


# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SATURDAY | 16 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 32.0°C  
Min: 20.0°C  
RH: 73%  
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.  
Max/Min temp.  
32/20 °C

COVID-19  
COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+39,212)

(+415)

1,05,41,760

1,52,086

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+202)

(+2)

TS: 2,91,118

1,574

(+94)

(+1)

AP: 8,85,710

7,139

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,38,61,080

DEATHS

20,09,441

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/  
coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana  
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Tadiya till  
7.47 am  
Star: Satabhisham till 6.09 am  
(Sunday)  
Varjyam: 12.44 pm to 2.23 pm  
Durmuhurtam: 6.53 am to 8.22 am  
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am  
HIJRI CALENDAR  
Jamadi-ul-Akhir 2,1442 AH  
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)  
Fajar: 5.40 am  
Zohar: 1.30 pm  
Asar: 4.30 pm  
Maghrib: 5.48 pm  
Isha: 8.30 pm  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.35 AM  
SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM  
MOONRISE TODAY 9.05 AM  
MOONSET TOMORROW 9.43 PM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

Kamal Morarka passes away

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



Kamal Morarka

Report on Page 4



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**TMC MP cancels meeting with Shah**



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**Joe Biden announces \$1.9 trillion relief**

**SPORTS | 8**  
**Natarajan makes an impressive debut**



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## Army's drone attack prowess



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

— PTI

## AP slams Centre port 'snatch'

### Resists move to control even minor ports from the states

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 15**

Andhra Pradesh has strongly opposed the Centre's move to snatch control of even minor ports from the states through the proposed Indian Ports Bill, 2020. Describing the Bill — that can decide which minor port should remain operational and which has to be shut down — as blot on the federal spirit, the state government has dashed off a letter to the Centre asking the latter to convene a meeting with all the maritime states before proceeding further on the proposed legislation.

Andhra Pradesh's objections come close on the

heels of the Gujarat Maritime Board (GMB), the oldest autonomous authority that revolutionised the maritime sector in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's native state, also opposing several provisions of the Bill. While GMB soft-peddled on the Bill apparently due to political compulsions, the AP Maritime Board explained in detail how the Bill is ultra vires the Constitution.

"The Centre under the guise of the new Bill cannot step into the shoes of states and take away all their powers," said N.P. Ramakrishna Reddy, APMB chief executive officer, in his latest letter to the Union ministry of shipping.

Earlier, too, the state authorities had expressed concern over the provisions of the Bill and insisted that minor ports should remain with the states.

Ramakrishna Reddy explained that sub clause 5 specifies that all ports operating prior to the appointed date shall not function after two years, unless permitted by the Centre.

"This cannot be accepted as it is against the long-term concession agreements signed with private developers," he pointed out. While the state developed or proposed to develop a few minor ports on its own, it allotted a few others to private players to develop under the pub-

lic private partnership mode. The Centre proposed a single entity, the Maritime Port Regulatory Authority, which will have control over the 130-odd minor ports nationwide. Though the states will have their boards, the Centre will appoint the constituents and will play big brother to every decision of the state boards.

Ramakrishna Reddy drew the Centre's attention to previous enactments on subjects included in the concurrent list and empowering the states to regulate them as in the case of labour, industrial and energy laws.

■ **Page 2: Row over Centre power to develop ports**

## TD, BJP cadres behind temple attacks, says DGP

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15**

In a major breakthrough, the Andhra Pradesh police arrested 15 persons with political affiliation to Telugu Desam and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in connection with the recent offences at various temples across the State.

The police, after thorough investigation into nine cases, identified 21 persons directly involved in desecration of idols and statues or spreading false news of attacks on temples.

Of them, 17 belonged to the principal Opposition while the remaining four were affiliated to BJP. Six accused are absconding.

The development gives

credence to the government's contention that the series of attacks on temples or desecration of idols were part of a larger game-plan to disturb communal harmony in the State and reap political benefits.

Briefing media persons, Director General of Police Gautam Sawang said a deliberate attempt was made by vested interests belonging to the political parties to create unrest in the State.

He appealed to people to cooperate with the Special Investigation Team constituted to probe into the attacks and provide further information about the incidents on mobile No: 93929-03400.

The DGP appealed to the political parties to

refrain their cadre from indulging in such wrongful acts and warned of stern action against people behind the conspiracy, irrespective of how influential they were.

As the opposition parties may dismiss the arrests as part of political vendetta and show them in poor light, the police claimed that they carried out the investigation in a scientific manner and gathered incriminating evidence against the accused.

The DGP, who has been personally monitoring the investigation, directed the officials to take the cases to their logical conclusion and as early as possible.

■ **Page 2: Material put on idol not impure: Forensics**



Mohammed Siraj

## SIRAJ TARGETED AGAIN BY CROWD ON OPENING DAY

**Brisbane, Jan. 15:** Fast bowler Mohammed Siraj was targeted for abuse by a section of the crowd on the opening day of the fourth Test against Australia, a newspaper here reported, claiming he was called a "grub". The incident happened a few days after Siraj was racially abused at the Sydney Cricket Ground during the third Test.

■ **Full report on Page 8**

## Farm talks stuck after nine rounds, next talk on Jan. 19

**SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 15**

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

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

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

One of the major challenges before the government is to ensure that the farmers call off their proposed tractor march to Delhi on Republic Day.

On Monday, the Supreme Court will have to decide on a petition by the Centre,

moved through the Delhi police, to stop protesters from holding any rally that could disrupt Republic Day parade.

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

After meeting 41 representatives of farmers' unions, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said: "Today's talks with the farmers unions were inconclusive. We will hold talks again on January 19. We are positive (about) reaching a solution through talks." During the negotiations, he urged the union leaders to be "flexible" in their approach. Besides Mr Tomar, Union ministers Piyush Goyal and Som Parkash, who is an MP from Punjab, were also present at the meeting which lasted for around five hours.

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

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

## CM SAVES BULL FROM GETTING INJURED, VIDEO GOES VIRAL

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15**

A video of AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy helping a bull has gone viral on social media platforms.

The Chief Minister, who was at Narasaraopeta in Guntur district for the Gopuja on the occasion of Kanuma celebrations was visiting stalls as part of the event. He stopped at a stall, which had the traditional Gangireddu (bull). Then the bull shook its head as if it was blessing him. At that moment, the head of the bull seemed to hit the iron rod on the fencing. Jagan Mohan Reddy immediately placed his hand on the iron rod to protect the bull. He then gently pushed the bull's head to the side and cautioned the man who was handling the animal to be careful.

Earlier, the CM participated in Gopuja Mahotsavam, which was organised by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD), at Municipal Stadium here on Friday. For the first time in Andhra Pradesh, the Gopuja was conducted in 2,679 temples across the state, which was jointly organized by the endowments department and TTD, as part of Hindu Dharma campaign.

