

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SATURDAY 16 | JANUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 29°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Thai 3
Tithi: Thrithiyai/ Chaturthi
Star: Avittam/ Sathayam
Rahukalam:
9 am to 10.30 am
Yamagandam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.20 am
Zohar: 12.23 pm
Asar: 3.35 pm
Maghrib: 6.01 pm
Isha: 7.17 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.02 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.35 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.08 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 9.03 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+13,560)	(+140)
1,05,42,068	1,52,094

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+621)
TN: 8,29,673 12,251

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

9,38,83,781

DEATHS

20,10,108

219
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

worldometers.info

Construction work of new Parliament building begins

New Delhi The construction work of the new Parliament building started on Friday, over a month after Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the project under the government's ambitious Central Vista redevelopment plan. The new Parliament building will have a triangular shape and is expected to be completed by the 75th anniversary of India's independence in 2022.

Nepal favours talks to resolve border issue with India

New Delhi: Visiting Nepalese Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali on Friday pitched for talks between India and Nepal to resolve the outstanding boundary issue, sought an early review of the bilateral peace and friendship treaty of 1950 and flagged concerns over his country's trade deficit with India.

COUNTER

POINT



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

Palamedu jallikattu: Eight visitors among 33 injured

ARUL OLI M | DC
MADURAI, JAN 15

Thirty-three persons including 19 bull-tamers and nine visitors were injured by bulls released at the Palamedu jallikattu held in the district here on Friday.

The event was flagged off by revenue minister R.B. Udhayakumar in the presence of district collector T. Anbazhagan by 8 am.

Around 600 bulls and 765 bull-tamers participated in the event, in which bull-tamers were allowed in batches of 75 after basic

health and Corona checks. Bull-owners also were tested for Covid-19.

The event, held in nine batches, extended up to 5 pm on the request of Sholavandhan MLA Manickam, as around 100 bulls were to be released through the Vadivasal even after 4 pm, the originally scheduled closing time.

Two bull tamers who sustained serious injuries were referred to the government Rajaji medical college hospital, Madurai. A policeman and five bull owners also were injured

in the jallikattu.

A polytechnic college student, Abishek of Palamedu, caught the maximum number of 18 bulls at the event, and was selected for the first prize, a car. Inaugurating the event, Mr Udhayakumar said the state government would consider giving special quota for the best bull-tamers in government jobs.

Bull tamers are seen taming a bull during the Palamedu jallikattu in Madurai district on Friday.

>>>

— K. MANIKANDAN



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Rules required to appoint school non-teaching staff: HC



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Dutch govt quits over child benefits scandal

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Natarajan's twin strikes boost India despite Oz domination



Key committee member recuses himself Talks fail; farmers say won't go to SC's panel

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

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

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

● **During the negotiations, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar urged the union leaders to be "flexible" in their approach**

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

Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesman Rakesh Tikait, who has been at the forefront of the agitation for over seven weeks at Delhi's borders, said: "Our demands of repealing of the three farm laws & MSP guarantee remain. We will not go to the committee con-

stituted by the Supreme Court. We'll talk to the Central government only."

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

Mr Tomar said the government was concerned about the health of the farmers who have been camping on Delhi's outskirts for almost two months.

Covid-19 vaccination drive from today

New Delhi, Jan. 15: India is all set to roll out the world's biggest vaccination programme on Saturday with over 3 lakh healthcare workers to be inoculated on the first day of the much-anticipated drive against coronavirus which the Union government said is "probably the beginning of the end" of Covid-19.

A total of 3,006 session sites across all states and Union territories will be virtually connected during the launch at 10.30 am by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and around 100 beneficiaries will be vaccinated at each session site.

The vaccination drive has been planned in a phased manner, identifying priority groups. Healthcare workers, both in government and pri-

vate sectors including ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) workers, will receive the vaccine during this phase, the health ministry said in a statement.

Mr Modi on Monday had said the country would enter a "decisive phase" in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

His office had said this will be the world's largest vaccination programme covering the entire length and breadth of the country and all preparations are in place to initiate it on the principles of 'Jan Bhagidari'. On the eve of the roll-out, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan reviewed the preparations and visited the dedicated Covid control room set up at the Nirman Bhawan premises of the health ministry. — PTI

Biden announces \$1.9tn corona stimulus plan to revive US economy

Washington, Jan. 15: President-elect Joe Biden has announced a USD 1.9 trillion stimulus package for the coronavirus-sapped US economy, including direct financial aid to average Americans, support to small businesses and a national vaccination plan. "During this pandemic, millions of Americans, through no fault of their own, have lost the dignity and respect that comes with a paycheck," Biden said in an address introducing the American Rescue Plan. The relief package, announced on Thursday.— PTI ■ P5

TMC senior VP Gnanadesikan passes away

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Senior Vice President of Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC), B S Gnanadesikan, passed away in Chennai on Friday following a brief period of hospitalization. He was 71.

He is survived by wife Thilagavathy and two sons. A traditional Congressman, Gnanadesikan began his political career during the period of G Kamaraj. An acolyte of G K Moopanar, he went along with him when he formed the TMC. ■ P2

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami is expected to go to Delhi on January 18, ostensibly to invite Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the inauguration of the Jayalalithaa memorial, triggering speculation about the AIADMK's alliance with the BJP. While it is said that the AIADMK government was keen on opening the memorial, being constructed on former chief minister J. Jayalalithaa's samadhi, before her birth anniversary on February 24, there seems to be more than it meets the eye in Mr Palaniswami personally flying to Delhi.

For, the AIADMK top honchos seem to be in the grip of a fear over the BJP possibly playing some games by creating rift within their party in a bid to arm twist it on issues such as allocation of seats for the Assembly elections. There is also a suspicion that the BJP might go in for a tie up with the Amma Makkal Munetra Kazhagam (AMMK), led by T.T.V. Dhinakaran. Not only had Mr Dhinakaran made a couple of trips to Delhi in the recent past — on one occasion he is said to flown from Bengaluru — he is said to have met some BJP leaders, too.

Besides, V.K. Sasikala, the

AIADMK's tribulations



former aide of Jayalalithaa, is expected to be released from Bengaluru jail on January 27 and the fear is that the BJP could use her presence. Though Ms Sasikala has been technically expelled from the AIADMK, the party has not filled up the general secretary's post that she had held.

Also in the recent past some leaders in the party have spoken in favour of AMMK and Ms Sasikala. For one, minister Rajendra Bhalaji described the relationship between the AIADMK and AMMK as 'brotherly', suggesting that they would fight one day but come together another day.

More recently, AIADMK's women's wing secretary Gokula Indira praised Ms Sasikala as one who lived a hermit's life in her mission to take care of Jayalalithaa and said that she deserved respect. ■ P2

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

Amidst the stand-off with China in Eastern Ladakh, Indian Army chief General M.M. Naravane on Friday said while India was committed to resolve the ongoing row through talks and

diplomacy, "no one should commit the mistake of testing our patience."

The day also marked the Army, for the first time at the annual Army Day parade, demonstrating its offensive swarm drone capability by taking down a slew of 'targets' such as

tanks, terror camps, fuel dumps and a 'suddenly-found' helipad.

The demonstration involved 75 indigenously developed drones autonomously locating and destroying the targets.

The baby Kamikaze drones detached them-

selves from the mother drones and directly hit the targets in suicide missions.

The drones can travel up to 50 kilometers to destroy enemy targets and could be used to drop emergency supplies to the soldiers.



Former Union minister, industrialist Kamal Morarka is dead

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JAN. 15

Former Union minister and industrialist Kamal Morarka (74) on Friday died of heart attack at his home in South Mumbai.

"Mr. Morarka died after he suffered a heart attack at 7.50 pm on Friday," a close friend and senior journalist Santosh Bharatiya told DC. "He complained of a cough on Thursday. He did not come to office yesterday as he was unwell." Mr Morarka, who hails from Rajasthan, was survived by two daughters and wife. Mr Morarka was a Union minister in the Chandra Shekhar government in 1990-91 and a former Rajya Sabha MP of the JD(S) from Rajasthan between 1988 and 1994. ■ P4

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SHORT TAKES

Gold seized by Chennai Customs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Chennai Customs officers on Friday seized gold worth Rs 36 lakhs from a passenger and arrested him. The department said that Manikandan Shankar (21) of Kallakurichi, who arrived from Dubai by an Indigo flight, was intercepted by Customs officials on suspicion. During his personal search, three bundles of gold paste weighing 836 grams were found concealed in his person. On extraction the paste yielded 722 grams gold worth Rs 36.52 lakhs. The same was recovered and seized under Customs Act. Manikandan Shankar was arrested.

All videos of 'Chennai Talks' channel removed from YouTube

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Chennai police on Friday got all the videos from the YouTube Channel of 'Chennai Talks'. The channel had found itself at the centre of a controversy after three members of the channel were arrested by the police for uploading obscene videos on their channel.

The city police have arrested three persons associated with the channel. Shastri Nagar police on Monday arrested M. Dinesh (31), owner of 'Chennai Talk' channel on YouTube, K. Asen Badshah (23), the anchor of the channel and cameraman K. Ajay Babu (24). Dinesh had started the channel in 2019 and the channel has more than 200 videos and reportedly seven crore people had seen them.

TMC leader Gnanadesikan no more

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Senior Vice President of Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC), B S Gnanadesikan, passed away in Chennai on Friday following a brief period of hospitalization. He was 71. He is survived by wife Thilagavathy and two sons.

A traditional Congressman, Gnanadesikan began his political career during the period of K Kamaraj. An acolyte of G K Moopanar, he went along with him when he formed the TMC. Later when G K Vasana revived the TMC he again went with him.

A two-time member of the Rajya Sabha, Gnanadesikan was the president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) between 2009 and 2014.

In his condolence message, Vasana thanked the Chief Minister, Edappadi K Palaniswami, Deputy Chief Minister, O Panneerselvam, and Health Minister, C Vijayabaskar, for regularly enquiring about the health of Gnanadesikan in the past two months when he was in hospital.

Among those who condoled the death of the leader were Palaniswami, DMK President M K Stalin and TNCC President K S Alagiri.



Bull tamers trying to tame the bulls in the Jallikattu which was held at Avaniyapuram near Madurai on Thursday. — DC



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami takes selfie with people during Pongal celebrations at Salem. — DC

CM, Dy CM celebrate Pongal with people

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Pongal celebrations took Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam and Health Minister C Vijayabaskar to be with the people at various places on Thursday.

Panneerselvam rode a bullock cart at Pallapatti

in Theni district where an event was organized in the pastoral settings by the tourism department on Mattu Pongal day.

Local AIADMK leaders, including Member of Parliament P Ravindranath, were onboard the bullock cart, in which the Deputy Chief Minister took the driver's seat, cracking the whip with aplomb. Vijayabaskar, for a

change, drove people around in an auto rickshaw at Pudukottai. He said that he played the auto driver's role to reach out to the people and know about their problems.

Palaniswami, on his part, spent the day with the people of an Arunthathiyar Colony in Salem district by taking part in the celebrations.

Opposition builds up to Kattupalli port expansion

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Opposition to the mega expansion of Kattupalli Port proposed by Marine Infrastructure Developer Pvt Ltd (MIDPL), a vertical of Adani Ports, is gaining momentum. A public hearing is scheduled at Bhagavaan Mahaveer Auditorium in Chandra-prabhu Jain College, Minjur at 11 am on January 22.

The opposition leader MK Stalin, in a statement, demanded that the Central and State Governments withdraw the Kattupalli Port Expansion project and stop all the related work immediately. He has questioned why the BJP government in Centre and ADMK government in the State are supporting the port expansion project which would destroy the livelihood of one lakh fishermen, increase the threat of food in the region and pose a threat to the Pulicat lake.

Stalin is asking why the state government is gifting land from Tamil Nadu Industrial Promotion Corporation and from

A group of volunteers from Poovulagin Nanbargal undertook a walk recently from Chennai to Kattupalli to understand the threat being posed by the existing Port, thermal plants and the danger posed by the port expansion project in Kattupalli. In 2018, the Adani Group had purchased the Kattupalli port from L&T which had established it in 2012

individuals for the project by abusing government norms. He said 1,967 acres of land would be converted by way of sea reclamation. More than one lakh fishermen from 82 coastal villages are dependent on farming the marine species in the region. The land would be submerged in sea if the project was implemented and the fragile, eco-sensitive Pulicat lake would disappear from the landscape. He said the Arani-Kosasthalaiyar rivers would be severely affected. The Government must withdrawn public hearing and cancel the

project immediately, he said.

A group of volunteers from Poovulagin Nanbargal undertook a walk recently from Chennai to Kattupalli to understand the threat being posed by the existing Port, thermal plants and the danger posed by the port expansion project in Kattupalli. In 2018, the Adani Group had purchased the Kattupalli port from L&T which had established it in 2012.

The Adani Group is planning to expand the port to a proposed total area of 2,472.85 hectares of land which includes 133.50 ha of existing area, 761.8 hectares of government land, 781.4 hectares of private land and proposed sea reclamation of 796.15 hectares. It will be one of the major ports in the country and handle cargo capacity from the current 24.66 MTPA (million tonnes per annum) to 320 MTPA. The company will invest more than Rs 50,000 crore in the project.

Environmental activists allege that the project would eat into wetlands of

the fragile Ennore ecosystem and is likely to pose a significant threat to India's second largest brackish water body - Pulicat lake. During the journey, volunteers found that sea had already intruded in the coastal region near Kattupalli. The proposed mega project would pose a threat to Chennai as it would occupy a major portion of the Kosasthalaiyar river. The river, which meets Bay of Bengal in two places, acts as a drainage channel for Chennai. The port would also pose threat to mangrove forest in the region.

The mega port would be set up on 6,000 acres of land, of which 2,000 acres would be in sea and the sea bed would be converted as land for the project. The coastal people are already hit by sea erosion after Adani Port was set up in the region. A larger port would pose more threat in the region. Besides affecting agricultural activities, it would pose a danger to environment and potable drinking water, the volunteers allege.

TEENAGER FOUND DEAD UNDER FLYOVER

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

A 13-year-old boy who went missing from his house in Mannivakkam near Vandalur was found mysteriously dead on Thursday evening. Identified as Mukeshkumar (13), son of Ponnurangam residing in Mannivakkam in Chengalpet district, had gone out for a walk with his dog on Wednesday evening.

Police said that at 8 pm the dog came home alone and Mukesh's parents launched a search for their son, who could not be found. The father lodged a missing complaint with the Otteri police.

On Thursday, the police received an alert that the body of a boy has been spotted under a flyover between Urapakkam and Aadhanoor.

Phone loan fraudsters widen tentacles using smishing tactics

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

While the people are struggling with financial stress during Covid-19 pandemic times, loan fraudsters are using smishing tactics widening their tentacles.

On Thursday, this correspondent received a text message from an address QP-ABROAD that said: "We are arranging private finance from a private financing company at a low rate of interest, kindly contact Mr. Sreejith 7871002858".

When the number was dialled, a Malayali, claiming to be 'Robin', picked up the phone and gave a straight offer of loan at 6 percent interest. He asserted that his company's name was 'Dhanvarsh', and sought to provide personal details to get the arrangement done.

But when asked about the address of the company, he wanted to send a "Hi" to Whatsapp. Though the 'Hi' was sent, he did not provide any details.

When we contacted Kerala police on the smishing attack, they said many such frauds were taking place in recent times.

Aji Nair, Superintendent of Police, Kerala Cyber Cell said all such messages are fraud. "Don't fall into their trap by providing your private details including bank account and Aadhaar numbers. Nobody has been authorised to arrange private finance to people at low interest. We are seeing such fraud cases in the newspapers every day," he said.

It may be recalled that Chennai City police arrested four persons, including two Chinese men, for loan frauds.

According to the police, they employed more than 100 persons to advance loans and through them targeting people suffering due to a cash crunch. The scam was conducted via 30 mobile phone apps procuring over 2,000 SIM cards and the crackdown was launched after three people died by suicide.

Cyber crime experts say that a customer should never pay any person who promises to get them a loan. "No banks charge processing fees upfront. Any person who asks for a fee for getting a personal loan sanctioned from the consumer is misleading him and most likely will run with that money and the loan will never get sanctioned. People are often misguided that they are receiving such text messages as the sender knows them," an official said.

Mixed message on Sasikala from leaders

From P1

Though minister D. Jayakumar immediately reacted to that, saying that leaders in the party should speak in a unified voice, it needed to be noted that Ms Indira spoke in praise of Ms Sasikala at a protest organised against DMK youth wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin

for speaking ill of Ms Sasikala.

While Ms Stalin's prime target in the speech was Mr Palaniswami, the remarks were construed as defamatory to Ms Sasikala and considered worthy of condemnation through a protest when Mr Palaniswami was trying to assert that he was

not chosen by Ms Sasikala as chief minister.

Another AIADMK leader Anwar Raaja had said that things would change upside down in state politics when Ms Sasikala came out of jail, indicating that many leaders, particularly among those not having any ministerial

berths or MLA posts, were waiting for Ms Sasikala to come out.

Ms Sasikala had held the reins of the party till she left Chennai to serve her jail term and most of the leaders who now hold posts and positions were chosen by her.

Rules required to appoint school non-teaching staff: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

The high court pointed out the failure of the authorities to indicate any rule or notification requiring prior permission to be sought to look for a replacement upon a sanctioned post falling vacant in the non-teaching category in government aided schools. The court upheld an order of a single judge, which had ruled in favour of an aided school appointing a person to the post of an Office Assistant in 2018.

The First Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy dismissed an appeal filed by the Director of School Education, the Chief Educational Officer, Thiruvavur District and the District Educational Officer, Thiruvavur, challenging an order of a single judge dated February 26, 2020.

The Vadamattam Higher Secondary School in Thiruvavur district had initiated the process of appointing S.Murugan to the post of an Office Assistant, which fell vacant in 2014 and sought permission from the DEO. Since there was no response, Murugan moved the high

court, which directed the authorities to dispose of the request of the school. However, permission was declined on December 12, 2019.

This was challenged and a single judge passed an order against the authorities holding that there was no room for seeking permission for appointment of any non-teaching staff of a government aided school. Aggrieved, the authorities filed the present appeal.

The bench said it was possible that there may be surplus staff in other government aided schools in the district or nearby areas. It was equally possible that the government may require the surplus staff to be deployed at other aided schools upon vacancies in a similar post.

However, there has to be a mechanism put in place for such purpose and the process has to be certain. It would not do for the department to refuse an appointment merely because, at the time of appointment, the department finds surplus staff of similar description in other aided schools in the district or the locality. The position as to surplus staff ought to exist at the time when the vacancy arose or, at any rate, prior to the process of appointment

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Cautioning a student and his parents that they have to face the legal consequences if any investigation ordered reveals manipulation has been committed by them in the screen shots of the OMR sheet, the Madras high court directed the Medical Counselling Committee to admit the student at Tuticorin Medical College where he has already been selected pursuant to an interim order of the court.

Passing further interim orders on a petition filed by K.S. Manoj (minor), Justice B.Pugalendhi gave the directive and made it clear that this admission is subject to the result of the petition.

Manoj had sought a direction to the NTA to declare the results and rank of the petitioner in NEET (UG) 2020 as 594 of 720 marks commensurate with his performance as reflected in first OMR answer sheet uploaded on October 16, 2020 and issue directions to the authorities to allow the participation of the petitioner in the counselling for admission to medical courses 2020 and provide him admission to medical course.

The court had on December 10, 2020 directed the National Testing Agency (NEET UG 2020) to consider the entire materials that have been placed by



the petitioner and conduct an investigation and file a report before the court by December 23 explaining as to how two OMR Sheets containing name of this candidate was uploaded in the website and how it was completely at variance with each other. The court had also directed the authorities to permit the petitioner to participate in the counselling for admission to the Medical UG course by taking the marks of the petitioner in NEET exam as 594 marks and if the petitioner secures a seat, the same shall not be finalised and the results shall be kept in a sealed cover, awaiting final orders.

When the case came up for hearing on January 11, 2021, Senior counsel G.Masilamani, appearing for NTA, demonstrated that the screenshots relied on by the petitioner from October 5 to October 16, 2020 showing more marks to the petitioner were fabricated ones and that there was only one OMR sheet, which would expose that the petitioner has secured 248 marks and not more than that.

However, M.Ravi, counsel for the petitioner, after getting instructions from the petitioner and his parents, submitted that the petitioner has not tampered any document, as claimed by the authorities and the court could order an investigation by any agency. According to him, the authorities were attempting to justify their second OMR sheet uploaded on October 17, 2020 and the truth can be ascertained only after thorough investigation. He also requested for an investigation and if it reveals that the petitioner has committed any fraud by manipulating the screenshots, then the petitioner was prepared to face the consequence of a criminal trial. On the contrary, if it was found that a mistake

in a fixed time, so that the relevant school can fill up the vacancy without undue delay. In the alternative, the DEO may circulate the description and number of

the surplus staff at various levels for such schools to be able to fill up any vacancy that arises from the surplus staff.

In the absence of either,

an aided school cannot be faulted for undertaking the appointing of a person to a sanctioned post or seeking the appointment, the bench added.

SHORT TAKES

Woman dies as bike falls into pit

DC CORRESPONDENT
SALEM, JAN. 15

A woman was killed when the bike on which she was riding along with her husband fell into a 50-feet deep pit, in Yercaud hill road.

Sources said Kasim Babu (35), hails from Kosavapatti, Namakkal district. He was proceeding on his bike to Yercaud along with his wife, Sasikala, on Thursday, on a sight-seeing trip.

After spending some time in Yercaud, the couple left for Salem taking a hilly route. En route, as they were crossing a 60-feet bridge, they suddenly fell into a 50-feet deep pit on the roadside. Sasikala died on the spot. On learning about the tragedy, Yercaud police and fire-fighters rushed to the scene, and retrieved Sasikala's body and severely injured Kasim also.

Sasikala's body was sent to the Salem government hospital for autopsy, and Kasim was sent to the same hospital for treatment.

Yercaud police have registered a case and are investigating.

RSS chief quotes Tiruvalluvar

Chennai, Jan 15: In the course of his two-day visit to Tamil Nadu, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat participated in Pongal celebrations and made a surprise visit to the house of a functionary of the organisation where he recited a couplet from Tirukkural. He also performed a 'gau puja' (cow worship).

Mr. Bhagwat taught a couplet on possession of self restraint from Tirukkural, authored by Tamil savant Tiruvalluvar, to a girl of the RSS functionary's family to whom he paid a surprise visit. The RSS chief recited the Kural meaning "the wound burnt by fire may heal but not the one by the tongue." And the girl responded to him by quoting a couplet on gratitude from the Tamil classic. Videos posted by a senior RSS functionary in this regard went viral on social media.

Earlier, Mr. Bhagwat clad in dhoti and with sacred ash (vibuthi) and vermilion (kumkum) smeared on his forehead in lines with the Tamil tradition, offered prayers at Sri Kadumbadi Chinnamman Temple in Ponniyammanmedu here and participated in community Pongal celebrations.

— Agencies



PM ENSURES TN LEAPS IN DEVELOPMENT: NADDA

Chennai, Jan. 15: BJP president JP Nadda who attended party's Pongal festival in Chennai on Thursday, said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been ensuring that Tamil Nadu takes a big leap as far as development is concerned.

He compared the functioning of finance commission towards Tamil Nadu under UPA and PM Modi. "PM Modi has tried to see to it that the whole country goes forward. At the same time, he has made sure that Tamil Nadu takes a big leap as far as development is concerned. The 13 finance commission during the UPA government gave Rs 94,000 crores to Tamil Nadu for the development. But the same commission under PM Modi gave Tamil Nadu Rs 5.42 lakh crores. Mainstreaming and bringing people of Tamil Nadu in the front of the development have been the basic ethos on which PM Modi is working," he said.

— Agencies

3 die, crops damaged by rain in Thoothukudi

ARULOLI M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, JAN. 15:

Three persons including a woman were killed due to the unseasonal rains in the district, where ripe harvest ready paddy crops in around 2,000 acres were completely submerged in flood waters.

The district registered 150 mm of rains this month, which is 15 times higher than the normal monthly rainfall of 10 mm that the district would receive during January. Continuous rains resulted in heavy discharge of water from major dams of Papanasam, Manimuthar and Kadana dam in Thamirabarani river, causing flooding in many habitats in low-lying areas, in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts.

Traffic between Tirunelveli and Thiruchendur was cut off due to the river overflowing onto the state highways

The power line had snapped as the tree branch had fallen on it. Similarly, two youths, reportedly bathing at Vaipar river in Vembar in the district, were washed away by flood water in the river. The NDRF personnel along with local swimmers fished out the body of one of the youths, while search is on for the other

near Karungulam village. The water however receded soon and traffic to Tiruchendur from Thoothukudi resumed after Friday afternoon.

Due to torrential rains at Thermalnagar area in Thoothukudi, an NTPL contract worker, Karuppasamy (35) was injured as a broken branch of a tree fell on him. But Karuppasamy's wife, Anusuya (27), who went to rescue her hus-

band, set foot on a live wire and was electrocuted to death.

The power line had snapped as the tree branch had fallen on it. Similarly, two youths, reportedly bathing at Vaipar river in Vembar in the district, were washed away by flood water in the river. The NDRF personnel along with local swimmers fished out the body of one of the youths, while search is on for the other.

Minister for information and publicity, Kadambur C Raju, who inspected the rain affected areas in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts along with the Revenue minister RB Udayakumar and Adi Dravida welfare minister Rajalakshmi on the Pongal day, said that the families of the three who lost their lives in the district, would be compensated by the government. He also added that Anusuya's husband,

Karuppasamy has been undergoing treatment for his injury at the Thoothukudi government medical college hospital.

Further, assuring full compensation for crop damages caused by the rain, Kadambur C Raju said that officials of the agriculture and revenue departments have been involved in enumerating the farm lands surrounded by water, and once the process is over, farmers would be duly compensated for their crop damage.

The minister also added that people at Punnaikayal village where river Thamirabarani enters the sea, have been shifted to safety in the rescue camps. However, as the rainfall decreased on Friday, discharge from the dams have been reduced to 25,000 cusecs from 62,000 cusecs from the Papanasam and Manimuthar dams.

Tamil Nadu 11th state to implement 'One Nation One Ration Card' reform: Fin Min

New Delhi, Jan. 15: As many as 11 states have implemented the 'One Nation One Ration Card' reform so far, following which the central government has allowed them to raise an additional Rs 30,709 crore, an official statement said.

Tamil Nadu has become the 11th state in the country to successfully undertake the Public Distribution System (PDS) reforms stipulated by the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, the statement said. The state has become eligible to mobilise additional financial resources of Rs 4,813 crore through open market borrowings and permission for the same was issued by the Department of Expenditure.

Other states which have successfully completed the reforms are Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh is the biggest beneficiary with an additional borrowing window

of Rs 4,851 crore, followed by Karnataka Rs 4,509 crore and Gujarat Rs 4,352 crore.

The Department of Food and Public Distribution in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution is the nodal department to certify that a state has met the conditions stipulated for this reform, the finance ministry statement said.

In view of the resource requirement to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government had in May enhanced the borrowing limit of the states by 2 per cent of their gross state domestic product (GSDP). This has enabled the states to mobilise additional financial resources to fight the pandemic and maintain the standards of service delivery to the public.

However, to ensure long-term debt sustainability and prevent any adverse impact on future, a part of the additional borrowing was linked to the states carrying out reforms in the sectors critical for

service delivery to the citizens.

One of the sectors identified for reforms was the Public Distribution System. Out of the additional borrowing limit of 2 per cent of GSDP, 0.25 per cent is linked to implementation of the 'One Nation One Ration Card' system. This was aimed to ensure that the beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other welfare schemes, especially the migrant workers and their families, get ration from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) across the country.

Other aims of the intended reform were to better target beneficiaries, elimination of bogus/duplicate/ ineligible ration cards and thus enhance welfare and reduce leakage, it said. For this, the reform conditions stipulated Aadhaar seeding of all ration cards, biometric authentication of beneficiaries and automation of all the Fair Price Shops in the state.

— PTI



Showers dampen winter spirit in Nilgiris district

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, JAN. 15

Continuous rains in January have brought about an odd and strange weather pattern in the Nilgiris which has been already masked by frost, a characteristic mark of winter here.

The wet spell has also dampened Pongal celebra-

tions and is playing spoilsport with the tourism industry.

The weather prolife here, especially in January, so far has been very strange. Instead of bone chilling frosting in winter, the rains, clouds, and winds had even the elderly here say that they had never experienced such rains in early

January.

The Nilgiris received nearly 124 mm of rains in the first half of January 2021.

Ecologists and farmers are of the view that frosting is needed in the hills during the winter months between December and February to keep pace with the seasonal cycle, and also make farmlands

use the severe frost to kill pests in farmlands in a natural way. So far, this winter had no recording of frosting, as the rain and cloudy weather dominated the month of December.

This odd weather has also dampened pongal celebrations here, and tourist sightseeing trips have been cancelled.

Popular TN doctors to be among the first to get vaccine shots

Chennai, Jan. 15: The vaccination for COVID-19 would be rolled-out in 166 locations across Tamil Nadu and ten medical doctors would get the shots on the first day, Health Minister C Vijayabaskar said on Friday.

In an effort to create a sense of confidence and dispel rumours, the vaccination would be administered to ten popular doctors in the state on Saturday, Vijayabaskar told reporters

Apollo Hospitals said chairman of the hospital group Dr Prathap C Reddy would be the first recipient of the vaccine at its vaccination centre at Nungambakkam here

in Pudukottai district.

During the first phase, about six lakh people on the priority list such as front-

line workers would be vaccinated, he said.

Apollo Hospitals said chairman of the hospital group Dr Prathap C Reddy would be the first recipient of the vaccine at its vaccination centre at Nungambakkam here.

MGM Healthcare said the vaccination service would "commence with administering of COVID-19 vaccines to our prominent Padma Shri Award winning doctors

alongwith our healthcare heroes who have braved the pandemic."

Vijayabaskar said Chief Minister K Palaniswami would take part in the vaccination drive in Madurai. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to launch the first phase of the pan India roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination drive at 10:30 AM via video conferencing.

A single vial of five ml could vaccinate ten people

with a dose of 0.5 ml per person, Vijayabaskar said, adding auto disable type of syringes mandated for immunisation would be used.

Vaccination for doctors and healthcare workers is being taken up after they volunteered, the Minister said.

"A detailed booklet will be released in English and Tamil to clear doubts of people on vaccination." — PTI

Two killed in road accidents on Bengaluru highway

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 15

Two women died and two others were injured in different road accidents that happened on Chennai-Bengaluru National highway on Wednesday night.

According to the police, Murugan (22), a Ramanathapuram native, who works in a private glass manufacturing unit in Sriperumbudur, was riding with his friend and colleague Kanchana (20) of Chembarambakkam towards Somangalam when the accident happened. Police said a speeding truck hit their bike from behind. Kanchana died on the spot while Murugan was rushed to the Sriperumbudur government hospital in an ambulance.

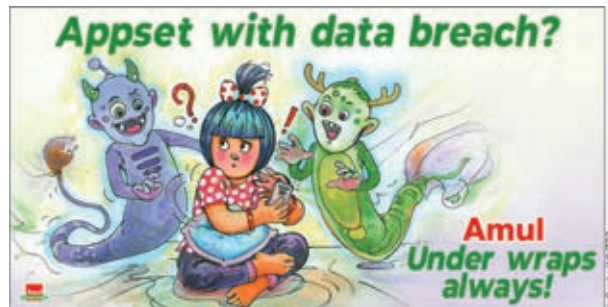
Sunguvarchatram police arrived at the spot and sent the body of the deceased to Kanchipuram government hospital for post-mortem.

In another accident that happened on the same highway on Wednesday, Ramya (18), a resident of E.B Colony in Sunguvarchatram was riding pillion with her relative Chelsea (48) on their way to Kanchipuram when a private bus rammed against their vehicle. The duo suffered severe injuries and they were rushed to Sriperumbudur government hospital where Chelsea was pronounced dead.

Ramya is undergoing treatment, the police said.

Tamil culture essential for India's future, says Rahul

Madurai, Jan. 15: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday witnessed the popular bull taming sport jallikattu at Avaniapuram near here, saying his visit was aimed at sending out a message to "those who think they can run roughshod on Tamil people." He described the sport as "Tamil culture and history in action." The former party president was joined by DMK Youth Wing Secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin on the dais.



Bathing ban in Kodiveri falls upsets tourists

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
ERODE, JAN. 15

Tourists who had gathered at the Kodiveri falls near Gobichettipalayam here for the 'Mattu pongal festival' were disappointed with the ban on bathing in the falls, and returned with the satisfaction of watching the falls from a distance.

The Kodiveri dam in Gobichettipalayam in the district was built over 600 years back using granite stones to serve as a check dam. Water released from the Bhavani Sagar dam into the Bhavani river reaches the Kodiveri dam and falls into the water-fall and confluences with the Cauvery river.

Thousands of tourists visit the dam during the holidays and festive seasons. Tens of thousands of tourists and their families and friends from various districts like

Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Erode, Namakkal, Karur and Salem, started flocking to the Kodiveri dam on Friday, on the occasion of Mattu pongal, the day following pongal.

As a precautionary measure against Corona, the district administration has banned bathing, tours and playing in parks at the Kodiveri dam on the specific dates of January 15, 16 and 17.

Tourists visiting Kodiveri dam can also enjoy the view of the Kodiveri falls standing on a high bridge over the Bhavani river. They also enjoyed grilled fried fish snacks sold by vendors on top of the bridge.

A few villagers and tourists who had come with their families to cook and dine together on the banks of Bhavani river, were upset that they could not bathe in the waterfalls.

TAMIL NADU SLUM CLEARANCE BOARD RECRUITMENT NOTIFICATION

Notification No. 01/2021

Dated : 13.01.2021

1. Applications are invited through Registered post upto 31.01.2021 from all the eligible candidates for the post of Office Assistant (Basic Service) by Direct Recruitment in Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board. Applications must be submitted in the prescribed format which can be downloaded from the website www.tnscb.org. Filled in Application must be sent to "The Chairman, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, No.5, Kamarajar Salai, Triplicane, Chennai - 600 005". The candidates registered with Employment Exchange are also eligible to apply for the said post against the vacancies. The qualifications and other details of the post are as follows :-

Sl. No.	Name of the Post	No. Of Vacancies	Pay Band (Rs.)
1.	Office Assistant	Total - 53 Nos.	15700 - 50000 (Level - 1)

2. Important Dates :

i)	Date of Notification	16.01.2021
ii)	Date of Commencement of Submission of application	16.01.2021
iii)	Last date for receipt of application in Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, Head Office, Chennai	31.01.2021

3. Age (as on 31.12.2020) :

The minimum age of all applicants as on 31.12.2020 should be 18 (eighteen) years of age. The maximum age is as follows.

Category of Candidates	Maximum age
i) SC, SC(A), ST	35 years (should not have completed)
ii) MBC/DC, BC and BC(M)	32 years (should not have completed)
iii) General [i.e. candidates not belonging to SC, SC(A), ST, MBC/DC, BC and BC(M)]	30 years (should not have completed)

NOTE :

➤ 10 years age relaxation is available for Differently Abled Persons of all categories wherever maximum age limit is prescribed.

4. Educational Qualification (as on 31.12.2020) :

Sl.No.	Name of the Post	Qualification
1.	Office Assistant	8 th Standard Pass from a recognized school

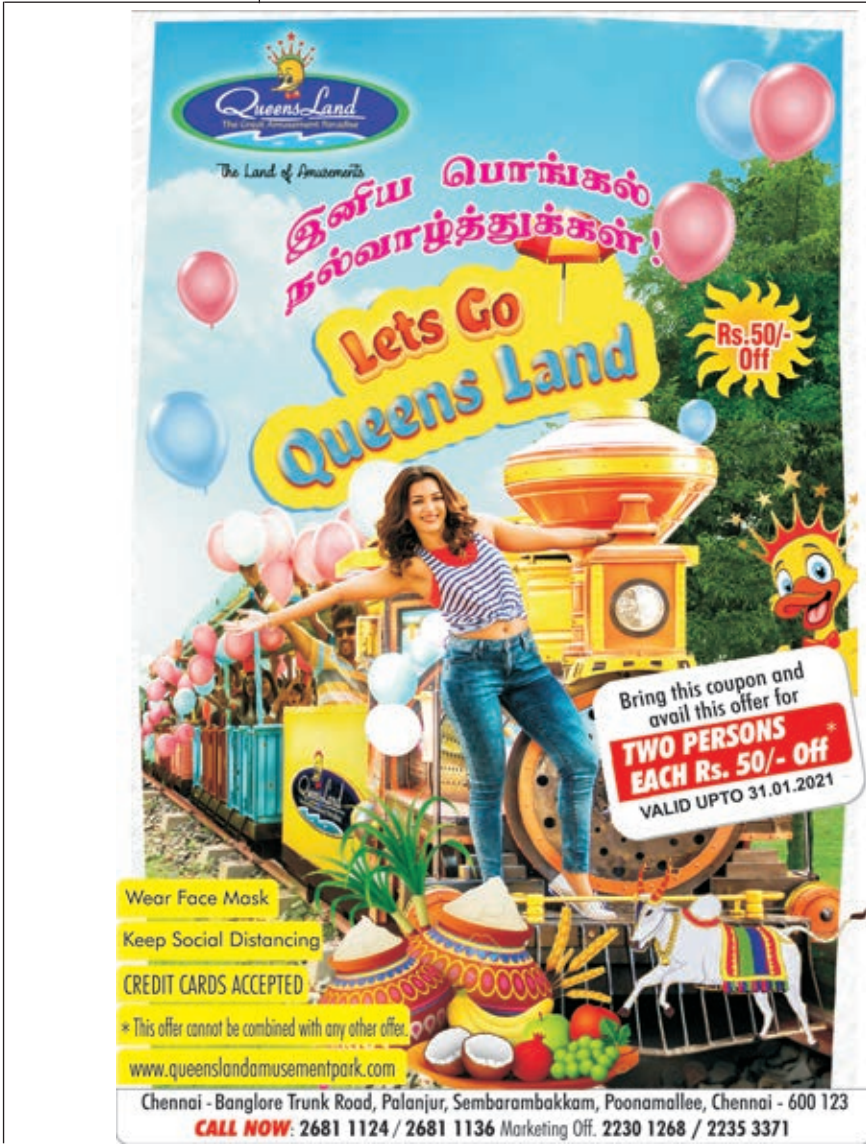
NOTE :

- The candidates those who have not passed 8th standard as on the cut - off date (i.e. 31.12.2020) are not eligible.
- The Rule of Reservation of appointments, age relaxations, etc. will be as per the Government Rules in force.
- The applicants are requested to read carefully the "Instructions to candidates" before filling up the application. The "Instructions to candidates" has been appended below the "Format for Application" and is available in the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board website www.tnscb.org.

DIPR/ 01 /DISPLAY/2021

Managing Director

DIPR/01/01/SLPLAY/2021



IN BRIEF

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FORMER MINISTER
MORARKA DIES

FORM PG 1

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

Mr Morarka, who was born in a well-known business family, donned many hats — a successful businessman, a cricket administrator who was the vice-president of the BCCI during Jagmohan Dalmia's time, a minister in the Union cabinet, a wild life photographer and an organic farmer who has done some great work in his native Rajasthan to promote agriculture and support farmers in many ways. He and his MR Morarka Foundation have been also at the forefront to promote art, Sanskrit literature and culture. He has a wildlife photography coffee table book published.

DRONE FEATURE
AT ARMY PARADE

FORM PG 1

The demonstration comes in the backdrop of Azerbaijan using drones to defeat Armenia by hitting the opponent's military assets to a devastating effect, and crippling its air defence system, tanks and artillery guns. Indian army is also considering augmenting its drones capacity as China has a formidable drones strength. The Army Chief said that 300-400 terrorists are waiting in various terror camps across the LoC in PoK to infiltrate into J&K. He said that last year there was 44 per cent increase in ceasefire violations at LoC by Pakistan.

PM doesn't respect farmers, says Rahul



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the first time at the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- PTI

Kerala to invest
more in higher
education, skillsDC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JAN 15

Kerala finance minister Dr Thomas Isaac on Friday presented the last budget of the Left Democratic Front (LDF), giving a thrust to usher in knowledge economy while offering a slew of welfare measures.

Free Covid vaccine for all, laptop in every household, high speed internet connection for 20 lakh economically backward families, 1.5 lakh houses for landless-homeless poor, hike in all social welfare pension were among the measures Dr Isaac announced in the Assembly.

He also announced creating a total of 4,000 new posts in the health sector, skill mission to provide and improve skills to 50 lakh youth and an allocation of Rs 2,000 crore for infrastructure development in universities.

With just three months left for the crucial Assembly elections in the state, the 3.18 hour record breaking budget speech of Dr Isaac sounded more like an

election manifesto. He announced a slew of social welfare measures including 10 kg rice for 50 lakh families and hike in all social welfare pensions from Rs 1500 to Rs 1600.

The finance minister also announced that the salary hike of state government employees would be implemented in April. The hike will be based on the recommendations of the state pay commission.

The government announced women friendly measures in the budget. Women filmmakers would be given assistance worth Rs 3 crore. The government has also set a target to bring down crime against women by 25 per cent.

At a time when farmers are protesting in Delhi, the Kerala government has announced a hike in procurement price of rice, coconut and rubber to help the farm and plantation sectors.

The government has decided to pump in more money for local bodies. The local self governments would get Rs 10,000 crore in 2021-22.

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

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

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

He added, “We worked hard during the disaster

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

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

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

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

Assam health minister

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

Umesh Chandra Sarma, former vice-chancellor of Sankardev University would be the first recipient

among 12 invitees for the inaugural vaccination programme on Saturday, Mr Sarma said.

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

MONEY | DRIVE

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

President, CMs contribute for Ram Temple fund

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 15

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

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

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 15

President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday donated ₹5,00,100 as a contribution in his personal capacity towards the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as the nationwide campaign - Samarpan

Nidhi Sangraha Abhiyan - to collect contributions for the temple by the VHP and Shri Ram Janambhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust commenced.

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

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

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand among other states.

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

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

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

Juna peeth's head Swami Avdeheshanand Giri par-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

SHORT TAKES

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

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

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

ALPS: AVALANCHE WARNINGS AFTER HEAVY SNOWFALL

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

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

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

INDIAN TEENAGER HELPS RECYCLE 25 TN OF E-WASTE

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

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

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

RUSSIA EXITS OPEN SKIES PACT, AFTER U.S.

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

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

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

42 killed in Indonesia earthquake



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

Biden declares \$1.9 tn Covid-19 stimulus plan

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHO tackles new Covid-19 strains

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHINA BUILDS NEW ISOLATION CENTRE AS CASES SURGE

Beijing, Jan. 15: A city in northern China is building a 3,000-unit quarantine facility to deal with an anticipated overflow of patients as Covid-19 cases rise ahead of the Lunar New Year travel rush.

State media on Friday showed crews leveling earth, pouring concrete and assembling pre-fabricated rooms in farmland outside Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital of Hebei province that has seen the bulk of new cases.

That recalled scenes last year, when China rapidly built field hospitals and turned gymnasiums into isolation centers to cope with the initial outbreak linked to the central city of Wuhan. China has largely contained further domestic spread of the Coronavirus, but the recent spike has raised concerns due to the proximity to the capital Beijing and the impending rush of people planning to travel large distances to reunite their families for country's most important traditional festival.

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

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

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

Gaga, one-of-a-kind artist, performer and a trailblaser in beauty and fashion, will sing the national anthem and Lopez will give a musical performance on the West Front of the US Capitol, where the ceremony will be taking place. Biden, 78, and Kamala Harris, 56, will be sworn in as President and Vice President of the United States during the ceremony. But it won't be a typical inauguration, for several reasons.

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

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

The Biden Inaugural Committee has already announced that the typical parade that follows the swearing-in ceremony will take place virtually and will feature supporters from across the country.

Trump's fate in Senate leader McConnell's hands

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

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

GOP leader Mitch McConnell, who says he's undecided, is one of several key senators to watch, along with Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, who is set to

take the Senate reins as his party reclaims the Senate majority.

Others to watch include GOP senators up for reelection in 2022 and several Republicans who have publicly backed impeachment. At least at the trial's start, all eyes will be on McConnell, who largely protected Trump during the last impeachment trial and refused Democrats' pleas to call witnesses.

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

The Republican leader holds great sway in his party even though convening the trial could be among his last acts as majority leader. Even as minority leader, McConnell will be a crucial and perhaps decisive voice. — AP

US executes drug kingpin under Don

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

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

He addressed the families of his victims in his final statement.

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

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

NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS FLOOD WASHINGTON

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

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

The number of National Guard troops coming to Washington to assist with security has so far grown to about 21,000. — AP

PARADIP PORT TRUST

FIRST CORRIGENDUM TO TENDER CALL NOTICE
NO. MD/ACCTS-WK-R-72020/1379 Dt. 24.12.2020 for the work "Manning, Operation & Maintenance of Port Crafts ML KALI, 300 Ton Reception Barge and Pollution Control Equipment for a period of 03 (three) years"

Estimated cost put to the tender ₹ 2,05,57,108/- Plus GST. With reference to the above e-tender, a Pre-bid meeting will be held in the chamber of the undersigned at 12.00 hrs. on 18.01.2021 where all the doubts of prospective bidders with respect to tender clauses will be clarified. Further the last date and time for downloading the e-tender document and submission & opening of bids are extended as follows: Document download end date : 25.01.2021 at 13.30 hrs. Bid Submission end date : 26.01.2021 at 15.30 hrs. Tender Opening date (Technical Bid) : 27.01.2021 at 10.00 hrs. All other terms & conditions remain unchanged. For details please log on to the website: <https://procure.gov.in/procurementapp>

Dy. Conservator
14.01.2021
PPT/PR/366/20-21

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement system

Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi - 110 001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:

S.No.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	09202117	YOKE DRG. NO. SK-62724	1810 NOS.	15-02-21

Note: 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.
2. No Manual offer will be entertained.

Tender No. : 49/2020-2021 Dated: 15.01.2021 122/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Notice is hereby given to all users of Railway lines and premises situated on the completed section of the under noted section of the Northern Railway that the 25 kV, 50 Hz, AC overhead traction wires will be energized on or after the date specified against the section. On and from the same date the overhead traction line shall be treated as live at all time and not unauthorized person shall approach or work in the proximity of the said overhead line.

Section	Date
Amb-Andaura excluding from location 148/2 (Ch: 148/68.50) to Daulatpur Chowk location 164/3 (Ch: 164/150.20) including Chintpurnimarg station location 156/8-9 (Ch: 156/450.00) station and including Chintpurnimarg yard and Daulatpur Chowk yard with associated turnout and X-over's and AT's and switching post at AADR/SSP and DLPC/SSP with feeder lines in Amb-Andaura-Daulatpur Chowk Section of Ambala Division, Northern Railway.	25.01.2021

No.: 17-Elect/CTRD/MB/127-A Dated : 13.01.2021 101/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

KONKAN RAILWAY CORPORATION LTD.
(A Government of India Undertaking)

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender Notice No.: KR-CO-SG-TENDER-03A-2020 dt. 15/01/2021.

Chief Signal & Telecom Engineer invites E-Tender bids (Two Packet Open Tender System) from Eligible and Experienced Contractors:

The Tender constitutes the following works -

- Supply, Laying, Testing and Commissioning of 24 Fibre Armoured OF Cable, 6-Quad Jelly Filled Cable and 20 Pair Jelly Filled Telecom Cable for KRCL of about 350 Kms. in Mid Sections of KRCL route (of 740 Kms) i.e. Roha to Thokur, at Tenderers own cost.
- In consideration of above (1), Laying / Blowing / Pulling of Tenderers own 24/48 Fibre Armoured OFC Cable along the 740 Kms. Stretch of KRCL. This 740 Kms. includes Blowing of Tenderer's 24/48 Fibre Cable (not more than 12 mm in dia) in the existing 40 mm DUCT carrying the 24 Fibre OF Cable laid by KRCL in Station areas of about 400 Kms. and the 350 Kms. being executed by Tenderer at his own cost as in (1) above.
- Payment of Way Leave / O&M charges etc., to KRCL by Tenderer towards the maintenance of 740 kms. of Tenderers 24/48 Fibre Armoured OFC by KRCL for 20 years.

Last Date & Time for Submission of Bids : 15/02/2021 up to 16:00 hrs.
Estimated Cost of Work : ₹ 67.66 Crore (Excluding GST).

For further details please visit : www.ireps.gov.in

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited
(A Government of India Undertaking)

Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001

OFFICE OF CHIEF ENGINEER /METERING
C-3, Shakti Vihar, PSPCL, Patiala, Punjab-147001

Tel. No. 0175-2218871, Fax: 0175-2200284, e-mail: se-hq-metering@psspcl.in
CIN: U40109PB2010SGC033813. Registration Number: 33813.
Website: www.psspcl.in E-tendering portal: <https://psspcl.abspcprocure.com>

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender Specification No.	MQP-172/2020-21/PO(M)
Short Description	Procurement of 'ISI' marked LT, AC, 1-Phase, 2-wire, Whole Current, DLMS compliant, (Category C-3) Static Intelligent Energy Meters of rating 10-60 Amps, 50Hz, 240 V of Accuracy Class-1 with 'Optical Port'
Quantity	7.5 Lac meters
Tender Documents	Tender documents can only be down loaded from website https://eproc.punjab.gov.in
Bid submission start date	13.01.2021 at 11:30 Hrs.
Last date of downloading of documents	03.02.2021 up to 11:00 Hrs.
Last date of Bid submission	03.02.2021 up to 11:00 Hrs
Bid opening (Part-I&II)	08.02.2021 at 11:00 Hrs.
Contact Person Name	Er. Charanjit Singh Hazuria SE/HMC, PSPCL, Patiala. (9646118774)

Tender specification can only be downloaded from PSPCL e-tendering website <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>. Tender ID is: 2021_POWER_5970_1

Note : Corrigendum, if any after the publication of this tender enquiry shall only be uploaded on website <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> and will not be published in newspapers.

C-15/21 SE/HMC
RO No PR-Advt. No :- 76155/12/40/2021/820 PSPCL, Patiala

Dutch govt quits over child benefits scandal

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

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

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

Rutte — one of Europe's longest-serving leaders, having been in power since 2010 — said the cabinet would stay on in a



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

caretaker role to oversee the response to Covid-19 until elections in mid-March.

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

"We are of one mind: if the whole system has failed, only joint responsibility can be borne. And that leads to the conclusion that I have just now offered the king the resignation of the entire cabinet."

US blacklists Xiaomi, 8 Chinese firms

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

office. The Department of Defense added nine companies to its list of Chinese companies with military links, including Xiaomi and state-owned plane manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corp. of China (Comac). US investors will have to divest their stakes in

Chinese companies on the military list by November this year, according to an executive order signed by Trump in November.

Xiaomi did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Xiaomi Corp. overtook Apple Inc. as the worlds No. 3 smartphone maker by sales in

the third quarter of 2020, according to data by Gartner. Xiaomi's market share has grown as Huawei's sales have suffered after it was blacklisted by the US and its smartphones were cut off from essential services from Google.

Separately, the

Commerce Department put China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC) on the entity list, an economic blacklist that forbids US firms from exporting or transferring technology with the companies named unless permission has been obtained from the US government. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

16 JANUARY 2021

Twice impeached, Trump makes dubious history

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

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

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

Women at mass: Slow steps

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

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

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

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

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



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

— From Recipes of Damnation by Bachchoo

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

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

immunisation programme.

Our local pharmacy, conveniently across the road from the medical practice, has been in the vaccinating business, but during the last round of flu vaccination, while the Asian pharmacist was administering the jabs, the young Afro-British assistant who works there all year round declared that she was a vaccine resistor, a sceptic. She didn’t believe in vaccination. There are millions of idiots around the world who are anti-vaccers. My unverified conclusion, gentle reader, was that this young lady belonged to a cultish church called Jehovah’s Witnesses, which has a meeting house down the road in this neighbourhood. These Witnesses don’t believe in scientific discovery and won’t accept blood transfusions, even if they are dying without them. Faith dictates foolishness — and in this case I thought it dictated against the one thing that can almost certainly save a person from the Covid-19 plague.

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

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

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

“Do you know the Bible?” She asked.

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

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

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

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

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

Again, blank looks.

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

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

“Genesis,” one of them enthusiastically ventured.

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

They looked bewildered and then

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

AN IMPRACTICAL DEMAND

The news that the farmers in Delhi on the warpath against the new farm laws have burnt the copies of the laws expose their adamant attitude and belligerence even towards the directives of the Supreme Court to suspend the agitation till the issues are thoroughly analysed by the experts’ panel. Their demand for the complete negation of the laws has no merit and meaning in that there will be absolutely no ground or need for any kind of negotiations or judicial scrutiny once the laws are repealed. As ‘affected’ citizens of the country they can only demand for amendments or rectifications of a law passed by the Parliament and they certainly don’t have any right to ask for its repeal.

S. Nagarajan Iyer,
Coimbatore

TRUMP’S SECOND IMPEACHMENT

WITH THE House of representatives having voted to impeach the outgoing President Donald Trump on the charge of incitement to insurrection which made him to suffer the ignominy of the first president to be impeached twice by the House of Representatives, the focus has now been shifted to Senate, the upper chamber, which will now hold a trial to determine Trump’s guilt. However, going by the determination of Senate’s Republican majority leader Mitch McConnell not to have an immediate impeachment trial and cannot begin until after the Senate returns from a recess on January 19, it is obvious now the trial will likely begin only after Mr Trump leaves office on January 20.

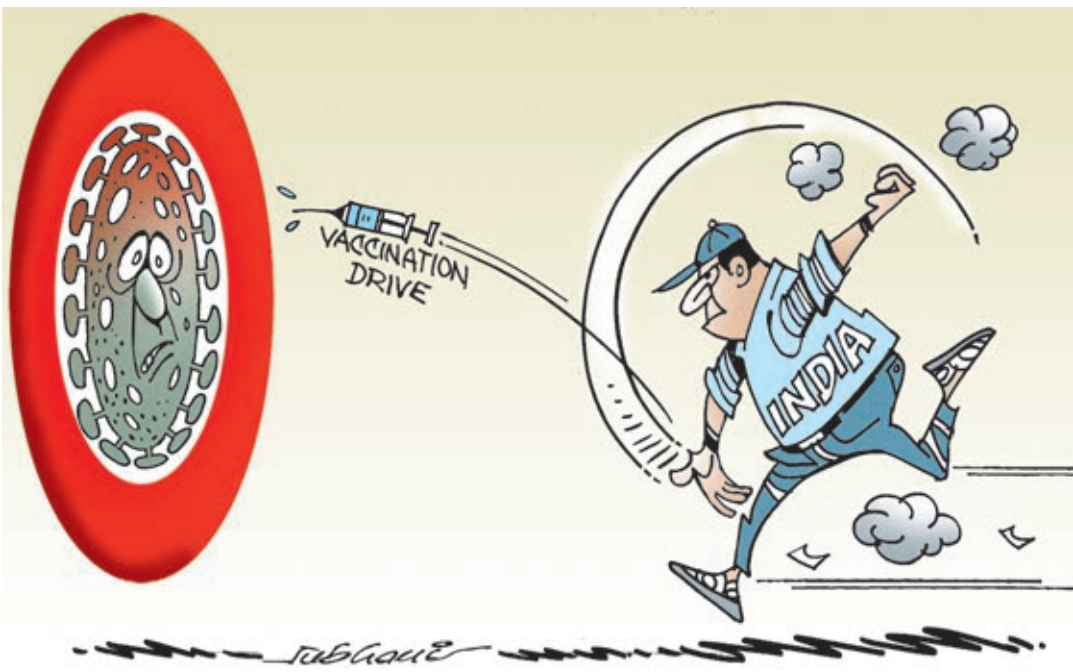
M. Jeyaram, Sholavandan

LAUDABLE EXECUTION

THE 52-YEAR-OLD Kansas woman Lisa Montgomery was sentenced to death and executed through lethal injection in prison at Terrae Haute, Indiana in the US for strangling a pregnant woman and cutting out the baby from her womb at Missouri. After 67 years a female prisoner has been executed. This kind of punishment will serve as a deterrent to all in future. More heinous crimes are being committed in India in recent times. Murders after rape are common. It would be appreciated if punishment is made more severe in India to bring down the murders following the US model.

M.C. Vijay Shankar,
Chennai

Subhani



Elections 2021: A mixed bag of hope & challenges



Sanjay Kumar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overall, the best the Left parties can do is to hold on to power in Kerala. The BJP will certainly win in Assam and will put up a strong fight to wrest power from the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal. For the Congress, the best scenario would be to win in Kerala and retain Puducherry.



SHORT TAKES

Six junior shuttlers among top-10

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

Nikolai is India's athletics coach

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

Walsh tests +ve in Bangladesh

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

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

Honda one-two in 2021 Dakar Rally

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: The final stage of the 2021 Dakar Rally delivered the outright race win to Monster Energy Honda Team. Kevin Benavides claimed the triumph after 12 gruelling stages. Ricky Brabec accompanied him on the podium in second place.

Live on TV

BADMINTON

Thailand Open: Semifinals from 7:30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

CRICKET

Sri Lanka vs England: First Test, Day 3 from 10 am on Sony Ten 2

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 Tournament: Assam vs Bengal from 11:55 am; Odisha vs Jharkhand from 6:55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

Big Bash League: Sydney Sixers vs Perth Scorchers from 1:10 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

Australia vs India: Fourth Test Day 3 from 5:30 am (Sunday) on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Mumbai vs Hyderabad from 7:20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Bologna vs Verona from 7:30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

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NATS AND BOLTS

Natarajan's twin strikes boost India despite Oz domination

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Siraj called 'grub' by Gabba crowd

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

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



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

Washington and Siraj grubs," a spectator named Kate was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

"It started targeted at Siraj and it was a chant similar to the SCG one (in which fans sung to the

tune of Que Sera, Sera but substituted the lyrics with Que Shiraz, Shiraz).

"But this time it was Siraj. I suspect it's not a coincidence that it's Siraj being targeted post the SCG stuff."

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

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

SUNDAR READY TO BOWL LONG SPELLS IN 4TH TEST

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

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

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

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

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

His answer is 'bring it on'.

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

Labuschagne all praise for Indian bowling at Gabba

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

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

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

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

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

— MARNUS LABUSCHAGNE
Australian batsman

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

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

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

NATTU 1ST INDIAN TO DEBUT THRICE ON SAME TOUR

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

SAINI COMPLAINS OF GROIN PAIN, TAKEN FOR SCANS

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

SYED MUSHTAQ | ALI TROPHY

Mighty Mumbai make shock exit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BIHAR NOTCH UP THIRD STRAIGHT WIN

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

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

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

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

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

PTI

BRIEF SCORES

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



Root's century drought ends

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

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

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

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

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

It was the star batsman's

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

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

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

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

— AFP

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

SAINA LOSES, INJURED SRIKANTH PULLS OUT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI