

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
NELLORE | FRIDAY | 22 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 32.6°C
Min: 23.0°C
RH: 76%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: clear.

Max/Min
temp. 32/23 °C

COVID-19
COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+14,229)

(+285)

1,06,24,702

1,53,028

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+226)

(+1)

TS: 2,92,621

1,584

(+139)

(+0)

AP: 8,86,557

7,142

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,75,68,114

DEATHS

20,89,522

219

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES

worldometers.info/
coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Navami
till 6.27 pm
Star: Bharani till 6.38 pm
Variyam: Nil
Durmuhurtam: 9.07 am to
9.51 am; 12.49 pm to 1.34 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 pm to 12 noon
HJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhri 8,1442 AH
PRAYERS
(SHAHI MASJID)
Fajar: 5.23 am
Zohar: 12.21 pm
Asar: 4.26 pm
Maghrib: 6.02 pm
Isha: 7.17 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.04 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.39 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.52 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 1.47 AM

COUNTER POINT

Not farmers' protest,
it is the Sensex!

SHORT TAKES

Pak sniper kills
Army jawan

Jammu: An Army jawan was killed in a sniper rifle attack from across the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Thursday. The Army and police said that Havaladar Nirmal Singh from 10 JAK Rifles was deployed at a forward Indian Army post in Mankote area of the LoC.

Report on Page 4

Anti-airfield
weapon tested

Bengaluru: State-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd on Thursday successfully test fired a Smart Anti Airfield Weapon (SAAW) from the hawk-i aircraft off the coast of Odisha. The aircraft flown by HAL test pilots Wing Commander (Retd) P Awasthi and Wg Cdr (Retd) M Patel executed the weapon release in a textbook manner.

Sensex crosses
50,000 mark

Mumbai: Equity benchmark Sensex rallied over 300 points to hit the 50,000-mark for the first time ever in early trade on Thursday on strong gains in index majors Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finance and ICICI Bank amid positive global cues.

Full report on Page 7

NATION | 4

SC grants bail to
Kannada actor Ragini

WORLD | 5

Harris credits mom
for showing faith

SPORTS | 8

Pogba fires Manchester
United to the top

FORMER AIADMK LEADER SASIKALA TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

Bengaluru, Jan. 21: Expelled AIADMK leader V K Sasikala, serving a jail term and shifted to a hospital here with complaints of fever and breathlessness, tested positive for coronavirus on Thursday, an official bulletin said. Sasikala, admitted to the Bowring Hospital on Wednesday, is presently in the dedicated Covid-19 Centre of the Victoria Hospital in the city and her condition was stable, hospital sources added. She had developed symptoms of Severe Acute Respiratory Illness, the very feature of Covid-19, but her previous Rapid Antigen and RT-PCR test reports turned negative. However, on suspicion, fresh tests were conducted on Thursday, which confirmed the Covid-19 infection, they said. A Victoria Hospital health bulletin issued late on Thursday said, "Covid Pneumonia (severe based on CT Scan - 16/25), hypertension, hypothyroidism on treatment." Serving a four year imprisonment in a corruption case at the Parappana Agrahara Prison here, Sasikala had complained of fever and breathlessness on Wednesday, a week before her slated release on January 27. She was admitted to the Bowring and Lady Curzon Medical College and Research Institute, also known as Bowring Hospital. Earlier in the day, Bowring Hospital Director Dr. Manoj Kumar H.V. said Sasikala's oxygen saturation level was 80 (against the normal of 95 and above) on Wednesday. —PTI

5 killed in Serum Institute fire

Workers wearing protective gear walk after a fire broke out at the Serum Institute in Pune on Thursday. Five men died in the fire in the five-storeyed building under construction at Serum's Manjari premises. All the victims were construction workers whose bodies were recovered by fire brigade personnel from the fifth floor, police said. Nine other workers were evacuated from the spot. The Manjari facility is where the Covishield vaccines used in the nationwide inoculation drive against the pandemic are made. However, Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla said Covishield vaccine production won't be affected due to the fire. ■ Report on Page 4 — AFP

4 Indian fishermen killed as Lanka Navy rams boat

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI/
RAMANATHAPURAM, JAN. 21
India on Thursday lodged a "strong protest" with Sri Lankan foreign minister Dinesh Gunawardena in Colombo over the death of three Indian fishermen and a Sri Lankan national in a "collision" between their vessel and a Sri Lankan naval craft. New Delhi also emphasised to Colombo the "need to deal with issues pertaining to fishermen in a humanitarian manner" and adherence to the "existing understandings between the two governments" in this regard, adding that "utmost efforts should be made (by Sri Lanka) to ensure that there is no recurrence" of such an incident. The tragic incident reportedly took place three days ago after which the Sri Lankan Navy on Thursday recovered the bodies of the four deceased. The Indian Tamil fishermen claim that the Sri Lankan Navy deliberately rammed a fishing boat resulting in the deaths while the Sri Lankan Navy has reportedly claimed that it was the

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fishing boat that collided with its naval craft after the Indian fishermen were resisting arrest for fishing in Sri Lankan waters. Fishermen on Thursday launched a black flag protest in Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu. The Federation of Traditional fishermen of Rameswaram also filed a Habeas corpus petition in the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on the issue on Thursday, said Chinnathambi, coordinator of the federation. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, meanwhile, announced a relief of ₹10 lakh each to the families of the dead fishermen. He also promised compensation for the boat that was sunk and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take up the issue with Sri Lanka.

FARMERS REJECT GOVT'S OFFER TO FREEZE 3 LAWS

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 21
The agitating farmers' unions on Thursday rejected the Centre's offer to suspend the three controversial agricultural reform laws for 18 months and set up a joint committee to address their grievances. The unions also rejected a suggestion by the Delhi police to hold their proposed Republic Day tractor rally on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway instead of Outer Ring Road. In a general body meeting of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the umbrella body of the protesting farmers' unions, the members reiterated their demand for a full repeal of the three laws and enacting of legislation for remunerative MSP. ■ Full report on Page 4

STRONG FAITH Receipts being issued on the spot for donations

Ram temple in pink granite

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 21
Only pink granite stones will be used for construction of the Lord Ram Temple in Ayodhya. No steel or cement will be used as the structure should withstand the vagaries of a 1,000 years, said national general secretary of Viswa Hindu Parishad, Milundu Parande, here on Thursday. Speaking to media the RSS Office here, the VHP

leader said the architect firm that built the Somnath temple in Saurashtra region of Gujarat will take up the work in Ayodhya too. Devotees of Lord Ram are going from door-to-door to meet 13 crore families in a drive from January 15 to 30 to collect donations as part of the Shri Ram Jamabhoomi Mandir Nirman Nidhi Samarpan Abhiyaan. He said receipts are issued on-the-spot for the contributions and

appealed to the people to donate what they can afford to. Some 3.50 lakh Hindus had lost their lives for the cause of the Ram Mandir, he said. The VHP leader said 13,000 Sri Rama temples existed in Andhra Pradesh. Abhiyan activists would meet one crore families living in rural areas to collect donations. "Right from President Ramnath Kovind, people from all walks of life are giving

donations for the Ram Mandir construction," Parande said. "There is no protection to Hindu temples, idols, and chariots in Andhra Pradesh after Jaganmohan Reddy became the CM," he alleged. VHP southern region secretary Kesav Hegde, RSS state president Nagareddy Harikumar Reddy, Sri Maheswar Swamy, and Mukku Radhakrishna were also present at the media meet.

CM launches 2.5k vans for rations

To deliver fine rice at doorsteps from Feb. 1

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21
Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday flagged off a fleet of 2,500 mobile dispensing units (MDU vans) to deliver ration with better quality, 'sorted swarna' variety medium-slender rice from the public distribution system at people's doorsteps from February 1.

These MDUs meant for Krishna, Guntur and West Godavari districts will ferry quality rice and essential commodities right at the homes of all ration cardholders. The scheme would be extended to other districts in stages after ensuring availability of more vehicles. The CM saw off the vehicles at Benz Circle in the heart of the city. They moved in four columns and went past the dais to their respective directions. He inspected the units and the reusable bags used for ration distribution. Ministers Kodali Venkateswara Rao, Perni Venkateswara Rao, Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy, Cherukuvada Ranganatha Raju, Vellampalli Srinivas, other MPs, MLAs, MLCs

Mobile dispensing vehicles for ration line up on the Beach Road during the inauguration in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

and officials were present. The CM said the aim is to ensure that every ration card holder including the elderly, the differently-abled and daily wage workers got their monthly ration on time and without hassles. He promised people that he would address all such issues during his padayatra. Malnourishment among the underprivileged due to consumption of adulterated supplies has been a worry for long and hence the supply of quality rice

to card-holding families, he said. Eradication of corruption is also aimed at. The scheme would do away with the role of middlemen in distribution. Adequate, quality and nutritious supplies would be ensured to the poor. This is the first time the state has launched a door-to-door delivery system for PDS rice and this will help 1.4 crore families availing ration. ■ Page 2: ₹830 cr annually for door delivery

HC gives green signal for local polls from Feb. 5

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

In a setback to the Andhra Pradesh government, the AP High Court has allowed the conduct of gram panchayat polls scheduled to be held in four phases from February 5 to 17 in the state. A division bench comprising Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and Justice C. Praveen Kumar delivered the verdict here on Thursday, allowing conduct of polls after setting aside an interim order issued by a single judge suspending the election process.

The High Court observed that as the conduct of election and vaccination programmes were of vital importance for the people, it asked both the state government and State Election Commission to make endeavours to ensure that both were to be conducted smoothly and successfully. The court said that the State Election Commissioner addressed the issue of the vaccination programme raised by the state government. It observed that the commissioner may not have agreed with the views of the government on conduct of polls, even though a consultation took place between both sides.

The court opined that the single judge did not assign any reason in which aspects the SEC failed to consider the state government's views on conduct of elections and how the conduct of elections would hamper vaccination process, as the SEC maintained that vaccination for category-I and II beneficiaries would not affect polls in any way, while election process would be completed before launch of vaccination for more than 93 lakh people in category-III. The court said that conduct of elections to panchayats, municipalities and even legislative Assembly in the height of

SEC poll plan not feasible: AP tells SC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

The Andhra Pradesh government filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court on Thursday expressing its difficulty to conduct the gram panchayat polls as scheduled by the State Election Commission and hold the Covid-19 vaccination programme simultaneously, following the High Court's verdict

allowing the elections to be held. The SLP followed the High Court verdict earlier in the day allowing conduct of the polls despite objections from the state government. The government's main contention in the SLP is that employees were now pre-occupied with the Covid-19 management and vaccination programmes.

■ Page 2: Can't put lives of staff at risk: Sajjala

GOVT EMPLOYEES TO PROTEST POLLS IN COVID

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

Government employees who want the rural local body elections held after completion of the Covid-19 vaccination process have decided to file a petition in the Supreme Court on Friday, objecting to the scheduling of the polls in February. ■ Report on Page 2

SEC TO CONDUCT POLLS AS PER SCHEDULE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

After the High Court verdict allowing the holding of gram panchayat polls, State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar on Thursday announced that the poll panel was going ahead to conduct the elections on schedule. ■ Report on Page 2

Covid-19 pandemic was not a dispute as the Supreme Court in the case of Satish Kumar Sharma issued an order on October 8, last year, directing the State Election Commission in Rajasthan to notify elections for municipal corporations in a week. The court observed that the SEC had decided to fulfil its obligation to hold elections as it was overdue by almost two-and-half-years. It said the interim order issued affected the valuable right of the SEC to carry out its constitutional requirement of holding elections to gram panchayats. It said it

failed to understand how the commissioner was acting mala fide in the sense of pursuing an illegitimate aim. Earlier, in the course of arguments during hearings held in the court, advocate general S. Sriram appearing for the state government, said the writ appeal filed by the SEC seeking to set aside the single judge's order suspending election schedule, was not maintainable under Clause 15 of the Letters Patent, saying that the impugned order was not a judgement. ■ Page 2: AG draws HC attention to SEC letter

SHORT TAKES

Pothula Suneetha elected as MLC

Vijayawada: Pothula Suneetha, representing the YSRC, has been elected uncontested as a member of the AP Legislative Council in the bypoll. The office of Chief Electoral Officer in a statement issued here on Thursday said that in the bypoll held for one casual vacancy for AP Legislative Council under MLAs quota, Suneetha was duly elected uncontested.

CID: PROBE INTO CHARGES AGAINST PASTOR ON TRACK

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

The CID informed that investigation in the pastor Praveen Chakravarthy's issue about conversion of villagers is progressing.

In a press release here on Thursday, CID officials informed that Singam Venkata Srilakshminarayana, resident of Pandaripuram, Guntur lodged a complaint on January 12 in the CID police station at Mangalagiri against Praveen. The complainant stated that in YouTube, he found a video of the pastor who stated that idols of Hindu gods were fake. He enclosed a CD containing the video of Praveen's statement.

The report disclosed a cognizable offence and the same was registered as Case in Cr.No.1 of 2021 of Cyber Crime Police Station, CID U/s 153 A, 153B(1) (c), 505(1)(c), 505(2), 295(A), 124(A), 115 IPC r/w 66 (F) of Information Technology Act. The investigation officer and his team acted fast and verified the facts and arrested the accused a day later.

The pastor was produced before court, which sent him jail on January 13 midnight. The inquiry officer filed a petition for police custody on January 18, and the court gave orders for custody the next day and raids were conducted at his residence, orphanage and office at Kakinada. The police custody ends on Saturday.

The investigation done so far is to ascertain the statements given by accused regarding the conversion of villages into Christian villages and destroying idols.

ACTION SOUGHT ON SAND, CEMENT SYNDICATES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 21

The Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI) Visakhapatnam chapter Chairman P. Koteshwara Rao demanded action against the syndicates of cement and steel companies which have enhanced the prices of raw material that is essential for the construction sector.

Talking to the media persons in Visakhapatnam on Thursday, he accused the cement and steel companies syndicates are blaming the builders and levelling false allegations against them.

A milestone in country's history: Amjad Basha

AP govt will launch quality ration delivery from Feb. 1: Deputy CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 21

Deputy Chief Minister SB Amjad Basha and Kadapa district in-charge as also state education minister Adimulapu Suresh have said here that the "Jagananna government" is one that serves the people in best possible ways.

While Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy flagged off 2,500 ration door delivery vehicles for Krishna, Guntur and West Godavari districts across Vijayawada Benz Circle on Thursday, the two ministers distributed 514 mobile vehicles to beneficiaries at the municipal ground in Kadapa district.

Deputy Chief Minister Amjad Basha said at the event that the government's launch of vehicles for quality ration delivery across the state from February 1 is a milestone in the country's history. "Apart from this, our government is credited with providing jobs and similar opportunities to four lakh people."

Minister Suresh said as CM Jagan has embarked on a new programme, it proved that every word he spoke and promise made during the Padayatra are acted upon. Jagan has already successfully implemented several welfare schemes and is ruling the state in his own style, the minister said.

District collector Chevuru Harikiran said the state government is facilitating the village self-government system dreamed of by Mahatma Gandhi and providing several public services at rural level through the village secretariats. State government agriculture adviser Ambati Krishnareddy and MLA Sudhir Reddy said that for the first time in the country, Jagan as CM has launched an innovative programme in the form of a new public distribution system.

IN EG, 1076 MOBILE DISPENSING UNIT VEHICLES FLAGGED OFF

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 21

Nearly 1076 Mobile Dispensing Unit Vehicles have been flagged off for East Godavari district covering 19 assembly constituencies.

Joint collector G. Lakshmisha said each vehicle will be supervised by a Village Revenue Officer and the ration would be supplied to the doorsteps of 16.24 lakh beneficiaries in the district.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, minister for civil supplies Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao, Bapatla MP Nandigam Suresh others flag off to Newly Vehicles at Benz Circle in Vijayawada on Thursday.

₹830 crore annually for door delivery

From page 1

The government will be spending an additional ₹830 crore per year to enable door-delivery of essential rations across the state, the CM said.

The government spent ₹539 crore to procure 9,260 vehicles. The CM said that simultaneously, the AP government will support the unemployed by way of providing livelihood to 9,260 unemployed youths from SC/ST/BC/ETC and minority communities. The CM has promised transparency via use of

biometrics and continuous social audit. The ration is delivered in public presence, thereby putting an end to black-marketing.

The rice bags would be packed with a tamper-proof seal. During the previous government's term, people had rejected the PDS system

saying the TD government distributed damaged, discoloured and chalky grains. The YSRC government would distribute only better-quality, medium-slender rice to all rice cardholders, the CM said.

A new chapter in PDS, says Avanti

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 21

Minister for tourism and culture Muttamsetti (Avanti) Srinivasa Rao said formal launch of PDS mini trucks that would carry the rice and groceries to the door-steps of beneficiaries is a new chapter in the public distribution system. He along with minister for agriculture K. Kannababu flagged off the vehicles at a ceremonial event on the RK Beach Road.

Addressing a gathering, Srinivasa Rao said 828 mini trucks would operate in the district that would carry rice and other goods to 18 lakh beneficiaries. The vehicles costing ₹6 lakh each have been allotted to unemployed SC, ST, BC and Minority youths by way of loan and collecting only 10 per cent as margin money.

