

SHORT TAKES

Man kills wife
suspecting affairAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

A man was arrested for allegedly killing his wife after he suspected her of having an illicit affair in northwest Delhi's Baljeet Vihar area, police said on Friday. The accused has been identified as Sohan Chaurasia, they said. According to police, the body of a woman was found in the field on Chhawla Tajpur road on January 4. The throat of the woman was slit with a sharp-edged weapon. Police on Monday said an information was received that a woman was missing from Baljeet Vihar area, which comes under Aman Vihar police station. When the missing report was checked, it was found that a woman with a similar age was missing from Aman Vihar on January 5, a senior police officer said. Police went to her place in Baljeet Vihar and she was identified by her son Shivam, but her husband Sohan was found missing, he said. Shivam was taken to a hospital where he identified the woman as Saraswati. "Police found that Saraswati and Sohan had strenuous relations. On Tuesday, Sohan was apprehended from Nithari Road," Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Shankar Choudhary said. During interrogation, he confessed that he had suspicion on his wife regarding an extra marital affair with a man, identified as Chandan, who was living with them for the last two years, police said.

3 arrested for fake
Covid challans

New Delhi: Three civil defence volunteers have been arrested for allegedly issuing fake Covid-19 challans and collecting the penalty amount, police said on Friday. The accused — Sunny (19), Yashwant Rath (21) and Lucky (20) — were posted in the office of SDM (New Delhi) in Jamnagar House, they said. They mostly issued fake challans to people visiting the Talkatora Garden, they said. The matter came to notice on December 31, when a resident of Shakarpur was issued a fake challan by the accused for not wearing masks when he was sitting inside the Talkatora Garden with his friend, police said. In his complaint, the victim alleged that the three volunteers came in Khakhi uniform and told him that they were posted in the office of SDM, New Delhi. They told us that since we had violated Covid-19 guidelines by not wearing face masks, challans of ₹2,000 each will be issued, the victim alleged. The complainant did not have cash so he paid them via Paytm, police said. However, the complainant got suspicious and approached the police. All the accused confessed that they captured the Covid-19 violation challan format in their mobile phones from the SDM office and prepared colour printouts. They then started issued them to people who were found without masks, police said. The cheated amount was equally distributed among the three, the police said. — PTI

Minimum temp rises
to 6.7°C in Delhi

New Delhi: Delhi's minimum temperature rose to 6.7 degrees Celsius, a notch above normal, on Friday due to partly cloudy weather, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. However, "moderate" fog lowered visibility to 201 metres at Safdarjung and 300 metres at Palam in the morning, an IMD official said. "Dense" fog is predicted in parts of the city on Saturday. According to the IMD, "very dense" fog is when visibility is between 0 and 50 metres. In case of "dense" fog, visibility is between 51 and 200 metres, "moderate" 201 and 500 metres, and "shallow" 501 and 1,000 metres. On Friday, the Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 2 degrees Celsius, five notches below normal. It was 3.2 degrees Celsius on Wednesday. Cold and dry northerly/northwesterly winds from the western Himalayas brought the minimum temperature down in Delhi on Thursday. The wind direction then changed to northeasterly. — PTI

Delhi geared up for Covid
vaccination rollout today

Inoculation drive at 81 centres including AIIMS, Safdarjung Hospital and RML Hospital; to kick off from LNJP Hospital

New Delhi, Jan. 15: The national capital is all set for the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination exercise on Saturday at 81 centres with healthcare workers who have been in the forefront of the fight against the pandemic to be given the shots first.

The inoculation drive will be kicked off from the state-run LNJP Hospital with a simple ceremony in the presence of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain.

The 81 sites include six central government facilities — AIIMS, Safdarjung Hospital, RML Hospital, Kalawati Saran Children Hospital and two ESI hospitals. The rest 75 centres, spanning all 11 districts of Delhi, include Delhi government-run facilities such as LNJP Hospital, GTB Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, DDU Hospital,

BSA Hospital, Delhi State Cancer Institute, ILBS Hospital, and private facilities such as Max Hospital, Fortis Hospital, Apollo Hospital and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

A senior official on Thursday had said Oxford COVID-19 vaccine Covishield will be administered at 75 centres while Bharat Biotech-made Covaxin doses will be given at the remaining six facilities. However, he did not clarify which of these hospitals will be the six centres where the vaccine made by Bharat Biotech will be used.

Kejriwal has said the Delhi government is fully prepared for the vaccination rollout starting January 16, with over 8,000 healthcare workers to be given the shots every scheduled day in the national capital.

The city government has received in total 2.74 lakh doses of the vaccine so far from the Centre, which would be sufficient to cater to 1.2 lakh healthcare workers, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said.

Delhi recorded 10 deaths and 295 Covid-19 infections on Friday, the lowest in more than eight months.

The city government has received in total 2.74 lakh doses of the vaccine so far from the Centre, which would be sufficient to cater to 1.2 lakh healthcare workers, he said.

"Every person will receive two doses, and the Centre has given 10 per cent extra in stock, in case of any mishapening, like damage of vials. There are a total of 2.4 lakh healthcare workers in Delhi who have registered for vac-

nation, and more doses are expected to arrive soon," he said.

The vaccine will be administered on four days of the week — Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. It will not be given on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays when other regular vaccination work will be carried out. Each day 100 persons will be administered the vaccine at a site, he said and hoped the people of Delhi and the rest of the country will finally get rid of the virus after facing hardships for past several months.

Delhi has recorded over 6.31 lakh Covid-19 cases and 10,722 coronavirus deaths till Thursday, out of which 6,17,930 patients have recovered, been discharged or migrated. On Friday, the city recorded 295 fresh infections, the lowest in more than eight months. — PTI

MCD councillors, officers living like lords
while Covid-19 workers don't get pay: HC

New Delhi, Jan. 15: The Delhi high court, on Friday, said that it intends to stop all non-essential, discretionary expenses of the three municipal corporations here, including the perks of councillors and senior officers "living like lords," so that salaries and pensions of Covid-19 front line workers—doctors, nurses, and sanitation staff—can be paid.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said that during the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic, the payment of salaries of health workers, including doctors, nursing staff, and sanitation staff—who are at the frontlines—should be prioritised over other discretionary expenses like perks of senior officers.

THE COURT said it intends to stop all the non-essential or discretionary expenses of the three corporations and perks of senior officers so that the money can be used to pay salaries and pensions of frontline workers during the prevailing pandemic

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The court further said that "paucity of funds cannot be an excuse for non-payment of salaries

and pensions" as these are fundamental rights under the Constitution since they have a bearing on the life and quality of the life of the persons entitled to them and the dependents of such individuals.

The bench also expressed its disapproval over Delhi government's decision to deduct from the amounts transferred to the corporations the loans given to them, saying even the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had imposed a moratorium on recall of loans and declaration of accounts as NPA by banks and financial institutions.

Delhi government additional standing counsel Satyakam urged the court to give him time to take instructions on why the

deductions were justified.

The court also asked the Delhi government to explain why funds payable to the corporations under the heads of transfer duty and parking charges have not been released to them when the same would be paid.

The court was hearing several PILs claiming non-payment of salaries and pensions of serving and retired employees, including teachers, doctors, and sanitation workers, of the three corporations.

During the hearing, the court said it intends to direct the Delhi government to transfer the funds under the basic tax assignment (BTA) without any deduction of loan amounts. — PTI

Farmers' stir: Rahul leads
protest outside L-G' houseAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday led the party's protest in the national capital in support of the agitating farmers and said his party will not relent till the new farm laws are repealed. He was accompanied by AICC (All India Congress Committee) general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other leaders of the Delhi Congress at the protest outside the Delhi L-G's residence as part of the countrywide agitation.

Addressing the gathering, the former Congress chief said that the party will not step back till the time the government repeals these three farm laws. "These laws are not to help farmers, but to finish them. These laws are aimed at helping corporates like Ambani and Adani instead," he charged and added, "That is why we are standing in favour of the farmers."

"The BJP government will have to take these black laws back. Till the time these laws are repealed, Congress will not relent," he told the protest-



ing Congressmen. "Earlier, the Narendra Modi government tried to take away the land of farmers when it brought the Land Acquisition Act and Congress stopped them at that time. Now, BJP and their two-three friends are once again attacking the farmers and have brought these three farm laws," he alleged.

Congress is taking out protest marches at all state capitals in the country and will gherao the Raj Bhavan. The party is also protesting against fuel price hike. It observed the day as Kisan Adhikar Diwas.



Army soldiers in a Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher march past during a ceremony to celebrate 73rd Army Day in New Delhi on Friday. — AFP

Fire at e-commerce storehouse: Woman, fireman injured

Child among 3 killed in fire
at scrap shop in west DelhiBHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

Three bodies including that of a child were recovered after a fire broke out at a scrap shop in west Delhi's Kirti Nagar on Thursday night. Meanwhile six people were rescued after a fire broke out at a store of Amazon in sector 6 area of Rohini on early Friday morning.

Two bodies are yet to be identified but the third body is identified to be that of one Rohit, aged 20. A resident of Kamla Nehru Camp, Rohit is a driver by profession, they said.

Prima facie, it has come to notice that Rohit came to the spot when the fire started to douse it and meanwhile got trapped in the fire and fell in the drain, police said.

According to fire department, a call was received at around 10.50 pm and seven fire tenders were rushed to the spot.

The fire broke out in a small scrap shop near a government liquor shop in Kamla Nehru Camp, Kirti Nagar. Immediately local police and fire tenders reached at the spot, police said, adding the scrap shop was owned by 50-year-old

TWO BODIES are yet to be identified but the third body is identified to be that of one Rohit, aged 20. A resident of Kamla Nehru Camp, Rohit is a driver

Tony Mehto, who has been absconding since the incident.

However, the fire from the scrap shop soon engulfed the small shanties made above the shop where family of one Monu, who worked at scrap shop lived. Immediately, the fire was brought under control and most of the family members were rescued, a senior police officer said.

After the fire was doused completely, two unknown bodies, completely charred were recovered from the debris. One unknown body aged about 20 years and another body aged about 8-10 years, he said.

In continuation of the rescue and search operations being carried out, one more body was recovered from a drain behind the spot. All the injured persons were shifted to hospital for medical assistance, he added.

Deputy commissioner of

police (West) Deepak Purohit said the exact cause of fire has not been established so far; however, possibilities of a short circuit cannot be ruled out.

"We have registered a case under relevant IPC sections for negligent conduct with respect to fire and culpable homicide not amounting to murder at Kirti Nagar police station. The scarp dealer Tony Mehto is absconding and searches are underway to nab him," he said.

In Rohini, a woman and a fireman sustained injuries and have been rushed to Ambedkar Hospital for treatment. The fire was in an "Amazon store" located on ground floor of a five-storied building.

Six persons were rescued from the terrace of the building by the staff of Delhi Fire Service. Out of them, all five are safe but a woman sustained minor burn injuries to her left and right hand, and was rushed to Ambedkar Hospital by CATS, said Atul Garg, Director of Delhi Fire Service (DFS).

A DFS staff identified as Sunil also got injured in his leg and has been rushed to Ambedkar Hospital, Garg said.

13-year-old boy
forced to change
sex, gangrapedAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

A 13-year-old boy was forced to change his sex at a locality in Delhi's Geeta Colony by six men who later went on to gangrape the minor on multiple occasions over months.

Delhi Commission for Women received a complaint over the incident following which an FIR was lodged.

The minor boy, Shubham (name changed), met the accused in Delhi's Laxmi Nagar area about three years ago at a dance event. The accused befriended the boy at the event and took him to Mandavali promising to teach him another dance.

Shubham then went on to dance at events and was given some money. He was told by the accused that he would have to continue to dance to earn a living.

Shubham told the police that he was given intoxicating substances by the men. Later, they forcefully performed a sex change surgery on him and was also given hormonal medicines, which made him look like a girl over time.

The accused and his friends then allegedly repeatedly raped him and even brought customers who would sexually exploit him at several occasions. Shubham has further alleged that he was forced to beg at traffic signals as a eunuch.

Shubham was also threatened with his life and the accused had said that his family would also be harmed if he tried to act against them.

SHUBHAM (NAME CHANGED) told the police that he was given intoxicating substances by the men. Later, they forcefully performed a sex change surgery on him.

The accused and his friends then allegedly repeatedly raped him and even brought customers who would sexually exploit him at several occasions.

Later these men brought a friend of Shubham to the den. In March 2020, during the Covid-19 lockdown, Shubham and his friend managed to escape and reach his mother. She got both of them to put up Shubham and his friend at a rented place.

But soon the accused men got to know about their whereabouts and reached the house where Shubham and his friend were living. They vandalised the house and took away both of them along with the family members. The four accused again took turns in raping both Shubham and his friend.

A few days later, the two children again managed to escape the ordeal and reached the New Delhi rail station where they hid for a whole day. A lawyer then spotted the two of them and took them to the Delhi Commission for Women.

Police have now filed a case against the accused with charges under Sections 377, 363, 326, 506, 341 of IPC and provisions of the POCSO Act.



IN BRIEF

DELHI, DHAKA
JOIN EFFORTS TO
COUNTER TERRORAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

Indian and Bangladesh security and intelligence agencies will now appoint nodal officers for “real-time exchange of intelligence and feedback on terror activities” among the two countries. Importantly, security and intelligence agencies of the two countries will now join efforts and resources to work jointly again terror entities, including global terrorist groups.

This collaboration between the two countries will also be extended to other fugitives who have been involved in organised crime in this region.

For this purpose “nodal points or officers” will be appointed or established for timely and effective handling and response to existing as well as emerging security and counter-terrorism challenges.

The decision was taken during a recent virtual meeting of top security and intelligence officials from India and Bangladesh. The meeting also discussed ongoing bilateral cooperation, issues of mutual concern and the way forward, it was decided to further strengthen the relationship of the Police forces of the two countries.

“Both sides felt that there was a greater need for sharing of real-time intelligence and feedback through these designated nodal points or officers. So a new mechanism is being put in place for the same to deal with insurgent groups operating in the region,” a senior security official said.

During the meeting scope of enhanced coordination to combat trans-border criminal activities, including smuggling of drugs, fake Indian currency notes, arms and ammunition and human trafficking were also discussed.

KERALA GOVT
ANNOUNCES
SLEW OF SOPsGILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JAN. 15

Free Covid vaccine for all, lap-top 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.

MAHESH SHARMA
TO GET VACCINE
ON JANUARY 16

Noida, UP: Former Union minister and sitting Lok Sabha MP Mahesh Sharma on Friday said he would take the Covid-19 vaccine on Saturday, becoming one of the first parliamentarians to get jabbed for coronavirus in the country.

Mr Sharma, a trained MBBS doctor and MP from Gautam Buddh Nagar, will be getting the vaccine on the very first day of the mega inoculation drive for his role as a “front-line healthcare worker” during the pandemic. “We don’t have to lag behind in this decisive battle against coronavirus. The government has decided that healthcare workers will be vaccinated first. I, as a doctor, will also get vaccinated tomorrow at 11 am,” the BJP leader tweeted in Hindi.

“This vaccine is completely safe. The government has approved its use only after it cleared tests successfully and met scientific standards. All of you must get vaccinated,” he said in another tweet.

The 61-year-old Sharma will get vaccinated at his private Kailash Hospital, which is also among the six selected centres for the vaccination drive the district.

— PTI

■ ‘Modi wants to tire out those protesting against agri laws’
PM doesn’t respect farmers: Rahul

New Delhi, Jan. 15: Rahul Gandhi led the Congress’ protest in the national capital in support of agitating farmers on Friday and said the opposition party will not relent till the three new farm laws are repealed.

He was accompanied by AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Delhi Congress leaders at the protest outside the lieutenant-governor’s residence here as part of the party’s countrywide agitation.

Addressing the gathering, Mr Gandhi said the Congress will not step back till the government repeals the three new farm laws. “These laws are not to help farmers, but to finish them. These laws are aimed at helping corporates like Ambani and Adani instead. That is why we are standing in support of the farmers,” he said.

“The Narendra Modi government tried to take away the land of farmers earlier, when it brought the Land Acquisition Act,



Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi during their protest against Centre’s farm reform laws at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

and the Congress had stopped it at that time. Now, the BJP and its two-three friends are once again attacking the farmers and have brought these farm laws,” he said. Rahul and Priyanka later joined Congress MPs and leaders from Punjab at Jantar Mantar, where they have been sitting on a “dharna” against the farm laws for 41 days.

“Prime Minister Modi

does not respect farmers and wants to tire out those protesting against the Centre’s agriculture laws,” Mr Gandhi said.

The Congress took out protest marches at all state capitals in the country and gheraoed Raj Bhavans on Friday. It also protested against the rising fuel prices.

The Opposition party observed the day as “Kisan Adhikar Diwas”.

A statement issued by the Congress said the “Kisan Adhikar Diwas” was observed under the aegis of the PCCs as “annadatas” (food-givers) are being misled and subjected to pointless filibuster by the government.

AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal said water cannons were used against party workers in Chandigarh while they were trying to gherao the Punjab Raj Bhavan.

The Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) president and other leaders were arrested and detained by police when they were trying to march towards the Raj Bhavan in Lucknow.

Simultaneous protests were staged in 28 states and Union territories, including Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, Mr Venugopal said. — PTI

SHIVRAJ HAILS
LAST YEAR’S
PADMA SHRI
AWARDEERABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
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, state public relations department director Ashutosh Pratap Singh said, “Let me check”.

