

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
VIJAYAWADA | MONDAY | 25 JANUARY 2021

## WEATHER

Max: 33.0°C  
Min: 20.0°C  
RH: 81%  
Rainfall: Nil  
Forecast: Cloudy.  
Max/Min temp.  
33/20 °C

## COVID-19 COUNTRIES

CASES (+13,676)  
DEATHS (+139)  
1,06,68,332  
1,53,502

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+197) (+1)  
TS: 2,93,253 1,589  
(+158) (+0)  
AP: 8,87,010 7,147

### CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,95,32,546

DEATHS 21,34,302

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

## ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Ekadasi till 10.54 pm  
Star: Rohini from 11.57 pm  
Varjyam: 3.08 pm to 4.54 pm; 6 am (Monday)  
Durmuhurtam: 4.34 pm to 5.18 pm  
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm  
HIJRI CALENDAR  
Jamadi- ul- Akhir 11,1442 AH

### PRAYERS

Fajar: 6.10 am  
Zohar: 1.30 pm  
Asar: 4.30 pm  
Maghrib: 5.54 pm  
Isha: 8.15 pm  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.39 AM  
SUNSET TODAY 6.00 PM  
MOONRISE TODAY 2.56 PM  
MOONSET TOMORROW 4.25 AM

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'Modi boosted gas, diesel, petrol (GDP)'

deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle

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Russia defends curbs on Navalny protests

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Ashwin high on series Down Under

## Bodo pact marked end of Assam insurgency: Shah

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, JAN. 24

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi can keep Assam free of corruption, terrorism and pollution.

Addressing a public meeting to commemorate the completion of one year of the Bodo Accord, Mr Shah asked the people to elect a BJP government in Assam for speedy development of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). "Form an NDA government in Assam with absolute majority in the upcoming election and ensure the development of Bodoland," he said. Assam is among the five states in the country slated to have elections in 2021. The other states and Union Territories are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry.



Union home minister Amit Shah at the BJP's public rally in Nalbari, Assam on Sunday

Mr Shah, who addressed another public rally at Nalbari, said, "I have seen many rallies in my life, but I am so happy to

see today's rally... Development will be placed in Bodoland through this BTR Accord. More than 5,000 people lost their lives, I assure you that the BTR will become a more developed region in Assam in coming days."

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated the process to end insurgency in the Northeast by signing the Bodo Peace Accord. Efforts were made for settlement for the Bru-Reang issue and 700 members of 8 armed groups laid down arms," he said. "I am here to assure people of BTR that the Government of India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will implement all BTR Accord clauses," he said.

## Doctors fear after-effects of Covid-19 in two years

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 24

The governments — Central as well as states — have been for long promoting a narrative that with the case fatality ratio being low, there is generally nothing to fear from Covid-19. Early detection is all that is required, except in some odd cases of patients with serious co-morbidities, to recover has been the cornerstone of this storyline.

The death rates have been pegged at 1.4 per cent all-India. The narrative appears to have worked, with people no longer really afraid of the disease. One just needs to step out to see mask-less

people, with many elected representatives including ministers acting no differently.

According to several doctors who have been treating Covid-19 patients for nearly a year now, it is just a matter of time before this make-believe safety bubble will burst. Other than some cursory comments on post-Covid-19 recovery care, little was done to create awareness on what patients need to look out for, after recovery. "We are seeing that nearly 80 per cent of those who have recovered from Covid-19 are developing diabetes, and fibrosis in the lungs in about six months," a senior doctor involved in treating

and following-up with recovered patients told *Deccan Chronicle*.

Everyone who has recovered from Covid-19 must get themselves tested for diabetes and have a thorough examination of their lungs after six months, which appears to be the threshold for these two diseases to begin manifesting in the survivors, the doctor said.

These are not the only diseases a Covid-19 survivor needs to watch out for. Since the disease is one of inflammation, the immediate term impact is being seen on the heart, doctors said.

■ Page 2: Covid-19 may affect cardiac health

## HEALTH WORKER DIES 5 DAYS AFTER TAKING JAB IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

A health worker died while undergoing treatment five days after taking the Covid-19 vaccine in Guntur district on Sunday. The relatives and health workers staged a protest following the death of B. Vijayalakshmi, an ASHA health worker, alleging that reaction to the vaccine had caused the death.

Demanding justice, they said that Vijayalakshmi had got the vaccine on January 19 but developed complications two days later. She was admitted to the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Guntur. The government had failed to provide proper treatment, they alleged, and sought compensation for her family.

■ Page 3: Collector agrees on relief to victim's family

## PARENTS KILL 2 DAUGHTERS AS HUMAN SACRIFICE

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, JAN. 24

In what was claimed to be a case of human sacrifice, a former college principal and his wife allegedly bludgeoned their two daughters, who had completed their post-graduation, to death with a blunt like object at their residence in Sivalayam street of Madanapalle town in Chittoor district late on Sunday night.

■ Full report on Page 2

## Farmers' tractor rally to start after R-Day parade

### Delhi police cyber teams keep strict vigil for miscreants

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JAN. 24

After several rounds of talks between Delhi Police and the farmers' unions, the police on Sunday allowed their proposed "tractor rally" inside the national capital on January 26.

"Protesting farmers can enter Delhi but can't disturb the Republic Day parade," the Delhi Police said on Sunday evening, declaring that the tractor rally will begin amid tight security after the Republic Day parade on Rajpath, which terminates at the iconic Red Fort close to noon.

"Barricades and other security arrangements will be removed and the farmers will enter the national capital. Later, they will return to their destinations after covering a respectable distance," a senior police official said.

Police said that the rally will be conducted in three parts — first from Singhu border will have a 62 km-long route, then from Tikri border with around 60 km route and Ghazipur Border with 46 km route.

Police also said that there



Mobile tents being set up by farmers during the agitation against the Centre's farm laws at the Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Sunday.

are intelligence inputs suggesting that there are elements, which pose a threat to the proposed rally and may disrupt it. "After analysis of Twitter handles it was revealed that there are 308 such accounts created in Pakistan which are attempting to create confusion and thus disturbances during farmers' rally," police said.

According to sources, the Delhi Police's cyber teams are keeping a vigil on social media to track miscreants who may try to create panic.

Delhi Police Commissioner S.N. Shrivastava issued a circular and directed all officers and men, as well as Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) and other forces to be deployed for Republic Day Parade security to remain in a ready position to move at short notice for law and order arrangement.

Giving details about the parade, Deependra Pathak, special commissioner of police (intelligence), said, "The rally will start from Singhu border and pass through Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar, Kanjhawala, Bawana, Auchandi Border, Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway and will return to Singhu border. It will cover around 62 kilometres stretch. Police teams have done the assessment of these routes."

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## COUNTER POINT



Not prison cells of freedom fighters... they want to see where current leaders are lodged!

## SHORT TAKES

## COVID-19 MAY AFFECT CARDIAC HEALTH

FROM PAGE 1

"Blood vessels are inflamed in Covid-19 patients, which means vascular walls become thick and their inner diameter gets restricted. This is the reason why the resting pulse rate in almost every Covid-19 patient goes up post immediate recovery," a doctor explained.

What this means is that the heart begins to work harder than before exposure to Covid-19, resulting in increased pulse rate. It has been found that the heartbeat can swing wildly too, the doctor said, recommending that post survivors should ideally begin taking more interest in their cardiac health.

"We have seen vascular constriction more often than not in children who suffered from Covid-19," a doctor told *Deccan Chronicle*, adding what this means to the quality of life of the children is something he was worried to even speculate about.

"We are also seeing cases among Covid-19 infected women who are developing complications during pregnancies, as well as pregnant women losing their babies because of the vascular inflammation-related issues," the doctor said.

If the governments do not start educating people at least on these aspects, if not the other commonly lingering effects such as fatigue, bouts of breathlessness and sore throat among other Covid-19 symptoms, then we are looking at a health care time bomb that could well explode in the next couple of years when the yet-to-be-clearly-understood near-and mid-term impacts of Covid-19 on general health begin making themselves felt, doctors said.

## KADAPA TO BE MADE HQ OF WALAMTARI

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, JAN. 24

AP government has decided to make Kadapa headquarter of state-level Water and Land Management Training and Research Institute (WALAMTARI). The institute will also have regional centres at Nellore, Amravati and Visakhapatnam.

The state government has directed Department of Water Resources to issue orders in this regard.

WALAMTARI was originally established at Hyderabad in 1982. After partition of Andhra Pradesh, the institute has gone to Telangana. This has led to non-availability of a proper training and research centre for water and land management.

## RAMBABU CHALLENGES PK TO FACE POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

YSR Congress MLA Anna Rambabu challenged Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan to face fresh election with him and wanted to know if he will wind up Jana Sena should the actor face electoral defeat.

He refuted allegations of Pawan Kalyan about him and his party being responsible for the death of JS activist Bandia Vengaiah Naidu and claimed that he is ready to face any investigation.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, the MLA challenged Pawan Kalyan to contest in Giddalur and stated that he would surrender in court if his involvement in Vengaiah's suicide was proved.

## Marching in step



Policemen march during a rehearsal at the IGMC Stadium to practice for the Republic Day celebrations, in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

## SEC not concerned for staff: Union

Says poll panel chief putting staff lives at risk by scheduling polls amid vaccination drive

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

AP Government Employees Federation chairman K. Venkatrami Reddy on Sunday clarified that he had only spoken about the rights enshrined in the Constitution during emergency conditions and had not made personal remarks against anyone.

He was reacting to State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar lodging a complaint with DGP Gautam Sawang about a threat to his life following the remarks of Venkatrami Reddy.

The employees leader had made the remarks while strongly opposing the scheduling of local body elections next month. Addressing a press meet here on Sunday, Venkatrami Reddy alleged that political leaders were distorting his comments although he had not mentioned anything against the SEC. He hit out at Ramesh Kumar for "not caring about the lives of employees."

Condemning the SEC's alleged "hypocrisy," he said, "The SEC addressed



AP Government Employees Federation chairman K. Venkatrami Reddy and others address the media in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— DC

a press conference which was attended by not more than 10-15 people. Despite there being a distance of at least 15 feet between press personnel and him, he chose to be surrounded by a glass shield to protect himself," Venkatrami Reddy said.

"On the other hand, without paying heed to what the government is saying, he has decided to call for the local body polls, thereby putting the lives of thousands of

employees in danger. Aren't our lives valuable," he asked.

Venkatrami Reddy recalled that government employees had joined the Nava Nirmana Deeksha when the TD government had let go of the demand for special category status and opted for the special package offered by the NDA government at the Centre.

Employees had joined the satyagraha deeksha when the TD government

had demanded the special category status. He said that the SEC can conduct the elections with the employees who are willing to work.

Questioning the timing of the notification, the employees' leader said "If the SEC was so committed to empowering the local bodies, why didn't he call for polls when they fell due in 2018? Even now, all we are asking is for him to delay the polls by 60 days so that all the employees are vaccinated before they are asked to interact with thousands of citizens as part of election duties. We aren't against the election. We aren't for any political party. We just want to be safe."

Responding to the SEC referring to elections being held in other states, Reddy said, "That was done at a time when none had a clue about when the vaccine would be out. But now the process to vaccinate employees has already started. Therefore, we are requesting the SEC to delay the polls by two months but to no avail. The SEC is acting at the behest of forces behind him."

