

WEATHER

Max: 29.07°C

Min: 17.06°C

RH: 49%

Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partially cloudy. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 30/17 °C

WORLD | 5

Joe Biden announces \$1.9 tn Covid stimulus

SPORTS | 8

Natarajan makes an impressive debut

TABLOID

Fusion of fashion and technology

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COVID-19

COUNT

CASES

(+39,212)

1,05,41,760

DEATHS

(+415)

1,52,086

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+202)

(+2)

TS: 2,91,118

1,574

(+94)

(+1)

AP: 8,85,710

7,139

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,38,61,080

DEATHS

20,09,441

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana

Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Tadiya till 7.47 am

Star: Satabhisham till 6.09 am (Sunday)

Variyam: 12.44 pm to 2.23 pm

Durmuhurtam: 6.53 am to 8.22 am

Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

HUIRI CALENDAR

Jamadi- ul- Akhir 2,1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.46 am

Zohar: 12.36 pm

Asar: 4.26 pm

Maghrib: 6.08 pm

Isha: 7.19 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.02 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.49 AM

MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.19 AM

MOONSET TODAY 9.05 PM

COUNTER

POINT

No, he hasn't won an election... he just got a Covid shot!

SHORT TAKES

Kamal Morarka dies at 74

Mumbai: Former Union minister and industrialist Kamal Morarka on Friday died of a heart attack at his home in South Mumbai. He was 74. A close friend and senior journalist Santosh Bharatiya said, "Morarka died after he suffered a heart attack at 7.50 pm on Friday. He complained of a cough on Thursday. He did not come to office yesterday as he was ill."

Report on Page 4

SCENT | HUNT

Tigers sense normal scent of a human body from afar, keep away

Forest officials get 'dirty' to trap tiger

PILLALAMARRI SRINIVAS I DC KANDI BHEEMANNA TEMPLE (KOMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD), JAN.15

These are hard times for the team of forest staff engaged in trapping the tiger that killed two persons in the forests on the outskirts of Papannapet village in Bejjur mandal late last year.

Forest officials say the tiger migrated from the Chandrapur area in Maharashtra and has spread panic in the state for the past few weeks. They have identified eight locations where the tiger movement was noticed. The tiger has also killed several animals.

A total of 62 animal trackers are on the job. Among them, 22 animal trackers are at the base camp in addition to the 15 other staff placed there.

Tigers are known to sense the normal scent of a human body from a distance and keep away. The caked up dirt and sweat of

A TOTAL of 62 animal trackers are on the job. Among them, 22 animal trackers are at the base camp in addition to the 15 others placed there.

THE DIRT, sweat of unbathed staff camouflages human scent

the unbathed forest personnel, it is believed, camouflages the scent of humans and will not warn the tiger away. Tigers can also sense perfumes, aftershaves and

other cosmetics. So, the forest staff on the rescue operation are avoiding shaving, they say.

Forest officials are also keeping packs of cow dung in the area and sprinkling water on these at intervals to spread the smell so as to attract the tiger to the manchan set up on a watchtower. There, a trap has been set up for the tiger. Once the tiger reaches the spot, the shooter and the veterinary doctors would tranquillise the tiger.

The forest team compris-

ing veterinary doctors and a shooter, among others, is placed in such a way that it will reach a location within half an hour, along with trap cages, after noticing a tiger movement. Their plan is to trap the tiger after tranquillising it via firing shots from a distance. The tranquillisation shot would be done as and when the tiger remains in the same position for at least 10 minutes.

Page 2: Forest staff cordon off area

Army's drone attack prowess

Soldiers display 'drone swarm' capability for the first time during the 73rd Army Day parade in New Delhi on Friday. The demonstration involved 75 indigenously developed drones which, working autonomously, located and destroyed "targets" like tanks, terror camps, fuel dumps and a "suddenly" found helipad. During the mock attack, the baby kamikaze drones detached themselves from mother drones and directly hit these targets in a suicide mission. The drones, which can travel 50 km, also delivered first-aid during the demo. Militaries are looking at drones after Azerbaijan used armed drone swarms to defeat Armenia in a recent conflict.

PTI

Farm talks stuck after 9 rounds

Next round of talks on Jan. 19, Centre worried about R-Day

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

The ninth round of talks on Friday between the Central government and the protesting farmers' unions over the three agricultural reform laws again failed to break the deadlock as the two sides were unable to reach common ground on the issues of repeal of the laws and the Minimum Support Price (MSP) Act.

The next round of talks has been scheduled on Tuesday, January 19, the day when the Supreme Court-appointed committee was due to start its consultations with stakeholders to end the impasse. Friday's was the first meeting after the court stayed the implementation of the farm laws till further orders and announced formation of a four-member panel to hear the grievances of the farmers and the government's views.

Just two days after the committee was named by the court, Bhupinder Singh Mann, president of BKU (Mann) and chairman of All India Kisan Coordination Committee, recused himself from the panel, saying: "I will always stand with my farmers and Punjab".

One of the major challenges before the government is to ensure that the farmers call off their proposed tractor march to Delhi on Republic Day. On Monday, the Supreme Court will have to decide on a petition by the Centre, moved through the Delhi police, to stop protesters from holding any rally that could disrupt R-Day parade.

While the Centre insists the laws introduced in September will unshackle farmers from having to sell their produce only at regulated wholesale markets, the protesting farmers say the bills are meant to benefit private buyers.

After meeting 41 representatives of farmers' unions, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said: "Today's talks with the farmers unions were inconclusive. We will hold talks again on January 19. We are positive (about) reach-

ing a solution through talks." During the negotiations, he urged the union leaders to be "flexible" in their approach. Besides Mr Tomar, Union ministers Piyush Goyal and Som Parkash, who is an MP from Punjab, were also present at the meeting which lasted for around five hours.

Mr Tomar said the government was concerned about the health of the farmers who have been camping on Delhi's outskirts for almost two months. The farmers' round-the-clock sit-ins in cold weather have also led to some deaths among them.

Page 2: SC panel will do its work: Tomar

PM to start biggest battle on Covid-19

100 to get jab at each of 3,006 sites on Day 1 today

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

India is all set to roll out the world's biggest vaccination drive against Covid-19 from Saturday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the first phase of the inoculation drive during which only healthcare workers, both in government and private sectors including ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) workers, will get the first life-saving shot. A total of 3,006 sites which will be connected virtually throughout the exercise. Around 100 beneficiaries will be vaccinated on Saturday at each of the session sites.

Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on Friday reviewed the preparedness and visited the dedicated Covid control room at the ministry. He also reviewed the Beneficiary Registration Page for all non-prioritised groups on CoWIN. He suggested pre-populating the software with beneficiaries by seeding it with the electoral database, in addition to other documents that are authorised for registration. He also reviewed the working of the 'Communications Control Room' which has been closely monitoring the disinformation campaigns and rumour mongering in relation to administering the Covid-19 vaccines. The Union minister reiterated that both the indigenously manufactured vaccines, Covishield and Covaxin, have proven safety and immunogenicity records and are the most important tools to contain the pandemic. The health ministry has also issued guidelines

Vaccination starts at 10.30 am in TS

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 15

It was back in February last that Gandhi Hospital here began checking people for Covid-19 infection. On March 2, the hospital had its first Covid-19 patient.

On Saturday, the hospital will be the place where the launch of the Covid-19 vaccination drive in Telangana state will begin.

Health minister Etala Rajendar, who, because of Covid-19, had the toughest job in the state Cabinet, will be among those who will receive the vaccine on day one of the drive.

"There are some apprehensions about the safety of the vaccines. I will take it to demonstrate that they are safe and I have faith in them," Rajendar told reporters on the eve of the vaccination drive launch.

Rajendar's decision to get the vaccine jab follows reports of dissatisfaction of possible safety of the vaccine among some doctors, nurses and other staff working at various government hospitals in the state.

The first vaccine will be administered at 10.30 am, at Gandhi Hospital, and then the rest of the state will see the drive launched in all the districts.

Page 2: Governor to be present at Nims

VACCINES SAFE, NO NEED TO WORRY: MINISTER, OFFICIALS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN 15

Vaccines approved by the Centre to combat Covid-19 are safe and there was no need for any fear, top health department officials said here on Friday.

Health minister Etala Rajendar, said, "It was only after extensive trials that the DCGI approved their use."

Full report on Page 2

to states giving directions on how to deal with certain situations. The vaccines have to be administered to people above 18 years of age. It cannot be given to pregnant and lactating women and to persons with a history of allergic reactions to a previous dose of Covid vaccine.

Interchangeability of vaccines is not allowed, hence the second dose of the vaccine should be of the same firm of which the first dose has been given. The vaccine has to be deferred among people with active symptoms, those who got convalescent plasma or are acutely unwell or hospitalised due to any illness.

Hockey skills

Women from Sikh community play hockey during a competition at B.R.Ambedkar Stadium in Karimnagar on Friday.

DC

Severe staff crunch hits schools in Telangana

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC HYDERABAD, JAN 15

Even as the Telangana State Teachers United Federation (TSTUF), a government teachers body, has welcomed the decision to reopen schools for in-person classes from Class 9, it has raised major concerns.

There is a major dearth of teaching staff in government schools, especially with the blended form of learning — that includes online and in-school classes — to be put in place from February 1.

There could be a crisis in school premises where, in order to follow physical distancing guidelines, students from one class will have to be split up into different sections, said Chava Ravi, general secretary, TSTUF.

"There are at least 7,000 vacancies in 5,000 high schools for subject teachers. We have tried reaching out to the government to fill the vacancies, without which it will be a Herculean task to hold classes, especially in schools where only one or two teachers are present. However, there has been no response to our demands," he said.

Another issue is that of regular sanitisation of schools. Even as the government has directed local bodies and gram panchayats in each district to undertake sanitisation of schools, the TSTUF is demanding that service persons be appointed to each school to examine the cleanliness and hygiene, as has been the case in the past four years.



## SHORT TAKES

## IIIT-H ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF 'INDIAN WIKIPEDIA' WEBSITE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JAN. 15

The International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad (IIITH), launched its project website 'Project Indic Wiki' to increase content availability in Indian languages and enhance the Telugu and Hindi Wikipedias, on Friday. Articles on their website [indicwiki.iiit.ac.in/](http://indicwiki.iiit.ac.in/) are freely available to the community to read, share, and enhance. The website will be available in both mobile and desktop modes and is equipped with a plethora of training content, Telugu and Hindi Wikipedia sandboxes, and a way to contact and join the team as a writer, subject or language expert. The Indic Wiki Project also announced its online internship programme, ideal for students and freshers looking for experience while helping the Wikipedia community.

## MATERIAL PUT ON IDOL NOT IMPURE: FORENSICS

From Page 1

In the Rajamahendravaram case in which idols were desecrated and a propaganda was carried out that some impure material was pasted on the Ganesh idol, Bommuru police arrested four persons, two each belonging to TD and BJP. The Forensic Lab Report revealed that the material pasted on the idol was not impure as propagated. The arrested included Vellapalli Prasad Babu and Chitikena Sandeep (both TD) and Adapa Varaprasad and Kasturi Srinivasa Rao from BJP.

TD activist Challa Madhusudhan Reddy was involved in damaging the idol of Goddess Saraswathi in Guntur district, while TD's Bojjana Subba Reddy was involved in garlanding slippers to Anjaneya statue in Kondalaveedu of Kadapa district. Golla Peddaiah, Gadde Ramanjaneyulu, Barme Jayaramudu and Syed Fakrudin, all belonging to TD, were involved in desecration and demolishing of Maddamma temple in Kurnool district for treasure hunting.

TD's Viswantha Reddy, who is temple committee chairman, was involved in the desecration of Aanjaneyaya Swamy idol legs and stealing of hundi in Marlamanda village in Kurnool district. Six persons belonging to TD were involved in the alleged damage to the idol of gods in Lakshminarasimha Swamy temple at Singarayakonda in Prakasam district.

Two TD activists spread false news about chopping of hands of a Vinayaka idol, a long time ago at Yetigyrampeta in Visakhapatnam.

One Konchada Ravikumar, who is Dompot BJP Mandal secretary, was involved in spreading false news about the damage of Hanuman statue, which was earlier damaged when a tree fell on it. BJP activist Dharmavarapu Acharya was involved in spreading false propaganda about veena of Saraswathi Devi being broken by people from another religion. It was actually broken a long time back due to wear and tear in Srikakulam district's Etcherla.

## Pre-vaccination check



East Zone DCP M. Ramesh Reddy inspects a centre where government employees would be vaccinated along with medical superintendent Dr S. Trilok Shyam at area hospital in Malakpet, Hyderabad on Friday.

— P. SURENDRA

## Do not fear Covid-19 vaccines: Health dept

Minister says DCGI approved jabs after extensive trials

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JAN. 15

Vaccines approved by the Centre for combating Covid-19 were safe and there was no need for any fear, top health department officials said here on Friday.

Health minister Etala Rajendar, who described himself as the "captain" of the healthcare workers in state, said, "It was only after extensive trials that the Drug Controller General of India approved their use. Some people are worried over the side-effects. You should remember that penicillin which has saved tens of crores of lives is never administered even now after, all these decades, without a test shot."

Director of Medical Education Dr K. Ramesh Reddy and Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao, who earlier in the day addressed a press conference, also stressed on the safety of the vaccines.

## READY FOR ANYTHING

The government has created elaborate infrastructure to deal with possible adverse effect after immunisation (AEFI) events

57 teaching, district and area hospitals ready 10-bed AEFI ICUs in big hospitals



● AEFI mitigation measures to stay in place till everyone in state is vaccinated

● AEFI kits — drugs, etc — including oxygen tanks, ready at even PHCs

● Adverse reaction that warrants increased medical attention to be taken to a bigger hospital

● Doctors, drugs to deal with any reaction

Dr Rao pointed out that though lakhs of Covid-19 vaccine doses had been administered in 26 countries, there was not a single death on account of any adverse reaction. "The economy is hurting. It is time to end the pandemic. We urge the media not to sensationalise any reactions to the vaccines.

We should all give confidence to the people," he said. There could be some very common reactions, such as some swelling or pain at the injection site, some may develop some fever just as happens with many other vaccines. Even commonly used medicines for headaches can have side-effects,

he said.

Dr Ramesh Reddy said as per the Centre's India guidelines, the vaccines will not be given to anyone younger than 18 years, women who are pregnant or lactating. This is not because the vaccine is not safe, but it is because these sections of the population were not covered in the trials.

Anyone with previous history of severe anaphylactic reactions, will not be given the vaccine, he said. Anyone with issues relating to blood clotting will also not be given the vaccine.

Some reactions are inherent to any vaccine and are an indication that the body is reacting to the vaccine and is generating antibodies. When the people take the second dose, the common reactions may be more marked. Some exaggerated reactions might be possible but adverse reactions may be possible at the rate of one in a lakh of people, he said.

## 2 students electrocuted, TRS man falls to death

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JAN. 15

Two students were electrocuted and TRS activist fell to his death in incidents related to kite flying, police said on Friday.

"In the first incident, Bangaru Krishna, a TRS activist from Chikkadpally division, was flying kites from the terrace of a multi-storey building at Ashoknagar when he slipped and fell on the iron grills fixed on the compound wall. Badly injured, he died while being shifted to the hospital," police said.

● YACHARAM POLICE said that at Nallavelli village, Kunduru Rakesh, 13, was flying a kite which got stuck in the power cables in front of the house. "He tried to free the kite with an iron rod and was electrocuted," police said.

At Jeedimetla, M. Charith Kumar, 12, a Class VII student, was flying a kite along with a group of friends when he got electrocuted. "In the process of balancing himself, he touched the pipe of the water motor and

was electrocuted. It was found that the cables supplying electricity to the motor were broken, resulting in the incident," said the police.

The Yacharam police said that at Nallavelli village, Kunduru Rakesh, 13, was flying a kite which got stuck in the power cables in front of the house.

"He tried to free the kite with an iron rod and was electrocuted," police said. His elder sister Soni, 19, tried to rescue him but sustained severe burns. She has been rushed to a hospital for treatment.

## WITH 202 NEW COVID CASES, TESTING DROPS IN TELANGANA

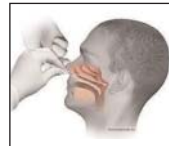
DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JAN. 15

Sankranti celebrations appear to have cut into Covid-19 testing, with the state conducting 19,898 tests on Thursday, further down from 28,894 tests on Wednesday. On Tuesday, the state had conducted 38,192 tests.

Reflecting the lower number of tests, the new cases on Thursday fell to 202, from 276 on Wednesday and 331 on Tuesday.

According to the state health department's daily Covid-19 bulletin, two people lost their lives to the disease on Thursday, while one death was registered on Wednesday. The cases found on Thursday took the total to 2,91,118 and the fatalities have reached 1,574. As many as 4,442 persons were still considered to be active Covid-19 cases as on Thursday, of whom 2,541 were receiving treatment while in isolation either at their homes or in designated isolation centres.

On Thursday, the highest number of cases, 48, were recorded from Hyderabad and GHMC area, followed by 15 in Ranga Reddy, 13 in Warangal Urban, 12 in Karimnagar, and 10 in Medchal Malkajigiri district.



## Tiger moving close to human habitations

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD, JAN. 15

Telangana State forest officials state that the intruding tiger that killed two persons in Bejjur and Penchikalpet mandal weighs around 170kg and is aged four-and-a-half years. The tiger was born in a non-forest area near the Chandrapur Super Thermal Power Station (CSTPS) in Maharashtra, according to information passed on by forest officials from there to their counterparts in Adilabad. This apparently made it used to human presence. Unlike others of the breed, this tiger does not shy away from human presence. CP Vinod Kumar, conservator of forests of Adilabad circle, said, "The tiger has a history of moving close to human habitations. It was earlier spotted in the Khairguda mines in Tiryan, which is similar to the mine area of CSTPS, Mancherial and Bellampalli, and Rebbera in erstwhile Adilabad district." The tiger had returned to the Maharashtra tra side 10 days ago, killed a cow there and then found its way back to the Kagazangar division forests.

Tigers are known to migrate to the area of CSTPS through the corridor of coal mines from Tadoba Andhari tiger reserve and settle down there. This happened due to the shrinking of forest area and increase in number of tigers, say forest officials.

## FOREST STAFF CORDON OFF AFFECTED AREA

From Page 1

Forest officials cordoned off the area and are not allowing anyone including the media there. The rescue operations are planned as per the guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). C.P. Vinod Kumar, conservator of forests of Adilabad circle and Kawal tiger reserve field director, who is personally monitoring the rescue operations, said the tiger is likely to return to the site within three to four days after killing an animal. He said the tiger trapping operations would be done only after sunrise and conclude before sunset. "Trapping the tiger will take time. It depends on the movement of the tiger." If the present tiger rescue operations do not succeed, it will be resumed after 15 days.

dor of coal mines from Tadoba Andhari tiger reserve and settle down there. This happened due to the shrinking of forest area and increase in number of tigers, say forest officials.

## Elderly woman dies in bonfire

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, JAN. 15

An elderly woman Kanaka Renuka Bai, 75, died after getting accidentally caught in a bonfire at her agricultural field. She had remained in her fields on outskirts of Gopalpur village in Indraveli Mandal. She had remained at the field on Thursday night to protect cotton that her family had piled

into a heap. Incidentally, the woman was reduced to ashes. The issue came to light when her son and family members reached the field on Friday morning. It is said Kanaka Renuka Bai's son went to their house to celebrate Sankranti festival, asking his mother to take care of cotton produce stocked after picking. Otherwise, both mother and son stay at the field.

## TRS: Bandi makes hate remarks for fame

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JAN. 15

Telangana Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief Bandi Sanjay is setting "deadlines" to the state government only to stay in the headlines, alleged Bodakuntla Venkatesh-warlu, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) Chief Whip in the Legislative Council.

Talking at the media point at the Council here on Friday, Venkateshwarlu said Sanjay wanted to magnify every issue. In Jangaon, Sanjay was setting separate deadlines in every village, he said.

He complained that Sanjay was speaking in a "vulgar" manner about Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, a person who had fought for Telangana statehood. Without any reason, Sanjay is attacking TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao, the MLC said. "Sanjay must maintain decorum as he is a member of Parliament and president of a state party unit. Senior BJP leaders must teach Sanjay how

● HE COMPLAINED that Sanjay was speaking in a "vulgar" manner about Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, a person who had fought for Telangana



statehood. Without any reason, Sanjay is attacking TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao, MLC Bodakuntla Venkatesh-warlu, said.

to behave," Venkateshwarlu said.

Referring to the police lathicharge on BJP activists last week, the MLC said the issue was "a very small" one but the BJP was making it appear that it was a statewide issue.

He said BJP leaders do not bring funds from the Centre but they blame the state government, the MLC said.

## UoH likely to review phased schools reopening policy

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC  
HYDERABAD, JAN 15

The University of Hyderabad is likely to review its decision to call for the phased return of 148 final semester post-graduate students of the Science and SN Schools, after the state govern-

ment's decision to reopen high schools, Intermediate and degree colleges, and professional courses from February 1. The UoH, a Central university, follows the UGC's guidelines. The task force at the university, however, will also take into consideration the state government's guidelines in

reviewing its decision, said Vinod Pavarala, head of the task force. "We have some review meetings scheduled in the next few days in which we may decide on increasing the number of returning students in the next phases in February, including the 150 already planned. We will be

focusing on priority students scheduled to graduate in June," he added. This comes at a time when PG and research students from non-science backgrounds are raising complaints over the university's alleged negligence towards humanities and social science students.

## TOSS extends last date for academic yr

**Hyderabad:** The Telangana Open School Society announced extension of the deadline for 2020-21 up to January 25. Candidates interested to continue studies through open and distance learning mode can enroll in SSC and Intermediate courses by uploading their applica-

tion form with the prescribed fee and late fee through TS Online, MeeSeva or APOne portals. For details, candidates can contact district education officers of their respective district or visit Telangana Open School website [telanganaopenschool.org](http://telanganaopenschool.org).

## Governor to be present at Nims

From Page 1

At the Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences in the city where a Covid-19 care centre was set up a few months into the pandemic last year, Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundarajan will be present for the launch. According to Raj

Bhavan sources, the Governor will not be among those receiving the vaccine as the first round is meant for healthcare staff who are active in hospitals. On day one, only 30 persons will receive the vaccines at each of the 139 session centres in the state.

From Page 1

Mr Tomar said he has no problem with the fact that the unions want to continue their talks only with the government, but also said the court-appointed panel will also continue its work.

On the Congress' protest led by Rahul Gandhi in support of the agitating farmers, he said: "Congress leaders laugh at the statements and actions of Rahul Gandhi, (they) mock him. I would like to tell him that in their 2019 election manifesto, the Congress had promised that they will bring this reform. If he does not remember, he should read the manifesto again."

Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesman Rakesh Tikait, who has been at the forefront of the agitation for over seven weeks at Delhi's borders, said: "Our demands of repealing of the three farm laws & MSP guarantee remain. We will not go to the committee constituted by the Supreme Court. We'll talk to the Central government only." All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee member Kavita Kuruganti said: "Both the government and the farmers' unions have reaffirmed their commitment to continue with the direct dialogue process."

Farmers' leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan said the unions have urged the government to repeal the three laws, but the Centre was unwilling to do so. "We decided to meet again on January 19 at 12 noon." He said the union leaders also raised the issue of the NIA raids on transporters in Punjab who are supporting the farmers' protests and providing logistics support for the agitation.



## OTHER STORIES

KITE FESTIVAL  
DAZZLES IN  
WARANGALDC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, JAN. 15

The Kakatiya University College of Arts and Science in Subedari was abuzz with excitement, on Friday, with the kite festival organised by the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) as part of the Swachh Survekshan 2021.

Colourful kites of different shapes and sizes flew into the sky. A total of six kite expert teams from Mangalore, Doddaballapur, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad participated in the festivities and flew kites.

Slow cycling and Rangoli competitions were also held on the occasion. Music and dances are also arranged on the ground. Through the food courts set up on the grounds, the townspeople enjoyed a variety of cuisine flavours. GWMC commissioner Pamela Satpathy tasted the food at a stall and raised awareness among the people on sanitation. She said the winners of the cycling and rangoli competitions will be given prizes on the occasion of Republic Day.

Government Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar hoped that this year's festival would bring light into people's lives with the Covid-19 vaccine distribution. The city mayor, Gunda Prakash Rao, said that following the GWMC's motto of saving energy as part of environmental protection, bicycles were handed over to 50 sanitation workers on the day. "We are offering bicycles instead of fuel coupons for environmental protection and will gradually provide all the personnel with cycles," he said.

● **Slow cycling and Rangoli competitions** were also held on the occasion. Music and dances are also arranged on the ground. Through the food courts set up on the grounds, the townspeople enjoyed a variety of cuisine flavours. GWMC commissioner Pamela Satpathy tasted the food at a stall.



Degavath Mothilal

ARMY JAWAN  
INJURED IN ROAD  
ACCIDENT, DIESDC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD, JAN. 15

On Friday, an Indian Army jawan hailing from Nizamabad district succumbed after being injured in a road accident. The jawan Degavath Mothilal, 25, of Meghyanai thanda in Indalwai mandal had come home on leave recently. He was transferred from Uttarakhand to Punjab, the sources said.

Mothilal was seriously injured in a road accident near Daggi village in Sadashivanagar mandal of Kamareddy district on National Highway 44 on December 28. He was admitted to the Army hospital in Secunderabad while undergoing treatment he succumbed on Friday. Minister for roads and buildings VPrashanth Reddy, MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha, Nizamabad rural MLA Bajireddy Govardhan expressed grief over the death of Army jawan. They assured possible help to the bereaved family members.

## BETTING | FESTIVAL

20,000 people from five mandals crossed border to watch, bet in AP

## Telanganites cross boundary for cockfights

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM/KOTHAGUDEM,  
JAN. 15

All roads led to the cockfight centres in Andhra Pradesh on Friday. An estimated 20,000 people from five mandals of Khammam and Bhadradi-Kothagudem districts crossed the state boundary to watch and bet on the cockfight in Andhra Pradesh villages.

As per one estimate, about ₹5 crore from mandals such as Aswaraopet and Dammamet in Bhadradi district and Sattupalli, Vemsoor and Penuballi in Khammam district changed



Cockfight centres in Telangana border villages.

hands during the cockfight held in West Godavari and Krishna districts. Punters and enthusiasts reached the

spots by their two-wheelers and cars. Farmer Adapa Lachiah Dora of Mandalapali said, "The locals of

Dammamet mandal started going to the border villages in West Godavari and Krishna districts to do the betting. Some carried with them their own 'Pandem Kollu' (fighter cocks). A post-harvest festival, cockfight is a form of entertainment to farmers who liberally spend from money they earned from farms. The Telangana state government did not entertain the cockfight in its border this year too. This prompted cockfight-lovers to cross the border and reach out to AP villages. Leaders like former DCCB chairman Muvva Vijay Babu and former MP P Srinivas Reddy

watched the cockfights at Kondalraopalem in West Godavari. Aswaraopet MLA Mecha Nageswara Rao was present at an event near Tiruvuru.

The organisers in Kondalraopalem engaged bouncers from Hyderabad to clear the traffic and extend protection to the VIPs. There was traffic jam for the distance of a kilometer as hundreds of cars came in. Comprising also the high-end vehicles like Audi, Benz, Range Rover and Fortuner, the presence of so many vehicles on the road was an attraction by itself to the local crowd.

Stage set for Covid-19  
vaccination in districts

People will be kept for 30 minutes under observation after vaccination

DC CORRESPONDENT  
SIRCILLA, JAN. 15

All arrangements are in place for a smooth conduct of Covid-19 vaccination programme in the district from Saturday, said district collector D. Krishna Bhaskar on Friday. He appealed to the people to follow the suggestions of doctors with regard to vaccination myths.

He inspected the arrangements at the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in Vemulawada, Thangallapally and Ellanthakunta mandals and at the government hospital in Sircilla.

Speaking on the occasion, Bhaskar said that around 1,280 doses of Covishield in 128 vials have been allotted to the district. About 10 doses will be present in each vial. In the first phase, a maximum of 30 members will be administered with the vaccination in each centre, and will cover health workers and anganwadi staff who have registered their names in the Co-WIN app, he informed.

A message will be sent to the individual's mobiles mentioning the place, time and date to come for getting the vaccination. They all should abide by the Covid-19 guidelines, he added.

They will be first sent to the waiting hall. After finding their details in the Co-WIN app, they will be sent to the second room to the vaccinator office where they will be administered with the vaccination and later they will be shifted to the third room (observation room) and they will be kept for 30 minutes under observation. After 28 days of the first dose, they will receive a message about the second dose.

Bhaskar urged health officials to keep the Adverse Event Following Immunisation (AEFI) kit ready at the vaccination centres for attending to any emergency situation by way of side-effects.

Vaccination will not be forced upon anyone and people should not believe myths about Covid-19 vaccination. It is fully safe and will protect the vaccinated person from the pandemic, assured the collector.



Rajanna Sircilla district Collector, D. Krishna Bhaskar inspecting the Covid-19 vaccination arrangements at the primary health centre in Vemulawada of Rajanna Sircilla district on Friday.

Vaccination to begin at  
21 centres in WarangalDC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, JAN. 15:

Covid-19 vaccination will take place in 21 government hospitals in the erstwhile Warangal district.

In a statement released on Friday, he said that the state government had made all arrangements to launch the state-wide covid-19 vaccine program on January 16 to prevent the Covid-19 pandemic. He said doctors at the vaccination centres would check the beneficiaries' body temperature at the entrance and would not allow them inside if they were found to have a fever. The minister said that upon receiving the first dose, the beneficiary would receive a message on his mobile phone when the second dose is due. After

in the erstwhile Warangal district.

The minister said ICU beds were being set up in hospitals across the state to provide immediate treatment to anyone who develops health problems due to the vaccine. The minister said the government had decided to use sophisticated syringes to administer the vaccines, which cannot be used a second time after vaccination. The minister said a call centre would be set up at the state level to provide hints and advice in case of side effects during the vaccination.

completing the second dose, a certificate that they have been vaccinated against covid-19 would be sent.

The minister said ICU beds were being set up in hospitals across the state to provide immediate treatment to anyone who develops health problems due to the vaccine. The minister said the government had decided to use sophisticated syringes to administer the vaccines, which cannot be used a second time after vaccination. The minister said a call centre would be set up at the state level to provide hints and advice in case of side effects during the vaccination.

## 302 vaccine vials reach Nizamabad

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD/KAMAREDDY,  
JAN. 15

Full arrangements with utmost care are being made for the launch of Covid-19 vaccination in Nizamabad and Kamareddy districts on January 16. The district administration made arrangements for smooth and successful conduct of vaccination in selected centres. Covid-19 vaccines had already reached both the districts. In Nizamabad, Minister for roads and buildings, legislative

affairs and housing V. Prashanth Reddy will launch the Covid-19 vaccination programme at Government General Hospital in Nizamabad. In addition, vaccination will be conducted at district hospital in Bodhan and primary health centres of Dichpally, Morthad, Makloor and area hospital in Armoor.

In each centre, separate rooms allocated for waiting, vaccination and observation. Special officers and medical officers are coordinating the vaccination programme. As a precautionary measure,

10 special beds were allocated during the vaccination. Meanwhile, Covid-19 control room was set up at Nizamabad collectorate. Covid-19 vaccination is provided for front-line warriors. In phased manner, Covid-19 vaccination will be extended to 42 government hospitals and 4 private hospitals in Nizamabad district. It is expected that around 15,000 health workers will get the dose of Covid-19 vaccine. District collector C. Narayana Reddy directed officials to conduct the Covid-19 vaccination programme with

36 CENTRES FOR  
VACCINATION  
IN KHAMMAMDC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, JAN. 15

State is set for Covid-19 vaccine in Khammam and Bhadradi districts on Saturday. About 153 vials of Covid-19 vaccine reached Khammam to administer to the health workers. Each vial is sufficient for ten members, and about 1,530 persons can be vaccinated with it.

Six centres in Khammam district headquarters hospital, Venkateswara Nagar and Mustafanagar, Sattupalli and Madhira community health centres and primary health centre in Bonakal were identified for the January 16 vaccination, and it was decided to administer the vaccine to 400 persons in each centre. District collector R.V. Karnan said 36 centres were identified for the vaccination to be done in the first phase until January 23. "The medical teams will be ready if any reaction is witnessed to the patient after the administration of vaccine", he said. About 12,800 persons will be vaccinated in the first phase. In Bhadradi district, Covid-19 vaccine will be administered in four centres including district headquarters hospital in Kothagudem, area hospital in Bhadrachalam, a community health centre in Yelandu, Pathakothagudem.

utmost care. "If any lapses occur, action will be initiated", he warned. Collector conducted a cell conference on Friday with line departments. He said that all had suffered from the Covid-19 virus for the last 10 months and vaccination would give relief to the people. He said that 302 vials reached Nizamabad district. Collector also visited the cold storage of Covid-19 vaccines at GGH. Government medical college principal Indira, GGH superintendent Prathima Raj and others were present.

## 26,521 FEMALE VOTERS MORE IN KHAMMAM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, JAN. 15

The final voters' list of five assembly segments in Khammam district was announced on Friday.

There are 26,521 more female voters in these segments than the male voters. There are 5,78,120 female voters against 5,51,599 male voters.

There are 1,58,577 female

voters in the Khammam segment against 1,47,763 male voters followed by 1,10,229 female voters against 1,04,892 male voters in Palair segment.

There are 1,05,832 females against 1,00,841 males in Madhira, 91,043 females against 88,310 males in Wyra and 1,12,439 females against 1,09,793 males in Sattupalli assembly segment.

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IN BRIEF

INDIA, NEPAL  
TALK BORDER  
MANAGEMENT

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI |  
DC  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

Crucial “political and security issues” as well as “border management” were among the subjects discussed at the sixth India-Nepal Joint Commission Meeting in New Delhi on Friday that was co-chaired by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his visiting Nepalese counterpart Pradeep Kumar Gyawali but it is unclear whether the Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipu Lekh border issues - that affected bilateral ties last year - were even briefly discussed or raised by the Nepalese side.

India had already made it clear earlier on Thursday that the JCM and boundary talks are “separate mechanisms”, thereby hinting clearly that it was not on the agenda.

But connectivity and development projects were very much discussed, with the two sides discussing the establishment of a new petroleum products pipeline on the eastern side connecting Siliguri in India to Jhapa in Nepal and a possible broad gauge railway line connecting Raxaul (Bihar) in India and the Nepalese capital Kathmandu.

Nepal also requested for early provision of Covid vaccines from India at the meeting.

KERALA  
ANNOUNCES  
SLEW OF SOPs

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN. 15

Free Covid vaccine for all, laptop in every household, high speed internet connection for 20 lakh economically backward families, 1.5 lakh houses for landless-homeless poor, hike in all social welfare pension thus goes the list of social welfare measures announced by Kerala's CPM led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in its budget on Friday.

With just three months left for the crucial Assembly elections in the state, the 3.18 hour record breaking budget speech of finance minister Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac in Kerala assembly sounded more like an election manifesto.

He announced a slew of social welfare measures including 10 kg rice for 50 lakh families and hike in all social welfare pensions from ₹1,500 to ₹1,600.

The LDF had tasted spectacular victory in the recently concluded local body polls. The victory was mainly attributed to the relief measures implemented during covid pandemic including distribution of free ration kits to the people and uninterrupted pension for socially and economically weaker sections.

The LDF hopes to retain power in assembly elections to be held in April-May with relief programmes that have a direct connect with people.

‘ACTION AGAINST  
MUNDE ONLY  
AFTER PROBE’

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC  
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar on Friday said that a woman of ACP rank should probe allegations of rape against social justice minister Dhananjay Munde. Mr. Pawar said that his party will decide on probable action against Munde after the police investigation is concluded.

Mr. Munde has been facing serious allegations of sexual harassment charges.

Mr. Pawar said that though he had termed the allegation against Munde of serious nature, action will be taken after the police investigation is complete.

A 38-year-old woman had alleged that she had been raped by Munde and claimed that her complaint was ignored by Mumbai Police. Following this, she had written a letter to Mumbai Police Commissioner on January 10, stating that the NCP leader, who hails from Beed district of Marathwada region, had raped her repeatedly in 2006.

Mr. Munde had denied the rape charges stating that he was in relationship with the complainant's sister.

Asked about some BJP leaders targeting the NCP over the episode involving Munde, Pawar said it is the right of the opposition to criticise.

## PM doesn't respect farmers, says Rahul



Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi during their protest against Centre's farm reform laws, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not respect farmers and wants to tire out those protesting against the new agri laws. He also said that the talks that are being held with the protesting farmer leaders are part of the government's delaying tactics. - PTI

## Naravane: Don't test patience

PAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

Amidst the ongoing standoff with China in eastern Ladakh, Indian Army Chief Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane on Friday said that while India was committed to resolving the ongoing row through talks and diplomacy, “no one should commit the mistake of testing our patience”.

On Pakistan, the Army chief said that 300-400 terrorists are waiting in various terror camps across the Line of Control in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to infiltrate into J&K.

He said last year had seen a 44 per cent increase in ceasefire violations at the LoC by Pakistan.

“You are aware of the ongoing tensions with China on northern borders. Regarding the conspiracy to unilaterally change the status quo on our borders, a befitting reply was given. I want to assure the country that the sacrifice of Galwan's bravehearts will not go in vain,” Gen. Naravane said while addressing the Army Day parade.

He said to resolve the issue there had been eight rounds of talks between the senior commanders of India and China. He added that efforts will continue to be made to resolve the issue on the principle of “mutual and equal security”.

For the first time at the

annual Army Day parade, the Army on Friday demonstrated its offensive swarm drone capability by taking down a slew of “targets” like tanks, terror camps, fuel dumps and a “suddenly” found helipad.

The demonstration involved 75 indigenously developed drones that working autonomously located and destroyed the targets. The baby kamikaze drones detached from mother drones and directly hit targets in suicide missions. They can travel up to 50 km to destroy enemy targets and can also be used to drop emergency supplies to soldiers.

Militaries around the world are looking at drones after Azerbaijan used them to defeat Armenia in the recent conflict. Azerbaijan used the armed drones it bought from Israel and Turkey to hit Armenian military assets to devastating effect, that crippled its air defence systems, tanks, artillery guns and other units. India is also taking a relook at its drone strategy, an area in which China has formidable strength.

Army Day is celebrated on January 15 to commemorate the day when Gen. (later Field Marshal) K.M. Cariappa became the first Indian to be commander-in-chief of the Indian Army, taking over from Gen. Sir F.R.R. Bucher, the last Briton to hold the post, in 1949.

SHIVRAJ HAILS  
LAST YEAR'S  
PADMA SHRI  
AWARDEE

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, JAN. 15

A twitter post by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan saying that the state was proud of the Padma Shri honour conferred on social activist late Abdul Jabbar for 2020, on Friday sparked confusion.

The Chief Minister, in his Twitter post, said Madhya Pradesh felt proud of late Jabbar being honoured with Padma Shri for 2020, posthumously. Late Mr Jabbar would be remembered for raising his voice for the cause of victims of Bhopal gas tragedy, the post said.

Mr Chouhan's post caused confusion in the official and media circles here since late Mr Jabbar was conferred the award posthumously in 2020. Mediapersons were seen contacting the state public relations department frantically trying to ascertain the reason for posting a year-old event on Twitter by the chief minister.

When contacted by this newspaper, state public relations department director Ashutosh Pratap Singh said, “Let me check”. Although officials in the chief minister's office were tight lipped on the issue, sources said the faux pas may have been committed by the CM's Twitter handlers.

Four persons from Madhya Pradesh were conferred with Padma Shri in 2020.

## EC wants govt to delete data once Covid vaccination exercise is over

New Delhi, Jan. 15: The Election Commission will extend “full assistance” to the government in identifying targeted beneficiaries at the polling station level for the Covid-19 vaccination drive, but wants health authorities to delete the data once the inoculation exercise is over, sources privy to the development said on Friday.

On December 31 last year, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora requesting the commission's help in identifying people above 50 years of age at the polling station level, the sources said.

On the issue of data security, the home secretary wrote that the government is complying with the current best practices for ensuring cyber security.

He has assured the poll panel that the data will be used only for the purpose of vaccination, the sources said.

The Election Commission (EC), after detailed deliberations, wrote back to the home secretary on January 4, saying it has decided to render “full assistance” in the vaccination drive. But asked the government to ensure that the data is strictly used for the limited purpose for which it has been sought, the sources said.

The commission also said that the data should be deleted by health authorities once the vaccination exercise concludes, they said.

Some senior EC officials will be in touch with nodal officers of the Union

VACCINE DRIVE  
TO START WITH  
SECURITY GUARD

DC CORRESPONDENT  
BHOPAL, JAN. 15

Madhya Pradesh is set to kick off the first phase of vaccination against Covid-19 on Saturday.

Security guard of the government-run J P Hospital here Hari Deb is set to get the first shot of the vaccine, according to state health minister Prabhuram Choudhury.

A workshop on vaccination was conducted jointly by Mr Choudhury and state medical education minister Viswas Sarang here on Friday to generate awareness regarding the vaccination, commencing on Saturday.

Mr Deb would get the opportunity to interact with the Prime Minister on Saturday on the occasion.

home ministry and the Union health ministry to settle day-to-day issues, the sources said.

Last month, officials of the Union health ministry and the Niti Aayog had met the EC top brass seeking their help in the distribution of Covid-19 vaccine given the poll panel's robust network at the booth level. According to guidelines for the vaccination drive, the latest electoral roll for Lok Sabha and assembly elections will be used to identify the priority population over the age of 50 years.

- PTI

## Former minister Morarka dies

DC CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

Former Union minister and industrialist Kamal Morarka on Friday passed away at his home in South Mumbai. He was 74. He died of a heart attack.

A close friend and senior journalist Santosh Bharatiya told *Deccan Chronicle*, “Mr. Morarka died after he suffered a heart attack at 7.50 pm. He complained of a cough on Thursday. He did not come to office on Thursday as he was unwell.”

Morarka, who hails from Rajasthan, was survived by two daughters and wife. He was a Union Minister in the Chandra Shekhar government in 1990-91 and a former Rajya Sabha MP from Rajasthan from JD(S) between 1988 and 1994.

In 2012, he became the head of Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya) which was started by Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal after they broke away from the Janata Dal in 1990.

Morarka, who was born in a well-known business family, donned many hats — a successful businessman, a cricket administrator who was the vice-



Kamal Morarka

president of the BCCI during Jajmohan Dalmia's time, a minister in the Union cabinet, a wildlife photographer and an organic farmer who has done some great work in Rajasthan to promote agriculture and support farmers. He and his MR Morarka foundation have been also at the forefront to promote art, Sanskrit literature and culture. Morarka was also associated with Indian cricket as an administrator.

He has served as vice president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. In 2000, he was a member of the BCCI disciplinary committee that took the decision to ban Mohammed Azharuddin. However, years later he criticised the decision as a sham.

## 2 lakh civil defence workers to boycott

PRANMOY  
BRAHMACHARI | DC  
BERHAMPORE, JAN. 15

A day before the Covid-19 vaccination gets underway in West Bengal, the contractual civil defence workers of the state have threatened to boycott the drive in protest of their short-term employment annually.

On Friday, West Bengal Civil Defence Association Murshidabad unit secretary Biswajit Das said, “Throughout the state our two lakh civil defence personnel will boycott the Covid vaccination programme which will start from Saturday. They include 2,200 members from this district also. We have decided it because we are in distress.”

He added, “We worked hard during the disaster

period risking our lives. But we got only a few days work. We demand 30 days full work for entire year till the age of 60. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee felt our necessity. So she decided to provide the vaccine to us. But our life is at stake not for work. It is because our family is at stake, If our demand is not met, we will boycott the vaccination drive.”

Mr Das argued though the vaccine would protect the civil defence workers, their family members would remain unsafe due to lack of earning throughout the year.

West Bengal is all set for the much-awaited inoculation drive and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will supervise the exercise virtually from the state secretariat.

## FORMER VC OF SANKARDEV VARSITY TO BE THE FIRST RECIPIENT IN ASSAM

MANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, JAN. 15

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Friday said that the state is all set to roll out vaccination programme for 1,56,000 people have registered on the website in Assam.

Umesh Chandra Sarma, former vice-chancellor of Sankardev University would be the first recipient among 12 invitees for the inaugural vaccination programme on Saturday, Mr Sarma said.

“We have received 2,20,000 vaccine vials. A total of 1,56,000 people in Assam have registered for the vaccine and we are capable of inoculating 1,19,000 people. There will be two doses of the vaccine which will be given at separate intervals,” he said.

SATABDI ROY  
CANCELS MEET  
WITH SHAH

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, JAN. 15

Ending speculation of her defection to the BJP ahead of the polls, three-time Trinamul Congress MP of Birbhum Satabdi Roy cancelled her New Delhi visit on Saturday after a meeting with her party leadership on Friday evening.

She was supposed to meet union home minister Amit Shah in the capital on Saturday as she quit as a member of Tarapeeth Development Council under the state municipal affairs and urban development department of the Mamata Banerjee government, complaining of her inability to work independently in the ruling party.

MONEY | DRIVE

## Kovind donates ₹5 lakh; Shivraj Singh Chouhan gives ₹1 lakh for construction President, CMs contribute for Ram Temple fund

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday donated ₹5,00,100 as a contribution in his personal capacity towards the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as the nationwide campaign - Samarpan - Nidhi Sangraha Abhiyan - to collect contributions for the temple by the VHP and Shri Ram Janambhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust commenced.

The trust, set up by the government after Supreme Court's direction, is the authority to oversee the construction of the temple.

At various locations throughout the country, contributions were made including in Gujarat,

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand among other states.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on August 5 performed the *bhoomi poojan* at the Ram Janmbhoomi in Ayodhya, paving the way for construction of the temple.

A delegation including VHP's international working president Alok Kumar, RSS leader Kulbhushan Ahuja, treasurer of the trust Govind Dev Giri and trust's head Nripendra Mishra called on the President at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Friday morning.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat also participated in the campaign at Mahrishi Valmiki Temple in the national capital.

Juna peeth's head Swami Avdeshanand Giri par-

ticipated in the campaign at the Seva Basti in Nagpur, while Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan donated ₹1 lakh as a contribution to the construction of the temple in Ayodhya. “One brick from my family shall also be placed in the construction Lord Ram's Temple. This is not a Ram Temple really, is a national temple,” he tweeted.

Uttarakhand governor Baby Rani Maurya and chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat also contributed.

The highest contribution on Friday came from former UP MLA Surendra Bahadur Singh, who donated contributed more than one crore (₹ 1,11,11,111) for the temple and handed over the

cheque to VHP's Champat Rai in Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh.

In Patna, BJP's Sushil Kumar Modi while participating in the campaign said, “I hope every Hindu family in Bihar contributes towards the building of the beautiful temple. I'm sure that whatever fund is required for the temple, we will get it out of people's cooperation.”

Former Union minister and senior BJP leader Uma Bharti also made a contribution of Rs 1 lakh for construction of the Ayodhya temple.

The Kinnar society of Madhya Pradesh has presented a cheque of ₹5.51 lakh for the cause.

It may be noted that the VHP's fundraising campaign will end on January 27.



BJP MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur with office-bearers of Vishwa Hindu Parishad addresses a gathering after donating a cheque of ₹1,11,111 lakh for the proposed construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya under a nationwide donation drive in Bhopal on Friday. - PTI



SHORT TAKES

U.S. DOWN TO 2,500 TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN

**Washington, Jan. 15:** The US military has met its goal of reducing the number of troops in Afghanistan to about 2,500 by Friday, a drawdown that appears to violate a last-minute congressional prohibition. President Donald Trump, who ordered the reduction in November, said on Thursday that troop levels in Afghanistan had reached a 19-year low, although he did not mention a troop number.

Last February his administration struck a deal with the Taliban to reduce American troop levels in phases and to go to zero by May 2021, although it is unclear how the incoming Biden administration will proceed. President-elect Joe Biden, who has advocated keeping a small counterterrorism force in Afghanistan as a way to ensure that extremist groups like al-Qaida are unable to launch attacks on the US, faces a number of questions on Afghanistan.

ALPS: AVALANCHE WARNINGS AFTER HEAVY SNOWFALL

**Berlin, Jan. 15:** Authorities in Switzerland have warned of high avalanche risk in mountainous regions of the Alpine nation after heavy snowfall in recent days.

Zurich's public transport company halted all tram and bus services in Switzerland's biggest city on Friday, saying snow had brought down trees and blocked access to three vehicle depots overnight.

Some eastern Swiss regions saw up to 80 centimetres (2.6 feet) of snowfall in 24 hours. Parts of the Goms valley on the border with Italy were cut off from the world due to blocked roads. Many roads were also closed due to avalanche risk or fallen trees in the western Austrian region of Tyrol. In the Voralberg region a power cut left some 7,400 households without electricity. Police in southwestern Germany said a 72-year-old woman died after a tree laden with snow fell on her while she was walking her dog near the Swiss border.

INDIAN TEENAGER HELPS RECYCLE 25 TN OF E-WASTE

**Dubai, Jan. 15:** A dubai-based 15-year-old Indian girl has launched a campaign, which helped in the recycling of 25 tonnes of electronic waste in the Gulf nation, according to a media report on Friday.

Riva Tulpule, a student of grade 10, got the idea to start the campaign while clearing out drawers filled with broken devices in 2016, the Gulf News reported. While shifting to a new house a few years ago, Tulpule found lots of disused electronics while helping her mom clear out drawers. This sparked the beginning of her campaign 'WeCareDXB' that she said has collected over 25 tonnes of e-waste for recycling in over four years, the report said.

"I had asked my mom why we can't just dispose the items we don't need. She told me they need to be tackled in a special way but we were not sure exactly how to go about it. So that made me curious and I decided to do some research into it, which led me to this cause," Tulpule was quoted as saying by the report.

RUSSIA EXITS OPEN SKIES PACT, AFTER U.S.

**Moscow, Jan. 15:** Russia said Friday it will withdraw from an international treaty allowing observation flights over military facilities following the US exit from the pact.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the US withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty last year "significantly upended the balance of interests of signatory states," adding that Moscow's proposals to keep the treaty alive after the US exit have been cold-shouldered by Washington's allies.

The ministry said Russia is now launching the relevant procedural moves to withdraw from the pact "due to the lack of progress in removing the obstacles for the treaty's functioning in the new conditions." The treaty was intended to build trust between Russia and the West by allowing the accords more than three dozen signatories to conduct reconnaissance flights over each others territories to collect information about military forces and activities.

42 killed in Indonesia earthquake



Rescuers assist a survivor pulled out from the ruin of a government building collapsed during an earthquake in Mamuju, West Sulawesi, Indonesia on Friday. A strong, shallow earthquake shook Indonesias Sulawesi island just after midnight Friday, toppling homes and buildings, triggering landslides and killing at least 42 people.

Biden declares \$1.9 tn Covid-19 stimulus plan

Prez-elect describes Trump admin's vaccine rollout a failure

**Washington, Jan. 15:** President-elect Joe Biden has announced a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package for the Coronavirus-sapped US economy, including direct financial aid to average Americans, support to small businesses and a national vaccination plan.

"During this pandemic, millions of Americans, through no fault of their own, have lost the dignity and respect that comes with a paycheck," Biden said in an address introducing the American Rescue Plan.

The relief package, announced on Thursday, includes \$415 billion focused on combating the Covid-19 pandemic, over \$1 trillion in direct aid to individuals and families and \$440 billion in assistance to businesses.

It includes \$1,400 in additional stimulus cheques to Americans, an extension for key unemployment programmes from mid-March to the end of September and an increase in weekly additional unemployment assistance from \$300 to \$400 and increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour over time.

Biden's proposal also sets aside \$20 billion for a national vaccination programme and \$50 billion to scale up Coronavirus testing. During his election campaign, Biden made tackling Covid-19 and the

IRAN'S GUARDS HOLD MISSILE, DRONE DRILL

**Tehran, Jan. 15:** Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Friday launched a missile and drone drill in central Iran, their official website reported — the country's third military exercise in less than two weeks. The moves come at a time of heightened tensions with the United States in the final days of President Donald Trump's administration.

Dubbed the *Great Prophet 15*, Friday's drill featured a "new generation" of surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, according to the *Sepahnews* website.

It involved a drone attack on a missile defence system followed by "a barrage of Zolfaghar, Zelzal and Dezful-class ballistic missiles," the site said. According to the Guards, the missiles were "equipped with detachable warheads and capable of being controlled outside the atmosphere." A video released showed several missiles being launched in a desert area with Guards commander Hossain Salami and the force's aerospace chief Amirali Hajizadeh present. "The message of this drill was our power and determined will to defend our sovereignty, our sacred system and our values against the enemies of Islam and Iran," Salami was quoted as saying. — AFP

WHO tackles new Covid-19 strains

**Geneva, Jan. 15:** Global health experts gathered on Thursday to tackle new Coronavirus strains blamed for a fresh surge in infections as countries including Britain and France tightened restrictions to head off a further worsening of the pandemic.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) emergency committee session came as their colleagues were seeking the origins of the virus on a long-delayed mission to the pandemic ground zero in Wuhan.

Almost two million of the more than 91 million people who have caught the disease have died, but the figures are widely believed to be an underestimate. "When you first met almost a year ago, just 557 cases of the disease we now call Covid-19 had

been reported to WHO," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in his opening remarks to the emergency meeting. Much of the planet is facing a second or third wave of infections, with populations chafing under painful and economically damaging restrictions.

Six European Union countries signed a letter to the European Commission on Friday to express "severe concern" over delivery delays for the Covid-19 vaccine developed by BioNTech and Pfizer. Ministers from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden said in their letter that the situation was "unacceptable" and "decreases the credibility of the vaccination process". — AFP

economic hardships it had put on Americans a core pitch to voters.

"It's not hard to see that we are in the middle of a once-in-several generation economic crisis within a once-in-several generation public health crisis. A crisis of deep human suffering in plain sight. And there is no time to wait,"

Biden, who is set to be sworn in as the 46th President of the US on January 20, said in his address from his hometown, Wilmington in Delaware.

Biden, a Democrat, described the outgoing Trump administration's vaccine rollout as a "disastrous failure." — PTI

Lady Gaga, JLo to perform at Biden swearing-in event

**Washington, Jan. 15:** Pop artists Jennifer Lopez and Lady Gaga will be among A-listers who will perform at the largely-virtual swearing-in ceremony of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States on January 20.