India’s vaccination plan
gives ‘great hope’: Nepal

India, Nepal take steps to normalise their ties

SRIDHAR
KUMARASWAMI
with agency inputs
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 (JCM) in New Delhi on Friday. The meeting was co-chaired by external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar and his visiting Nepalese counterpart Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, but it is unclear whether the Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipu Lekh border issue — that affected bilateral ties last year — was even briefly discussed or raised by the Nepalese side.

Meanwhile, news agency reports cited Nepalese diplomatic sources as saying the visiting Nepalese foreign minister had indeed raised the boundary row with India at a separate one to one discussion with Mr Jaishankar.

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

Both leaders held a com-

prehensive review of all aspects of bilateral ties and explored ways to further strengthen cooperation in key areas of connectivity, trade and energy.

Describing the Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum products pipeline a “milestone”, the MEA said the two sides discussed its expansion to Chitwan and the establishment of a new pipeline on the eastern side connecting Siliguri 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. India is a frontrunner in starting vaccinating people against Covid-19 and this “has given us great hope”, Mr Gyawali said today.

He said Nepal too will be availing these vaccines. “Today as we wait for the availability of Covid-19 vaccines, India is one of the frontrunners. This has given us great hope. I take this opportunity to congratulate India and its innovative companies for success. Being next door, we believe we too will be availing these vaccines,”

Mr Gyawali said in a speech during an event organised by the Indian Council of World Affairs at Sapru House.

The JCM took place amid the current volatile political situation in Nepal, even as China has extended its influence in the Himalayan nation enormously in the past few years especially after the Nepalese Communists assumed office.

The MEA said “discussions were held on expediting the joint hydropower projects, including the proposed Pancheshwar multipurpose project”, with New Delhi also conveying that “India will undertake two more cultural heritage projects in Nepal, namely, the Pashupatinath Riverfront Development and the Bhandarkhal Garden Restoration in Patan Durbar, with grant assistance”.

The JCM emphasised the need to facilitate cross-border movement of people and goods. It was noted that the recently inaugurated integrated check posts at Birgunj and Biratnagar have helped in seamless movement of people and trade between the two countries, the MEA added.

Prez, CMs contribute
for Ram Temple fund

Kovind donates ₹5L; Shivraj gives ₹1L

AGE 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 Janambhoomi in Ayodhya, paving the way for the construction of the temple.

A delegation including VHP’s international working president Alok Kumar, RSS leader Kulbhushan Ahuja, treasurer of the trust

► **THE HIGHEST** contribution came from former UP MLA Surendra Bahadur Singh, who donated contributed more than one crore (₹1,11,11,111) for the temple

► **THE KINNAR** society of Madhya Pradesh has presented a cheque of ₹5.51 lakh

► **FORMER UNION** minister Uma Bharti also made a contribution of ₹1 lakh

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 Uma Bharti also made a contribution of ₹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.

EC nod to use its data
for Covid vaccination

Wants data to be deleted after 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

► **ACCORDING TO** guidelines for the Covid-19 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

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 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.

The letter by the home secretary is a follow up to

the meeting, the sources said.

According to guidelines for the Covid-19 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.

Twelve identity documents, such as Voter ID, Aadhaar card, driving licence, passport and pension document, will be required for beneficiary identification.

According to the government, the shots will be offered first to an estimated one crore healthcare workers, and around two crore frontline workers, and then to persons above 50 years of age, followed by persons younger than 50 years of age with associated comorbidities.

Cost of vaccination of healthcare and frontline workers will be borne by the central government.

The Drugs Controller General of India had recently approved Oxford vaccine Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute, and indigenous developed Covaxin of Bharat Biotech for restricted emergency use in the country. — PTI

2L civil defence workers in
Bengal to boycott vaccinePRANMOY
BRAHMACHARI
BERHAMPORE, JAN. 15

A day before 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.

Assam: Sankardev varsity's
ex-V-C to be 1st recipientAGE CORRESPONDENT
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 which 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.

Doctors, nurses, sweeping staff (Covid Warriors) will get the vaccine doses in the first phase.

In the second phase, teachers and police personnel will get the vaccine, while people above or below 50 years of age but suffering from co-morbidity will be administered vaccines in the third phase, said the minister.

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.

SPECIAL TRAINS

For the convenience of passengers, Railways have decided to run following Special Trains as per the schedule given below :-

05114/05113 Chhapra Kacheri - Gomti Nagar - Chhapra Kacheri Special Express (Daily)					
Train No. 05114	ARR.	DEP.	STATIONS	ARR.	DEP.
--	19:20	--	Chhapra Kacheri	08:40	--
06:35	--	--	Gomti Nagar	--	21:10

Days of Run: 05114 Ex. Chhapra Kacheri Daily from 27.01.2021 & 05113 Ex. Gomti Nagar Daily from 28.01.2021.

Accommodation: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

Stoppage : Marhaua, Mashrakh, Dighwa Dubauli, Gopalganj, Thawe Jn., Tamkuhi Road, Dudahi, Padrauna, Ramkola, Kaptanganj Jn., Gorakhpur Jn., Basti Mankapur Jn., Gonda Jn. & Barabanki Jn. Stations.

09731/09732 Jaipur - Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jaipur Special Express (Daily)					
Train No. 09731	ARR.	DEP.	STATIONS	ARR.	DEP.
--	07:35	--	Jaipur	20:20	--
13:45	--	--	Delhi Sarai Rohilla	--	14:45

Days of Run: 09731 Ex. Jaipur & 09732 Ex. Delhi Sarai Rohilla Daily from 18.01.2021 to 31.01.2021.

Accommodation: AC 3 Tier, AC Chair Car, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

Stoppage : Gandhinagar Jaipur, Getor Jagatpura, Dausa, Bandikui Jn., Alwar Jn., Rewari, Gurgaon & Delhi Cantt Stations.

Note : The above Special Trains will have the reserved accommodation only.

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

Security Helpline No. 182
Integrated Helpline No. 139

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12821

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

Dy. CSTE/CW/Northern Railway, DRM Office, 2nd floor, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites open e-tender under Single Packet system from experienced & established contractors having sufficient experience in similar nature of work and satisfying minimum eligibility criteria on the prescribed form for the following work:

Name of work	*S&T work for alteration of PI at Kathua and Madhopur Punjab stations and associated telecom work at adjoining stations in c/w doubling across Ravi Bridge section over Firozpur Division of Northern Railway*.
Approximate cost of the work	Rs. 66.35 Lakh
Earnest money	Rs. 1,32,700/- (Rupees One Lakh Thirty Two Thousand Seven Hundred only)
Completion period	06 (Six) months
Date, Time & Place for submission and opening of tender	Tender will be available on www.ireps.gov.in website from 18.01.2021 to 11.30 Hrs. on 10.02.2021 and will be opened on 10.02.2021 after 11.30 Hrs. Tender can be uploaded from 27.01.2021 to 11.30 Hrs. on 10.02.2021 and will be opened on 10.02.2021 after 11.30 Hrs.
Address from where tender form can be purchased	E-Tender document cost - Nil. The detailed e-tender notice and document will be available on Northern Railway website i.e. on www.ireps.gov.in from 18.01.2021 to 11.30 Hrs. on 10.02.2021, bidders are advised to electronically register themselves on the above website for which, they would require to obtain class III digital certificate (if already not obtained) issued by CCA under IT Act-2000. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tenders are given in tender document.

No.: 178-Sig/CW/32/96/PI-II Date: 15.01.2021 125/2021

Serving Customers with a Smile

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

The Dy. Chief Engineer/Const/SERD-II, Northern Railway, 2nd floor, NDCR Building, State Entry Road, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites e-tender under Single Packet System for the under noted work:-

1 Name of work and Location:	Hiring of 01 No Non AC vehicle such as Jeep, Gypsy, Tata Sumo type of vehicle for AXEN/C/SERD-II for 24 Months
2 Completion period of the work	24 (Twenty Four) Months
3 Approx. Cost of work:	Rs. 10.95 lacs
4 Earnest Money to be deposited	Rs. 21900.00 only
5 Date & Time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender	Tenders may be uploaded upto 11:30 hrs on 10.02.2021 on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in . The bidders can participate in the e-tender, the Technical cum Commercial cum financial Bids of which will be opened at 11:30 hrs on 10.02.2021.
6 Detailed Tender Notice & Tender Document:	The detailed e-tender notice is available on www.ireps.gov.in from 19.01.2021 to 10.02.2021. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tender are given in tender document. The detailed tender notice also can be seen on the Notice Board of the above office.

Tender Notice No. 56-Acs/HV/02Y/Dy.SERD-II Dated: 15.01.2021 127/2021

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

Youth held for bid to film girl in trial room

Keonjhar, Odisha: A youth was on Friday detained for allegedly trying to capture photographs and videos of a girl secretly while she was changing clothes in the trial room of a shopping mall in Odisha's Keonjhar town. According to reports, the girl had gone to a shopping mall located in Maguragadia area of Keonjhar town to buy clothes. After selecting some clothes, she went to one of the trial rooms for checking out. While she was taking off her clothes, she saw a black object in the corner of the stall. She looked up and saw a phone with its camera angled over the edge. When the girl realised this she raised an alarm following which the security personnel of the mall rushed near the trial room and caught hold of the youth. Later he was handed over to the town police.

₹450cr black money in Kolkata tax raids

New Delhi: The income-tax department has detected undisclosed income of over ₹450 crore after it raided some Kolkata-based entities engaged in various businesses such as running of hotels and wholesale trading of fruits, the CBDT said on Friday. The search and survey operation was carried out on January 13 and the department also seized ₹1.58 crore in cash. "The search and seizure operation has resulted in unearthing of incriminating documents of undisclosed cash sales and claim of bogus expenses," it said. "During the course of search operation, incriminating documents have been found which revealed sale of shares of unlisted companies through layering to bring back unaccounted cash in the books of account in the form of unsecured loan and share capital," the CBDT said in a statement. — PTI

Wild buffalo that killed 2 shot dead

Guwahati: Assam forest personnel on Friday shot dead a wild buffalo which strayed into a civilian area from Kaziranga national park and killed two people in Biswanath district of Assam. Forest official said that the adult buffalo, which strayed from the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, was killed at Kumoliya by forest personnel after they failed to tranquilize the violent buffalo. The wild buffalo had created terror in the area since Thursday as it killed one Jayanta Das. After the incident an irate mob had torched a forest range office and an official vehicle accusing forest officials of failing to catch the wild buffalo. The animal attacked and killed another person named Sukur Ali on Friday morning.

11 killed in road mishap in K'taka

Dharwad, Karnataka: Eleven people, including nine women, were killed in a road accident near Ittigatti cross on the city outskirts on Friday. Dharwad (rural) SP P. Krishnakant said most of them were residents of the district headquarters town of Davanagere, and they were on their way to Goa. The mini-bus they were travelling in collided head-on with a tipper. "Eleven people, including the driver, were killed and nine injured", Mr Krishnakant said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief at the loss of lives. "Saddened by the loss of lives due to a road accident in Karnataka's Dharwad district. In this sad hour, my thoughts are with the bereaved families. I pray for a quick recovery of those injured: PM @narendramodi," the PMO tweeted. — PTI

Snow in Himachal likely after Jan. 22

Shimla: A fresh western disturbance is very likely to affect the western Himalayan region from January 22 onwards and it may cause scattered to fairly widespread rains and snow over Himachal Pradesh, the meteorological department said on Friday. Till January 22, the weather will remain dry and no rain or snow is expected over the state of HP till then. During this period, there will no large changes in maximum and minimum temperature, the met office added. — PTI

'Action on Munde after cops probe rape claims'

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

The 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 is 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 commission on January 10, stating that the NCP leader, who hails from Beed district of Marathwada region, had raped her repeatedly in 2006. Refuting the allegations, 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. But, he added, it is the responsibility of the NCP to go deep into the matter to know the facts and take the right decision accordingly.



Sharad Pawar

Wife of Rose Valley group chief arrested

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JAN. 15

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Friday arrested Shubhra Kundu, a small-time Bengali actor and wife of Goutam Kundu, owner of chit fund major Rose Valley Group, for her alleged role in siphoning off depositors' funds to the tune of several crores after her husband's arrest by the ED nearly six years ago.

Ms Kundu, before her arrest, was detained by a CBI team from her residence in South Kolkata after she failed to give satisfactory answers to them during questioning. She had earlier skipped several summons to face questioning, a CBI official anonymously claimed while adding that the accused is also wanted by the ED in a case of money laundering. Ms Kundu was brought to the CBI office at the CGO Complex in Salt Lake. She will be produced at a court in Bhuvanagar on Saturday when the CBI is likely to pray for her remand.

According to CBI sources, Ms Kundu was

BJP fields ex-babu in UP MLC polls

Speculation rife over Cabinet berth

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

Former IAS officer Arvind Kumar Sharma, who took a voluntary retirement last week and is considered close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been named by the BJP as one of its candidates for the upcoming legislative council elections in Uttar Pradesh. Mr Sharma had joined the BJP on Thursday. Speculation has been rife that the former bureaucrat will get a key position in Yogi Adityanath led UP government. Polling for 12 legislative council seats in Uttar Pradesh will be held on January 28.

A Gujarat cadre officer hailing from Uttar Pradesh, Mr Sharma had long been one of the trusted bureaucrats of Mr Modi since his tenure as the Gujarat chief minister. He also served in key positions in the PMO after Mr Modi became PM in 2014.

Besides Mr Sharma, the BJP also named deputy chief minister Dinesh Sharma, its state president Swatantra Dev Singh and Lakshman Prasad Acharya as its candidates



A.K. Sharma

for the polls. The present terms of Dinesh Sharma, Mr Singh and Mr Acharya in the state upper house come to an end on January 30. Only the former IAS officer is the new face in the party's first list of candidates that was released on Friday.

Polling for 12 legislative council seats in Uttar Pradesh will be held on January 28 and the ruling party can win 10 seats going by its brute majority in the 403-member Assembly.

In the 100-member UP legislative council, currently the SP has 55 MLCs, BJP has 25 MLCs, BSP has eight MLCs, Congress and 'Nirdaliye Samoo' have two MLCs each and Apna Dal (S) and 'Shikshak Dal' have one MLC each.

There are three independent MLCs and three seats are vacant.

Morarka was part of Chandra Shekhar govt in 1990-91

Ex-Union minister Morarka dies

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

Former Union minister and industrialist Kamal Morarka (74) on Friday passed away at his home in South Mumbai. He died owing to the heart attack.

A close friend and senior journalist Santosh Bharatiya told *The Asian Age*, "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 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



Kamal Morarka

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 Janata Dal in 1990.

Guj too plans law against 'love jihad', hints minister

Ahmedabad, Jan. 15: The Gujarat government is examining laws enacted by Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to curb "forced religious conversions by marriage", said deputy chief minister Nitin Patel on Friday.

Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, both ruled by the BJP, have brought religious freedom laws to stop conversion through marriage or by any other fraudulent means. "Some people indulge in trapping or alluring or cheating Hindu girls to marry them. But we have seen that most of the time such girls regret taking this step as they and their families are never happy in such situations."

"This also creates division in the society," Mr Patel said in reply to a question. Mr Patel was speaking to reporters after attending an event organised by the VHP to start the drive for raising donations for the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

"The Gujarat government has also received many such representations from different organisations and people," the deputy chief minister said. — PTI

► **KAMAL 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 Rajya Sabha MP from Rajasthan from JD(S) between 1988 and 1994. In 2012, he became the head of Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya).

Morarka, who was born in a well-known business family, donned many hats — a successful businessman, a cricket administrator who was the BCCI vice-president during Jagmohan Dalmia's time, a minister in the Union Cabinet, a wild life photog-

MoD unveils India's 1st driverless Metro

Rajnath lauds BEML engineers for 'good work'

Bengaluru, Jan. 15: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Friday unveiled the country's first indigenously designed and developed driverless Metro car at the BEML manufacturing facility here.

The minister, who visited the facility, said he was proud of the good work the team of engineers and technicians are doing at the city-headquartered BEML, a company under the defence ministry.

"They are the real warriors of Atmanirbhar Bharat, taking India ahead," he said.

According to BEML, the state-of-the-art driverless Metro cars, being manufactured at its facility here housing the rail and Metro division, are made up of a stainless-steel body with a capacity of carrying 2,280 passengers in six-cars Metro train-set.

BEML bagged a total order of 576 cars for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA)'s MRS1 project, and the supply is scheduled progressively up to January 2024.



Defence minister Rajnath Singh and Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa at the apex committee meeting on Aero India 2021 in Bengaluru on Friday. — PTI

Mr Singh said MMRDA project has 63 per cent indigenous content which will enhance to 75 per cent in next two to three years.

This reflects Indian Industries overwhelming response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan" call, he said.

The minister said this driverless metro project will act as a source of inspiration to other Indian companies, particularly the defence industry to help the country emerge as a manufacturing hub which, in turn,

will fulfil the USD five billion defence export target and \$25 billion defence industry turn-over by 2025.

Mr Singh expressed hope that MMRDA driverless technology will lead to its expansion into other fields of defence such as tanks and fighter planes in the future.

BEML recently opened its Depot office at Charkop Metro depot, MMRDA, Mumbai for commissioning, testing and round-the-clock services for Driverless Metro cars. — PTI

Farmers' talks still deadlocked

■ **Continued from Page 1** 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."

TMC foils 'defection' plans of Satabdi Roy

■ **Continued from Page 1** continuing with the TMC because of Didi. I will not go to Delhi. I have told Abhishek everything I needed to," Ms Roy said. She earlier voiced her discord with the TMC for the first time through the "Satabdi Roy Fans Club" in Facebook on Thursday, and made it clear she felt that as an MP there was no harm in her meeting Mr Shah as he was the country's home minister.

"As an MP I can meet anyone. Mr Shah is known to me. We come across each other in Parliament. We may meet on Saturday. But nothing is so far confirmed," she had said earlier on Friday.

Some of the senior journalists said they were all too willing to share their inputs with the police but felt hamstrung as the DGP did not pick up the phone and the person receiving calls simply noted down details of the caller with the promise that the officer will call back which never happened.

The CM then telephoned the DGP S.K. Singhal himself and directed him to spruce up the mechanism for communication with journalists. A hastily issued order from the state police chief ensued, enlisting mobile and landline numbers which mediapersons could dial to contact him. — PTI

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

World's biggest vaccination drive

■ **Continued from Page 1** 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 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.

CM Nitish loses cool after scribes nettle him on crime

Patna, Jan. 15: A heated exchange was witnessed here on Friday between Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar and journalists when they nettled him over a high-profile murder case that rocked the state capital earlier this week.

Mr Kumar was talking to reporters after dedicating to the public the first phase of "Atal Path", a ₹379.57 crore elevated multiple lane road project that promises to drastically reduce traffic congestion in a major part of the city.

As the chief minister began to speak about the improvement in infrastructure since he assumed power a decade and a half ago, he was interrupted by journalists who insisted that law and order has deteriorated, citing the example of a young official of a private airlines having been gunned down outside his residence in the city Tuesday evening.

"Please do not mix up the issues of development and crime," Mr Kumar requested and then snapped, when reporters persisted, saying "your projection will demoralise the state police which is doing its job. I had myself summoned the



Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar feeds a flock of geese at the newly-inaugurated Venu Van in Rajgir. — PTI

DGP and gave necessary directions".

Responding to their contention that the police was not able to prevent crime, he retorted "does a murderer seek permission before he commits the offence? Do you have any necessary inputs to share? If so, please go ahead".

"Bihar has one of the lowest crime rates across the country. Please have a look at other states before painting a grim picture. And do you remember how bad things were when for a decade and a half the state was ruled by pati-patni (husband and wife an allusion to Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi)," a visibly irritated chief minister said.

at the event, which was also attended by Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhaduria, Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh and Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat.

The Indian Army said it carried out a live demonstration of "drone swarming capability" using 75 indigenously designed and developed drones, which executed an array of artificial intelligence (AI) enabled simulated offensive missions and close support tasks, at the event.

"This demonstration is a recognition of the Indian Army's steady embrace of emerging and disruptive technologies to transform itself from a manpower-intensive to a technology enabled force to meet future security challenges," it said in a statement.

Around 75 drones of the Army carried multiple mock operations including kamikaze attacks, first-aid delivery and parachute payload delivery exercises at the event. — PTI

Drone ops feature for first time at Army Day parade

New Delhi, Jan. 15: Drones of the Indian Army carried out mock kamikaze attacks and first-aid delivery exercises as the service showcased its latest assets during the Army Day parade held at the Cariappa Ground here on Friday.

This is the first time drones featured at the parade that also had detachments of the upgraded anti-aircraft weapon system Schilka, BrahMos missile system, infantry fighting vehicle



Drone attack being displayed for the first time during the 73rd Army Day parade at the Cariappa Ground on Friday. — PTI

BMP-2, T-72 bridge laying tanks and multi-rocket launcher system Pinaka.

Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane conferred gallantry awards and unit

THE ASIAN AGE

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

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 but 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 the 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.

THE ASIAN AGE

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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 Jehovan 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”, Aryabhata 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 mueve!*” — 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.

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 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

REPUBLICAN CHURN

US President Donald Trump’s impeachment by the House of Representatives for a historic second time is a dubious distinction. Trump’s role in the riot at Capitol Hill stunned the nation and left five dead. In an extraordinary move, ten Republicans broke rank with their party to approve the article of impeachment. The Democrats said they wanted accountability from the President, who they described as dangerous and unfit for office. What a fall from grace for Trump!

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

DUSHYANT’S EXPOSE

EMINENT JURIST Dushyant Dave has rightly exposed SC’s double standard by saying that the SC is making forays into uncharted territory by staying the implementation of the new farm laws while refusing to freeze the CAA and the recent “love jihad” ordinances issued by the government in UP and Uttarakhand. He has just been compelled to resign from the post of president of the Supreme Court Bar Association due to the presence of some politically motivated elements therein.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

JUSTICE FOR HAL

IT’S HEARTENING that though Hindustan Aeronautics Limited was neglected by Dassault Rafale the Indian Air Force understands its value and will purchase 83 light combat aircraft manufactured by it. At ₹48,000 crore, no doubt, it is the biggest contract awarded to India’s homegrown military aviation industry. HAL is to deliver 73 fighters and 10 trainers to IAF by 2026. The LCA, Tejas Mark 1A, will have more than 40 “improvements” over an initial order by IAF in 2016. It is a big opportunity for HAL.

Bidyut K. Chatterjee
Faridabad

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

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 Vorarlberg 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 we 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. — AP

Biden declares \$1.9trn 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

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 stand-by. Most of the events surrounding Biden's swearing-in will be virtual. Biden's inauguration is expected to feature limited attendance.

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.

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

US blacklists Xiaomi, 8 Chinese firms

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Trump's fate lies 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 Republicans 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 for 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. — AFP

"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

NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS FLOOD WASHINGTON

Washington, Jan. 15: All through downtown Washington, the primary sound for several blocks was the beeping of forklifts unloading more fencing. There were no cars or scooters and seemingly no tourists on Wednesday, just the occasional jogger and multiple construction crews at work.

The US Capitol, which proved such a soft target last week, was visible only through lines of tall, black fence. Two blocks from the White House, a group of uniformed National Guard troops emerged from a tour bus and headed into a hotel as a state of lockdown descended on Washington that will last through the Jan. 20 inauguration.

The number of National Guard troops coming to Washington to assist with security has so far grown to about 21,000, but could increase as law enforcement agencies review the ongoing threats, officials said on Thursday.

A retired Air Force officer who was part of the mob that stormed the US Capitol last week carried plastic zip-tie handcuffs because he intended "to take hostages," a prosecutor said in a Texas court. "He means to take hostages. He means to kidnap, restrain, perhaps try, perhaps execute members of the US government," Assistant US Attorney Jay Weimer said of retired Lt Col Larry Rendall Brock Jr without providing specifics.

The prosecutor had argued that Brock should be detained, but Magistrate Judge Jeffrey L. Cureton said he would release Brock to home confinement. Cureton ordered Brock to surrender any firearms and said he could have only limited internet access as conditions of that release. "I need to put you on a very short rope," Cureton said on Thursday. — AP

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.

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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.

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.

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

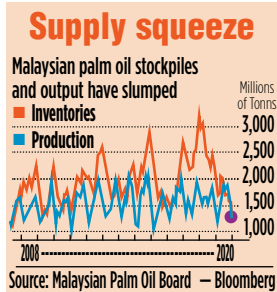
ringgit in the first quarter, before easing to 3,400 ringgit in the second, according to the survey. Estimates ranged from 3,000-4,150 ringgit for the first quarter, and from 2,500-4,280 ringgit in the second.

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

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).

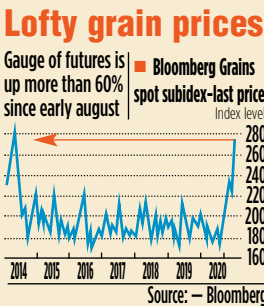
—PTI

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



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 multi-year 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

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.

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.



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), Treesa 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 Snasarev 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 Amrish 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 in 2021 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

BADMINTON

Thailand Open: Semifinals from 7.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

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

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NATS AND BOLTS

Natarajan's 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

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

SUNDAR READY TO BOWL LONG SPELLS IN 4TH TEST

Brisbane, Jan. 15: Washington Sundar, prior to his unexpected Test debut on Friday against Australia, had bowled over 285 overs in first-class cricket and after dismissing Steve Smith, the Tamil Nadu off-spinner is ready to bowl 50 in an innings if that's what the side wants of him.

India's T20 specialist off-spinner was asked to stay back by the team management after the white-ball series to help as a net bowler but injuries to key players, including senior pro Ravichandran Ashwin, landed him in a mouth-watering duel with Smith which he won hands down.

"I have always felt that my skills are very good with red ball. I have bowled a lot of overs in first class cricket and first divi-

sion league in Chennai as well. I was just waiting for this opportunity and last couple of months, we were here. I did get to bowl a lot of overs and improve upon my skills," the shy bowler said after first day's play.

But does he have the stamina to bowl long spells that a team expects from its spinners considering that he hasn't played first-class cricket since 2017?

His answer is 'bring it on'. "Like any bowler, I love bowling a lot of overs. It's just so much fun to bowl a lot of overs. Give me 20, 30, 40 or 50 overs. We had some plans going for Steve Smith and (Marnus) Labuschagne and I am very glad they worked. The first wicket definitely felt good." — 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 scoring hundreds and probably for me (it was

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

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

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.

"The stuff dreams are made of. A perfect treble for @Natarajan 91 as he is presented with #TeamIndia's Test No. 300. It can't get any better! Nattu is now an all-format player," BCCI 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. With this, his further participation in the match, which began this morning, has been thrown into serious doubt.

"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 one-Test-old bowler's condition.

"Navdeep Saini has now gone for scans," added a brief update that came after the initial note.

Vice-captain Rohit Sharma completed Saini's over. India have lost several key players, such as pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, to a spate of injuries that has marred their overall gutsy show in Australia.

— 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 knock-out 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 2 for 27 at one stage.

BIHAR NOTCH UP THIRD STRAIGHT WIN

In Chennai, Bihar defeated Meghalaya by six wickets for their third straight win in the Plate group.

Sent in to bat, the Meghalaya batsmen found the going tough against some tight bowling and could manage just 82 for 9 in 20 overs.

Chasing the total, Bihar lost opener Mangal Mahrouer (8) in the fifth over but fellow opener Shasheem Rathour (33) and Sakibul Gani (31 not out) batted well to see the team home.

In other matches, Chandigarh outplayed Mizoram by 89 runs while there were wins for Manipur and Nagaland.

Bihar is on top of the Plate group with 12 points from three matches followed by Chandigarh and Nagaland with 10 each.

PTI

BRIEF SCORES

■ Mumbai 143 (Atharva Ankoekar 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 with five fours and one six.

Lawrence, who plays for English county Essex, survived two dropped catches on 60 and 68 and finally fell to Perera.

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 (J. Root 168 batting, Lawrence 73, Embuldeniya 3/131).

SAINA LOSES, INJURED SRIKANTH PULLS OUT

Bangkok, Jan. 15: Star India shuttler Saina Nehwal was knocked out of the Yonex Thailand Open Super 1000 after losing the women's singles second round to Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan here on Thursday.

In a battle of attrition, Saina managed to grab the opening game but ran out of steam in the end, losing 23-21, 14-21, 16-21 in a match that clocked 68 minutes.

It was Saina's fourth straight loss to the world number 12 Busanan.

In the men's singles, former world number one Kidambi Srikanth was forced to give a walkover

to his eighth seeded Malaysian opponent Lee Zii Jia after pulling up his right calf muscle.

Earlier in the day, Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty bowed out of the competition after suffering a 19-21, 17-21 defeat against second seeded Indonesian combination of Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan.

Saina and Busanan engaged in some long rallies but it was the Thai shuttler who had the last laugh as she dished out some delectable drops and also stood out with better placement of shots.

— PTI