After greeting people, Reddy performed the rituals as per Hindu traditions.

■ **Page 2: CM presents silk robes**

## BURNING | ISSUES Farmers burn copies of agri laws, urbanites burn property tax GOs

# Sankranti turns to be protest season

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15**

The three-day Sankranti harvest festival turned into a season of protests repeatedly for the past two years in Andhra Pradesh. Various farmers' organisations burned copies of the new agriculture laws in Bhogi Mantalu (bonfire) this year, while urban citizen forums burned government orders (GOs) on an increase in property tax in a similar fashion.

In reactions that Deccan

Chronicle gathered on the political turn to the festival season, a priest G Venkateswarlu noted that discarding of old material and welcoming new things as part of social transformation is the message from Bhogi for centuries.

"This used to be the time when people burned old and abandoned items and forgot hatred of the past to start a new life from Sankranti. However, of late, Bhogi has turned into a festival of protests. Earlier, political parties

● **FARMERS FACING** difficulties due to new farm laws were not sleeping for many days

● **THE OPPOSITION** Telugu Desam was in the forefront in burning copies of GOs of the YSR Congress government's GOs via the Bhogi bonfire

used to honour religious sentiments and avoid politicizing the traditions.

Nowadays, the trend has changed and religion has turned into a political subject. Hence, the burning of GOs in bonfire started," he noted.

"Any group can express its anguish to the government any time, but protests during festivals would draw added attention. Hence, resort to such actions is seeing a rise year after year," he added.

Social activist, R Vinod said farmers who facing "difficulties" due to the new agriculture laws were not

sleeping for many days. "They are not in a position to celebrate the harvest festival. There is nothing wrong in burning the copies of GOs, as Bhogi is meant to burn the old and the unacceptable. Aside of the burning protests by several groups and political parties, the people in general organised Bhogi bonfire in a traditional manner, which showed the greatness of our society."

■ **Page 2: Women trash agriculture laws**



## CAPITAL ISSUE

## TULASI PULLS AUTO WITH ROPE OVER FUEL PRICE HIKE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, JAN. 15

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee working president N. Tulasi Reddy on Friday tied a rope around an auto and pulled it along the road at Vempalli in Kadapa district to protest against hike in fuel prices. He criticised the BJP-led government at the centre and YSR Congress regime in AP of being inhuman in raising prices of petrol when people are already in serious financial trouble due to Coronavirus, lockdown, and Nivar storm. "Increasing the prices of petrol under these circumstances is highly unreasonable," he contended.

The state party chief said when Congress was in power, price of crude oil in international market was \$40 per barrel, while in the Indian market, petrol had been sold for ₹38 per litre and diesel ₹25 per litre. When a barrel of crude was \$140 in international market, a litre of petrol had been supplied at ₹70 a litre and diesel ₹60 a litre.

He pointed out that currently, crude oil is priced \$40 per barrel in international market, but a litre of petrol has crossed ₹90 per litre and diesel ₹80 per litre. He said bereft of ideas, the central and state governments are filling their treasuries instead of passing on the benefit of lower crude prices to consumers. Tulasi Reddy pointed out that when Narendra Modi took over as Prime Minister, the central excise duty on petrol was ₹9.48 a litre and diesel ₹3.56 a litre.

## STATE RELEASES BUDGET ORDER FOR ₹16

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15

The state agriculture commissioner issued a budget release order for an amount of ₹16 from the BE provision 2020-21 in relaxation of quarterly regulation towards meeting the expenditure for implementation of normal Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana-Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied sector Rejuvenation as balance of the first instalment during the financial year 2020-21.

The government issued GO RT No. 64 here on Friday stating that the provision in BE 2020-21 was ₹1,105.35 lakh and additional amounts sanction were ₹7,74.85 lakh taking the total provision to ₹1,880.01.



Dr Patnam Subbaiah

## FORMER MINISTER SUBBAIAH DIES OF CARDIAC ARREST

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JAN. 15

Former minister and three-time MLA Dr Patnam Subbaiah died of a cardiac arrest in Chittoor district on Friday. Patnam Subbaiah was a three-time MLA from Palamaner assembly constituency between 1985-1999.

Mr Subbaiah, who was working as a government doctor in 1982, has ventured into politics following a call given by Telugu Desam Party founder N.T. Rama Rao. He won his first election in 1985 as an MLA from Palamaner and served as a civil supplies minister and also as a health minister during the TDP regime in the united state of Andhra Pradesh.

His political career drew to an end following the demise of N.T. Rama Rao and Chandrababu Naidu denied him a party ticket to contest the 1999 general elections from Palamaner. Later, he resigned from Telugu Desam and joined BJP in 2014 and held many key posts in the party. However, he again shifted his loyalty to the TDP in the 2019 election. Mr Subbaiah was unwell for some time now. He died due to a cardiac arrest at his home at 45 Kothapalli village in Irala mandal in the early hours on Friday. His final rites are expected to be held on Saturday.

## Crores spent on betting as cockfights held in AP

There were punters also from Telangana, Bengaluru

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, JAN 15

It was a free-for-all for organisers of traditional cockfights and gambling games — playing cards, the Gundata-cutting cards game — in two Godavari districts during the three-day Sankranti festival. The police warning that these traditional activities would not be allowed in view of court directives went unheeded.

In the run-up to Sankranti, the police created a stir and filed bound-over cases against many; ploughing the fields where cockfights are organised, and in general creating an atmosphere of fear. This did not help.

Cockfights were organised in remote villages in the two Godavari districts and crores of rupees changed hands. To make things more exciting, record dances were also held in some places.

Initially, many organisers were skeptical of the events this time due to the Covid-19 scare and the vigorous police campaign against these. But, the first day of the Sankranti season, on Bhogi Day, some big organisers of cockfights initiated the action in places like Kesanakurupalem in East Godavari as also Undi and Mahadevapatnam in West Godavari district. This emboldened others too.

In general, the police used to start raids on the cockfight grounds on the third day of Sankranti, on Kanuma. On this Friday, the Kanuma Day, the cockfights were organised on a scale larger than on the Sankranti day. Even small teams also held the cockfight wherever they got a vacant space. In some areas, women also participated in the sport.

The state government had decided not to allow cockfights this year. But, in the aftermath of destruction of Hindu idols in some temples, the ruling YSRC felt such a curb will have a negative impact. The Opposition Telugu Desam was waiting in the wings to take advantage of any resentment against the Jagan-led government and the ruling party. Hence, the government thought it wise to not enforce a curb.

Compared to last year, the amount spent on bet-



Rooster fights at Uppuluru village on the occasion of Sankranti celebrations in Krishna district on Friday. — DC

## Chittoor defies ban, holds bull-taming

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JAN. 15

Despite a ban, Chittoor district witnessed the traditional bull-taming sport, a mild version of Tamil Nadu's Jallikattu, with thousands of people including politicians urging the bull-tamers on in many villages this time too, on Friday.

The ban enforced by local administrations and the police earlier this month in Chittoor and Tirupati urban district limits was on done the ground that both the bulls and tamers faced risk to their lives. The organisers with their social and political support made sure the cattle festival styled as 'Pasuvula Panduga' or 'Goppa Mylaru Panduga' was conducted unhindered.

The cattle festival is in vogue in the Chittoor district for the past 150 years. The sport involves chasing of bulls and cows, making them run amok through a narrow passage. Enthusiasts lining up on both sides compete with each other and run after the cattle to snatch trophies tied to their horns. The organisers argue that this fete is not aimed at hurting the cattle but only to revere them

ting this time appeared to be less because of the Covid-19 virus, the economic downturn and the existing transportation problem. Software profes-

sional, cine celebrities and others have not arrived in large numbers. There were arrivals also from Telangana state and Bengaluru.

The event was organised also at Kotha Sanambatlai in Chandragiri mandal, Anuppalle in Ramachandrapuram mandal and Rangampeta. This time too, several people were injured. YSRC MLA RK Roja took part in the bull-taming sport at Pullaiahgaripalli village.

The police said they booked cases against some of the organisers. "We received information from locals about the conduction of Jallikattu and from the hospitals about the injured participants. We are booking cases against the organisers. Stringent action would be initiated against them," Ramakrishna, SI, Chandragiri, told *Deccan Chronicle*.

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## CHENCHU TRIBALS LEAD SANKRANTI CELEBRATIONS AT SRISAILAM TEMPLE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, JAN. 15

Members belonging to Chenchu tribe of Nallamala forests have been given the rare honour of officiating during Sankranti celebrations at the Srisailem Temple. It was Chenchus who had first found the Maha Shiva Lingam amid these dense forests a millennium ago.

Authorities of Sri Bharamamba Mallikarjuna Swamy temple of Srisailem celebrated the Kalyanotsavam of Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy and Goddess Parvati Devi on Thursday, inviting people of Chenchu tribes as special guests.

The tribals performed Bhramotsava Kalyanam wearing their traditional dresses. At least 200 tribal families from various Chenchu Gudems of Kurnool, Guntur, and Prakasam districts attended this holy programme, said temple executive officer K. S. Rama Rao.

Conventionally, Goddess Bhramaramba is treated as daughter of Chenchus while Lord Shiva (Srisailem Mallanna) is seen as their son-in-law, the EO pointed out. It is for this reason that they invited Chenchu families as special guests on the occasion, he underlined.

Meanwhile, priests and officials performed Vise-shapujalu, Mandaparadh-analu, Janusthulu, Panchavarachanalu and Rudrahomam at various temples of Swamy-Amma Varlu.

After completion of Kalyanotsavam, officials organised Seyanotsavam and Ekanta Seva to Swamy-Amma Varlu late on Thursday night.

As many as 1.5 lakh devotees witnessed the Kalyanotsavam and offered prayers to the God and Goddess.

● **THE TRIBALS** performed Bhramotsava Kalyanam wearing their traditional dresses.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy tries to save the Ox from hitting a barricade, while playing the act of 'Do-Do-Basavanna' during Gopuja Mahotsavam which was organised by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanama (TTD) at Municipal Stadium, Narasaraopet town of Guntur district on Friday.

— TEJO ROY ELETI

## Material put on idol not impure: Forensics

FROM PAGE 1

In the Rajamahendravaram case in which idols were desecrated and a propaganda was carried out that some impure material was pasted on the Ganesh idol, Bommuru police arrested four persons, two each belonging to TD and BJP.

The Forensic Lab Report revealed that the material pasted on the idol was not impure as propagated. The arrested included Vellapalli Prasad Babu and Chitkena Sandeep (both TD) and Adapa Varaprasad and Kasturi Srinivasa Rao from BJP.

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

TD's Viswantha Reddy, who is temple committee chairman, was involved in the desecration of Aanjaneyaya Swamy idol

● **TWO TD** activists spread false news about chopping of hands of a Vinayaka idol, a long time ago at Yetigyrampeta in Visakhapatnam. Kondalaveedu of Kadapa district.

legs and stealing of hundi in Marlamanda village in Kurnool district. Six persons belonging to TD were involved in the alleged damage to the idol of gods in Lakshminarasimha Swamy temple at Singarayakonda in Prakasam district.

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

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

## WORSHIPS PERFORMED FOR 108 COWS

FROM PAGE 1

Presented silk robes, garlanded cow and the calf. Puja was performed for 108 cows. Ministers Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao, Mekathoti Sucharita, Cherukuvada Sriranganadharaju, TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy, Deputy Speaker Kona Raghupathi, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, public representatives, TTD officials and Vedic scholars were present at the event.

## ROW OVER CENTRE POWER TO DEVELOP PORTS

FROM PAGE 1

Another feature of the Bill that may threaten to lead to biased development of the maritime sector is the Centre's power to decide and publish a plan for development of ports.

"Waterfront and land in the sea up to the baseline belong to the state and we should decide development of our 974-km long coastline, not the Centre," the APMB chief said. The Bill is likely to hamper the states' growth if the Centre ignores development of minor ports in a particular state due to reasons other than technical and commercial, which, in other words, mean political. The dispute resolution and adjudication process suggested in the Bill is also faulty and will not withstand the legal scrutiny, he pointed out in the letter.

## TD DEMANDS YSRC TO FACE PANCHAYAT POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15

Telugu Desam MLC P. Ashok Babu on Friday slammed the ruling YSRC leaders and ministers for 'changing' their stand on the panchayat elections only to suit their party political convenience but not in the interests of the state or its people. The TD leader demanded that if the ruling party had any commitment to democratic ideals, it should face the people in the February elections.

Ashok Babu deplored that the YSRC was the only political party in the world that used the Covid-19 pandemic for its political agenda and left the common public to their fate. He recalled that the CM and his MLAs had said that the local polls should be held in March as per the constitutional requirement, but now they were saying it was against the constitution's spirit.

The TD MLC named many ruling party ministers and leaders who had changed their voice and said that they were adopting double standards and telling lies so openly without any fear or shame. He asserted that the YSRC leaders at all levels were scared of seeking votes from the people at this juncture due to all-around disappointment prevailing against the Jagan regime's policies.

## AP's voter population ratio stands at 4.05 crore, says electoral rolls data

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15

Andhra Pradesh has 4,05,08,222 voters, including NRIs and service electors. Of these, 2,00,30,486 are men, 2,04,73,601 women and 4,135 belong to the third gender as per the final special summary revision with January 1 as the qualifying date.

The data was contained in the special summary revision (SSR) of electoral rolls released here on Friday by Chief Electoral Officer K. Vijayanand.

The total number of

overseas electors are 7,070 including 5,570 men, 1,498 women and two belonging to the third gender. Of the 66,844 service voters, men constitute 64,749, women 2,095. The total number of voters in the 18-19 age group is 2,83,301 and new electors added to the list were 4,25,860: 2,08,396 men, 2,17,378 women and 86 belonging to the third gender. The elector to population ratio stands at 752 to 1,000 and the gender ratio 1,025 to 1,000.

The draft electoral rolls published on November 16, 2020 put the total number of voters at 4,00,79,025. Subsequently, the names of 4,25,860 (1.06 per cent) voters were included and 63,507 electors (0.16 per cent) deleted since the draft publication of electoral rolls taken up under SSR, 2021.

This marks a net increase in the number of electors by 3,62,353 constituting 0.90 per cent over the draft electoral rolls. In the process of rationalisation, 84 new polling stations have come up while three polling stations were merged with existing ones. This resulted in the

number of polling stations going up from 45,836 to 45,917.

The total number of electors including general and service district-wise include: Srikakulam: 22,85,054, Vizianagaram: 19,00,934, Visakhapatnam: 36,75,483, East Godavari: 43,12,739, West Godavari: 33,02,400, Krishna: 36,29,100, Guntur: 40,54,052, 26,75,178, 24,57,707, 22,81,000, 33,32,259 and Chittoor: 32,74,776.

AP Urban Citizens Forum leaders lamented that the Sankranti festival turned painful for all due to imposition of "huge" taxes even as the people were already facing a severe financial crises due to the series of lockdowns.

"People were not able to celebrate Sankranti due to tax hikes. Hence they are holding protests via the Bhogi bonfire. The leaders of APUCE, CITU, farmers' organisations and women associations led by APUCE convener Ch Babu Rao gathered at

FROM PAGE 1

The Opposition Telugu Desam was at the forefront in burning the GOs of the YSR Congress government via the Bhogi bonfire. TD chief N Chandrababu Naidu joined the Bhogi event at Paritala and burned objectionable GO copies via the bonfire. TD leaders did the same in all the 13 districts.

AP Urban Citizens Forum leaders lamented that the Sankranti festival turned painful for all due to imposition of "huge" taxes even as the people were already facing a severe financial crises due to the series of lockdowns.

"People were not able to celebrate Sankranti due to tax hikes. Hence they are holding protests via the Bhogi bonfire. The leaders of APUCE, CITU, farmers' organisations and women associations led by APUCE convener Ch Babu Rao gathered at

Besant Road in Vijayawada and burned the copies of central laws in the Bhogi bonfire.

Women also made use of Bhogi bonfire to trash the new agriculture laws. Women in large numbers led by Mahila Aikya Vedika convener Sunkara Padamasree burned copies of three laws in a Bhogi bonfire at Benz Circle in Vijayawada. She lamented that the BJP government "turned a deaf ear to the agitation of farmers" and helping corporates by killing the farming sector.

POLITICAL | ROW Gopuja is part of YSRC chief's strategy of mixing religion with politics, says TD state chief

## Atchannaidu slams Jagan's religious ideology

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15

Telugu Desam state president K. Atchannaidu on Friday advised Jagan Mohan Reddy government against using the most-sacred "Gopuja" (cow worship) programme for deriving political mileage; thereby creating religious differences within people of Andhra Pradesh.

Atchannaidu questioned how Chief Minister and his ministers can worship cows at temples when it is they who are spearheading attacks on temples and burning sacred chariots. He sought to warn the government that creating

ill-will between different religions through their acts will not be good for the state as a whole.

TD state president said CM Jagan has a knack of indulging in "bankrupt politics". Cow worship is part of YSRC chief's strategy of mixing religion with politics.

He claimed nobody will believe in Chief Minister's claim of faith in any god or religion, as he has not shown any sympathy in the murder of his own uncle Y. S. Vivekananda Reddy.

Atchannaidu maintained that cow is integral to Hindu way of life since Vedic times. He charged that in recent times, many

cows at Gosalas have died due to lack of fodder and proper care. Instead of taking care of such cows, the Chief Minister is starting a drama in the name of "Gopuja" at temples.

Alleging that attacks on temples are continuing, the TD state chief accused Jagan regime of not allowing devotees belonging to any religion live peacefully and happily.

He claimed that YSRC has wantonly cancelled "Christmas Kanuka", "Ramzan Tohfa" and "Sankranti Kanuka" programmes implemented for benefit of Christian, Muslim and Hindu devotees respectively.

## B. Tech Ravi's arrest condemned

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, JAN 15

Telugu Desam state executive secretary Balishetti Hariprasad said B. Tech Ravi, who is emerging as a strong leader in Pulivendula constituency, has been arrested illegally because of a political ploy. Kadapa constituency TD in-charge V. S. Ameer Babu and district Telugu Desam women's president Karnati Swetha Reddy visited B. Tech Ravi's house in Kasunur village in Simhadripuram constituency on Friday and

● **SPEAKING** ON the occasion, Ameer Babu said hasty arrest of the TDP leader at Chennai Airport in a three-year-old case is atrocious. Swetha Reddy advised police officers to realise that power is not permanent and they must work towards protecting democracy than carry out a party's bidding.

met his wife Latha Reddy and other family members.

Speaking on the occasion, Ameer Babu said hasty arrest of the TDP leader at Chennai Airport in a three-year-old case is atrocious. Swetha Reddy advised police officers to realise that power is not permanent and they must work towards protecting democracy than carry out a party's bidding.

Former fisheries corporation director Yatagiri Ramprasada, ex-Kadapa district court public prosecutor Gurrappa and other leaders also met family members of B. Tech Ravi.



## SHORT TAKES

**45 held for rooster fights**

**Visakhapatnam:** The police arrested 45 gamblers and seized cash of ₹45,347 by carrying out raids on several places where cockfights and gambling were being organised in Visakhapatnam district in the last two days.

**ONE CRORE WORTH RED SANDERS LOGS SEIZED**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, JAN. 15

The investigators of AP Red Sanders anti-smuggling task force sleuths have seized Rs 1 crore worth red sanders logs on the outskirts of Tirupati in the early hours on Friday.

According to Taskforce DSP Venkataiah, acting on specific information, the taskforce teams were conducting combing operations inside the Seshachalam forests near S.V. Zoo park road since Thursday night and have encountered a group of red sanders smugglers loading logs into a truck at about 4 am on Friday near S.V. Nagar burial grounds at Perumallapalli village.

Before the teams surrounded them up, the smugglers managed to escape by abandoning the truck and the logs behind. Police seized 49 red sanders logs weighing nearly 1.5 tonnes worth approximately ₹ 1 crore.