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

Yanamala Ramakrishnu, Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council, on Sunday asserted that it is the constitutional responsibility of AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan to restore "rule of law" and prevent breakdown of administrative machinery.

Ramakrishnu said it is unprecedented that government officials and employees are openly refusing to take up election duties. He observed that in no other state had employees publicly defied a decision taken by the State Election Commission (SEC) on holding of polls to local bodies.

Ramakrishnu wanted the Governor to invoke Article 243K (3) and conduct elections towards ensuring "self-rule" in local bodies. He charged that there is constitutional breakdown caused by the

● **RAMAKRISHNU SAID** it is unprecedented that government officials and employees were refusing to take up election duties. He observed that in no other state had employees publicly defied a decision taken by the SEC.

"fascist" regime of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. "The YSRC government should govern by rule of law and not whims and fancies of one individual," he said.

Accusing the CM of having no respect for democracy, Ramakrishnu said Jagan Mohan Reddy was undermining the Constitution, judiciary, legislature and even the media. He alleged that false cases are being filed against media personnel to terrify them. There is no "Grama Swaraj" in villages, which YSRC party workers are domineering, he stated.

## TECH | THAT

## New codes confuse parents during counselling

## Few take new BTech courses, students opt for old favourites

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

Students and parents have preferred conventional engineering courses over emerging technologies. This is an aspect that has clearly emerged from the available trends of engineering seats being allotted in AP during the first phase of seat allotments.

The regular BTech CSE (computer science engineering) is in huge demand. New courses in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, data science, machine learning, internet of things and cyber security have not found many takers.

Ninety-four per cent of CSE seats have been filled. Lack of awareness about the benefits of new courses and no information with regard to available job opportunities are causes for the lukewarm response, observers say.

Of the total 22,672 BTech CSE seats, 21,312 seats have already gone in the first phase of allotments itself, which reflects the demand for this course.

In contrast, there are 2,178 seats in computer science, artificial intelli-

● Of the total 22,672 BTech CSE seats, 21,312 seats have already gone in the first phase of allotments itself, which reflects the demand for this course.

● Ninety-four per cent of CSE seats have been filled in the first phase of admissions.

● In contrast, there are 2,178 seats in computer science, artificial intelligence and machine learning. But only 1,346 of them have been filled, according to the data on admissions after the first phase.

● CSE cyber security has 633 seats in which 401 have been filled.

137 seats are available in B.Tech artificial intelligence of which 76 have been filled.

With regard to BTech cyber security, 43 seats of total 115 seats have been filled.

Only CSE IOT, blockchain technology with cyber security have got a good response, as 253 of total of 275 seats have been already been taken in the first phase of admissions.

Educational experts feel parents and students are confused over the codes. For example, CSE Cyber Security is shown as CSEC, CSE Data Science as CSED and CSE Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning as CSM.

Experts point out that engineering streams are

changing. In the coming years, there will be a good demand for AI, data science, ITO, cyber security, machine learning and blockchain technology.

K.V.K. Rao, secretary, Federation of Self-Financing Technical Institutes, said the main cause is absence of knowledge among students and parents about emerging engineering streams. He said they had written a letter about changing of the codes into an easier form to highlight awareness about modern courses, which are future of the world.

Students S. Tharannum, P. Gayatri and others, who have opted for CSE, told *Deccan Chronicle* they can study all subjects thoroughly in CSE. They can then opt for specialised courses in their higher semesters during the third year through Choice-Based Credit Systems (CBCS). They said they can take emerging technology courses under CBCS.

The students also point out that presently, majority of corporate companies are choosing CSE students compared to students of emerging courses.

According to reports, Pawan had claimed his party had good support in the constituency and was ready to campaign if the BJP agreed to field a JS candidate.

At the meeting here, the two leaders touched on the idea of fielding a common candidate. They agreed to evolve a consensus through more meetings. Both stressed on the need for united efforts by BJP and JS to win power in AP by 2024.

Veerraju later said the talks were fruitful and a win would help the party confidently march ahead for the 2024 hustings.

Kalyan appealed to the youths to contest the panchayat elections and work for development of villages.

## EX-PRINCIPAL, WIFE 'SACRIFICE' DAUGHTERS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JAN. 24

In what was claimed to be a case of human sacrifice, a former college principal and his wife allegedly bludgeoned their two daughters, who had completed their post-graduation, to death with a blunt like object at their residence in Sivalayam street of Madanapalli town in Chittoor district late on Sunday night.

According to the police, the accused couple Padmaja and Purushottam Naidu, both in their 50s, killed their daughters Alakhya, 27, and Sai Divya, 22, graduation. Naidu was a former principal of a women's degree college in the town.

On Sunday night, police raided the couple's house in Shivalayam street after a tip-off that some strange sounds were coming from there. When police forcefully entered the house, Alakhya and Sai Divya were found lying dead - one in the puja room and another just outside with their body covered with red-coloured cloth.

As per Madanapalli DSP Ravimanohara Chary, police learnt during their preliminary investigation that the family had superstitious beliefs and were allegedly involved in occult practices.

"During the course of preliminary investigation, the accused have confessed to have made human sacrifice. They narrated a story and requested us to leave their house in the night and come back on Monday morning to see their daughters alive. They asked us to give them some time to perform some occult puja to bring their daughters back to life," DSP Chary told this newspaper.

The DSP said, "The couple told us that miracles were occurring in their house for the past few years. They said they had received a divine message to sacrifice their daughters, as Kali Yuga was going to end on Sunday night and they will be reborn on Monday in the beginning of Satya Yuga. They asked us to leave our footwear outside as the house had been cleaned after 'evil' left the premises."

"We are taking the couple into custody and a case will be registered. The bodies were sent to the government hospital for autopsy and investigation is on," he said.

## VEERRAJU AND PAWAN MEET FOR LS BY POLL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

BJP state president Somu Veerraju met Jana Sena chief K. Pawan Kalyan at the latter's home here on Sunday and discussed strategies to win the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection.

The two parties in the alliance have not finalised a candidate. During a recent meeting with JS leaders and activists in Tirupati, Kalyan sought to field his party's candidate. Pawan had expressed dissatisfaction over attitude of the BJP vis-a-vis candidate selection.

According to reports, Pawan had claimed his party had good support in the constituency and was ready to campaign if the BJP agreed to field a JS candidate.

At the meeting here, the two leaders touched on the idea of fielding a common candidate. They agreed to evolve a consensus through more meetings. Both stressed on the need for united efforts by BJP and JS to win power in AP by 2024.

Veerraju later said the talks were fruitful and a win would help the party confidently march ahead for the 2024 hustings.

Kalyan appealed to the youths to contest the panchayat elections and work for development of villages.



## NOW NEW CORONAVIRUS DEATHS IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 24

No new Coronavirus-related deaths have been reported in the state on Sunday. However, 158 new infections have been recorded during the past 24 hours, taking the total Covid-19 positive cases to 8,87,010.

The number of recoveries increased to 8,78,387, with 155 patients getting healed during the past 24 hours, taking the recovery rate to 99.03 per cent. The number of active cases in the state is 1,476.

As many as 44,382 samples have been tested for Covid during the past 24 hours.

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## One lakh from Kadapa district to get jobs every day under NREGS

Those who migrated to other cities for livelihood returned to their hometowns

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, JAN. 24

Approximately one lakh persons from Kadapa district will be employed every day under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). Officials from District Water Management Authority (DWMA) are on the job of finalizing plans towards this.

Rural employment scheme for drought conditions only supports the poor in summer.

It must be noted that those who migrated to other cities for livelihood returned to their hometowns last year because of corona.

DWMA plans to employ more than one lakh people a day in summer. It was decided to provide 1,33,54,000 working days for the year 2020-21. However, as of January 20, 1,34,66,000 working days have been created. The target for the current financial year is ₹527 crore, of which ₹316.45



A picture of people working under NREGS in Kadapa district

crore is to be spent on wages. However, ₹322.15 crore has been spent already apart from ₹210.99 crore for material component and an additional ₹158.23 crore. Another ₹53 crore is also to be spent. With the deadline set for March 31, officials are optimistic that more job card-

holders will be able to find employment. Gram panchayats and mandals have been targeted for labour attendance. It was decided to ensure that lakhs of labourers would attend every day from February 1. Workers earn an average of ₹235.57 as wages per day. There are a total of 3,61,168

job cards in the district and 30,489 labour unions. Already 30,000 families have been provided with a full 100 days of work while 22,000 families completed 90 to 99 working and 25,000 families had 70 to 90 working days. While each family is required to provide one hundred days of work, the

average is still 53.3 working days. Employment is mainly in the areas of water conservation and orchard cultivation.

DWMA project director Dr Pandillapalli Yadubhushan Reddy told *Deccan Chronicle* that they would provide work to all those having a job card. He

● DWMA plans to employ more than one lakh people a day in summer. It was decided to provide 1,33,54,000 working days for the year 2020-21. However, as of January 20, 1,34,66,000 working days have been created.

● Workers earn an average of ₹235.57 as wages per day. There are a total of 3,61,168 job cards in the district and 30,489 labour unions. Already 30,000 families have been provided with a full 100 days of work while 22,000 families completed 90 to 99 working and 25,000 families had 70 to 90 working days.

## Indian vaccines safe: Tamilisai

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JAN. 24

Telangana state Governor Tamilisai Soundarajan said vaccines made in India were safe and that people need not be afraid to take them.

The TS Governor was speaking to the media after she and her family members had darshan of Lord Venkateshwara at Tirumala on Sunday. She

was presented with Srivari prasadam at Ranganayakula Mandapam by TTD additional executive officer A.V. Dharma Reddy.

The TS Governor appealed to frontline workers to take the vaccine without any hesitation because it was developed and cleared as per all international safety norms. She said, "We all

## Students march to support farmers' stir

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 24

Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) president Aishe Ghosh has said the agitation against farm laws would continue and this was time to oppose the anti-people and privatisation policies of the Modi-led government.

Addressing a rally of students, Left activists and others at Gandhi Park on Sunday, Aishe Ghosh said a united fight would be waged against the 'anti-farmer' policies of the Union Government that was "aiming to promote the interests of the corporates at the cost of the farmers."

Ghosh, a national executive member of the SFI, said the nation was going

through turbulent times and called upon the people to continue their struggle against the Modi government till the farm laws were repealed.

She said there was growing unrest all over the country as the BJP-RSS was fanning communal passions. "Those raising their voice against the draconian laws are being killed, women are assaulted as never before and the BJP leaders are supporting the perpetrators of such crimes."

She recalled how a journalist from Kerala, who had gone to cover the Hathras incident, was jailed under the UAPA.

She said the nation was witnessing an Emergency-like rule for the last six years.

## Collector promises relief to victim's kin

FROM PAGE 1

After primary treatment, she was admitted to the GGH. Lakshmi also fell ill but recovered.

Family sources said Vijayalakshmi suffered a brain-stroke and went into a coma.

TD Guntur East in-charge Md Naseer and other leaders demanded ₹50 lakh compensation, government job to a family member, and a house. CPM Guntur district east secretary Pasam Rama Rao recalled that Vijayalakshmi was a Coronavirus warrior and was entitled to the ₹50 lakh compensation.

Guntur collector I. Samuel Anand Kumar rushed to the spot and assured to send a proposal to the government seeking release of compensation, house site and job to a family member. He assured to provide all possible aid from the government side after which the protestors withdrew their agita-



Guntur collector I. Samuel Anand Kumar interacts with ASHA workers, who staged dharna at the General Hospital, Guntur. — DC

tion. Meanwhile, Director of Medical and Health department Dr Geetha Prasidini conducted a meeting with medical experts and discussed the side-effects of the vaccine. She said that only a few people had experienced simple reactions after taking the vaccine. She said they are waiting for an autopsy report of Vijayalakshmi to know the exact cause of her death.

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SHORT TAKES

RAM TEMPLE IN 3YRS; TO COST ₹1,100 CR: TRUST

Mumbai, Jan. 24: The Ram temple in Ayodhya will be built in around three years and the construction cost of the project will exceed ₹1,100 crore, a prominent functionary of the temple trust has said.

"The main temple will be built in three to three and a half years and will cost ₹300-400 crore. The expenditure on the development of the entire 70 acre land there will exceed ₹1,100 crore," said Swami Govind Dev Giri Maharaj, treasurer of Ram Janmabhoomi Tirath Kshetra Nyas.

He said he arrived at these figures after consulting experts involved in the Ram temple construction project. The Nyas (trust) has not come out with an official statement so far on the expenditure involved in the project, he said while talking to a TV channel. "It was possible for us to raise funds (for the temple construction) from some corporate people. Some (corporate) families had approached us, requesting us to hand over the (temple) designs and assuring us they will complete the temple project, but I humbly declined that request," he said.

CENTRE OFFERS JABS TO ENVOYS POSTED IN INDIA

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 24

The Indian government on Sunday offered vaccination against Covid-19 to foreign diplomats posted in India. Embassies have been asked to give the names of diplomats and their family members who want to be vaccinated by Friday though no dates for their vaccination have been given so far.

Over 16.13 lakh healthcare and frontline workers have been vaccinated till date. On Sunday, the ninth day of the vaccination drive, 31,466 people were vaccinated in five states. Union health ministry officials said 10 cases of AEFI were reported on Sunday. India on Sunday reported 14,849 cases of Covid-19 and 155 deaths. In the coming week the government plans to intensify its immunisation coverage to complete its target of inoculating 3 crore healthcare and frontline workers well in time so that the vaccination drive for the rest of the population can be rolled out. It is expected that the diplomatic missions will be covered in the 2nd phase.

In a letter to all diplomatic missions, the MEA said that "as a gesture of goodwill and solidarity," the Government of India is considering to offer Covid-19 vaccination to "eligible foreign diplomats and their family members" accredited to all diplomatic missions, including consulates, United Nations and its specialised agencies, and other international organisations based in India.

FIR FILED AGAINST TANDAV ACTORS IN MP, K'TAKA

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL/BENGALURU JAN. 24

A case was registered against actors Saif Ali Khan and Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub in a police station in Datia in Madhya Pradesh late on Saturday evening for their roles in OTT web series *Tandav* which sparked a furor among Hindu bodies for "hurt religious sentiments".

A FIR was filed against the two actors in Kotwali police station in district headquarters of Datia following a complaint lodged by the local unit of Hindu Jagarn Manch, police said on Sunday.

Earlier on January 21, a delegation of the outfit led by Ravi Sharma filed a complaint with local sub-divisional officer of police Sumit Agrawal saying that the two actors slighted Hindu deities in the film.

Meanwhile, A case has also been registered by the Bengaluru police against the cast and crew of *Tandav*.

Based on a complaint by one Kiran Aradhya, the case was registered on Friday against *Tandav* director Ali Abbas Zafar, producer Farhan Akhtar, actors Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub and Saif Ali Khan and the head of India Originals of Amazon Prime Video, Aparna Purohit.

Cases have been registered under section 295A, 298, 153A and 34 of the IPC for insulting religious belief and promoting religious enmity between groups.

Tractors converge on Delhi for rally

25,000 tractors from UP, U'khand; 12,000 from Amritsar, 10,000 from Doaba to take part

Chandigarh/Ghaziabad, Jan. 24: More batches of farmers from Punjab on Sunday set out for Delhi to participate in the proposed tractor parade on January 26.

Farmer unions protesting the Centre's three farm laws had said they would go ahead with their tractor parade in Delhi on Republic Day. They had announced to take out the tractor parade on the Outer Ring Road in Delhi. A batch of 500 tractors-trolleys left Amritsar and several groups of growers from Phagwara, Hoshiarpur and other places of Punjab moved towards the national capital to take part of the tractor parade, farmer leaders said.

Kisan Sangharsh Union leader Baldev Singh Verka in Amritsar said, "Today as many as 500 more tractor trolleys left for Delhi to join the tractor parade. Each tractor-trolley will carry 20 persons along with bedding and eating arrangement for fourteen hour-long journey to Delhi".

He said on Saturday, around seven hundred tractor trolleys had left for Delhi. Gurbachan Singh Chhabba, spokesperson of the Kisan Sangharsh Committee said so far, around 12,000 tractor and trolleys had already left Amritsar and Tarn districts. While most of the tractor convoys from Doaba region had left for Delhi on Friday and Saturday, many left on Sunday also to take part in



Tractors arrive for farmers at Singhu border in New Delhi on Sunday, during an ongoing protest against the new farm laws.

the tractor parade, said Satnam Singh Sahni, General Secretary Bharti Kisan Union (Doaba). Sahni, who returned here from Delhi's Singhu border on Saturday night to further mobilise farmers for the parade. He said a total of around 10,000 tractors from Doaba region would join the parade to highlight agitating farmers' demands and the "stubborn" attitude of the central government towards them.

Around 25,000 tractors from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand will participate in the 'kisan parade' on January 26, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said on Saturday.

Farmers moving towards UP Gate from the two states on their tractor trol-

leys were intercepted by police in different districts but farmers will arrive here at every cost, he said. "Around 25,000 tractors would arrive here and a tractor rally would be brought out on Republic Day. Apart from the districts of western Uttar Pradesh, farmers would take out rallies in every district," Tikait said in a statement. "No political person will be allowed to participate," the BKU national spokesperson said. District administrations are sending notices to farmers and mounting pressure on them not to participate in the rallies citing Covid-19 norms and section 144 of the CrPC, he claimed.

Meanwhile, authorities in some Haryana districts close to the national capi-

tal have issued advisories against unnecessary travel towards Delhi over the next couple of days in view of a January 26 tractor parade by protesting farmer unions.

On Sunday, thousands of tractors were seen plying on the highways in the state heading towards Delhi, resulting in traffic congestion at several points on the GT Road, a police officer in Karnal said.

The Haryana Police issued an advisory stating that in view of the security and traffic arrangements for Republic Day and the proposed tractor parade, there would be disruptions in vehicular movement on the national highway from Karnal and Rohtak towards Delhi during January 25-27. — PTI

Farmers tableaux to depict protest

New Delhi, Jan. 24: The Republic Day tractor parade by agitating farmers will feature a number of tableaux from across states depicting village life, the protest against the Centre's contentious farm laws, and hailing their courage, according to organisers.

A farmer leader said that directions were issued to all organisations participating in the protest to prepare tableaux for the parade. "Around one lakh

tractor-trolleys from across the country will participate in the parade. Around 30 per cent of these will have tableaux on different themes, including the history of the farmers' movement in India, the role of women farmers and farming practices followed in different states," he said.

A few children from Maharashtra's Vidarbha region have also planned a tableau on farmer suicides. — PTI

Maha farmers to march to Capital

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 24

Protesting against the Centre's farm laws, thousands of farmers from various districts of Maharashtra reached Mumbai on Sunday via a vehicle march. They are expected to march towards Delhi to support the protesting farmers on Republic Day.

The Nashik to Mumbai rally is part of the call given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM),

which is leading the protests in Delhi. The farmers have started their statewide vehicle march from Nashik to Mumbai on Saturday.

Arriving in cars, jeeps, vans and trucks flying red flags, the farmers reached the city's iconic Azad Maidan, where they will hold a massive rally on January 25 to protest the controversial agriculture laws. The rally will then march to the Raj Bhawan and submit a memorandum to the Governor.

J&K ENCOUNTER: ARMY CAPTAIN NAMED IN CHARGESHEET

Shopian, Jan. 24: The Army captain involved in the fake encounter in Kashmir's Shopian district last July and two other civilian accused haven't provided any information about the source of weapons planted on the three slain youths and had also attempted to destroy the evidence, a police charge sheet said.

Captain Bhoopendra Singh had also provided wrong information to his superiors and the police about the recovery made during the staged encounter, the charge sheet filed by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Jammu and Kashmir Police before the chief judicial magistrate here said.

The case relates to the July 18, 2020 encounter in Shopian's Amshipura in which three youths were killed and dubbed as terrorists. Later, the Army ordered a Court of Inquiry after reports appeared on social media that the three youths were innocent.

"No leads regarding the source of illegal weapons as illegally arranged by accused" for planting on the bodies were provided, the charge sheet said.

"By staging the encounter," the three accused "have purposefully destroyed evidence or real crime that they have committed and also have (been) purposefully projecting false information as part of a criminal conspiracy hatched between them with the motive to grab a prize money of ₹20 lakh," it said. — PTI



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during his election campaign at Poondurai in Erode district on Sunday, ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

Stalin deceiving people, says CM

Coimbatore, Jan. 24: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Sunday accused DMK president M.K. Stalin of deception for posing with Lord Muruga's spear like weapon, 'Vel' and said the divine symbol has come to leader of opposition's notice since Assembly elections were round the corner.

On the second day of his campaign here, the AIADMK leader referred to a photograph of the DMK chief holding the Vel alleging it was an act of deceit. The AIADMK respected all religions equally, but it was not the case with the DMK which involved in 'deception,' in such matters, he alleged.

Accusing Stalin of 'deceit,' the Chief Minister claimed Stalin spoke one thing for the outside world but in his

MODIJI HAS BROUGHT GROWTH IN GDP (GAS, DIESEL, PETROL): RAHUL

Chennai, Jan. 24: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday attacked the Centre over rise in fuel prices, saying people are suffering due to inflation, while the Modi government is busy in tax collection.

The former Congress chief's attack came a day after petrol and diesel prices in the country touched new all-time highs after rates were increased for the fourth time in the week. "Modi ji has brought about the tremen-

dous growth in GDP — gas, diesel and petrol — prices," Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi.

"People are suffering due to inflation, while the Modi government is busy in tax collection," he alleged.

The increase in prices took the petrol price in Delhi to ₹85.70 per litre and in Mumbai to ₹92.28.

Diesel rate climbed to ₹75.88 a litre in the Delhi and to ₹82.66 per litre in Mumbai, the price data showed. — PTI

heart of hearts he knew it was not his conviction. "The God will not grant you boon if you only

receive Lord Muruga's Vel. The boon will be only for the AIADMK." The DMK has for a long

time been accused of offending Hindu beliefs and sentiments by the BJP and 'Hindu Munnani,' a noted Sangh Parivar outfit in Tamil Nadu.

Recently, Stalin had slammed the BJP and Munnani for trying to build a 'perception' that his party was against the Hindus. "It is not the truth," the DMK chief had said. Palaniswami alleged, "Since elections are round the corner, the Vel is visible to his (Stalin's) eyes only now and till now it was not visible to him." "The God will give you (DMK) appropriate punishment through the elections," he said.

On Saturday, DMK workers had presented a glittering Vel made of silver to Stalin at a party's rural outreach programme in Tiruvallur district. — PTI

INDIA, CHINA HOLD NINTH ROUND OF TALKS

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 24

India and China on Sunday held the ninth round of Corps Commanders level talks to resolve the nine-month-long military stand-off in eastern Ladakh.

The meeting started at around 11 am in Moldo on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control.

The Indian delegation was led by 14 Corps Commander Lt-General P.G.K. Menon and included a joint secretary from the external affairs ministry.

Sunday's meeting between top Commanders in the sector from India and China to discuss disengagement and de-escalation was held after a gap of around two-and-a-half months.

The meeting was held when China is consolidating its position all along the LAC. India is expecting a hot summer in 2021 all along the LAC and is keeping a tight vigil.

India has maintained that it will only accept complete disengagement by the Chinese troops and restoration of the status quo ante of April 2020 at the LAC.

India's position is that it was China which first moved its troops at the LAC and China will have to be the first to withdraw from these positions.

TMC vows to take revenge

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 24

A day after "Jai Shree Ram" chants prompted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to refuse to address the Centre's Parakram Diwas celebration as a mark of protest in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's presence at Victoria Memorial, her nephew and Diamond Harbour Trinamul Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee vowed to take "revenge" against the BJP "in every inch" as the ruling party demonstrated across the districts, crying of an "insult" to its supremo at the official event, to swing the public mood in the poll-bound state.

Advising the BJP workers to chant 'Jai Shree Ram' at their homes and on religious occasions Banerjee on Sunday told a party rally at Kultali in South 24 Parganas, "They polluted the environment when our elected CM was about to address the official event on the solemn occasion. When they did not allow her to speak,

she protested and did not deliver her address to make the PM feel that no insult to iconic freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose is tolerated here. They did not learn a lesson even after demolishing the bust of another legend: Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar in 2019."

In a threatening mood he added, "It was Mamata Banerjee's magnanimity that she gave the slogan: *Bodla Noy, Bodol Chai* (We want change, not revenge). That is why they are now making tall talks. After coming to power again, revenge will be meted out to them in every inch. Be ready for that. You will be paid back in full. I will see then how much power you have."

The TMC MP also declared to quit politics if he can not wipe out the saffron party in the coming Assembly election. Apart from him, TMC ministers like Firhad Hakim and Bratya Basu also tore into the BJP for raising religious slogans in political overtones at a government event to "insult" the CM.

States to look for malnourished kids

New Delhi, Jan. 24: Identifying severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in children and their referral to hospitals, using AYUSH concepts and monitoring through 'Poshan Tracker' are among highlights of the government's new guidelines which aim to improve nutritional status of children and women in the country.

In a letter to all states and UTs, the women and child development ministry asked all chief secretaries to launch a drive for identification of severe acute malnutrition in children for referral to hospitals, if required, and AYUSH centres and complete this exercise by January 31.

"The states shall launch a drive for identification of SAM children for referral to hospitals (if required) and AYUSH centres in accordance with the detailed action plan approved by the district nutrition committee to be finalised in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer. This exercise shall be completed by January 31, 2021,"

● GOVT'S NEW guidelines aim to improve nutritional status of children and women.

the ministry said. The ministry shared the guidelines and stressed on the need to ensure that entitlements of Supplementary Nutrition Programme reach the intended beneficiaries in a time-bound manner as per quantity and nutritional standards.

The ministry said it has streamlined guidelines on quality assurance, roles and responsibilities of duty holders, procedure for procurement, integrating AYUSH concepts and data management and monitoring through 'Poshan Tracker' for transparency, efficiency and accountability in delivery of supplementary nutrition.

The ministry has asked all states to mandatorily implement Poshan Tracker that uses centralised data architecture to align with digital technology systems of other ministries and programmes. — PTI

WATER | WOES

Families say no household is connected to piped water supply

J&K: Villagers pool funds for pipelines

Bhaderwah (J&K), Jan. 24: Claiming neglect over the past seven decades, the villagers in remote Thanhala Panchayat in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district have set out on a mission this winter to bring potable water to their homes.

To fulfill their objective, the mostly below poverty line (BPL) families of the snow-bound village in the lap of mighty Aashpatti Glacier got into a hurdle recently and decided to contribute ₹40,000 to purchase the required water pipes to get connected to the nearest water source.

"We are living by the example of the proverb 'God helps those who help themselves' as the government had miserably failed to ensure tap water in our homes over the years. In the absence of the facility, we have to fetch water round-the-year from a nearby source even during this harsh winter and the lurking threat of avalanches," a local resident Ajiaz Ahmad said.

● BPL FAMILIES decided to contribute ₹40,000 to purchase required water pipes to get connected to the nearest water source.

About 30 families live in the village bordering Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh, just 1.5 km from the interstate Bhaderwah-Chamba road. The villagers depend on the labour work in Bhaderwah town for a living. Despite 'Har Ghar Nal Yojna' under 'Jal

Jeevan Mission', villagers claim that none of the households are connected with the piped water supply. When contacted, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Bhaderwah, Rakesh Kumar said that providing potable water to every household is the priority of the government.

"The area being rich in natural water resources, I will take up the issue with the concerned department of 'Jal Shakti Vibhag' Bhaderwah to make temporary arrangements to

provide piped water to the village in view of extreme cold wave conditions unless permanent gravity line is laid under Jal Jeevan Mission," he said.

Talib Hussain, another resident, said they literally ran from pillar to post to get piped water supply but no one listened to their woes.

"Under these circumstances, we have no other option but to pool money from our daily wages to bring water to our homes," he said. — PTI



SHORT TAKES

# 11 IRAQI FIGHTERS DIE IN IS AMBUSH

**Samarra, Iraq, Jan. 24:** At least 11 fighters from Iraq's state-sponsored Hashed al-Shaabi force were killed in an ambush by the Islamic State group north of the capital on Saturday, Hashed security sources said.

The jihadists used light weapons and the cover of darkness to target the Hashed east of Tikrit, the capital of Iraq's Salahaddin province, two days after a twin suicide attack claimed by the group killed 32 people in Baghdad.

"IS launched an attack on the Hashed's Brigade 22," said one of the unit's officers Abu Ali al-Maliki.

# 'STEALING' FILES: TESLA SUES EX-EMPLOYEE

**San Francisco, Jan. 24:** Tesla has sued a former employee for allegedly stealing about 26,000 confidential files in his first week of working at the company, according to a court filing seen by AFP.

The company said on Friday that within three days of being hired, software engineer Alex Khatilov "brazenly stole thousands of trade computer scripts that took Tesla years to develop" and transferred them to his personal Dropbox, a cloud storage service.

Tesla said that when confronted by Tesla's security team, Khatilov claimed he had only transferred "a couple of personal administrative documents", whilst trying to delete the evidence.

# SCOTLAND WILL HOLD VOTE REFERENDUM

**London, Jan. 24:** Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on Sunday said she planned to hold a legal referendum on independence from Britain despite Westminster's opposition, as an opinion poll showed a majority would vote yes.

If her Scottish National Party (SNP) wins a strong showing in regional elections in May, Sturgeon said she would seek a fresh referendum even though Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said such a vote should only be held once in a generation.

"I want to have a legal referendum, that is what I am going to seek the authority of the Scottish people for in May and if they give me that authority, that's what I intend to do," she told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

# PM OLI EXPELLED FROM NCP'S MEMBERSHIP

**Kathmandu, Jan. 24:** The ruling Nepal Communist Party's splinter faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda on Sunday expelled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli from the party's general membership.

The decision to remove Oli from the party's general membership was taken at the Standing Committee meeting of the faction led by former prime ministers Prachanda and Madhav Kumar Nepal after Oli failed to produce explanation to his recent moves as sought by party leadership, sources said. Madhav Nepal was named as party's second chairman. Prachanda is the first chairman.

# Russian cops go on the rampage

## 3,500 protesters arrested at rally in support of jailed Putin critic Navalny, says monitor

**Moscow, Jan. 24:** Nearly 3,500 protesters were arrested at demonstrations in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, a monitor reported on Sunday, as authorities probed violence on the part of both protesters and police.

Police clashed with demonstrators in Moscow as tens of thousands took to the streets across the country on Saturday following Navalny's call to demonstrate against President Vladimir Putin's 20-year rule.

A number of protesters were injured, including a woman in Saint Petersburg who was hospitalised with a head injury and was in intensive care Sunday.

The West condemned the arrests and "harsh tactics" used against demonstrators, with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell saying the bloc would discuss "next steps" on Monday.

Late Saturday the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it launched criminal inquiries in Moscow over the use of violence against law enforcement, hooliganism and property damage.

"Investigators are continuing to study and analyse a large amount of photo and video materials," the Committee said. In a separate statement, investigators said Sunday a 36-year-old man hit two policemen at the Saint Petersburg protest and was detained.

But Saint Petersburg prosecutors also said they were probing violations "on the part of law enforcement" and the use of force against a woman. The statement was released after local media published a video showing a middle-aged woman falling to the ground after being kicked by riot police.

In the video, a woman — identified as Margarita Yudina — is seen asking three policemen in full riot gear why they are detaining a young protester. One of the policemen then kicks her in the

# US condemns 'harsh tactics'

**Washington, Jan. 24:** Washington on Saturday rebuked Moscow over its use of "harsh tactics" against protesters demanding the release of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

"The United States strongly condemns the use of harsh tactics against protesters and journalists this weekend in cities throughout Russia," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

Navalny being taken into custody and the arrests of his supporters were "troubling indications of further restrictions on civil society and fundamental freedoms," he added.

"We call on Russian authorities to release all

those detained for exercising their universal rights and for the immediate and unconditional release of Aleksey Navalny," Price said, using an alternative spelling.

"We urge Russia to fully cooperate with the international community's investigation into the poisoning of Aleksey Navalny and credibly explain the use of a chemical weapon on its soil."

In Russia tens of thousands nationwide answered Navalny's call to rally, which he issued after he was detained at a Moscow airport on arrival from Germany, where he had been recovering from a near-fatal poisoning with a nerve agent. — AFP

# US INTERFERING IN 'DOMESTIC AFFAIRS': KREMLIN

**Moscow, Jan. 24:** The Kremlin on Sunday accused the US embassy of interfering in Russia's domestic affairs after the mission distributed a "demonstration alert" to US citizens in Russia recommending they avoid protests.

Ahead of the demonstrations, the US embassy issued a safety warning to Americans based in Russia.

"Of course, these publications are inappropriate," President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a state TV channel.

"And of course indirectly, they are absolutely an interference in our domestic affairs," he added. He accused the US embassy of "indirectly" supporting the violation of Russian legislation and backing "unauthorised protests". — AFP

# Review military sex assault programmes: Defence secy

**Washington, Jan. 24:** Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, in his first directive since taking office, has given his senior leaders two weeks to send him reports on sexual assault prevention programmes in the military, and an assessment of what has worked and what hasn't.

Austin's memo, which went out Saturday, fulfills a commitment he made to senators last week during confirmation hearings. He had vowed to immediately address the problems of sexual assault and harassment in the ranks.

This is a leadership issue, Austin said in his two-page memo. Reports of sexual assaults have gone up since 2006. — PTI

# AUSTIN CALLS COUNTERPARTS FROM JAPAN, S. KOREA, UNITED KINGDOM

**Washington, Jan. 24:** US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke to his counterparts from Japan, Britain, and South Korea, the Pentagon has said. During his interaction with Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi, Austin reiterated America's commitment to the US-Japan alliance and emphasised on the importance of maintaining peace in the Indo-Pacific, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said.

"Austin and Kishi discussed a range of security issues in the Indo-Pacific and exchanged views on

ensuring the readiness of the alliance despite the challenges posed by Covid-19," Kirby said. They also discussed the need to continue implementing US force realignment initiatives including continued efforts regarding the construction of the Futenma Replacement Facility in Henoko, he said. Austin affirmed that the Senkaku islands are covered by Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty, and that the US remains opposed to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea. — PTI

# Snowing in London



Snow settles on one of the Trafalgar Square lions in central London on Sunday.

— AFP

# Vaccine immunity will take 3 weeks: UK medical officer

**London, Jan. 24:** One of England's leading medical officers on Sunday urged the public to continue to follow the strict lockdown rules because any vaccine-related immunity from Covid-19 takes at least three weeks to kick in. Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, England's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, also warned that there is no clear evidence yet to show that vaccinated people cannot transmit the deadly virus on to others.

"Regardless of whether someone has had their vaccination or not, it is vital that everyone follows the restrictions and public health advice, as protection takes up to three weeks to kick in and we don't yet know the impact of vaccines on transmission," said Van-Tam. His warning comes as the UK registered another high daily death toll from the virus of 1,348 this weekend.

He pointed to an additional 32 vaccination sites coming on stream to add to the thousands of venues where the National Health Service (NHS) has been delivering 140 jabs a minute, taking the vaccinated total to over 5.8 million. "The vaccine is rightly something to celebrate — let's stay patient, stay at home and support the NHS as it continues to roll out the vaccine," he said. A Living Museum where the BBC filmed a hit drama series 'Peaky Blinders' based on the notorious Birmingham gang in the 1920s is among the new vaccine sites. — AFP

# Hindu priests charge more for SA funerals

**Johannesburg, Jan. 24:** Cashing in on the fearful atmosphere prevailing in South Africa amidst a second wave and a new variant of the Covid-19 virus, some Hindu priests in the country are allegedly charging exorbitant rates for conducting funerals of coronavirus victims.

The priests are under fire for charging between 1,200 rand (\$79) and 2,000 rand (\$131) to conduct a funeral, according to Pradeep Ramall, a member of the Hindu Dharma Association of South Africa and Manager of the Clare Estate Crematorium in Durban.

This is not right. As per our scriptures, this is our seva (service) to the community. If a family wants to give a priest a donation, then that is acceptable but priests should not be charging people, he told the Weekly Post newspaper as he slammed the priests who are overcharging. Ramall said the organisation has received a number of complaints from people whose relatives succumbed.

In view of a second wave and a new variant of the virus, the crematorium has had to introduce double shifts amid daily deaths. — PTI

# A NASAL SPRAY THAT BLOCKS OUT COVID-19

**London, Jan. 24:** A nasal spray which can prevent a Coronavirus infection for up to two days is being prepped for mass production by scientists at the University of Birmingham with the hope of having them available over-the-counter in pharmacies in a few months, a UK newspaper report said on Sunday. Dr Richard Moakes, the study's lead researcher, told 'The Sunday Telegraph' that he is confident in the spray's formula to help unlock society from social distancing restrictions. — PTI

# Oman limits jobs for expats

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JANUARY 24**

Gulf nation Oman's reported move on Sunday to bar certain jobs for foreigners such as finance, commercial and administrative positions in insurance companies, shops and car dealerships as well as nationalise some jobs in the private sector is set to impact Indian workers there. Although there was no official reaction from New Delhi till late on Sunday evening, it

is expected that India will examine the matter to ascertain what impact the move will have on Indian workers in the Gulf nation. A huge number of Indian workers stay and work in the entire Gulf region spanning several countries.

According to media reports, the Omani Labour Ministry was quoted as saying, "A number of jobs in the private sector will be nationalised," adding that certain jobs in insurance

companies, shops and car dealerships, including finance, commercial and administrative positions, will be "limited to Omanis only". Oman also reportedly announced that work permits of foreigners in those professions will not be renewed after their expiry date.

According to media reports, Oman has undertaken the move in an effort to create more employment opportunities for its citizens amid an economic downturn.

# Ageing dams pose threat in India

**New York, Jan. 24:** Over 1,000 large dams in India will be roughly 50 years old in 2025 and such aging structures across the world pose a growing threat, according to a UN report which notes that by 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of dams built in the 20th century.

The report, titled 'Ageing water infrastructure: An emerging global risk' and compiled by United University's Canadian-based Institute for Water, Envir-

onment and Health, says most of the 58,700 large dams worldwide were constructed between 1930 and 1970 with a design life of 50 to 100 years. It said at 50 years, a large concrete dam "would most probably begin to express signs of ageing." Ageing signs include increasing cases of dam failures, progressively increasing costs of dam repair and maintenance, increasing reservoir sedimentation, and loss of a dam's functionality and effectiveness, "st-

rongly interconnected" manifestations, the report said. "By 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of large dams built in the 20th century, many of them already operating at or beyond their design life," according to the UN University analysis.

The analysis includes dam decommissioning or ageing case studies from the USA, France, Canada, India, Japan, and Zambia and Zimbabwe. According to the report, the world is

unlikely to witness another large dam-building revolution, but dams constructed then will inevitably be showing their age.

The report said that 32,716 large dams (55 per cent of the world's total) are found in just four Asian countries: China, India, Japan, and South Korea — a majority of which will reach the 50-year threshold relatively soon. The same is true of many large dams in Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe, it said.

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# DECCAN Chronicle

25 JANUARY 2021

## Is power only language in which to talk farm laws?

Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar's statement to the farmers' unions during the 11th round of talks that there are no problems with the farm laws and that the government offered to suspend them for up to 18 months as a sign of respect for farmers is unhelpful, to say the least, in ending the stalemate. Instead, it casts a shadow over the sincerity the government displays in the talks.

It has been almost three months now that the farmers are in Delhi, agitating, demanding the repeal of the three laws that seek to rework the way agriculture in this country is conducted. They also want a legal assurance that the minimum support price (MSP) regime is retained. The government has been non-committal on all these demands.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the umbrella union of the 40 agitating farmers unions, cannot be faulted for rejecting the government's offer to suspend the laws and discuss them "clause by clause" for many reasons. First, such an offer has no legal backing. A bill, passed by Parliament and signed into law by the President, cannot be kept in abeyance by the government. There has been no legal mechanism to ensure the laws are not acted upon, except that the government may delay the framing of the rules, but that cannot be a legitimate route a government can take while negotiating on critical laws that have serious ramifications for the future.

**Talks are unlikely to reach a conclusion if the government goes into them with the stand that all is well with the laws**

The government, as Mr Tomar has stated, has been insisting that the laws are for the good of the farmers and the agriculture sector. The farmers, on the other hand, fear that it's a bogey the government advances and that it would, ultimately, want to withdraw from the sector and throw them at the mercy of the corporates. The government can either say the laws are good or they are bad; and it has said they are good. It is up to the government to explain what it seeks to gain by sticking to its stand and then offering negotiation, at a juncture when the Supreme Court has stayed the operation of the laws. Second, the farmers cannot be faulted for not taking the bait of clause-by-clause discussions as the government had failed to follow the regular, democratic law-making process in this case. It was in an unholy haste to rush them through the legislature.

The government agreed to the discussion only after the farmers showed their grit at the gates of the national capital. If the government understands only the language of power, then the farmers need to continue to talk that. The government may be concerned about the elderly farmers suffering in the extremely cold weather of Delhi; but for them, it's a do-or-die struggle, and they may be willing to pay the price for it.

The government has of late allowed the proposed tractor rally by the farmers' unions on Republic Day. The government must show the same spirit of accommodation and seriousness of purpose while sitting with the farmers next time. It's unlikely to reach a conclusion if the government goes into the talks with the stand that all is well with the laws.

## Heed General on arms buys

Last week, Army chief Gen. M.M. Naravane did well to highlight in the public sphere the hidebound, time-consuming, procedures for defence acquisitions that impact our military capabilities and preparedness, especially in relation to potential adversaries who are able to absorb innovations in military technologies more speedily.

If our armed forces are working for a revolution in military affairs (RMA), it is inescapable that we also bring about a revolution in bureaucratic affairs (RBA), General Naravane aptly pointed out. It seems plain common sense to us that RMA — which the major powers have already brought about, and is an area in which India lags behind — cannot be achieved without RBA taking place. It is a rude awakening to hear from the country's military leader that while the Defence Procurement Procedure 2016 was 450 pages, the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 is 681 pages. It's got worse, rather than better. This is surely a travesty. The Army chief quotes the late defence minister Manohar Parrikar as saying that the system and procedures of military procurement is built on "distrust" — or, should we say, mistrust. The premium is on the detailed crafting of bureaucratic rules that attempt to take in every future infraction of procedure, and not on the quick availability of a much-needed equipment or defence system. In a word, the idea is to catch the thief, as it were. This is pathetic.

The whole system still appears to be paying the price for the then Opposition crying foul over the procurement of Bofors artillery guns with the purpose of bringing down the Rajiv Gandhi government. As we know since then the successive governments have not been able to establish corruption on the part of the then PM.

We must move on if we are to grow as a credible regional power, leave alone international power. The way things are, any mid-way course-correction in acquisition or introducing of a newly available useful technology requires the whole Quality Requirement procedures to start all over again. Sometimes more than a decade passes. By then what has been got at great cost is already antiquated.

Gen. Naravane is right. There must be built-in flexibility clauses for the end user (our armed forces) as well as the manufacturer. Similarly, overhaul of procurement procedures are needed in the civilian domain to gain efficiency and cut delays.

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Subhani



## Trump to Biden: Modi's US ties in need of reset



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Ending his much-acclaimed address to a joint session of both Houses of the American Congress in July 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, to rapturous applause: "Partnerships can be of two kinds. There are partnerships based on principle and there are partnerships based on pragmatism. I believe we are at a juncture where we can embark on a partnership that can draw both on principle as well as pragmatism. We must build on this opportunity."

The India-US relationship has waxed and waned depending on how this mix between values, defined by principles, and interests, based on pragmatism, has worked out. As a new administration with a very different and well-defined ideological orientation takes charge in Washington D.C., diplomats and observers in both countries will wait to see what kind of a balance would be struck between the two considerations in taking the India-US relationship forward.

For a long time, when leaders of both countries met, they could only speak about their shared democratic values because their interests were so wide apart. The simultaneous occurrence in 1991 of India's economic opening up and the end of the Cold War added the ballast of shared interests to the relationship. India's desire to secure new markets, new technologies and foreign investment as well as its need to diversify the country's sourcing of defence equipment and bolster its national security, at a time when China was rising and jihadi terrorism had come closer home, created a powerful and potent mix of values and interests.

Long-term and durable bilateral relations between

flesh on the trade and market access side.

