

on Sunday



India, China to hold ninth round of military talks today
page 7



HAL to deliver the first batch of Light Combat Helicopters soon
page 7



Larry King, legendary U.S. talk show host, passes away at 87
page 9



Washington Sundar recalls the heroic effort in the Gabba Test
page 14

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NEARBY



Vaccination achieves 86% of daily target in Delhi

NEW DELHI
On the fifth day of vaccination in the city on Saturday, a total of 6,967 healthcare workers – 86% of the target of 8,100 – were inoculated, which is the highest till now. Also, 24 adverse events following immunisation were reported.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

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MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

World watching new India: PM

'Country giving befitting reply to those interfering in its territorial sovereignty'

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday wondered how Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose would have felt had he seen the new India, which is not only becoming self-reliant but also giving a befitting reply to those interfering in its territorial sovereignty.

"Netaji had imagined a kind of strong India. Today the world is seeing India in its new avatar; from LAC to LoC, wherever anyone is trying to pose any challenge to the territorial sovereignty of the country is given a befitting reply," Mr. Modi said.

The Prime Minister was speaking in Kolkata while participating in the 125th birth anniversary celebrations of the iconic freedom fighter.



Face to face: PM Narendra Modi and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee releasing a book in Kolkata on Saturday. ■ PTI

Addressing a gathering on the lawns of the Victoria Memorial Hall, Mr. Modi said Netaji would be satisfied and proud to see the new self-reliant India.

The Prime Minister said, "Today our forces have jets such as Rafale and it is manufacturing advanced jets such as Tejas. When he [Netaji] would see that the armed

forces of his country are so strong and have the advanced equipment which he wanted, how would he feel."

He went on to say that Netaji would be proud to see that his country had not only fought the COVID-19 pandemic and but also developed a vaccine.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Why not have four capitals, asks Mamata

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday suggested that India should have four capitals on a rotation basis.

"Why shouldn't Kolkata be the capital of the country – I am saying this because of our contribution to the freedom struggle. I will again urge the Centre to the national capital on January 26.

A senior police officer, however, said that while the original proposal to hold a rally on the Outer Ring Road had been vetoed, farmers would be allowed to enter Delhi in the course of their parade.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Police give nod for tractor parades in Delhi on R-Day

More than 2 lakh vehicles of protesting farmers to join rally

SAURABH TRIVEDI

NEW DELHI

Protesting farmers who have been camping at the borders of the national capital for more than two months now will be allowed to enter Delhi with their tractors on Republic Day, according to a compromise arrived at between the farm unions and the Delhi Police on Saturday. The solution came after three days of discussions.



Safety first: A policeman keeping watch during the full dress rehearsal of the Republic Day parade in New Delhi. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

ers' parade would begin well after the official Republic Day parade on Rajpath is completed, the unions added.

Tens of thousands of farmers, including many women, have already reached the Singhu border from Haryana, Punjab and Uttarakhand to participate in the rally, he added.

Thousands of farmers, including many women, have already reached the Singhu border from Haryana, Punjab and Uttarakhand to participate in the rally, he added.

"Preparations are in full swing for a disciplined rally. We are getting a huge response from farmers. We had a meeting with the police and the final route has been discussed. It will be conveyed to the protesters," Mr. Kohar said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

150-metre cross-border tunnel found in Jammu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

SRINAGAR

The Border Security Force on Saturday unearthed a 150-metre tunnel on the International Border in Jammu. This is the fourth such passage to be found in the past six months.

A BSF spokesman said the 30-foot-deep cross-border tunnel was detected in the



A view of the 150-metre tunnel. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pansar area.

It opened near a fence meant to push trained and

armed militants". The BSF said two Pakistan outposts, identified as Abhiyal Dogra and Kingre-de-kothi in Sargodha district, are located opposite the area where the tunnel was found.

in the same area in June last year.

"An infiltration bid was also foiled in November 2019 in the same area," the BSF said. A tunnel, around 150 metre long and 15 to 20 foot deep and around 3 foot wide, was detected on November 22 last year.

On January 13, another such tunnel, around 30 foot

deep and 150 metre long, was spotted in Jammu's Samba district. The tunnel unearthed on Saturday is the fourth such tunnel busted in the past six months in Jammu's Samba, Hiranagar and Kathua areas.

"Around 10 such tunnels were unearthed in the Jammu region in the past one year," officials said.

Indonesia makes room for an Indian hero

The Embassy in Delhi honours Biju Patnaik's role in the nation's freedom struggle

SUHASINI HAIDAR

NEW DELHI

Tucked away inside the Indonesian Embassy in New Delhi is a special room – one that has been built in recognition of the nation's freedom struggle from Dutch colonialism 74 years ago, and named, unusually, for an Indian leader, Biju Patnaik.

The former Chief Minister of Odisha, who was a skilled pilot, flew several missions in 1947 to transport Indonesian leaders, including the nation's tallest leader, President Sukarno, Vice-President Hatta and Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir out of Indonesia, at grave risk to himself.

"We wanted to build a living memorial that would not just be a museum, so we decided that our meeting and videoconference room would be named the Biju Patnaik



Mark of respect: A view of the Biju Patnaik Room in the Indonesian Embassy in New Delhi. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

Room," says Hanafi, the Cultural and Social Counsellor at the Embassy, who helped execute the project that was completed by Indonesian Ambassador Sidhartha Sudirodipo this month, before he ended his tenure in Delhi.

On the walls of the Biju Patnaik room are photographs, newspaper clippings and letters that document Mr. Patnaik's secret assign-

ments to fly out the Indonesian leaders, as well as his relations with the Indonesian leadership. Eventually, Indonesia won back its freedom. In 1950, President Sukarno was the chief guest at India's first Republic Day, and India-Indonesia ties remained strong for the next decade.

A letter in the Patnaik room also tells the tale of how relations between the two

countries soured after Indonesia didn't support India in the 1962 war with China. Hoping to sway President Sukarno, Mr. Patnaik wrote to him in November 1962, "Today, through an irony of fate, our freedom is in danger. I do hope and pray that Sukarno, the man of destiny of Indonesia, would not forget his brothers-in-arms in India, in their hour of darkness."

Relations were revived only decades later, when in 2005, India and Indonesia signed a Strategic Partnership agreement; military exchanges and trade ties have grown since. The newly-inaugurated Patnaik room, is a reminder not only of the historical bonds between the two countries, but the imperative of keeping ties strong in the present as well, diplomats at the Embassy say.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 8

+

Lalu Prasad's health worsens, shifted to AIIMS

+

Indonesia makes room for an Indian hero

The Embassy in Delhi honours Biju Patnaik's role in the nation's freedom struggle

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PATNA

Rashtriya Janata Dal president Lalu Prasad was shifted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi on Saturday as his health deteriorated at the Ranchi-based Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS).

Mr. Prasad, serving a prison sentence in several cases related to the fodder scam, has multiple ailments.

"Lalu Prasad is having trouble breathing for the past two days. On Friday, he was found to be having pneumonia. Considering his age [72], we have decided to shift him to the AIIMS, Delhi," RIMS Director Kamleshwar Prasad said.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 8

+

AMU medical team pulls out all stops for vaccine trial

University's JNMCH team completed phase 3 trials for Covaxin, earning praise from the pharma major

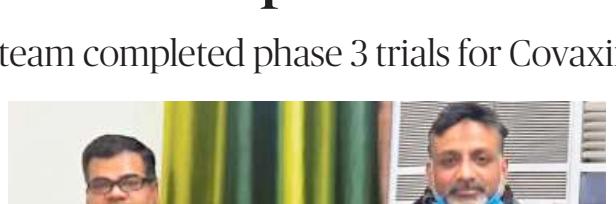
ANUJ KUMAR

ALIGARH

Shafiqur Rehman Khan is elated as the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital (JNMCH) of Aligarh Muslim University has received a letter of appreciation from Bharat Biotech for completing the enrolment and evaluation process of 1,000 volunteers under phase 3 trials of Covaxin well within time. Mr. Khan, a microbiology postgraduate, was one of the two field officers in the drive.

"The biggest challenge was to fight the myths that people associate with the vaccine. We were repeatedly asked if it would cause infertility. It was the reputation of the university and my standing in society that helped us clear the myths," said Mr. Khan, who has been a student representative in the AMU Court.

Prof. Mohammad Shameem, principal investigator, Covaxin trials, AMU, with Dr. Nafees Khan, sub-investigator, at their office in Aligarh. ■ ANUJ KUMAR



of appreciation from Dr. Rakesh Ella, son of chairman of Bharat Biotech, Dr. Krishna Ella, who is coordinating the Phase 3 trials. The letter congratulated the Vice-Chancellor, the professor, and his team for "speedy enrolment and execution".

The process, he said, started in the first week of November when JNMCH received the letter from ICMR as one of the sites for the COVID-19 vaccine trial.

"Our field workers did a good job in clearing the doubt that the goal of vacci-

nation is not population control. The doubts are not specific to one community or religion. It is again a myth propagated by a section of media and politicians with vested interests," he said.

The doubts, he added, sometimes also emanate when "we advise the volunteers not to conceive for the next four-five months as we don't yet know the vaccine's impact on the newborn".

As per ICMR protocol, Prof. Shameem said, 25% of volunteers were from the high-risk category – at least 60 years of age with comorbidities. "Less than 5% were from health care workers. For every visit, they are paid ₹50," he said.

In the first week following the vaccine jab, Mr. Khan said the team called up the volunteers every day. "After that, we called them once a week. They were given contact numbers to report any adverse effect."

The two volunteers whom *The Hindu* spoke to said the doctors cleared their doubts but they were not aware that they could have been injected with a placebo.

Mahesh from Kwasri area of Aligarh said he saw the trial as a good opportunity to get vaccinated. "We were given a booklet with a consent form. I even got my mother, who is a diabetic, injected. I didn't know that we could be injected with something other than the vaccine."

Similarly, Tahir from Turkman Gate area of Old Aligarh said he and his wife volunteered after the doctors clearly explained the process. "I work as a guard and felt it would be good if I get vaccinated. How could the doctors inject something other than the vaccine?" he wondered.

(The names of the volunteers have been changed to protect their identity)

2-year jail for Bharti in assault case

AAP calls it 'injustice', says MLA will appeal against verdict

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

AAP MLA Somnath Bharti was on Saturday sentenced to two years in jail by a Delhi court in a 2016 case of assaulting a security staffer at AIIMS and causing damage to the hospital property.

The court, however, granted bail to Mr. Bharti to enable him to file an appeal before the High Court against his conviction.

The Aam Aadmi Party said "injustice" has been meted out to Mr. Bharti and he will appeal against the decision.

"We respect the judiciary and have full faith in it. However, we feel injustice has happened to Mr. Somnath Bharti in this case. Somnath is a very popular leader and is loved by everyone in his constituency. People are

quite sad in his constituency as the news of his conviction is spreading. Somnath is filing an appeal. We are confident that justice will be done to him at appellate level," AAP said in a statement.

DJB office vandalism: AAP for court-monitored probe

Application alleges attack was orchestrated by Delhi BJP chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Delhi Jal Board vice-chairman and Aam Aadmi Party MLA Raghav Chadha moved a court here on Saturday seeking a court-monitored probe into the case of alleged vandalism of his office and attack on staff members in December last year.

The application was filed before Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ganjender Singh Nagar. The application, filed

through advocate Prashant Manchanda, alleged that the attack was orchestrated by Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta and party leaders Yogendra Chandoliya, Ravi Tanwar Upadhyaksh and Vikas Tanwar.

Dereliction of duties

It said that the application is being filed due to alleged inaction coupled with dereliction of duties by police, which aggravated the rampage meted out by the offenders who unleashed the "abominable" attack on the Delhi Jal Board and its staff on December 24 last year.

Around 200 to 250 BJP workers allegedly vandalised

Hold House session on ₹26,000-cr. scam: BJP

NEW DELHI
The Delhi BJP on Saturday demanded that the Aam Aadmi Party government convene a special session of the Assembly so that an alleged ₹26,000-crore scam in the Delhi Jal Board can be discussed in detail.

the DJB headquarters in broad daylight, the application alleged.

"The incident of violence was aggravated due to the conspicuous inaction on the part of the Delhi police which nonchalantly stood as mute spectators while the mob created havoc and ille-

gally trespassed the DJB headquarters and woefully ravaged the public property of DJB," it said.

The application also sought the court's directions to the DCP concerned to file an action taken report regarding the steps taken by the Delhi Police in view of the alleged "partisan and biased actions and attitude displayed by policemen in the viral video of the incident".

It further sought registration of an FIR against the alleged delinquent police officials for illegal omission to perform their duty.

The mob damaged furniture, destroyed computers

and printers, tore and brought down pictures of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and caused harm to the staff, injuring and intimidating them, the application said.

The application alleged that police lodged an FIR frivolously under trivial sections without any headway whatsoever using the COVID-19 pandemic as a shield.

"It is an attack on the state machinery and democracy and thus requires a court-monitored unbiased and impartial investigation to meet the ends of justice and upholding the rule of law in its true spirit," the application said.

This will be a historic parade: farmer leader

Protesters set up panel to oversee preparations for rally

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Kirti Kisan Union president Nirbhai Singh Dhudike, who presided over a meeting of the Punjab farmers' union, said that more than one lakh tractors are expected to arrive from Punjab and others will be coming from Haryana, Uttarakhand and other States for the tractor parade on January 26.

Mr. Singh said the focus of the three-hour-long meeting was to discuss preparations for the parade. A central committee has been formed to oversee arrangements, and volunteers will be deployed to ensure smooth facilitation of tractors along the parade route.

"This is going to be a historic rally. We will have around 2,500 volunteers who will facilitate the tractor rally on Republic Day. In case anyone needs assistance or help during the rally,



A farmer reads a newspaper at the Singhu border.

■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

We will have around 2,500 volunteers who will facilitate the tractor rally on Republic Day. Each volunteer will be given a badge, a jacket and an ID card

NIRBHAI SINGH DHUDIKE
Kirti Kisan Union president

items such as water and edibles. Each tractor will have a group of four-five farmers on it," he said.

Another farmer leader said the central committee formed to handle arrangements for the rally, will operate from a control room and around 20 members will be part of the panel.

There will be various sub-committees, including a traffic control team and volunteers' team and more. He added that 40 ambulances will be stationed along the route of the tractor parade.

Wreaking havoc



Over 50 shanties were gutted in a massive fire that broke out in east Delhi's Ghazipur on Saturday, officials said. Seventeen fire tenders were rushed to the spot and the blaze was brought under control at 2.50 p.m. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

'Universities will play pivotal role in generating employment in country'

Deputy CM Sisodia addresses students of NSUT

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Speaking at the Netaji Subhas University of Technology on the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that the pandemic has led to massive unemployment across the globe, and universities will play the lead role in generating employment.

"Their [universities] role

will be crucial in this fight against unemployment. Delhi government's goal is to inculcate an entrepreneurial mindset in the students, and it has taken several steps in this direction," said Mr. Sisodia.

Tribute to Netaji
A 50-metre-high national flag was also installed at the university campus.

Mr. Sisodia said that the biggest tribute to Netaji

would be to keep aside differences and work towards creating a strong future of the nation through better education. "Netaji's dreams would be fulfilled when the children of the country would be skilled enough to contribute to its growth and development. This would embody true patriotism," he said. Mr. Sisodia also inaugurated Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam lecture hall complex at the university.

Allegations of misconduct against me false: Akbar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister M.J. Akbar on Saturday reiterated before a Delhi court that the allegations of sexual misconduct made by journalist Priya Ramani against him were "fabricated and false".

Mr. Akbar made the submission before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ravindra Kumar through senior advocate Geeta Luthra during the final hearing in a criminal complaint filed by him against Ms. Ramani for allegedly defaming him by accusing him of sexual misconduct decades ago.

Ms. Luthra said that Ms. Ramani "removing the tweet when the matter was sub judice was [in] bad faith". "You [Ramani] can't make allegations on social media without any care and caution or responsibility after 20-30 years," she said. The court will further hear the matter on January 27.

Jeweller, two others held for staging robbery

He wanted more time to repay loan

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 47-year-old jeweller was arrested along with his employee and a ragpicker for allegedly plotting a fake theft incident in order to get extra time to return money which he had borrowed, the police said on Saturday.

The accused have been identified as Mukesh Verma, a resident of Rohini Sector-3, Suraj (20) and Sunny (31), residents of Mangolpuri.

According to the police, there was another reason for this incident.

Verma's wife forced him to wear a royal blue sapphire ring for propitious results in future. He was fed up with this and also wanted to prove her wrong.

On January 16 night, the police received information regarding theft of bags from a car.

Car lock

Verma told the police that he runs a jewellery shop in Rohini. Around 9.10 p.m., he parked his car and

reached home. He was in a hurry and forgot to lock the car. After sometime, when he came back, two bags containing 650 g of gold jewellery, ₹8 lakh and some keys were found to be missing, a senior police officer said.

During investigation, the police checked the CCTV footage and found the actions of Sunny, who had kept the bags in the car, suspicious, the police said.

"Later, he was questioned where he admitted that Verma, along with him and one hired ragpicker, staged a fake theft incident to gain sympathy of persons from whom Verma had borrowed money and would seek time to return the amount," DCP (Rohini) P.K. Mishra said.

In order to delay the payments, he made a plan with his help Sunny.

He told Sunny that they will lodge a police complaint which will help him find an excuse to delay the pending payments, DCP Mr. Mishra said.



Timings
DELHI

SUNDAY, JAN. 24
RISE 07:13 SET 17:54
RISE 14:01 SET 03:15
MONDAY, JAN. 25
RISE 07:13 SET 17:55
RISE 14:45 SET 04:11
TUESDAY, JAN. 26
RISE 07:13 SET 17:56
RISE 15:35 SET 05:08

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	20	08
Safdarjung	20	08
Palam	18	09

Delhi Palam Today
18°C A cold morning with moderate fog likely. A pleasant day would prevail with partly cloudy sky.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
17°C A cold morning with dense fog. A pleasant day with mainly sunny sky.

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THE HINDU
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READY FOR THE BIG DAY



(Clockwise from above) Seating arrangements are being made to ensure social distancing at Rajpath ahead of Republic Day; the Delhi tableau; CRPF men during full-dress rehearsals in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY, SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



DDA scheme sees 46,500 applications in 3 weeks

Urban body says portal open till next month for over 1,000 flats across EWS, LIG, MIG and HIG categories

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

A new housing scheme of the Delhi Development Authority has seen nearly 46,500 applications within the first three weeks of launch.

Under the new scheme, 1,354 flats across Jasola, Dwarka, Vasant Kunj and Rohini are on offer. The flats vary across categories – from EWS, LIG (Low Income Group) to MIG (Middle Income Group) and HIG (High Income Group) – based on prices.

As of Tuesday, the data provided by senior DDA officials showed that around 8,550 applicants have submitted their applications while 2,325 have completed the payment process. Interested stakeholders are required to deposit an application fee. While those in the EWS category are required to pay ₹25,000, those applying under the LIG category are required to pay ₹1 lakh, and those applying under the MIG and HIG categories have to pay ₹2 lakh.

Out of total flats on offer, around 1,200 are newly constructed flats while the rest of them are from older inventories.



Around 1,200 out of the 1,354 flats on offer are newly constructed and the rest are from older inventories.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of the Jasola Vihar Shaheen Bagh Metro Station on the Delhi Metro's Magenta Line. Equipped with modern facilities, these flats owners will not face last-mile connectivity issues, officials said.

"The new flats are modern and in multi-storey buildings. This time, the response has been great and even the locations are in great demand. Those interested in a South Delhi address will also be able to get flats in Jasola and Vasant Kunj. Even in Dwarka, a lot of investment is taking place, including the convention centre and other projects carried out by the DDA such as the golf courses," said Mr. Gandhi.

The application portal for the housing scheme will be active till February 16, according to the DDA.

The land-owning agency has also made the provision for inspections by interested stakeholders at each of the sites where they can visit the model flats. According to the DDA, eligible applicants would be considered for allotment through a computerised draw based on the random number technique.

"The draw shall be held in the presence of independent observers and the process streamed online," officials said.

Scheme update	
Applicants registered	46,500
Applications submitted	8,550
Payments made	2,325
Flats on offer	1,354

SOURCE: DDA

Around 100 such flats are from previous inventories and they include units that were surrendered by people for various reasons."

In earlier housing schemes, the DDA had faced several issues such as flats remaining unsold due to connectivity issues, lack of infrastructure in the locality and size of the flats. However, officials said that the newly constructed flats are well-connected and have seen a surge in demand.

The 215 HIG 3-BHK flats offered by the urban body in Jasola Pocket 9B are located within a few metres

of the Jasola Vihar Shaheen Bagh Metro Station on the Delhi Metro's Magenta Line. Equipped with modern facilities, these flats owners will not face last-mile connectivity issues, officials said.

"The draw shall be held in the presence of independent observers and the process streamed online," officials said.

DDA owes ₹2,000 cr. to North, South civic bodies'

AAP demands explanation from BJP

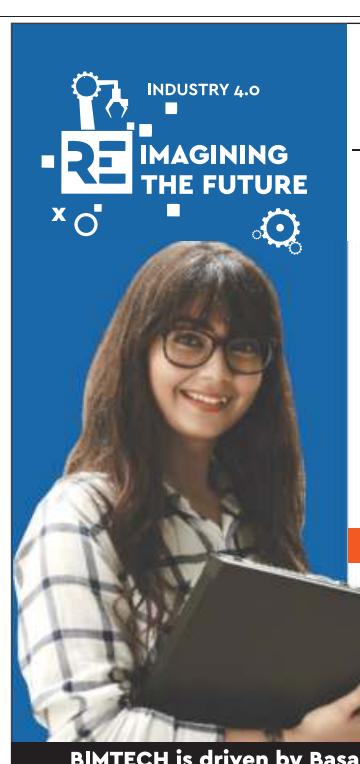
STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The AAP on Saturday alleged that the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) under the Central government owes more than ₹2,000 crore to the North Delhi Municipal Corporation and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation.

"AAP demands that the BJP should immediately disclose why they have not taken any initiative to get this money from the DDA because both civic bodies and the DDA are under the BJP," said AAP chief spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj.

"The DDA owes around ₹857 crore to the BJP-ruled North Corporation till March 31, 2018. Based on this figure, if we calculate the number today, then it becomes ₹1,200 crore. Similarly, the DDA owes around ₹535 crore to the SDMC. If we calculate all the zones then it comes that the DDA owes around ₹2000 crore to the North body and the SDMC," he added.

Mr. Bharadwaj said that the party wants to know from Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta the steps taken to bring this money from the DDA.



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6,967 get jab on Day 5, drive achieves 86% of daily target

There were 24 adverse events following immunisation; 100% turnout at some sites

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

On the fifth day of vaccination in the city on Saturday, a total of 6,967 healthcare workers were vaccinated, which is the highest till now. Also, there were 24 adverse events following immunisation (AEFI), said the Delhi government spokesperson.

The number of people vaccinated on Saturday was 86% of the target of 8,100 for the day, with some centres achieving 100% turnout, officials said. Several hospitals, including Delhi government-run Lok Nayak, Rajiv Gandhi, State Cancer Institute, and GTB hospitals, reported 100% achievement of the targeted vaccination, the officials said.

On the first day of vaccination,



A beneficiary getting COVID-19 vaccine at G.B. Pant Hospital in New Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

on January 16, 4,319 healthcare workers were vaccinated. On Monday, the figure was 3,598, on Tuesday it was 4,936 and 5,942 on Thursday. Of the 24 AEFI on Thursday, 23 were "minor" cases and one was "severe".

The increase in the number of vaccinations is due to better trust, change in policy allowing people not in the daily list of beneficiaries to also get vaccinated, according

to officials.

Also, currently, the vaccination is being undertaken only in 81 healthcare facilities and workers in other hospitals have been allowed to get vaccinated in these centres at least in some of the 11 districts. "This has also led to more people getting vaccinated," an official said.

The city is currently inoculating about 2.4 lakh healthcare workers, whose names have been registered with the government, and it is voluntary. The vaccination will now continue from Monday.

The vaccination drive is likely to pick up the pace in the coming days with the Delhi government increasing the number of centres to over 175, officials said.

Active cases fall below 2K; 197 new infections

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The national capital recorded 197 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, taking the tally to 6,33,739, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Saturday.

The death toll has risen to 10,799 after 10 more fatalities were reported in a single day.

A total of 76,868 tests were done in 24 hours.

Of the total cases, 6,21,060 people have recovered and there are now 1,880 active cases.

The test positivity rate was 0.26% on Saturday, and the overall positivity till now is 6.16%, as per the bulletin. Out of the total 9,053 beds available for COVID-19 treatment in the city, 8,199 beds are vacant. There are only 806 people under home isolation and 854 patients in hospitals.

The case fatality rate till now is 1.7%.

Also, there were 1,810 containment zones in the city as of Saturday.

Gautam Buddha Nagar sees three fresh COVID-19 cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NOIDA

Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar recorded three new cases of COVID-19 on Saturday, pushing the district's infection tally to 25,306, as per official data.

The active cases in the district have come down to 55 from 70 the previous day, while the recov-

ery rate surged to 99.42%, according to the data released by the UP Health Department.

Nineteen more patients were discharged during the period, taking the overall recoveries to 25,160, the fifth highest in the State. The death toll in Gautam Buddha Nagar stands at 91 and the mortality rate is 0.35%.

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RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 hrs)

Forecast for Sunday: Dense/very dense fog likely in some/isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Bihar, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. Cold wave conditions likely in isolated pockets over north Rajasthan

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	20.4	11.7	Kozhikode	—	33.9	—
Ahmedabad	—	28.4	13.5	Kurnool	—	33.0	20.4
Aizawl	—	19.4	8.7	Lucknow	—	16.4	9.1
Allahabad	—	22.4	9.7	Madurai	—	31.4	23.6
Bengaluru	—	29.2	18.0	Mangaluru	—	33.2	22.4
Bhopal	—	30.3	11.0	Mumbai	—	33.0	18.8
Bhubaneswar	—	32.0	17.6	Mysuru	—	32.2	16.8
Chandigarh	—	21.8	11.8	New Delhi	—	20.4	8.0
Chennai	—	31.1	23.2	Patna	—	16.2	10.8
Coimbatore	14.4	30.6	22.4	Pondicherry	—	31.1	21.8
Dehradun	—	22.7	6.3	Pune	—	33.6	15.7
Gangtok	—	13.6	5.5	Rajpur	—	31.8	14.1
Goa	—	32.2	21.3	Ranchi	—	26.0	8.5
Guwahati	—	24.8	9.9	Shillong	—	16.2	5.5
Hubballi	—	31.0	19.0	Shimla	—	14.4	5.1
Hyderabad	—	31.6	18.8	Srinagar	—	20.9	2.3
Imphal	—	22.8	8.5	Tiruvananthapuram	—	32.7	24.2
Jaipur	—	25.6	11.0	Tiruchi	—	31.3	23.4
Kochi	—	30.2	26.0	Vijayawada	—	31.2	22.4
Kohima	—	15.4	5.0	Visakhapatnam	—	30.6	22.4
Kolkata	—	23.2	13.0				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	—	—	49	—	—	—
Bengaluru	.7	.38	.30	.106	.108	...■■■
Chennai	.4	.5	.119	.32	.46	...■■■
Delhi	15	14	.71	.491	.398	...■■■
Hyderabad	.5	.42	.21	.149	.128	...■■■
Kolkata	.35	.24	.79	.343	.215	...■■■
Lucknow	.8	.62	.55	.316	.327	...■■■
Mumbai	15	14	.50	.333	.310	...■■■
Pune	—	.196	.69	.188	.127	...■■■
Visakhapatnam	18	.53	.34	.174	.143	...■■■

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

NC opposes L-G's new policy

Such decisions should be left for elected govt, says party

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Senior National Conference (NC) leader and Member of Parliament Hasnain Masoodi on Saturday opposed the J&K Industrial Land Allotment Policy approved by Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday.

"Such policy decisions should have been left for the popular State government to approve," Mr. Masoodi, also the convener of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration, said.

'Long term effect'

Mr. Masoodi said his party was dismayed with the new policy. "Such decisions have a long term bearing on the industrial outlook of J&K. A coterie of bureaucrats cannot replace a vital and vibrant legislature," he said.

He said such decisions, in a democratic set-up, are initiated by taking counsel from those associated with



Hasnain Masoodi. ■ FILE PHOTO

small and large scale industries. "A Bill is discussed in the Cabinet and then tabled in the legislature for further discussions. In this case, the entire process has been skipped," he alleged.

He warned that the scheme was meaningless in absence of a peace initiative. "Hundreds of lives have been lost in about a hundred encounters, quite a few in urban areas. The government does not even muster courage to restore the Internet at the speed available in other parts of the country," he added.

The L-G administration

on Saturday decided that the new policy proposes zoning of industrial areas at block and municipality level "after taking into consideration various factors including the existing level of industrial development, location of the proposed zone, and level of urbanisation".

"The Jammu and Kashmir Industrial Land Allotment Policy 2021-30 will also cover land allotment for health institutions, medi-cities and educational institutions or edu-cities," an official spokesman said.

It was approved that the Land Allotment Committee will decide and allot industrial land to the applicant within 45 days in cases of projects worth ₹200 crore, ₹50-200 crore and up to ₹50 crore, respectively.

The policy aims at achieving inclusive growth through sustainable industrialisation and employment generation," the official said.

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CORRIGENDUM TO TENDER NOTICE NO. - PR 04/2021

With reference to Tender Notice No.- PR 04/2021 issued in various Newspapers on 08th January, 2021 for "Selection of agency to provide (1:1) Internet Lease Line Connectivity on OFC media to Bihar School Examination Board, Patna," changes have been made in Tender document and Tender Schedule. The updated Tender document is uploaded on e-procurement website <https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>

Secretary

म.प्र. राज्य सहकारी विपणन संघ मर्यादित

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INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

The Executive Engineer, HPPWD Division Sunder Nagar(HP) on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPPWD for the works detailed in the table.

Sr. No	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (In Rs.)	Starting date for downloadig Bid	Earnest Money	Deadline for submission of Bid.
1.	C/o Additional Accommodation of Inspection Hot Rest House at Dehra in Tehsil Sundernagar Distt., Mandi (H.P) (SH- ROFD, Metalling, and Tarring, RWalls, C.D. works, Metal beam crash barrier railing and road marking, road furniture and dumping site etc, for double lane portion KM 6/600 to 6/1/600) under CRF Job No. HP-2017-18-143).	Rs.69.54,249/- only	29.01.2021	Rs.10,02,100/- only.	11.02.2021
2.	Improvement and widening of Stepper Tatapani road Km 0/0 to 6/80. (SH- ROFD, Metalling, and Tarring, RWalls, B/Walls, C.D. works, Parapets, Metal beam crash barrier railing and dumping site etc, for double lane portion KM 6/600 to 6/1/600) under CRF Job No. HP-2017-18-143).	Rs. 10,04,82,430/- only	29.01.2021	Rs.20,09,700/- only.	11.02.2021
3.	Improvement and widening of Stepper Tatapani road Km 0/0 to 6/80. (SH- ROFD, Metalling, and Tarring, RWalls, B/Walls, C.D. works, Metal beam crash barrier railing and dumping site etc, for single lane portion KM 8/500 to 20/500) under CRF Job No. HP-2017-18-143).	Rs.20,179,365/- only	29.01.2021	Rs.40,43,600/- only.	11.02.2021

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website WWW.hptenders.gov.in.

Executive Engineer,
Sunder Nagar Division,
HPPWD Sunder Nagar-175018

On behalf of
Governor of Himachal Pradesh.

HP / 5281/20-21

Tender notice No.7 of 2020-21

Corrigendum Government of Gujarat

Narmada Water Resources Water Supply & Kalpasar Department

Online E-Tender notice No.7 of 2020-21 issued in the office of the Executive Engineer, Irrigation Project Dr. No.2, Sukhi Colony, Alikherava Road, Bodeli-391135 Ta. Bodeli Dist. Chhotaudepur Phone No. 0265-220319 as under.

| Sr.No. | As per Tender Notice | Read Now as Under |
</tr
| --- | --- | --- |

FROM PAGE ONE

World is watching new India, says Prime Minister

"Netaji once asked people not to lose hope of free India; similarly, no one can stop India from being self-reliant," he added.

During his speech of more than 40 minutes, Mr. Modi referred to a question that Netaji asked his nephew Sisir Bose before executing the daring escape from the country in January 1941. Netaji had asked his nephew in Bengali "Amar ekta kaj korbe (Will you do something for me)?"

"If today, every Indian places his hand on his heart and feels the presence of Netaji, then he will hear the same question: will you do something for me? This work, this task, this goal is to make India self-reliant today," Mr. Modi said.

Reflecting on the contribution of West Bengal in the freedom struggle, the Prime Minister said the State will

have to take up new responsibility for a self-reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat).

"Along with the dream of self-reliant India, Netaji is the biggest inspiration for Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal). As with the role played by Netaji in the freedom struggle, West Bengal will have to take up the same responsibility for a self-reliant India. A self-reliant and Sonar Bangla will have to take lead in making a self-reliant India," he said.

The reference to "Sonar Bangla" by Mr. Modi is significant as the term is the BJP's catch phrase for its campaigns in the State scheduled to hold Assembly polls in the next few months. Mr. Modi called on the people of the State to come forward and restore their pride and like Netaji not rest till the objective is achieved.

Why not have four capitals, asks Mamata

"Sudipda (Leader of the Trinamool Congress in the Lok Sabha, Sudip Banerjee), you should demand that Parliament sessions be held on a rotation basis in each of the four places," she added.

Ms. Banerjee said, "We are not parochial. We are saying it for everyone."

She questioned why a capital should not come up in the south in Tamil Nadu, Kerala or Karnataka, in the north in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab or Rajasthan and similar in the east in Kolkata.

The Chief Minister called for a change in attitude towards the States.

Quoting the BJP's oft-repeated slogans, she said, "The attitude needs to be changed... one leader, one nation, one ration card, one nation... one political party, one nation... what is the valuation?"

Later in the day, while participating in another event at the Victoria Memorial along with Prime Minis-

ter Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister expressed her annoyance to slogans, including "Jai Shri Ram", being raised at the venue.

"I think government programmes should have a dignity. It is not a programme organised by a political party... I am thankful to the Prime Minister and Ministry of Culture for holding the event here in Kolkata," Ms. Banerjee said.

She went on to say that "disrespecting someone by inviting them to an event" does not speak well of the organisers, adding that in protest, she would not address the gathering. The Chief Minister then ended her speech abruptly with, "Jai Hind, Jai Bangla".

Ms. Banerjee, however, attended the entire programme that ran for almost an hour after the incident. The development evoked strong reactions from both the BJP and the Trinamool Congress.

Police give nod for tractor parades in Delhi on R-Day

Gurnam Singh Chaduni, who heads a faction of the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Haryana, told presspersons that as thousands of farmers will participate in the parade, there will be no single route.

Krantikari Kisan Union president Darshan Pal said barricades set up at the Delhi border points would be removed on January 26 and farmers would take out tractor rallies after entering the national capital. He added that it would be a peaceful rally and the protesters would follow the route map agreed upon during the meeting.

A senior police officer said the farmers have not been allowed to hold a protest on the Outer Ring Road as initially proposed. However, the tractors would be allowed to enter Delhi and leave along a fixed route.

Earlier in the day, the protesting farmers handed over to the Haryana police a man, who they alleged, had come to kill some of the farm leaders. The suspect,

however, is said to have told the police that he was thrashed by a group of people at the Singhu border before he was presented before the media. A video of the suspect, recorded when he was grilled by the Haryana police, has been widely circulated on social media.

"On January 26, there was a plan to create disturbance during the tractor parade by opening fire on Delhi Police personnel, which would prompt them to retaliate against the protesting farmers in a strong manner," he claimed during a press conference at the Singhu border on Friday night.

A police officer said the young man was being quizzed in Sonipat by the Crime Branch officials. The man had been residing in Sonipat and had no previous criminal record. "He was not carrying any arms or ammunition. We are questioning him, but nothing has so far been found that points to any kind of conspiracy, as is being alleged," the officer said.

Punjab to build fiscal information platform

VIKAS VASUDEV
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government has signed an agreement with the eGovernments (eGov) Foundation to build a first-of-its-kind fiscal information exchange platform to enable better management of public finance in the State.

The platform will facilitate real-time availability of financial information to the stakeholders for data-dri-

ven and efficient deployment of public funds and policy making.

"Over the next two years, the State aims to build tools to monitor and track its financial health by building agility to adapt to dynamic and evolving needs such that available funds can be deployed actively to meet its development agenda and priorities," State Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

The platform will facilitate real-time availability of financial information to the stakeholders for data-dri-

Despite A.P. govt. objection, SEC notifies panchayat polls

Friction between State govt. and State Election Commission reaches a flashpoint

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

The conflict between the Andhra Pradesh government and the State Election Commission (SEC) over holding gram panchayat elections reached a flashpoint on Saturday with State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar issuing the notification for the first phase of the four-phase elections. The State government had filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the High Court order to hold elections as per schedule, is due to be heard on January 25.

As per the notification released at a press conference here, elections will be held in 14 revenue divisions covering 146 mandals in 11 districts on February 5, for which nominations have to be filed before 5 p.m. on January 27.

Addressing presspersons, Mr. Ramesh Kumar said the High Court believed that the SEC had fixed the election schedule after duly taking the safety of voters and government employees into consideration, and insisted that the elections would be



Poll call: A.P. SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar releasing gram panchayat election notification in Vijayawada. ■ RAJU V

held in tandem with the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

He asked why employees' unions should object to holding the elections in February, when local body elections and Assembly polls had been successfully completed in many States. There had already been an inordi-

nate delay of nearly two-and-a-half-years in conducting the elections and the SEC ought to fulfil its Constitutional responsibility thereof, he pointed out.

While claiming to have no personal enmity with Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das and Director-General of Police Gautam Sawang, whom he described as "mature officers", Mr. Kumar hoped that the government would at least now extend cooperation for the smooth conduct of the elections.

He issued a subtle warning that if the election process was obstructed, the government would have to bear the entire responsibility, and said that the Panchayat Raj Department had failed in discharging its duties.

Shivamogga blast exposes illegal mining

Probe on into source of explosives

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HASSAN

pended on raw materials (boulders) extracted in other areas. "When sufficient raw material is not available, those who had invested huge money to set up the crushing unit, go for mining," he said.

The technical experts who visited the spot have collected samples to ascertain the actual explosive stocked at the site. It is said that it could be ammonium nitrate, normally used in the mining areas. "Nobody keeps a huge stock of explosives at a working place as it is highly risky. There are designated suppliers. There are strict guidelines on how to transport them. However, those into illegal trade ignore them," he said.

The Shivamogga Rural police registered a case against three people and arrested them.

AICC plots a new political course for Cong. in Kerala

Top leaders meet party MPs, MLAs and workers in State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A galaxy of top national-level Congress leaders met here on Saturday to plot a definitive political course to help the party's Kerala unit shrug off its organisational sluggishness and win the Assembly election in April.

The import of the message of the All India Congress Committee's (AICC) message seemed clear.

Including acceptability and factoring in caste, communal, gender and age demographic trends in candidate selection will pave the way for victory. So will building bridges with community leaders, social organisations and other influencers. Factional loyalty will not inform candidate selection henceforth.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and AICC general secretaries Tariq Anwar and K.C. Venugopal reportedly conveyed the message to MLAs, MPs and Kerala Pradesh Congress Commit-

tee leaders during marathon meetings here. The presence of the top office-bearers indicated that the AICC held the State unit in a vice-like grip. The national leadership has brought all leaders on board, including Oommen Chandy, Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chemmuthala, KPCC president Mullappally Ramachandran and United Democratic Front (UDF) convener M.M. Hassan as a microcosm of Kerala's diverse electorate.

It has also banned open speculation about the chief ministerial candidature to

prevent any mid-campaign power struggle.

The AICC has asked the party's election management and strategy committee headed by Mr. Chandy to rebuild the party's election machinery.

The AICC prevented potentially embarrassing optics of senior leader K.V. Thomas deserting the party. It made a placatory gesture by hearing him at the KPCC headquarters. However, the Congress was unlikely to accede to his demands to prevent possible copycat conduct by other leaders.

The schedule had been designed such that the first phase would be completed by February 15 and the second phase would start soon after, the Minister said.

With the State set to ramp up the vaccination drive, the Health Department has drawn up an action plan for the upcoming phase.

Health workers who have received the first shot of the Covishield vaccine will be ready for their final jab by February 13.

The schedule had been designed such that the first phase would be completed by February 15 and the second phase would start soon after, the Minister said.

Every district would have at least 14 vaccination centres, the Minister said.

Draft policy to help grow nano, micro enterprises

Udyog Sahayak Enterprises Network put together by FICCI, TISS and Azim Premji University

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

A new policy on the anvil, the Udyog Sahayak Enterprises Network (USENET), may give a major fillip to the growth-stunted nano and micro-enterprises in India's informal sector.

The proposed framework, whose draft was jointly put together by the Azim Premji University, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), is aimed at providing a slew of growth-driven services to ov-

er 62 million nano and micro-enterprises that currently employ over 100 million people.

By enabling scale-up, the draft claims, USENET can aid in the creation of an additional 10.3 million jobs over five years, going up to nearly 56.9 million jobs over 10 years.

Each of these small enterprises currently has one to three employees, and if given a boost, they have the potential to grow and create a large number of jobs, says the draft.

If the value-added per worker can be computed, according to the draft, it could bring in a 12% nominal growth in GVA (gross asset value), amounting to an economic value of ₹2.16 lakh crore in five years and over ₹19 lakh crore at the end of 10 years.

T. Muralidharan, chairman, FICCI, Telangana State Council, and co-author of the report said, "Through USENET, we are trying to create a country-wide entrepreneurial network. The platform will give millions of nano and micro-

enterprises, which are facing harassment and growth challenges, information on policies, schemes and credit options, and visibility to lenders and customers, thereby helping them grow and go digital."

Report co-author and faculty member at Azim Premji University, Amit Basole, noted that rather than creating more nano-entrepreneurs, the country has to help existing MSEs grow in size. "We can do this by creating a support system which enables them to go digital, avail of government

schemes, adopt new technologies, and increase productivity. This will create millions of new jobs," he said.

According to co-authors of the proposal, the draft is currently under review by the group of ministers and the PMO. The Union government is likely to sanction upto ₹5,000 crore to part-fund CAPEX to set up at least 19 lakh USENET centres. Each of these centres will be headed by a Udyog Sahayak, who will have a mandate to help and monitor the growth of 15 to 50 enterprises.

'Sukhoi helped maritime security'

Resurrection of the 222 Squadron with the fighter jets in Thanjavur hailed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The resurrection of 222 Squadron at Thanjavur with Sukhoi-30 aircraft has paved the way for strengthening maritime security in the southern peninsula and maintaining Indian interests in the Indian Ocean region, Air Marshal Amit Tiwari, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Air Command (SAC), has said.

Speaking at a Commanders' Conference held at the SAC, Akkulam, on Saturday, he outlined efforts by the command in fast-tracking infrastructure development for fighters, deployment of radars, and successful con-

duct of Combined Guided Weapons Firing at Suryanagar on varied firing platforms.

The Air Marshal expressed satisfaction over the induction of an additional in-

digenuously built LCA (light combat aircraft) Tejas aircraft squadron at Sulur. The Air Force is in a highly accelerated growth stage and induction of indigenous sys-

SSC exams in Telangana to be held from May 17

Attendance has not been mandated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

The Telangana Department of School Education has announced the academic calendar for the 2020-21 academic year, with the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations scheduled from May 17 to 26.

The department has worked out a schedule of 89 working days for Classes IX and X when they open from February 1 and function till May 26. Summer vacation will be from May 27 to June 13.

However, the total working days for the year have

been calculated as 204, including 115 days from September 1, 2020 to January 30, 2021, when digital classes were held. Minimum attendance will not be mandatory to write the exams for students of all the classes. No child will be withheld from writing the examinations on any grounds, the academic calendar says.

Students will have to complete project work and assignments covering 30% of the syllabus at home, with the help of teachers and parents. This syllabus, however, will not be part of the final exams or the internal assessments.

India, China to hold 9th round of talks today

Corps Commander dialogue being held after a long delay

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

India and China are scheduled to hold the ninth round of Corps Commander talks on Sunday after a long delay in the senior military-level talks to work out a phased disengagement and de-escalation along the disputed border in Eastern Ladakh.

The talks will be held on the Chinese side at Moldo opposite Chushul, a defence source said. As the earlier round, the Indian side will be led by Lt. Gen. P.G.K. Menon, General Officer Commanding of the I4 Corps.

Last November, officials said both sides are close to finalising a phased withdrawal plan of troops and equipment but there was no progress since in concluding it. With no breakthrough in several rounds of military and diplomatic-level talks,



Lt. Gen. P.G.K. Menon will lead the Indian team.

both sides have dug in for the harsh winter in the high-altitude region. The Indian stand continues to be complete disengagement and de-escalation along the entire Eastern ladakh.

No progress

After the sixth round on September 21, both sides for the first time issued a joint statement in which they agreed to "stop sending more

troops to the frontline" and "refrain from unilaterally changing the situation on the ground". There has been no progress towards resolution in the subsequent rounds.

Early this month, Army chief Gen. Manoj Naravane said the forces were ready to hold the ground for as long as it takes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to achieve "national objectives". He had also downplayed reports of Chinese troop withdrawal from the training areas in the depth which he said were 500-1,500 km away from the border and one should not lay "too much significance" on these comings and goings.

With the long-term view, the Army is reorganising some of its strike elements from the western border to the northern border for deployment along the LAC.

Teacher dies of COVID-19 in Ludhiana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUDHIANA

A 48-year-old government schoolteacher, who had tested positive for COVID-19, died at a private hospital here on Saturday, following which her 12 colleagues and three students also returned positive results, an official said.

Schools in the State reopened for Classes 5 to 12 from January 7 after a government order.

The deceased teacher taught maths at the Government Senior Secondary School Galib Kalan in Jagraon.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Neetu Katyal said the school has now been shut and the samples of other students and the staff were being taken for testing.

State Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla had said the decision to open schools was taken following a persistent demand by parents.



In step: The Army's 61st cavalry regiment rehearsing at the Rajpath on Saturday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Security tightened across Delhi for Republic Day

SFJ has given a call to 'plunge city into darkness'

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Following Intelligence inputs, the Delhi Police have deployed personnel at power substations and grids, after banned terrorist outfit Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) gave a

call to agitating farmers to "plunge Delhi into darkness on Republic Day" by targeting the offices of power distribution companies and cutting power supply.

The order copy signed by the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Branch) says supporters of the U.S.-based SFJ were planning to cut off power supply on January 25 and 26. The organisation

supports the Khalistan movement, the secession of Punjab from India as Khalistan. The BSES, the power supply company of Delhi, said it had received an input from the SFJ.

The SFJ is known to incite gullible youth into committing acts of arson and violence. Some youth recently damaged mobile towers in Punjab.

Tug of war over Netaji's legacy

Bengal CM announces new varsity, monument while PM takes part in 3 events

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The 125th birth anniversary celebration of Subhas Chandra Bose on Saturday turned into a tug of war between the Centre and State government, with each trying to appropriate the legacy of the national icon. With only a few months to go for the Assembly election in West Bengal, attempts to appropriate cultural icons like Netaji and Rabindranath Tagore are being made by the Trinamool Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The Union Culture Ministry had earlier this week announced that "in order to honour and remember Netaji's indomitable spirit and selflessness to the nation, the Government of India has decided to celebrate his birthday on the 23rd day of January every year as Parakram Divas". While the Centre had announced the day to be observed as Parakram Divas (day of courage), Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee observed the day as Desh Nayak Divas (day of hero of nation).



Show of strength: Mamata Banerjee at a rally on the 125th birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose in Kolkata. ■ AP

participated in an event at the Victoria Memorial, and said the Centre would celebrate Netaji's birthday as Parakram Divas every year.

Earlier in the day, Ms. Banerjee visited the Netaji Research Bureau and participated in a roadshow from the Netaji statue at Shyam Bazaar to another statue of the national icon on Red Road. "I do not understand Parakram, whether it is Hin-

di word or Bengali word or an English word, but we understand that Netaji was the greatest Desh Nayak. Therefore, we are observing the day as Desh Nayak Divas," Ms. Banerjee said. The title "Desh Nayak" was given to Netaji by Tagore, she said.

The Chief Minister went on to say that she was in touch with Netaji's family "for 365 days, and not just before the election". She also announced on social media that a monument named after the Azad Hind Fauj would be built at Rajarhat. "A university named after Netaji is also being set up," she said.

"Attempts are being made by the Trinamool to show that the BJP is alien to the culture of West Bengal. That is why the State's ruling party goes into a hyper drive when the PM visits the city or Home Minister Amit Shah goes to Santiniketan," Professor of political science at Rabindra Bharati University Biswanath Chakraborty told *The Hindu*.

HAL to deliver three combat helicopters soon

12 more LCH to be handed over

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) is scheduled to deliver the first batch of three indigenous light combat helicopters (LCH) to the Army and the Air Force before March 31, a defence official said. They are part of the 15 limited series production (LSP) LCHs approved by the Defence Acquisition Council.

"HAL has received the Letter of Intent from Army and Air Force. Once the order is given, it will deliver the remaining 12 helicopters of the LSP in the next financial year," the source said.

Early this month, the Defence Ministry said in its annual report that the contracts for the procurement of the LCH from HAL, additional Harop (P-IV) loitering drones from Israel and the upgrade of unmanned aerial vehicles in service were "likely to be signed in the first quarter of 2021".

The Army variant of the light utility helicopter (LUH), which has completed all tests and also demonstrated its high-altitude capability last September, is scheduled to receive its initial operational clearance at the Aero India show, which will be held in Bengaluru from February 3.

The LCH and the LUH along with the weaponised ALH will be showcased inside the Indian pavilion at Aero India. The LUH is a three-tonne helicopter positioned as replacement for the Cheetah and Chetak helicopters. According to HAL, it can fly at 220 kmph.

The light combat helicopter made by HAL. ■ ANI

Snowfall cuts off road, air links to Kashmir

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

A fresh spell of snowfall on Saturday cut off the Kashmir Valley from the rest of the country, as both air and surface traffic were affected.

An official said flights were cancelled as snow had accumulated on the runway of the Srinagar airport.

The Srinagar-Jammu National Highway, which runs through the Qazigund area of south Kashmir, was also closed to traffic.

"The weather system is likely to persist for the next eight to 10 hours and gradually improve thereafter," the meteorological department said.

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QR CODE

Congress faces twin challenges

Polls come amid leadership row

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

A day after the stormy meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), party leaders on Saturday conveyed a sense of urgency with regard to preparations for elections in States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

While former party chief Rahul Gandhi embarked on a three-day tour of Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, who had taken on the group of 23 dissenters (G-23) during Friday's CWC meet, was in Thiruvananthapuram to oversee the first meeting of Kerala's election management committee.

Referring to the series of meetings in Kerala, AICC general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal tweeted, "We all resolved to put up a united front in the coming election."



K.C. Venugopal

the party does well in Puducherry, and Tamil Nadu as part of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led alliance, and wrests Kerala from the Left Democratic Front (LDF), Mr. Gandhi can be convinced to return as party chief.

Mr. Gandhi, however, steadfastly avoided speaking about the issue even when party leaders asked him to reconsider his resignation.

No going back

While the G-23 may shed their reservation about Mr. Gandhi coming back, it is clear that they do not want to leave decision-making the "sole prerogative" of the Gandhi family.

"The letter writers have stuck to their guns and won't back off. Timing is crucial as the party needs to be fighting fit well ahead of the 2024 to take on the BJP," said a G-23 member who's not part of the CWC.

Their calculation is that if

MINISTRY OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS
Government of India

PUBLIC NOTICE

A New and Comprehensive Form for New Companies SPICe+

As part of Government of India's Ease of Doing Business (EODB) initiatives, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified and deployed a new Web Form christened 'SPICe+' (pronounced 'SPICe Plus').

SPICe+ offers 11 services by 3 Central Govt. Ministries & Departments and Two State Govt. (Maharashtra & Karnataka), thereby saving many procedures, time and cost for Starting a Business in India and is applicable for all new company incorporations.

SPICe+ is an integrated Web Form. SPICe+ has two parts viz.:

PART A FOR NAME RESERVATION FOR NEW COMPANIES, and

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- (i) Incorporation (ii) DIN allotment
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- (vii) Mandatory issue of Profession Tax registration (Maharashtra) (viii) Mandatory issue of Profession Tax registration (Karnataka)
- (ix) Mandatory Opening of Bank Account (x) Allotment of GSTIN (if so applied for) for the Company, and

- A new and user friendly Dashboard on the Front Office has been created for company incorporation application (SPICe+ and linked forms as applicable).
- The new web form facilitates On-screen filing and real time data validation for seamless incorporation of companies.
- Registration for EPFO and ESIC is mandatory for all new companies incorporated and no EPFO & ESIC registration nos. shall be separately issued by the respective agencies.
- Registration for Profession Tax is mandatory for all new companies incorporated in the State of Maharashtra and Karnataka.
- All new companies incorporated through SPICe+ are mandatorily required to apply for opening the company's Bank account through the AGILE-PRO linked web form.

NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY DELHI
(A University of Law Established by Act No. 1 of 2008 of NCT of Delhi)
Sector-14, Dwarka, New Delhi-110078

ADMISSION ANNOUNCEMENT 2021-22

LAST DATE FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS : May 20, 2021
ALL INDIA LAW ENTRANCE TEST (AILET) : June 20, 2021 (10.00 am - 11.30 am)
(To be conducted offline, subject to revision)

The NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY DELHI established in 2008 by Act No. 1 of 2008 is premier Law University in the capital city of India. The University invites applications for admission to B.A.LL.B.(Hons.), LL.M. and Ph.D. Programmes for the Academic Year 2021-22. Eligibility, total seats and other details for these Programmes are:

B.A.LL.B.(Hons.) [Five-Year Programme]

Eligibility: Senior Secondary School Examination (10+2 System) or Equivalent Examination with 45% marks (40% in case of SC/ST/Persons with Disabilities). The candidates appearing for the 12th standard annual examination in 2021 are eligible to apply.

Total Seats: 110+10 (110 seats on AILET merit; 5 seats each for Foreign Nationals and OCI/PIO for direct admission on merit). Foreign Nationals/OCI/PIO are exempted from AILET, but should have 65% marks in the qualifying examination.

Additional Supernumerary Seats: One seat for Kashmiri Migrants and Two seats for Residents of Jammu & Kashmir.

LL.M. Programme [One Year]

Eligibility: LL.B. or an equivalent law degree with 50% marks (45% in case of SC/ST/ Persons with Disabilities). The candidates appearing for final year LL.B. annual examination in 2021 are eligible to apply.

Total Seats: 70+10 (70 Seats on AILET merit; 5 seats each for Foreign Nationals and OCI/PIO for direct admission on merit). Foreign Nationals/OCI/PIO are exempted from AILET.

Note: One additional supernumerary seat for Kashmiri Migrants.

Ph.D. Programme

Eligibility: LL.M. or an equivalent law degree with 55% marks (50% in case of SC/ST/ Persons with Disabilities).

Total Seats: 13+2 (13 Seats on AILET merit and 2 Seats for direct admission to Foreign Nationals on merit of Research Proposals). Foreign Nationals are exempted from AILET.

AILET-2021 will be conducted at the following cities:

Bengaluru, Bhopal, Chandigarh, Chennai, Cochin, Cuttack, Dehradun, Delhi, Gandhinagar, Greater Noida, Gurugram, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Jammu, Jodhpur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, Nagpur, Patna, Raipur, Silchar, Varanasi and Visakhapatnam.

Interested candidates should apply online on payment of application fee of Rs.3,050/- (Rupees Three Thousand Fifty Only). Application fee in case of SC/ST and Persons with Disabilities (PWD) is Rs.1,050/- (Rupees One thousand Fifty Only). Below Poverty Line (BPL) applicants of SC/ST category are exempted from application fee.

For category wise reservation, seat matrix and other details relating to Application Form, Eligibility Criteria, Pattern of Test etc., please visit the University websites: <https://nationallawuniversitydelhi.in>; <http://www.nludelhi.ac.in>.

Only online applications through <https://nationallawuniversitydelhi.in>; <http://www.nludelhi.ac.in> are accepted. The admit cards will be available online w.e.f. June 5, 2021 on the above websites.

HELPDESK CONTACT DETAILS:

Contact Number : 022-61306293, 011-28034257 Email id : ailetadmissions@nludelhi.ac.in

Note: National Law University Delhi has not authorized any agent/ agency for admission. No payment should be made to any unauthorized person. Any complaint of this kind should be intimated to the University on admission@nludelhi.ac.in

**PROF. (DR.) ANUPAMA GOEL
REGISTRAR**</

Seven more States to deploy Covaxin

Maharashtra tops with 21,751 inoculations on the eighth day of the drive; 123 adverse events reported

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

From next week, the Centre will expand access to Covaxin, a COVID-19 vaccine being developed by Bharat Biotech, to seven States in addition to the existing 12, the Union Health Ministry said in a briefing on Saturday.

One more death – the first in a woman – following vaccination was reported in Gurugram, Haryana taking the tally to six. This too was attributed to cardiac failure and not linked to vaccination, a Ministry official said.

Following the immunisation, 123 adverse events have been reported till 6 p.m. on the eighth day of the drive. So far, no severe or serious adverse events or death have been linked to the adminis-



First dose: A doctor showing her support for vaccination in Ahmedabad. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

stration of vaccines, the Ministry said.

Nearly 1.4 lakh were vaccinated until 6 p.m. with Maharashtra accounting for nearly 21,751 inoculations

followed by Bihar at 12,165 and Andhra Pradesh at 11,562. This brings the number in the first week since the vaccination drive began to 15,37,190 healthcare work-

ers. Across India, 27,776 sessions have been organised since last Saturday and ideally there should have been 2.7 million vaccinations so far. Accounting for today's num-

bers, this works out to nearly 55% of the intended beneficiaries getting their inoculations. Eleven persons have been hospitalised so far.

Sharing expertise

A training of immunisation programme managers of 13 countries (Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brazil, the Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka) using Indian vaccines was conducted by the Ministry covering all aspects of the roll-out spread over two days.

The seven States administering Covaxin from next week would be Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and West Bengal.

WHO chief thanks Modi for 'continued support'

Response to pandemic evokes praise

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

GENEVA

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Saturday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his continued support to the global COVID-19 response, saying acting together, including sharing of knowledge, will help in combating the novel coronavirus.

"Thank you, India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for your continued support to global COVID-19 response. Only if we act together, including sharing of knowledge, can we stop this virus and save lives and livelihoods," tweeted Mr. Ghebreyesus, WHO's Director-General.



Tedros Ghebreyesus

On January 19, India announced its assistance of vaccines to the neighbouring countries. A day after, 1.5 lakh doses of vaccines were supplied to Bhutan and one lakh doses to the Maldives. Over 2 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines were provided to Bangladesh and 1 million doses to Nepal.

Vaccines: U.S. applauds 'true friend' India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WASHINGTON

Terming India a "true friend" which is using its pharmaceutical sector to help the global community, the U.S. has applauded New Delhi for gifting COVID-19 vaccines to several countries.

"We applaud India's role in global health, sharing millions of doses of COVID-19 vaccine in South Asia. India's free shipments began with the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal and will extend to others," the South and Central Asia Bureau of the U.S. State Department tweeted on Friday. "India's a true friend using its pharma to help the global community," it said.

Perarivalan's advocate writes to T.N. Governor

He makes plea to 'alleviate suffering'

S. VIJAY KUMAR

CHENNAI

The advocate of Perarivalan, convict in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, has written to Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit, appealing to provide solace to the convict and his aged parents and alleviate their sufferings.

In his letter, advocate-on-record K. Paari Vendan said Perarivalan was suffering from multiple co-morbidities, including systemic hypertension, chronic prostatitis, gout arthritis and irritable bowel syndrome, among others. While he had suffered 29 years of imprisonment, his aged parents were running from pillar to post to get premature release for their son.

It was essential to note that a key investigating official, then in the Special Investigation Team that probed the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, had gone on record stating that he did not record the "exculpatory" part of Perarivalan's

confessional statement while in custody "which means that my client Mr. A.G. Perarivalan could be innocent and due to lack of any legal recourse he is still languishing in jail", his advocate wrote.

Mr. Vendan said the investigation officers, the officer who recorded Perarivalan's confessional statement and others were all asking for his release as their conscience had prodded them to do so.

"Now it is in your good office to consider and provide solaces to these long-pained souls. Please do justice, alleviate their sufferings," he said.

Sources in the State government said Perarivalan, lodged in the Puzhal central prison here, had petitioned for 30 days' parole for undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Villupuram. The petition was submitted days before the hearing on remission came up before the Supreme Court a couple of days ago.

Judges recall dark days of Emergency

Justice Ramana recounts flight from arrest on a lorry as a student in 1975

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

Justices N.V. Ramana and D.Y. Chandrachud of the Supreme Court on Saturday shared their personal experiences as students when the Emergency was declared in 1975, deeply affecting their lives.

Justice Ramana, who is in line to be the next Chief Justice of India following the seniority norm, recounted how as an 18-year-old student, he escaped on a lorry from imminent arrest to his maternal aunt's home with ₹10 in his pocket.

Justice Chandrachud spoke of the personal insight he gained as a Delhi University law student, whose father was on the Bench, into the "tribulations of a judge grappling with his reconfigured role in this novel state of exception".

They were speaking at the virtual launch of a book *The Law of Emergency Powers: Comparative Common Law Perspectives*, authored by Abhishek Singhvi and Khashoggi Gautam.

In the face of mortality, one could not simply argue for their fundamental right to travel freely. Even if a state of emergency was not declared in India, several executive actions were taken to meet the challenges of the extraordinary challenge [of COVID-19]

Justice D.Y. CHANDRACHUD

Justice Chandrachud narrated how the Emergency visited on the nation an "unprecedented destruction of civil liberties in the garb of curbing internal disturbances". He said the Emergency served as "harrowing reminder of State excess".

Lessons learnt
Justice Ramana said the Emergency taught him much about the "human tragedies of hunger, pain and suffering".

"My transformative years as a student were deeply impacted by the 21-month Emergency between 1975 and 1977. Ours was the first Emergency batch in Delhi University. One of the first

consequences which emanated from that was the ragging which we had to undergo at the university was meagre as compared to wider tradition of the university," Justice Chandrachud said.

He recounted that students like him were witness to the indoctrination and the "black arts of the 20-point programme" during the Emergency during the bus journeys to the varsity. He was also privy to some of the speeches delivered by some of the most leading examples or crusaders of personal liberty.

Justice Chandrachud referred to the lockdowns, restrictions on movement and

enhanced powers of the Executive during the pandemic, which he described as one of the largest global disruptors in a century.

Necessary steps

However he said these steps were considered a "pervasive phenomenon necessary to tailor a state infrastructure to battle a deadly virus".

"In the face of mortality, one could not simply argue for their fundamental right to travel freely. Even if a state of emergency was not declared in India, several executive actions were taken to meet the challenges of the extraordinary challenge. The judiciary, as a counter-majoritarian institution, in times of such state crisis, has to adopt a much finer line of judicial review over executive action that is dealing with medical novelties to preserve public health," Justice Chandrachud said on the pandemic.

Justices S.K. Kaul and Suganya Kant, also spoke at the virtual event.

Ban on Chinese apps will stay, says govt. notice

TikTok says privacy of users is priority

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The government has sent notices to Chinese apps, including TikTok, that the order to block them will be continued.

The notice has been issued by the Ministry of Electronics and IT after reviewing replies of blocked apps, according to a source who did not wish to be identified.

When contacted, TikTok confirmed that it had received a notice from the government.

"We are evaluating the notice and will respond to it as appropriate. TikTok was among the first companies to comply with the government of India directive issued on June 29, 2020. We continually strive to comply with local laws and regulations and do our best to address any concerns the government may have. Ensuring the privacy and security of all our users remains to be our topmost priority," a TikTok spokesperson said.



The government started blocking Chinese apps in June 2020.

The government had blocked 59 Chinese apps in June and 118 more, including PUBG mobile game, in September.

The Ministry of Information Technology had blocked the apps under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act after learning that they may be used for "activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order".

Centre carries out bureaucratic reshuffle

Khandekar named Secretary of DoPT

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

AHMEDABAD

Ahead of the Union Budget, the Modi administration on Saturday carried out a reshuffle with appointments of Secretaries in crucial Ministries.

The appointments include that of the 1985-batch IAS officer Deepak Khandekar as Secretary in the Department of Personnel and

Training (DoPT). He has been shifted from the Tribal Affairs Ministry.

Water Resources Secretary U.P. Singh, also of the 1985 batch, has been made Textiles Secretary.

Mines and water
Alok Tandon has been appointed Secretary in the Mines Ministry. Mr. Tandon, a 1986-batch IAS officer, is serving in his parent cadre State of Uttar Pradesh.

Pankaj Kumar, Chief Executive Officer, Unique Identification Authority of India,

has been appointed Water Resources Secretary.

Tourism Secretary Yogenra Tripathy has been moved as Secretary, Chemicals and Petrochemicals, while Rajesh Chaturvedi has been shifted from there to the Department of Fertilizers as Secretary.

Arvind Singh, Chairman of the Airports Authority of India, has been made Tourism Secretary.

The appointment orders were issued by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister.

Lalu's health worsens, shifted to AIIMS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PATNA



Lalu Prasad

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Jail authorities gave the approval for shifting him.

Mr. Prasad, along with his wife and former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, took an air ambulance to Delhi on Saturday evening.

The former Bihar Chief Minister was sent to the Birsia Munda Central Jail in Ranchi in December 2017. Later, he was admitted to the pay ward of the RIMS.

On the advice of a panel of doctors, for better treatment," RIMS Director Kashi

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Hooda against domicile rule changes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Leader of the Opposition in the Haryana Assembly Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Saturday opposed the changes in the rules reducing the time period needed to get domicile of the State.

"The State government had issued a notification that allowed any person living in Haryana for 5 years to get a State domicile, reducing it from the earlier 15 years," he said.

Mr. Hooda said on the one hand the government is seeking to provide 75% reservation for 'Haryanvis' even in private jobs, while on the other, it is reducing the time period for domicile.

Mr. Hooda said he was not against the people of other States. But it was the responsibility of the government to first safeguard the rights of the people of its State, he said.

Maharashtra to unlock history in prisons

The State government will open to visitors jails which once held freedom fighters



Tales of the past: The prison tourism project will be inaugurated at the Yerawada Jail in Pune on Republic Day. ■ PTI

Pune, Ratnagiri are a few places in Maharashtra where these great freedom fighters were imprisoned by British. All these jails have a significant historical value. The barracks where these great personalities were kept as memorials which remind us of the dedication of these personalities in winning

freedom," the Minister said.

On Republic Day, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, along with Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, will inaugurate the project at Yerawada Jail.

"The famous Poona Pact between Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi took place beneath a mango tree at Yerawada jail. In 1899, the Chapekar

SUDOKU



Fuel prices touch an all-time high

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Petrol and diesel prices set a record in the country on Saturday after prices were raised by 25 paise a litre each, the oil marketing companies said in a price notification.

The new petrol price in Delhi is ₹85.70 a litre and in Mumbai ₹92.28. The diesel price is ₹75.88 and ₹82.66, respectively. This is the second consecutive day of rate increase and the fourth this week. The prices have gone up by ₹1 a litre this week. The prices last touched a record on October 4, 2018.

Various sections have been demanding a cut in excise duty on fuel to ease the burden on consumers. Fuel prices vary from State to State depending on local sales tax or VAT. Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has blamed Saudi Arabia's oil output cut for the surge in prices.

The Maharashtra government is set to launch "jail tourism" under which historically significant jails in Maharashtra, which are still being used as penal centres, will be opened to visitors to see the barracks where freedom fighters were imprisoned by the British.

"Pune's Yerawada Jail will be opened for first-of-its-kind jail tourism from January 26," said Home Minister Anil Deshmukh. Mr.

Biden govt. to review U.S.-Taliban deal

It wants to ascertain if the outfit is 'living up to its commitments to reduce violence in Afghanistan'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The Biden administration said it will review a landmark U.S. deal with the Taliban, focusing on whether the insurgent group has reduced attacks in Afghanistan, in keeping with its side of the agreement.

Washington struck a deal with the Taliban in Qatar last year, to begin withdrawing its troops in return for security guarantees from the militants and a commitment to kickstart peace talks with the Afghan government.

But violence across Afghanistan has surged despite the two sides engaging in those talks since September.

President Joe Biden's newly appointed National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, spoke with his Afghan counterpart Hamdullah Mohib and "made clear the United States' intention to review" the deal, said National Secur-



Resetting ties: President Joe Biden signing executive orders on the economy in the White House on Friday. ■AP

ity Council spokeswoman Emily Horne in a statement late on Friday.

Specifically, Washington wants to check that the Taliban is "living up to its commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups, to reduce violence in Afghanistan, and to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Afghan government and other stake-

holders," she said.

It added that Mr. Sullivan underscored that the U.S. will support the peace process with a robust and regional diplomatic effort, which will aim to help the two sides achieve a durable and just political settlement and permanent ceasefire."

Mr. Sullivan also discussed the U.S.'s support for protect-

ing recent progress made on women and minority groups' rights as part of the peace process.

When contacted, the Taliban said they remained "committed to the agreement and honour our commitments".

"We expect the other side to remain committed to the agreement too," Mohammad Naeem, the group's spokesman in Qatar, said.

Kabul welcomes move

Washington's move was met with a sigh of relief from officials in Kabul after months of speculation over how the new administration would potentially recalibrate the Afghan policy.

Mr. Mohib tweeted that during the call the two sides "agreed to work toward a permanent ceasefire and a just and durable peace" in the country.

Another top Afghan go-

vernment official lambasted the Taliban's failure to live up to the February 2020 deal, saying the agreement had failed to achieve its stated goals.

"The agreement so far, did not deliver a desired goal of ending Taliban's violence and bringing a ceasefire desired by the Afghans," Sediq Sediqqi, Deputy Interior Minister and former spokesman to President Ashraf Ghani said on Twitter.

"The Taliban did not live up to its commitments."

Deadly attacks and high-profile assassinations have increased in recent months, particularly in Kabul where several journalists, activists, judges and politicians have been murdered in brazen daylight attacks.

The Taliban have denied responsibility for these killings, but Afghan and U.S. officials have blamed the group for the murders.

Trump impeachment trial to begin on February 8: Schumer

It will give the ex-President more time to prepare a defence

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Opening arguments in the Senate impeachment trial for Donald Trump over the Capitol riot will begin in the second week of February, the first time a former President will face such charges after leaving office.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced the schedule late on Friday after reaching an agreement with Republicans, who had pushed for a delay to give Mr. Trump a chance to organise his legal team and prepare a defence on the sole charge of incitement of insurrection.

"Once the briefs are drafted, presentation by the parties will commence the week of February 8," Mr. Schumer told colleagues on the Senate floor.



Donald Trump

history behind us," Mr. Schumer said about the deadly January 6 Capitol siege by a mob of pro-Trump supporters.

"But healing and unity will only come if there is truth and accountability. And that is what this trial will provide."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will send the article of impeachment on Monday, with Senators sworn in as jurors on Tuesday. But opening arguments will move to February.

Mr. Trump's impeachment trial would be the first of a U.S. President no longer in office, an undertaking that his Senate Republican allies argue is pointless, and potentially even unconstitutional. Democrats say they have to hold Mr. Trump to account.

Over 2,500 arrested at Navalny rallies

Tens of thousands of supporters staged protests across Russia seeking his release

REUTERS
MOSCOW

Police detained over 2,500 people and used force to break up rallies around Russia on Saturday as tens of thousands of protesters demanded the release of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, whose wife was among those detained.

Mr. Navalny had called on his supporters to protest after being arrested last weekend as he returned to Russia from Germany for the first time since being poisoned with a nerve agent he says was applied to his underpants by state security agents in August.

The authorities had warned people to stay away from Saturday's protests, saying they risked catching



Huge support: Law enforcement officials trying to stop the demonstrators in Saint Petersburg on Saturday. ■REUTERS

COVID-19 as well as prosecution and possible jail time for attending an unauthorised event. But protesters defied the ban and bitter cold, and turned out in force.

In central Moscow, where Reuters reporters estimated at least 40,000 people had

gathered in one of the biggest rallies, police were seen detaining people, bundling them into nearby vans.

The authorities said just some 4,000 people had shown up. The Foreign Ministry questioned Reuters' crowd estimate, using sar-

casm to suggest it was too high. "Why not just immediately say 4 million?" it quipped on its official Telegram messenger channel.

Anti-Putin stand
Some protesters chanted "Putin is a thief", and "Disgrace" and "Freedom to Navalny!"

Mr. Navalny's wife Yulia said on social media she had been detained at the rally. Mr. Navalny's mother Ludmila was also at the protest. Some of Navalny's allies were detained in the days before the protest.

The OVD-Info protest monitor group said that at least 2,500 people had been detained across Russia. It reported arrests at rallies in nearly 70 towns and cities.

Taiwan reports Chinese air incursions

Air Force warned away the Chinese jets and deployed missiles to monitor them

REUTERS
TAIPEI

Eight Chinese bomber planes and four fighter jets entered the southwestern corner of Taiwan's air defence identification zone on Saturday, and Taiwan's Air Force deployed missiles to "monitor" the incursion, the island's Defence Ministry said.

China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, has conducted almost daily flights over the waters between the southern part of Taiwan and the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands in the South China Sea in recent months.

However, they have generally consisted of just one or two reconnaissance aircraft. The presence of so many



Intrusive movement: A Chinese H-6K bomber patrolling the islands in the South China Sea, in this file photo. ■AP

Chinese combat aircraft on this mission – Taiwan said it was made up of eight nuclear-capable H-6K bombers and four J-16 fighter jets – is

Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft, flew over the same waters where the most recent Chinese missions have been taking place near the Pratas Islands, though still well away from mainland Taiwan.

Beijing has watched with growing concern increasing U.S. support for democratic Taiwan.

The flight by the Chinese bombers and fighters on Saturday came just days after Joe Biden assumed the U.S. presidency.

Saudi Arabia intercepts 'hostile target'

Saudi-led coalition says it destroyed the air target headed towards Riyadh

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH

Saudi Arabia intercepted a "hostile target" over Riyadh on Saturday, said state media in the kingdom which has come under repeated attack from Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels since 2015.

An explosion was heard in the Saudi capital at around 11 a.m. (0800 GMT), AFP correspondents reported.

"I heard a loud sound and thought that something had fallen from the sky," said one

The Saudi-led coalition, which backs Yemen's internationally recognised government against the Houthis, said it had "intercepted and destroyed a hostile air target going towards Riyadh", without elaborating, according to state-run Al Ekhbariya television station.

Riyadh's King Khaled International Airport said

there were a number of flight delays, but it was not immediately clear if they were linked to Saturday's incident.

Saudi Arabia has been repeatedly targeted by the Houthis since its intervention in the Yemen war in 2015.

It is rare, however, for drones and missiles launched by the Houthis to reach the kingdom's capital – about 700 km from the Yemeni border.

The Shia rebels have yet to comment on the incident, which comes only days after Joe Biden was sworn-in as U.S. President.

According to the new U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, the Biden administration will revisit the designation of Houthi rebels as terrorists. Mr. Blinken said he would "immediately" review the labelling of the insurgents, fearing the move was worsening a humanitarian crisis.

Saeed's brother-in-law Hafiz Abdur Rehman Makki, JuD spokesperson Yahya Mu-

Pak. court jails Hafiz Saeed's 3 aides in terror financing case

Six-month jail term for Saeed's brother-in-law, two others

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAHORE

jihad and Zafar Iqbal were handed down the six-month imprisonment each by the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Lahore.

With Friday's sentencing,

the collective imprisonment of Mujahid and Iqbal has climbed to 80 and 56 years respectively.

The verdicts against them will run concurrently in the terror financing cases regis-

tered by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of the Punjab police.

"ATC-II Presiding Judge Arshad Hussain Bhutta announced the verdict in FIR No 32 of 2019 against Zafar Iqbal, Abdul Rehman Makki and Yahya Mujahid," a court official said. The three convicts were present in the court when the judge announced the verdict.

New warning on vaccine supplies sparks EU concern

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

A warning from AstraZeneca that initial supplies of its COVID-19 vaccinations to Europe will be lower than expected has sparked new concern over the rollout of inoculations.

Friday's announcement by the British firm followed another last week by Pfizer,

which said it would delay shipments of its vaccine for up to a month.

EU has not yet approved the vaccine from AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford, but is expected to take a decision by January 29.

AstraZeneca said that if EU approval is granted, the "initial volumes will be lower than anticipated".

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Pak. man killed during TikTok stunt on rail track

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD

A young man was hit and killed by a train in Pakistan while being filmed walking along the tracks for a TikTok stunt, police and rescue officials said on Saturday.

The accident happened on Friday in the Shah Khalid neighbourhood of Rawalpindi city, near the capital Islamabad.

Hamza Naveed, 18, was walking next to the tracks while a friend filmed him, Raja Rafiqat Zaman, a spokesperson for the local rescue agency, said.

"The moving train hit him while he was posing for a video and walking on the railway track," Mr. Zaman said.

Taking selfies and making videos for social media is wildly popular in Pakistan, as in many other countries.

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'Halwa' ritual held, Budget app unveiled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur and senior officials of the Finance Ministry on Saturday participated in the symbolic 'Halwa Ceremony' that marks the beginning of compilation of budget documents.

The ceremony used to mark the launch of the printing exercise for the Budget. This will be the first time since independent India's first Budget on November 26, 1947, that the documents will not be physically printed.

The Finance Minister also launched the 'Union Budget Mobile App' for access of Budget documents by Members of Parliament and the general public.

The app facilitates access to 14 Budget documents as prescribed by the Constitution, the Ministry said in a statement.

Telcos seek clarity on onus of security breach post NSD roll-out

They urge Centre to ensure price competitiveness if Chinese gear is barred

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Telecom firms have asked the government to clarify about the entity that will be held liable in the event of a security breach in the network post implementation of the National Security Directive (NSD) in the telecom sector, according to sources aware of the development.

Telecom operators have given their input to the government in a meeting called by the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) about one-and-a-half weeks back, industry sources told PTI.

'Work on road map'

"A meeting was called to work on the road map for trusted products by the NSCS," said an official with a private operator. "Senior regulatory officials of tele-



Playing it safe: Under the security directive, operators will have to buy equipment from trusted sources. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE

com service providers attended the meeting and gave their inputs. Telcos wanted the government to come out with clear guidelines [as to] who [would] be responsible for any breach in the network if the government is making a list of trusted products that have to be deployed in the network," said the official.

Under the current rules,

telecom operators are held responsible for any security breach in their network.

Another private operator representative said two private mobile service providers wanted the government to ensure price competitiveness among vendors in case equipment from China was barred from the networks.

"It was suggested that the price competitiveness can

be maintained by way of reducing import duties. Nokia and Ericsson have told government officials that the prices of their gear would come down as they manufacture in India and [hence] save on import duty," the representative said.

In a bid to tighten the security of the communications network, the Centre had, on December 16, announced the National Security Directive for the telecom sector, which will mandate service providers to purchase equipment from trusted sources.

Notably, Chinese gear-maker Huawei has had runs with governments in Canada and the U.S. The U.S. has alleged Huawei did not comply with its cybersecurity and privacy laws leaving the country and the citizens vulnerable to espionage.

Prepared to meet surge in demand: Coal India

Friday saw record power consumption

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
State-owned Coal India Ltd. (CIL) on Saturday said it was prepared to meet any surge in demand for coal from the power sector.

The statement follows power demand touching an all-time high of 187.3 GW on Friday. "CIL is well geared to meet any surge in demand for the dry fuel from the power sector, especially on the back of close to 63 million tonnes stock at its pitheads," the public sector unit said in a statement.

