistan to shut down its electrical supply from Iran, leaving Herat in the dark, said Wahidullah Tawhidi, spokesman for the Ministry of Power Supply.

The road between the city of Herat and Islam Qala is a dangerous stretch of highway that Afghans rarely travel at night for fear of attacks by criminal gangs. Taliban insurgents also travel freely in the area. Afghan security services had set up checkpoints and were assisting ambulances and emergency vehicles traveling to and from the border crossing.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that following the request from Herat's governor, Iranian "rescue forces and fire fighters are underway to extinguish the fire inside Afghanistan," according to Mohsen Nejat, director-general of crisis manage-

ment in Iran's Khorasan Razavi province.

The fire spread to the Dogharoon customs facilities on the Iranian side and first responders — including the fire department, the Iranian army and border forces — were assisting in extinguishing the blaze, according to Iranian state television. Trucks carrying natural gas and fuel were directed to leave the scene.

The Islam Qala border crossing is around 120 kilometres (75 miles) west of the city of Herat. It is a major transit route between Afghanistan and Iran.

The United States allows Afghanistan to import fuel and oil from Iran as part of a special concession that exempts Kabul from sanctions against Iran. Satellite photos taken Saturday showed dozens of tankers parked at the border crossing before the explosion. — AP

Charge against  
Trump a lie,  
say his lawyers

Washington, Feb. 13 : Donald Trump's insurrection incitement charge is a "monstrous lie" and the impeachment proceedings against the former president a "politically motivated witch hunt" by the Democrats, his lawyers said as they presented evidence in the US Senate. Trump, a Republican, is accused of inciting riots in the US Capitol on January 6 which left five people, including a police officer, dead.

Trump's lawyers Bruce Castor, David Schoen and Michael van der Veen each took turns addressing the Senate members on Friday, day four of Trump's impeachment trial, to describe Trump as a staunch supporter of law and order, not someone who incited the chaos at the Capitol.

His attorneys had up to 16 hours over the course of two days to push back on House impeachment managers' case that Trump should be convicted and barred from running for future office for inciting the attack on the Capitol to try to stop Joe Biden's presidential election victory being certified.

There is a complete lack of evidence on the article of impeachment against Donald Trump, his lawyers told the United States Senate. "We have a complete lack of evidence for the article of impeachment presented by the House managers," Trump's lawyer Castor said.

The impeachment by the House, the case for which was laid out by the House managers in the Senate during the last two days, was political.

"Their goal is to eliminate a political opponent, to substitute their judgment for the will of the voters," he said as he showed clips of various Democratic leaders. Castor said that the critical issue in this case is the very narrow issue that is charged against the 45th president.

"That issue is did the

AS VOTE DRAWS  
NEAR, MCCONNELL  
REVEALS LITTLE

Washington, Feb. 13: Seldom has Mitch McConnell signaled so little about such a consequential vote.

While many expect the Senate's top Republican to back acquitting former President Donald Trump of inciting rioters who assaulted the Capitol last month, no one is really sure. The Washington political universe and the world beyond will collectively hold its breath when the Senate impeachment trial roll call reaches the Kentuckian's name.

Over 36 years in the Senate, the measured McConnell has earned a reputation for inexpressiveness in the service of caution. This time, the suspense over how he'll vote underscores how much is at stake for him. — AP

45th president engage in incitement of — they continue to say — insurrection. Clearly there was no insurrection," he said. Trump's lawyer van der Veen used his opening remarks to dispute the Democrats' case that the former president had incited violence during his speech to supporters on January 6.

Trump had made allegations of voter fraud and urged his supporters to converge at the Capitol building a short while before the riot broke out.

"To claim that the president in any way wished, desired or encouraged lawless or violent behaviour is a preposterous and monstrous lie. In fact, the first two messages the president sent via Twitter once the incursion at the Capitol began were 'Stay Peaceful' and 'No violence because we are the party of law and order,'" the lawyer said. — PTI

## Paint on Thai riot cops



Riot police covered in red paint thrown by pro-democracy protesters stand guard during an anti-government demonstration next to the Grand Palace in Bangkok on Saturday as demonstrators scaled a Bangkok monument, draping it in a crimson cloth and calling for the kingdom to abolish its draconian royal defamation laws. — AFP

## Biden: Govs, mayors need \$350 bn to fight virus

Washington, Feb 13: President Joe Biden met with a bipartisan group of governors and mayors at the White House on Friday as part of his push to give financial relief from the coronavirus pandemic to state and local governments — a clear source of division with Republican lawmakers who view the spending as wasteful.

As part of a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus package, Biden wants to send \$350 billion to state and local governments and tribal governments. While Republicans in Congress have largely objected to this initiative, Biden's push has some GOP support among governors and mayors.

"You folks are all on the front lines and dealing with the crisis since day one," Biden said at the start of the Oval Office meeting. "They've been working on their own in many cases." Republican lawmakers have stressed that some past aid to state and local governments remains unspent and revenues have rebounded after slumping when the coronavirus first hit. But state governments have shed 332,000 jobs since the

outbreak began to spread last February, and local governments have cut nearly 1 million jobs, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics.

Republican Govs. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas and Larry Hogan of Maryland attended the Friday meeting, along with Democratic governors, including New York's Andrew Cuomo and New Mexico's Michelle Lujan Grisham. The mayors of Atlanta, Detroit, Miami and Arlington, Texas, also were at the meeting. New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell was set to attend, but she could not due to White House health screening and safety protocols, according to her press secretary. Under the relief package being crafted in House committees this week, every state and the District of Columbia would get at least \$500 million, but most of the money going to states would be distributed based on their share of unemployed workers nationally.

Local governments would also get \$130.2 billion and tribal governments would get \$20 billion. The money could be used to

US: China must make available  
data of outbreak's earliest days

Washington, Feb. 13: The US on Saturday demanded that China must make available its Covid-19 data from the earliest days of the outbreak to the world to better understand the pandemic and prepare for the next one.

China reported the first Covid-19 case in the central city of Wuhan in late December 2019 and since then the disease has snowballed into a pandemic, affecting 108,822,502 people with 2,396,283 deaths worldwide. According to Johns Hopkins Coronavirus tracker, the US, which is the worst affected country in the world, has reported over 27,189,188 cases

and 468,103 deaths from the deadly virus.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, in a strongly-worded statement, expressed deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the Covid-19 investigation by the World Health Organisation (WHO) were communicated. "We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the Covid-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them. It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by

the Chinese government," he said.

"To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak. Going forward, all countries, including China, should participate in a transparent and robust process for preventing and responding to health emergencies — so that the world learns as much as possible, as soon as possible," Sullivan demanded. The mission of the WHO has never been more important, and the US has deep respect for its experts and the work they are doing every day. — PTI

AIRLINES PUSH  
WH TO REJECT  
TESTS FOR FLYERS

Washington, Feb. 13: Leaders of several major US airlines met online Friday with White House officials to press their case against requiring Coronavirus tests for passengers on domestic flights, saying it would undermine the already fragile industry.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki downplayed speculation that the Biden administration could soon impose a requirement that passengers on domestic flights first pass a Covid-19 test. But she stopped short of taking the idea off the table.

"Reports that there is an intention to put in place new requirements such as testing are not accurate," Psaki said. A person familiar with the discussions said the airline CEOs talked with White House Coronavirus-response coordinator Jeff Zients. — AP

## NO | SHOWS

## A testament to the grit of organisers who followed French rules

## Circus festival adapts to Covid-19 rules

Marseille, Feb. 13: It's been a tough year for the performing arts in most countries, with virus lockdowns cancelling shows and shuttering venues.

But the world's top circus festival has found a way to flourish between the cracks in the rules — even without the huge crowds that would normally have attended. Ending Saturday in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille, the fourth edition of the Circus Biennale (BIAC), held every two years in the south of France, celebrates

the injury-defying and spine-stretching arts that fuel the storied spectacle. More than 110,000 people attended the last BIAC, in 2019. This year it had up to 2,000 visitors, all professionals who work in the circus or are looking to buy shows. Even that is a testament to the grit and determination of the organisers, who skillfully adapted their festival to the French authorities' rules and regulations.

"We started with a plan A, then plan B, then plan C, then plan D, and finally

● IN FRANCE, theatres, concert halls and other venues have been shuttered since Oct. 30 due to Covid-19.

we decided to do plan E which was a Biennale for professionals. That was possible, we were allowed to do it," said BIAC organizer Raquel Rache de Andrade. The dozens of performances featured upside-down tutus, acrobatic bicycles, multicoloured parachutes and enough contortionism to shock

a chiropractor.

Virus safety signs put up at the port-side venue showed a clown with red nose, bow tie and mask, and the accompanying text: "Having a big nose does not exempt you from wearing one." In France, theatres, concert halls and other venues have been shuttered since Oct. 30 due to Covid-19. Before that, they were shut from mid-March to late June.

No one knows when the performing arts will be allowed to begin again. But it's important to show

that culture is essential, according to Yoann Bourgeois, a dancer and choreographer who trained in the circus arts and is the flagship artist of this year's BIAC.

"The management of this crisis has had an extremely violent impact on poets, artists, people who dedicate their lives to culture in general," Bourgeois said. "It has categorised what is considered essential or non-essential. We are convinced that poetry is essential to live." — AP





## DECCAN Chronicle

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Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Off the beaten track

### A bottom-up view of the annual Budget

Despite the hoopla around the Union government's Budget, for citizens, allocations in their state budgets matter more. Nearly two thirds of total government expenditure is done by states and for capex, this proportion increases to 90 per cent (FY 2020-21 BE data).

Twenty-eight states and eight Union Territories share the enlarged pie at their level. No individual state matches the fiscal power of the Union finance minister's signature releasing budget allocations. But for citizens, at the receiving end of the pipe, what matters most is the efficiency and effectiveness of the last-mile expenditure management by the state governments.

Living in a well-performing state matters and not just for employment. Progressive "states" bend with the breeze blowing from Delhi, to tap the flow of funds, their way. Telangana is a good example. More importantly, enjoying decent levels of basic public services — subsidised food, education, public health, drinking water electricity and public transport, direct income transfers to farmers, women, old age pensioners and support to the specially-abled, subsidised credit — depends crucially on the efficiency of the local administration.

The primary federal fiscal role of the Union is to collect tax and pass through a mandated share (41 per cent XV Finance Commission) to the states. The Union government, however, games how much it passes through. The mandatory sharing applies only to tax not cess (say on petroleum products). Increasing the cess on imported liquor, as done in the Budget, whilst lowering the duty rate, avoids sharing the extra revenue with states. This is in bad faith.

Voluntary adoption of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 enhanced centralisation of fiscal power in the Union. The GST council collectively determines tax rates. But the Union has veto power. Happily, the benefits, despite the convoluted design (multiple rates) of the GST, far exceed the costs from dilution of state tax autonomy. The avoided cost of pancaked sales tax on goods sold across state borders and the ease of movement — most recently via e-tax invoices — will reduce tax leakage and benefit both the Union and the states.

Significant "tax gouging" potential, however, remains with states via punitive tax on the non-virtuous (excise duty on alcohol) and the well-off (exorbitant sales tax on petroleum products and registration fee on purchasing a personal motorised vehicle or property). Less developed states use this mechanism pervasively. The share of "tax gouging" sources was just 46 per cent (2020-21 BE) in well-developed Maharashtra as compared to 63 per cent in Telangana and 57 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. Significantly, Maharashtra and Delhi — both high-income states — recently reduced the registration fee on property purchase, hoping to boost real estate transactions.

Less developed states rely heavily on tax receipts shared by the Union government, per the formula of the quinquennial finance commission, which compensates states with low tax potential to promote "balanced development". For Maharashtra and Telangana, central tax transfers are only 21 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, of own tax revenue. Conversely, in Uttar Pradesh, central tax transfers are 87 per cent of own tax revenue.

Irrespective of the state you live in, if your annual income is more than Rs 1 million you are in the top quintile (20 per cent). Be prepared to finance delivery of common use public services to the bottom 40 per cent for some time. Aspirers (40 per cent) in the middle do not pay income tax either. But they consume more and thereby pull their tax weight by paying GST, sales tax and excise and bear the impact of customs duties (indirect taxes). It rankles that honest taxpayers also subsidise fraud and tax evasion. Their rightful outrage was mellowed by the Union Budget retaining this year's tax regime including the income tax relaxations and rationalised GST rates. But watch out for your state budget levies coming soon!

A "soft tax" regime rides majorly on the government's ability to ramp up tax collections using big data analytics to make tax evaders and their in-government colluders accountable. It does not help when ideologically driven e-privacy paranoia results in data "privacy" being privileged over better tax collection! The only upward bias in the Budget is in import taxes to protect domestic manufacturing under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat program, possibly to finance the new performance linked financial incentives for 13 industrial sectors. The intent, as also behind the proposal to set up three new textile parks, is to encourage global entrepreneurs to set up manufacturing hubs in India and create good new jobs — on the template of China three decades ago.

The big push is on capital investment, financed by imported capital. Foreign investment in insurance is now liberalized, raising the limit from 49 per cent to 75 per cent. Private Banks (ICICI, HDFC and Axis Bank) already operate under majority foreign ownership. There are also plans for restarting privatisation after a lapse of 15 years creating new opportunities for inward financial flows.

The International Financial Centre at GIFT city got another round of special incentives to ramp up business. Asset reconstruction and management companies are proposed to deal with the swollen non-performing assets (13.5 per cent of assets per RBI), giving public sector banks a clean slate to restart lending. Less convincingly, a Development Finance Institution is to re-engage with long-term project finance to compensate for an absent corporate bond market. Fintech, meanwhile, awaits formalisation, through legislation, of the hitherto ambivalent regulatory regime for cryptocurrency.

The revised FY 2020-21 Budget is expansionary with government borrowing a "never before" net ₹18.5 trillion (fiscal deficit 9.5 per cent of GDP). For the moment inflation is moderating as the RBI curtails excess liquidity and the economy heals steadily.

What follows next depends on the course of the pandemic. There is enough fiscal power in the FY 2021-22 Budget (fiscal deficit 6.8 per cent of GDP) for enhancing demand and facilitating growth. This comes at the expense of pandemic-related relief measures, which are skimpy and will be missed by the bottom 40 per cent who are also the least able to deal with inflation and suffer most from the downturn in employment. In the meantime, fingers crossed.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



### De-escalation at LAC: Is a real solution in sight?



K.C. Singh

Former Army Chief and now Union minister V.K. Singh's rash comment on the Line of Actual Control having often been breached by both India and China caused an uproar, with Beijing seizing on it as proof that India was the aggressor. But when news emerged of a likely coordinated de-escalation in Ladakh, after the nine-month standoff between Indian and Chinese forces, Gen. Singh's downgrading of the LAC acquired an intent. It was to ensure any withdrawal deal would not draw attention to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion last year that no one had intruded into India.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh told Parliament on Thursday that a mutual and calibrated withdrawal of forces, north and south of Pangong Tso, was underway, but unwisely refused to share details, pleading their "sensitive and operational" nature. This naturally raised questions whether the likely buffer-zones ceded space historically and traditionally patrolled by Indian soldiers. Some speculated whether China had managed by subterfuge to push the LAC closer to its 1959 claim-line.

The defence ministry decried the next day "mis-informed and misleading comments". It reasserted India's old claims, including the illegal occupation by China of 43,000 sq km in Aksai Chin, as shown in Indian maps. The LAC passes through Finger 8, north of Pangong. Mutual withdrawal will create a buffer-zone between Fingers 4 and 8. India will retain its Dhan Singh Thapa outpost near Finger 3, while Chinese troops shall stay beyond Finger 8.

The intrusions at Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang Plains will be tackled after current withdrawals are completed. The 255-km Durbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road runs at places alongside the LAC, giving connectivity to the Karakoram Pass. At Depsang plains, the flat terrain allowed China to make deep intrusions, threatening the highway.

Multiple questions on about the timing and depth of the Chinese intrusions from April-May 2020, in the middle of a global pandemic it caused. Also, why the flexibility now after months of sabre-rattling, China may have had multiple motives for the sudden, heavily armed and wide-fronted intrusion, under the subterfuge of spring military exercises in Tibet. It had strongly objected in August 2019 to the unilateral revocation of Article 370, affecting the status of a "disputed territory", where China had a stake. In September, the "Howdy Modi" Houston rally with President Donald Trump signalled a growing India-US proximity. Meanwhile, US-China relations mired in trade sanctions. Then came Mr Trump's return visit to India in February 2020, in an US election year, indicating a deeper Trump-Modi connect. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 epidemic began swirling as Wuhan was locked down. In mid-March 2020 President Trump termed the new pandemic "China Virus". All these would have heightened Chinese paranoia. China also saw a chance for strategic gain by repositioning as the world was distracted by the pandemic.

Thus, China also began ratcheting up its aggressive behaviour towards US allies Australia and Japan, that along with the

US and India are part of the "Quad". In May 2020, as the Ladakh LAC heated up, China hit Australian barley and beef exports. In August, Australian wine faced anti-dumping duties. By September, China fully suspended barley imports, ordering stricter controls on wheat. The next month, the squeeze was extended to Australian coal. Similarly, regarding Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands held by Japan, in the 17-month period from April 2019 to August 2020, Chinese vessels were inside contiguous zone 456 days out of 519, as against half that in the previous period. Chinese President Xi Jinping's Japan visit, due for early April 2020, was postponed, ostensibly due to the pandemic. In July, Japan's ruling party cancelled it over China's imposition of a new national security law on Hong Kong.

Initially surprised, the Indian Army quickly mirrored Chinese deployments, by inducting armour, drones, etc backed by air power and artillery. It upped the ante by seizing heights overlooking Spanggur Gap, south of Pangong, stymieing any Chinese thrust towards Chushul, besides dominating Chinese deployments in the sector. India, despite the financial cost, also dug in for the winter, demonstrating resolve. India also began raising the economic and reputational cost for China by banning several "apps" and tightening trade. China in May 2020 imposed draconian controls over Hong Kong, in breach of its international commitment to Britain. China also sharpened its tone on Taiwan, as the US began upgrading its Taiwan ties. The US-China verbal exchanges exacerbated as US presidential

elections neared. After Mr Trump's defeat, outgoing secretary of state Mike Pompeo directly alleged genocide by China in Xinjiang against the Uighurs.

Having opened multiple flashpoints against its continental and maritime neighbours, China awaited the outcome of US presidential elections before reassessing tactics. The Biden administration's endorsement of the Trump approach to China, but with smarter tactics like outreach to key allies for building an "alliance of democracies", put China on notice. India's success in handling the Covid pandemic and its economy recovering rapidly also showed that the Chinese browbeating had faltered. China in any case had succeeding in underscoring Indian vulnerability to determined Chinese pressure at the LAC, especially with an irate Pakistan acting in tandem. India also needed to buy peace abroad, with farmers agitating at home and a Biden administration murmuring nervously about human rights and democracy breaches in India.

Will buffer zones be a precursor to a mutually acceptable delineation of the LAC or just a Band-Aid solution to a deeper problem of China seeking Asian hegemony and bipolarity with the US globally? Are there some unwritten understandings on India scaling back its border infrastructure upgrade, handling of the Dalai Lama, non-militarisation of the "Quad"? It is unlikely China will curb its South Asian ingress, using the Belt and Road projects. It is unimaginable that a nationalist Indian government will concede Chinese hegemony. Thus, the Ladakh de-escalation may just be both sides stepping back, having tested each other's "red lines", to try rebuilding trust and resume the usual path of cooperation, competition and calibrated friction.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

**India's success in handling the Covid pandemic and its economy recovering rapidly also showed that the Chinese browbeating had faltered**

### LETTERS

#### ABOVE PARTY LINES

The unity of leaders across political spectrum to protest against Vizag Steel privatisation is highly commendable (*Ganta, Avanti share dais at hunger strike, DC, Feb. 12*). Though both the leaders are from different parties, they kept their political affiliation aside to take up issues concerning the people in their state. This should be taken as an example across the country. People matter more than political ideology.

**Teja Deenamsetty**  
Visakhapatnam

#### TMC CRUMBLING

Is Prashant Kishor, the political strategist working for the TMC, the villain of the piece alienating the bigwigs? That's the impression gaining now with Dinesh Trivedi too ditching his mentor, saying, inter alia that "....it has been taken over by a corporate professional...." pointing to PK. Time is slipping for Mamata with her staunch confidantes leaving her in the lurch. The BJP armageddon is on the move in West Bengal.

**K. Nehru Patnaik**  
Visakhapatnam

#### WATCH OVER CHINA

The beginning of disengagement of Indian and Chinese troops at the LAC is a welcome step (*Go slow on peace thrust, up the ante during talks, DC, Feb. 13*). However, Chinese are known to make assurances and agreements but do not honour them on the ground. In order to have a peaceful environment, both sides need to maintain sanctity of LAC. Further, our troops have to be constantly on the watch.

**Dr C. Ghanshyam**  
Visakhapatnam

#### GRUESOME MURDER

The ghastly manner in which the Corporator was done to death should be condemned. The video footage of the murder which went viral was horrible to watch. One wonders if humans could behave in such a gruesome manner, that too when two persons were right on the spot. The person who had perpetrated the inhuman act simply did his job of finishing his friend turned foe by running over the victim and sped away without remorse. Whether it was a premeditated or not is a secondary question, but such a murder could only be seen in movies. This case must be taken to its conclusion quickly instead of delaying prosecution on one pretext or other.

**Govardhana Myneedu**  
Vijayawada

### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

#### Pak units on border

AGARTALA, FEBRUARY. 13 Reports of concentration of the Pakistan Army in Sylhet area opposite to Dharmanagar subdivision of Tripura were received here today.

The reports said the Pakistan army personnel had already started camping in a wide area and the camps were being strengthened. Another report said Pakistan troops were also stationed at the Pakistan border off Sonamura sub-division of Tripura. Pakistan has demanded from India compensation for the extra mileage.

Claude Arpi



### Trusty old allies India, France can bond over big research

President Xi Jinping recently affirmed that "time and momentum are on China's side". The Great Helmsman believes in the "great rejuvenation of Chinese nation" led by the soon-100 years old Communist Party of China; he, however, cited challenges, adding: "The world is in a turbulent time that is unprecedented in the past century."

Only the future will ascertain if the "momentum" is indeed on China's side, but there is no doubt that the world is going through uncertain and difficult times. As this is bound to continue in 2021 and probably beyond, India has to find reliable and unwavering support abroad.

Addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, Mr Xi recently asserted, somewhat ironically: "The misguided approach of antagonism and confrontation... will eventually hurt all countries' interests and undermine everyone's well-being."

For over 20 years, France and India have been practising cooperation. Recently, India had supported France when the country was attacked by Islamic fundamentalists: "India stands with Paris at this difficult

moment and fully supports the French government on this issue," affirmed New Delhi.

Trust is the key in every relationship. When President Jacques Chirac came to India in 1998, he proposed a strategic partnership. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee readily agreed to give a concrete shape to one based on shared values.

The 1998 Indo-French partnership is deep for many reasons; one of them is a shared vision of the world. Further, France has never tried to bully India into accepting its views, while standing by India during the nuclear tests, in favour of a UN Security Council seat and on terrorism. This has not always been the case with other countries, including the United States.

The recently-concluded "Exercise Desert Knight-21" held in Jodhpur is another example of sharing. With 11 Rafale aircrafts having already joined that Indian Air Force (IAF), the collaboration has been a game changer for India in the confrontation with China in Ladakh.

Speaking in Jodhpur, Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Bhadauria said the first priority had been for the IAF to

integrate the fighter planes in the existing fleet: "It has been done and the current exercise Desert Knight is the result of that." French Ambassador to India, Emmanuel Lenain, noting that the first French aircraft landed in India in 1953, observed "the partnership has persisted through good and bad times".

New Delhi and Paris also held their annual Strategic Dialogue on January 7. National security advisor Ajit Doval met his French counterpart Emmanuel Bonne, the French President's diplomatic advisor (known as the "Sherpa"). According to a South Block press release: "The two sides held discussions on... counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, defence cooperation, maritime security, regional and global issues, and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region."

According to some sources, France agreed to an Indian request that defence technologies will not be shared with Pakistan. Further, Mr Bonne would have offered that 70 per cent of the assembly line for future Rafales could come under "Make in India" scheme, with technology transfer.

During the recent India-France-Japan Workshop on the Indo-Pacific held in

Delhi, the foreign secretary said: "The Indo-Pacific has become an essential concept in international relations today." It is certainly a field where Paris and Delhi could collaborate, however a "turbulent-time" partnership means more than joining a new grouping or buying a few combat aircrafts. Of course, sharing advanced technology is difficult; years ago, Safran, the French company which has developed the engine for the Rafale, tried to work with DRDO on a new engine for the Tejas, nothing has materialised.

One still remembers how difficult has been the cooperation and transfer of technology under the "75 Project" for six Scorpene submarines. The fifth Scorpene, *INS Vagir*, built by the Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL) with technology transfer from France was launched in November 2020; MDL will manufacture a total of six submarines with technology assistance from the Naval Group under a US \$3.75 billions deal signed in October 2005.

Concrete collaborations are, and will be, undoubtedly difficult, they will face obstacles, which in the end can only help deepen bilateral relations.

It is ironic that for years Paris

believed in the depth of its relations with China, so much so that a P4 Lab was "offered" to China in Wuhan, with consequences that are suspicious today. The P4 lab episode is an example of what should never be done — work with untrustworthy partners.

What is required for France and India is to take their relations to the next level; for this, both nations need to work on a "big" research project.

I am thinking of an armed drone of the next generation; another field could be quantum communication, yet another could be a sixth-generation aircraft. In Jodhpur, the Air Chief said, "Our present vision is to incorporate all the latest technologies and sensors in our fifth-generation aircraft" and at a later stage work on a sixth-generation plane, a project in which both nations could collaborate.

For this, the thrust of the leaders of both countries is necessary — but can they find time to "dream" in these turbulent times?

The writer is based in South India for the past 42 years. He writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations.



## SHORT TAKES

## FORMER PM OF GUINEA-BISSAU LEAVES COUNTRY

BISSAU, Feb. 13: Former Guinea-Bissau prime minister Aristide Gomes, who has been holed up in United Nations premises in the capital Bissau for 11 months, left the country on Friday.

Gomes, who left office in early 2020, boarded a special UN-chartered flight in the afternoon without making any comments.

The flight was headed for Dakar, the capital of neighbouring Senegal, according to an airport source.

Gomes, a leading member of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), took refuge in the local offices of the United Nations in March 2020 after President Umaro Sissoco Embalo took office following an election victory contested by PAIGC.

Citing fears for his safety, Gomes sought international help to allow him to leave the former Portuguese colony in West Africa. On Thursday the foreign ministry confirmed in a statement that an agreement had been reached to allow Gomes to go abroad for medical reasons. This came after the prosecutor general had given the green light for his departure, despite an investigation into embezzlement of public funds.

## ECUADOR'S PREZ RUNNERS-UP SEEK RECOUNT

Quito, Feb. 13: The two runners-up in the first round of Ecuador's presidential election on Friday asked the country's electoral body for a vote recount to determine which one of them will contest a runoff. Environmental lawyer Yaku Perez and right-wing ex-banker Guillermo Lasso finished neck-and-neck in the race for second and third place in Sunday's vote.

Pre-election polls had placed Lasso comfortably in second place. First place went to young leftist economist Andres Arauz, but he did not earn enough votes to avoid a second-round runoff set for April 11.

"Our proposal is that this (electoral) process be suspended until a recount is given in the 24 provinces" of the country, Perez said at a meeting with Lasso at the headquarters of the National Electoral Council (CNE) in Quito.

CNE head Diana Atamaint, other council members and international election observers were present at the meeting.

Perez, a prominent indigenous leader who claims there was wrongdoing in the first round, said a recount would offer a chance "to demonstrate to the country that there is no fraud, that the electoral process was transparent."

Hundreds of Ecuadorans rallied in support of their candidate Thursday. Perez, 51, an environmental lawyer, has been given 19.38 per cent of the vote behind conservative Lasso, 65, who got 19.74 percent.

## KILLING OF GIRL: BELGIAN COURT SENTENCES COP

Mons, Belgium, Feb. 13: A Belgian court on Friday gave a police officer a one-year suspended sentence over the fatal shooting of a two-year-old Kurdish girl during the chase of a van carrying migrants.

Victor-Manuel Jacinto Gonçalves, 48, was found guilty of involuntary homicide after a trial in the southern city of Mons over the 2018 incident in which he opened fire at the vehicle. The high-profile tragedy caused a scandal in Belgium and, for rights activists, became a symbol of the dangers posed by the "criminalisation" of irregular migration.

The Iraqi Kurdish driver of the vehicle, on trial alongside the police officer, was jailed for four years. A third man accused of being the people smuggler was acquitted.

The lawyer representing Gonçalves, Laurent Kennes, said the conviction was a "great disappointment" and that the legal team will consider appealing.

The toddler named Mawda was fatally wounded in May 2018 when she was shot in the head as police chased a van being driven across Belgium by traffickers taking migrants from the continent to Britain.

The officer — who initially faced up to five years in jail — insisted he intended to shoot out a tyre to halt the suspect vehicle, but his car swerved violently and the bullet went astray.

Prosecutors ended up demanding only a one-year suspended sentence.

## Tensions running high in Myanmar

## Street protests enter 2nd week with neither protesters nor military govt ready to back off

Yangon, Feb. 13: Mass street demonstrations in Myanmar entered their second week Saturday with neither protesters nor the military government they seek to unseat showing any signs of backing off from confrontations.

Protesters in Yangon, the country's biggest city, again congregated at Hleden intersection, a key crossroads from which groups fanned out to other points, including the embassies of the United States and China. They marched despite an order banning gatherings of five or more people. The US, especially after the announcement by President Joe Biden of sanctions against the military regime, is regarded as an ally in the protesters' struggle against the Feb. 1 coup.

China is detested as an ally of the ruling generals, whose support is crucial to them keeping their grip

on power. Demonstrations also resumed in the second biggest city, Mandalay, with lawyers making up one large contingent. The military ousted the country's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and her government and prevented recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament.

Suu Kyi and other senior members of her government and party remain in detention. The junta led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing said it was forced to act because Suu Kyi's government failed to properly investigate allegations of fraud in last year's election, which her National League for Democracy party won in a landslide.

The election commission said there is no evidence to support the military's claims. Saturday's protests coincided with the birthday of Gen. Aung San, the country's independence leader and father of

Suu Kyi. His name and image have appeared on signs carried by some demonstrators. Authorities have stepped up the arrests of politicians and activists, and in areas outside Yangon have become more aggressive in trying to break up protests.

According to the independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, at least 326 people have been detained since the coup, of which 303 remain in custody. There have been many reports over the past three nights of raids during a curfew in which security personnel have tried to seize people from their homes. In several cases, neighbours and others people have rushed to the scene in such numbers that security forces have abandoned their attempts to haul in their targets. Videos of such raids have been widely posted on social media.

— AP

## Terror hints: Khalsa TV fined

London, Feb. 13: The UK's media watchdog has imposed a total fine of £50,000 on Khalsa Television Ltd or KTV in Britain for broadcasting a music video and a discussion programme that was an indirect call for British Sikhs to commit violence and also contained a terror reference.

The Office of Communications (Ofcom), the UK government-approved media regulatory authority, issued the order on Friday following its findings dating back to February and November 2019.

Its order also includes a direction for the channel to broadcast a statement of Ofcom's findings on a date and in a form to be determined by the watchdog and also for KTV not to repeat the music video or the discussion programme found in breach of its rules.

"Ofcom has imposed financial penalties of £20,000 and £30,000 on Khalsa Television Limited in relation to its service KTV for failing to comply with our broadcasting rules. The £20,000 penalty relates to a music video. The

£30,000 penalty relates to a discussion programme," the Ofcom decision states.

On July 4, 7 and 9 in 2018, KTV broadcast a music video for a song called 'Bagga and Shera'.

Following its investigation, Ofcom found that the music video was an "indirect call to action for Sikhs living in the United Kingdom to commit violence, up to and including murder".

It also included brief flashes, which, when slowed down, revealed frames of on-screen text.

— PTI

## Biden admin files appeal pressing for Assange extradition

Washington, Feb. 13: The administration of US President Joe Biden has appealed a British judge's stance on the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, a Justice Department official said Friday.

A brief filed late Thursday declared Washington's desire to have Assange stand trial on espionage and hacking-related charges over WikiLeaks' publication of hundreds of thousands of US military and diplomatic documents beginning in 2009.

The Justice Department had until Friday to register its stance on Judge Vanessa Baraitser's January 4 ruling that Assange suffered mental health problems that would raise the risk of suicide if he were sent to the United States for trial.

"Yes, we filed an appeal and we are continuing to pursue extradition," Justice Department spokesman Marc Raimondi said.

After Baraitser's decision, which did not question the legal grounds for the US extradition request, Donald Trump's administration moved to appeal. But Biden's stance was not clear, and he was pressured by rights groups to drop the case, which raises sensitive transpa-

rency and media freedom issues. After WikiLeaks began publishing US secrets in 2009, then-president Barack Obama, whose vice president was Biden, declined to pursue the case. Assange said WikiLeaks was no different than other media constitutionally protected to publish such materials.

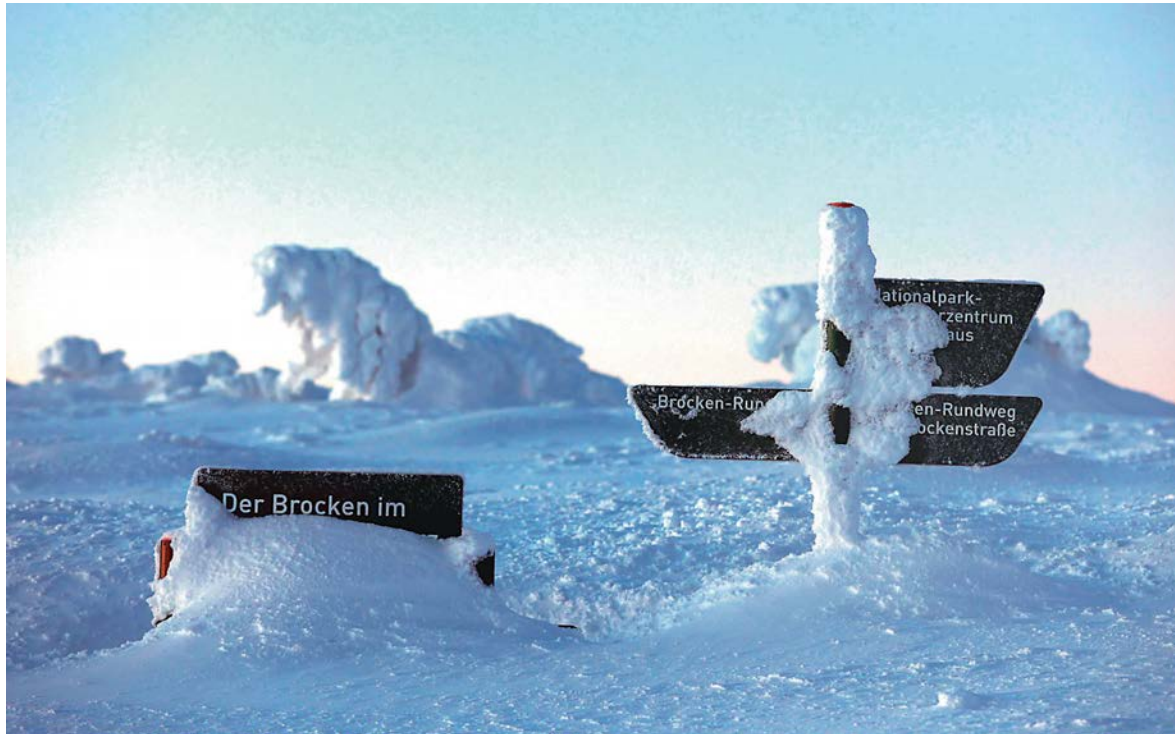
Prosecuting him, too, could mean also prosecuting powerful US news organisations for publishing similar material — legal fights the government would likely lose. But under Trump, whose 2016 election was helped by WikiLeaks publishing Russian-stolen materials damaging to his rival Hillary Clinton — the Justice Department built a national security case against Assange.

In 2019 the native Australian was charged under the US Espionage Act and computer crimes laws with multiple counts of conspiring with and directing others, from 2009 to 2019, to illegally obtain and release US secrets.

In doing so he aided and abetted hacking, illegally exposed confidential US sources to danger and used the information to damage the United States, according to the charges.

— AFP

## White carpet



Snowed under signposts are pictured before sunrise on the top of the Brocken, the highest point of the Harz Mountains, near Schierke in central Germany. Temperatures of minus 20 degrees Celsius and icy winds have been measured on the Harz peak.

— AFP

## 3 killed in Mogadishu car bomb

Mogadishu, Feb. 13: Three people were killed and eight wounded after the Al-Shabaab Islamist group detonated a car bomb near a security checkpoint in the Somali capital Mogadishu Saturday, a security official and witnesses said.

"The police were chasing the hostile vehicle after spotting it a few kilometres away from where it exploded," the official, Abdirahman Mohamed, informed.

"Three civilians died according to the information we have received so far and eight others are wounded," he said.

"The police opened fire on the vehicle and chased it and this allowed many people to flee. This has really limited the number of casualties the blast could have caused," Witnesses said they heard gunfire and saw vehicles including three-wheel tuk-tuks scatter before the heavy blast occurred on a key road near the presidential palace.

"I was at a gym close to where the blast occurred, but thanks to God we have heard the gunshots before the blast. And this alerted many people including

myself and we fled from the area to take cover before the vehicle reached the area of the explosion," said one witness, Dahir Osman.

A police statement said there had been no deaths, only seven wounded in the blast which destroyed eight cars and nine tuk-tuks. However witnesses contradicted this, saying there were casualties.

"My uncle was among the dead, I went there to collect his body and I saw another civilian who died in the blast as well," said Suleiman Ali.

The Al-Qaeda linked Al-Shabaab claimed the attack through their Shahada News Agency, according to the US monitoring group SITE.

The Somali capital is regularly targeted with attacks by Al-Shabaab who have been waging a long and violent insurgency seeking to unseat the internationally backed government.

They were driven out of Mogadishu in 2011, but still control swathes of territory from where they plan and launch frequent, deadly strikes against government and civilian targets.

— AFP

## UN welcomes US revocation of Houthis as ultras

United Nations, Feb. 13: The United States announced Friday it is revoking the designation of Yemen's Houthi rebels as a terrorist group effective February 16, a reversal by the Biden administration welcomed by the United Nations and humanitarian groups who feared former president Donald Trump's actions would impede aid deliveries to the conflict-torn country facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called President Joe Biden's decision to rescind the designation a recognition of the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen.

He said the new US administration listened to warnings from the United Nations, humanitarian groups, bipartisan members of Congress and others that the designations

could have a devastating impact on Yemenis' access to basic commodities like food and fuel.

Yemen imports 90 per cent of its food, nearly all purchased through commercial channels, and UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock warned last month that US designation of the Houthis already had companies pulling back from dealing with the Yemenis and would likely lead to a large-scale famine on a scale that he was not seen for nearly 40 years.

Blinken's announcement followed a phone conversation Thursday with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, where Yemen was one of the issues they discussed.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric on Friday called the US action extremely positive.

— AP

## Indian-origin UN staffer in race for Secy-Gen post

United Nations, Feb. 13: A 34-year-old Indian-origin employee at the UN has announced that she is running to be its next Secretary General, throwing her hat in the ring against the world organisation's current chief Antonio Guterres, saying she refuses to be a bystander and it is now time for a new UN.

Arora Akanksha, whose work includes managing audits at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said she will run for the post of the world's top diplomat.

People in my position aren't supposed to stand up to the ones in charge. We are supposed to wait our turn, hop on the hamster wheel, go to work, keep our heads down and accept that the world is the way it is, Akanksha said in a two-and-a-half minute campaign video posted online.

The #AroraForSG campaign video shows Akanksha walking inside the sprawling UN headquarters, as her voice over says that people who have come before her have failed to hold the UN accountable. For 75 years, the UN has not fulfilled its promise to the world — refugees haven't been protected, humanitarian aid has been minimal, and technology and innovation has been on the back-burner. We deserve a UN that leads progress," she said.

That is why I am running for the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I refuse to be a bystander. I will not accept this is the best the UN can do, she said in the video.

Akanksha posted another video on Twitter in which she thanked people for supporting her campaign. I am so humbled at the support I've received from everyone and thrill-

ed that you're with me on this journey together. I know it's a David and Goliath story and I know we are the little guys here, but we have to remember, we the people, are more powerful than any system, she said, adding that once we realise that we can change the system, we can influence the system.

She urged people to vote on her website to send a message that they support change and support a new UN. Last month Guterres, 71 had confirmed that he will seek a second five-year term as chief of the world organisation.

Guterres' first term ends on December 31 this year and the term of the next Secretary-General will begin on January 1, 2022. Guterres assumed office on January 1, 2017 after a reformed selection process that included a public informal dialogue session.

— PTI

## RAPE PLOT, CRIES FRENCH TV PRODUCER

Paris, Feb. 13: A prominent French television producer who is being investigated for child sexual assault said Saturday he was the victim of a plot by his nephew who had demanded money from him.

"I am not a predator!" Gerard Louvin told the newspaper Nice-Matin, in his first public comments on the affair — the latest sexual assault case to rock the intellectual elite in France. French prosecutors said Tuesday they had opened an investigation into accusations of rape and complicity in raping minors by Louvin, who has produced some of the most popular shows on French television over the last decades, and his husband Daniel Moyné. The probe was opened in January after a complaint was filed by Louvin's nephew, named as Olivier A.

— AFP

## Inmates must be allowed to have a spiritual adviser by their side as they are executed

## SOME SUCCESS

## Religion, death penalty collide at the US Supreme Court

Washington, Feb. 13: The Supreme Court is sending a message to states that want to continue to carry out the death penalty: Inmates must be allowed to have a spiritual adviser by their side as they are executed. The high court around midnight Thursday declined to let Alabama proceed with the lethal injection of Willie B. Smith III.

Smith had objected to Alabama's policy that his pastor would have had to observe his execution from an adjacent room

rather than the death chamber itself. The order from the high court follows two years in which inmates saw some rare success in bringing challenges based on the issue of chaplains in the death chamber. This time, liberal and conservative members of the court normally in disagreement over death penalty issues found common ground not on the death penalty itself but on the issue of religious freedom and how the death penalty is carried out.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh,

one of three justices who said they would have let Smith's execution go forward, said Alabama's policy applies equally to all inmates and serves a state interest in ensuring safety and security. But he said it was apparent that his colleagues who disagreed were providing a path for states to follow.

States that want to avoid months or years of litigation over the presence of spiritual advisers "should figure out a way to allow spiritual advisors into the execution room, as other

● THIS TIME, liberal and conservative members of the court normally in disagreement over death penalty issues found common ground not on the death penalty itself but on the issue of religious freedom and how the death penalty is carried out.

States and the Federal Government have done," he wrote in a dissent joined by Chief Justice John Roberts. Justice Clarence Thomas also would have

allowed the execution of Smith, who was sentenced to die for the 1991 murder of 22-year-old Sharma Ruth Johnson in Birmingham. Alabama had up until 2019 allowed a Christian prison chaplain employed by the state to be physically present in the execution chamber if requested by the inmate, but the state changed its policy in response to two earlier Supreme Court cases.

Robert Dunham, the executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center, says the court's or-

der will most clearly affect states in the Deep South that have active execution chambers. Dunham said most state execution protocols, which set who is present in the death chamber, do not mention spiritual advisers. For most of the modern history of the US death penalty since the 1970s, spiritual advisers have not been present in execution chambers, he said. The federal government, which under President Donald Trump resumed federal executions following a 17-year hiatus and

carried out 13 executions, allowed a spiritual adviser to be present in the death chamber. The Biden administration is still weighing how it will proceed in death penalty cases. The court's order in Smith's case contained only statements from Kavanaugh and Justice Elena Kagan.

"Willie Smith is sentenced to death, and his last wish is to have his pastor with him as he dies," Kagan wrote for herself and liberal justices Sonia Sotomayor and Stephen Breyer.

— AP



## SHORT TAKES

## Sandeep, Priyanka break nat'l records

**Ranchi:** Three Indian race walkers qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics during the National Open Race Walking Championships here on Saturday, with Sandeep Kumar and Priyanka Goswami shattering national records in the men's and women's 20km events respectively. With the three new entrants, the total number of Indian race walkers who have qualified for the Tokyo Games has swelled to five as K T Irfan (men's 20km) and Bhawana Jat (women's 20km) have already made the cut earlier. Sandeep clocked 1 hour 20 minutes and 16 seconds to win the men's group 'A' 20km event while Goswami emerged victorious in the corresponding women's group 'A' event with a time of 1:28:45. Rahul, who finished second in the men's group 'A' 20km race walk event with a time of 1:20:26, also qualified for the Tokyo Olympics. — PTI

## Navdeep, Arvind secure Oly berths

**Dubai:** Para-athletes Navdeep and Arvind secured quotas for the upcoming Tokyo Paralympics as India's gold medal tally swelled to nine after the third day of competitions at the 12th Fazza International World Para Athletics Grand Prix here. Overall, India has claimed 17 medals including nine gold, with four of them coming on Friday. The day was lit up by brilliant shows by Indian men's javelin throwers — reigning world champion Sandeep Chaudhary (F44), Ajeet Singh (F46) and Navdeep (F41). However, javelin thrower Sundar Singh Gurjar (F46) had to settle for a bronze. Arvind attained the Minimum Qualification Standard with a distance of 14.05m in men's shot put final F35/36 to clinch Tokyo Paralympics spot. — PTI

## Leicester humble Liverpool 3-1

**Leicester:** Slumping champion Liverpool fell to a third straight loss in the Premier League after a dramatic late collapse against Leicester, conceding three goals in seven minutes in a 3-1 defeat at King Power Stadium on Saturday. Leading 1-0 through Mohamed Salah's 17th goal of the season, Liverpool was pegged back in the 78th when Maddison levelled up with a stunner. Jamie Vardy and Harvey Barnes netted the next two goals and tilted the match in Leicester's favour. — AP

## Chepauk Ro-mance

## Rohit cracks whip with 161 to lift India against England

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 13

As expected, the ball gripped, bounced and turned sharply. It was a tricky pitch to bat on, but an elegant Rohit Sharma made it look easy. The opener's classy 161, his seventh Test century, put India in the driver's seat against England in the second Test here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Saturday.

At stumps, India were 300 for six in 88 overs with Rishabh Pant (33 not out) and Axar Patel (5 not out) threatening to pile on runs.

Winning a crucial toss on a bunsen track, India suffered an early jolt when England pacer Olly Stone trapped Shubman Gill in the second over of the day. But Rohit, in the calm company of Cheteshwar Pujara, steadied the ship by stitching together a brisk partnership of 83 runs.

India, however, found themselves on the back-foot again shortly before lunch. Pujara's dismissal — after poking a shot away from his body off left-arm spinner Jack Leach — triggered a mini collapse. Virat Kohli's stay in the middle lasted just five balls. Off-spinner Moeen Ali knocked down the Indian skipper's off-stump to dismiss him for a duck. Kohli stood there in disbelief before trudging back to the pavilion. At this juncture, India were 86 for three.

Mumbaikars Rohit and Ajinkya Rahane forged a delightful stand for the fourth wicket (162 runs off 310 balls) to put an end to their lean patch. With Rahane (67 off 149) playing the perfect second fiddle, Rohit took the responsibility of unsettling the bowlers.

Rohit set the tone for the day by pulling Ben Stokes for back-to-back boundaries, including a six. Skipper Joe Root had to take Stokes off the attack and he never returned to bowl. Against spinners, Rohit used his feet effectively. His sweep shots were perfect examples of controlled aggression. It was a treat for the weekend crowd that walked through the turnstiles of



India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot against England during the first day of their second Test at M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Saturday. — BCCI

a cricket ground in India for the first time since January 2020. Rohit took just 130 balls to complete his century, with a paddle shot towards fine leg.

Moeen, playing his first Test after an 18-month break, struggled to offer the same control that Leach provided from the other end. The productive

sweep shot proved to be Rohit's undoing in the end as he holed out at deep square leg off Leach.

Rahane, too, followed suit. He was bowled while trying to sweep a full-length delivery shortly after England's appeal for a bat-pad catch was wrongly turned down by the third umpire.

## NUMBERS GAME

## ROHIT SHARMA'S FOURTH 150+ SCORE IN TESTS:

● Rohit Sharma became the 20th Indian batsman on 26 occasions to score 150 plus runs in an innings against England by making 161 off 231 balls with 17 fours and two sixes on the first day of the second Test match at Chennai on Saturday (February 13).

● It was Rohit Sharma's fourth 150 plus knock in 60 innings of 36 Test matches.

● After this innings, Rohit Sharma's Test average in India reached to 83.55. Among the 203 batsmen who have scored at least 1500 runs at home, Rohit Sharma reached that milestone today — only one batsman, Don Bradman, has a managed better.

● Sharma has seven hundreds in 23 innings in India, of which four have been 150-plus scores. Only once has he been dismissed for less than 150 after he has passed 100.

● Rohit Sharma made 19 hundreds in international cricket since the beginning of 2018, the most among all batsmen. Virat Kohli (18) and Joe Root (13) are next in the list. Rohit Sharma has struck four hundreds in Tests, 13 in one day internationals and two in Twenty-20 internationals; no other batsman has struck multiple hundreds in each format in this period.

● Rohit Sharma's 161 was seventh hundred in Tests at home for Sharma, without a single overseas century. Among all batsmen without an away hundred, only one — Mominul Haque — has more centuries at home (10). Only two other batsmen have scored their first away hundred after making more than seven centuries at home: Allan Lamb (nine) and Mahela Jayawardene (eight). Robin Smith had seven centuries in England before scoring his first one away from home.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

## SCORECARD

**India 1st Innings:** Rohit Sharma c Moeen b Jack Leach 161, Shubman Gill lbw b Olly Stone 0, Cheteshwar Pujara c Stokes b Jack Leach 21, Virat Kohli b Moeen 0, Ajinkya Rahane b Moeen 67, Rishabh Pant batting 33, R. Ashwin c Ollie Pope b Root 13, Axar Patel batting 5. Extras 0. **Total: (for six wickets in 88 overs) 300.**

**FoW:** 1-0, 2-85, 3-86, 4-248, 5-249, 6-284. **Bowling:** Stuart Broad 11-2-37-0, Olly Stone 15-5-42-1, Jack Leach 26-2-78-2, Ben Stokes 2-0-16-0, Moeen Ali 26-3-112-2, Joe Root 8-2-15-1.



Karolina Muchova of Czech Republic celebrates after defeating her countrymate Karolina Pliskova 7-5, 7-5 during their women's singles match at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on Saturday. — AFP

## Muchova sends Pliskova packing

**Melbourne, Feb. 13:** World number one Ashleigh Barty gave long-suffering Melbourne something to cheer as the home hope swept into the Australian Open last 16 at an empty Margaret Court Arena following a snap Coronavirus lockdown on Saturday.

Barty's straightforward 6-2, 6-4 win over Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova put her into the fourth round without dropping a set as she bids to become the first Australian winner since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

As play unfolded in Melbourne Park's empty arenas on Saturday, former world number one Karolina Pliskova had a racquet-smashing tantrum en route to a 7-5, 7-5 defeat by fellow Czech Karolina Muchova.

Meanwhile, Rafael Nadal extended his winning streak against fellow left-handers to 18 with a 7-5, 6-2, 7-5 victory over Cameron Norrie that earned him a place in the Australian Open's fourth round.

The latest curbs triggered bizarre scenes late on Friday as Novak Djokovic's injury-hit win over Taylor Fritz was suspended at 11:30 pm local time to remove fans before the midnight lockdown.

The defending champion's tournament now hangs in the balance over the midriff injury he said could rule him out of his last 16 match against Milos Raonic.

Elina Svitolina beat Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 6-0, and Daniil Medvedev overcame buttock pain and a mid-match lapse in his 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-0 win over Filip Krajinovic of Serbia.

"It's a different atmosphere, different vibe," said Stefanos Tsitsipas, after his 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 win over Mikael Ymer.

Casper Ruud, by outlasting Radu Albot 6-1, 5-7, 6-4, 6-4, became only the second Norwegian to make the last 16 of a Grand Slam Saturday, emulating his father Christian who made the grade at the Australian Open in 1997. — Agencies

## SELECTED RESULTS

**Men's singles third round:** Rafael Nadal bt Cameron Norrie 7-5, 6-2, 7-5; Mackenzie McDonald bt Lloyd Harris 7-6 (7), 6-1, 6-4; Casper Ruud bt Radu Albot 6-1, 5-7, 6-4, 6-4; Daniil Medvedev bt Filip Krajinovic 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-0; Stefanos Tsitsipas bt Mikael Ymer 6-4, 6-1, 6-1; Andrey Rublev bt Feliciano Lopez 7-5, 6-2, 6-3; Matteo Berrettini bt Karen Khachanov 7-6 (1), 7-6 (5), 7-6 (5); Fabio Fognini bt Alex de Minaur 6-4, 6-3, 6-4.

**Women's singles third round:** Elina Svitolina bt Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 6-0; Karolina Muchova bt Karolina Pliskova 7-5, 7-5; Jessica Pegula bt Kristina Mladenovic 6-2, 6-1; Jennifer Brady bt Kaja Juvan 6-1, 6-3; Donna Vekic bt Kaia Kanepi 5-7, 7-6 (2), 6-4; Elise Mertens bt Belinda Bencic 6-2, 6-1; Ashleigh Barty bt Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 6-4; Shelby Rogers bt Anett Kontaveit 6-4, 6-3.

## Centurion Rohit happy after fans return to stadium

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 13

Rohit Sharma knew he had to be "proactive and not reactive" on a challenging Chepauk pitch that offered bounce and spun sharply. Calling his seventh Test century one of the most satisfying knocks, Rohit said it was the result of subtle adjustments he made in his game.

"When you play on turning pitches, you have got to be proactive. We wanted to make sure we used our feet more and swept the ball," said Rohit.

"Getting on top of the bowler and making sure you are ahead of him is very crucial. The preparation helped. We knew how the pitch was prepared and that it would turn. We had a few good training sessions before the game and trained according to what we were going to expect in the middle," he added.

Rohit said he had worked out plans for each bowler. "What helped me was the preparation I did before the game. Understanding the line that Moeen Ali was bowling. He was trying to bowl in the rough outside the off-stump. So there was very little chance of being out lbw when you are sweeping from outside off. With two fielders on the boundary line, even if I

top-edged it, I knew it was going to land in a safe area. Against Leach, I wanted to make sure I played with an angled bat with the turn," he explained.

Asked to rate Saturday's knock, Rohit said: "I am not going to rate any of my knocks because every knock comes with a different kind of pressure and this too came from different circumstances. I am not one to rate my knocks. A little disappointing to get out like that but I'm happy the team is in a good position."

Thousands of fans cheered every run that came off his bat. Rohit said the return of spectators changed the atmosphere. "It was great to have them back. It's something that livens up the whole atmosphere. Without spectators, the intensity was a bit low in the first game. It's been a long time since fans enjoyed live action at the stadium. I am happy they witnessed some good cricket today. I am sure they're going to enjoy the rest of the days as well," he said.

Rohit said a score of 350 would be a good first innings total. "It is going to start turning more as the days go by. We still have four wickets in hand and if Rishabh and Axar can get as many as possible tomorrow, it will help us."



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