**ANTIDOTES FOR VACCINATION REACTION**

**FROM PAGE 1**

In case the beneficiary develops adverse effects following immunisation, he or she will be given anti-dotes at the vaccine site using a kit containing all requisite drugs. If required, the beneficiary may even be shifted to the nearby area hospital having 10 beds reserved for such patients.

The persons may even be moved to district hospitals in case of emergency, where 20 ICUs will be earmarked only for vaccine-reaction cases. The entire process will be monitored at the district and state control rooms.

In the first phase, 3.87 lakh healthcare workers are to be vaccinated in AP at the rate of 20-25 persons every two hours a day. Once, all healthcare workers are covered in Phase-I, authorities will start Stage-II of vaccination to immunise other frontline workers including those from police, defence and sanitation wings.

**BJP DEMANDS SETTLEMENT OF FARMERS' DUES**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, JAN. 15

BJP Nellore district Vice President M. Ramesh demanded the state government pay pending salaries for workers and dues to the farmers related to the sugar factory in the Podalakur mandal of Nellore district. On Friday, the BJP leader visited the factory and interacted with the workers and farmers from this region who supplied sugarcane to the factory. Speaking to media persons, Ramesh alleged that the sugar factory management has been forcing the Cane Assistant Commissioner not to deposit the cheque of ₹4.3 crore submitted earlier to settle the dues. "Around 750 sugarcane farmers and 350 workers in the factory suffered from the sugar factory management's negligent attitude. Officials should take it seriously and initiate stern action against the management", he said, demanding the cane officials to settle dues to the victims as per the Revenue Recovery Act.

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

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, JAN. 15

The International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad (IIIT-H), launched its project website 'Project Indic Wiki' to increase content availability in Indian languages and enhance the Telugu and Hindi Wikipedias, on Friday.

Articles on their website indicwiki.iiit.ac.in/ are freely available to the community to read, share, and enhance. The website will be available in both mobile and desktop modes.



Staff of district cold-chain complex for vaccines stores the Covid Vaccine in a storage container at the Central Drug Stores near ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

**AP records 94 Covid-19 cases and one death**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 15

Andhra Pradesh registered 94 fresh Covid-19 cases and one death in the last 24 hours.

The State health authorities issued Covid-19 bulletin on Friday reporting that out of 31,696 samples tested, 94 persons were found infected with Covid-19.

Out of a total number of 1,25,14,639 samples tested, 8,85,710 persons were found infected with Covid-19 and of them, 8,76,372 were recovered while 2,199 are still active

with the virus in the state.

Among the daily cases of Covid-19, East Godavari registered the highest number of 15 followed by 14 in Guntur, 13 in Kadapa, 12 each in Krishna and Visakhapatnam, 10 in Chittoor, five each in Srikakulam and West Vizianagaram, three in Prakasam and one each in Anantapur, Kurnool and Nellore.

Nellore district registered the highest number of cumulative Covid-19 active cases fol-

lowed by 322 in Krishna, 310 in Guntur, 231 in East Godavari, 171 in Visakhapatnam, 160 in Kadapa, 159 in Chittoor, 143 in West Godavari, 101 in Kurnool, 97 in Anantapur, 67 in Prakasam, 52 in Srikakulam and 35 in Vizianagaram.

Among the daily cases of death of Covid-19 infected patients, only one case was registered at Krishna, rising toll to 7,139.

With regard to cumulative death cases, Chittoor was the worst affected with 846 followed by 676,

in Krishna, 668 in Guntur, 636 in East Godavari, 597 in Anantapur, 580 in Prakasam, 557 in Visakhapatnam, 539 in West Godavari, 506 in Nellore, 487 in Kurnool, 462 in Kadapa, 347 in Srikakulam and 238 in Vizianagaram.

The state health authorities discharged 232 patients after recovery in the state in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,34,357 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 7.08.

**KURNOOL LEARNS ALPHABETS ON ROADS IN REVERSE MODE**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KURNOOL JAN. 15

The Kurnool Municipal Corporation (KMC) caught in a quagmire of problems due to resource crunch to improve civic amenities, has hit upon a novel idea to propagate the Telugu language. Though there is no need to sensitise the public on literacy, the entire alphabet of the Telugu language consisting of 56 letters and nine numbers were decorated on the road dividers. The illuminated letters have become the talk of the town as they were arranged so that the long matra of the alphabet comes first followed by the short matra.

The alphabets flowered on the medians from KMC Children Park to Chiranjeevi park covered the KMC office main road are providing amusement to the passersby. KMC Commissioner D.K. Balaji explains that A and AA are paired together, whereas AA comes first and A later. But the pair is one compact lot and there is no confusion.

Likewise, Kha comes first then Ka instead of Ka, Kha. People say it is hilariously confusing as Telugu letters changed their places from short matra to long matra.

Apart from alphabets, the KMC has also decorated C camp Rythu bazaar circle with a bullock cart. Kurnool people crazily watching these and said the KMC officials had elevated society's prestige by keeping the alphabet and bullock cart. It reflexes our culture, has said Kalkura Chandrasekhar, Telugu Bhasha Abivrudhi Committee convener. KMC commissioner D.K. Balaji said that nowadays, most children do not learn their mother tongue naturally.

To develop an interest among the students to learn the Telugu language this initiative has been taken up, he added. Moreover, these letters will remind the students not to forget their mother tongue, stated the KMC commissioner.

**46, 500 VACCINE DOSES REACH EG**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KAKINADA, JAN. 15

A total of 46,500 doses Covid-19 vaccine has arrived in East Godavari; it was stored in 33 session centres in the district. The vaccine administration will be launched from Saturday, and initially, the vaccine will be administered to medical and health personnel. It will be administered by 100 personnel in each day for five days. The District Medical and Health Officer K.V.S. Gowreeswara Rao said that a five-member team in every centre would assist the personnel in every health centre where the vaccine was stored amidst safety norms. He said that there would be no danger in administering the vaccine as all precautionary steps have been taken.

**ANANTAPUR ALL SET FOR VACCINATION**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 15

Anantapur is all set for the vaccination programme of the first phase for Covid-19 at 26 hospitals in the district. In the first phase, the health workers of various categories and other frontline warriors would be given vaccination. About 33,000 units of the vaccine were allotted to the district and distributed to all storage points of 26 hospitals.

District in-charge Collector and Joint Collector A. Siri said the vaccination programme would start from Saturday. Additional medical staff, including doctors, were deputed at all the 26 hospitals as part of the first batch of covid 19 vaccination in the district.

Temporary cold storage units along with ups systems were attached to maintain temperatures even during a power disruption.

She said that all arrangements had been made for the vaccination process. Health workers and Anganwadi workers, who were initially registered for vaccination, will be vaccinated, she said and added pregnant women, those with allergies and chronic ailments, and those under the age of 18 should not be vaccinated, and vaccination will be in three stages.



People in large numbers throng at the sands of Ramakrishna Beach and fly kites during the Sankranti celebrations on Friday.

**1,042 PUNTERS PLAYING COCKFIGHTS AND CARDS ARRESTED IN KAKINADA**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KAKINADA, JAN. 15

As many as 1,042 persons were arrested in West Godavari District on the charges of playing gambling games cockfights, playing cards, Gunda and others

Eluru Deputy Superintendent of Police O. Dilip Kiran said that 546 persons were arrested in Eluru Sub-Division police limits for the past two days on the charges of playing gambling games like cockfights, playing cards, Gunda and others.

He said that the police officials of 12 police stations under Eluru DSP limits conducted a special drive and booked 110 cases against them. He said that Rs

● Rs 9,22,529 of cash seized from 316 gamblers who played cards and 48 cases were registered, and 230 were arrested and seized 82 cocks and 72 cock-knives and seized Rs 1,22,920.

9,22,529 of cash seized from 316 gamblers who played cards and 48 cases were registered, and 230 were arrested and seized 82 cocks and 72 cock-knives and seized Rs 1,22,920.

According to the West Godavari police, nearly 500 persons were arrested under the Kovvuru DSP limits on the charges of playing cards and other gambling games.

**AHOBILAM DEITY GOES OUT TO INVITE VILLAGERS TO HIS WEDDING**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KURNOOL JAN. 15

The Ahobilam Mutt officials organised paruveta Utsavam, also known as the wedding invitation of God, on Friday in grand manner at Bachepalle village near-by Ahobilam temple. The mutt authorities led by its endowments officer B. V. Narasiah and mutt delegates and priests have performed special pujas on the occasion of the launching ceremony of 45 days Utsavam. Lord Sri Narasimha Swami will invite his devotees for his marriage by going to their doorsteps, temple EO said.

People residing in the surrounding 33 villages in the Allagadda assembly constituency being invited for the holy wedding of Lord Sri Narasimha Swamy, presiding deity of Ahobilam. And this event ends on February 28 at Ahobilam temple. After completing the invitation, the mutt official will be held Swami vari kalyanotsavam on March first in the traditional manner. Some tribals and priests of Ahobilam temple, considering themselves representatives of the Lord, take out a procession called Paruveta, with Lord Sri Narasimha Swamy in a palanquin.



Devotees take part in the 'Prabhala Utsavam' an annual festival in Konaseema, which has been popular for the last 135 years. Prabhala of all gods from different villages come to Jagannathota in East Godavari on the occasion of 'Kanuma' on Friday.

**Prabhala Utsavams held on a grand scale in Konaseema**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KAKINADA, JAN. 15

Sankranti was celebrated for three days with great enthusiasm by people of East and West Godavari districts. Prabhala Teerthams in Konaseema of East Godavari district were specially celebrated on a grand scale with hundreds of people participating in them.

Prabhala Teertham was held in Kothapeta mandal on Thursday and Amabijet mandal on Friday. The festivities are very famous in Konaseema and a large number of people participate in the celebrations from across the two Telugu states. According to certain

records, the Prabhala Teertham celebrations have been held since 17th Century in these areas.

Nearly 11 "Prabhala" were taken brought in a procession from 11 villages in Ambajipeta mandal. People worship these 11 Prabhals as "Ekadasa Rudrulu" - Lord Chenna Malleswara Swamy, Lord Eeswara Swamy of Gangalakurru Agraharam, Lord Vyaghreswara Swamy of Vyaghreshwaram, Madhura as a n t h a Bhogeswara Swamy of Mosalapalli, Menakeswara Swamy of Pedapudi, Lord Ananda Rameswara Swamy of Iruksamanda, Lord Abhinava Vyaghreswara Swamy of Pulletikurru,

Lord Raghveswara Swamy of Mukkamala, Lord Kasi Viveswara Swamy of Vakkalanka and Palagummi and Lord Chennamalleswara Swamy of Nedunuru.

Despite the scare due to Covid-19, people participated with enthusiasm in large numbers and worshipped Gods. The Teerthams were also celebrated in T h o n d a v a r a m , Chiruthapudi, Kothapeta and other villages.

Meanwhile, beaches at Kakinada in East Godavari and Perupalem in Mogaltur mandal of West Godavari were full of festival crowds. Main streets of all towns in the two Godavari districts were full of people.



## IN BRIEF

INDIA, NEPAL  
TALK BORDER  
MANAGEMENTSRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI |  
DC  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

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

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

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

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

KERALA  
ANNOUNCES  
SLEW OF SOPsGILVESTER ASSARY | DC  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN. 15

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

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

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

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

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

'ACTION AGAINST  
MUNDE ONLY  
AFTER PROBE'SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC  
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

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

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

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

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

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

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

## PM doesn't respect farmers, says Rahul



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

Naravane:  
Don't test  
patiencePAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

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

On Pakistan, the Army chief said that 300-400 terrorists are waiting in various terror camps across the Line of Control in P a k i s t a n - o c c u p i e d Kashmir to infiltrate into J&K.

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

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

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

For the first time at the

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

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

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

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

SHIVRAJ HAILS  
LAST YEAR'S  
PADMA SHRI  
AWARDEERABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, JAN. 15

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VACCINE DRIVE  
TO START WITH  
SECURITY GUARDDC CORRESPONDENT  
BHOPAL, JAN. 15

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

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

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

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

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

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

- PTI

Former minister  
Morarka diesDC CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

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

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

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

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

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



Kamal Morarka

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

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

2 lakh civil defence  
workers to boycottPRANMOY  
BRAHMACHARI | DC  
BERHAMPORE, JAN. 15

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

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

He added, “We worked hard during the disaster

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

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

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

FORMER VC OF SANKARDEV VARSITY  
TO BE THE FIRST RECIPIENT IN ASSAMMANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, JAN. 15

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

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

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

SATABDI ROY  
CANCELS MEET  
WITH SHAHRAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, JAN. 15

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

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

## MONEY | DRIVE

## Kovind donates ₹5 lakh; Shivraj Singh Chouhan gives ₹1 lakh for construction

## President, CMs contribute for Ram Temple fund

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand among other states.

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

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

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

Juna peeth's head Swami Avdeshanand Giri participated in the campaign

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



## SHORT TAKES

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

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

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

## ALPS: AVALANCHE WARNINGS AFTER HEAVY SNOWFALL

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

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

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

## INDIAN TEENAGER HELPS RECYCLE 25 TN OF E-WASTE

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

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

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

## RUSSIA EXITS OPEN SKIES PACT, AFTER U.S.

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

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

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

## 42 killed in Indonesia earthquake



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

## Biden declares \$1.9 tn Covid-19 stimulus plan

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

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

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

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

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

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

## IRAN'S GUARDS HOLD MISSILE,

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

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

It involved a drone attack on a missile defence system followed by "a barrage of Zolfaghar, Zelzal and Dezful-class ballistic missiles," the site said. According to the Guards, the missiles were "equipped with detachable warheads and capable of being controlled outside the atmosphere". A video released showed several missiles being launched in a desert area with Guards commander Hossain Salami and the force's aerospace chief Amirali Hajizadeh present.

"The message of this drill was our power and determined will to defend our sovereignty, our sacred system and our values against the enemies of Islam and Iran," Salami was quoted as saying. — AFP

## WHO tackles new Covid-19 strains

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

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

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

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

Six European Union countries signed a letter to the European Commission on Friday to express "severe concern" over delivery delays for the Covid-19 vaccine developed by BioNTech and Pfizer.

Ministers from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden said in their letter that the situation was "unacceptable" and "decreases the credibility of the vaccination process". — AFP

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

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

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

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

The ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and fresh security concerns following a pro-Trump mob breaching the Capitol last week have combined to force some changes to what is a historical American day. More than 10,000 National Guard troops will be in the city, with about 5,000 more on stand-by. Most of the events surrounding Biden's swearing-in will be virtual. Biden's inauguration is expected to feature limited attendance.

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

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

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

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

US blacklists Xiaomi, 8 Chinese firms

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## Trump's fate in Senate leader McConnell's hands

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## US executes drug kingpin under Don

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

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

He addressed the families of his victims in his

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

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

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

## Dutch govt quits over child benefits scandal

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

found in Britain.

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

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

"CNOOC acts as a bully for the People's Liberation Army to intimidate China's neighbours, and the Chinese military continues to benefit from government civil-military fusion policies for malign purposes," Ross said. — AP





DECCAN  
Chronicle

16 JANUARY 2021

Twice impeached, Trump makes dubious history

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

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

could bring about the same desirable end for the most controversial US politician but they would be subject to interpretations by the Supreme Court. It is apparent many in his party are distancing themselves, though not in sufficient numbers considering that as many as 197 lawmakers voted against his impeachment in the House of Representatives.

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

Women at Mass: Slow steps

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

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

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

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

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Farrukh  
Dhondy  
Cabbages &  
Kings



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

— From Recipes of Damnation  
by Bachchoo

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

The world waits for the vaccines to be made available and kick in. My local doctor's surgery sends texts to say that we, its patients, should earn the description. The UK government intends to immunise first all workers in hospitals and care homes and citizens who are 80 years old and over. Sensible. Who will administer the vaccines and where will they do it? British pharmacists, who have been administering winter flu jabs over the past few years, have petitioned the government to use their premises, services and injecting expertise to assist the country's

immunisation programme.

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

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

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

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

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

“Do you know the Bible?” She asked.

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

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

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

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

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

Again, blank looks.

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

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

“Genesis,” one of them enthusiastically ventured.

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

They looked bewildered and then

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subhani



Elections 2021: A mixed bag of hope & challenges



Sanjay Kumar

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

This year elections are due in two states in the east — West Bengal and Assam — and three states/UTs in the south — Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. It's important to note that all these are now governed by different parties and no party has a government in more than one state. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress is in power in West Bengal for the past decade; the BJP has been ruling Assam; Tamil Nadu, which has swung between the DMK and AIADMK since 1967, is currently governed by the AIADMK since 2016.

Kerala has a LDF government, but here too governments swing between the LDF and UDF. Once a dominant party, the Congress is in power only in Puducherry, that too in alliance with the DMK as it doesn't have a majority on its own.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

SANKRANTI REUNION

It seems that Sankranti has brought about a semblance of normalcy in the Telugu states, likely due to Coronavirus slowing down and vaccination drive scheduled from Saturday. Celebrations are in full swing with cock fights and other entertainment. Flights and buses are packed with passengers. Theatres are full of fans, critics and general public boosting collections. Only sad thing is Railways have not resumed operations.

P. Govardhana Rao  
Kankipadu, Krishna district

TEJAS FIGHTER

The approval for procurement of 83 upgraded Tejas fighter jets is indeed a significant effort to accelerate towards self-reliance in the defence sector (*Centre clears purchase of 83 Tejas Mk 1A for IAF, DC, Jan. 14*). Aerospace company HAL has its work cut out and it needs to step up its production rate.

Dr C. Ghanshyam  
Visakhapatnam

FARMERS R-DAY RALLY

It is very unfortunate that farmers are thinking of taking out a tractor-rally on the Republic Day as if there was no other day for it. I appeal to them to drop that plan as a mark of respect towards our nation.

Jagannadham Chowdari  
Srikakulam

50 YEARS AGO IN  
DECCAN  
Chronicle  
Plea to develop  
small industries

HYDERABAD, January. 15

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



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,034.67	-1.11
Nifty 50	14,433.70	-1.11
S&P 500*	3,771.14	-0.64
Dollar (₹)	73.04	0.00
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.71	0.01
Euro (₹)	88.70	0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,690.286	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	54.71	-3.03
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.988	1.08
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.095	-0.034

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Gail announces ₹1,046-crore share buyback

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

Embassy REIT raises ₹2,600 cr to refinance debt



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

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

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

Honda City tops mid-sized sedan segment in 2020

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



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

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 15

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

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

The Nifty-50 Index shed 161.90 points to close at 14,433.70 on Friday. The broader market also saw profit-taking with the BSE Mid-cap Index closing down 1.25 per cent and the Small-cap Index down 1.06 per cent.

During the week, the Nifty-50 gained 3.2 per cent while the Sensex gained 2.7 per cent. Mid-caps continued to outperform with the Nifty Mid-cap 100 Index gaining 5.2 per cent in the week. "Considering the overall development seen in F&O (futures & options) space, we expect some follow up selling in the coming week as well," said Sneha Seth, derivatives analyst, Angel



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DHFL lenders vote for Piramal Enterprises bid

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

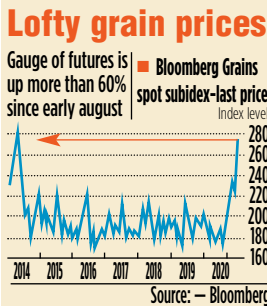
—PTI

Wheat jumps as Russia hikes tax

MEGAN DURISIN & YULIYA FEDORINOVA JAN. 15

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

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



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

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

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

—Bloomberg

Palm oil to have best year since 2011

ANURADHA RAGHU & EKO LISTIYORINI JAN. 15

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

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

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

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

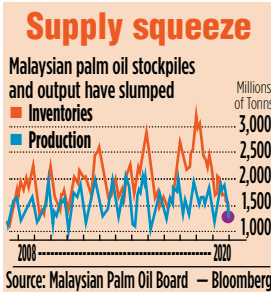
ringgit in the first quarter, before easing to 3,400 ringgit in the second, according to the survey. Estimates ranged from 3,000-4,150 ringgit for the first quarter, and from 2,500-4,280 ringgit in the second.

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

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

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

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



ambitious mandate, which stipulates that fossil fuels must be blended with 30 per cent palm oil, could soak up bulging supplies in the top grower. But palm's premium over petrol has ballooned to the widest in at least two decades, which puts the programme under pressure.

Oil World's Thomas Mielke called the B30 mandate a "swing factor," and said it could be temporarily reduced in March or April.

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

their lowest in 13 years.

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

Samsung's Galaxy S21 to hit market this month

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 15

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

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

SKODA DRIVES IN REFRESHED SUPERB AT ₹32 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 15

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



INTEL | OUTSIDE New devices will mark Apple's move away from Intel components

MacBook Pro returns to magnetic charging

MARK GURMAN JAN. 15

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

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

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



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

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

An Apple spokeswoman didn't

immediately respond to a request for comment.

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

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

elongated pill-shape design of the older MagSafe port.

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

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

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

—Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Six junior shuttlers among top-10

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

## Nikolai is India's athletics coach

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

## Walsh tests +ve in Bangladesh

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

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

## Honda one-two in 2021 Dakar Rally

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

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

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

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

## FOOTBALL

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

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

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## NATS AND BOLTS

## Natarajan twin strikes boost India despite Oz domination

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

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

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

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

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

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

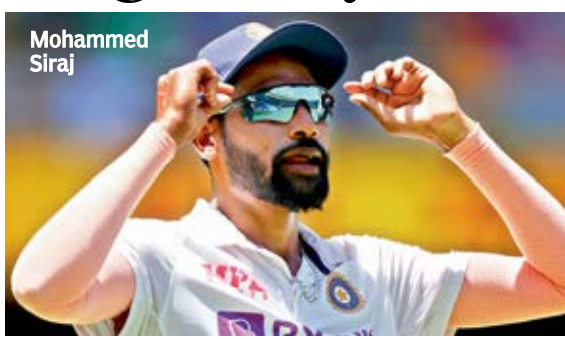
But add the hardships of a daily wage mother trying to put food on table, being called for suspect action early in his career, not being privileged enough to get a paternity leave (his daughter is already three months old), it's a million miles emotionally that Team India's favourite "Nattu" has traversed.

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

## Siraj called 'grub' by Gabba crowd

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

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



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

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

According to the newspaper, at one point, a man in the crowd was heard yelling, "Siraj, give us a wave, give us a wave, give us a wave. Siraj, you bloody grub." Play was halted during the Sydney Test for about 10 minutes after Siraj complained of racial abuse from a section of the crowd. The BCCI had also lodged a complaint with the match referee against the abuse. — PTI

## SUNDAR READY TO BOWL LONG SPELLS IN 4TH TEST

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

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

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



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

## SCORECARD

**Australia first innings:** David Warner c Rohit b Siraj 1, Marcus Harris c Washington Sundar b Thakur 5, Marnus Labuschagne c Pant b T Natarajan 108, Steven Smith c Rohit b Washington Sundar 36, Matthew Wade c Thakur b T Natarajan 45, Cameron Green batting 28, Tim Paine batting 38. Extras (b-4, lb-4, nb-5) 13. **Total (for 5 wks, in 87 overs) 274.**

**FW:** 1-4, 2-17, 3-87, 4-200, 5-213.

**Bowlers:** Mohammed Siraj 19-8-51-1, T Natarajan 20-2-63-2, Shardul Thakur 18-5-67-1, Navdeep Saini 7.5-2-21-0, Washington Sundar 22-4-63-1, Rohit Sharma 0.1-0-1-0.

## Labuschagne all praise for Indian bowling at Gabba

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

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

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

"Any Test century, it doesn't matter who it is against or against what opposition, you want to make sure you are scoring hundreds and probably for me (it was

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

— **MARNUS LABUSCHAGNE**  
Australian batsman

today it was disappointing that (I) did not end up making that a really big hundred," he stressed.

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

"...Indian bowling attacks, they are very disciplined and doesn't matter who is bowling, they are very planned, they are very strategic and we saw that today with their bowling attack. They did not give us

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The stuff dreams are made of. A perfect treble for @Natarajan 91 as he is presented with #TeamIndia's Test No. 300. It can't get any better! Nattu is now an all-format player," BCCI tweeted.

— PTI

## SAINI COMPLAINS OF GROIN PAIN, TAKEN FOR SCANS

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

The 28-year-old Saini had bowled five balls of his eighth, and the innings 36th, over during the second session when he had to walk off the field because of the pain. With this, his further participation in the match, which began this morning, has been thrown into serious doubt.

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

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

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

— PTI

## SYED MUSHTAQ | ALI TROPHY

## Mighty Mumbai make shock exit

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

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

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

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

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

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

Haryana then rode on Himanshu Rana's blazing unbeaten 75 off 53 balls to

chase down the target without much fuss, despite being down 27 for 2 at one stage.

## BIHAR NOTCH UP THIRD STRAIGHT WIN

In Chennai, Bihar defeated Meghalaya by six wickets for their third straight win in the Plate group. Sent in to bat, the Meghalaya batsmen found the going tough against some tight bowling and could manage just 82 for 9 in 20 overs.

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

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

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

— PTI

## BRIEF SCORES

■ **Mumbai 143** (Atharva Ankoekar 37, Yashviji Jaiswal 35; Jayant Yadav 4/22; Arun Chaprana 3/22) lost to Haryana 144/2 (Himanshu Rana 75 n.o.; Shivam Chauhan 43 n.o.; Arjun Tendulkar 1/34).

■ **Delhi 212/4** (Shikhar Dhawan 77; Lalit Yadav 52 n.o.; S. Sreesanth 2/46) lost to Kerala 218/4 (Robin Uthappa 91, Vishnu Vinod 71 n.o.; Lalit Yadav 1/33).



## Root's century drought ends

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

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

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

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

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

It was the star batsman's

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

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

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

Earlier Bairstow became left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya's third victim, caught at gully. The wicket ended a 114-run third-wicket stand for the tourists. Off-spinner Dom Bess returned career-best figures of 5-30 to help skittle Sri Lanka out for 135 — the lowest first-innings score at the venue in two sessions on Thursday after the hosts elected to bat.

— AFP  
**Brief scores:** Sri Lanka 135 vs England 320/4 (J. Root 168 batting, Lawrence 73, Embuldeniya 3/131).

## SAINA LOSES, INJURED SRIKANTH PULLS OUT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI