

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

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Holidays end



Passengers rush to bus stands as the Pongal holidays come to and end in Vijayawada on Sunday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Lack of surveillance makes AP temples easy to target

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

Absence of surveillance and security measures in several temples is helping gangs in committing crimes. The series of incidents in recent weeks took place in such temples, police said and stressed that these had happened in past years too.

AP police initiated or strengthened surveillance steps for holy places under which, for the first time in the country, as many as 58,871 temples were geo-tagged in the 13 districts. Committees were formed with locals for protection of religious places.

Attacks on temples took place in previous periods too, but this time some political parties made a big hue and cry even in the matter of minor incidents.

Mainly, the Telugu Desam, the BJP and the Jana Sena were in the forefront while other Hindu organisations too raised their voice.

As per records, 163 temple offences were registered in 2015, in which 12 were of idol

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desecration/idol theft, 144 of ornament theft, six of digging of temple premises and one of chariot burning.

The temple offences increased to 207 in 2016, in which 31 cases were of idol desecration/idol theft, 139 of ornament theft, three of digging the temple premises and 34 of temple demolitions.

In 2017, as many as 139 temple offences registered in which 25 were of idol desecration/idol theft, 113 of ornament theft and one of digging a temple premises.

As many 123 temple offences were registered in 2018, in which 29 were of idol desecration/idol theft, 91 of ornament theft, two of diggings the temple premises and one of tem-

ple demolition. In 2019, as many as 177 temple offences were registered, in which 22 were of idol desecration/idol theft, 151 of ornament theft, four of digging the temple premises and two of chariot burning.

In 2020, 143 temple offences were registered, in which 34 were of idol desecration/idol theft, 103 of ornament thefts, four of diggings the temple premises and two of chariot burning. In the corresponding year 2021, six temple offences were registered in which four were of idol desecration/idol theft and two of ornament theft.

There are 23,834 recognised temples under the supervision of the state government through the endowment department. Further, nearly 25,000 temples belong to private individuals and committees.

Barring a few big temples, the majority of these temples lacked surveillance and security measures.

■ Page 2: Offenders target temple hundis: Priest

'World pharmacy' India invited to UK's G-7 meet

UK PM moves to 'deepen expertise' at elite summit

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

Currently battling a fresh wave of the raging coronavirus pandemic at home and hailing India as the "pharmacy of the world", Britain on Sunday officially invited New Delhi to attend the G-7 summit to be hosted by it in Cornwall from June 11 to 13 this year. It had first been confirmed last month that British PM Boris Johnson had invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "join the UK-hosted G-7". Mr Johnson will also now visit India before the G-7 summit.

India is not a member of the G-7 bloc that comprises seven countries — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States — termed as seven of the "largest" advanced

● BRITAIN HAS also invited Australia and South Korea for the summit which will be held in Cornwall, from June 11 to 13 this year. The UK PM will visit India before that

economies in the world, but the G-7 host nation can invite other nations as guests to the summit. Australia and South Korea have also been invited to attend by Britain which launched a fresh condemnation on Sunday of "Russia's annexation of Crimea". This has made it clear that ties between the West and Russia will continue to remain strained, something that will worry New Delhi since Moscow has been its time-tested friend for decades. The Cornwall summit is also likely to be the first in-person G-7 leaders' meeting after Joe Biden takes

charge as US President this week.

It may be recalled that Modi had earlier attended the G-7 summit in Biarritz, France, in August 2019 at the French government's invitation. He was also been invited by US President Donald Trump to attend the G-7 meeting that was to have been held in the US last year but was cancelled due to the pandemic. Britain on Sunday said: "The G-7 — which is made up of the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the USA and the EU — is the only forum where the world's most influential and open societies and advanced economies are brought together for close-knit discussions".

Hailing India on Sunday as the "pharmacy of the world", Britain pointed out that "India already supplies more than 50 per

cent of the world's vaccines, and (that) the UK and India have worked closely together throughout the pandemic", adding: "Our Prime Ministers speak regularly and Prime Minister Johnson has said he will visit India ahead of the G-7".

In a statement, the British high commission in New Delhi said: "Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (has been) invited to attend G-7 as a guest. The UK will use the G7 presidency to unite leading democracies to help the world build back better from coronavirus and create a greener, more prosperous future. Australia and South Korea (have) also (been) invited as guest countries." Britain said the three nations had been invited "to attend as guest countries to deepen the expertise and experience around the table".

FARMERS TO HOLD R-DAY RALLY, SC HEARING TODAY

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

The farmers' unions on Sunday decided to go ahead with their proposed tractor parade in the national capital on Republic Day.

The decision has come just a day before the Supreme Court will hear the Centre's plea seeking an injunction against the proposed tractor rally or any other kind of protest that seeks to disrupt celebrations on January 26.

Kisan Sangharsh Samiti convener Mandip Nathwan dispelled rumours that the protesters would unfurl the tricolour at Red Fort and that the tractors and tanks will roll together on Republic Day.

Covid vaccinations to take longer than scheduled

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

It might take a longer time of six to eight months to complete the three-phase Covid-19 vaccination programme in Andhra Pradesh, where the first phase started on Saturday covering health warriors.

According to officials, the first phase of Covid vaccination would take a month and the second dose for the health warriors would start after a gap of 28 days. The vaccine is offered to health workers in the first phase; to police, municipal and other Covid related staffs in the second phase; and to people above 50 years of age in the third phase.

Only 100 persons can get the jab at each of the 332 centres in a day. A lot of time will go to complete administration of the first and second doses in all three phases. The entire government machinery will be busy till it is over. The state government continued the vaccination process for the second day on Sunday by giving the shot to health workers at 312 centres. According to a report by the state medical and health department, the target set for the day was 27,233 people, of which 13,041 people were vaccinated. Two persons, one each in Krishna and Nellore districts, fell sick after vaccination but recovered soon.

On Saturday, 19,108 healthcare workers were vaccinated. The target given by the Centre was 14,300. The vaccination continued beyond the set target. Andhra Pradesh has been in the forefront of the vaccination programme. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of 21,291 people vaccinated, followed by Andhra Pradesh with 19,108. The least number of 21 persons have been vaccinated in Lakshadweep. Despite the presence of larger populations in Maharashtra and Karnataka, they vaccinated 18,328 and 13,594 people respectively.

■ Page 3: Krishna collector says 2,700 vaccinated

WILD BOARS SEEN NEAR BALAJI TEMPLE IN TIRUMALA

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, JAN. 17

Wild boars were found roaming on the streets in the vicinity of Lord Balaji temple at Tirumala late on Saturday night. On noticing this, officials of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) started fixing meshes to the entry points to prevent the wild boar from entering human habitation.

It may be mentioned here that during the lockdown the animals were seen moving around in groups in search of food at various locations of Tirumala. One of the reasons for the boars frequenting the hill town was that nearly 25 tonnes of garbage is generated daily because of 40,000 pilgrims every day.

Though the TTD took measures to prevent these animals from entering Tirumala, they managed to beat the barriers in their search for food. Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, TTD vigilance and security officer G. Balireddy said that they are in pursuit of permanent and concrete measures to prevent wild boars from straying into the streets.

■ Page 3: Iron mesh put at all entry, exit points

Lower seropositivity in vegetarians: CSIR

New Delhi, Jan. 17: Smokers and vegetarians were found to have lower seropositivity indicating that they may be at a lesser risk of getting infected by coronavirus, according to a pan-India serosurvey conducted by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research in its nearly 40 institutes.

The survey also found that those with blood group 'O' may be less susceptible to the infection, while people with 'B' and 'AB' blood groups were at a higher risk.

For its study, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) took samples of

10,427 adult individuals working in its laboratories or institutions and their family members, based on voluntary participation, to assess the presence of antibodies to SARS-CoV-2.

The study piloted by CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, Delhi said of the 10,427 individuals, 1,058 (10.14 per cent) had antibodies against SARS-CoV-2. A follow up on 346 seropositive individuals among the samples after 3 months revealed 'stable' to 'higher' antibody levels against SARS-CoV-2, but declining plasma activity for neutralising the virus.

PILGRIMS | PROGRESS

Airport location midway between Nandyal and Kurnool

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, JAN. 17

With Kurnool airport now all set to take off, there is a great scope for promotion of temple tourism besides giving impetus to real estate development.

The location of Orvakal, about 25 kilometers from Kurnool, where the airport is to commence its operations, is almost midway between Nandyal and Kurnool.

● FINANCE MINISTER Buggana Rajendranath Reddy gave the finishing touches as the air project was moving back and forth in the last two decades.

Buggana Rajendranath Reddy, who had pursued the realisation of the airport in its last lap, gave the finishing touches as the air project was moving back and forth in the last two decades.

Guatemala immigration



Honduran migrants clash with Guatemala soldiers as they attempt to reach the U.S. border in Vado Hondo, Guatemala on Sunday. Guatemala authorities estimated that as many as 9,000 Honduran migrants crossed into Guatemala as part of an effort to form a new caravan to reach the U.S. border. — AP

COLD WAVE IN NORTH INDIA PERSISTS

New Delhi, Jan. 17: Parts of north India remained under the grip of an intense cold wave on Sunday with night temperatures dropping below the 5 degrees Celsius mark at some places and dense fog enveloping several areas.

The minimum temperature in Delhi dropped to 5.7 degrees Celsius but it is likely to rise over the next two days due to a change in the wind direction, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The national capital will see shallow fog on Monday morning and light rain is likely to occur, the IMD said.

The city's minimum and maximum temperatures are expected to settle around 8 and 17 degrees Celsius. An IMD official said easterly winds are blowing in Delhi that are not as cold as northwesterly winds coming in from the snow-clad western Himalayas. Hence, the minimum temperature is likely to rise by a few notches over the next two days. Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality index (AQI) improved slightly to the 'very poor' category from 'severe' on Saturday as favourable wind speed helped in dispersion of pollutants. — PTI

WEATHER
Max: 30.0°C
Min: 16°C
RH: 49%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 30/16 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

| CASES | DEATHS |
|-------------|----------|
| (+14,012) | (+159) |
| 1,05,71,658 | 1,52,447 |

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

| (+299) | (+2) |
|--------------|-------|
| TS: 2,91,666 | 1,577 |
| (+161) | (+1) |
| AP: 8,85,985 | 7,140 |

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,51,90,015

DEATHS

20,35,297

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Panchami till 9.15 am
Star: Purvabhadra till 7.43 am
Variyam: 6.12 pm to 7.57 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.48 pm to 1.33 pm; 3.01 pm to 3.46 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Akhir 4,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM
MOONSET 8.05 PM
MOONRISE 10.03 AM

COUNTER POINT

Full dress rehearsal of farmers for the parade!

SHORT TAKES

Ustad Ghulam Mustafa dead

Mumbai: Legendary Indian classical musician and Padma Vibhushan awardee Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan passed away on Sunday afternoon at his residence here. He was 89. Khan's daughter-in-law Namrata Gupta Khan told PTI that the veteran breathed his last at 12.37 pm at his Bandra home.

■ Report on Page 4

Nepali climbers scale K2 in winter

Kathmandu: A team of 10 Nepali climbers made history by becoming the first to scale in winter the world's second highest mountain K2, considered as the world's most dangerous and challenging peak. K2 with its daunting 8,611 metres height is located in Gilgit-Baltistan side of the Karakoram range.

Kamal Haasan to undergo surgery

Chennai: Makkal Needhi Maiam chief Kamal Haasan on Sunday said he would be undergoing a 'follow-up surgery' on his leg and assured the people that he shall be back soon fully rejuvenated to resume his poll campaign. Due to an accident a few years ago, he had undergone a surgery on his leg.

SHORT TAKES

HOUSING MINISTER ADVISES TD TO WITHDRAW CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
UNDI, JAN. 17

Housing minister Cherukuwada Sriranganadha Raju exhorted Telugu Desam MLAs to exert pressure on their leader and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to withdraw cases regarding house sites. He said that due to court litigations, the state government is not able to provide house sites to many of the beneficiaries and unable to provide documents to the beneficiaries to enjoy their sites.

Raju distributed house sites to beneficiaries in his native village Yandagandi in Undi mandal and other villages in West Godavari district on Sunday. Addressing the beneficiaries, he said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was aiming to distribute more than 31 lakh houses to the poor by acquiring 65,000 acres and setting up 17,500 colonies. He said that the government has allocated ₹7,000 crore to create infrastructure facilities in the colonies.

However, due to legal litigations, some of the colonies could not come up. He said that Jagan Mohan Reddy wants to provide pakka documents so that they beneficiary can sell the house after five years, to meet any financial emergencies.

He told Undi MLA Manthana Ramaraju, who participated in the meeting, that TD MLAs should advise Naidu to withdraw the cases from the courts. In his response, Ramaraju said that there was no connection between Naidu and the court cases.

ANGANWADI CENTRES TO BE CONVERTED AS 'PRE-SCHOOLS'

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 17

Women and child welfare minister Taneti Vanitha said that anganwadi centres in the state would be converted into 'pre-schools' to inculcate values among children besides helping children from downtrodden families.

She told reporters at Rampachodavaram on Sunday that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was implementing several welfare schemes to uplift the poor and improve their living conditions, as a part of which nutritious food like egg and milk are being provided to pregnant women and lactating mothers.

She said that ₹1,800 crore was allocated to anganwadi centres for the purpose. She said that Naadu-Nedu programme is being applied for anganwadi centres also and training will be given to the anganwadi teachers on the 'pre-school' concept.

She said that Jagan Mohan Reddy aspired to provide education, food and housing to all poor people in the state. She said that more funds are being released to develop tribal areas.

CM ASKED TO FULFIL POLL PROMISE, CANCEL CPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

Krishna and Guntur districts Teachers' constituency candidate P. Venkata Mallikharjuna Rao said that the government has failed to fulfil its promise of abolishing Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS). He would raise his voice in the Legislative Council for the cancellation of CPS in addition to resolving the problems of teachers, he said.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Rao said that as an educationalist he has imparted quality education and had established a junior college. He said that he is aware of the problems faced by teachers and lecturers in government aided, municipal, Gurukul, Intermediate, degree, engineering, medical and ITI colleges.

He recalled that Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy during the walkathon had assured that CPS would be cancelled after he comes to power, which has not materialised till date. He lamented that during the Covid lockdown, private teachers faced innumerable financial problems, which he would take to the notice of the government.

Rao further said that he was contesting the elections slated for March as a candidate backed by most teachers' associations.

State Teachers' Union president Ch. Joseph Sudhir Babu and vice-president Ch Suresh Kumar and others were present.

TD, BJP accused of instigating people using temple attacks

Both parties are trying to derive benefits for Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll, says minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

Minister for endowments Velampalli Srinivas Rao on Sunday alleged that the BJP and Telugu Desam were indulging in politics in the name of temples to derive benefits in the ensuing Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election.

He said that BJP state president Somu Veerraju has threatened the police about lodging complaints against them with the Union government regarding attacks on temples, which was objectionable.

The minister affirmed that they have nothing to fear and the BJP can go ahead with their complaints. Srinivasa Rao came down heavily against Veerraju, his party MLC P.V.N. Madhav and TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for targeting police over attacks on temples.

Speaking to the media here, the minister said that it was unfortunate that instead of denying the allegations of the involvement in temple vandalism, Veerraju has threatened DGP Gautam Sawang. He said the DGP will provide evidence for the charges filed against those arrested for vandalising temples and the government would take strict action against those trying for political gains. He said Naidu had no faith in God and hence had no moral right to speak about temples and Hindus.

The minister questioned BJP's alliance with Pawan Kalyan, who had hurt the sentiments of Hindus, and the silence of Somu Veerraju and Madhav when 40 temples were demolished in Vijayawada during the TD government and when a chariot was burnt in Tadepalligudem. He said the state government has handed over Antaredi chariot blaze case to CBI on September 11 of last year.

Playing the BJP for alleging religious conversions at the behest of the state government, he pointed out that financial assistance was being provided to archakas along with pastors and imams.

The minister said that while the state government has formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate temple offences, the opposition parties are trying to create a communal divide.

He said a mere ₹150 crore was sanctioned by the previous government from 2014-19 for development of temples while ₹168 crore was sanctioned within 18 months by the incumbent government which should explain everything.

He said that for the first time ₹70 crore has been sanctioned for development works at Kanakadurga temple in Vijayawada by the YSRC government.



Seer of Saivakshetram Sivaswami offers aarti to River Krishna at Durga ghat in Vijayawada on Sunday to seek protection from temple attacks and Hindu Parirakshana.

— DECCAN CHRONICLE

TD: Cops failed to check pastor's 'wrong' activities

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

Former minister and senior Telugu Desam leader Bandaru Satyanarayana Murthy on Sunday demanded that the AP Police explain as to why they have failed to restrain pastor Praveen Chakravarthy from making "derogatory comments" against Hindu religion and allowed these go viral.

He told a media conference that the police did not take immediate action in the pastor's video case and, instead, went about making arrests of those posting social media comments for protection of temples and idols in the state. "The pastor's comments have only exposed how there was a deep conspiracy behind conversions and behind the ongoing attacks on Hinduism in Andhra Pradesh," he said.

Murthy alleged that under the Jagan Mohan Reddy rule, desecrations and acts of vandalism were going on at temples. "The DGP should explain to the people why he had not yet ordered a detailed inquiry into the objectionable activities of the pastor. It should be investigated as to who were supporting this pastor from their bases in America," he said.

He demanded that all those behind Praveen's "unholy activities" should be identified and stern action taken against them.

Murthy said a pastor had made highly objectionable comments from Bellampalli on former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu but the DGP did not

Chinarajappa says YSRC govt is protecting pastor

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN 17

Former home minister and Peddapuram MLA Nimmakayala Chinarajappa of the Telugu Desam has criticised the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led state government over its "failure" to initiate legal action against Pastor Praveen Chakravarthy who claimed he had converted many villages into Christianity.

"The pastor had confessed that he had converted 699 villages as Christ Villages and encouraged the disgracing of idols in Hindu temples, via his WhatsApp video calls, in which he also stated that he was behind the desecration of idols in some Hindu temples," the MLA said.

The former minister said the state government, in

particular the DGP and the Intelligence department, has avoided arresting the pastor who had released a series of his hate-speeches between December 2019 and January 2021. The DGP should state the reasons why he was delaying the pastor's arrest and also not acting against the pastor mobilising funds from foreign countries. "What are his relations with Brother Anil Kumar," the MLA asked.

He said that the DGP has not taken any action against those behind the idol destructions. "The DGP initially went on record to say that some maniacs were behind the attacks on temples. He is now blaming TD and other opposition leaders who raised such issues in public."



Tridandi Chinna Jeeyar Swami and Sri Tridandi Ahobila Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami during a visit to Sri Raghavendra Swamigalavaru temple in Mantralayam.

take any action. "It is high time the central government intervened and ended the ongoing attacks on the Hindu temples in

AP. It was only due to sheer negligence of the YSRC government that the miscreants are becoming so bold," he said.

Veerraju seeks dismissal of DGP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 17

Andhra Pradesh state BJP president Somu Veerraju has demanded that the state government release a white paper carrying details of the properties in possession of the churches.

The government has similar accounts of the properties the Hindu temples have in the state, he said.

Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, Veerraju said he would submit a report to the central government on the church attacks.

"Churches in Andhra Pradesh have thousands of crores of rupees with them and yet the state government is extending financial assistance to build new churches," Veerraju said.

"Christians comprise

just one per cent of the state's population and many have been enjoying the benefits of reservation by retaining their Hindu names though the Supreme Court had rejected the concept of 'Dalit Christians'. Is the government giving monthly remuneration to pastors for religious conversions," he asked.

Alleging that the YSRC was trying to weaken

Hinduism in the state, the BJP leader said not a single case has been filed yet on the attacks on temples.

He flayed DGP Gautam Sawang over his remark that BJP leaders were behind the destruction of temples.

Demanding his immediate dismissal from service, Veerraju said the top cop was behaving like a politician and not substantiating his allegations.

OFFENDERS TARGET TEMPLE HUNDIS: PRIEST

From page 1

For instance, of the 32 temples in one-town area of Vijayawada city, only four temples are equipped with CCTV cameras and the rest 28 did not have cameras. Only six temples have security guards and there was no protection for 26 temples, which reflected the poor security and protective measures.

Temple priest S. Rama Murthy said habitual temple offenders would rob the hundis, take away ornaments and ancient idols. They sometimes do digging for treasure hunt.

He said many temple committees would not initiate measures to appoint security guards and install surveillance systems. All temples should be equipped with modern surveillance equipment and these be linked with the concern police stations.

DGP Gautam Sawang said the police department geo-tagged 58,871 temples in AP and 43,824 CCTV cameras were installed for continuous surveillance. This was the first-of-its-kind initiative in the country. The police also set up communal harmony committees at state, district and police station levels for the protection of religious places.

Minister for endowments Vellampalli Srinivas said all the temples were instructed to initiate security measures. A majority of the temples are following the norms and the rest would install protective measures in coming days, he said.

PROTECTION OF TEMPLES IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY: CHINNA JEEYAR

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 17

Sri Tridandi Chinna Jeeyar Swami said protection of Hindu temples is the sacred duty of all and frequent attacks on temples smacked of intolerance. He visited the recently vandalised Sajjala Guddam Anjaneya temple and Lakshminarasimha temple at Vagarur in Kosigi mandal on Sunday and made enquiries.

Speaking to the temple priests and villagers, he said intolerance towards any religion was not a civilised behaviour. Hindu culture propagated toleration towards the religious beliefs of others and promoted peace.

The Swami was on a yatra in Kurnool, Kadapa, Anantapur, and Chittoor to sensitise people on preserving the Hindu temples and propagating the message of peace.

Tridandi Chinna Jeeyar Swami and Sri Tridandi Ahobila Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami visited Mantralayam and had darshanam of Sri Raghavendra Swamigalavaru. They met Sri Subudhendra Teertha Swami.

They discussed the need for protection of temples in Andhra Pradesh and of Hindu "dharma parirakshana".

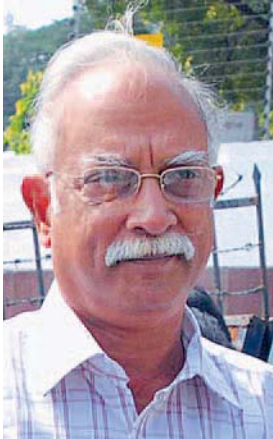
Ashok's donation for Lord Rama idol rejected

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, JAN. 17

In another humiliation meted out to senior TD leader Pusapati Ashok Gajapati Raju, the AP endowments department on Saturday rejected his donation of ₹1,01,116 for making a new idol of Lord Rama to be placed in the Sri Kodanda Rama Swamy temple at Ramatheertham in Vizianagaram district. The previous idol was desecrated by miscreants a few weeks ago.

Venting his anger on Twitter, and attaching the donation slip, Raju said "First, they unilaterally dismissed me as hereditary trustee / chairman without as much as a notice in complete contravention of section 28. Now, they reject my offerings to the Lord as a representative of the founder family for the vigrahas."

Stating that the TD leader had failed to discharge his duties in temple administration, the state government on Saturday removed him from the post of chairman of three temples in the state.



P. Ashok Gajapati Raju

Assistant commissioner of endowments Ch. Ranga Rao said that the new idol of Lord Rama is being prepared by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) as per agama guidelines.

The TTD had offered to make a three-foot tall idol free. The vandalised idol at Ramatheertham was carved out of stone, and so would the new idol be. "Though many people came forward with donations for the new idol, we rejected their offerings since the TTD is making the idol," he added.

2 idols stolen from temple, recovered within hours

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

Two celestial brass idols were stolen from a temple in broad daylight at Guntur on Sunday and an alert police arrested the culprit within hours.

Police said the accused came to the Kusma Haranatha temple and stole two brass idols from there. The temple is situated near the Chamber of Commerce building in the busy Jinnah Tower centre in Guntur.

The temple representative found the missing of the two brass celestial idols of Kusuma and Haranath at 10.30 am and called in the police. Guntur urban SP R.N. Ammi Reddy said the two celestial idols were 30 years old. Police formed three teams, led by

Guntur east DSP B. Seetaramaiah, to track the culprit(s).

He said a person was found suspiciously moving around at Kodi Guddu Satram area. Police detained him and found the two brass idols in his possession. The police identified him as Poliseti Durga (21) belonging to 9th lane of Kattavari street in Old Guntur area. He was arrested.

The SP said Durga was a habitual offender and involved in two cases in Guntur police station limits and one in Krishnalanka police station of Vijayawada. The police started an investigation to ascertain the real motto behind the idol theft. He announced rewards to the police staff for their swift action and arrest of the accused.

Three arrested for thefts in temples

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, JAN. 17

The Vizianagaram police arrested three persons in three incidents of thefts in temples the past one week. The three were B. Jagadeesh (20), K. Narayana (28) and G. Prasad (30).

Vizianagaram police chief B. Raja Kumari said they have received complaints related to theft of collection boxes and other items at Garagallamma temple in S Chintalavalasa under Ramabhadrapuram mandal, the Sri Chandramouleswara temple in Vizianagaram town and the Hanuman temple at Bhudevipeta under Gajapathinagaram.

The police had formed special teams to crack such cases. "B. Jagadeesh stole cash of ₹3,000 from the collection box at Garagallamma temple at S Chintalavalasa. Of this, ₹1,374 was recovered from

him. Jagadeesh, a native of Dwarapudi village in the district is addicted to several vices and was involved 15 crimes so far," police said.

Police nabbed K. Narayana, a native of Jandardapeta village under Nellimarla mandal, after he struck at the Sri Chandramouleswara temple in Vizianagaram town and decamped with 25kg of rick and some furniture. He was also involved in property offences in East Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts. Over ₹8,000 worth of stolen goods was recovered from the accused.

Cops arrested G. Prasad for stealing cash from the hundi at the Hanuman temple in Bhudevipeta under Gajapathinagaram.

Prasad was involved in property offenses for the past one decade. The police recovered ₹700 in cash from him.

Port workers, steel barge owners interests would be protected: AP Maritime Board CEO

SURVIVAL | FIGHT

Fresh controversy over ports' handling rice cargo

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 17

A fresh controversy has erupted over the possible diversion of rice cargo, traditionally meant for the anchorage port, to Kakinada Deep Water Port (DWP).

The AP Maritime Board is proposing to allow handling of surplus rice cargo at the new port, reserving cargo sufficient for seven ships to the anchorage port.

This proposal was placed

before steel barge owners, port workers, carry and forward agents and others in shipping trade.

There is stiff opposition from workers and steel barge owners who argue that if the traditional rice cargo is also handled in the DWP, the anchorage port will be left with no cargo and it will be closed gradually.

At present, the only major cargo of rice is being handled at anchorage port for exporting purposes.

According to sources, the state government had given an assurance in the 1990s that there would not be any diversion of cargo from the old port, but several traditional cargoes like fertilisers and others have already diverted to the deep water port.

Thousands of workers and steel barge owners are dependent on the anchorage port.

"If the rice cargo is handled at DWP, gradually the entire lot may be diverted to DWP and the old port

faces threat of closure," said the Steel Barge Owners Association President Bandana Hari.

He said that officials say that the surplus cargo will be handled at DWP and earlier also they had similarly convinced workers but all traditional cargo has been diverted to DWP.

He said that when there was no cargo at anchorage port, the officials could not allot some cargo from DWP to the old port to help the workers. Now, why they should sacrifice sur-

plus rice cargo, he asked.

He also said that rice exporters are not able to procure sufficient quantity before the ships arrive and this delays handling of the cargo.

A decision would be taken up in the general body meeting to be held on Monday.

Rice Exporters Association president B.V. Krishna Rao (Velpuri Srinivas) said that nearly 20 ships have been waiting for handling of rice cargo and the anchorage port is

sufficient for only seven ships. He said that exporters have to pay demurrage charges. If the rice cargo is allowed at DWP, the waiting period can be saved. Some exporters are already diverting their cargo to other ports, he said.

The AP Maritime Board CEO N.P. Ramakrishna Reddy said that port workers and steel barge owners need not worry as their interests would be protected. He said that a committee would be constituted to

monitor cargo handling process regularly. He said that the Union Ministry of Commerce has asked the state government about delay in port operations. Accordingly a meeting was convened with the shipping trade fraternity on the need to increase the efficiency of Kakinada ports. He said that the cargo for seven ships will continuously handle the cargo at the anchorage port and only the excess cargo will be handled in the deep water port.

SHORT TAKES

RINL TIES UP WITH BRIDGE & ROOF

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 17

RINL- Vizag Steel entered into an MOU with Bridge & Roof for a project management consultancy from concept to commission to execute miscellaneous civil, structural, electrical and mechanical engineering works of RINL. The MoU was signed and exchanged by K.K. Ghosh, Director (Projects), RINL and S.S. Rawat, Director (Projects Management), M/s Bridge & Roof in the presence of P.K. Rath, CMD, RINL in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. The MOU will be valid for three years and has a provision to extend by two more years. M/s Bridge & Roof is a 'Mini Ratna' public sector enterprise under administrative control of the department of heavy industries and is associated with many projects in RINL - both in Visakhapatnam and at Forged Wheel Plant, Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh.

MODI GOVT KILLED DEMOCRACY, SAYS CPI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 17

CPI state secretary K Ramakrishna alleged on Sunday that the Modi government, which had "given out many state-owned enterprises to corporates," has brought in the new agricultural laws with a view to palming off the agriculture sector to these entities as well.

He said the struggle of the farmers for repeal of anti-agriculture laws would go down as a landmark in the nation's history. The CPI leader was speaking at an all-party conference chaired by party district secretary Eshwarayya at the Kadapa Press Club. He said the Modi government had brought in ordinances at a time when the world was fighting the corona virus and got them passed. "Although the agriculture sector is a domain of the states, the introduction of the Cultivation Agreement in the name of free trade has murdered democracy.

The black laws were imposed on the nation regardless of the objections from MPs in Parliament," he said.

The CPI leader said, "The benefits for corporate giants like Ambani and Adani are hidden behind the simultaneous amendment of the 'Agreement on Cultivation Agreement, Free Trade and Commodities Act' by way of the new agricultural laws."

"If the laws are enforced, farmers would be exploited for not getting even the minimum support price for their crops."

In the name of free trade, these new laws were designed to enable corporate companies freely transport the entire crop collected from farmers of one state to another, store the crop beyond the limit and create artificial shortages so that farmers and consumers can be systematically exploited," he said.

One death, 161 new Covid-19 cases in AP

In the past 24-hours, 251 patients have been recovered from the virus

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

Only one new death and 161 new Corona positive cases registered in AP in the past 24 hours on Sunday. As many as 36,091 samples were tested in the past 24 hours and total tests increased to 1,25,76,272 in the State. The total Corona positive cases increased to 8,85,985 and death toll reached 7,140 with a recovery rate of 98.98% and a death rate of 0.81%. In the past day, 251 patients have been recovered taking the total number of recoveries to 8,76,949 and leaving 1,896 patients under treatment across the State. The positivity rate of the tests conducted in the past day was 0.45% and the overall positivity rate of 1.257 crore samples tested so far was 7.04%.

The lone death was reported in Visakhapatnam district. The Chittoor district reported the highest number of infections in the past day among the districts and it is the only district to see more than 50 new infections. The Chittoor district registered 52 new Covid-19 positive cases followed by Krishna with 26, Guntur 19, East Godavari 12, Srikakulam 12, West Godavari 11, Visakhapatnam 7, Kurnool 6, Anantapur 5, Prakasam 5, Nellore 3 and Vizianagaram 3 and no new infection was reported in Kadapa district. The East Godavari is on the top in highest total number of positive with 1,24,067 cases, West Godavari 94,103, Chittoor 86,785, Guntur 75,282, Anantapur 67,558, Nellore 62,261, Prakasam 62,115, Kurnool 60,729, Visakhapatnam 59,526, Kadapa 55,158, Krishna 48,335, Srikakulam 46,065 and Vizianagaram registered total number 41,106 cases.

KRISHNA COLLECTOR SAYS 2,700 VACCINATED

FROM PAGE 1

Krishna district collector AMD Intiaz said 2,700 health workers were given the first dose at 30 centers in the district on Sunday. The collector inspected the vaccination process at GGH along with RDO Khaja Vali, e district immunisation officer Dr Sharmista and others.



A staff nurse gets administered COVID Vaccine as her fellow nurses cheer up for her during the vaccination drive at VIMS Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

-DC

Zero Covid-19 +ve cases in Kadapa

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 17

Sunday marks the first time since the outbreak of the Covid Pandemic that no positive case has been registered in the district. Over the past few days 1500 to 3 thousand covid tests have been conducted per day. Also on Sunday, 3,314 throat samples were taken. In October and November 2020, more than 500 cases registered daily. Five Sanjeevini buses across the district are conducting tests on the suspects. In the city of Kadapa one Sanjeevini bus is desperately undergoing covid tests. Sunday zero positive cases were reported and one patient discharged from hospital. District Medical and

Health Officer Dr. KVNS Anil Kumar Speaking to Deccan Chronicle said that it is a joint effort of all the departments in the district. He said that we are all working under the dynamic leadership of young collector Chevuru Harikiran, who is working very hard to reduce the covid cases in the district. He said that zero positive cases were registered today as a result of the collective efforts of all public and private doctors. He said they are still collecting thousands of samples daily by Sanjeevini buses, he explained that it would continue like this. He congratulated the medical staff and officers of all departments who work to control covid-19 in the district.

MANY HEALTH WORKERS SKIP VACCINE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 17

Many health workers in Srikakulam did not avail the vaccination on the second day on Sunday though they registered their names with the health department.

An official release said 1700 names were enlisted for Sunday, but only 1,140 availed the benefit. The release said the absentees went on Sankranti vacation and did not report to their workplaces.

Meanwhile, the Minister for Tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao reviewed the vaccination process at Visakh Institute of Medical Sciences and interacted with the health workers inoculated with the vaccine.

Protests stall 'plan' to remove Kadiri temple balipeetham

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 17

Speculation over the removal of the bali peetham in the historic Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple at Kadiri has led to tension, following protests. While the issue was viral on social media that bali peetham was being removed as part of the road-widening process, the government had to react and ruled out any such removal.

Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple

was built centuries ago with gopurams set up at all eight directions in Kadiri town. Along with gopurams, bali peethams were also fixed as part of tradition. On Sunday, news spread that bali peetham at west gopuram was being removed as part of road widening. A group of activists reached the temple and staged protest. The issue went viral after BJP state Secretary Vishnuvardhan Reddy tweeted that the government was acting against traditions and hurting

sentiments of devotees. Interestingly, the endowment department released a press note that there was no attempt to remove the bali peetham stone. Executive officer Venkateswar Reddy said that priests were performing pujas and offerings at bali peethams. "On coming to the fourth bali peetham, while performing pujas one after the other, suddenly a group of protestors came and staged protests", the EO said and ruled out its removal.

15 more held for aiding Akhila Priya

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD JAN. 17

The Hyderabad city police have arrested 15 more suspects in connection with the Bownpally kidnap case on Sunday.

According to the police, the accused, M. Siddhartha, an event manager, had arranged about 20 persons to pose as income-tax officials and execute the kidnap of Pravin Rao and his two brothers on January 6.

"Akhila Priya, the prime suspect in the case, along with her husband, M. Bhargav Ram Naidu, conspired with her brother Jagath Vikhyath Reddy and her follower Srinivas Choudhary alias Srinu Srinu.

They conducted meetings at her residence in Lodha Apartments in KPHB and a school in Yousufguda on executing the kidnap in the first week of January," said Anjani Kumar, Hyderabad police commissioner.

Kumar said that Srinu contacted Siddhartha and asked him to recruit young men to execute their plan with a promise to pay ₹5 lakh to him and ₹25,000 to each person. Bhargav Ram, through

Mallikarjun Reddy and Sampath, got 10 stamp papers. Srinu along with the duo bought six basic mobile phones and procured toy pistols, rope and plasters used in the offence, the police said.

"On January 5 evening, all the suspects assembled at a school in Yousufguda, where they were briefed by Bhargav Ram about the execution of their plan posing as cops and I-T officials," Anjani Kumar, Hyderabad police commissioner said adding that a recipe of the victims' house in Manovikas Nagar was also done.

The police seized five cars including one driven by Bhargav Ram and Vikyath Reddy and registered in the name of Bhargav Ram's mother.

The suspects will be produced before the court for remanding in judicial custody, police said.

On the other hand, teams deployed to nab Bhargav Ram, Guntur Srinu and others in Hyderabad and Allagadda and other places in Andhra Pradesh were still on the job, Anjani Kumar, Hyderabad police commissioner said.

IRON MESH AT ALL TIRUMALA ENTRY, EXIT POINTS

FROM PAGE 1

"On Saturday night, we received information about wild boars straying. As an immediate measure, we have arranged iron mesh and chain-links at all entry and exit points along the four mada streets.

To put an end to this menace, we are in consultation with forest officials for erecting such fences on the outer corridor of Tirumala, so that the wild animals will not be able to enter the inner corridor", Reddy explained.

In fact, the abode of Lord Venkateswara located in the midst of the lush green Seshachalam biosphere, is home to many wild and endangered animals, including elephants, leopards, hyena, golden jackal, Indian fox, jungle cat, sloth bear, spotted deer, mouse deer, and four-horned antelope.

The TTD, which manages the affairs of the holy shrine, keeps a tab on the movement of wild animals especially leopards and elephants to keep them at bay from the temple town.

"They rely on advanced surveillance systems and take measures accordingly.

Demand for fruit covers made of wood pulp goes up

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 17

In the wake of the mysterious illness at Eluru indicating the presence of residues of pesticides in vegetables and fruits, and the growing awareness thereof, there is a huge demand for fruit covers made of wood pulp for raising varieties like mango, pomegranate, mosambi, banana, among others to provide protection from pests, inclement weather conditions and even to provide value addition in Andhra Pradesh.

Horticulture authorities say that some farmers are using such covers for mango crop, especially in parts of Krishna district. They fix cover to the mango fruit when the size of the fruit is like a small lemon and keep it for nearly 40 to 45 days until its harvest and the same cover can also be used for ripening the fruit in four to five days as against using carbide.

They say that the advantages for fixing such cover are that there is no need for farmers to

● They fix cover to the mango fruit when the size of the fruit is like a small lemon and keep it for nearly 40 to 45 days until its harvest and the same cover can also be used for ripening the fruit.

spray pesticide; protects fruit drop in case of heavy gales and there is no damage to the fruit in case of rainfall. By the time, the fruit gets ready for harvest, it is free from residues of pesticides, high quality of fruit with no black spots on its outer skin, more weight and shelf life and fetches high price with value addition, maintain the authorities.

A mango farmer K. Srinivasa Rao from Reddykunta in Krishna district said, "After using covers, the fruit has become free from pesticide residues and its weight has gone up by 100 gms. I exported 10 tonnes of banginapalli variety of mangoes to Singapore at a good price of Rs 85,000 per tonne last season."

Another mango farmer

Ch. Krupa Raju from Reddygudem in Krishna district, said, "As I had fixed covers to mango fruits, its quality was enhanced substantially. I sold a tonne of such fruits for Rs 1.20 lakh whereas the regular variety price was Rs 75,000 last year." The farmers are making a fervent appeal to the state government to provide them fruit covers at subsidized rates as it costs Rs two for each cover and Re one towards labour charges. They said that they got a subsidy of Rs 1.40 for each cover during the TD regime and sought its continuation so that they can raise several varieties of fruits.

Horticulture authorities say that as there is a huge demand for Banginapalli variety of mangoes which are free from pesticide residues in Mumbai, Delhi, the US, Europe and Singapore, it is time to encourage farmers to use such covers to provide value addition to their fruits and help them earn good money and reduce input costs on raising the crop.

Delay in appointing members hits functioning of Consumer Forums

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 17

Delay on the part of the state government for appointing members for the Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums across the state has been causing trouble to the victims of unfair trade practices knocking the doors of the forums for justice.

It is mandatory to have three members including a male and female apart from a retired district Judge, who is designated as president, for every Consumer Redressal Forum.

The president and at least one member should be present for delivering the verdict.

Though the presidents are continuing in few places, they cannot deliver the verdict for any case in the

● More than 3,000 cases have been lying pending due to lack of quorum in the 13 forums out of 15 forums in Andhra Pradesh.

absence of the members (quorum), said a senior advocate of consumer forum MD Rahim Khan.

In the case of Nellore, the post of woman member has been lying vacant since 2013 because of the failure of state government to appoint new member.

Incidentally the Union government repelled the old consumer act and introduced Consumer Protection Act, 2019, in July last year.

As per the act, name of the district forums has been changed as District Consumer Disputes

Redressal Commission and the Pecuniary Jurisdiction also enhanced to ₹ 1 crore from previous ₹20 lakh.

The basic aim of the act is to save the rights of the consumers by establishing authorities for timely and effective administration and settlement of consumers' disputes.

However, it is not happening because of the laxity of government in appointing members in consultation with the Chief Justice of High Court, sources in the Forum said.

They alleged that more than 3,000 cases have been lying pending due to lack of quorum in the 13 forums out of 15 forums in Andhra Pradesh. Not only members' posts, even president (retired judge) posts are also vacant in many district forums, sources added.

28-yr-old dies while playing kabaddi

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 17

A youth died in the ring during a district-level kabaddi competition held at a model school in Gangayapalli village in Valluru mandal, police said on Sunday.

The person was identified as M. Narendra (28) from Kondapeta village of the Chennai mandal.

The incident occurred at the second session of the kabaddi post lunch, the play being in the finals. He

went to the opponent team player's court, and while caught, he fell down. He rose from the fall, walked two steps and then fell down again.

The co-players and the staff there gave him first-aid and he was immediately shifted to the Kadapa Government General Hospital RIMS. Doctors there confirmed that he was already dead.

Police said Narendra had completed his Master in Commerce. His parents were in the

dhobi profession. He was having a brother and two sisters.

Kamalapuram MLA P o c h a m r e d d y Ravindranath Reddy said he was shocked to hear the news and got in touch with the local officials and leaders for providing necessary support and assistance to the family.

The family members rushed to the hospital and were confused as he wasn't sick. The police said they would investigate the matter.

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SHORT TAKES

INDIGO FLIGHT MAKES EMERGENCY LANDING IN BHOPAL

Bhopal, Jan. 17: An IndiGo Airlines flight going to Kolkata from Surat with 172 passengers on board made an emergency landing at Bhopal's Raja Bhoj Airport on Sunday due to a technical glitch, said an official.

Raja Bhoj Airport Director Anil Vikram said that the flight made an emergency landing just after 12 noon. "The IndiGo Airlines flight from Surat to Kolkata carrying 172 passengers made an emergency landing at 12.04 pm on Sunday. The landing was safe. The pilot informed the ATC (Air Traffic Controller) about the technical glitch and made an emergency landing safely," he said. Of the 172 passengers, 19 have to go further to Guwahati and Amritsar from Kolkata, and these passengers were sent to Bengaluru by flight to help them get connecting flights to their destinations, he said.

"For the remaining passengers, a plane is coming from Nagpur, which will take them further to Kolkata," the airport director said.

SHAH: DOUBLING FARMERS INCOME BIGGEST PRIORITY

Bagalkote (Karnataka), Jan. 17: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said doubling farmers income was the biggest priority of the Narendra Modi government and that the three central farm laws would ensure manifold hike in their earnings.

Since coming to power, the Modi government had increased the budget for the farm sector and also the minimum support price (MSP) for various crops, he said.

"I want to say that if there is any big priority of the Narendra Modi government it is to double the farmers income," he said at an event in Kerakalmatti village in this district in Karnataka.

Speaking after laying the foundation stone and inauguration of farmer-friendly projects of the MRN group, headed by newly inducted Karnataka Minister Muruges R. Nirani, Shah listed out various programmes and initiatives of the central government for the welfare of the farmers.

Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa led BJP government in the state too has not left any stone unturned to work for the welfare of farmers, the Home Minister said.

If there was any government that was in the forefront of implementing central schemes and programmes in the country, it was the government here, he added.

CBI BRINGS SUBHRA KUNDU FOR QUESTIONING

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 17

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials on Sunday brought Subhra Kundu, the wife of Rose Valley Group chairman Gautam Kundu, to Bhubaneswar for questioning.

As per sources, the CBI is keen to conduct further probe in connection with the Rose Valley chit fund scam in Odisha. The group has allegedly cheated thousands of depositors, promising high returns on investments in its illegal schemes.

According to CBI sources, the amount of money garnered by Rose Valley through such schemes could be more than ₹12,000 crore.

The CBI is expected to conduct an intensive investigation to ascertain the involvement of other persons in the scam in Odisha. Subhra Kundu's husband Gautam Kundu is also in jail since March 2015.

As per reports, Subhra was also running a jewellery chain — Adrija — which has been sealed since the investigation started. Subhra Kundu was reportedly arrested from her apartment in south Kolkata. She was earlier brought to the CBI office at the CGO complex at Salt Lake for questioning.

Subhra had also faced interrogation several times by the CBI and ED since 2015 when her husband was arrested.

At least 174 chit fund firms, including Rose Valley Group, AT Group, Seashore and Micro Finance Group have looted 20 lakh people, especially small depositors, by promising high returns on their investments,ged links with the ponzi firms.

Indian Navy prepares for Republic-Day



Indian Navy contingent prepare for the Republic Day parade in full swing, starting their practice in the early hours practices, at Rajpath in New Delhi, on Sunday.

— PTI

Missing Scindia at party function raises eyebrows

Opposition Congress described the development as a ‘sign of rift’

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 17

Senior BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia's absence at a party function here on Sunday, organised to felicitate new office-bearers of the state unit, has raised many eyebrows here with the Opposition Congress describing the development as a "sign of rift" between him and state BJP leadership.

Madhya Pradesh Congress unit vice-president Raja Pateria said Scindia's absence was significant considering the inadequate representation given to his camp in the recent reorganisation of the party. "Only one leader from Scindia's camp has been accommodated. This indicates all is not well in the BJP in MP", Pateria said.

Madan Kushwaha, a leader from Gwalior considered Scindia's loyalist, has been appointed state secretary. The BJP dismissed the charges, describing it a "conspiracy theory manufactured by the Congress."

"It is not necessary for Scindia to attend all party events. He has expressed his best wishes to all the newly-appointed office-bearers individually. Many senior leaders such as Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar were also not present at the function. It is the Congress which promotes the 'my men, his men' culture. The BJP shuns such culture," state BJP secretary Rajneesh Agrawal said.

State party president V.D. Sharma and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan were among the senior party leaders who were present on the occasion.

Hailing Sharma for giving an opportunity to the next generation leaders in his team, the Chief

Cong seeks to fight 130 seats in WB, Left rejects demand

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 17

Bargaining for the main face of its alliance with the Left Front in the coming West Bengal Assembly elections, the Congress has sought to contest in as many as 130 out of 294 seats with a plan to finalise their joint candidates list within this month. But the Left parties have clearly rejected the Congress' demand, leading to an argument over the seat-sharing formula between the two partners at a meeting on their alliance in Kolkata on Sunday.

Congress Lok Sabha leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who placed his party's demand for 130 seats, became so angry at the Left's response that he almost stormed out of the meeting. Chowdhury, who is also the state Congress chief, was stopped by Rajya Sabha MP Pradip Bhattacharya, who was present along with the party's Assembly leader Abdul Mannan.

At the meeting, Chowdhury named six districts—Malda, Murshidabad, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Bankura and Purulia—where the Congress would field a majority of its 130 candidates, party insiders said. Left Front chairman Biman Bose and other leaders, including CPI(M) state secretary Suryakanta Mishra, reminded the Berhampore MP that Left candidates should be fielded in these districts in

Minister said BJP always promoted young people unlike the Congress which never dared to look

SHIV SENA TO CONTEST IN UPCOMING WEST BENGAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 17

In a bid to damage the prospects of the BJP, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena on Sunday formally announced that it would contest the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections. The elections which are expected to witness a high-octane fight may be scheduled in April-May this year.

Shiv Sena spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut said, "So, here is the much awaited

view of their votebank.

Ironically, the Congress, which won 44 seats in the 2016 Assembly polls, has been reduced to 24 in the House after 19 of its MLAs defected to the ruling Trinamul Congress and one to the BJP. The Left, which had 33 MLAs five years ago, has been reduced to 25. With no outcome from Sunday's meeting, the two partners will sit again on January 25 before an announcement on their seat-sharing formula and candidates' list, possibly on January 28.

Silent on the Congress' demand of 130 seats, Chowdhury later said: "The Congress and the Left have to fight the Assembly polls unitedly as a secular democratic

update. After discussions with Party Chief Shri Uddhav Thackeray, Shivsena has decided to contest the West Bengal Assembly Elections. We are reaching Kolkata soon." Raut also Tweeted this decision in Bangla.

In 2019, the Sena had contested the Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal. Last year, it had contested the Bihar elections. However, all its candidates had failed to save even their deposits. The Sena polled 0.05 per cent of the total votes in the Bihar elections.

alliance to defeat a communal BJP and an autocratic Trinamul Congress. We are heading in that direction. Our meeting, held in a cordial environment, was not only peaceful but also a friendly discussion through exchange of opinions. None of us wants to put anything onto each other. We want to finalise our seat-sharing within this month. It is a process and cannot be finalised overnight. As the Left will discuss it among its constituents, we will do the same."

Echoing him, Bose said: "There is no gap in understanding between the Congress and the Left. There is no bitterness between us over the lack of results on the seat-sharing."

taries, a treasurer, an assistant treasurer, an office secretary and a media in-charge.

SHIV SENA, CONG IN SLUGFEST OVER RENAMING OF AURANGABAD

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 17

The political slugfest over the renaming of Aurangabad city as Sambhajinagar has continued as the Shiv Sena and the Congress – the alliance partners in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra – have accused each other of indulging in vote bank politics over the issue.

The Shiv Sena has said that the renaming might affect the vote bank of 'secular parties' as it will upset the Muslim community. However, calling its alliance partner a 'hypocrite', the Congress said Sena is raising the renaming issue for the fear of losing its voters.

Writing for 'Rokhthok', the weekly column in Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana', party MP Sanjay Raut said, "Secular parties like the Congress are of the view that Aurangabad should not be renamed as Sambhajinagar. They feel that minority communities like Muslims will not be happy if Aurangabad is renamed and it will affect their vote bank."

"However, Aurangzeb was never secular. He was religiously blind and harboured hatred towards other religions. He considered Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as his enemy and killed Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj brutally. Hence, there should not be any city named after Aurangzeb at least in Maharashtra. Call it 'Shivbhakti' (devotion to Shivaji Maharaj) or Maharashtra's self-esteem," said Mr Raut.

2.24 lakh get jab; 447 adverse cases reported

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

As the Covid-19 vaccination drive entered the second day, India for the first time reported Sunday that its share of active cases within the total number of infections has shrunk below two per cent. Of the 2,08,826 positive cases reported in the country, the number of active cases had now gone below 1.98 per cent.

While over 1.91 lakh healthcare and frontline workers were vaccinated on the first day, only 17,072 received their jabs in six states on Sunday. The states and UTs have fixed specific days for vaccinations.

Of all 2.24 lakh people who have been vaccinated, 447 developed minor complications. Only three persons who were hospitalised have now been discharged.

India is the only nation in the world, including the United States, Britain and France, to have vaccinated the highest number of people on the first day of the immunisation drive. It is also the only country in the world which started a mass vaccination drive at a time when its infection rate is on the decline. In contrast, in European nations where the vaccination drive started before India, there has been a steep rise in the number of viral infections, posing a serious challenge to their medical facilities.

India has been reporting less than 20,000 daily cases in the past 10 days. Its total recovered cases —10,196,885— exceed the active cases by 99,88,059. The country's death toll is now 1,52,274, with 181 fatalities reported in the last 24 hours.

Of the total active Covid-19 cases, Kerala has the highest number, at 68,633, followed by Maharashtra at 53,163, Uttar Pradesh at 9,162, Karnataka at 8,713, West Bengal at 7,151, and Tamil Nadu at 6,128.

A day after India took its first steps out of the pandemic with shots of the Covishield and Covaxin vaccines, the Congress Party on Sunday hit out at the Centre, asking why didn't Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ministers take vaccine shots. Congress spokesman Randeep Surjewala also asked the government if people below the poverty line will get free coronavirus vaccines. He raised questions over the price of Covishield and Covaxin doses, and the Centre's decision to allow the export of one of the vaccines before immunising everyone in the country.

In Delhi, where 4,319 healthcare and frontline workers were vaccinated on Saturday, health minister Satyendar Jain said there were 51 cases of minor complications. He said there was one "serious adverse" case, in which the patient was admitted to the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences.

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested two Chinese nationals in a money laundering case. Charlie Peng and Carter Lee were arrested in connection with a probe linked to an alleged hawala racket worth an estimated ₹1,000 crore that involved shell or dubious firms. They were produced before a local court here on Saturday that sent them to 14 days custody.

The ED case against Peng stems from an income-tax department (ITD) investigation of last year and an FIR filed by the Delhi Police special cell against him in 2018. Peng's name had cropped up last year in connection with the detention of two persons in Himachal Pradesh who were allegedly tracking Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama's movements on his directions. The Chinese national and some of his alleged associates, including bankers, were raided by the Income Tax Department in August.

Peng, sources had alleged, had a fake Indian passport. Tax officials had claimed that he created a web of sham compa-

nies to launder hawala funds to and from China in the past two-three years. Sources had said his front or showcase business was import and export of medical and electronic goods and some other items.

Peng was arrested by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police in September 2018 on charges of fraud and forgery and was allegedly running an illegal money changer. Both ED and I-T department, sources had said, are also probing allegations if Peng was "bribing" some Tibetans living in Delhi.

In a statement in August last year, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) had, without identifying the entities involved, stated that its searches were based on "credible inputs that a few Chinese individuals and their Indian associates were involved in money laundering and hawala transactions through a series of shell entities". It had said the "subsidiary of Chinese company and its related concerns have taken over ₹100 crore bogus advances from shell entities for opening businesses of retail showrooms in India". Similar charges are being probed against Lee by the ED, they said.

Veteran hailed from family of musicians, got basic classical music training from his father

END OF AN ERA

Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan passes away at 89

Mumbai, Jan. 18: Legendary Indian classical musician and Padma Vibhushan awardee Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan passed away on Sunday afternoon at his residence here. He was 89.

Khan's daughter-in-law Namrata Gupta Khan said that the veteran breathed his last at 12.37 pm at his Bandra home. "Today morning he was fine. We had a 24 hour nurse at home. During his massage he vomited and I ran immediately his eyes were shut and he was breathing slowly. I tried connecting to doctors and when they came he had already died," Namrata said.

She said the family is in shock due to Khan's sudden demise as he was keeping well. The musician was going to turn 90 on March 3. Khan had suffered a brain stroke in 2019 and left side of his body was paralysed. Namrata also shared the news of Khan's demise on her Facebook page.

"With a very heavy heart, I inform you all that my father-in-law the pillar of our family and a legend of our nation, Padma Vibhushan Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan sahab has left for his heavenly abode few mins ago," she posted on the social media platform.



President Ram Nath Kovind confers the Padma Vibhushan on classical singer Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan during the Padma Awards 2018 function at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi on March 23, 2018.

— PTI

Khan's last rites will be performed at Santacruz Kabrastan later this

evening. Born on March 3, 1931 in Badaun in Uttar Pradesh, Khan was the eld-

est son in a family of four brothers and three sisters.

His father, Ustad Waris Hussain Khan was the son of celebrated musician Ustad Murred Baksh, while his mother, Sabri Begum, was the daughter of Ustad Inayat Husain Khan, credited as the founder of the Rampur-Sahaswan gharana of music.

Khan got his basic classical music training from his father and later studied music under his cousin, Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1991, followed by Padma Bhushan in 2006 and Padma Vibhushan in 2018.

In 2003 he was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi award, the highest Indian recognition given to practicing artists.

Soon after Khan's demise his collaborators from Indian music industry including legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar and music composer A.R. Rahman took too social media to pay tributes to the maestro.

Mangeshkar said she was "deeply saddened" by the news of Khan's death. "I got to know the news of passing away of Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan Saheb. I am deeply saddened. He was not only a

very good singer but also a very good human being," she said, adding, her niece had also learnt music from him.

Rahman remembered Khan as the "sweetest teacher". "The sweetest teacher of all... May the Ghafoor-ur-Rahim give you a special place in the next world #UstadGhulamMustafa," he wrote. Ustad Amjad Ali Khan said Khan's passing away has left him heartbroken. "He was one of the most respected and versatile Vocalists of our country. My deepest condolences to his family. May his soul Rest In Peace," he tweeted. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

BANKING HEIR
BENJAMIN DE
ROTHSCHILD DIES

New York, Jan. 17: Benjamin de Rothschild, who oversaw the banking empire started by his father in 1953, has died. He was 57. The Edmond de Rothschild Group, the company he was chairman of, said that de Rothschild died of a heart attack Friday afternoon at his home in Pregny, Switzerland.

Since 1997, Benjamin de Rothschild headed the banking group, which was named after his father. Today, Edmond de Rothschild Group says it manages assets worth 160 billion euros, or \$190 billion. Forbes magazine estimates de Rothschild's net worth at \$1.5 billion. He is a descendant of the Rothschild family, which has a nearly 300-year history running European banks.

In a press release announcing his death, the Edmond de Rothschild Group said de Rothschild was passionate about finance, sailing, cars and wine. He was also a philanthropist, involved in the Adolphe de Rothschild Foundation Hospital, the company said. He is survived by his wife, Ariane de Rothschild, and their four adult daughters.

PALESTINIAN
VOTE: EU ASKS
ISRAEL TO HELP

Brussels, Jan. 17: The European Union on Saturday welcomed a promise by Palestinian leaders to hold their first elections in 15 years, urging Israel to facilitate the ballots.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said elections would be held in May and July, as part of a warming of ties between his Fatah party and its Islamist rival Hamas.

"This is a welcome development," said a spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. He said the bloc "stands ready to cooperate with relevant actors to support the electoral process" and urged Israel to "facilitate the holding of these elections throughout the Palestinian territory".

The statement from Abbas said he expected polls to be held "in all governorates of Palestine, including east Jerusalem", which was annexed by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War but is considered occupied territory by much of the international community.

Israel bans all Palestinian Authority activity in east Jerusalem, and there was no indication the Jewish state would allow a Palestinian vote within the city.

The 2005 Palestinian presidential vote saw Abbas elected with 62 percent support to replace the late Yasser Arafat.

In the last Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, Hamas won an unexpected landslide.

The polls resulted in a brief unity government but it soon collapsed and in 2007, bloody clashes erupted in the Gaza Strip between the two principal Palestinian factions, with Hamas ultimately seizing control of Gaza.

ANTI-NETANYAHU
PROTESTS ON
IN ISRAEL

Jerusalem, Jan. 17: Hundreds of protesters braved a cold night in Jerusalem on Saturday to press on with their calls for Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu to step down over corruption charges against him.

Demonstrators gathered at a Jerusalem square near Netanyahu's official residence. The weekly protests have been taking place for over seven months. Netanyahu is charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three cases involving billionaire associates and media moguls, charges that he denies.

The protesters insist Netanyahu cannot properly lead the country while under indictment for corruption. His trial is set to begin evidentiary hearings next month. Israel will hold its fourth national elections in two years in March, in what will likely be another referendum on Netanyahu as he faces a challenge from defectors within his Likud party. The protesters also say Netanyahu and his government have bungled the Coronavirus response.

The country has seen its economy hit hard by virus curbs and is again under a nationwide if partial lockdown. Netanyahu has used vaccination drive, in which more than a tenth of its population has been immunised, to try to belittle the protesters and their cause. They say the PM is working to end the outbreak while they hold demonstrations.

National Guards
in Washington

Step taken to keep eye on possible protests

Washington, Jan. 17: By the busload and plane-load, National Guard troops were pouring into the US capital on Saturday, as governors answered the urgent pleas of defence officials for more troops to help safeguard Washington even as they keep anxious eyes on possible violent protests in their own states.

Military leaders spent chunks of Thursday evening and Friday calling states in an unprecedented appeal for more National Guard troops to help lock down much of the city in the days before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. In dribs and drabs, governors responded, some agreeing to send an extra dozen, 100 or even 1,000, while others said no.

The calls reflect fears that violent extremist groups are targeting the city in the wake of the deadly insurrection at the US Capitol on Jan. 6. The threats range from armed insurgents to possible attempts to plant explosive devices at so-called soft targets. But as Washington begins to resemble an armed camp, with more than 25,000 Guards due in the city by early next week, concerns about violence at state capitals has grown. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said she turned down the federal request to send at least 100 more National Guard troops to D.C. "I didn't think that we could safely fill that commitment," Brown said.

Oregon has already agreed to send 30 to Washington, but state leaders are worried about violence at the state capital in Salem. Others agreed, setting off a dizzying torrent of military flights and convoys into the region. "The peaceful transfer of power is a central tenet of American democracy, and Connecticut stands ready to aid in the protection of our country," said Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, who had initially approved sending 100 Guard and on Friday agreed to send 200 more. All told, more than 130 US Air Guard flights in the past 72 hours have carried at least 7,000 Guard troops to Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, according to US officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal numbers.

Thousands more are in buses and military trucks, thundering up highways toward Washington. Army Gen. Dan Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, called adjutants general around the country, and others, such as Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy, called governors to seek help.

Man arrested with
gun at checkpoint

Washington, Jan. 17: A man with a loaded handgun and more than 500 rounds of ammunition has been arrested in Washington at a security checkpoint near the US Capitol, authorities said.

Wesley Allen Beeler, of Virginia, had driven to a checkpoint on Friday evening and tried to use a phony credential to access the restricted area where President-elect Joe Biden will be inaugurated next week, according to a document filed in Washington, DC Superior Court.

As officers checked against an authorised access list, one of them noticed decals on the back of Beeler's pick-up truck that said "Assault Life," with an image of a rifle, and another with the message: "If they come for your guns, give 'em your bullets first." Under questioning, Beeler told officers he had a Glock handgun in the vehicle.

A search uncovered a loaded handgun, more than 500 rounds of ammunition, shotgun shells and a magazine for the gun, the court document said. Beeler was arrested on charges including possession of an unregistered firearm and unlawful possession of ammunition, a police report said.

Following his arrest, Beeler said it was "an honest mistake" and that he was

BIDEN TO PRIORITISE
LEGAL STATUS FOR
IMMIGRANTS

San Diego, Jan. 17: President-elect Joe Biden's decision to immediately ask Congress to offer legal status to an estimated 11 million people in the country has surprised advocates given how the issue has long divided Democrats and Republicans, even within their own parties.

Biden will announce legislation his first day in office to provide a path to citizenship for millions of immigrants in the United States illegally, according to four people briefed on his plans. The president-elect campaigned on a path to citizenship for the roughly 11 million people in the US illegally.

A private security guard who got lost on his way to work near the Capitol.

Washington is under a high state of alert ahead of Biden's Wednesday inauguration, after a mob of President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol on January 6.

Five people died in the assault, including a police officer.

— AFP

Day 1: Biden to sign
executive orders

Washington, Jan. 17: Joe Biden's top aide said Saturday the incoming president would sign about a dozen executive orders on his first day in office, as police fearing violence from Trump supporters staged a nationwide security operation ahead of the inauguration. Incoming Biden chief of staff Ron Klain said in a memo to new White House senior staff that the executive orders would address the pandemic, the ailing US economy, climate change and racial injustice in America.

"All of these crises demand urgent action," Klain said in the memo. "In his first 10 days in office, President-elect Biden will take decisive action to address these four crises, prevent other urgent and irreversible harms, and restore America's

place in the world," Klain added. As he inherits the White House from Donald Trump, Biden's plate is overflowing with acute challenges.

The US is fast approaching 400,000 dead from the Covid-19 crisis and logging well over a million new cases a week as the Coronavirus spreads out of control.

The economy is ailing, with 10 million fewer jobs available compared to the start of the pandemic. And millions of Americans who back Trump refuse to recognise Biden as the legitimate president.

Biden this week unveiled plans to seek \$1.9 trillion to revive the economy through new stimulus payments and other aid, and plans a blitz to accelerate America's stumbling Covid vaccine rollout effort.

— AFP

Auspicious Kolam drawings
mark inauguration kickoff

Washington, Jan. 17: Kolam, a traditional Indian art form of drawing geometric patterns on the floors as a sign of welcome, was part of the virtual kick-off ceremony of the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden and his deputy Kamala Harris, who traces her origin to Tamil Nadu where these auspicious designs adorn almost every household. In Tamil Nadu, where

Harris has roots, women draw Kolams on the ground to invite health and prosperity into houses where they are displayed.

Pictures of thousands of Kolam tiles were on Saturday woven into a video to welcome Biden and Harris in the spirit of 'Presidency for All' and to showcase the multi-cultural heritage of America.

More than 1,800 individuals from across the US

and many from India participated in the online initiative to create thousands of Kolam designs. "Many believe Kolams symbolise positive energy and new beginnings. People from various communities collaborated from homes with eco-friendly materials," said Shanthi Chandrasekar, an award-winning multimedia and multidisciplinary artist from Maryland.

— PTI

TEST | FIRING

Artemis I mission to test the SLS, unmanned Orion spacecraft to take place before '21 end

NASA test of mega Moon rocket engines cut short

Washington, Jan. 17: NASA conducted a test firing of the engines for its giant Space Launch System (SLS) lunar rocket on Saturday but they shut down earlier than planned, the space agency said.

The "hot-fire" test at the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi was supposed to last a little over eight minutes — the time the engines would burn in flight — but they shut down just over a minute into the burn.

"Teams are assessing the data to determine what

caused the early shutdown, and will determine a path forward," NASA said in a statement.

The SLS rocket is intended to launch the Artemis missions that will take US astronauts back to the Moon.

Despite being cut short, NASA said the test of the RS-25 engines had provided valuable information for the planned missions.

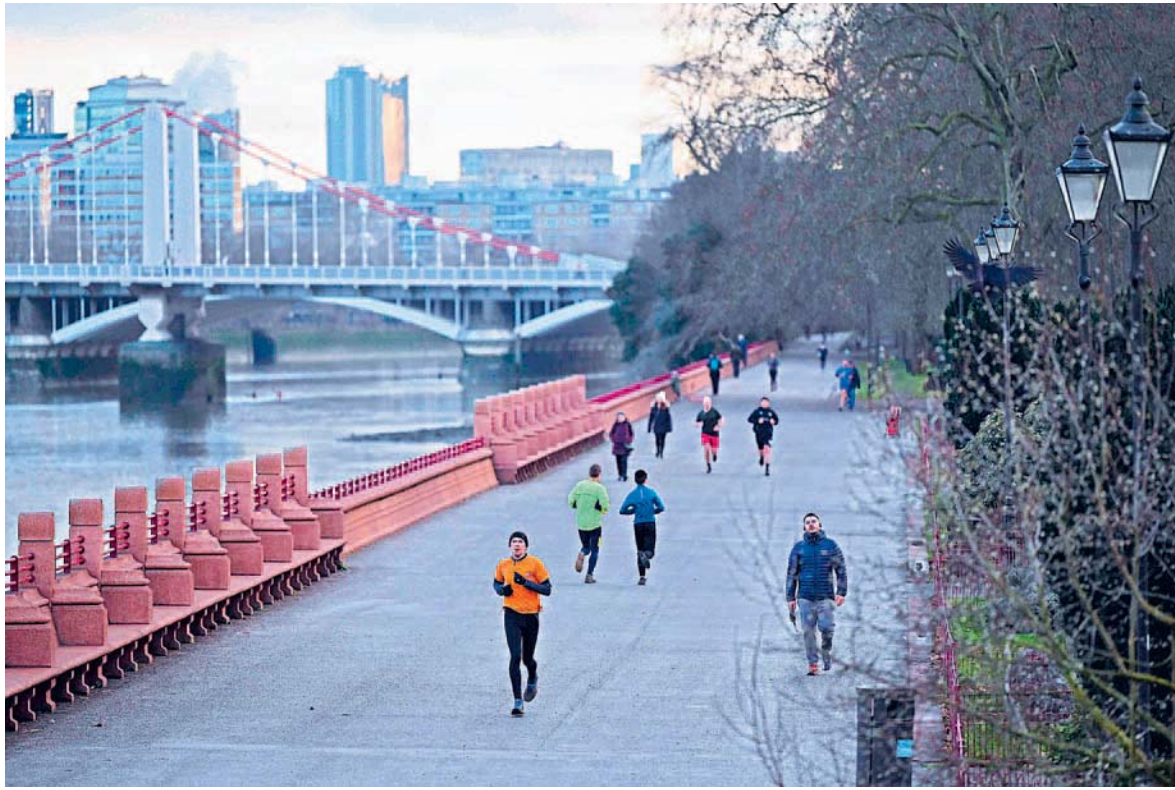
"Saturday's test was an important step forward to ensure that the core stage of the SLS rocket is ready for the Artemis I mission,

● **THE "HOT-FIRE" test** at the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi was supposed to last a little over eight minutes — the time the engines would burn in flight — but they shut down just over a minute into the burn.

● **THE SLS rocket** is intended to launch the Artemis missions that will take US astronauts back to the Moon.

● **NASA'S EVENTUAL goal** is to establish an Artemis Base Camp on the Moon before the end of the decade, an ambitious plan that would require tens of billions of dollar of funding and the green light from President-elect Joe Biden and Congress.

and to carry crew on future missions," said NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine.



People jog along the river front as they exercise in Battersea Park in London on Sunday, as surging cases of the novel Coronavirus are placing health services under increasing pressure. Britain recorded another 55,761 cases of Coronavirus on Friday, although new cases have fallen nearly 14 percent in the last week.

— AFP

Pfizer tries to ease Europe's
worries on vaccine delivery

Paris, Jan. 17: Pharma giant Pfizer tried to ease concerns in Europe about deliveries of its Coronavirus vaccine as nations across the world doubled down on restrictions to fight the rampaging pandemic. The Coronavirus pandemic is showing no signs of slowing down, with infections surging past 94 million and more than two million deaths, and Europe among the hardest-hit parts of the world.

Worries have grown that delays in the delivery of Pfizer-BioNTech shots could hamper a European vaccine rollout which has already faced heavy criticism across the continent.

Work is ongoing at the Pfizer plant in Belgium to increase capacity, and the firm and its German partner BioNTech said Saturday it would allow them to "significantly" scale up vaccine production in the second quarter.

Deliveries would be back to the original schedule to the EU from January 25, they pledged. Several Nordic and Baltic countries have described the situation as "unacceptable", while Belgium's vaccination strategy task force condemned a lack of consultation by Pfizer over the deliveries as "incomprehensible". France, which crossed 70,000 Covid-19 deaths on the weekend, is set to begin a campaign to inoculate people over 75 from Monday. Russia plans to begin mass vaccinations the same day.

Despite the rollout of vaccines, countries still have few options but to rely on movement and distancing restrictions to control the spread of the virus. Curbs will be tightened in Italy and Switzerland from Monday, while Britain will require testing of all international arrivals.

The number of infections in the United States — the worst-hit country — soared to more than 23.7 million on Saturday, with close to 400,000 deaths, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally.

The pandemic has battered the American economy, with millions left jobless, and President-elect Joe Biden has vowed to step up efforts to end the pandemic.

Biden will sign executive orders on the day he is inaugurated next week, including action on the coronavirus crisis.

Mexico City, Jan. 17: Mexico posted its second straight day of more than 20,000 Coronavirus cases Saturday, suggesting a surge in a country already struggling in many areas with overflowing hospitals. There were 20,523 newly confirmed cases Saturday, after 21,366 infections were reported Friday.

That was about double the daily rate of increase just a week ago. Reporting normally declines on weekends, suggesting next week may bring even higher numbers. The country also recorded 1,219 more deaths, a new record. The country has now seen almost 1.63 million total infections and has registered over 140,000 deaths so far in the pandemic. The country's extremely low testing rate means that is an undercount, and

The incoming administration has pledged to set up thousands of immunisation sites, deploy mobile clinics and expand the public health workforce in a bid to revive the stuttering rollout of vaccines.

In some nations, that resentment has sparked protests.

Roughly 10,000 people marched in Austria's capital Vienna against coronavirus restrictions on Saturday, calling on the government to resign.

Britain's government said on Sunday it is looking at requiring all incoming travellers to isolate in hotels, expanding on new Coronavirus restrictions entering into force in the coming hours. All arrivals to the UK will have to quarantine and show negative tests for Covid-19 from Monday at 0400 GMT, after the government scrapped "travel corridors" from countries with lower case-loads following the emergence of new strains.

The *Sunday Times* said the government planned to go further, emulating countries such as Australia and New Zealand in requiring travellers to self-isolate in hotels at their own charge, using GPS and facial-recognition technology to check they are staying put.

— AFP

FB PUTS WARNING ON CARDINAL VIDEO

Mexico City, Jan. 17: Facebook has placed a warning screen over a rambling chat by retired Mexican Cardinal Juan Sandoval Iniguez in which he claims Coronavirus vaccines contain a satanic microchip.

The Facebook screen warns viewers, "This post repeats information about Covid-19 that independent fact checkers say is false." However, viewers on Saturday could still see

the video, which was posted Jan. 12. Sandoval Iniguez is the emeritus archbishop of the archdiocese of Guadalajara, where he retired in 2011 after reaching the age of 75. He turns 88 in March.

In the video, he refers to "the chip that they are planning to put in the vaccine to control you, it is the mark of the beast." The video is titled, "The plot to impose a new world order without Christ."

— AP

official estimates suggest the real death toll is closer to 195,000.

Teams vaccinating frontline health care workers administered about 25,000 shots on Saturday, bring the total so far to over

463,000. The numbers are still inadequate for the 750,000 frontline health care workers, each of whom will require two doses. Mexico has reported severe reactions to the Pfizer vaccine.

— AP

Pak approves use
of Oxford vaccine

Islamabad, Jan. 17: Pakistan has approved the emergency use of Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine and the government hopes to make the drug available by the first quarter of the year, as the country's Coronavirus tally surged to 519,291.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister Imran Khan on Health Dr Faisal Sultani confirmed on Saturday that the Drug Regulatory Authority Pakistan (DRAP) has granted approval for emergency use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Coronavirus vaccine across the country, according to a report in the *Geo TV*.

Minister for Planning Asad Umar, who is also the chief of National Command and Operations Centre (NCOCC), the country's Coronavirus control body, said that the vaccine will be rolled out by March, the report said. In the first phase, the vaccine will be given to health workers and those aged 65 years and above, he said. The vaccine is designed by scientists at the Universi-

ALL TRAVELLERS TO
SINGAPORE MUST
TEST ON ARRIVAL

Singapore, Jan. 17: All travellers, including Singaporeans and permanent residents, will need to take a Covid-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test upon arrival in Singapore, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has announced. This will take effect from 11.59 pm on January 24 as part of tighter border measures to manage the risk of imported Covid-19 cases, reported the *Channel News Asia*. Singapore has seen an increase in the number of Coronavirus cases.

— PTI

ty of Oxford and produced by AstraZeneca, a British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical company. Pakistan reported 43 deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of fatalities to 10,951.

— PTI

missions that sent the first astronauts to the Moon.

NASA's eventual goal is to establish an Artemis Base Camp on the Moon before the end of the decade, an ambitious plan that would require tens of billions of dollar of funding and the green light from President-elect Joe Biden and Congress.

A manned return to the Moon is the first part of the Artemis programme to set up a long-term colony and test technologies for a crewed mission to Mars in the 2030s.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

18 JANUARY 2021

Transparency the key to success of vaccine drive

India has a population of 136 crore people and the highest number of Covid-affected people after the United States, and hence a campaign to inoculate the entire population is critical to the success of humanity's fight against the pandemic. It ought to be an exercise without parallel in history for the sheer number of the target group and the logistical and economic challenges it would face. The Union government is working with the states and vaccine manufacturers to ensure that about three crore people, who are mainly Covid warriors, are inoculated in the first phase with two made-in-India vaccines in a drive that began on Saturday. Reports say 1.91 lakh people were vaccinated on the first day against a target of three lakh.

Everyone wants the campaign to be a success, but it is regrettable that the government has been less than transparent about it. Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes justifiable pride in the fact that both the vaccines are made in India and underlines the role of Indian scientists in making it happen. But the truth

is that one of the two vaccines, Covaxin, which is developed jointly by the Indian Council of Medical Research and Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech International Limited, and manufactured by the latter, has been in a clinical trial mode. Those people who were given the Covaxin jab were made to sign a consent form, which says that they are participating in a trial. A section of doctors in the government-run Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in Delhi insisted that they be given the vaccine developed by Oxford University and manufactured by Pune-based Serum Institute of India. They said they are a bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial in the case of Covaxin.

This is unfair and unacceptable. If a vaccine is under trial and has not gone through the due process, then its administration should be called a clinical trial, and not vaccination. It should be given only to volunteers and its administration should not be part of the inoculation campaign. This is the minimum the government owes to the people. The Prime Minister's statement that Indian vaccine scientists, medical system, Indian process and institutional mechanism are trusted globally and that this trust is earned with a consistent track record is true, but it does not square with the present campaign. Also true is the fact that about 60 per cent of children the world over receive life-saving vaccines which are made in India and passed through stringent Indian scientific tests; but the only point is that Covaxin has not gone through those tests.

That the head of All India Institute of Medical Sciences and the member (health) of Niti Aayog took the Covaxin jab proves nothing; it can only be seen as a persuasive act. Even if the Prime Minister is administered the vaccine, it proves nothing except sending a message on vaccination, not on the vaccine. The government must be upfront about the whole programme and respect science and scientific processes. Tom-tomming national pride is not a great idea in the face of a pandemic.

Subhani



Bolstering corporates was intent of farm laws



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

The recent Supreme Court decision staying the farm laws, protecting the minimum support price regime and directing that no farmer would be dispossessed of his land is appropriate under the given circumstances. Perhaps if the committee appointed by the Supreme Court could also have also been constituted in consultation with the protesting farmer unions, it would have inspired far greater confidence.

When the Supreme Court finally does decide to hear the farm laws matter, for many petitions that deal with equally contentious decisions taken by the current government continue hanging fire in the apex court, it must keep in mind that agriculture, with its allied sectors, are the largest source of livelihoods in India.

A total of 70 per cent of our rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. Of them, 82 per cent of farmers are small and marginal. On the whole, about 60 per cent of the Indian population, i.e. 81 crore people, are agriculture-dependent.

They can be called small entrepreneurs, for they mostly own the land they till and it is their labour on that small patch, varying from one to five acres, that keeps the home fires burning. The average size of a land holding in India is 1.16 hectares. This is roughly 2.8 acres. Moreover, these farm laws also have the added potential of making us import-dependent bringing back the spectre of ship-to-mouth that the green revolution finally surmounted in the early 1970s.

These farm laws are actually intended to give Corporate India a legal licence to muscle in on these small guys who have unequal or no bargaining power.

Look at what has happened to the Indian economy over the past 80 months. The chairperson

of the Competition Commission Of India in a recent interview stated, "The Commission has now decided to undertake market studies in pharmaceutical sector, telecom sector and digital market sector... The Commission has received cases with allegations of anti-competitive conduct by market players in these sectors as well as reviewed various combination notices in these sectors..." The goal is to ensure that competition remains "vibrant" and "there are enough players who are able to participate in the award of concessions".

A classical example of this is the aviation sector where the government despite opposition from both the department of economic affairs (DEA) ministry of finance and the Niti Aayog allowed the Adani Group of companies to take six key airports and also acquire a controlling stake in both the Mumbai and the upcoming greenfield Navi Mumbai Airport. These seven airports, namely Ahmedabad, Mangalore, Lucknow, Jaipur, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram and Mumbai, roughly handled 80 million passengers during the last fiscal (2019-20). This converts into nearly one-fourth of the 340 million odd domestic air passenger traffic.

On the 11th of December 2018 when the NDA/BJP government's public private partnership appraisal committee (PPPAC) considered the civil aviation ministry's privatisation pitch, the DEA in a note ostensibly red-flagged it, stating, "These six airports projects are highly capital-intensive projects, hence it is suggested to incorporate the clause that not more than two airports will be awarded to the same bidder duly factoring the high financial risk and performance issues. Awarding them to different companies would also facilitate yardstick competition."

Niti Aayog also surprisingly demonstrated spine and, in a note, opined, "A

bidder lacking sufficient technical capacity can well jeopardise the project and compromise the quality of services that the government is committed to provide."

Brushing aside these concerns, the government still went ahead and allowed one company with no previous experience in airport management to take control of all these airports albeit through a public auction.

However, therein lies the problem. Even if it is through the bidding route allowing monopolies to develop in sector after sector of the economy tantamount to creating economic oligarchies and chaebols.

An oligarchy is a country or industry that is controlled by a small group of powerful people while a chaebol denotes a "wealth clique" in Korean. They are popularly assumed to have been influenced by the Japanese zaibatsu — both sharing the same Chinese characters and meaning. Like chaebols, zaibatsus were also family controlled conglomerates that dominated the Japanese economy until they were finally extinguished by the United States during its occupation of Japan post World War II.

Country after country has had to deal with these oligarchies and chaebols for ultimately they start influencing the politics of nation in the most pernicious manner possible. The US had to bring the Sherman Anti-Trust Act way back in 1890 to curb concentrations of power that interfere with trade and reduce economic competition. The unsaid part of it was that do not allow corporations to become so powerful so that they start "controlling by influence" the policy frameworks and governance of the state. However, where the government is itself engaged in facilitating the development of these oligarchic chaebol-like struc-

These farm laws are actually intended to give Corporate India a legal licence to muscle in on these small guys who have unequal or no bargaining power

tures it becomes even more sinister to put it mildly.

The US has used its anti-trust laws to reign in various entities, including Standard Oil, AT&T, Kodak and Microsoft in the twentieth century, to name a few.

Way back in 1909, the Department of Justice of the US government filed a federal anti-trust lawsuit against Standard Oil arguing that the company restrained trade through its preferential deals with railroads, its control of pipelines and by engaging in unfair practices like price-cutting to drive smaller competitors out of business.

On May 15, 1911, the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of Standard Oil Company, ruling it was in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The court's decision forced Standard to break into 34 independent companies spread across the country and abroad. Many of these companies have since split, folded or merged today. The primary descendants of Standard include ExxonMobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips. Recently, the US government has gone after Big Tech companies with a wave of anti-trust law suits for it considers their market dominance among other things as dangerous for democracy.

Similarly, South Korea has for long grappled with the malevolent influence of chaebols on their politics. Russia is a typical example where a noxious combination of big business and entrenched political interest are controlling that country since the exit of Boris Yeltsin at the turn of the millennium.

The Supreme Court, therefore, must be mindful of the true intent of these farm laws. It is to further the agenda of further consolidating these oligarchies and chaebols that control a significant part of the Indian economy already and, therefore, are, through their financial, media and other muscle, disproportionately significant players in our democratic and governance ethos.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

LETTERS

VACCINATION

Forcing recipients of Covaxin to sign a consent form agreeing to be part of a clinical trial, is not a good practice under the present circumstances (*Vaccine drive turns Bharat Bio 'Phase 3' trial, DC, Jan. 17*). While all other vaccines have completed trials, Bharat Biotech vaccine is openly conducting Phase-3 trial. Though it is not to belittle the efforts of this Indian firm, the matter should not be taken lightly even under emergency circumstances. Covaxin manufacturers should have taken some more time before going public. Alternatively, the Centre should also have not granted permission. I was surprised to note that in Telangana, Covaxin was not used on the first day.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

It is heartening that a woman sanitation worker got the first jab at Vijayawada giving a pride of place to the unsung and neglected workers and emphasising "cleanliness is next only to Godliness".

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

RIVETING ARTICLE

The article is riveting and interesting (*How life got in the way of my one true calling, DC, Jan. 17*). The author has been candid and forthright in her expressions. Although crafting and creative skills are an asset for the writer, far more important is one's natural flow and that makes the reader unable to put it down.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

TPS has one-point manifesto

HYDERABAD, JANUARY. 17 The Telangana Praja Samithi leader, Dr. M. Chenna Reddy, said here today that the Samithi had been converted into a political party only to fulfil the requirement to get a common symbol for TPS candidates in the elections.

Dr. Reddy, who was replying to a question at a "meet the people and the press programme", said the TPS was equidistant from all other political parties though it was "absolutely clear" that "we stand for all progressive things."

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Kishwar
Desai
London Diary

Long UK lockdown defeats Britons; Spurs' 'shot in arm' for soccer fans

So not only is it very cold but the forecast is also bleak. And the worst is that another lockdown has been announced! As of 2 am on Monday, all travel corridors to the UK will be shut. As they used to say 'Fog in the Channel. Continent isolated. Lockdown in UK. The World isolated!'

Those were the days! But now the tables have turned. It is the UK that has become even more of an island!

Theatres were pleased last November they could open but now they are shut again as are pubs and restaurants. We have vaccinations slowly covering the population but as of now it will be Easter before the over 50s will be covered. That leaves the younger half of the 70 million to come.

However, what is astonishing is that the latest photos show that the stoic Briton is completely fed up and would rather party than live in isolation. So where will this lead — except for more infections and more deaths? One despairs! This was once a disciplined

and well-regulated country. But now as Covid continues to rampage through lives — I am worried about the consequences. With at least 1,000 deaths everyday, in a small nation like this... what terrible impact will Covid have on households, on the economy?

The British may have been great at finding a vaccine that work — coming second, though not first — with AstraZeneca. But technology does not seem to be a strong point. Despite the tough stance of home secretary Priti Patel about fighting crime and immigrants, it turns out the Home Office has managed to wipe out 150,000 (or could be 400,000 no one knows for sure) people's arrest records and with it much sensitive information — their fingerprints, DNA and arrest history. At least that makes those 150,000 happy. No so long ago, a National Health computer lost thousands of names of people who had been infected. We need an abacus urgently.

Meanwhile... Brexit is still causing problems. Now the Atlantic storm

Filomena has ruined the Spanish lettuce crop and we have a serious lettuce shortage.

A cheerful event did happen the other day. It was rather like a battle between the elephant and the mouse. The mouse did not win but it did get to ride on the elephant's back for a bit. The FA Cup is a contest where all the football teams — the best ones from Premier League down to local village teams playing in a small league — can contest with each other. Rather like the Mumbai Indians of the IPL playing with a team from a village in Bihar. This year Marine, a village team established back in 1884, and playing in the Northern Premier League Division One, North West, was drawn against the mighty Premier League North London side, Tottenham Hotspurs, in the Third Round. This was on the Marine's home grounds rather than in London on Spurs' home turf. Anyway no spectators are allowed due to Covid. Anyone would expect the mighty

Spurs to send their third reserve side to play the minnows 160 places below them in national ranking. But Jose Mourinho, the Spurs Spanish manager, selected their regular top side with a few stars and promising youngsters hoping to show he took the fixture seriously.

The result, alas, was not the unexpected victory of the mouse. The elephant won. But Marines were able to sell 30,000 tickets for watching on Zoom at £10 each. Their ground facility only accommodates 3,185 in all with 389 seats and rest standing. But thanks to Covid and the Big team bringing all the stars, the Marines cleaned up. Their game was shown on BBC. They lost 5-0 but who is counting the goals. Their good luck continued. After a match, players often exchange their shirts as a gesture of friendship. In Covid Times, this is forbidden. But the Spurs promised to send the Marine team a freshly washed set of shirts which then the entire team wore on the day. It is the gesture that made the day.

Good news at last about Noor Inayat Khan. This famous daughter of a Sufi music master fought in the Second World War with the spy code name Madeleine on the British side. She was sent to France where she worked as a radio operator. She was captured but refused to say anything about her associates because, being a Sufi, she would not tell a lie. She was sent to the Dachau concentration camp where she died. Now there will at last be a TV series with Freida Pinto. This is good news for me as well. Long ago, my husband and I had spotted this as excellent story to make a film, and bought the rights for a book on it and even lobbied for it for a long time. But we found the process of filmmaking very daunting, and so am thrilled that 15 years later — something is happening on the OTT platform.

Kishwar Desai is an award-winning author. The Longest Kiss: The Life and Times of Devika Rani is her new book.

quick
BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|------------------------|------------|-------|
| Sensex | 49,034.67 | -1.11 |
| Nifty 50 | 14,433.70 | -1.11 |
| S&P 500* | 3,768.25 | -0.72 |
| Dollar (₹) | 73.04 | 0.00 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 99.71 | 0.01 |
| Euro (₹) | 88.70 | 0.17 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 48,690,286 | 0.00 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 55.10 | -2.34 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 5.988 | 1.08 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.087 | -0.92 |

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bank credit up
3.2% in first nine
months of FY21

Bank credit grew 3.2 per cent to Rs 107.05 lakh crore in the first nine months of the current financial year against a growth of 2.7 per cent in the same period of 2019-20. In the fortnight ended March 27, 2020, bank advances stood at Rs 103.72 lakh crore. Bank deposits rose 8.5 per cent to Rs 147.27 lakh crore in the April-December 2020 period against an increase of 5.1 per cent a year ago, RBI data shows.

FPIs invest close
to ₹18,500 cr in
stocks this month

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) put in Rs 14,866 crore in Indian capital markets in the first half of January with participants expecting strong third-quarter results by companies. As per depositories data, FPIs invested a net Rs 18,490 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 3,624 crore from debt segment between January 1 and January 15. This translated into a total net investment of Rs 14,866 crore.

Alkem arm recalls
over 20K bottles
of drug in US

Ascend Laboratories LLC, subsidiary of Mumbai-based Alkem Labs, is recalling over 20,000 bottles of antibacterial drug cephalexin for oral suspension from the US market, as per a report by the US drug regulator. The US-based Ascend Laboratories is recalling bottles of cephalexin for oral suspension, USP, 125 mg per 5 ml, manufactured by Alkem Laboratories, according to the US FDA's Enforcement Report.

2021 to be good
year for Indian
IT: Balakrishnan

The year 2021 will be good for India's information technology sector and most of the companies in the space are expected to clock high single digit growth, according to IT industry veteran V. Balakrishnan. The former CFO of Infosys said Indian IT companies have handled the Covid very well in terms of transitioning to work-from-home and capturing new business opportunities in the wake of the pandemic.



■ May propose SLR, CRR requirements for big players

RBI mulls stricter
norms for NBFCsAFTAB AHMED, SWATI BHAT & NUPUR ANAND
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, JAN. 17

India's central bank is likely to propose tightening rules on "shadow banks" in a bid to strengthen solvency and sustainability of a sector that has been showing signs of stress in recent years, two sources said.

The Reserve Bank of India has been trying to tighten regulatory norms on the sector since Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services, the largest non-bank financial company, went bankrupt in 2018 and Dewan Housing Finance Corp and Altico Capital defaulted on payments in 2019.

The RBI is expected to set out proposals in a discussion paper this week, recommending that bigger shadow banks maintain a statutory liquidity ratio, the sources said.

India's banks must maintain at least 18 per cent worth of deposits that they must hold in cash, gold or government securities.

The RBI could also suggest large non-banks be required to maintain a cash reserve ratio. For banks this ratio is 3 per cent, reduced from 4 per cent in a measure the central bank imposed that is to be reversed after March 31. The move could be a huge cash drain for the sector which is currently free from maintaining these reserve ratios, allowing them to lend to subprime lenders as well.

CUTTING SYSTEMIC RISKS

- ▶ RBI is expected to recommend phased implementation of reserve ratios
- ▶ Currently banks must maintain at least 18% of deposits as statutory liquidity ratio
- ▶ They must also set aside 3% of deposits as cash reserve ratio
- ▶ Mandating the ratios could proved to be a huge cash drain for the sector

FINMIN LOOKS AT BANK
INVESTMENT COMPANY

New Delhi, Jan. 17: The finance ministry is looking at other avenues for affordable capital infusion, including setting up of a Bank Investment Company (BIC), as the RBI has raised concern over the issuance of zero coupon bonds for recapitalisation of public sector banks (PSBs), sources said.

Setting up BIC as a holding company or a core investment company was suggested by the P. J. Nayak committee.

The report recommend-

ed transferring shares of the government in the banks to the BIC, which would become the parent holding company of all these banks, as a result of this, all the PSBs would become 'limited' banks. BIC will be autonomous and it will have the power to appoint the board of directors and make other policy decisions about subsidiaries. BIC will serve as a super holding company and reduce the dependence of PSBs on government support. —PTI

The proposal is expected to recommend a phased implementation of the reserve ratios, giving non-banks time to comply, one official said.

"Cost of compliance to rules and regulations should be perceived as an investment, as any inadequacy in this regard will

prove to be detrimental," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said in a speech on Saturday, referring to increased regulation in recent years for banks and shadow banks.

One official said that move is to avoid failures of big shadow banks that could pose systemic risks

and is expected to encourage some of the larger ones to move towards becoming full-time banks.

But shadow banks believe the new norms will hurt their operations.

Shadow banks enjoy "certain flexibilities which allow them to do last-mile financing which banks can't do," said an executive at a non-bank. "Blurring the lines" between banks and non-banks would "be detrimental for India, where financial inclusion is still low."

At its last monetary policy meeting last month Das said regulations of shadow banks need review and that a discussion paper would be issued by mid-January.

There are nearly 10,000 shadow banks in India but just over two dozens are thought to be large enough to pose systemic risks, sources said.

Raising liquidity ratios "or other liquidity buffers could pose a drag on their earnings" said A.M. Karthik, head of financial sector ratings at Icria. Lenders will also have to manage their treasuries more effectively, which would entail additional operating costs, he said.

The RBI will also recommend stricter checks on thousands of smaller non-banks, one official said. The central bank may not propose norms such as statutory lending or cash-reserve ratios, but it will recommend more scrutiny of their books, the official said. —Reuters

WFH bares wage disparity
for industrial homeworkersSANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 17

While the pandemic has brought 'work from home' to the limelight as a strategy to prevent mass unemployment, traditional homeworkers in India earn 60 per cent less than their counterparts who do not work from home, finds a study by the International Labour Organisation.

In India home work is dominated by industrial homeworkers, who are employees working from their home premises. The Periodic Labour Force Survey in 2018 has identified 31 lakh as homeworkers. When 2.35 million home-based beedi rollers and almost 8,00,000 home-based embroiderers were recast as probable homeworkers, the total homeworkers in India stood at 62,41,333, says ILO.

Around 66 per cent of these homeworkers are women. Most of them are in the age group of 35-59 years of age. Further, 58 per cent are into craft and related trades.

The industrial homeworkers of India are paid by piece and their earnings are just 41 per cent that of workers who do not work from home. The monthly earnings of garment workers in India are 11 per cent of the average Indian wage.

The earnings gap is 18 per cent due to fewer hours and 82 per cent due to very low hourly wages as they are paid per piece. In India homeworkers in all occupational categories are paid less.



The gender wage gap is higher among homeworkers in low or middle income countries like India, Mexico and Argentina. However, average weekly working hours for women homeworkers were higher at 36 hours, while it was 28 hours for non-home-based women workers.

At one end of the category of homeworkers are some of the poorest workers in the world of work, such as the 2.5 million women rolling beedi in India, while at the other end are the well-educated and highly paid employees of leading corporations working remotely from their home. In India, the Department of Telecommunications has given IT workers an exemption that allows them to work from home. This has led to 90 per cent of India's 4.3 million strong IT workforce shift-

ing to full-time telework, says ILO.

"Given the possibility of other labour market disruptions in the future, homeworking may well feature as a key method of operation adopted by firms and their workers," says ILO. Hence, the governments have the responsibility of establishing comprehensive home work policies. Key policy areas include improving the visibility of homeworkers, raising awareness of their rights and responsibilities, setting fair wages and limiting working hours, ensuring safe and healthy workplaces, eliminating child labour, applying a strategic compliance model of enforcement, ensuring social protection coverage, ensuring access to quality childcare and promoting training and career development.

Game startup Nazara
kicks off tech IPO seasonSARITHA RAI
JAN. 17

Nazara Technologies Ltd, the cricket games developer backed by ace investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, became the first Indian gaming technology company to seek a market debut as mobile entertainment takes off across the world's No. 2 smartphone arena.

The Mumbai-headquartered startup filed initial public offering documents with the market regulator on Friday. Its impending debut on the local exchanges could encourage other Indian startups to tap public markets, after years of explosive growth in mobile and internet usage created giant private firms from Paytm to Flipkart.

Founded by gamer Nitish Mittersain in 2000, when he was a college undergrad, Nazara is among the firms that have benefitted from a global boom in smartphone gaming that began even before the pandemic drove millions



online. Mittersain started the company with Rs 3 crore borrowed from friends and family, only to get derailed during the dotcom bust. The firm spent its first decade clearing debt, but steadily built market share by acquiring fellow gaming startups. It's now seeking to be among the first major startups to go public.

The company's platform hosts several content categories and is active in esports, while commanding a share of the mobile cricket gaming segment with titles like World Cricket Championship. Nazara operates in 52 countries from North America and the Middle East to Africa and SE Asia.

—Bloomberg

REALTY SECTOR
ASKS FOR ITC ON
LEASED PROPERTY

New Delhi, Jan. 17: The government should allow commercial real estate developers to set off GST paid on inputs like cement from the tax liability on rental income to avoid double taxation and boost the office market realty firms and consultants said on Sunday.

In its Budget recommendation for the 2021-22, industry body CII has demanded that Section 16 read with Section 17(5) of the CGST Act should be amended to enable the real estate players to avail ITC (input tax credit) on procurement of goods and services during the construction phase when the space is intended for commercial leasing or renting.

The denial of ITC, leads to blockage of funds for a real estate player, it said.

"In case of commercial leasing of properties and outlets at malls, the renting of such premises attracts 18 per cent which is available as credit to the client. Disallowance of credit during the construction phase leads to the increased cost of construction, working capital loss and increased financing costs," the CII said. —PTI

Publishers seek duty waiver
as newsprint cost shoots up

New Delhi, Jan. 17: The cost of paper used in printing newspapers and magazines has jumped 20 per cent in the past three months due to a demand-supply imbalance post-pandemic, prompting news publishers to rush to the government seeking the waiver of 5 per cent import duty to cut cost.

An industry that was facing headwinds from a slowing economy even before the pandemic was hit hard when most readers stopped buying newspapers and magazines on fears of them being carriers of viruses.

While no medical studies have established the virus transmission theories, sales did not pick up even after lockdown restrictions were relaxed, industry leaders said.

Now, the rising cost of newsprint created due to a drastic fall in supplies after 3 million tonnes of manufacturing capacities were either closed or converted to brown paper grades worldwide has dealt a second blow that is threatening the survival of the industry.

Indian Newspaper

Society (INS) president L. Adimoolam said most newspapers have stopped sending the hard copies to the rural areas with readership of less than 50 copies to reduce the distribution cost.

In a representation to finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the INS has suggested cutting the customs duty on imported newsprints.

They also want a fiscal stimulus package for the publishing industry or raising tariffs of government advertisements by 50 per cent.

"If working out a stimulus package for print media is difficult at this juncture, DAVP (Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity) may please consider releasing advertisement for all its departments to all publications with an increased tariff of 50 per cent, which would be highly helpful for the industry as a whole," the INS representation said.

It has also sought extension of the validity of RNI (Registrar of Newspapers for India) circulation certificates to up to March 31, 2022, which will enable

DAVP rates to remain the same till next year.

It is estimated that the print media would take two-three years to recover from the current situation, the INS added.

Adimoolam told PTI, "The government helped a few industries (during the pandemic) with stimulus packages. We are (also) expecting some stimulus."

Several newspapers have responded to the situation by including shutting down editions, reducing the number of pages and laying off staff.

Several small papers have closed down, Adimoolam added.

He said the newspaper distribution has become very costly.

The Indian publishers continue to be dependent on imported newsprint due to insufficient domestic capacity/output and poor quality.

"Prices of newsprint have shot up by 20 per cent in the past three months. Another increase of 10-15 per cent is on the anvil next month which will severely impact the publishers," said the INS. —PTI

LUXURY CAR
FIRMS WANT
CUT IN TAXES

New Delhi, Jan. 17: Luxury car makers Mercedes-Benz, Audi and Lamborghini expect the government to lower taxes on automobiles in the upcoming Budget, saying the premium segment of the auto industry has not been able to grow due to high taxation besides being hit hard by coronavirus.

Any hike in taxes on luxury cars will hit demand and prevent recovery from the disruptions witnessed last year, according to officials of the companies.

"Anything which is a deterrent to the demand in the sector we should stay away," Mercedes-Benz India MD & CEO Martin Schwenk said.

He was responding to a query on the company's expectations on the tax front from the government in the budget.

Seeking a reduction on taxes on the auto sector, Schwenk said, "Already the auto industry is highly taxed...from the import duties to GST and cess which is 22 per cent (on luxury cars). I think the target should actually be to support the growth of the sector and reduce tax."

Expressing similar sentiments, Audi India head Balbir Singh Dhillon said the challenges for the luxury car segment in 2021 are "more or less the constants from the past".

"One is, of course, the high taxation on luxury cars, including cess. That remains a challenge because what it has done is that it has not let luxury cars grow beyond 1 per cent (of the total automobile markets in India). It is just hovering around 1 per cent and in last year 2020 it could have dropped probably 0.7-0.8 per cent," he added. —PTI

Over 1.26 cr join stock
market rush in last one yrRAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 17

The Covid period saw a record number of new investors joining the stock market, with at over 1.26 crore unique client code being added during the last one year, taking the total to over 5.96 crore registered investors as on January 15, 2021.

Of these, the maximum, of over 27 lakh investors, were added in Maharashtra and in per cent term the maximum rise at 71 per cent, or over 6.55 lakh investors, was registered from Telangana against the all-India annual rise of 26.86, BSE data shows.

Telangana added 6,55,354 unique code

clients in the last one-year period, taking the total registered investors tally in the state to over 15.70 lakh. Andhra Pradesh added over 6.77 lakh new investors at an annual growth rate of 27.46 per cent.

The largest number of retail investors is based out of Maharashtra, at over 1.30 crore.

Gujarat (11.77 lakh), UP (10.51 lakh), Karnataka (7.46 lakh), Rajasthan (7.28 lakh) and Andhra Pradesh (6.77 lakh) were the states from where maximum number of retail investors was added. Northeastern states also added retail investors at high rate due to their low base.



Washington Sundar (right) is congratulated by Shardul Thakur after reaching his half century against Australia on the third day of the fourth Test at the Gabba in Brisbane on Sunday.

— AFP

INDIA'S FOURTH HIGHEST SEVENTH WICKET STAND AGAINST AUSTRALIA

- Shardul Thakur and Washington Sundar added 123 runs for the seventh wicket in India's first innings on the third day.
- It was India's fourth best stand for this wicket position against Australia. Ravindra Jadeja and Rishabh Pant are the only Indian pair to add more than 200 runs for the seventh wicket against Australia. They added 204 at Sydney in 2018-19.
- Overall, it was eighth century stand for the seventh wicket for India against Australia.
- Washington Sundar became only the sixth Indian batsman to score a fifty on debut against Australia.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

WINNING OVER OZ CROWD WAS SHARDUL INSPIRATION

Brisbane, Jan. 17: When Shardul Thakur stepped out to bat on Sunday, rescuing India from a precarious 186/6 was not the only target on his mind as he was also keen to impress the Australian crowd after being told how "rewarding" it would feel by coach Ravi Shastri.

"When I walked in, the situation was difficult I would not deny that. The crowd was cheering for Australians bowlers. But I remembered our coach Ravi Shastri saying right at the start of the One-day series that 'if you perform in this country, you will be rewarded'," Thakur talked about the inspiration behind the unfazed manner with which he battled.

"People will love you for your performances and that one thing was also on my

mind that people are going love me."

Batting at number eight, Thakur impressed with his stroke-play, his drives coming straight out of coaching manuals. At stumps, Australia were 54 ahead after reaching 21 for no loss in their second innings following India's dismissal for 336.

"Eventually at the end of the day it would help my team, that was the biggest positive. These two things were on my mind. Crowd would make noise, but if I bat well, the same crowd will cheer for me," Thakur said after the day's play.

Cheered, he definitely was by not just the crowd but also his teammates, who gave him a standing ovation on his way back to the dressing room.

— PTI

ENGLISH SMELL VICTORY AGAINST SRI LANKANS

Galle (Sri Lanka), Jan. 17: Sri Lanka rattled England with three quick wickets late on the fourth day of the first Test in Galle on Sunday, but the visitors remained favourites to win the match with just 36 more runs needed and seven wickets in hand.

England were expected to comfortably close in on a victory after Jack Leach took 5/122 with Sri Lanka all out for 359 in their second innings, leaving the visitors needing only 74 to win. But Sri Lanka struck early, with Dom Sibley (2) and Zak Crawley (8) falling to left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya. Captain Joe Root was run-out for one after a mix-up with Jonny Bairstow. Bairstow and Dan Lawrence took a nervous England to 38-3 as bad light brought an early end to proceedings.

— AFP
Brief scores: Sri Lanka 135 & 359 (Perera 62, Thirimanne 111, Mathews 71, Leach 5/122, Bess 3/100) vs England 421 & 38/3 (Embuldeniya 2/13).



Members of the Warangal Urban team are all smiles after winning the TCA Telangana North East Cup U-14 T20 cricket tournament in Adilabad on Sunday.

Warangal Urban win T20 trophy

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 17

Warangal Urban defeated Adilabad Rural by five wickets to win the TCA Telangana North East Cup U-14 T20 cricket tournament at the Indira Priya Darshini Stadium in Adilabad on Sunday.

Batting first, Adilabad Rural managed a mere 113 for the loss of nine wickets in the stipulated overs. Their total was built on an unbeaten 71 by Mohammed Asfan even as Ramu took 3 wickets

while conceding 14 runs.

Warangal Urban replied with 114 for 5 in 18.3 overs, with Rithwik (24) being the top scorer.

Ramu was adjudged Man of the Match, Rithwik Best Batsman as well as Man of the Series while Bhavesh of Adilabad was voted Best Bowler of the tournament.

BRIEF SCORES

■ Adilabad Rural 113/9 in 20 overs (Mohd Asfan 71 n.o., Ramu 3/14) lost to Warangal Urban 114/5 in 18.3 overs (Rithwik 24, Hiranya Dowki 2/17)

FAIRYTAIL!

Tailenders Shardul, Sundar put on a magical stand

Brisbane, Jan. 17: Debutant Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur punched above their weight with splendid half-centuries to keep Australia at bay and India bullish after an engrossing third day's play in the series-deciding fourth Test here on Sunday.

Australia's openers — David Warner (20) and Marcus Harris (1) — saw out six overs, and extended the home team's lead to 54 by stumps after India's first innings ended at 336.

However, Australia's lead could have been much more had it not been for a delightful 123-run partnership for the seventh wicket between Washington (62) and Shardul (67), who defied and then attacked the rival bowling attack with gusto.

"We knew their bowlers were tiring out a bit so it was a matter of hanging in there for one hour. We

SCORECARD

Australia 1st Innings: 369
India 1st Innings (overnight 62/2): Rohit Sharma c Starc b N. Lyon 44, Shubman Gill c Smith b P. Cummins 7, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b J. Hazlewood 25, Ajinkya Rahane c Wade b M. Starc 37, Mayank Agarwal c Smith b J. Hazlewood 38, Rishabh Pant c Green b J. Hazlewood 23, Washington Sundar c Green b M. Starc 62, Shardul Thakur b P. Cummins 67, Navdeep Saini c Smith b J. Hazlewood 5, Mohammed Siraj b J. Hazlewood 13, T. Natarajan not

out 1. Extras (b-5, lb-7 nb-2) 14.
Total (all out in 111.4 overs) 336.
FoW: 1-11, 2-60, 3-105, 4-144, 5-161, 6-186, 7-309, 8-320, 9-328.
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 23-3-88-2, Josh Hazlewood 24.4-6-57-5, Pat Cummins 27-5-94-2, Cameron Green 8-1-20-0, Nathan Lyon 28-9-65-1, Marnus Labuschagne 1-1-0-0.

Australia 2nd Innings: Marcus Harris batting 1, David Warner batting 20. **Total (for no loss in 6 overs) 21.**
Bowling: Mohammed Siraj 2-1-12-0, T. Natarajan 3-0-6-0, Washington Sundar 1-0-3-0.

knew we probably would be on top if we hung in," said Shardul at the post-play press conference.

Pacer Josh Hazlewood finished with a well-deserved 5/57 for Australia, a reward for consistently bowling with an impeccable line and length at a brisk pace.

Symbolising the courage shown by the visitors, now

rendered almost second-string owing to a plethora of injuries suffered by their top players through the four-match series, Washington and Shardul mixed caution with aggression to bail their team out of a precarious 186 for six.

First, they turned unlikely saviours after three soft dismissals pushed India on the back foot, and in the

final session, the two opened up and went after the world-class Australian attack.

If his nine fours were not enough, Shardul bludgeoned off-spinner Nathan Lyon for a maximum over long-on to reach his maiden Test fifty in style in only his second match.

In fact, Shardul opened his account with a hooked six off the world's number one bowler, Pat Cummins.

Playing in his first Test, Washington too soon got to his maiden fifty in the traditional format while finding the fence seven times and clearing it once.

He became the first visiting cricketer in Australia in 74 years to grab three wickets and smash a half-century on debut. The one before him was also an Indian, Dattu Phadkar, who made 51 while batting at No.8 and took three wickets during a 1947/48 tour.

— PTI

Allround Andhra hammer Kerala

Mumbai, Jan. 17: Andhra Pradesh dished out an all-round show to beat an in-form Kerala by six wickets in an Elite Group E match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament.

Kerala, who had won their first three matches in the group, managed to score 112/4 after being asked to bat first.

Andhra overhauled the target in 17.1 overs, with opener Ashwin Hebbar top-scoring with 48.

Kerala lost both openers, Robin Uthappa (8) and Mohammed Azharuddeen (12) cheaply and were in a spot of bother at 28/2. It soon became 30/3 after skipper Sanju Samson (7) also perished early.

Andhra's chase was anchored by right-handed opener Hebbar, who hammered six boundaries and

a six, despite losing partners at the other end.

In Chennai, Bihar thrashed Manipur by nine wickets in a Plate Group match to register their fourth straight win.

Bihar opted to field first and restrict Manipur to 105 for 8 in 20 overs. Chasing, opener Shasheem Rathour hammered an unbeaten 60 and shared a 61-run second-wicket stand with Babul Kumar to take Bihar home in 17.1 overs. — PTI

BRIEF SCORES

■ Kerala 112/4 in 20 overs (Sachin Baby 51 not out; Manish Golamaru 2/19) lost to Andhra Pradesh 113/4 in 17.1 overs (Ashwin Hebbar 48, Ambati Rayudu 38 not out).

■ Mumbai 94 all out in 19 overs (Shivam Dube 28; Santha Moorthy 5/20, A. Aravinddharaj 2/20) lost to Puducherry 95/4 in 19 overs (S. Karthik 26; Shivam Dube 2/8).

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