The company is also pushing for increased production, to shore up supplies to coal-fuelled power plants. In this backdrop, close to 67% of the total coal-fired power generation in the country depends on



CIL's supplies. Of the 199 GW of coal-based power programmed for generation per day during the ongoing fiscal, 133 GW is scheduled from CIL-linked coal.

Average coal-based power generation of power per day, which was 2,795 BU till Friday, spurted up to 3,072 BU, a jump of almost 10%.

Coal-based power generation remains consistently high over other categories.

Apollo raises ₹1,170 cr. via QIB route

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Apollo Hospitals on Saturday announced raising ₹1,169.99 crore through allotment of shares to qualified institutional buyers (QIBs).

The Fund Raising Committee on Saturday "approved allotment of 46,59,498 equity shares of face value ₹5 each to eligible qualified institutional buyers at the issue price of 2,511 per equity share, i.e., at a premium of 2,506 per equity share aggregating to ₹11,699.99 million, pursuant to the issue," Apollo Hospitals Enterprise said in a filing with the BSE.

The issue opened on January 18, 2021 and closed on January 22, 2021, the healthcare major said in the filing.

Demand rising in leisure segment: Oriental Hotels

'Corporate seeing gradual pick-up'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHENNAI

Oriental Hotels Ltd., an associate firm of The Indian Hotels Company, is witnessing a growth in demand in leisure and a gradual increase in corporate business segments, according to a top company executive.

Announcing standalone financial results for the quarter ended December 31, it said net loss stood at ₹7.63 crore as against a net profit of ₹4.65 crore seen a year earlier.

Revenue dipped to ₹43.53 crore from ₹85.09 crore. "All our hotels resumed operations in a staggered manner after the lockdown was eased. We are witnessing a growth in demand especially in the leisure segment and a gradual pick up of corpo-

rate business," company MD Pramod Ranjan said.

'Spending deferred'

Occupancy levels at the hotels were increasing 'month-on-month', he said in a statement. During the COVID-19 enforced lockdown, the company undertook a series of measures to ensure adequate liquidity and cost optimisation. Cash conservation measures have included deferral of discretionary spending and capital expenditure unless absolutely required, he said.

"We expect a recovery in business to be driven by domestic leisure and business tourism and limited international travel. We do not expect any significant challenge to our supply chain," he added.

Tata Motors introduces Altroz variant

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Tata Motors has announced the introduction of the i-Turbo variant along with iRA-connected car technology for its premium hatchback Altroz iRA at an ex-showroom price starting ₹7.7 lakh.

"In FY 21, our market share in the hatchback category has increased by 5.4% compared with the last fiscal and we have captured 17% market share in the premium hatch segment. We are confident that the new Altroz range will cater to the evolving needs of the Indian customer," Shailesh Chandra, president, Passenger Vehicles Business Unit, Tata Motors said.

Okinawa unveils EV for delivery firms

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Okinawa, an electric vehicle manufacturer, has announced the introduction of Okinawa Dual, a B2B electric two-wheeler in India priced at ₹58,998. The two wheeler is customised to meet the varied needs of delivery companies and will be used for last-mile logistics.

With dual loading capacity on the front as well as the rear, the vehicle has been designed to cater to delivery of heavy items such as gas cylinders, heavy hardware equipment, water cans as well as day-to-day items such as groceries and medicines.

INTERVIEW | V. JAGANNATHAN

'Metro orders took a bad hit'

Infra projects kept Johnson Lifts on the move, says ED

N. ANAND

Major disruption in construction activity during the lockdown severely impacted the lifts and elevators business, as most migrant labourers were forced to return home. However, with the realty sector picking up, sales began returning to normal in December. Johnson Lifts hopes to reach pre-Covid sales figures by April 2021, executive director V. Jagannathan said in an interview. Excerpts:

What has been the impact of COVID-19 on your business beginning April?

■ The builder segment is a major contributor to the lifts business and migrant workers form a majority of the workforce in the real estate sector. Due to COVID-19 and the lockdowns, migrant workers moved to their hometowns, thereby affecting construction activity. Hence, Q1 sales dipped, but [things] improved in Q2, supported by the government stimulus. There was further improvement in Q3, showing positive signs of an early revival.

What challenges did the company face? How did you manage?

■ The major challenge was a sudden drop in business and reduced liquidity in the real estate sector. Big builders faced a cash crunch that directly affected us; secondly, manpower migration in our industry during the lockdown started to be very expensive. In spite of that, we ensured that services were provided to hospitals round the clock and high-rise resi-

dential buildings, [besides] ensuring uninterrupted functioning of lifts for passenger use. Due to the pandemic, there was uncertainty all around with regard to revival of economy. Besides, nobody was sure when this pandemic would.

Another major challenge for us was complying with government regulations during the lockdown and in different stages of unlocking.

With regard to customers, educating them on safe lift-use procedures was a major task. When it came to manufacturing, increase in input cost of raw materials took a toll on us. The entire supply chain got affected.

Providing a safe work environment to employees at offices pan India and at sites was a big challenge.

Have you reached pre-Covid levels in sales? How long will it take?

■ We had progressed to normal sales in December 2020 and by April 2021 we should reach pre-Covid sales figures month on month.

What is the current order book position?

■ During FY20, we had order booking close to 13,000 units and a turnover of close to ₹2,000 crore. Currently, we are at 80% of last year's business and our order book is close to 12 months of our sales volume.

Are you getting fresh orders from metros or tier 2 cities?

■ Business was drastically down in metro cities and hence we have started to dive deep into tier 2 and tier 3 cities as well.

Enquiries have been there in all three categories such as metros, tier 2 and tier 3 cities, but the [impact] was high in metro.

As soon as the unlocking happened, the pent-up demand in tier 2 cities got finalised first, with a delay in metro cities.

All the more, since projects in metros are large in size, there was greater delay in restarting and in fresh orders/activity. However, infrastructure projects such as airports and metro stations, where our presence is very high, maintained continuous activity and presented new opportunities.

What is the capex for FY22?

■ Our original capex plan for FY22 was around ₹20 crore. Since we expect the market to be stable in FY21 we are maintaining the same with no downward revision.

What is the status of exports?

■ Johnson predominantly caters to neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and to Central Asia and African countries.

Impact on sales was only marginal compared with India.



UltraTech Q3 net more than doubles on housing, infra

Urban demand expected to improve, says cement maker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Aditya Birla group firm UltraTech Cement on Saturday reported over two-fold jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 1,584.58 crore in the December quarter, compared with ₹711.12 crore a year earlier, UltraTech Cement said in a BSE filing.

Revenue from operations rose 17.4% to ₹12,254.12 crore. Total expenses declined 6.29% to ₹10,190.03 crore in the third quarter of FY21. Volumes grew 14% to 22.82 million tonnes, it said.

"Recovery from the COVID-19-led disruption... has been fuelled by quicker demand stabilisation, supply-side restoration and greater cost efficiencies," the firm said in a statement.

Notably, Chinese gear-maker Huawei has had runs with governments in Canada and the U.S. The U.S. has alleged Huawei did not comply with its cybersecurity and privacy laws leaving the country and the citizens vulnerable to espionage.



During the quarter, UltraTech's Board approved capital expenditure of ₹5,477 crore towards increasing capacity by 12.8 mtpa (million tonnes per annum) with a mix of brownfield and greenfield expansion in the fast-growing markets of the east, central and north regions of the country.

"This expansion is in addition to the company's 6.7 mtpa capacity addition that is currently underway in Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar and West Bengal, which has picked up the pace and is expected to get commissioned by financial year 2022, in a phased manner," it said.

"With strong rural growth, revival in manufacturing sentiment, buoyancy in GST and tax collections, UltraTech expects demand to grow on the back of the government's push on infrastructure projects."

Government of India Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH TRAINING & RESEARCH, 332 SVP Road, Khetwadi, Girgaon, Mumbai-400004

ADMISSION NOTICE (2021-22)

National Institute of Public Health Training & Research, Mumbai, a Central Training Institute of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India invites applications in the prescribed format for the following courses for the academic year 2021-22.

A. Regular Courses :

Regular Courses	Age (Years)	No. of Seats	Duration
1. Master in Public Health (MPH)	Minimum age 21 years	10	Two Years
2. Post Graduate Diploma in Hospital Management (PGDHM)	Minimum age 21 years	30	One Years
3. Diploma in Health Promotion Education (DHPE)	Upto 40 years. (Age relaxation as per GOI rules)	30	One Years
4. Post Graduate Diploma in Community Health Care (PGDCHC)	Upto 40 years. (Age relaxation as per GOI rules)	30	One Years

B. Skill Based Training Programmes: (As per the guidelines issued by the, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India, New Delhi)

Skill Based Training Programme	Age (Years)	No. of Seats	Duration
1. Sanitary Health Inspector	18-30	30	One Year
2. Diabetes Educator	Above 22 Years	30	On campus – 3 Months Online / Off campus – 6 Months
3. Home Health Aide	18-30	30	4 Months
4. General Duty Assistant	18-30	30	6 Months
5. First Responder	18 years and above	30	4 Days

SNAPSHOTS



How we formed

Scientists have come up with a new model of the formation of our solar system. They argue, in *Science*, that the snow line, which separates regions containing water as vapour and solid ice, first migrated outward then inward, giving rise to planet infinitesimals. These then grew into large planets through collisions.



Essence of vetiver

Vetiver oil lends its woody fragrance to many perfumes we know. Scientists have now unravelled what gives vetiver its characteristic scent. Settling a long-time quest, scientists have described in an article in *Angewandte Chemie International Edition* the specific molecular component responsible for this.



Squid-like robot

Pulse-jetting, a cycle of expanding and contracting a hollow within their bodies, thereby regulating inflow and expulsion of fluid, is how squids and jelly fish propel themselves. An article in *Science Robotics* describes how scientists have made a robot that mimics this process to propel itself.



Safe boundaries

The boundaries between tropical forests and savannas play an important role in controlling natural fires. Analysing forest savanna boundaries in Africa, authors of an article published in *Journal of Ecology* found that these can act as natural buffers. Boundary trees shaded the grasses, thereby shielding the interior from fire.

CoWIN glitches also responsible for low vaccine uptake

Registration of health-care workers on CoWIN is incomplete, many practising alternative medicine are not included

R. PRASAD

There has been a low turnout of healthcare workers at over 3,000 COVID-19 vaccination sites across the country even a week after the massive exercise began on January 16. If vaccine hesitancy, especially in the initial days, may be the reason for the low turnout, the glitches in the CoWIN platform too have contributed to that.

Slow, steady increase

On January 16, the first day of COVID-19 vaccination in the country, with about only 1.91 lakh health-care workers taking the jab, only about two-third of the eligible people were vaccinated. January 17, a Sunday, saw very small numbers - 17,072 beneficiaries vaccinated in six States. Since January 18, the numbers per day have been slowly but steadily increasing - from 1.48 lakh on January 18 to 2.28 lakh on January 22. At the end of one week, 1.27 million were vaccinated, with the number crossing the one million mark on January 22 morning.

With the majority of States vaccinating only on four days a week, with the most populous State, Uttar Pradesh, vaccinating on just two days, the pace of vaccination has to be ramped up, says Dr. Rijo John, Health Economist and Consultant. "If only about two lakh people are vaccinated in a day, we're looking at eight years to vaccinate even 20% of Indians with two doses," says Dr. John.

"To vaccinate the original

target of 300 million people with two doses each by end-August, about four million doses need to be administered per day for four days a week," says Dr. John.

The major reason for low uptake has been vaccine hesitancy arising from short timelines for vaccine development and clinical trials, questions about Indian regulator's approval process, data of the trials not being made public and approval to Covaxin even in the absence of efficacy data. But the glitches in the CoWIN platform and the way it was programmed to assign people for vaccination may have also contributed much to the problem.

"I am not sure if vaccine hesitancy is a real big problem in India as it is projected to be. We are known for vaccinating millions of children and adolescents, a sensitive age group, yet there are no major vaccine hesitancy issues," says epidemiologist Dr. Giridhara Babu of Public Health Foundation of India, Bengaluru. He had led the team of World Health Organisation's polio eradication efforts as Karnataka's senior medical officer and is a member of the Karnataka COVID-19 Technical Advisory Committee.

Convenient term

"I am hesitant in clubbing the problems with CoWIN into one phrase - 'vaccine hesitancy'. This is a convenient term for those who have abandoned their responsibility and want to deflect the blame for low uptake on the



Leading the way: At 1.82 lakh vaccinations as on January 22, Karnataka has the most number in the country, followed by Andhra Pradesh (1.27 lakh) and Odisha (1.21 lakh). ■ K.R. DEEPAK

community," says Dr. Babu.

Discussing about the CoWIN platform, Dr. Babu says: "My own stand is that any technological tool should complement but not replace human interface or ignore India's strength in vaccination programmes. The human interface is needed for improving confidence. Microplanning is a strength of the supplementary immunisation programmes."

The CoWIN platform, developed quickly, is a work in progress with improvements and upgrades being made each day based on the needs of different areas and States, he says. Connectivity issues too are affecting the platform. While the improvisation of the platform theoretically allows beneficiary registration, session micro-planning, real-time reporting

of vaccination and issuance of vaccination certificates, the real challenge arises in allocation of eligible people to a specific site on a particular day. "Allocation to a session site based on one's institution of work or pin code is a complex process. This is probably the first time any country is deploying such software for vaccination campaigns of this scale," says Dr. Babu. Incidentally, sending out SMS messages and issuing certificates soon after vaccination have been a challenge.

When people assigned to a vaccine site on a given day do not turn up, the platform was originally not designed to alert and invite others assigned on other days to receive the vaccine. "People are manually reaching out to others. The health ministry

has now made it possible to add available people to an ongoing session and vaccinate them provided they are registered previously," explains Dr. Babu.

Bigger problem

But the bigger problem is that the registration of health-care workers on CoWIN is incomplete. "Many people practising alternative medicine are not registered on CoWIN. Such people do not know how to register themselves for vaccination," informs Dr. Babu. "Imagine the problem when we reach the stage of vaccinating of people with comorbidities, where data of such people is very sketchy."

The platform now allows registration on the spot, which permits States to accommodate walk-ins. Ho-

wever, this message has not been widely communicated. "Many health-care workers are simply not aware that they can walk-in and register on the spot," he says.

Despite the low level of vaccine hesitancy generally seen in Tamil Nadu, the number of jabs at the end of one week stands at just about 48,000. At 1.82 lakh vaccinations as on January 22, Karnataka has the most number in the country, followed by Andhra Pradesh (1.27 lakh) and Odisha (1.21 lakh). ■ K.R. DEEPAK

Explaining the reason for the higher uptake seen in the two States, Dr. Babu says: "In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the administrators are continuously following up field templates and doing more sessions a day. Additional manpower has been deployed at the State and districts only for this. District and State control rooms have been set up and co-ordinated each day at all levels."

Heeding to demands from States such as Karnataka, the CoWIN software has been enhanced by creating more session sites, more sessions per site and change in site locations. "It now allows up to seven sessions per site. But running it in offline mode to vaccinate people and using the CoWIN platform to update the vaccine stock and list of beneficiaries whenever feasible can help in reaching more people in a short time," says Dr. Babu.

Despite not relying on an IT solution, India's universal immunisation programme immunises millions of children each year. In January 2020, India achieved a record 90% coverage of all vaccines to be given in infancy. Are there measures that the COVID-19 vaccination programme can adopt from the UIP to improve coverage? "The Universal immunisation programme (UIP) and supplementary immunisation programmes (SIAs) (Pulse Polio or MR campaigns) have adapted polio micro plans," says Dr. Babu. "These are prepared using the bottom-up approach from sub-centre to the primary health centre (PHC) to the district. The physical micro plan is prepared well in advance every year, updated, and implemented weekly."

Tested approach

He then adds: "All planning in CoWIN is centralised at the district level. Instead, an approach similar to UIP can be adopted for the COVID-19 vaccination. Many of the States have physical copies ready at the PHC level and are referring to them even now. The UIP approach needs to be refined to target adults across all age groups."

Apparently, the UIP approach can be applied everywhere - urban as well as rural areas. "Rural areas have reasonable manpower. In urban areas, we need volunteers. This is how the supplementary immunisation programmes - Pulse Polio and MR campaigns - are implemented in India," he adds.

German scientists make paralysed mice walk again

REUTERS

is not only used to stimulate those nerve cells that produce it themselves, but that it is also carried further (through the brain)," the team's head Dietmar Fischer told Reuters in an interview.

"In this way, with a relatively small intervention, we stimulate a very large number of nerves to regenerate and that is ultimately the reason why the mice can walk again."

The paralysed rodents that received the treatment started walking after two to three weeks, he said.

The treatment involves injecting carriers of genetic information into the brain to produce the protein, called hyper-interleukin-6, according to the university's website.

More flash droughts in India by end of century

Atmospheric anomalies, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions play a role

ASWATHI PACHA

In 1979, India faced a severe flash drought, affecting about 40% of the country and taking a toll on agriculture. An article published that year in the journal *India International Centre Quarterly* noted that the big granaries of Uttar Pradesh and Andhra were affected, and the country suffered a loss of about ₹5,000 crores. A new study has now pointed out that India could experience more such flash droughts by the end of this century.

Flash droughts

Flash droughts are those that occur very quickly, with soil moisture depleting rapidly. Normally, developing drought conditions take months, but these happen

within a week or in two weeks' time. Several factors including atmospheric anomalies, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions play an important role.

Hopeful note

"The ongoing climate change has caused a significant increase in global temperature and this can lead to more and more flash droughts in the coming years. If we can meet the 'Paris Agreement' goals and limit global warming to well below 2 degrees C, the numbers and frequency of the projected flash droughts may go down," says Vimal Mishra from the Civil Engineering and Earth Sciences at IIT Gandhinagar. He is the corresponding author of the paper published in *npj Climate and Atmospheric Science*.



Impact: Frequent flash droughts can have deleterious effects on crop production in India. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Science. The team analysed the major flash droughts that occurred from 1951 to 2016 in India. They simulated the soil moisture using the meteorological data obtained from the India meteorological department. Duration, intensity, and area of the

flash droughts were studied and an overall severity score was given. The top five flash droughts based on the overall severity score occurred in 1979 followed by 2009, 1951, 1986 and 2005.

To predict the future flash droughts the team used a Community Earth System Model which simulates the summer monsoon precipitation, sea surface temperature, role of El Nino Southern Oscillation, and air temperature over India. The analysis showed a considerable rise in the frequency of extremely dry and hot years in the coming three decades. They also examined the role of greenhouse gas emissions, industrial aerosols, and land-use/land-cover change. "The frequency of concurrent hot and dry extremes is projected

to rise by about five-fold, causing an approximately seven-fold increase in flash droughts like 1979 by the end of the 21st century," adds the paper.

They conclude that this increased frequency of flash droughts can have deleterious implications for crop production, irrigation demands and groundwater abstraction in India.

Predicting droughts

The team has planned future studies that will consider the flash-drought prediction ahead of time using operational meteorological forecasts from India Meteorological Department. They explain that this will help manage irrigation water demands and avoid considerable losses in agriculture.

Lookalike snakes but with self-styled venoms

Indian antivenoms were ineffective in neutralising venoms of cryptic kraits

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

A study of snakes in southern and western India has identified a new species of snake. Named the Romulus' krait (*Bungarus romulus*) after the 'snake man of India', Romulus Whittaker, the species has so far remained undetected because of its similarity in appearance to the common krait (*B. caeruleus*) and only a careful genetic analysis revealed that the two were distinct species. The study also showed that some kraits in Maharashtra that were misidentified as the Wall's Sind krait were actually the same as the Sind krait which is also found in parts of Pakistan and Rajasthan and has been identified as the snake with the most potent venom in India. This study, published in *Toxins*, was conducted by scientists from the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru (IISc), in collaboration with members of the Liana Trust and the Indian Herpetological Society, based in Pune.

Surface likeness

Though the Sind krait and the common krait may look

identical to a wayside observer, morphological differences do exist between the two. "The former has 17 dorsal scales at the mid-body, while the latter has 15," says Kartik Sunagar, who heads the Evolutionary Venomics Lab at IISc and is the lead author of the paper, in an email to *The Hindu*. "The Romulus' krait and common krait are so hard to distinguish that even herpetologists with years of experience couldn't tell that it could be a distinct species through casual observation. Only after the genetic examination, we were surprised to discover a new species," he adds.

The Wall's Sind krait was originally described in the Oudh state by a British herpetologist as a distinct subspecies. "Our comparisons between the Wall's Sind krait in Maharashtra and the Sind krait in Pakistan clearly revealed that there are only minor variations in their genes, suggesting that there is no evidence to support the identity of this subspecies," explains Dr. Sunagar.



Number one: The Sind krait (seen in the picture) has been identified as the snake with the most potent venom in India. ■ SHUBHAM N. KURUNDWADKAR

The Romulus' krait and common krait are so hard to distinguish that even herpetologists with years of experience could not tell them to be distinct species with a casual observation.

KARTIK SUNAGAR
IISc, Bengaluru

(Maharashtra), the Romulus' krait (Karnataka) and the Sind krait (Pakistan), they found that there were significant differences. Similar comparisons between the Wall's Sind krait population in Maharashtra with the Sind krait population in Pakistan showed only 0.3% to 3% difference.

whereas the venom of the Romulus' krait was about six times as potent. When the Indian antivenoms were tested for their ability to neutralise the venoms of these cryptic kraits, they were found to be ineffective. This is because these antivenoms are made to protect against the bites of the 'big four' Indian snakes - the spectacled cobra (*Naja naja*), common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), Russell's viper (*Daboia russelii*) and saw-scaled viper (*Echis carinatus*). In a situation where about 58,000 people die in India every year due to snake bites and three times this number suffer permanent disabilities, it is necessary to take cognisance of the difference between the venoms of the different species and their distribution across the country, according to the researchers.

Sequencing the venom glands, the group found that while the abundance of RNA that codes for the toxin proteins was similar, each krait species was producing distinct compositions of proteins (toxins) using the same set of RNA. "There are molecular mechanisms that have been described that can contribute to this. However, more work is needed to fully understand this," he says.

Venom analysis
The group also found that the venoms of the snakes were very different compositionally from each other and this reflects in their toxicity. The venom of the Sind krait was 12-13 times as potent as that of the common krait,

whereas the venom of the Romulus' krait was about six times as potent. When the Indian antivenoms were tested for their ability to neutralise the venoms of these cryptic kraits, they were found to be ineffective. This is because these antivenoms are made to protect against the bites of the 'big four' Indian snakes - the spectacled cobra (*Naja naja*), common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), Russell's viper (*Daboia russelii*) and saw-scaled viper (*Echis carinatus*). In a situation where about 58,000 people die in India every year due to snake bites and three times this number suffer permanent disabilities, it is necessary to take cognisance of the difference between the venoms of the different species and their distribution across the country, according to the researchers.

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The decades-old Kadison-Singer problem asks whether unique information can be gleaned from a system in which only some features can be observed or measured, according to the Yale news.

Nikhil Srivastava

is joint winner of maths prize

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indian mathematician Nikhil Srivastava, has been named winner of the prestigious 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize along with two others for solving long-standing questions on the Kadison-Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs. Srivastava from the University of California, Berkeley, Adam Marcus, from the Ecole polytechnique federale de Lausanne (EPFL) and Daniel Alan Spielman from Yale University will receive the 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize, the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S. said in the statement.

The prize consists of a medal and \$100,000. Srivastava, Marcus and Spielman solved long-standing questions on the Kadison-Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs.

Srivastava from the University of California, Berkeley, Adam Marcus, from the Ecole polytechnique federale de Lausanne (EPFL) and Daniel Alan Spielman from Yale University will receive the 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize, the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S. said in the statement.

in the *Journal of the Royal Society Interface*. The flexible butterfly wings form a cupped shape during the upstroke and a clasp that thrusts the butterfly forward, while the downstroke is used for weight support.

Though butterflies exhibit a fluttery flight, they also perform highly directed and sustained flights during migration and take-off. Butterflies need high force and control for fast take-off flights. The team kept six individuals of silver-washed fritillaries (*Argynnis paphia*) in a wind tunnel and studied the behaviour and aerodynamics.

Why should one study butterflies and their flight? Researcher Per Henningsson,



Joe Biden signing a series of orders at the White House on January 20. ■ AFP

U.S. & climate action

What are the implications of U.S. President Joe Biden rejoining the Paris climate agreement?

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

The story so far: Joe Biden assumed office as President of the United States on January 20, 2021, and among the first orders he signed was one to restore America's participation in the United Nations Paris Agreement on climate change. His decision on America's return will take effect on February 19, which would be 107 days after its withdrawal under the Donald Trump administration became formal on November 4, 2020. Under President Barack Obama, the U.S. played an active role in climate negotiations, although the Copenhagen UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference in 2009 failed to produce a consensus, and member-countries only acknowledged the science, without committing themselves to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions-reduction targets. By 2015, the negotiations progressed with the Obama administration engaging in diplomacy, resulting in the Paris Agreement premised on voluntary targets for national emissions cuts. On the long road to Paris, the U.S., under George W. Bush, had pulled out of the previous pact, the Kyoto Protocol, in 2001.

What changes did the Trump administration make on climate?

The withdrawal from the Paris Agreement meant that the U.S. was no longer bound by its national pledge made under the pact: to achieve an economy-wide reduction of its GHG emissions by 26%-28% below the 2005 level in 2025 and to make best efforts to reduce emissions. America also stopped its contribution to the UN's Green Climate Fund, to which it had pledged \$3 billion, after transferring an estimated \$1 billion.

On the contrary, the Trump regime focused on, among other things, relaxing controls on emissions from fossil fuel-based industries, diluting standards on air quality and vehicular emissions, hydrofluorocarbon leaking and venting from air-conditioning systems, loosening the way the government calculated the social cost of carbon, restraining individual States such as California from setting higher standards, revoking protection for natural habitats, including the Arctic sought by the oil and gas industry, and for individual wildlife species. In all, more than 100 environmental rules were tinkered with by the administration, with some rule reversals remaining in process when the presidential election took place, and others taken to court. The ability of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to enforce the law was weakened, and the scientist leading the production of the National Climate Assessment, Michael Kuperberg, was replaced just after it became clear that Mr. Trump was losing the election.

The Clean Power Plan, a major provision from the Obama-era to cut power sector emissions by 32% over

2005 levels by 2030, was initially replaced with the Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) rule, with a reduction effect of only 0.7%, according to an estimate by Harvard Law School. In the final days of the Trump presidency, however, the ACE rule was struck down by a court, giving Mr. Biden the freedom to reformulate a strong rule.

What areas will Mr. Biden focus on to cut emissions?

The U.S. accounts for 15% of global GHG emissions, but it is the biggest legacy contributor of atmosphere-warming gases. Transport (28%) and power (27%) are the two biggest national sectors contributing to GHG emissions, followed by industry (22%) and agriculture (10%), according to data published by the EPA in 2020. Commercial and residential emissions together make up only 13%. Significantly, 10% of U.S. emissions are methane, which has a greater warming effect than CO₂, and 81% is carbon dioxide. The rest is made up of nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases.

Mr. Biden, who has formed a high-powered team including special presidential envoy for climate, John Kerry, to lead clean development, has placed climate change front and centre among his priorities. He has promised an "enforcement mechanism to achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050", including a target no later than the end of his term in 2025, aided by a planned federal investment that will total \$1.7 trillion over ten years, besides private investments.

The plan revolves around 10 million well-paying clean energy jobs with a focus on solar and wind power, close linkages between university research and the private sector modelled on the post-World War II economy, active support for carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and a renaissance in green transport that includes the "second great railroad revolution" in a country that starved the railways to promote cars and road freight.

What does Mr. Biden's policy mean for other countries?

In his Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice released before the election, Mr. Biden says America will strongly support multilateralism again, but also call for accountability from other countries, including the top emitter, China, on GHG emissions. Nations that default could face carbon adjustment fees or quotas. This year's UN climate conference in Glasgow will see the new administration engaging UNFCCC member-nations to raise global ambition.

COVID-19 vaccines and possible side effects

How effective are the two vaccines rolled out in India and are there concerns about safety?

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

The story so far: Two COVID-19 vaccines, Covaxin and Covishield, after being granted emergency use authorisation, were rolled out on January 16 across India to inoculate three crore healthcare and frontline workers in the first phase of the vaccination drive. Both the vaccines have been manufactured in India. While Covaxin is produced under a collaboration between Bharat Biotech and the Indian Council of Medical Research, Covishield has been developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University with the Serum Institute of India conducting clinical trials of the vaccine in the country and also manufacturing the vaccine for India and low- and middle-income countries.

What are the known side effects of the two vaccines?

Covishield is made of a weakened and modified version of adenovirus (a common cold virus) that causes infections in chimpanzees and contains the genetic material of the SARS-CoV-2 virus spike protein. After vaccination, the surface spike protein is produced, priming the immune system to attack the SARS-CoV-2 virus if it later infects the body.

Common side effects of the vaccine include tenderness, pain, redness, itching, swelling or bruising, fatigue, chills or feeling feverish, headache, nausea, joint pain or muscle ache, a lump at the injection site, fever, vomiting and flu-like symptoms, such as high temperature, sore throat, runny nose, cough and chills. Feeling dizzy, decreased appetite, abdominal pain, enlarged lymph nodes, excessive sweating, itchy skin or rash are the uncommon side effects of the vaccines. Apart from this, "serious and unexpected side effects may occur", the SII has stated.

Bharat Biotech in its fact sheet notes that besides the listed side effects, Covaxin, in rare cases, can also cause a severe allergic reaction. "Although rare, signs of this include difficulty in breathing, swelling of your face and throat, a fast heart rate, rash all over the body and dizziness and weakness," the company said.

Who should not be taking the vaccines?

Cross-use of either of the vaccines is not permitted and the vaccines are contraindicated for pregnant and lactating women.

Besides this, Covaxin should not be given to those who are immunocompromised or are on medication for the same, individuals with a history of allergies, those who have a fever, a bleeding disorder or are on a blood



The makers of both Covaxin and Covishield note that receiving the vaccines does not mean that other precautions against COVID-19 need not be followed

a previous dose. Beneficiaries are also to tell medical staff about any bleeding disorder, an immunocompromised medical condition, and the medication for that. Healthcare workers should also be informed if the beneficiary has got another vaccine shot.

Why is an effective and safe vaccine important?

The development of safe, effective, affordable, and deployable vaccines against COVID-19 is paramount for tackling the COVID-19 crisis and re-establishing normality.

"We report on the first clinical efficacy results of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 [Covishield] in a pooled analysis of phase 2/3 trials in the UK and Brazil, and safety data from more than 20,000 participants enrolled across four clinical trials in the UK, Brazil, and South Africa. ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 has an acceptable safety profile and is efficacious against symptomatic COVID-19, with no

hospital admissions or severe cases reported in the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 arm. The vaccine can be stored and distributed at 2-8°C, making it particularly suitable for global distribution," noted an interim study published in *The Lancet* recently.

Similarly, Bharat Biotech, in its fact sheet released this week, said in phase 1 and 2 clinical trials, Covaxin has demonstrated the ability to produce antibodies against COVID-19. However, the clinical efficacy of the vaccine is yet to be established and it is still being studied in phase 3 clinical trials, said the company.

Both the vaccine makers note that receiving the vaccine does not mean that other precautions against COVID-19 need not be followed.

What should be done in case of side effects?

While the Health Ministry has claimed that so far, there have been no serious or severe reactions after vaccination, it is advised that you call a healthcare provider if you have any side effects that bother you or which do not go away. The Ministry says that if one experiences a severe allergic reaction, they must go to the nearest hospital. The Health Ministry has now also updated its Co-WIN system for "enhanced safety of the beneficiaries". It said the enhanced system allows tagging of contraindications in the vaccinator module. "The improved module also allows the creation of more session sites and change in site location. It also facilitates the planning and scheduling of the sessions for the entire week," added the Ministry.

Testing the efficacy of a nasal SARS-CoV-2 vaccine

Is the nasal route likely to provide a better immune response? What have animal studies shown?

RAMYA KANNAN

The story so far: Recently, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation recommended granting permission for phase I human clinical trials for Bharat Biotech's nasal COVID-19 vaccine, BBV154. On its website, Bharat Biotech said "the nasal route has excellent potential for vaccination due to the organised immune systems of the nasal mucosa". Effectively, intranasal candidates have shown good potential for protection in animal studies conducted thus far.

What is a nasal vaccine?

An intranasal vaccine does exactly what it says it does – deliver a vaccine through a spritz through the nostrils. The advantages of this method of vaccine delivery over the injection and oral forms are quite apparent. The method comes with the guarantee of better compliance and the advantage of lower costs. But only clinical trials can determine whether such a vaccine with an easy delivery mechanism can be efficacious too.

In August 2020, scientists at Washington University School of Medicine said they had developed a nasal vaccine that targets the SARS-CoV-2 virus. *Science Daily* reported the study published in *Cell*, a journal, specifying that the vaccine could be given in one dose via the nose and was effective in preventing infection in mice susceptible to the novel coronavirus. The investigators then revealed their plan to test the vaccine further on



Is the vaccine suitable for COVID-19?

The Washington University study, while doing a comparison, found that while a COVID-19 vaccine injection (at that stage) induced an immune response that prevented pneumonia, it did not prevent infection in the nose and lungs. Such a vaccine might reduce the severity of COVID-19, but it could not prevent infected individuals from spreading the virus, said the study.

A study published in *Science Direct* in December 2020 showed the pre-clinical efficacy of a lentiviral vector, delivered nasally, as a COVID-19 vaccine. The authors said targeting the immune response to the upper respiratory tract provides critical protection, and intranasal vaccination induces protective mucosal immunity against the SARS-CoV-2 in rodents. Given that the SARS-CoV-2 virus shows a proclivity to dwell in the upper respiratory tract for a prolonged period of time, a safe and efficacious nasal vaccine is well-placed to target the literal entry point of the virus into the body.

Earlier this month, researchers at Lancaster University working with the Biomedical Research Institute in Texas claimed they had administered two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine via a nasal spray in animals, and this had elicited robust antibodies and T-cell responses that were enough to be neutralise SARS-CoV-2.

Are there other such nasal vaccines?

So far, intranasal vaccination is being used only for influenza. However, it cannot be used on certain groups of people, particularly those who have compromised immune systems. *Science Daily* reports that "the new COVID-19 intranasal vaccine in the Washington University study does not use a live virus capable of replication, presumably making it safer". The Bharat Biotech vaccine also rides on an adenovirus vector.

Will it be a game changer?

Dr. V.K. Paul, a neonatologist and member of the NITI Aayog, said, "It looks like an exciting development because potentially, yes, this route can be used to deliver the safe antigen against which an immunological response would happen. If it does work, it can be a game-changer because it is so easy to use and we look forward to this development." AIIMS director Randeep Guleria recently commented in an interaction that if the nasal vaccine was approved, it will be easier to give. "In half-an-hour, you can vaccinate an entire class," he said. The injectable vaccine being used now is not recommended for children.

The road to the World Test Championship finals

How did Team India get to the top of the standings? Who are the other contenders and what lies ahead?

K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR

The story so far: Thanks to its marvellous comeback since the abysmal defeat at Adelaide, India ambushed Australia to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at 2-1 in the recent four-match Test series. The win propelled India to the top of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) standings. India has an overall tally of 430 points and 71.7 percentage points, just ahead of New Zealand (420, 70.0%). A squad can gain a maximum of 120 points per series with the 'points for a victory' ratio being linked to the number of contests. Just to illustrate this fact, in a two-match series, a triumph will earn 60, while in one that features five games, a win will yield 24, the norm being that the total points per unit will be capped at 120.

Were the rules changed due to COVID-19?

As the COVID-19 pandemic forced people indoors and silenced grounds, cricket suffered too. The disruption affected the Test championship, and the ICC Cricket Committee headed by former India captain Anil Kumble suggested that games that never happened should not be taken into account as draws with points being split for the sake of convenience. Instead, it was recommended that it would be prudent to factor in only contests that happened and teams should be ranked on the basis of percentage of points earned, the formulae being points gained divided by overall points available.

Is India assured of playing in the WTC final?

India, Australia and New Zealand are the top three contenders for the final of the inaugural edition to be held



Indian players and staff at The Gabba on January 19 in Brisbane after the Test win. ■ GETTY IMAGES

at Lord's this June. But to seal its qualification, India has to defeat England by a two-match margin in the imminent four-game Test series that would be played in Chennai and Ahmedabad.

If India loses one Test, then it has to win by 3-1, but in case England prevails by 4-0 or 3-0, then Virat Kohli's men will fail to qualify. It is difficult to envisage India losing, but it is prudent to remember that England prevailed at 2-1 during its 2012-13 tour.

Why did the ICC start the Test championship?

Be it One Day Internationals (ODIs) or Twenty20s (T20Is), there was always a multi-nation top-billed championship – the ODI World Cup since 1975 and the ICC World Twenty20 from 2007 (subsequently rechristened as the T20 World Cup). But Tests, plagued by dwindling attendance, needed a rousing context.

Despite all the excitement centred around the Ashes, the Indo-Pak clashes and the India-Australia face-offs, bilateral Test series needed to lead towards a significant climax. Hence, the ICC drew up a time-frame from August 2019 to June 2021, originally featuring 71 Tests in 27 series leading into the final. But due to the pandemic, the ICC now hopes to finish only around 85% of these stated fixtures.

Do ICC Test Rankings have any bearing? Where is India placed there?

The ICC Test rankings have a limited bearing, in the sense that the top nine teams in that list qualify for the Test championship. But beyond that, the grading system is different for both benchmarks – be it rankings or championship. Another complexity is that not all bilateral series are deemed a part of the championship, while every Test is taken into consideration for the overall rankings. As far as rankings go, currently, India is placed second below top-billed New Zealand. But in the championship, it is a role reversal as India leads while New Zealand snaps at its heels.

What is happening on the women's side?

Though women's Test matches commenced in the 1934-35 season, the longer-format outings, except the four-day variety, have been meagre. So far, a total of 140 games have been played, with two being abandoned. India last played a Test during November 2014 against South Africa at Mysuru. Women cricketers have been clamouring for more Tests, besides ODIs and T20Is. However, a formal Test championship for women is yet to take shape.

TV PICKS

Serie A: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m., Sony Six (SD & HD), 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Monday)

FA Cup: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5.30 p.m., 10.30 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Monday)

Sri Lanka vs England: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 9.45 a.m.

Thailand Open badminton: Star Sports 2HD & 3, 10.30 a.m.

ISL: Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 5 p.m. & 7.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF

Roma wins seven-goal thriller against Spezia

ROME: Embattled Roma gained some relief with a 4-3 win over visiting Spezia in Serie A on Saturday.

Important results:

Serie A: Roma 4 (Mayoral 17, 52, Karsdorp 55, Pellegrini 90+2) bt Spezia 3 (Piccoli 24, Farias 59, Verde 90).

Bundesliga: Bayer Leverkusen 0 lost to Wolfsburg 1 (Baku 35). AP

First defeat for Indian women in Argentina

BUENOS AIRES: The Indian women's hockey team suffered its first defeat on the tour of Argentina when it lost 1-2 to the host's 'B' side. **The result:** Argentina 2 (Sol Pagella, Agustina Gorzelany) bt India 1 (Salima Tete). PTI

Bharat and Shashank shine for Young Star

NEW DELHI: Bharat Kumar scored 91 and Shashank Singh picked up four wickets as Young Star Academy beat Golden Hawks Club by 48 runs to enter the semifinals of the seventh SN Dubey under-16 tournament.

The scores: YSA 226/9 in 40 overs (Bharat Kumar 91, Anubhav Singh 40, Sangam Shahi 32, Hardik Sharma 3/33) bt GHC 178 in 37 overs (Vansh Gupta 54, Piyush Kumar 46, Dhruv Yadav 35, Shashank Singh 4/24, Kartik Goel 3/24).

PSPB lifts trophy

Chetan Kamble and Dinesh Chauhan scored half-centuries as PSPB beat Ministry Of Petroleum and Natural Gas by 75 runs in the annual PSPB tournament.

The scores: PSPB 171/4 in 20 overs (Chetan Kamble 56, Dinesh Chauhan 50, Bhupender Kumar 2/30) bt Ministry of PNG 96/8 in 20 overs (Pramod Kumar 35, Vishwa Vardhan Bhati 3/16).

Harikrishna still joint second

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

P. Harikrishna (3.5 points) drew with Poland's Radoslaw Wojtaszek in 43 moves to retain the joint second spot behind leader Nils Grandelius (4) after six rounds of the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament at Wijk aan Zee on Friday.

Against Wojtaszek, a former 'second' of Viswanathan Anand, Harikrishna could not get any advantage with white and eventually settled for a draw following perpetual checks in a rook-and-pawn endgame.

Other results (sixth round): Nils Grandelius (Swe, 4) drew with Fabiano Caruana (USA, 3.5); Jan-Krzysztof Duda (Pol, 2.5) drew with Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 3.5); Jorinde van Foreest (Ned, 3.5) bt David Anton Guijar (Esp, 2); Andrey Esipenko (Rus, 2.5) drew with Arish Nir (Ind, 3.5); Alexander Donchenko (Ger, 1.5) lost to Alireza Firouzja (FIDE, 3.5); Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra, 2.5) drew with Aryan Tari (Nor, 2.5).

Decision to go for victory instinctively taken'

Washington Sundar reveals how the climactic stages of the epic Gabba chase unfolded

CRICKET

S. DINAKAR
CHENNAI

"If you believe in something, you've got to be prepared to die for it." M. Sundar's message in his WhatsApp status.

Washington's father Sun-
dar, a pace bowling all-rounder who was in the Tamil Nadu squad in the 90s, is his inspiration. "He has gone through so much in life, is so tough that he has shown the right path for me," the 21-year-old rising young star told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

Heroic display

Washington's performance in the epic Test at the Gabba is heroic. Three wickets in the first innings, including Steve Smith "bowling to a plan", a fluent 62 when India was in the dumps in the first innings, dismissing David Warner and unlucky not to send back Smith in the second innings, and his game-changing 22 on the final day.

Taking us to the decisive moment on day five at the Gabba, Washington said, "It was a tense day and I watched every ball and, at that point, thought if India batted 98 overs for a draw it would be huge."

Cummins landed one short and Washington, light

Going for it

The decision to go for victory was "instinctively taken" said Washington. "There were more than 50 runs to go and, I thought, if we could get 25-30 runs quickly, then Australia would be under pressure and the rest of the runs would come easily."

That really was the genesis of India breaching For-
tress Gabba.

Washington decided to counter-attack dangerous Cummins. "I knew Cummins would bowl two bouncers and the rest of the deliveries would be short pitched."

Cummins landed one short and Washington, light

on his feet and quick with his reflexes, hooked him for an audacious six. The next ball was steered for four and the sluice gates were open again. "The plan worked," he said.

And then he walked in with India still needing more than 60. Washington took us right to the heat of the battle when he and Rishabh Pant met for a mid-pitch conversation.

"Pant asked 'Who do you think will bowl the next over?'. 'Cummins' replied Washington. Then Pant said, 'But he has already bowled plenty in this spell,' recalled Washington.

He conceded to being a tad nervous before the Test, after bowling coach B. Arun broke the news about him playing. "That night I went to bed around 10.30 p.m. but could not sleep till it was 1.30."

Once the Test began, his trademark composure was back.

He bowled with control and Washington's driving through the off-side was brilliant. And he flicked Starc with grace. "Starc was fast, Cummins nippy and Hazlewood moved it both ways."

Here, Washington took us to a little story on the tour. "I was not finding my batting rhythm, not getting my head and body position right during nets. But suddenly it all fell in place when I practised during the Sydney Test. I carried that to Brisbane."

The rest is history.



Taking the bull by the horns: Washington's six off Cummins at the business end exemplified India's audacity. ■ AFP

Anderson's spell keeps Sri Lanka in check

ENGLAND IN SL

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GALLE



Anderson. ■ FILE PHOTO

England paceman James Anderson returned his best figures of six for 40 in Asia to help bowl out Sri Lanka for 381 on day two of the second Test here on Saturday.

The tourists were 98 for two at stumps after Lasith Embuldeniya struck early to remove the openers. Skipper Joe Root, on 67, and Jonny Bairstow, on 24, were batting as England trails by 283 runs.

Anderson denied wicket-keeper-batsman Niroshan Dickwella a century after sending him back on 92 to claim his 30th five-wicket haul and second in Sri Lanka

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka — 1st innings: L. Thirimanne c Buttler b Anderson 43, K. Perera c Root b Anderson 6, O. Fernando b Anderson 0, A. Mathews c Buttler b Anderson 110, D. Chandimal lbw b Wood 52, N. Dickwella c Leach b Anderson 92, R. Mendis c Buttler b Wood 0, D. Perera c Leach b Curran 67, S. Lakmal c Crawley b Anderson 0, L. Embuldeniya c Root b Wood 7, A. Fernando (not out) 0; Extras (lb-2, nb-1, w-1): 4; Total (in 139.3 overs): 381.

England — 1st innings: Z. Crawley c Thirimanne b Embuldeniya 5, D. Sibley lbw b Embuldeniya 0, J. Bairstow (batting) 24, J. Root (batting) 67; Extras (b-2; 2; Total (for two wkts. in 30 overs): 98.

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-5.

Sri Lanka bowling: Lakmal 5-2-10-0, Embuldeniya 11-4-33-2, Fernando 5-2-12-0, Perera 7-1-22-0, Mendis 2-0-19-0.

Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-7, 3-76, 4-193, 5-232, 6-243, 7-332, 8-

with Dilruwan Perera scoring a defiant 67.

All the 10 wickets went to pacemen with Wood taking three. But it was spin in the

final session with left-arm orthodox Embuldeniya sending back Dom Sibley, for nought, and Zak Crawley, for five, in quick succession.

Duhan and Shruti emerge champions

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI



Trophy time: Chirag Duhan and Shruti Ahlawat with their winnings. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

showed the improvement by beating tough players like Karan Singh and Ajay Malik without dropping a set.

Duhan has been given a solid foundation by coach Gaurav Sharma over the years and the towering boy

showed the improvement by beating tough players like Karan Singh and Ajay Malik without dropping a set.

Balram Singh, member of the national selection committee, gave away the prizes.

Amir Sayed steals the show, wins four races

Ashwin inches closer to title in FLGB4 class

MOTORSPORTS

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE



Mother's pride: Sixteen-year-old Amir Sayed (MSport) poses with mom Marcela after winning the title. ■ RAYAN ROZARIO

his previous best was five for 75 in Galle in 2012.

Anderson, who replaced Stuart Broad in the team for this Test, bowled 29 overs with 13 maidens before Sri Lanka was bowled out in an extended second session

ring moments from the sidelines.

"I am his biggest fan and supporter. I am very happy to see the joy in his face. It's very fulfilling, but a lot of hard work has gone into it," she said.

Put the youngster at the

Even as Amir was enjoying his moment, Ashwin was busy beating the best in his class. He finished second and first in two races, while his teammate A. Sandeep Kumar completed a fine double and positioned himself well for the final day challenge.

The results (provisional):

FLGB4: Race 1: A. Sandeep Kumar (Dark Don) 17.32.376; 2. Ashwin Datta (Dark Don); 3. T.S. Diljith (Dark Don). **Race 2:** 1. Ashwin 14.35.521; 2. Sandeep Kumar; 3. Diljith.

JK Tyre Novice Cup: Race 1: 1. Amir Sayed (MSport) 13.08.679; 2. Chetan Surineni (Moment); 3. Neym Rizvi (MSport). **Race 2:** 1. Amir; 2. Chetan; 3. Neym.

Race 3: 1. Amir 13.33.497; 2. Chetan; 3. Dhruvin Gajjar (DTS).

Race 4: 1. Amir 13.36.512; 2. Aman Chaudhary (DTS); 3. Chetan.

Team TVS Racing raring to go

INRC

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE



Ready to roll: Gautham Hari, MRF's Regional Sales Manager, flags off the MRF MOGrip 2W rally on Saturday.

with the record number of entries. "We refused about 20 entries because we needed to have the provision of avoiding any incidents happening."

MRF's Regional Sales Manager Gautham Hari flagged off the event from the Suguna Kalyana Mandapam on Saturday.

Akido should make amends

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