What now with the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris duo? Clearly, their values are very different from Mr Trump's, and in a world where domestic politics increasingly influences foreign policy no country can ignore the influence of these "new values" at home on US foreign policy. At the same time, given the domestic economic pressures and promises made, Mr Biden may well not be able to ease up on the demands being made on India on the trade and economic side.

Consider then the emerging balance between principles and pragmatism — the "principles" dear to the new Democratic administration in the US may favour Mr Modi's India less than the principles that defined Mr Trump's attitude; and domestic policy pragmatism may require Mr Biden to stay the course on the economic demands the United States has been making on India.

On the Indian side, Mr Modi has weakened India's global standing as a multicultural, pluralistic, liberal and secular democracy, especially in his second term in office, while at the same time pursuing insular trade policies that raise hackles in Washington D.C. How Mr Modi intends to redefine and rework his approach to the new America of Mr Biden and Ms Harris remains to be seen.

The fact that vice-president Kamala Devi Harris is partly of Indian origin and that several Indian Americans have been nominated to serve the

**Mr Modi has weakened India's global standing as a multicultural, pluralistic, liberal and secular democracy, especially in his second term in office, while at the same time pursuing insular trade policies that raise hackles in Washington D.C**

Biden administration is no guarantee of a smooth ride for India in the US capital. While the interest groups that lobby for good relations between India and the US may have better access to the Biden-Harris team, the team itself may have many whose values clash with the BJP's majoritarianism. Listen carefully to Mr Biden's speech.

In the past it used to be assumed all too easily that Indian Americans are India's diplomatic asset. Indeed, they were. Their role in ensuring congressional support for the India-US civil nuclear agreement cannot be underestimated. Prime Minister Modi's rallies in New York and Houston, attended by enthusiastic Indian Americans, also helped Indian diplomats build bridges with Mr Trump's people. However, those Indian Americans lost out in this election. The Indian Americans now in office are the ones who may well have disliked external affairs minister S. Jaishankar refusing to meet US Congresswoman Premila Jayapal and her delegation, or his quoting Donald Trump approvingly in his book.

Among senior Biden administration officials there are many from the Obama administration who know India and Indians well, including the new CIA director William Burns and the pointman for Asia, Kurt Campbell. They may well wish to strengthen relations with India. It remains to be seen if their diplomatic "pragmatism" in the pursuit of "interests", is able to score over the assertion of "principle" by those who seek to defend the liberal, democratic "values" of the Democratic Party. Clearly, Prime Minister Modi will have to undertake some reset in his domestic politics and policies to ensure that he gets as warm a reception in Joe Biden's America as he did in Donald Trump's.

*The writer is an economist, a former newspaper editor, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh*

### LETTERS

#### PETROL PRICES

Petrol and diesel prices are hiked every now and then in spite of public protests. Now, it has reached all-time high. As most commodities are transported, the impact of price hike will reflect on commodities. The Centre does not care.

K.L. Rao

Visakhapatnam

#### GP ELECTIONS

With regard to gram panchayat polls, it is a bizarre situation in AP (*SEC notifies GP polls, phase-1 on Feb. 5, DC, Jan. 24*). Since the ruling party and SEC are at loggerheads, the situation has exacerbated. However, it calls for coordination and a 'give-and-take' policy to make the election possible. Ironically, both are affirming that they are doing this for the governance and in the interest of people.

Dr C. Ghanshyam

Visakhapatnam

The gamut of GP polls is getting murkier in spite of a pending SC verdict. The state government's contention of postponing them on the grounds of safety of staff and voters as well as the ongoing vaccination since 16/1, seems valid.

K. Nehru Patnaik

Visakhapatnam

#### STRANGE DEMAND

The eve of elections brings out the maverick in our politicians without an exception (*India should have 4 capitals: Mamata, DC, Jan. 24*). The free spirits in them come out alive as they make strange statements. Unfortunately, our people are also sentimentally 'attuned' to this kind of electioneering, which should change for good.

Govardhana Myneedu

Vijayawada

### 50 YEARS AGO IN

## DECCAN Chronicle

#### UGC may set up 'open varsity'

HYDERABAD, January. 24 Dr. D.S. Kothari, chairman of the UGC today called for "linking education to the community" and disclosed that the Commission was giving "loud thinking" to the establishment of an "open university" as in the United Kingdom.

Such an "open University", Dr. Kothari said, would admit persons above the age of 25 without any rigid formal education so that an individual with motivation and desire for higher education would have the opportunity to enter a university.

Chandrajit Banerjee



## Reviving growth: Govt needs to do a fine balance in Budget on Feb. 1

With economic activity resuming and the vaccine becoming a reality, the challenge of lives versus livelihoods is largely addressed. The next big challenge facing the government is getting growth back.

The government has been fiscally prudent in its Covid interventions, with support to industry coming in the form of loan guarantees and reform measures. However, as private consumption, investments and exports remain sluggish, the burden to nurture the unexpected but buoyant recovery falls primarily on public expenditure, at least in the immediate term.

Government spending in areas with high multipliers is important for demand creation, employment generation and catalysing private investments. The RBI estimates the Central government capex has a multiplier effect of 2.45 in the year the expenditure is incurred and 3.14 next year. This shows a hike in capital expenditure by the government crowds in higher private investments benefitting the economy in the next few years. Private investments have been slow even before the pandemic, and this boost can get them back on track. Higher investments, public and private, will lead to

employment generation, boosting consumer demand and savings.

The virtuous cycle of public expenditure, demand generation, private investment and employment generation can put the economy back onto a high growth trajectory.

However, the fiscal situation is now under stress driven by a shortfall in revenue collections due to a fall in GDP induced by the Covid-19 crisis, constraining higher public spending.

Supporting economic recovery and growth via greater public expenditure as well as ensuring prudent fiscal management to safeguard macro-economic stability is an immediate concern the Budget must address.

CII suggests a seven-point agenda.

One, prioritise public investment in infrastructure and health. Infrastructure has one of the highest multiplier effects on the economy and boosts long-term competitiveness. Therefore, the government must hike its infrastructure spend by one per cent of GDP, including higher allocations for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

The pandemic highlighted the importance and need for a robust public health infrastructure. India should look at increasing its public health

expenditure to three per cent of GDP by 2025.

Two, the government should look at fiscal deficit management from a three-year perspective. The deficit target for next year should be realistic.

Three, the government should ensure greater transparency in the deficit numbers, inspiring confidence in markets, rating agencies and investors. This implies realistic revenue projections, avoiding off-Budget borrowings, realistic estimation of costs of schemes and accounting fully for borrowing for food subsidy. Last year's Budget listed off-Budget expenditures and their financing as an annexure. This year it should build on this positive step.

Four, given the uncertainties set a range-bound deficit target, instead of pursuing a single number, as was recommended by the economic advisory panel of the 15th Finance Commission.

Five, adopt a suitable Fiscal Performance Index framework to capture both the quantum and quality of the deficit. Higher expenditure on areas like infrastructure, healthcare, education and sustainability boosts the economy's productivity and efficiency, leading to higher growth, which helps pay for itself in the long run.

CII wants a composite Fiscal Perfor-

mance Index with six components: (i) Quality of revenue expenditure: measured by the share of revenue expenditure other than interest payments, subsidies, pensions and defence in GDP; (ii) Quality of capital expenditure: measured by share of capital expenditure (other than defence) in GDP; (iii) Quality of revenue: ratio of net tax revenue to GDP (own tax revenue in case of states); (iv) Degree of fiscal prudence I: ratio of fiscal deficit to GDP; (v) Degree of fiscal prudence II: ratio of revenue deficit to GDP; and (vi) Debt index: Change in debt and guarantees to GDP.

Six, the government should look at raising revenues through non-tax measures. It should look at aggressive disinvestment, taking advantage of booming capital markets. The disinvestment plan should include both loss-making and profit-making PSUs. To get better valuations, that is often a concern, the government could announce a list of PSUs where it plans to bring down its holdings below 51 per cent. The positive market sentiment this creates may lead to higher interest and valuations.

Monetisation of assets of the government and public sector enterprises, like surplus land and buildings, profitable brownfield assets like roads, transmission lines, airports, power

plants, etc, could be another source of significant revenue. State governments should also be encouraged to do so.

The proceeds should be ring-fenced for creating health infrastructure and other physical infrastructure in both urban and rural areas.

Seven, further rationalise subsidies and non-productive expenditure. Some of the measures that can help achieve this objective include: pursue Aadhaar-enabled direct benefit transfer (DBT) for food and agri-input subsidy. A policy of giving subsidised kerosene and LPG through DBT only to BPL families should also be explored.

The term for extension of the urea subsidy, given by the CCEA, will come to an end in 2020. The government should use this opportunity to carry out urea price decontrol and rationalise the fertiliser subsidy based on soil health card scheme data.

Savings can accrue from rationalisation of power subsidies. For the deserving, the subsidy could be provided through direct benefit transfer. This will also reduce the cost of power for industrial users, helping Indian manufacturing become more competitive.

*The writer is the director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry*



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,878.54	-1.50
Nifty 50	14,371.90	-1.50
S&P 500*	3,841.47	-0.30
Dollar (₹)	72.97	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.67	0.57
Euro (₹)	88.79	-0.16
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,861*263	0.53
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.64	-0.82
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.939	-0.29
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.094	-0.013

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Reliance spins off O2C business into new unit

Reliance Industries Ltd has completed spin-off of the firm's oil-to-chemical (O2C) business into a new unit that will help it pursue growth opportunities with strategic partnerships, RIL has said. The O2C business unit holds Reliance's oil refinery and petrochemical assets and retail fuel business but not upstream oil and gas producing fields such as KG-D6 and textiles business.

## FPIs invest over ₹24,400 crore in stocks this month



Foreign portfolio investors (FPI) remained net buyers to the tune of Rs 18,456 crore so far in January as global liquidity led to continued investment in emerging markets. According to depositories data, overseas investors pumped in Rs 24,469 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 6,013 crore from the bonds market during January 1-22. The total net investment during the period stood at Rs 18,456 crore.

## NCLT admits Devas Multimedia, names liquidator

The National Company Law Tribunal has admitted the petition filed by Antrix Corporation, the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation, for winding up Devas Multimedia and has appointed a provisional liquidator for the firm. A two-member NCLT Bengaluru bench of the NCLT has directed the provisional liquidator to take control of the management, properties and actionable claims of Devas Multimedia.

## NIIF invest less than ₹5,000 crore in five years

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) in its five years of existence has made equity investments of less than Rs 5,000 crore in infra projects, sources said. The Rs 40,000-crore NIIF was set up in Dec. 2015 for investing in greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects. NIIF has made an equity investment of Rs 4,689 crore while the co-investment by its partners stood at about Rs 7,053 crore by Sept.



## Lockdown reverses trends in space demand Apartment size expands as office space shrinks

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 24

Bucking a four-year declining trend, average apartment sizes grew by 10 per cent in Covid-hit 2020 while office spaces have started shrinking. A major contributor to this trend reversal is the new work from home (WFH) culture.

The average apartment sizes in the top seven cities rose by 10 per cent to 1150 sq. ft. in 2020 from 1050 sq. ft. in 2019.

Last year, space-starved Mumbai saw the highest, 21 per cent, increase in apartment sizes to 932 sq ft from 773 sq ft in the previous year.

Among the big seven cities, Hyderabad has the largest average apartment size of 1750 sq ft, says an update from Anarock Property Consultants.

The average apartment sizes have been reducing since 2016. In 2016 it was 1440 sq ft and by 2017 it had declined 13 per cent to 1260 sq ft.

"The two main reasons



for apartment sizes reducing in previous years were affordability and millennials' preference for low-maintenance homes. Keen to generate more buyer interest with smaller price-tags, developers whittled down their flat sizes. But 2020 saw an almost immediate reversal of buyer preferences. With the accent suddenly being on accommodating the WFH and learn-from-home culture, flat sizes began increasing for the first time in four years,"

said Anuj Puri, chairman, Anarock Property Consultants.

The same work from home (WFH) culture saw the average size of office space shrinking in 2020. According to Nobroker.com, companies are choosing smaller office spaces now compared to pre-Covid times as many of them have adopted WFH as an option for at least a part of their employees.

Start-ups, IT companies and financial services

have freed up office space during the lockdown and are looking to work out a hybrid model in the future where work-from-office would be on a rotational basis for the employees. About 30-40 per cent of the companies, mainly driven by start-ups, IT and financial services companies, have let go of their leased office spaces either partially or completely post-lock-down.

This led to a drastic fall in demand for office space, especially larger sapce.

"While we have witnessed the overall office demand fall by about 50 per cent during the November-January period compared to the same period a year ago, the demand for office spaces which are lesser than 5000 sq ft is witnessing a less severe decline in demand," said Amit Agarwal, co-founder and CEO of NoBroker.com

Demand for small office space has fallen only by about 25 per cent during the same months.

## Separate cheques for vehicle, insurance likely

**New Delhi, Jan. 24:** Buyer of a new vehicle may have to pay the cost of vehicle and insurance premium through separate cheques, if the recommendations of a committee to review MISP guidelines are accepted by the Irdai.

The insurance regulator had issued Motor Insurance Service Provider (MISP) guidelines in 2017

with the intention of streamlining the process and bringing the practices of vehicle insurance, being sold by automotive dealers.

MISP refers to an automobile dealer appointed by the insurer or the insurance intermediary to distribute and/or service motor insurance policies of vehicles sold through it.

In June 2019, the Irdai

had set up a committee to review the MISP guidelines. The panel examined the current practice of collecting the premium payment from the customer. It observed a lack of transparency in the cost of insurance premium when the customer buys the vehicle through the dealer and makes the payment via a single cheque.

As the MISP makes payment to the insurance company from his own account, "the customer does not know the insurance premium being paid as it is subsumed in the cost of the vehicle", the committee said.

The panel recommended the customer should make payment to the insurance company directly. —PTI

## Q3 SEES 19 IPOs WORTH \$1.84 BN, SAYS EY REPORT

**New Delhi, Jan. 24:** Reflecting strong momentum, India witnessed 19 initial public offerings (IPOs) worth \$1.84 billion in the December quarter of 2020 and the market sentiment remains positive in what could be a stellar 2021, according to a report.

There were 10 IPOs in the main market and nine in the small and medium enterprises (SME) segment during this period.

There were 19 IPOs valued at \$1.836 billion and the largest was that of Gland Pharma's with an issue size of \$869 million. There were just 11 IPOs in the year-ago quarter.

India ranks ninth globally in terms of the number of IPOs in 2020 with 43 IPOs raising \$4.09 billion, as per the report by EY.

Real estate, hospitality and construction and diversified industrial products were the most active sectors in terms of the number of IPOs, with three IPOs launched in each sector (including main and SME markets), the report said.

It said in 2020, global IPO volumes continued to accelerate, increasing by 19 per cent to 1,363 while proceeds rose 29 per cent YoY to \$268 billion. — PTI

## Diamond trade roaring back from WFH shoppers

THOMAS BIESHEUVEL &amp; YULIYA FEDORINOVA JAN. 24

The global diamond trade spent years in the doldrums, only to be crippled by the pandemic just as things started looking up. Now, at last, business is booming again.

Factories in the industry's "engine room"—the Indian city of Surat—are so desperate to boost production that the most-skilled cutters and polishers are being headhunted with offers of 50 per cent pay hikes and perks like free food and housing. Miner De Beers is poised for its biggest rough-diamond sale in three years, even after raising prices, and rival Alrosa PJSC said last week it expects the recovery will keep going for some time.

The boom is being driven by bumper holiday jewellery sales, particularly in the vital US and Chinese markets. For years, diamonds faced growing competition from travel as a form of luxury spending. Now, with vacations on hold due to lockdowns and other restrictions, consumers are putting their disposable income into online purchases.

"People have not only learned to work remotely, but also buy online, including diamonds," Alrosa chief of sales Evgeny Agureev said in an interview. "Money was previously spent on trips or on dinners at expensive restaurants, but now part of this demand has gone to diamonds. Online sales almost doubled last year to about 20 per cent of the total."

The sales boost is feeding

through to surging demand for polished diamonds, at a time when stocks held by factories and traders had shrunk dramatically following the initial Covid-19 lockdowns.

But for an industry long familiar with dramatic booms and busts, it's unclear whether the rebound will take hold, or represents only a temporary respite. Some industry participants are also concerned that the market is running too hot, risking a slump later in the year.

Annual diamond jewellery demand had been stagnant at about \$80 billion for the past five years and the sector's middlemen were struggling to turn a profit. As global vaccines roll out and other luxury purchases become viable again, there's a risk that the industry finds itself facing the same old challenges as before.

For now, money is pouring in. Signet Jewellers Ltd reported a 7.8 per cent jump in holiday sales in North America, by far the industry's biggest market. The jeweller's online sales surged in the period. It was a similar story in China, the second-biggest market, where Chow Tai Fook reported an 18 per cent rise in quarterly sales.

India, where about 90 per cent of diamonds are cut or polished, imported almost \$2 billion in rough diamonds last month as cutters and polishers raced to meet the increased demand and restock their inventories.

De Beers and Alrosa have both responded by raising prices, seeking to recover some of the ground they lost last year when demand



collapsed.

But while De Beers implemented an increase of about 5 per cent in its first sale of the year last week, customers are still buying. The sale hasn't yet been finalised, but the miner was on course for its biggest rough-diamond auction in three years—at about \$600 million—according to people familiar with the situation.

Still, the first sales of the year are the traditionally the busiest, when the industry's middlemen rush to restock. If sales slow later in the year, prices could come

under pressure again.

The risks of a short-lived revival are compounded by the billions of dollars of rough diamond stocks held by the two big miners. So far, they've resisted the temptation to start offloading the inventories.

"There's a dilemma for the miners. If they choose not to sell, they lose out on monetising stock, but if they sell too much they risk over-saturating the market," said Anish Aggarwal, a partner at specialist diamond advisory firm Gemdax. "If they get this right, there will be support for prices."

At the moment, the middlemen who cut, polish and trade the world's diamonds are making money. In the so-called secondary market—where buyers sell to gem manufacturers who don't have direct access to De Beers or Alrosa—boxes have been changing hands at premiums above 5 per cent, and some in double digits, even after the price rise. That suggests manufacturers believe they can make a profit at current prices.

Rough diamond prices generally have recovered back to pre-pandemic levels, while polished prices are slightly higher. That's good news for mostly small and private family-run businesses that cut, polish and trade the stones.

"So long as midstream stocks don't get saturated, margins can be defended," said Aggarwal. "All industry stakeholders—miners, midstream and retailers—will need to work in a measured way to enable this to continue."

—Bloomberg

## Chip shortage: VW may claim damages from supplier Bosch



**Berlin, Jan. 24:** German car manufacturer Volkswagen is looking into possible claims for damages against its suppliers Bosch and Continental due to a lack of semiconductors, Automobilwoche magazine reported on Sunday.

Automakers around the world are shutting assembly lines due to problems in the delivery of semiconductors, which in some cases have been exacerbated by the former Trump administration's actions against key Chinese chip factories.

The shortage has affected Volkswagen, Ford Motor Co, Subaru Corp, Toyota Motor Corp, Nissan Motor Co Ltd, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and other car makers.

Citing people familiar with the matter, Automobilwoche reported that Volkswagen was in talks with alternative suppliers of semiconductors but there were concerns this could lead to higher prices.

Volkswagen wants to make sure that both Bosch and Continental share the burden and partly compensate the company for the resulting additional costs, the magazine reported.

Contacted by Reuters, a Volkswagen spokesman declined to comment, and Bosch and Continental did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The magazine cited Bosch company sources which said the car supplier was ready to discuss the matter directly with its customers and suppliers in due course.

German economy minister Peter Altmaier has asked his Taiwanese counterpart Wang Meihua to persuade Taiwanese manufacturers to help ease the shortage of semiconductor chips, which is hampering its fledgling economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Altmaier asked Wang to address the issue in talks with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd (TSMC), the world's largest contract chipmaker and one of Germany's main suppliers.

—Reuters

## Cancelled Keystone XL pipeline may yield 48,000 tonnes of scrap



JOE DEAUX JAN. 24

The scrapping of Keystone XL not only means the end of multi-billion-dollar pipe dream for TC Energy Corp—it also leaves behind 48,000 tonnes of steel.

US President Joe Biden revoked permits for the oil pipeline on his first day in office, killing a cross-border project that had won a four-year reprieve under his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump. The pipeline would have spanned almost 1,900 kilometres. TC Energy anticipated needing about 660,000 tonnes of steel just for the US portion.

About 150 km of pipe had been installed and an additional 2.2 km had been completed at the Canada-US border as of the end of 2020, the Canada Energy Regulator said in a January 22 email. That would amount to nearly 48,000 tonnes of steel, assuming standard dimensions of line pipe, according to Bloomberg calculations based on industry criteria.

The benchmark steel price is about \$1,060 a tonne, which would value the haul at almost \$51 million—though as scrap it would be sold for less. Once sold, the scrap metal is remelted by the buyer and formed into new steel products.

TC Energy may have to sell already delivered metal to secondary markets. —Bloomberg

### DESTINY'S | DESIGNS

### Police found that nearly 90 DC Avantis were used for fraudulent financing

## Dilip Chhabria: From high-flying auto designer to jailbird

K.J. BENNYCHAN MUMBAI, JAN. 24

It's an irony that what was supposed to be a big leap 'forward' for Dilip Chhabria, the only supercarmaker who built the country's first real sports car DC Avanti, has turned out to be his nemesis.

Chhabria, the founder of DC Designs, was arrested by the Mumbai police on December 28, 2020 allegedly for cheating and defrauding car buyers and financiers, and the man who changed the face of automobile design in this part of the world since the early 1990s is now lan-

guishing in a city jail.

But the final blow to what was his biggest, boldest dream was when a DC Avanti customer from Tamil Nadu claimed to have found his prized possession already registered in someone else's name in Haryana and was also hypothecated twice.

This happened soon after the comedian Kapil Sharma moved the economic offences wing of the city police complaining that despite paying full amount for a vanity van long ago, Chhabria did not deliver the van.

According to the joint police commissioner

(crime) Milind Bharambe, the police have found that nearly 90 DC Avantis were used for fraudulent financing by availing multiple loans on the same car and they peg the scam at around Rs 100 crore. The police have also found that most of these 90 vehicles were registered with two or at times three RTOs in various states.

Avanti in Italian means 'forward' and launching DC Avanti was meant to be his fast forward move. But fate had it differently.

The car, billed as the first Indian sports car, was unveiled by Amitabh Bachchan at the 2012 Auto



Dilip Chhabria

Expo in New Delhi and it hit the road in 2015 after being in the making from 2008.

Though the car had adequate ground clearance compared to the Italian namesake and had a killer pricing at just about Rs 42 lakh, it failed on many grounds in performance

and this had sales not picking up as expected. All he could manage was to sell 120-odd cars.

Chhabria set up DC Designs way back in 1993, bringing a whiff of fresh air after securing a degree from the Art Centre College of Design in Pasadena in California, the Mecca of auto design, to offer design and prototype services to auto firms and customers. His timing was so perfect as he launched himself into what was then an unknown territory called automobile designing in a market that had no choice except a Maruti, Premier

Padmini and Ambassador.

One of his initial successes was his modification on a Maruti Gypsy which he christened as BTS (Better than Sex), earning him wide publicity and making him the go-to guy for auto design.

Soon Chhabria was going places and he made personal history—in January 2003, the stunning prototype of the V8 Vantage he developed for the British supercar maker Aston Martin was on display at the Detroit Motor Show!

But all that is history and a new history is being made in the jail today. —PTI



# Down under, offie rises from the Ash-es

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC  
CHENNAI, JAN. 24

R. Ashwin would not have featured in the first Test against Australia at Adelaide if Ravindra Jadeja had been available. Ashwin himself knew that. And that's why it felt like starting all over again for the off-spinner who has been constantly put under the microscope despite proving his worth time and again.

Apart from taking 12 wickets — he dismissed big fish Steve Smith thrice — in three Tests, Ashwin scored a gritty unbeaten 39 to save the Sydney Test. In a chat on Sunday, Ashwin spoke about the importance of his Sydney knock and how he has been subjected to unfair comparisons with other spinners. Excerpts:

**Is this the best that you have bowled in Australia?** Looking back, you can say that but I think this is just another dimension of cricket that I'm seeing myself in. It didn't look like I was going to start the series in all honesty but Jadeja damaged his hamstring and that is how I got an opportunity in the first Test. Yes, 2018-19 was good, but I think 2020-21 was one of the best if you compare the last three years.

Before each Test, I sat and

watched match videos for eight hours on the bounce. I made my own plans about where the fielders should be. For example, how Tim Paine got out in Melbourne came from what happened in Adelaide with the short-leg fielder and where the ball might go. So these are orchestrated moves and thanks to the freedom the team management gave me in how I should be working it.

**On his back injury:** It (back injury) was looking good for the fourth Test in Brisbane and looked like I would play. But there was some unfortunate turn of events. Even the swimming pool access was cut. The pool is an important activity in the recovery process. Then we had to do a plunge pool activity but it is not the same. The physio also felt if the recovery process was in place, there was a good chance I could play. It was a freakish injury. By day three or four, I was alright to bowl. After that 1-1 draw, things took a U-turn. The way things happened in Sydney and Brisbane, we had to quarantine. Sometimes it was questionable.

There was insensitivity around people commenting on why we were complaining. The rules were not such.

**On the importance of his**



R. Ashwin

**Sydney knock:** There have been questions raised over my batting since that West Indies tour. But another thing that needs to go into consideration is I was an all-format player and sometimes the roles of people playing Test cricket alone don't really sit down well or people don't quite make an effort to understand how it works. I feel ever since that particular thing where I've just been playing Test cricket, it's pretty much a one game here or there and I'm constantly fighting with someone else for the lone spinner spot. And if I have to be judged purely on my batting skills and batting averages, then I think a decision based on an innings or two alone to drop me out of a particular series wasn't

quite justified. I am looking to fight for my place and when I'm doing that I need to emphasise on my primary skill which is to pick up wickets, which I think over the last two years in South Africa, England or Australia, I have done justice to.

**Despite being on the international stage for more than a decade, why do you feel that you have to prove yourself in every game?** I have had some wonderful interactions with batting coach Vikram Rathour (a former selector) throughout this series. He told me that they were looking to leave me out after the England series in 2011-12. He said, 'We didn't quite think that you were bowling well'. But I made close to 400 runs in that series and picked up 14-15 wickets. It's a battle that I have always fought. It's not new territory for me.

Whenever I was pitted against another off-spinner, the series has turned out well for me. From 2013 to 2015, I was competing with Harbhajan who had made a comeback. In 2015-16, it was Jayant Yadav. For me, competition has always got the best out of me. I feel whatever I have left ahead of me will also be along these lines. So I have decided to play every Test like it's my first.

If I can't be excellent, I should just move on.

**On comparisons with Nathan Lyon and the duel with Smith:** There has been a lot of noise about how I am bowling, and constant references to someone like Nathan Lyon. During the previous tour in Adelaide, I picked up six wickets and kept on bowling despite a tear in the abdomen. After the match, there were comparisons between us. I felt it was extremely insensitive after a good performance. That was the lowest I ever felt in my life. I feel I have been constantly put under the microscope. I did take it personally. So rather than me competing against Lyon, I thought I must be competing against Smith.

Lyon is a lovely bowler and I have respect for him. But my focus was on something else. There were records that Smith had never got out to spinners in Australia. I wanted to turn that around. I am entitled to think I am, probably, the best in the world. I wanted to think along those lines. I thought 'who is the best in the series?' I can't compete with Virat Kohli so I decided to compete against Smith. A lot of people were talking about who will dismiss Smith. But, nobody even gave me a chance. Then, I

made sure that people spoke about me at the end of the series.

**Now, there will be comparisons with Washington Sundar...**

Honestly, I have always said it is irrelevant who walks alongside me into the ground. When I walk into the next Test, I will be looking at Burns, Sibley, Crawley, Root. Why would I worry about someone who is going to stand beside me because for all you know I'm walking with a guy who is going to help me over the next five days and he has to do his job and I have to do mine. These are insignificant things.

**Is there a tinge of disappointment that you were not considered for the vice-captaincy role when Rahane took over from Kohli?**

I am not disappointed and it's irrelevant to me. I go out there and make my own plans and get the fields that I want. The captains and vice-captains that I have played with have been very supportive of whatever I have wanted. Leadership is just leading yourself and keeping your space upbeat for any situation that arises. If you can help another teammate, that's also leadership, so it really doesn't matter.



Sai Sandhipa

## Sandhipa scores a century

Hyderabad, Jan. 24: Sai Sandhipa scored a century in the Hyderabad Cricket Association's A-2 Division league matches played on Sunday.

Opener Sandhipa made 112 in 222 balls and hit 12 boundaries for Time CC but could not prevent his side from losing by 66 runs to International CC, who had made 307.

**Brief scores:**

**A-2 DIVISION (TWO-DAY)**

**Day-2:**  
■ International CC 307 in 76.5 overs bt Time CC 241/7 in 90 overs (Sai Sandhipa 112 — 222b, 12x4).  
**Points:** International 5, Time 0.  
■ New Star CC 257 in 77.2 overs bt Tirumala CC 114 in 50.5 overs (Deepak Nayak 3/23, Yasir Arafat 3/31). **Points:** New Star 5, Tirumala 0.

## Record sailors sign for R-Day regatta

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JAN. 24

The Republic Day Regatta at Hussain Sagar this year will have an unprecedented 114 entries as it kicks off the sailing calendar of India.

This is the largest ever fleet of Optimist Class boats to sail in the Hussain Sagar and those passing by can witness them bobbing around like colourful flowers bringing the lake to life with kids upwards of 8 years to 18, battling for medals and trophies.

With 90 entries in the Sub-Junior Optimist Class and 24 in the Junior Laser Class the entries this year have come from all across the state.

In the under-18 Junior Class, to be sailed in the Laser 4.7 with 27 entries Nitin Nayak from MJPT School, who is the current

Telangana State Champion is the favourite closely followed by Lakshmi Nookarathnam of Udbhav and Gaddam Mallesh also of MJPT.

In the Sub Junior Optimist Class India No.1 Jhansi Priya Laveti will sail closely followed at second seed by Vaishnavi Veeravamsham and third seed Ravali Parandi all of Udbhav School at Rasoolpura but the field is wide open and one never knows what dark horses the light and fluky wind conditions will produce.

The weather has suddenly dropped to conditions that will favour the lighter sailors with winds hovering around just 5 to 9 knots but superb conditions for a lions share of the fleet that has almost 60 beginners who have been trained across in four months.



Action from the final day of the 23rd JK Tyre FMSCI National Racing Championship in Coimbatore on Sunday.

## Sandeep, Amir on top in JK Racing

Coimbatore, Jan. 24: Chennai's Sandeep Kumar and Amir Sayed from Kottayam emerged champions in the Formula LGB 4 and Novice Cup category respectively in the 23rd JK Tyre-FMSCI National Racing Championship here on Sunday.

At the Kari Motor Speedway, the final day provided plenty of sparks as the Formula LGB 4 championship went down to the wire till the last lap of the last race. It was heartbreak for Ashwin Datta, who led overnight in the Formula LGB 4 category with 63 points.

Sandeep's experience and ice cool nerves stood him in good stead as he finished fifth in the last race. He totalled 66 points to seal the Formula LGB 4 championship.

Ashwin finished with 63 points, as per provisional standings. Vishnu Prasad was third with 54 points.

Tween sensation Amir Sayed crowned himself in glory in the Novice Cup category.

### THE RESULTS

#### Formula LGB 4

**Race 4 (14 laps):** 1. Mohamed Ryan (MSport) 20:21.929, 2. Vishnu Prasad (MSport)

20:23.545, 3. Arya Singh (Dark Don Racing) 20:25.170.  
**Race 5 (15 laps):** 1. Dilijith TS (Dark Don Racing) 23:58.426, 2. Sandeep Kumar A. (Dark Don Racing) 23:58.890, 3. Sarosh Hataria (Ahura Racing) 23:59.793.

**Race 6 (15 laps):** 1. Vishnu Prasad (MSport) 21:01.907, 2. Mohamed Ryan (MSport) 21:07.490, 3. Sarish Hatarai (Ahura Racing) 21:14.292.

#### JK Tyre Novice Cup

**Race 5 (10 laps):** 1. Amir Sayed (MSport) 14:17.157, 2. Chetan Surineni (Momentum Motorsports) 14:31.672, 3. Aman Chaudhary (DTS Racing) 14:32.509.

**Race 6 (10 laps):** 1. Amir Sayed (MSport) 16:34.084, 2. Chetan Surineni (Momentum Motorsports) 16:56.452, 3. Neym Rizvi (MSport) 17:01.933.

#### OVERALL CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS

##### LGB Formula 4

**Champion:** Sandeep Kumar (Dark Don Racing) 66 points.  
**First Runner-Up:** Ashwin Datta (Dark Don Racing) 63 points.  
**Second Runner-Up:** Vishnu Prasad (MSport) 54 points.

##### Novice Cup

**Champion:** Amir Sayed (MSport) 120 points.  
**First Runner-Up:** Dhruvin Gajjar (DTS Racing) 49 points.  
**Second Runner-Up:** Aman Chaudhary (DTS Racing) 46 points.

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