Gaga, one-of-a-kind artist, performer and a trailblazer in beauty and fashion, will sing the national anthem and Lopez will give a musical performance on the West Front of the US Capitol, where the ceremony will be taking place. Biden, 78, and Kamala Harris, 56, will be sworn in as President and Vice President of the United

States during the ceremony. But it won't be a typical inauguration, for several reasons.

The ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and fresh security concerns following a pro-Trump mob breaching the Capitol last week have combined to force some changes to what is a historical American day.

More than 10,000 National Guard troops will be in the city, with about 5,000 more on standby. Most of the events surrounding Biden's swearing-in will be virtual. Biden's inauguration is expected to feature limited attendance.

MILITARY LINKS

China's oil firm found acting as a bully for PLA to intimidate its neighbours

US blacklists Xiaomi, 8 Chinese firms

**Hong Kong, Jan. 15:** The US government has blacklisted Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp. and China's third-largest national oil company for alleged military links, heaping pressure on Beijing in President Donald Trump's last week in office.

The Department of Defense added nine companies to its list of Chinese companies with military links, including

Xiaomi and state-owned plane manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corp. of China (Comac). US investors will have to divest their stakes in Chinese companies on the military list by November this year, according to an executive order signed by Trump in November.

Xiaomi did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Xiaomi Corp. overtook Apple Inc.

as the worlds No. 3 smartphone maker by sales in the third quarter of 2020, according to data by Gartner. Xiaomi's market share has grown as Huawei's sales have suffered after it was blacklisted by the US and its smartphones were cut off from essential services from Google.

Separately, the Commerce Department put China National Offshore Oil Corp.

(CNOOC) on the entity list, an economic blacklist that forbids US firms from exporting or transferring technology with the companies named unless permission has been obtained from the US government.

The move comes after about 60 Chinese companies were added to the list in December, including drone maker DJI and semiconductor firm SMIC. CNOOC has been involved

in offshore drilling in the disputed waters South China Sea, where Beijing has overlapping territorial claims with other countries including Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Taiwan, and Malaysia. "China's reckless and belligerent actions in the South China Sea and its aggressive push to acquire sensitive intellectual property and technology for its militarisation efforts are a

Trump's fate in Senate leader McConnell's hands

**Washington, Jan. 15:** For a second time, Republican senators face the choice of whether to convict President Donald Trump in an impeachment trial. While only one GOP senator, Utah's Mitt Romney, voted to convict Trump last year, that number could increase as lawmakers consider whether to punish Trump for his role in inciting a deadly insurrection at the Capitol.

Whatever they decide, Trump is likely to be gone from the White House when the verdict comes in. An impeachment trial is likely to start next week, as early as Inauguration Day, raising the specter of the Senate trying the previous president even as it moves to confirm the incoming president's Cabinet.

GOP leader Mitch McConnell, who says he's undecided, is one of several key senators to watch, along with Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, who is set to take the Senate reins as his party reclaims the Senate majority.

Others to watch include GOP senators up for reelection in 2022 and several

Republican who have publicly backed impeachment. At least at the trial's start, all eyes will be on McConnell, who largely protected Trump during the last impeachment trial and refused Democrats' pleas to call witnesses.

This time, Trump may not be so fortunate. McConnell has told associates he is done with Trump and has said publicly he is undecided on impeachment. How he votes could sway other Republicans whose votes Trump needs to avoid conviction.

The Republican leader holds great sway in his party even though convening the trial could be among his last acts as majority leader. Even as minority leader, McConnell will be a crucial and perhaps decisive voice. If the veteran Kentucky Republican sticks with Trump, conviction is unlikely.

If McConnell votes against Trump, all bets are off as Democrats seek the 17 GOP votes they will need for the first-ever Senate conviction in a presidential impeachment trial. — AP

US executes drug kingpin under Don

**Washington, Jan. 15:** US federal authorities executed a former drug trafficker who had contracted Covid-19 late Thursday, and a final execution of Donald Trump's administration was scheduled for Friday with just five days left of his presidency.

Corey Johnson was part of a gang implicated in 10 murders in 1992 in the US state of Virginia. He was convicted in federal court for his involvement in seven of them. The 52-year-old African American received a lethal injection at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana, and was pronounced dead at 11:34 pm.

He addressed the families of his victims in his

final statement. "I would have said I was sorry before, but I didn't know how. I hope you will find peace," he said.

On Friday, authorities plan to execute Dustin Higgs, a 48-year-old Black man convicted of kidnapping and killing three young women on federal land near Washington in 1996. Both men contracted Covid-19 in December and a judge on Tuesday postponed their executions for several weeks.

Their lungs have not fully recovered and the injection of pentobarbital may cause suffering prohibited by the Constitution, which bans "cruel" punishment, the court said. — AFP

Dutch govt quits over child benefits scandal

**The Hague, Jan. 15:** Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's government resigned on Friday over a child benefits scandal, threatening political instability as the country battles the Coronavirus pandemic.

Thousands of parents were wrongly accused by Dutch authorities of fraudulently claiming child allowance, with many of them forced to pay back large amounts of money and ending up in financial ruin.

The fact that some parents were targeted for investigation by tax officials because they had dual nationality also underscored long-standing criticisms of systemic racism in the Netherlands.

Rutte — one of Europe's longest-serving leaders, having been in power since 2010 — said the cabinet would stay on in a caretaker role to oversee the response to Covid-19 until elections in mid-March.

"The buck stops here," Rutte told a press conference after a crisis meeting of his four-party coalition cabinet in The Hague.



Dutch resigning Prime Minister Mark Rutte rides a bicycle as he leaves a press conference in The Hague on Friday.

"We are of one mind: if the whole system has failed, only joint responsibility can be borne. And that leads to the conclusion that I have just now offered the king the resignation of the entire cabinet." He added: "The rule of law must protect its citizens from an all-powerful government, and here that's gone terribly wrong." Rutte defended the decision to resign when the Netherlands is fighting the coronavirus pandemic, with the country facing a surge in cases of a new variant first

found in Britain. "Our fight against coronavirus continues," said Rutte, adding that the caretaker cabinet would "do what is necessary in the interests of the country." Polls say his Freedom and Democracy Party would likely come first in the next elections, putting Rutte in line for a fourth term since 2010.

A hard-hitting parliamentary investigation in December said civil servants cut off benefits to thousands of families wrongly accused of fraud between 2013 and 2019. — AFP



DECCAN  
Chronicle

16 JANUARY 2021

Twice impeached, Trump makes dubious history

The US Senate has the opportunity to make Donald Trump the first American President in history to be convicted. A series of moves by Mr Trump aimed at bucking democratic norms and traditions had led to his being impeached a second time on January 13, when he left behind Andrew Johnson (1868) and Bill Clinton (1998) as Presidents who had been impeached. Charged with inciting an insurrection after trying to cling to power by overturning an election he had indubitably lost, Mr Trump committed a treasonous crime in encouraging his hardcore followers into invading institutions of democracy on Capitol Hill — the House of Representatives and the Senate. Worse, as supporters vandalised the Capitol and hunted for vice-president Mike Pence, the President ignored pleas to rein in his crazed and violent army of followers. He showed no remorse after the protests against the highest symbols of democracy, giving lip to words denouncing the violence only with an eye to avoid legal complications. “Appropriate,” he said of words like “fight like hell” he had earlier spoken in whipping up passions that led to the invasion of Capitol Hill.

Regardless of the Senate’s ultimate decision under Kamala Harris’ chairmanship during the presidency of Joe Biden, Mr Trump will have cleaved America like no President before him

The Republican Party has two choices — forgive him and vote on partisan lines for a President whose four-year reign is all but over — or punish him for his misdemeanours by voting with their conscience and ridding the party of a troublesome leader who could make a run for the presidency again in 2024. If at least 17 Republican Senators vote with 50 counterparts of the Democratic Party, a first ever man who was President to be convicted in a Senate trial would be toast. A simple majority vote in the Senate would then be sufficient to stop Mr Trump from running for any office in future. There may be other provisions in the American statutes that could bring about the same desirable ending for the most controversial US politician but they would be subject to interpretations by the Supreme Court. It is apparent many in his party are distancing themselves, though not in sufficient numbers considering that as many as 197 lawmakers voted against his impeachment in the House of Representatives.

The democratic world waits with bated breath to see if American lawmakers have the gumption to condemn Mr Trump for a rule that has left the US fractured and disunited, angry and confused. Faith in the system has also eroded at a time when the pandemic has killed more Americans than World War II and Vietnam War combined. The chapters in history in which the USA was a shining light for democracy seemed to have ended. It is small relief that Mr Trump has been boycotted by Big Tech platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, which have denied him the megaphones with which he had wreaked havoc on his country even as he played ducks and drakes with foreign policy to earn more enemies than friends around the globe. Regardless of the Senate’s ultimate decision under Kamala Harris’ chairmanship during the presidency of Joe Biden, Mr Trump will have cleaved America like no President before him. He may not have been the first demagogue in the White House be he was certainly the one that did the most damage.

Women at Mass: Slow steps

The Catholic Church could be one of the most conservative of organisations that are long functional and whose decisions touch the lives of millions of people. So a step the Holy See takes to rework its hugely patriarchal system and make it more inclusive would be making history, and will have a catalytic and cascading effect. The latest decision of Pope Francis to formally recognise the role of women in the celebration of Mass is one such.

As per a revised clause in the Canon law, now “lay persons”, instead of the former “lay men”, can perform “the ministries of lector and acolyte” in Catholic services. In his decree, called Spiritus Domini, the Pope said women were making a “precious contribution” to the Church and the effort was to “rediscover the co-responsibility of all of the baptised in the Church”. The Pope, however, has once again refused to give women permission to become priests.

The announcement in itself has nothing revolutionary: the Pope has only given his formal assent to a practice prevalent in the Church in many parts of the world. But by doing so, he has ensured two things. One, the changes that visit the Church, even though incremental, are irreversible. Two, the conservatives did not rise up in revolt and undermine every single change he has ushered into the 2,000-year-old institution by letting priesthood remain a male domain.

The Catholic Church stood its ground when several others, including the Anglican Church, liberalised itself in the matters of faith and rituals, giving women more roles. That Jesus Christ took only his 12 male disciples and no woman, not even his mother, to the Last Supper, which offers the basis of the Eucharist, is an argument the conservatives have offered while resisting granting priesthood to women. The Pope seems to be trusting the dictum, slow and steady wins the race.

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KAUSHIK MITTER  
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K. SUBHAKAR  
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DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

**Hyderabad:** 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256  
**Vijayawada:** No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

**Visakhapatnam:** Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285  
**Rajahmundry:** Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

**Anantapur:** Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

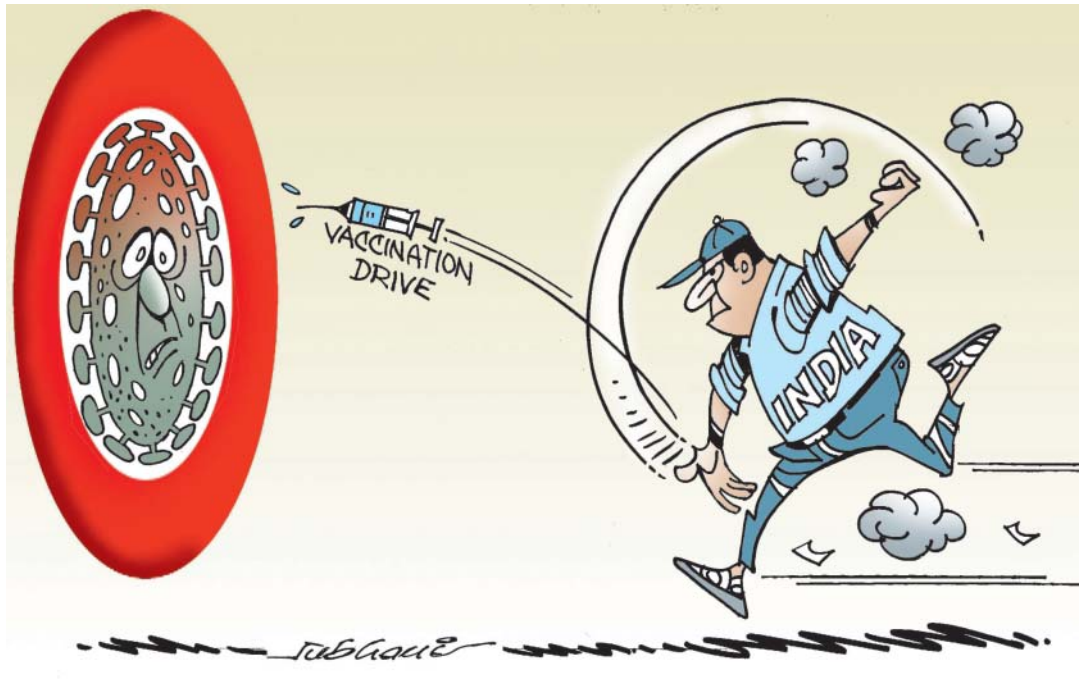
**Karimnagar:** Survey No.1341, Vavilapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

**Nellore:** Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemmudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

**Chennai:** SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/4230525

**Coimbatore:** 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255  
Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. HSD-34/2006-08

Subhani



Elections 2021: A mixed bag of hope & challenges

Sanjay Kumar

Elections are held in India every year, in one state or another. But 2021 is going to be slightly more eventful, as five states are going to the polls in the middle of this year. The political fortunes of many parties are at stake in these polls. For some, the challenge is to save their government against possible anti-incumbency, while others need to make an attempt for a comeback, and some need to make an impact for the first time. There is a mixed bag for a large number of parties, both national as well as regional ones.

This year elections are due in two states in the east — West Bengal and Assam — and three states/UTs in the south — Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. It’s important to note that all these are now governed by different parties and no party has a government in more than one state. Mamata Banerjee’s Trinamul Congress is in power in West Bengal for the past decade; the BJP has been ruling Assam; Tamil Nadu, which has swung between the DMK and AIADMK since 1967, is currently governed by the AIADMK since 2016. Kerala has a LDF government, but here too governments swing between the LDF and UDF. Once a dominant party, the Congress is in power only in Puducherry, that too in alliance with the DMK as it doesn’t have a majority on its own.

The political atmosphere is completely charged in West Bengal, a state ruled for a few decades by the Congress,

over 30 years by the Left Front and by the TMC for the last 10 years. Ms Banerjee is facing a very tough fight from BJP, which has made huge inroads in the state in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In 2019, the BJP polled 40 per cent votes and won 18 Lok Sabha seats, while the TMC polled 43 per cent votes and won 22 Lok Sabha seats. Seen in terms of leads in Assembly constituencies, the BJP led in 121 Assembly seats, while the TMC led in 164 Assembly seats. It is important to note that the TMC won 211 Assembly seats in the 2016 Assembly polls. The results of 2019 Lok Sabha polls and recent ground reports suggest the BJP has managed to expand its support base hugely and Ms Banerjee will find it tough to win her third election in a row. West Bengal is on the boil and political change seems on the cards.

In Assam, the ruling BJP may not face a significant challenge from its main opponent, the Congress, that is still lying low, unable to overcome its defeat in the 2016 Assembly polls and its poor show in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The passing away of Tarun Gogoi, three-time Congress CM (2001-2016), has only added to the Congress’ problems in the state.

In Tamil Nadu, the Congress has hardly any role to play, as politics in the state is dominated by the two Dravidian parties. The Congress, that has mostly been the DMK’s coalition partner, is likely to play a similar role, but given its recent poor performance in Bihar it will be

on the defensive regarding seat-sharing arrangements with the DMK. The Congress has not been in a dominant position in Tamil Nadu politics since 1967, and the 2021 elections hardly promises anything different. If the DMK wins the 2021 Assembly polls, the Congress can at best have the solace of being a partner in the state’s coalition government, but there remains a lot of uncertainty about what might happen. Alliances hold the key to electoral success in TN, and the alliance are still to take shape. Kamal Hassan did try his luck in 2019 but was unsuccessful. We still need to see how the BJP approaches the TN elections: will it go solo or form an alliance with the AIADMK, which has already sent a strong message to the BJP asking it to contest under the AIADMK’s leadership. However, it is unwilling to include the BJP in a coalition government if it comes to forming a government after winning the election. Given this, it will be a tough call for the BJP.

Since Kerala has been swinging between the LDF and UDF for decades, it should be the UDF’s turn this time. The Congress, the main party in the UDF, is the best bet in Kerala, but given its performance in recent local body elections, it may not be easy

Overall, the best the Left parties can do is to hold on to power in Kerala. The BJP will certainly win in Assam and will put up a strong fight to wrest power from the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal. For the Congress, the best scenario would be to win in Kerala and retain Puducherry. For regional parties, the best outcome is to retain power in both West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. So yes, the stakes are very high for many political parties.

for the UDF to stage a comeback. It is also important to note that elections have been decided in the state mostly by narrow margins, but during the 2016 Assembly polls, the LDF victory was slightly more convincing, polled 42.6 per cent votes and won 92 seats, compared to the UDF’s 38.6 per cent votes and 47 seats. Given the LDF’s four per cent lead in the last election, the UDF needs to work really hard if it aims to stage a comeback. We must also watch the BJP’s moves in the state. It is important to note the BJP polled 14.6 per cent votes in the state in the 2016 Assembly elections, when it opened its account in Kerala. It could upset the calculation of established political formations.

The Congress, which is the ruling party (in alliance with the DMK) in Puducherry, has to fight hard to save the only place where it is the ruling party among the five going to the polls. Given the small number of the Union territory’s Assembly constituencies, and the multipolarity it has, an alliance will hold the key to electoral success in Puducherry.

Overall, the best the Left parties can do is to hold on to power in Kerala. The BJP will certainly win in Assam and will put up a strong fight to wrest power from the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal. For the Congress, the best scenario would be to win in Kerala and retain Puducherry. For regional parties, the best outcome is to retain power in both West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. So yes, the stakes are very high for many political parties.

The writer is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political analyst. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

VACCINE COST

When the vaccine is being produced in bulk due to our population, the costs should have fallen. Why is Covishield priced exorbitantly for the public? Even subsidised vaccines seem expensive compared to the Western countries.

P.J. David  
Hyderabad

TAX EXEMPTION

Senior citizens who crossed 70 years are not eligible for medical insurance, loan on EMI, driving licence, etc. However, they must pay all taxes. When the government is spending crores of rupees on irrelevant schemes, the senior citizens may be exempted from paying taxes in the Budget.

G.R. Narsing Rao  
Secunderabad

NEED PAVEMENTS

Authorities are not concerned about shops, big or small, occupying pavements. This can be seen in the pavement constructed in front of DMart, SD Road, and on the road going from Alpha Hotel to Monda market. Pedestrians are forced to walk on the road risking accident; the roads themselves are crammed with parked or moving vehicles.

Keshav Reddy  
Secunderabad

STUNNING EXAMPLE

Full marks for selecting ordinary people to be given the Padma Shri in 2020. They selflessly rendered yeoman public service. It is an inspiring initiative that will set an example for all future awards in recognition of meritorious services in various fields.

C.J. Bhupathi  
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN  
Chronicle

Plea to develop small industries

HYDERABAD, January. 15

Development of Small Scale industries on a big scale alone will solve the growing unemployment problem besides bringing prosperity, observed Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi, Chief Minister, today. Inaugurating a three-day campaign for development of small-scale industries here, the CM said that there was a considerable potential for industrial development in Telangana and Rayalaseema.

Farrukh  
Dhondy  
Cabbages &  
Kings



“If religion is the opium of the masses  
Then superstition is its LSD  
Turning us into hallucinating asses  
Chained to illusions, lies, unfree  
Thoughts that defy all logic and sense  
Beliefs that spring from idiocy  
And fear of some future recompense,  
That’s hell right here — not yet to be!”

— From **Recipes of Damnation**  
by Bachchoo

Time for all to get Covid jabs; don’t listen to ‘anti-vaccers’

The world waits for the vaccines to be made available and kick in. My local doctor’s surgery sends texts to say that we, its patients, should earn the description. The UK government intends to immunise first all workers in hospitals and care homes and citizens who are 80 years old and over. Sensible.

Who will administer the vaccines and where will they do it? British pharmacists, who have been administering winter flu jabs over the past few years, have petitioned the government to use their premises, services and injecting expertise to assist the country’s

immunisation programme.

Our local pharmacy, conveniently across the road from the medical practice, has been in the vaccinating business, but during the last round of flu vaccination, while the Asian pharmacist was administering the jabs, the young Afro-British assistant who works there all year round declared that she was a vaccine resistor, a sceptic. She didn’t believe in vaccination.

There are millions of idiots around the world who are anti-vaccers. My unverified conclusion, gentle reader, was that this young lady belonged to a cultish church called Jehovah’s Witnesses, which has a meeting house down the road in this neighbourhood. These Witnesses don’t believe in scientific discovery and won’t accept blood transfusions, even if they are dying without them. Faith dictates foolishness — and in this case I thought it dictated against the one thing that can almost certainly save a person from the Covid-19 plague.

Forgive my arrogance, but I am convinced that the young black assistant in our pharmacy was a Jehovah’s Witness. How do I know? I don’t. But some months ago, I encountered two young black girls dressed in very maid-

only Sunday-best sitting at a bus stop. I was myself waiting for a bus. There were only the three of us. One of them gingerly approached me.

“Excuse me, sir, may I speak to you?” she ventured. I said she could.

“Do you know the Bible?” She asked.

“Bits,” I said, and then, before either of them could begin to convert me to their true Jehovah faith, I asked: “But do you know the Bible?”

They both nodded, and said: “Yes, of course.”

“Right then,” I asked: “In which and only book of the Bible are the three Magi who visited Jesus’ birth mentioned?”

They looked at each other. They didn’t know.

“Mathew,” I said, and then: “And what religion were these Magi?”

Again, blank looks.

“They were Zoroastrians,” I said. I was enjoying this.

“And so, which book of the Bible begins with: “In the beginning was the Word?”

“Genesis,” one of them enthusiastically ventured.

“Wrong,” I said, “It’s John in the New Testament!”

They looked bewildered and then

my bus arrived and stopped. They were waiting, I gathered, for the other routed bus which serves that stop. So, as I got on and left them, I said: “Remember, you heard it on the Road to Damascus!”

I think, gentle reader, I understand the Jehovah’s Witness’ reluctance to accede to scientific truth. The latter is the product of the use of reason, the building of deductive processes of thought through the centuries, from Archimedes leaping out of his bath shouting “Eureka”, Aryabhatta formulating the zero, or Isaac Newton realising that the entire earth and trees move upwards towards apples, which come loose from the stems holding them. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have no use for this system of logical conscious apprehension. They have a complete, self-contained belief system of their own.

So did the court that tried Galileo for saying that the earth moved around the sun. His prosecutors and judges had a complete system of belief which specified that the earth was stationary. Poor old Gally recanted and said they were right, to save himself from being tortured and put to death, but as we know, on his way out of court he muttered to the

gods — “*epur si muove!*” — and yet it moves.

The deniers of vaccination who pose a puzzle are those who have no such complete theory of the universe. What they have instead is the Internet through which the most abject nonsense is spread. A Brit campaigner called Hannah Dean has gathered 13,000 followers on Facebook by sneaking into hospitals and taking photographs of empty corridors, which she says proves that Covid-19 and the emergency that the government has declared are a mass conspiracy and hoax. She hasn’t yet said why she thinks the government has perpetrated a false scare about a virus that hasn’t done what the government, to the detriment of the economy, claims every day that it has. Then there is a weirdo, a black guy called Chris Preddie, who has used Facebook to muster 47,000 followers, calling on them to riot against the Covid-19 lockdown.

These people may actually believe what they perpetrate, or they are using this crisis in world health to gain the cheap popularity that today’s Internet outlets offer — notoriety for nothing — or even worse, for murderous, nonsensical negativity.



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,034.67	-1.11
Nifty 50	14,433.70	-1.11
S&P 500*	3,771.14	-0.64
Dollar (₹)	73.04	0.00
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.71	0.01
Euro (₹)	88.70	0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,690,286	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	54.71	-3.03
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.988	1.08
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.095	-0.034

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Gail announces ₹1,046-crore share buyback

Gail (India) Ltd announced a Rs 1,046.35-crore share buyback programme, as it looked to return surplus cash to shareholders, the biggest being the GoI with a 51.76 per cent share. Gail India said it will buy back 6.97 crore shares at Rs 150 per share each. The board also declared an interim dividend of 25 per cent (Rs 2.50 per share) for 2020-21. The record date for buyback as interim dividend is January 28.

## Embassy REIT raises ₹2,600 cr to refinance debt



Embassy Office Parks REIT said it has raised Rs 2,600 crore through issue of non-convertible debentures to refinance an existing debt of its IT park 'Embassy TechVillage' in Bengaluru. Embassy said it has "successfully priced and allotted by way of a private placement, Rs 2,600 crore or \$351 million of rupee-denominated, listed, rated, secured, redeemable, transferable NCDs at a 6.40 per cent quarterly coupon."

## L&T Finance Q3 net profit slips 51% to ₹288 cr

L&T Finance Holdings reported a 51 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 287.75 crore in the December quarter against Rs 591.47 crore in the year-ago quarter. The NBFCs total income fell to Rs 3,622.16 crore from Rs 3,735.79 crore YoY. Average AUM fell to Rs 68,976 crore from Rs 71,587 crore. "Post-Covid, the rural economy performed better than urban and this trend is reflected in our disbursements, MD Dinanath Dubhashi said.

## Honda City tops mid-sized sedan segment in 2020

Honda Cars India said its mid-sized sedan City led the segment last year with cumulative sales of 21,826 units. Staying true to its legacy of being the Japanese automaker's longest running nameplate in India, the all-new fifth generation City was launched in July 2020. The City's market share in Dec. 2020 stood at 41 per cent in the segment, Honda said. Its cumulative sales in July-December 2020 stood at 17,347 units.



## Volatility index surges 16% during week Profit taking trips overbought mkt

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD**  
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

The market turned volatile after healthy gains during the week that took the indices to record highs. The volatility index surged more than 16 per cent during the week, which is certainly not good news for the bulls. Also, the build-up in derivatives contracts showed the market was overbought, said analysts.

The Sensex fell 549 points, or 1.11 per cent, on Friday, closing just above 49,000 mark amid weak global cues. The benchmark index plunged 788 points intraday, touching a low of 48,795.79 before a pullback. Earlier, on Wednesday, Sensex had touched a new all-time high of 49,795.19 before a climbdown in the next two sessions.

The Nifty-50 Index shed 161.90 points to close at 14,433.70 on Friday.

The broader market also saw profit-taking with the BSE Mid-cap Index closing down 1.25 per cent and the Small-cap Index down 1.06 per cent.

During the week, the Nifty-50 gained 3.2 per cent while the Sensex gained 2.7 per cent. Mid-caps continued to outperform with the Nifty Mid-cap 100 Index gaining 5.2 per cent in the week.

"Considering the overall development seen in F&O (futures & options) space, we expect some follow up selling in the coming week as well," said Sneha Seth, derivatives analyst, Angel



## PFC's ₹5,000-CR BOND ISSUE SUBSCRIBED 94%

New Delhi, Jan. 15: State-run Power Finance Corporation's Rs 5,000-crore taxable non-convertible debenture issue was subscribed 94 per cent on the first day on Friday and is likely to close on Monday, a source said.

PFC has planned to raise Rs 10,000 crore through bonds in two tranches. The first tranche of Rs 5,000 crore opened for subscription on Friday and was scheduled to close on January 29. "The issue has got overwhelming response and subscribed for an amount of Rs 4,700 crore or 94 per cent on first day," the source said. —PTI

Broking. "The market remained volatile last week and hence we saw mixed activ-

ity in terms of open interest in the index futures segment and clearly suggested the market was overbought," Seth said. On Friday, only four of the 30 Sensex stocks and seven of the Nifty-50 stocks managed to close in the green.

Nevertheless, on a weekly basis Tata Motors was the biggest mover in Nifty-50, gaining 32 per cent. Other two big gainers were Bharti Airtel (11.7 per cent) and ITC (8 per cent).

Shrikant Chouhan, analyst-equity technical research, Kotak Securities, said, "The market is showing indecisiveness. The chart indicates that the market has taken a breather ahead of the major event of Union Budget, which is scheduled on February 1, 2021."

Provisional data showed domestic institutions were net sellers on Friday of equities worth Rs 942 crore while foreign portfolio investors were net buyers by Rs 971 crore.

## HCL TECH TO HIRE 20,000 IN NEXT TWO QUARTERS: CEO

New Delhi, Jan. 15: IT services major HCL Technologies is looking at hiring about 20,000 people over the next two quarters to meet the demand coming in on the back of strong growth in deal signing and adoption of digital services.

The Noida-based company, which crossed the \$10-billion revenue milestone in the calendar year 2020, had 1,59,682 employees at the end of December 31, 2020.

It saw a gross addition of 12,422 people, while net addition during the December 2020 quarter was of 6,597 people. Attrition for IT services (on last 12 month basis) was at 10.2 per cent. "There was a net hiring of over 6,500 people in Q3 (third quarter). There is a big demand pipeline and so, we are continuing to hire both freshers and lateral talent to fulfil the demand," HCL Tech president and CEO C. Vijayakumar said.

"I foresee about 20,000 people to be hired—both freshers and laterals—in the next four-six months based on the demand that we have seen". He added that about 15 per cent of these would be for onshore locations or client geographies with the remaining will be offshore.

HCL Tech shares fell nearly 4 per cent after the firm reported a 31.1 per cent rise in its December quarter net profit at Rs 3,982 crore on strong momentum in its digital, products and platform segment. —Agencies

## DHFL lenders vote for Piramal Enterprises bid

New Delhi, Jan. 15: Piramal Enterprises' bid for debt-ridden DHFL received the most votes from lenders at the close of the voting process on Friday, sources said.

Piramal Enterprises' bid received 94 per cent votes as compared to 45 per cent for the US-based Oaktree Capital.

Voting was done on various parameters, including qualitative and quantitative.

After this, the committee of creditors (CoC) is likely to meet to take a final call and send its recommendation to the NCLT, the sources added.

Since the conclusion of the fifth and final round of the bidding process last month, Piramal Enterprises and Oaktree Capital each claimed that their bid was the highest and fully implementable.



According to sources, suitors have submitted bids in the range of Rs 35,000-37,000 crore.

In November 2019, the Reserve Bank referred Dewan Housing Finance Ltd (DHFL), the third-largest pure-play mortgage lender, to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for insolvency proceedings.

DHFL was the first finance company to be referred to NCLT by the RBI using special powers under Section 227 of the IBC. Prior to that, the company's board was

superseded and R Subramaniakumar was appointed as the administrator. He is also the resolution professional under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

As of July 2019, the company owed Rs 83,873 crore to banks, the National Housing Board, mutual funds and bondholders.

Its large lenders are SBI, including SBI Singapore with Rs 10,083 crore exposure. Others are Bank of India (Rs 4,125 crore), Canara Bank (Rs 2,681 crore), NHB (Rs 2,434 crore), Union Bank (Rs 2,378 crore), Syndicate Bank (Rs 2,229 crore), Bank of Baroda (Rs 2,075 crore), Indian Bank (Rs 1,552 crore), Central Bank (Rs 1,389 crore), IDBI Bank (Rs 999 crore) and HDFC Bank (Rs 361 crore).

—PTI

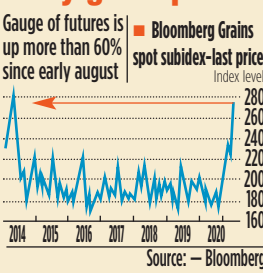
## Wheat jumps as Russia hikes tax

**MEGAN DURISIN & YULIYA FEDORINOVA**  
JAN. 15

Wheat rose to a six-year high in Chicago after Russia said its new wheat-export tax will rise even more than expected a few weeks after kicking in, as the country accelerates efforts to cool domestic food prices.

Russia, the biggest wheat exporter, is adding to measures announced late last year after President Vladimir Putin told the government to cool food-price inflation

### Lofty grain prices



because of sharp increases for staples like bread and sunflower oil. A grain-export quota and wheat-export tax that will both

kick in February 15 have combined with tightening supply elsewhere and surging Chinese demand to drive global grains prices to multiyear highs.

Russia's wheat duty will rise to 50 euros a tonne (\$61) from 25 euros on March 1, the Economy and Trade Ministry said in a statement. The government is also planning to continue taxing shipments into the next season. The agriculture ministry earlier this week proposed an increase to 45 euros from March 15. —Bloomberg

## Palm oil to have best year since 2011

**ANURADHA RAGHU & EKO LISTIYORINI**  
JAN. 15

Palm oil prices are set to have their best annual showing in a decade even as the coronavirus pandemic rages on.

Benchmark futures for the tropical oil, used in everything from cooking oil to shampoo, will average 3,200 ringgit (\$791) a tonne in 2021, the highest in a decade, according to the median of 23 estimates in a Bloomberg survey of analysts, traders and plantation executives, versus 2,700 ringgit last year.

A bullish cocktail of La Nina-linked flooding and shrinking inventories in Malaysia is bolstering the market, but prices may come under pressure in the second half as production of palm, as well as soybean oil, rebounds.

"With lower production and the lowest stockpiles in years, crude palm oil prices are expected to stay elevated up to the middle of February, but to ease thereafter as production begins to recover and stocks grow from March onwards," said Sathia Varqa, owner of Palm Oil Analytics in Singapore. Prices will average 3,650

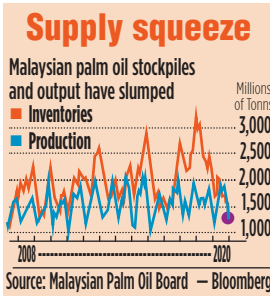
ringgit in the first quarter, before easing to 3,400 ringgit in the second, according to the survey. Estimates ranged from 3,000-4,150 ringgit for the first quarter, and from 2,500-4,280 ringgit in the second.

What's in store for palm? Veteran analyst Dorab Mistry predicts "explosive price moves" in the first quarter, but overall, 2021 will be a "year of two halves". Here's what the industry is watching:

**La Nina:** La Nina is wreaking havoc across the world, unleashing heavy rains in Southeast Asia that's led to flooding in second-largest grower Malaysia, and parching soybean crops in South America. Sunflower oil exports have also slumped from Russia and Ukraine. This will tighten supplies of edible oils around the world.

Rainy weather, however, may pave way for palm oil production to rebound in the second half of the year. James Fry, chairman of LMC International, forecasts combined production in Indonesia and Malaysia to expand by 5.5 million tonnes this year.

**Biofuel blues:** Indonesia's B30 programme will be a crucial make-or-break driver for palm's rally. The



ambitious mandate, which stipulates that fossil fuels must be blended with 30 per cent palm oil, could soak up bulging supplies in the top grower. But palm's premium over petrol has ballooned to the widest in at least two decades, which puts the programme under pressure. Oil World's Thomas Mielke called the B30 mandate a "swing factor," and said it could be temporarily reduced in March or April.

**Production, labor shortage:** Weaker-than-expected yields and a chronic labour crunch has not only curbed Malaysian production, it's also hurting plantation stocks. What's more, floods in key-growing areas could further cut monthly production and drive down stockpiles that are already at

their lowest in 13 years.

"Production growth will remain a challenge in the first quarter due to severe localised flooding in December and into the first week of January," said Varqa from Palm Oil Analytics. In addition, a "shortage of workers from border closures and the existing moratorium on hiring of new foreign workers is likely to combine to hamper harvesting work and weigh down production."

**Pandemic risks:** Despite enthusiasm surrounding a vaccine, the coronavirus may still play a hand in palm oil's fortunes this year. A resurgence in new cases, for instance, could shutter cities and stifle any recovery in food demand from hotels and restaurants.

**Demand watch:** Appetite for palm oil will be closely watched this year, especially in biggest consumers India and China. Palm's recent rally has taken a toll on shipments to price-sensitive India and may face further headwinds from the growth of its domestic oilseed crops. Still, if palm exports stay robust, prices could reach 4,000 ringgit. —Bloomberg

## Samsung's Galaxy S21 to hit market this month

New Delhi, Jan. 15: Samsung said it will bring its new lineup of flagship Galaxy S21 smartphones to the Indian market by the end of the month, with prices starting Rs 69,999, intensifying competition in the premium segment.

Samsung, which competes with Apple and OnePlus in the premium segment in India, said customers can pre-book all three variants—Galaxy S21 Ultra, Galaxy S21+ and Galaxy S21—from Friday.

"All the three devices are hyper fast 5G ready and are powered with Samsung's own Exynos 2100 chipset. Consumers can pre-book Galaxy S21 Series starting January 15 across Samsung's Exclusive Stores and retail stores and on Samsung.com and leading online portals," it said in a statement.

The Galaxy S21 will be priced between Rs 69,999-73,999, Galaxy S21+ for Rs 81,999-85,999 and the Galaxy S21 Ultra will retail for Rs 1,05,999-1,16,999.

"We are living in a mobile-first world, and with so many of us working remotely and spending more time at home, we wanted to deliver a smartphone experience that meets the rigorous multimedia demands of our continuously changing routines," said T. M. Roh, president and head of mobile communications business at Samsung Electronics.

The Galaxy S21 features a 6.2-inch display, 10MP front and triple rear camera, 8GB RAM, 128GB/256GB internal memory and 4000 mAh battery. The Galaxy S21+ features a larger 6.7-inch display and 4800 mAh battery.

The Galaxy S21 Ultra features a 6.8-inch display and 5,000 mAh battery.

Samsung is introducing support for its S Pen on the Galaxy S series in the Galaxy S21 Ultra.

The S Pen allows users to draw, take notes, edit photos and sign documents on the screen itself. Users will be able to use an existing S Pen from a Galaxy Note/Tab. —PTI

## INDIGO PAINTS PRICES PUBLIC ISSUE IN ₹1,488-₹1,490 BAND



**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD**  
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

Pune-based Indigo Paints announced a Rs 1,170-crore initial public offering (IPO) of equity shares in the price band of Rs 1,488–Rs 1,490 per equity share of Rs 10 face value. The public issue opens on January 20 and closes on January 22.

The IPO comprises fresh issuance of equity shares aggregating Rs 300 crore by the company and an offer for sale of up to 5,840,000 equity shares worth Rs 870.16 crore by Sequoia Capital India Investments, SCI Investments V (investor selling shareholders), and Hemant Jalan, the promoter selling shareholder,

## SKODA DRIVES IN REFRESHED SUPERB AT ₹32 L

**MICHAEL GONSALVES**  
PUNE, JAN. 15

The Czech automaker Skoda on Friday launched the updated Skoda Superb sedan priced at Rs 31.99 lakh for the Sportline and Rs 34.99 lakh for the Laurin and Klement model. "With its compelling combination of elegant design, luxurious interiors, plentiful space, and distinctive presence, the saloon has been a favourite for many 'value luxury' seekers in India," Zac Hollis, Brand Director at Skoda Auto India, said.



INTEL | OUTSIDE

## New devices will mark Apple's move away from Intel components

## MacBook Pro returns to magnetic charging

**MARK GURMAN**  
JAN. 15

Apple Inc is planning upgraded MacBook Pro laptops this year with much faster processors, updated displays and the return of its magnetic charger, according to a person with knowledge of the plans.

The new laptops are planned to come in two screen sizes, a 14-inch model codenamed J314 and a 16-inch version internally dubbed J316. Both will use next-generation versions of Apple's in-house Mac processors, upgraded with more cores and enhanced graphics, the person said, asking not to be named as the products are not yet announced.

These devices will mark Apple's first high-end laptops to move away from Intel Corp. components. The company updated its base 13-inch MacBook Pro with



its own M1 chip in November; to broadly positive reviews.

Beyond the more powerful chips, Apple is also planning to step up the displays in its new MacBook Pros with brighter, higher-contrast panels. The new Macs will look similar to the current versions, albeit with minor design changes. Apple is aiming to launch the new MacBook Pros around the middle of the year.

An Apple spokeswoman didn't

immediately respond to a request for comment.

A major change to the new computers will be how they charge. Over the past five years, Apple has relied on USB-C ports for both power and data transfer on its laptops, making them compatible with other manufacturers' chargers. But the company is now bringing back MagSafe, the magnetic power adapter that means any accidental yanking of the power cable would simply detach it from the laptop rather than pull down the entire computer. It was a favourite feature of the company's portable PC lineup that was first introduced in 2006 and most recently revived for its latest lineup of iPhones.

The return of MagSafe with the next MacBook Pros will also allow those laptops to charge at a faster rate, the person said. The connector will be similar to the

elongated pill-shape design of the older MagSafe port.

Despite moving away from USB-C for charging, Apple will still include multiple USB-C ports on its future Macs.

In developing its next set of Mac laptops, Apple has also tested versions that remove the Touch Bar from its laptop keyboards. The Touch Bar, introduced as part of the last MacBook Pro redesign in 2016, turns the keyboard's top row from function keys into a touch-screen strip that can display a variety of information and a changing set of controls to adapt to apps and tasks. Some professional users have said they found that control scheme less convenient than physical keys.

Apple is also planning a redesigned MacBook Air, but that is not expected to be released until long after the next MacBook Pros. —Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Six junior shuttlers among top-10

**New Delhi:** Young shuttlers Varun Kapur and Samiya Imad Farooqui have attained career-best second spots in their respective categories in the latest BWF's junior world rankings, which features six Indians in the top-10. Varun jumped four places among male singles players, while Samiya climbed six spots in the female category. Varun had a great run last year as he picked his sixth junior title, claiming the XII Portuguese International 2020 in November. While Varun is the only Indian in the top 10 among male shuttlers, the female singles category has three other Indian shuttlers — Tasnim Mir (4), Treasa Jolly (8) and Aditi Bhatt (10) — in the top-10 list. In the women's doubles category, Tressa (8), Tanisha Crasto (9) and Aditi (9) are among the Indians who are placed inside top-10. — PTI

## Nikolai is India's athletics coach

**New Delhi:** The Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Friday said it has approved the appointment of Belarus' Nikolai Snesarev as the middle and long distance coach of the Indian athletics team, little less than two years after he quit the post. The 72-year-old has been appointed till the end of September, a period which will include the Tokyo Olympics scheduled to take place in July-August. He will be coaching 3,000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable, who has already qualified for the Olympics, and other middle and long-distance runners in their bid to qualify for the Tokyo Games. Nikolai had quit as Indian athletics' long and middle distance coach in February 2019 after Sable opted to leave him and train under Army coach Amrith Kumar. — PTI

## Walsh tests +ve in Bangladesh

**Dhaka:** West Indies leg-spinner Hayden Walsh Jr. has tested positive for Covid-19 and ruled out of the upcoming ODI series against Bangladesh, the country's cricket board has said. The 28-year-old Walsh, who is asymptomatic, has returned positive after being tested twice in the last two days here. He had tested negative upon arrival in Dhaka on January 10. But tests on Wednesday and Thursday came out positive, and he is now in self-isolation until he gets two negative results.

"Following PCR tests administered on Wednesday, January 13, Cricket West Indies (CWI) can confirm that Hayden Walsh Jr has tested positive for Covid-19 and will now undergo a period of self-isolation," the board said in a statement. — PTI

## Honda one-two at the Dakar Rally

**Riyadh, Saudi Arabia:** The final stage of the 2021 Dakar Rally delivered the outright race win to Monster Energy Honda Team. Kevin Benavides claimed the triumph after 12 gruelling stages. Ricky Brabec accompanied him on the podium in second place. It was an intense, yet intriguing 202-kilometre special stage, which brought down the curtain on the Dakar Rally on the shores of the Red Sea. And it could not have been a happier one for the elated Honda Team riders: "We have won the 2021 Rally Dakar!" Kevin Benavides has clinched the 2021 Dakar crown with team-mate Brabec finishing runner-up. This marks a first title for the Argentinean rider and, once again, a historic result for Honda, who dominated throughout the 2021 Dakar.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20**  
Tournament: Assam vs Bengal from 11.55 am; Odisha vs Jharkhand from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

**Australia vs India:** Fourth Test Day 3 from 5.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

## FOOTBALL

**Indian Super League:** Mumbai vs Hyderabad from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

**Italian League:** Bologna vs Verona from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

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## NATS AND BOLTS

## Natarajan twin strikes boost India despite Oz domination

**Brisbane, Jan. 15:** The incredible underdog fairytale of Thangarasu Natarajan got better with his twin strikes on debut headlining a commendable effort from an inexperienced Indian bowling attack, which reduced Australia to 274 for 5 despite a stylish hundred from Marnus Labuschagne on the opening day of the final Test here.

The Indian attack, with a collective experience of 3 Tests and 10 balls and 11 wickets in its kitty, was pitted against a batting line-up with 59 hundreds.

After 87 overs, the two Tamil Nadu rookies Natarajan (20-2-63-2) and Washington Sundar (2-4-63-1) could hold their heads high for a lion-hearted effort on a good batting pitch in the absence of the injured Ravichandran Ashwin and Jasprit Bumrah.

If tall off-spinner Washington set up a nice little trap to get rid of Steve Smith (36 off 77 balls), Natarajan forced centurion Labuschagne (108 off 204 balls) and Matthew Wade (47 off 85 balls) to miscue their pull-shots after a 113-run stand which threatened to put India in a spot.

At stumps, Tim Paine (38) and Cameron Green (28) had added 61 runs for the sixth wicket and the visitors would need a few quick wickets to keep the first innings total within a manageable range.

The distance between Palayampatti, a non-descript village in Tamil Nadu's Salem, to Australia's modern city Brisbane is 9,035 km on a google map.

But add the hardships of a daily wage mother trying to put food on table, being called for suspect action early in his career, not being privileged enough to get a paternity leave (his daughter is already three months old), it's a million miles emotionally that Team India's favourite "Nattu" has traversed.

Getting Labuschagne, who was on a rampage, with a short delivery ensured that Australia didn't finish the day with a score close to 350. — PTI



Thangarasu Natarajan (centre) celebrates the wicket of Australia's Marnus Labuschagne with teammates on Day One of the fourth Test at The Gabba in Brisbane on Friday. — AFP

## SCORECARD

**Australia first innings:** David Warner c Rohit b Siraj 1, Marcus Harris c Washington Sundar b Thakur 5, Marnus Labuschagne c Pant b T Natarajan 108, Steven Smith c Rohit b Washington Sundar 36, Matthew Wade c Thakur b T Natarajan 45, Cameron Green batting 28, Tim Paine batting 38. Extras (b-4, lb-4, nb-5) 13. **Total (for 5 wkts, in 87 overs) 274.**  
**FoW:** 1-4, 2-17, 3-87, 4-200, 5-213.  
**Bowlers:** Mohammed Siraj 19-8-51-1, T Natarajan 20-2-63-2, Shardul Thakur 18-5-67-1, Navdeep Saini 7.5-2-21-0, Washington Sundar 22-4-63-1, Rohit Sharma 0.1-0-1-0.

## Siraj called 'grub' by Gabba crowd

**Brisbane, Jan. 15:** India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj was targeted for abuse by a section of the crowd on the opening day of the fourth Test against Australia, a newspaper here reported, claiming that he was called a "grub" by some spectators.

The reported incident happened a few days after Siraj was racially abused by spectators at the Sydney Cricket Ground on the third and fourth day of the drawn third Test. That had led to an expulsion of six people from the stands and an unreserved apology from Cricket Australia to the visiting team.



On Friday, a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted a spectator as saying that a section of the crowd at the Gabba targeted Siraj. "The guys behind me have been calling — shouting — both

tune of Que Sera, Sera but substituted the lyrics with Que Shiraz, Shiraz). "But this time it was Siraj. I suspect it's not a coincidence that it's Siraj being targeted post the SCG stuff."

According to the newspaper, at one point, a man in the crowd was heard yelling, "Siraj, give us a wave, give us a wave, give us a wave. Siraj, you bloody grub."

Play was halted during the Sydney Test for about 10 minutes after Siraj complained of racial abuse from a section of the crowd. The BCCI had also lodged a complaint with the match referee against the abuse. — PTI

## Labuschagne all praise for Indian bowling at Gabba

**Brisbane, Jan. 15:** A fifth Test hundred in his kitty against a "very disciplined" bowling attack but Australia's Marnus Labuschagne was still a disappointed man on the opening day of the fourth Test against India here as the knock was not "big" enough for him.

Australia ended the day 274/5, thanks largely to Labuschagne's 108 off 204 balls. The 26-year-old said he should have done more.

"...I think, I am definitely disappointed not going on and getting a really big score, which would have put us in a better position as a team," Labuschagne said at the virtual post-play press-conference.

"Any Test century, it doesn't matter who it is against or against what opposition, you want to make sure you are scor-

**Indian bowling attacks, they are very disciplined and doesn't matter who is bowling, they are very planned, they are very strategic and we saw that today with their bowling attack.**

— MARNUS LABUSCHAGNE  
Australian batsman

ing hundreds and probably for me (it was) today it was disappointing that (I) did not end up making that a really big hundred," he stressed.

However, he credited the Indian bowlers for being disciplined early on and hardly giving away any scoring opportunities.

"...Indian bowling attacks, they are very disciplined and doesn't matter who is bowling, they are very planned, they are

very strategic and we saw that today with their bowling attack. They did not give us many of those scoring opportunities in the first session," the batsman said.

He said he worked to his plan, which was to tire out the bowlers and then pick scoring chances.

"I think when you are playing really good teams, it doesn't matter who comes in, everyone in that line-up is very disciplined, they understand their role, you know they are very skilled bowlers."

"So, it was sort of a matter of discipline early on, specially in the first session and half, making sure you get yourself in, you get pace of the wicket. So that you can really cash in when the bowlers are little-bit tired and there are a bit cooked, he added. — PTI

## NATTU 1ST INDIAN TO DEBUT THRICE ON SAME TOUR

**Brisbane, Jan. 15:** Pacer Thangarasu Natarajan, who came to Australia as a net bowler, on Friday became the first Indian cricketer to make his international debut across all three formats during the same tour.

The 29-year-old Tamil Nadu player was one of the rookies named in the playing eleven of the Indian team in the fourth and final Test. He made his international debut in the third ODI against Australia on December 2 in Canberra, which India won by 13 runs.

Natarajan made an immediate impact by taking two wickets for 70 runs from his 10 overs.

Natarajan then played his part in India's 2-1 series win in the three-match T20 International rubber by taking six wickets during the series.

"Welcome to Test cricket ... Thangarasu Natarajan becomes the first Indian player to make his International debut across all three formats during the same tour," the ICC tweeted. — PTI

## SAINI COMPLAINS OF GROIN PAIN, TAKEN FOR SCANS

**Brisbane, Jan. 15:** The injury-plagued Indian team took another hit on Friday when pacer Navdeep Saini was forced off the field during the final Test against Australia due to groin pain and taken for scans.

The 28-year-old Saini had bowled five balls of his eighth, and the innings 36th, over during the second session when he had to walk off the field because of the pain.

"Navdeep Saini has complained of pain in his groin. He is currently being monitored by the BCCI medical team," read a short statement from the BCCI on the bowler's condition. — PTI

## SYED MUSHTAQ | ALI TROPHY

## Mighty Mumbai make shock exit

**Mumbai, Jan. 15:** Domestic giants Mumbai crashed out of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy after suffering their third straight defeat — this time by eight wickets against Haryana in an Elite E Group league game — here on Friday.

The loss meant Mumbai's campaign is over, although they still have two more games left in hand.

As per the format of the tournament, the top ranked teams from each group (six groups in total) will qualify for the knockout stage, along with the next two teams in Elite Groups A to E with the most points.

So even if Mumbai win their last two games, they will only have eight points which will not be enough to make it to the knock-outs from Elite Group E as there are two other teams already with 12 points apart from current table-toppers Kerala.

Opting to bat at the BKC ground, Mumbai was bundled out for a meagre 143 with seasoned off-spinner Jayant Yadav (4/22) and right-arm medium pacer Arun Chaprana (3/22) doing bulk of the damage.

For Mumbai, barring young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal (35), the entire top-order faltered.

Haryana then rode on Himanshu Rana's blazing unbeaten 75 off 53 balls to chase down the target without much fuss, despite being down 27 for 2 at one stage. — PTI

## BRIEF SCORES

■ **Mumbai 143** (Atharva Ankolekar 37, Yashasvi Jaiswal 35; Jayant Yadav 4/22; Arun Chaprana 3/22) lost to Haryana 144/2 (Himanshu Rana 75 n.o.; Shivam Chauhan 43 n.o.; Arjun Tendulkar 1/34).  
■ **Delhi 212/4** (Shikhar Dhawan 77; Lalit Yadav 52 n.o.; S. Sreesanth 2/46) lost to Kerala 218/4 (Robin Uthappa 91, Vishnu Vinod 71 n.o.; Lalit Yadav 1/33).

## Root's century drought ends

**Galle (Sri Lanka), Jan. 15:** England captain Joe Root hit an unbeaten 168 as his side built up a lead of 185 over Sri Lanka on a rain-hit second day of the opening Test.

England were 320 for four when rain halted play in Galle. Root and Dan Lawrence, who scored 73 on his Test debut, built a 173-run partnership after the tourists resumed the day on 127-2.

Root, who is batting with Jos Buttler (7), hit his 18th Test ton and kept up the pressure on the home bowlers despite losing overnight partner Jonny Bairstow for 47 early in the day.

After a full opening day in the empty stadium in Galle, rain started falling just before the start of the second day and wiped out the final session.

Root started the day on 66 and passed 100 soon after lunch with a single off Dilruwan Perera. He raised his bat and hugged Lawrence.

It was the star batsman's highest Test score in more than a year after going through 2020 without a century and dropping out of the world top 10 batsmen.

Lawrence, 23, stood firm with his captain, displaying confidence against the spinners as he brought up his fifty in 95 balls striking five fours and one six in his innings.

Earlier Bairstow became left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya's third victim, caught at gully.

The wicket ended a 114-run third-wicket stand for the tourists. Off-spinner Dom Bess returned career-best figures of 5-30 to help skittle Sri Lanka out for 135 — the lowest first-innings score at the venue — in two sessions on Thursday after the hosts elected to bat. — AFP

## BRIEF SCORES

■ **Sri Lanka 135** vs **England 320/4** (Joe Root batting 168, Lawrence 73, Embuldeniya 3/13).

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