He said, initially, a pilot project was launched in Srikakulam and after suc-

cess of the project, it was launched all over the state.

"The beneficiaries were facing difficulties in getting their ration from dealers. There was cheating and harassment by dealers. Under the present system, quality goods weighed with electronic machines will be delivered at homes," the minister said.

He also said the scheme would be more beneficial in rural and agency areas where road accessibility was less. All district MLAs were present.

In Srikakulam, deputy chief minister Dhanmanthi Krishna Das and minister for fisheries Seediri Appalaraju launched the scheme at Kodi Ramamurthy stadium in the town. Around 530 vehicles were paraded in the town after the launch. Lok Sabha member Bellana Chandrasekhar launched 458 vehicles in Vizianagaram district.

DOOR DELIVERY SPARES ORDEALS OF WAITING BEFORE RATION SHOPS: ANIL

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 21

Minister for water resources Dr P. Anil Kumar Yadav said the idea behind the door delivery of essential commodities is to ensure their quality and quantity apart from saving the ordeals for the aged and the differently-abled, of going out to shops and taking the ration.

Addressing a gathering after flagging off the vehicles meant for the door delivery programme in Nellore on Thursday, he said the system would spare the people of the need to wait for hours at ration shops in situations like of technical glitches and non-availability of dealers.

Referring to the frequent complaints against the dealers on the quantity and quality of products, he said there is no role for them in the new system where packed materials are being delivered through the vehicles.

Crediting the Chief Minister with the grand vision to devise such systems despite criticism about the expenditure thus incurred for managing the vehicles, Anil Kumar said the initiative is generating employment for more than 500 people in each district.

Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said the programme covers all rural and municipal areas of the district. They would hand over fine rice from February 1 to around 8 lakh beneficiaries.

He also said the department is providing orientation to drivers put on the distribution system this month. A VRO would also be attached to the distribution vehicle for hassle-

Gram panchayat polls to be held as per schedule: SEC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

After the High Court verdict allowing the holding of gram panchayat polls, State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar on Thursday announced that the poll panel was going ahead to conduct the elections on schedule.

The State Election Commission (SEC) had issued the election schedule on January 8 to conduct gram panchayat polls in four phases on February 5, 9, 13 and 17.

In a statement issued here on Thursday, Kumar announced that the model code of conduct had come into effect following the High Court judgment, and said that the Chief Secretary had been informed to bring it to the notice of the collectors to ensure that public representatives are not associated with distribution of benefits as it would influence voters in the rural areas.

He said that the SEC would hold a meeting with the Chief Secretary, the Director General of Police, collectors and superintendents of police with regard to making arrangements for the elections.

Kumar said that the SEC was concerned about the safety of the poll staff and the voters and said the government should take measures to ensure their safety. Maintenance of law and order was an area of focus for the SEC in the wake of past experience involving violence during the elections. He asked for cooperation from all the stakeholders for conduct of the elections in a fair and peaceful manner and urged all voters to exercise their franchise to strengthen the gram panchayats as they were having a significant role to manage the Covid-19 epidemic and other issues.

He said that it was the constitutional mandate of the Election Commission to conduct polls and the gram panchayat polls were a process of empowerment envisioned by the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution.

Earlier, Kumar offered prayers at the Lord Venkateswara temple at Dwaraka Tirumala in West Godavari. The temple authorities welcomed him with temple honours.

At Kadapa, BJP state secretary Nagothu Ramesh Naidu said they welcome the High Court verdict. "We are ready for the panchayat elections," he said.

Speaking to reporters in Rajampet, he said the government should take initiative to ensure smooth conduct of local body elections. He said that our system has the capacity to conduct elections on the one hand while facing the pandemic.

AG draws attention of HC to SEC letter

From page 1

He contended that the single judge exercised his discretion to pass an interim order in a judicious manner, keeping in mind the facts and circumstances of the case. He said the appellate court ought not to interfere in such exercise of discretion and substitute its opinion, unless such exercise of discretion found to be incorrect or untenable.

The AG drew the attention of the court to a letter written by the election commissioner on October 28, 2020, addressed to the Union home secretary, attributing motive to the YSR Congress government, stating that it was determined not to hold elections in his tenure as it was going to be over by next March. He referred to another letter written to

the Governor on the same day, stating that the government was not intending to conduct elections as he would be strict in holding free and fair elections.

The AG said the state government wanted the election to be deferred until completion of the first phase of vaccination while the election commissioner wanted the election to be held in his tenure, even at the cost of large public interest, public health and unmindful of the vaccination programme.

State Election Commissioner's senior counsel D.V. Srirama Murthy dismissed the allegations on the commissioner that he had a predetermined bent of mind to conduct elections and consultations with the state government were a mere formality, saying they were "baseless".

CAN'T PUT LIVES OF STAFF AT RISK: SAJJALA

from page 1

It would be difficult to simultaneously handle the vaccination programme and the gram panchayat polls, the SLP stated. The government expressed the fear that performing both the tasks at the same time could jeopardise the safety of the general public and the employees. It sought the intervention of the apex court to set aside the high court order.

Meanwhile, state government adviser (public affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said the government cannot put the lives of employees in peril by forcing them hold the gram panchayat polls. The state government should not be blamed if the Covid-19 pandemic spread aggravated as a result of simultaneous polls.

Speaking to the media, Reddy slammed Telugu Desam chief N. Chandr-

ababu Naidu for "spreading lies" such as "arrest" of former TD president K. Kala Venkata Rao. The police only served a notice on Rao under section 41-A CrPC, asking him to report for an inquiry. Naidu was also making false allegations against the state DGP, he said, and added that such derogatory remarks could invite defamation suits and payment of compensation.

The adviser played Naidu for his "insulting" remarks about the idols of gods and in particular of Lord Ram. Naidu used expressions like 'beheading' of Ram idol. "It only reflected his mental state."

On desecration of the Nandeeswar statue at Santhabommali, Reddy alleged that TD leaders were behind the recent attacks on temples. "TD leaders are trying to save their face after CCTV footage exposed their wanton acts."

GOVT EMPLOYEES TO FILE A PETITION IN SUPREME COURT AGAINST HC VERDICT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

Government employees who want the rural local body elections held after completion of the Covid-19 vaccination process have decided to file a petition in the Supreme Court on Friday, objecting to the scheduling of the polls in February.

The leaders of the AP Government Employees Federation and Employees Joint Action Committee said that it was not possible to hold the vaccination

drive while conducting the elections; they wanted the polls to be scheduled after the inoculation process was complete.

Federation chairman K. Venkatrami Reddy said, "We cannot participate in the elections as there is a threat to our lives." He said that they were not against the elections but wanted them held after the Covid-19 vaccination process in two months. There is no need to rush into the elections amidst fears of Covid-19 resurfacing.

DHARMA | PARIRAKSHANA

Police say TD leaders violated rules by holding a bike rally and arranging noisy sound systems

Tension in Tirupati as cops foil TD's yatra, detain key leaders

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI/KADAPA/VISAKHA PATNAM, JAN. 21

Tense situation prevailed for some time in Tirupati when Telugu Desam leaders were to take out a 'Dharma Parirakshana Yatra' to protest against the spate of attacks on temples in the state.

The Tirupati urban police foiled the yatra, scheduled to take-off from here, covering seven Assembly segments under Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency and spread across Nellore and Chittoor districts.

Police detained several leaders, including TD state president Kinjarapu Atchannaaidu, leaders like Nakka Anand Babu, Amarnath Reddy, Nimmala Rama Naidu, A. Satya Prasad, Panabaka Lakshmi and Sugunamma. It is pertinent to mention that Tirupati Urban police on Wednesday evening accorded permission for conducting the Yatra under certain rules and conditions. It was scheduled to take-off with a rally from Alipiri to NTR statue, where a public meeting was also planned before the commencement of the yatra. However, the police withdrew the permission Thursday morning and served notices to leaders, citing that they had violated

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu demanded the DGP Gautam Sawang to resign from the post if he cannot respect his uniform and alleged that forcible conversions had become part of YSRC vote bank politics. Naidu on Thursday termed it as a 'dangerous thinking' on the part of the YSRC Congress government to make false arrests in the Ramatheertham temple

rules by holding a bike rally and arranging heavy sound systems.

At Alipiri, tens of party leaders and workers were taken into custody and police thwarted a bid to conduct a public meeting in Town Club circle, where the party workers arranged heavy sound systems.

Also, high tension prevailed at the private hotel where a strong police force foiled attempts of activists to barge into the hotel for the release of their leaders, including Atchannaaidu.

However, Atchannaaidu made it clear that 'Dharma

case with the ulterior motive of terrifying and suppressing the voice of the opposition cadre and the general public. He condemned the late-night arrest of senior TD leader K. Kala Venkatrao regardless of the fact that he was a non-controversial 69-year-old leader with 40-year credible standing.

Addressing a press conference here, Naidu demanded Sawang to explain what crime Venkatrao had committed. He said it was high time that Sawang follows

Parirakshana Yatra' would continue, no matter the hurdles and roadblocks at the behest of YSRC leaders.

"House arrests and huge police force deployment will not deter the TD's spirit from conducting the yatra. Today, the high-handed behaviour by the police is part of the harsh measures of the government, which is trying to suppress peaceful and democratic protests against the spate attacks on Hindu temples", Atchannaaidu said while addressing the media later.

At Kadapa, leaders and party activists staged protests

the Indian Penal Code to safeguard rights of the people but not follow the 'Jagan Reddy Penal Code'. He stated that if the DGP cannot overcome pressure from ruling party leaders to implement the rule of law, then he should resign and pack his bags.

Naidu stated that the government was daydreaming that the TD leaders could be suppressed through fabricated cases and arrests. He deplored that there was no proper response from the Chief Minister and the

in various parts of the district condemning the illegal arrest of politburo member Kala Venkata Rao. In Kamalapuram, state secretary Kashibhatla Satyasainatha Sharma held a massive rally and staged a dharna in front of the tahsildar's office and submitted a petition to the deputy tahsildar. State executive secretary Bachala Pullaiah said that the illegal arrests of Telugu Desam leaders in the state were atrocious.

Balishetti Hariprasad, another state executive secretary said the arrest of Kalavenkata Rao was an

DGP though the head of Lord Rama idol was cut off and there were attacks on over 150 temples. He said that Sawang should at least respect his khakhi uniform.

The former chief minister welcomed the latest order of the High Court giving a green signal for conduct of panchayat elections. Referring to the Dharma Parirakshana Yatra in Tirupati, he asked the DGP to clarify how the police permission can be given and be cancelled within a span of 24 hours.

atrocious decision. Yatagiri Ram Prasad, former director of the AP Fisheries Corporation, said that the barge was meant to suppress the weaker sections.

There were protests in Visakhapatnam and Anakapalle against the arrests of their leaders in the last 24 hours. Former Anakapalle MLA Peela Govind Satyanarayana said fearing exposure of their deeds, the YSRC government is resorting to such dubious arrests. "YSRC government is killing democracy by making illegal arrests during peaceful protests.

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 21

Defending the Tirupati urban police's withdrawal of permission to the Telugu Desam for holding the 'Dharma Parirakshana Yatra' from here, SP Avula Ramesh Reddy said on Thursday that these leaders were stirring up religious hatred among people in the pilgrim city.

"People from all religions have the right to live in this society with equal rights. The TD leaders are polluting the atmosphere and creating a sense of insecurity among the people. This doesn't make sense. We will not spare anyone coming from outside to pollute the religious harmony in this temple city," the SP said.

Explaining to the media the spate of incidents here during the launch of the Yatra, the SP said the TD leaders obtained permission only for the Yatra in the form of a peaceful walkathon from Alipiri to Town club circle, but they

Explaining to the media the spate of incidents here during the launch of the Yatra, SP Avula Ramesh Reddy said that the Telugu Desam leaders obtained permission only for the Yatra in the form of a peaceful walkathon from Alipiri to Town club circle, but they attempted a huge bike and car rally and a public meeting with heavy-sound speakers."

attempted a huge bike and car rally and a public meeting with heavy-sound speakers."

"On the 19th of this month, TD's Tirupati parliamentary in-charge G. Narasimha Yadav requested us for permission for the Dharma Parirakshana Yatra on the 21st and for use of a mike-set during the walkathon. The urban police granted permission only for the foot-march with certain conditions. We denied permission for mike-sets as they didn't follow the

necessary procedure for this. They were asked to hold the foot rally peacefully with less than 100 participants due to the Covid-19 restrictions and without raising slogans. They were also asked not to disturb the traffic," he explained.

"The TD leaders including state party chief Atchannaaidu and Narasimha Yadav however planned to take out a huge bike and car rally with 300 odd party activists. They also arranged heavy sound systems and mike sets. As these would disturb the pilgrim movement here, we have withdrawn the permission for the Yatra," he said.

The SP also said TD activists obstructed the meeting of the parliamentary committee held in a private hotel here. Leaders including Atchannaaidu, Narasimha Yadav, D. Bhaskar, Munikrishna Yadav, Anand Babu, Rama Naidu, B. Sudhakar Reddy, Pulivarthi Nani and 36 others were arrested under 151 CrPc for rule violations.

SHORT TAKES

DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME ON
DAIRY INDUSTRYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FAPCCI) conducting five-day online Entrepreneurship Development Programme on dairy industry supported by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). The demand for milk and milk products in India is projected to increase by 191.3 million tonnes in 2020. At the current growth rate in the dairy sector, in the next decade supply will fall short of the demand. There are tremendous opportunities for many commercial dairy units in medium and small scale sector. He said that unemployed youth and women and Graduation Post Graduations Degree students can attend the programme and can contact on FAPCCI Mobile Nos: 8008579624, 8391422821, 8309306291 and 08662452256 for registration and details.

KURNOOL AIRPORT
GIVEN IATA
CODE 'KJB'DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 21

A team of Indigo airlines officials visited the Orvakal airport of Kurnool district on Thursday to unspect facilities in different technical parameters to launch commercial operations. The IATA Code proposed for Kurnool was 'KJB', the team said.

The team, comprising Akshay Subbaramu, Rahul Bajaj, Rambabu Mehata, said they had inspected and observed all technical facilities in the airport. The team members told the media that they will conduct a meeting on February 5, and will announce the date of the start for commercial flight functioning.

SET UP CHILDREN'S
ADALATS IN AP:
CHILDREN'S FORUMDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 21

The state convener of the Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) Dr G. Sitaram has requested the Chief Minister and State Assembly Speaker Tammineni Sitaram set up special juvenile Adalats in 13 districts of the state, especially in Visakhapatnam, which will be the administrative capital, to ensure speedy justice for children and their parents.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, No.15186205X (NK) Peddamallu Sathyanarayana is serving in Indian Army of 852 Lt Regt have changed my brother name P.NAGAR JUNA is incorrect in Army document. Correct name PEDDAMALLU NAGARJUNA is correct as per affidavit No-69AA 964085.

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PLOTS

✓ **PLOT FOR sale:** LRS paid 240Sq.yards, Uppal, NewVijayapuri Colony,Behind South India Shopping Mall. Near Rankers Techno School &*Building for sale*: 900sq.yards, 7000sqft building in 360sq.yards in Kothakota, Wanaparthi District. School Recognition up to 2030. Contact 9 1 6 0 0 1 8 2 9 2 (HYMM/2021/C05871)

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Yadadri showcases skills
of Allagadda sculptors

They are credited with creation of Garbhalayam and 60 pillars

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 21

Allagadda in Kurnool district is famous for creators of art works that adorn temples around the world. Be it the Sri Venkateswara temple at Pittsburgh in the US or Yadadri in Telangana state, the idols and the stone-art were all chiseled by the sculptors in this region.

Stating this, sculptor Ravindra Achari from the area said the Allagadda sculptors are credited with creation of Garbhalayam and the 60 pillars with intricate carvings and other works of divine inspiration.

Koilkuntla near Allagadda had made major contributions to the Yadadri temple. It had recently delivered 35 Vishnu idols, each of 3 feet height, said YADA chief stapathi Dr A Velu. With this, the contributions of Kurnool sculptors are permanently etched in history, said Ravindra Achari.

He said Allagadda is



famous for stone art (sculpture) and Daru Shilpa (wooden sculpture).

A top-rung traditional sculptor from this town was Mahasilpi Durugadda Balaveerachri (1926-1986) who won award at the first world Telugu conference in 1975 and was facilitated in Andhra Pradesh Rajatotsav

celebrations in 1983.

Another famous sculptor was Durugadd Ramachari (1935-2008) who served as professor at the Telugu University.

The main contributions of Allagadda sculptors are the Mahanandi Ramalayam (the ceiling in the mandapa and garbhagriha; an exceptional

work of art), the Srisailam Bhramarambha temple, the Chagalamarry Ammavarisala and the Ramalayam at Brahmagiri Matam in Kadapa district. In almost all these places, one can find their portraits carved on the pillars by themselves.

Their tradition was of the Vijayanagara style. Unfortunately, due to commercialization of the traditional art practices, they are now influenced by calendar art or the Jaipur style of work.

"Generally, the all temples including the Srisailam and Tirupati have Rajagopurams (galigopuram) made by stones till rope level and the rest of the constructions are completed with cement and other materials. Now, the Yadadri temple's Rajagopurams are erected only with stone sculptures," Raveendra Achari said.

This was a first time this type of stone works was made, he said.

Mystery behind theft of 3 silver
lions in Durga temple solvedDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

The police cracked the mystery behind the theft of three silver lion statues attached to the chariot of Goddess Kanaka Durga atop Indrakeeladri, which happened a few months ago. A habitual offender has been arrested from West Godavari district, police sources said.

The thief had sold these to a jeweler who melted them. The disappearance of the three silver lions came to light following an audit ordered by the state government on temple properties and tightening of security following the recent incidents of temple attacks. The three silver lions weighed 16 kg.

Following detection of the theft, an SIT was formed by the police to probe the matter. Workers from other states who laboured at the Durga temple, the temple staff and 40 habitual thieves were questioned but in vain.

SIT FORMED IN ALL DISTRICTS TO
INVESTIGATE TEMPLE ATTACK CASESDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

The AP Police formed SIT teams to investigate the recent attacks on temples and recommend ways for better protection of shrines.

Addressing a press meet here on Thursday, DIG Pala Raju alleged that some political parties are targeting the police department for no real reason. Police department had set up special teams across districts to investigate the temple attacks cases.

Earlier, DGP Gautam Sawang had revealed details

of the attacks on temples during the 2020 - 2021 period and referred to 44 cases. In seven cases, no attack took place. In nine cases, the people involved had political background.

Pala Raju said news written in print media and aired on electronic media are based on facts but not so the jottings in social media. He said that the police have been investigating as to who are internationally spreading false news on social media platforms. A few people are trying to bring down the morale of the police department, he said.

The sources said that the West Godavari district police arrested a habitual offender in a property case. During questioning, he gave details of theft of silver lions.

Police got in touch with the Vijayawada police and

detained the man for questioning.

It turned out that the thief sold the silver lions to a jeweler in Tuni in West Godavari district.

He quickly melted it. The jeweler has also been taken into custody.

State administers Covid-19
vaccine to 23,338 beneficiariesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

The state government has administered the Covid-19 vaccine to 23,338 beneficiaries at 616 session sites with no case of adverse events following immunisation in AP on Thursday. The state health authorities administered the Covishield vaccine to 21,814 targeted healthcare workers and the Covaxin vaccine to 1,524 targeted beneficiaries in the state by 6.30 pm.

AP RECORDS 139 FRESH COVID-19
CASES, NO DEATH IN PAST 24 HOURSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

AP registered 139 fresh cases of Covid-19 and no death in the last 24 hours. The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin on Thursday reporting that out of 49,483 persons tested, 139 were infected with Covid-19.

Out of a total number

of 1,27,39,648 samples tested so far in the state, 8,86,557 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,77,893 were recovered in the course of treatment while 1,522 are still active with the virus.

No case of Covid-19 death was reported in the state, and the death toll remained static at 7,142.

Donated lands to be used
for religious activities: TTDDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 21

The assets protection committee, instituted to appraise the assets of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), has recommended the temple trust to ensure that all the land assets donated by devotees should be utilised only for religious activities.

A meeting on TTD's immovable assets with the committee was held here on Thursday, under the Chairmanship of TTD EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy with JEO Health and Education Sada Bhargavi as convener. TTD Estates Officer Mallikarjuna was also present. The assets protection committee comprises Sringeri Sharada Peetham CEO Gauri Shankar,

Kamakoti Peetham representative Retd. Chief Justice Seetharama Murthy, Mantralaya Peetham representative Sridhar Rao, TTD board members Vaidyanathan Krishnamurthy, Govind Hari, veteran journalist K. Ramachandra Murthy and social activist Bayya Srinivasulu.

They recommended the temple body to utilize all assets for religious activities only and also to utilise assets with small areas for setting up goshalas for stray cattle and Gita mandiram, which are useful to the local people. They recommended strategic plans within a fixed time frame to look into the issues.

Earlier, the committee members were appraised about TTD

assets across the country from 1974-2014 and also on the latest status of the assets and assets pending in courts.

It may be mentioned here that the TTD Trust Board has already resolved that the land assets donated by Srivari devotees should never be sold away and the committee is tasked to examine feasibility of utilisation of properties, which are in no way viable to TTD.

Meanwhile, during his remarks after the review meeting, Jawahar Reddy directed officials to utilise the properties in a manner not to hurt the sentiments of donors and ensure that they were used only for spiritual activities. He also called for a re-examination of lease policy terms.

BIE warns of stern action against
colleges charging excess feeDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 21

In the wake of complaints from a few students and parents on the collection of excess fee by the management of some private un-aided junior colleges, the Board of Intermediate Education warned stringent action against them.

In a statement released on Thursday, Board of Intermediate

secretary V. Rama Krishna said that due to complaints on the collection of excess fee, he directed all the private un-aided junior colleges in the state to follow GO Ms No. 57, school education department issued on Oct. 30, 2020 as the state government had reduced the tuition fees by 30 per cent for the academic year 2020-21.

The Board of

Intermediate secretary directed all the principals of private un-aided junior colleges to display the fee particulars to be collected category wise in the notice board prominently.

BIE secretary also cautioned that any deviation from the norm would be viewed seriously and warned stern action against the erring managements.

YOUTH DIES BY SUICIDE AFTER
PARENTS REFUSE TO BUY HIM BIKEDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 21

A 22-year-old youth from Pichatur mandal in Chittoor district ended his life on Thursday after his parents reportedly denied to buy him a motorcycle. The deceased was identified as Srikanth, son of Venkatappa, hailing from Golla Kandriga village under Pichatur mandal.

According to reports reaching here, Srikanth had completed his diploma and currently working at a private company in Chennai. He recently visited his native place and requested his parents to buy a motorcycle for him. Srikanth's parents, however, turned down his request

because of their current financial status. Subsequently, the youth has reportedly gone into depression and consumed pesticide in the forest area close to his village on Tuesday. He informed the same to his friends over the phone before taking the extreme step.

On learning about this, Srikanth's relatives rushed to the spot and shifted him to a local hospital at first, but later taken to a private hospital in Chennai for better treatment. However, Srikanth breathed his last while undergoing treatment in Chennai on Thursday morning. A case has been registered and further investigation is being done by the police.

MAN SLITS HIS WIFE'S THROAT,
KILLS HIMSELF IN SRIKALAHASTIDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 21

A 30-year-old man ended his life after killing his 26-year-old wife, at Srikalahasti town in Chittoor district on Thursday.

According to the reports, the couple Srinivasulu and Manjula have been living in the Project street in Srikalahasti town, along with their two children. Srinivasulu has killed his wife by slitting her throat

with a knife during the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday. He later ended his life by hanging himself to the ceiling.

On Thursday morning, the children found their father hanging to the ceiling and mother lying in a pool of blood. They informed their relatives about the incident. On being informed by them, the police rushed to the spot and collected details about the incident.

TNSF PULLS UP
MLA FOR
REMARKS ON SPDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 21

Slamming Kovur legislator Nallapareddy Prasanna Kumar Reddy for his objectionable remarks against the Nellore District Superintendent of Police Bhaskar Bhusan, the functionaries of the Telugu Nadu Students Federation demanded an apology from the legislator.

During a protest held at the VR College Centre in Nellore on Thursday, TNSF City President Ashok questioned the rationale behind targeting the SP while pointing to various awards he bagged for his meritorious services.

Referring to the MLA's allegation that the SP stalled registration of a case under SC ST atrocities prevention act, Ashok reminded that Apex Court had given clear directions to check facts before filing such cases.

Taking serious view over the adverse remarks of Prasanna Kumar Reddy against the SP in a public meeting at Kodavur segment, Ashok warned that they would lay seize to the house of the MLA if he fails to tender an apology to SP.

Sridhar performs
Chandi Yagam

Nellore: The party office of Nellore rural legislator Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy reverberated with Vedic hymns as the MLA performed Chandi Yagam on Thursday. The office appeared as a holy place following several priests' presence to conduct the sacred Homam religiously.

Shradhanjali

The Dasadinakarma of my father
Dr. G.V.B.K. Gangadhara Reddy
is being performed on
23rd January 2021 at our residence,
6-3-1186/7/2, Begumpet, Hyderabad-16.

This is an intimation of the ceremony
from 12 noon onwards.

G V SIVANAND
+91 98485 16585

IN BRIEF

SC GRANTS BAIL TO KANNADA ACTRESS RAGINI

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 21

The Supreme Court on Thursday granted bail to Kannada film actress Ragini Dwivedi who is in custody since September 4 last along with others in a drugs racket case.

A bench of Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman, Justice Navin Sinha and Justice K.M Joseph set aside the November 3, 2020, order of the Karnataka High Court, refusing bail to Dwivedi and others in the case registered under various provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

The court had heard the matter at length on Wednesday, the order was pronounced on Thursday.

The court noted that Ragini is entitled to get the bail since the maximum punishment for the crime alleged against her is only one year imprisonment.

She was in the Bengaluru prison for the past four months in the arrest affected after a raid on her house in the city on September 4.

Her lawyer noted that the officials did not recover any drugs from her house in the raid on September 4 and yet she was arrested on the charge of conspiracy.

SONU SOOD'S PLEA REJECTED BY HIGH COURT

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 21

The Bombay High Court on Thursday dismissed a petition filed by Bollywood actor Sonu Sood challenging the demolition notice issued by the Mumbai municipal corporation. The civic body has alleged that Mr Sood has conducted unauthorised construction and converted a residential structure into a hotel.

Mr Sood, who shot to fame for helping thousands of migrant workers reach their home from Mumbai during the lockdown, had approached the court seeking interim relief against the notice.

The actor had approached the high court after a City Civil court rejected his plea. Through the petition, he had sought to quash the notice and to grant interim relief by not taking any ‘coercive’ action against him.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) had issued notice to Sood in October 2020 under section 53 of the Maharashtra Regional Town Planning Act, with regard to alterations made to a six-storey residential building in Juhu.

While opposing his plea, the BMC claimed before the court that Mr Sood was a “habitual offender,” who was repeatedly trying to convert a residential building into a hotel.

PM TO TAKE VACCINE IN SECOND ROUND

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 21

With hesitancy slowing down the progress of Covid-19 vaccination drive, the central government on Thursday launched a major drive to convince healthcare workers and others to come forward and take the shot. In the last six days, over 10.4 lakh persons have been vaccinated across India at 18,161 session sites. On Thursday itself over 2.33 lakh beneficiaries were vaccinated, with no deaths due to Adverse Effect from Immunisation reported.

In the last six days, close to 10 lakh persons have been vaccinated across India at 18,159 session sites.

On Thursday itself over 1.92 lakh beneficiaries were vaccinated, with no deaths due to Adverse Effect from Immunisation reported.

However, it is felt that the progress is slow and given this pace of vaccination, it will take much longer time than expected to reach the target of 3 crore beneficiaries in the first phase and may delay the second phase when people above 50 years are to be vaccinated.

The President, Prime Minister, union ministers, chief ministers, MPs, MLAs, and judges will be among those who will get the jab in the second phase.

India on Thursday registered 15,223 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 151 new deaths. So far, 145 persons have been found positive with the mutated UK strain of the virus.

CWC TO DISCUSS ROADMAP FOR NEW CONGRESS PREZ POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 21

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) will be meeting on Friday to take stock of the political situation prevailing in the country.

The meeting is also expected to draw up a schedule for the long-pending organisational elections that could also pick a new party chief.

In the August meeting of the CWC, interim President Mrs. Sonia Gandhi had asked the CWC to relieve her of her duties and pick a new party chief.

The process of internal elections started in September with electoral roles of the party being revised.

Insiders say that an AICC session along with a ‘Chintan Shivir’ is expected to be called after the budget session of Parliament to look for a new President.

Several leaders have come out in the open and demanded that Mr. Rahul Gandhi once again take up the reins of the party.

Several leaders had a written a letter to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi in August last year demanding sweeping changes in the functioning of the party. They also pressed for internal elections for electing the President and CWC members.

Last month Mrs. Gandhi had met some of these letter writers in a bid assuage their feelings and to initiate the free flow of ideas. Back room parleys have also been held with these leaders. The party does not want any embarrassment if a situation arises when elections are not being held.

The CWC is also expected to release a strongly worded resolution in favour of the farmers and against the farm laws. The issue of alleged Chinese incursions is also expected to be taken up. The issue of national security that came up post the purported chats of Arnab Goswami may find a mention.

5 dead in Serum Institute fire; Covishield facility unaffected

Fire breaks out due to an electric fault during the ongoing construction

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
with agency inputs
MUMBAI, JAN. 21

Five people including four men died on Friday in a massive fire which broke out in Pune’s Serum Institute of India (SII). The fire broke out in an under construction building. Six people were rescued by the fire department personnel. However, the production of Covid vaccine would not be affected.

Maharashtra Public Health Minister Rajesh Tope said that the fire is under control. Five bodies were found after the fire was doused.

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray said that as per the preliminary information, the fire broke out due to an electric fault during the ongoing construction works. He will visit the Institute on Friday.

Speaking with this newspaper, Pune police commissioner Amitabh Gupta, who visited the spot, said, “The bodies are yet to be identified.”

A senior official of Disaster Management Unit, requesting anonymity said, “The fire erupted suddenly around 1.00 pm on the fifth floor of a building at the SII complex in Gopal Patti. Primafacie, it appears that the cause of the fire is short-circuit.”

Speaking with the reporters, Mr. Tope said that the fire broke out at a newly constructed building, where work related to rotavirus plant installation was underway. The fire was noticed around 2.00 pm.

“Five fire tenders and three water tankers were sent to the spot. It took around two-three hours to extinguish the fire. Fire personal discovered five bodies when they entered the building after the fire was completely doused,” Mr. Tope said.

The health minister said that the Covishield vaccine’s building is far away from the fire. He also said that the police investiga-



Workers of Serum Institute of India come out of the building after fire broke out in it in Pune on Thursday.

- PTI

tion is underway and a fire audit would also be conducted.

In a series of tweets, SII CEO Adar Poonawalla said, “We have just received some distressing updates; upon further investigation we have learnt that there has unfortunately been some loss of life at the incident. We are deeply saddened and offer our deepest condolences to the family members of the departed (sic).” In another tweet, Mr. Poonawalla said, “I would like to reassure all governments & the public that there would be no loss of #COVISHIELD production due to multiple production buildings that I had kept in reserve to deal with such contingencies at @SerumInstIndia. Thank you very much @PuneCityPolice & Fire Department (sic).”

A team of the National Disaster Response Force was also sent to the spot from Talegaon on the outskirts of Pune. Cyrus S Poonawalla, chairman and MD of Serum Institute of India, on Thursday said the vaccine major will offer a compensation of ₹25 lakh in addition to the mandated amount to families of persons who died in a fire at the company’s premises in Pune.

“Today is an extremely sorrowful day for all of us at Serum Institute of India. Regrettably, there were losses of lives in the fire that broke out in our under installation facility situated at the Special Economic Zone at Manjari,” Poonawalla said in a statement.

“We are deeply saddened and offer our condolences to the families of the departed. In this regard, we will be offering a com-

pensation of ₹25 lakh to each of the families, in addition to the mandated amount as per the norms,” he added.

“We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone for their concerns and prayers in these distressing times,” Poonawalla said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief at the loss of lives in a fire at the Serum Institute of India building. Modi tweeted, “Anguished by the loss of lives due to an unfortunate fire at the @SerumInstIndia. In this sad hour, my thoughts are with the families of those who lost their lives. I pray that those injured recover at the earliest.”

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said it was distressing to learn of the tragic loss of lives in a fire incident at a Serum

Institute of India facility and urged the state government to provide necessary help to the victims and their families.

“While it’s distressing to learn of the tragic loss of lives in the fire incident at Serum Institute, the news of another fire is extremely worrying,” Gandhi said in a tweet.

“My condolences to the family of the deceased. I request the state govt to provide necessary help to the victims & their families,” he said.

The Manjari facility is where the Covishield vaccine used in the nationwide inoculation drive against the pandemic is made.

The building where the fire broke out is part of the under-construction site of the Serum facility and is one km from the Covishield manufacturing unit, sources said.

Naravane: Defence modernization held hostage; flays ‘rigid’ process

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 21

Indian Army chief Gen M.M. Naravane on Thursday hit out at the bureaucratic procurement process holding defence modernization a “hostage” and called for “revolution in bureaucratic affairs” to realize the vision of “self-reliance”.

The Army chief pointed out that the new weapon acquisition policy Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 which came into force around four months back has 681 pages against the earlier policy Defence Procurement Procedure 2016 which had just 450 pages. He said that the former defence minister

Manohar Parrikar had once remarked that our entire procurement process is based on distrust. “We are not being able to fast-track the process of acquisition. It is because we have tried to cater for every contingency and every loophole. This results in acquisition process getting tied up in knots. To that end what has happened is that the process and procedures, rather than the product, have become paramount and these are holding hostage the defence modernization,” he said.

“The laborious and time consuming and often rigid stages of this acquisition process also in themselves, create delays in the acquisition cycle. During this cycle better version of these equipment become available than is in the original contract. “But there is still no scope for negotiations to incorporate these new features and to make any mid-course corrections,” said Gen Naravane.

He said that any contemplated change takes this already delayed cycle back to the start point. “And then you have to start once again so this becomes a vicious cycle. We need to be able to fast track all these things. Since we have made the rules, we should also have the latitude to override them. Rules should be user

friendly for the customer that is armed forces as well as the manufacturer. This waiver clause must be there to cater to operational condition and to accommodate different specifications then were originally promulgated,” he said.

Army chief said that once skis to be used in snowbound terrain were rejected because vendor offered ultra-light skis weighing 1.6 kilos against formulated qualitative requirements of 2 and 5 kilos. Similarly, punji which are sharp pointed spikes used as obstacles, were rejected because it was of 6 kilos against notified requirement between 3 and 5 kilos.

Farmers say no to 18-month pause on 3 new farm laws

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 21

The protesting farmers’ unions on Thursday rejected the central government’s proposal to suspend the three contentious agriculture laws for 18 months and set up a joint committee to address grievances.

The unions also rejected a suggestion by the police officers to hold their proposed Republic Day tractor rally on the Kundli-M a n e s a r - P a l w a l Expressway instead of Delhi’s busy Outer Ring Road.

In a general body meeting of Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the umbrella body of the protesting

farmer unions, the members reiterated a full repeal of the three laws and enacting legislation for remunerative MSP as the pending demands of the peasants’ movement.

Generally, representatives of 41 farmers’ unions had been participating in such meetings. But Thursday’s meeting was attended by about 80 farmers’ unions.

After the meeting, a statement issued by the Morcha said, “the proposal put forth by the government on Wednesday was rejected. A full repeal of three central farm acts and enacting a legislation for remunerative MSP for all farmers were reiterated as the pending

demands of the movement.”

The union leaders also paid homage to the 143 farmers who have been martyred in this agitation which has been going on at Delhi borders for the last 57 days.

The Morcha said, “These companions are separated from us while fighting this mass movement. Their sacrifice will not go in vain and we will not go back without the repealing of these farm laws.”

On Wednesday, when the Centre put forward the offer during their tenth round of talks with the farmers, the union leaders said they would decide upon it only after holding internal consultations.

Banerjee to contest from Nandigram against the backdrop of Suwendu quitting Trinamul

Forgotten Nandigram divided between Didi, Dada

Nandigram (WB), Jan. 21: Two large cut-outs of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her protégé-turned-rival Suwendu Adhikari adorning opposite sides of the street in Tengua bazar of Nandigram sum up the prevailing political mood of the area which is hogging national limelight following the former’s announcement of her candidature from here.

The obscure Nandigram village that shook the base of mighty Left regime and became a bastion of the Trinamul Congress 14 years ago, now stands divided between its favourite “Didi and Dada” amid speculations of Banerjee taking on her trusted lieutenant in the anti-land acquisition

movement, Suwendu Adhikari. Though, the BJP is yet to take a call on fielding Suwendu from Nandigram which he represented in the assembly before quitting after joining BJP, the dashing leader has expressed willingness to take on the challenge and defeat Banerjee in the polls.

Many locals in the cradle of change, Nandigram, were feeling ‘disenchanted and forgotten’ and yearning for another change till a few months back.

But, with the announcement of Banerjee’s candidature and Adhikari, a political heavyweight of the region, who had switched over to the BJP vowing to defeat her, has put the entire East Midnapore district, especially Nandigram, on edge.

“The people of Nandigram are not very happy with the TMC and also have grievances against Mamata di as she hardly visits Nandigram. Had there been any other candidate of the TMC, the defeat would have been imminent.”

But, there is a section of the people who have a soft corner for the TMC chief.

“We can’t forget the tough days of the movement when she and Suwendu da were our only saviours,” Anisur Mondal, a sharecropper who was part of the Bhumi Uchedh Pratirodh Committee (BUPC), said.

Mondal’s views were echoed by local BJP leader Sabuj Pradhan, who agreed that Banerjee’s poll announcement is likely to change the social-political

equations on the ground level. “Till last month the situation in Nandigram was not in favour of the TMC. It will be a divided house if both Mamata Banerjee and Suwendu Adhikari contest from Nandigram assembly.

“If one of them pull out from the contest, the elections will swing easily the other way,” Pradhan, a former Congress leader and part of BUPC, who had recently joined the BJP, said.

Banerjee and Adhikari were heroes of the Nandigram movement.

The feisty Trinamul Congress boss was its guiding spirit, while Adhikari was her general on the ground, holding protests against the SEZ where Indonesia’s Salim group wanted to set up a

chemical hub.

But, after Adhikari jumped the ship, several villages overnight switched sides, and the rival camps took over party offices.

Even as Gokulpur, Gokulnagar, Gopi-mohanpur, Adhikaripari, Heria have turned into strongholds of Adhikari, Sonachura, Haripur, Khejuri, Brindaban Chak, Daudpur, Tekhali remains bastion of the Trinamul Congress.

Sixty-year old Kanchan Mal of Gokulpur village, who was injured during the agitation and her house was set on fire, said despite the anger against the TMC, “both Mamata di and Suwendu babu are like son and daughter of Nandigram. It will be a tough choice for us.” - PTI



A larger than life cut out of West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee put up at Nandigram in East Midnapore district on Thursday.

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

POPE CALLS ON BIDEN TO FOSTER 'RECONCILIATION'

Vatican City, Jan. 21: Pope Francis on Wednesday urged the United States' new president Joe Biden to promote "reconciliation and peace" around the world following his inauguration.

He offered Biden, the second Roman Catholic to become US president after John F. Kennedy, his "cordial good wishes and the assurance of my prayers" in the task ahead.

"Under your leadership, may the American people continue to draw strength from the lofty political, ethical and religious values that have inspired the nation since its founding," he said. "At a time when the grave crises facing our human family call for far-sighted and united responses, I pray that your decisions will be guided by a concern for building a society marked by authentic justice and freedom," the Pope said.

MEXICO LAUDS BIDEN HALT TO BORDER WALL

Mexico City, Jan. 21: Mexico on Wednesday hailed US President Joe Biden's order to halt construction of former President Donald Trump's wall along the US-Mexican border, as well as his other immigration-linked reforms. "Mexico welcomes the end of the construction of the wall, the immigration initiative in favour of DACA and a path to dual citizenship," Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard wrote on Twitter.

He was referring to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme to regularize the immigration status of young people who arrived illegally as children, which Trump tried to shut down.

The Republican sparked anger during his 2016 election campaign when he branded Mexican migrants "rapists" and drug dealers, and vowed to build a wall across the southern US border.

'STRENGTHEN' U.S.-ISRAEL TIES, BIBI TELLS BIDEN

Jerusalem, Jan. 21: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday urged new US President Joe Biden to "strengthen" a long-standing alliance between the two countries, partly to confront the "threat" posed by Iran. "I look forward to working with you to further strengthen the US-Israel alliance, to continue expanding peace between Israel and the Arab world and to confront common challenges, chief among them the threat posed by Iran," Netanyahu said.

The Israeli leader was speaking in a video congratulating Biden moments after he was sworn in as US president.

Netanyahu, who has referred to Trump as the "best friend" Israel has had in the White House, noted that he had "a warm personal friendship going back many decades" with Biden. Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, said it was "not sorry" to see Trump depart, calling him "the world's main source and sponsor of oppression, violence and extremism" and partner in "Israeli aggression" against the Palestinians.

INTEL CHIEF 1ST NOMINEE TO GET SENATE NOD

Washington, Jan. 21: The US Senate voted Wednesday to confirm former CIA official Avril Haines as director of national intelligence, making her the first member of newly-inaugurated President Joe Biden's Cabinet to gain approval. Senate Democrats and Republicans gave strong support to Haines, voting 84-10 to make her the first woman ever to lead the 18 entities of the US intelligence community.

Biden and the Senate are moving quickly to get key members of his government in place, with votes expected in the coming days on the secretaries of defence, state and the Treasury.

Biden, sworn in Wednesday as successor to Donald Trump, has pledged to hit the ground running to deal with several major challenges.

But until the Senate approves his nominees, government departments will be led by acting secretaries and directors, keeping a brake on some of his administration's momentum.

Haines, 51, is a veteran of the intelligence world, having served as deputy CIA director and deputy national security advisor in the previous Obama-Biden administration.

US rejoins climate accord, Muslim travel ban lifted, masks mandatory

President Biden reverses Trump's decisions, sets a clear policy path for new administration

Washington, Jan. 21: US President Joe Biden signed a series of executive orders to launch his administration Wednesday, including a decision to rejoin the Paris climate accord and a mask mandate for all federal buildings.

The orders included keeping the United States in the World Health Organisation, ending the ban on entries from mostly Muslim-majority countries, bolstering environmental protections and strengthening the fight against Covid-19.

Also among the directives was a halt to construction of the wall on the US-Mexico border, and efforts to expand diversity and equality for minority groups in the federal government.

The orders were aimed at reversing decisions by his predecessor Donald Trump and setting a clear policy path for Biden's new administration, just hours after he was sworn in as president.

"Some of things we are going to be doing are going to be bold," he said in the Oval Office.

"We are going to combat climate change in a way we have not done so far," Biden said of returning to the Paris agreement, a treaty signed by most nations in 2016 to limit global warming.

He said his actions on the Covid-19 pandemic, which has claimed 400,000 American lives, would help change the course of the crisis.

His return to the Paris Agreement, which the United States joined Barack Obama was president and Biden vice president, was lauded by other leaders.

"Welcome back," said French President Emmanuel Macron.

"We are together. We will be stronger to face the challenges of our time. Stronger to build our future. Stronger to protect our planet," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also welcomed the move, saying it was a large step for the leading producers of global carbon pollution.

"But there is a very long way to go," he said in a statement.

"We look forward to the leadership of United States in accelerating global efforts towards net zero" emissions, he said, calling for "ambitious" new targets for 2030 and expanded climate finance.

Biden's climate czar John Kerry hailed the move as a boon for "America's credibility and commitment — setting a floor, not a ceiling, for our climate leadership."

— AFP

SOME ORDERS THAT BIDEN SIGNED

● **KEEPING THE** United States in the World Health Organisation.

● **A DECISION** to rejoin the Paris climate accord, a treaty signed by most nations in 2016 to limit global warming. His return to the Paris Agreement, which the United States joined Barack Obama was president and Biden vice president, was lauded by other leaders.

● **A MASK** mandate for all federal buildings.

● **END TO** the ban on entries from mostly Muslim-majority countries.

● **BOLSTERING ENVIRONMENTAL** protections.

● **STRENGTHENING** THE fight against the deadly Coronavirus pandemic.

● **EFFORTS TO** expand diversity and equality for minority groups in the federal government.



A TV screen broadcasts the news of the inauguration of US President Joe Biden at a shopping mall in Hong Kong, on Thursday.



There is a much broader scope of political accord with President Biden. There would be debates about how we can do things well for both countries. Biden represents the interests of the US, I represent those of the Federal Republic of Germany

— ANGELA MERKEL
German Chancellor



Best wishes on this most significant day for the American people! We are together. We will be stronger to face the challenges of our time. Stronger to build our future. Stronger to protect our planet. Welcome back to the Paris Agreement!

— EMMANUEL MACRON
French President

Even in dark times, we not only dream, we do: Harris

Washington, Jan. 21: In her first remarks to the nation as US Vice President, Kamala Harris has highlighted "American aspiration" and underlined that President Joe Biden has summoned the people to look beyond crisis and aspire to unite. Harris, 56, made history on Wednesday when she was sworn in as the first female, first PoC and first Asian-American US vice-president. The former senator was sworn in just before

Biden took the oath of office to become the 46th US President.

"In many ways this moment embodies our character as a nation. It demonstrates who we are, even in dark times. We, not only dream, we do. We not only see what has been, we see what can be."

"We shoot for the moon, and then we plant our flag on it. We are bold, fearless and ambitious. We are undaunted, in our belief that we shall overcome,

that we will rise up. This is American aspiration," Harris said outside the Lincoln Memorial.

She cited the accomplishments of President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, who "saw a better future and built it with land grant colleges, and the transcontinental railroad."

She also highlighted how Martin Luther King Jr fought for racial and economic justice.

— PTI

Harris credits mom for showing faith

New York, Jan. 21: Kamala Harris, who scripted history by becoming the first-ever woman Vice President of the US, has credited her Indian mother for showing faith in her and always reminding her two daughters that "though we may be the first, we should not be the last."

Harris remembered her late mother Shyamala Gopalan, a cancer researcher and civil rights activist from India, saying she has always carried that lesson from her mother with her throughout her career from serving as the first woman District Attorney of San Francisco, to the first woman Attorney General of California, and the first woman of colour to represent California in the United States Senate.

Harris, 56, created history on Wednesday by becoming the first-ever woman Vice President of the United States.

She is also the first female, first PoC and first

South Asian American vice president.

"My story is the story of millions of Americans. My mother Shyamala Gopalan arrived in the United States from India. She raised my sister Maya and me to know that though we may be the first, we should not be the last. Harris said at the Presidential Inaugural Committee's official Asian American inaugural ball, hosted virtually by IMPACT, the leading Indian American advocacy and political action committee on Wednesday.

"Your continued faith in me has brought me to this moment, she said."

She thanked IMPACT and RUN AAPI, an Asian American voter outreach organisation, for their leadership, asserting that the contributions of the Asian Pacific American community are woven throughout the fabric of the US.

— PTI

Harris success inspire students

Montreal, Jan. 21: Students at a high school in Canada were glued Wednesday to coverage of former student Kamala Harris's inauguration as US vice president, saying her achievements would drive them to reach new goals. Harris, then aged 12, moved to Montreal

with her sister Maya in 1976 when their divorced mother relocated the family to pursue her career as a cancer researcher.

From 1978 to 1981 Harris attended Westmount High, which also counts singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen among its alumni. "I find it so crazy that a

woman from this school, my own high school, went and became such a great woman, and now she is the vice president of the USA," a student named Brenda said. Harris was an extroverted American teenager who identified as African-American, former classmates said.

— AFP

Bring ties back on the right track, urges China

Beijing, Jan. 21: A visibly relieved China on Thursday warmly congratulated new US President Joe Biden and urged him to heal and rebuild the severely damaged bilateral ties by his predecessor Donald Trump. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, known for fiery retorts against the US, welcomed Biden's first moves to join the Paris Climate Accord and the World Health Organisation (WHO) which was trashed by

Trump as a puppet of China over its conduct to deal with the Covid-19.

"We express congratulations on the inauguration of President Biden. I noted many US media say this is a new day in America...After travelling an extraordinary period, we believe our two peoples deserve to embrace a better future. We hope Biden will be successful in governance," she said.

"I noticed the word unity has been mentioned several times in his inaugural

speech. This is what is urgently needed in our bilateral relations," she said, adding that over the past four years "a handful of US politicians made so many lies and incited so much hatred and division".

"Chinese and Americans have fallen victims to this," she said and asked the new US administration to bring the damaged China-US ties on the right track.

"We have different social systems, development stages and historical cul-

ture. It is only natural for us to have differences. Just as Biden said democracy should allow the right to dissent and disagreement must not lead to disunion, this should also be true to international relations," she said.

"Countries with different ideologies, social systems and culture can live in harmony and achieve the goal of common development and peace and development for the world," she said.

— PTI

TRUMP'S LETTER 'GENEROUS': BIDEN

Washington, Jan. 21: US President Joe Biden has said his predecessor Donald Trump has left him a "very generous" letter in the Oval Office before departing the White House. It is customary for outgoing presidents to write their successors a letter and leave it for them on the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office.

However, given that the

former president broke several of the past traditions, including by opting to skip Biden's inauguration ceremony and never formally congratulated him on his election win, it was unclear until Wednesday whether Trump would maintain the tradition of outgoing presidents leaving notes for their successors.

— PTI

WOMEN'S | SUFFRAGE

Michelle Obama drew praise from fans on social media for her belted pantsuit in plum

Inauguration fashion: Purple, pearls, US designers

Washington, Jan. 21: Joe Biden and Kamala Harris showcased American designers at their inauguration Wednesday, and Harris gave a nod to women's suffrage, Shirley Chisholm and her beloved sorority in pearls and purple.

Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush also donned hues of purple. Harris has cited Chisholm, a Democrat from New York, as an inspiration for her career. Chisholm was the first PoC woman elected to

Congress and the first PoC major-party candidate to run for US president.

Pearls had a strong fashion showing, in line with a social media campaign that had inauguration watchers donning strands in support and celebration of Harris. Nobody in attendance did them quite like Jennifer Lopez — from earrings to bracelets — as she sang "This Land is Your Land" in head-to-toe white Chanel.

Rep. Barbara Lee, a California Democrat, wore a pearl necklace owned by

Chisholm herself. It was a gift from Chisholm's god-daughter.

"Because of Shirley Chisholm, I am," Lee, who is PoC, posted on Twitter. "Because of Shirley Chisholm, Vice President Harris is."

The pearls Harris wore, by Wilfredo Rosado, were also a symbol of unity with her sisters in Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first African American Greek-letter sorority, said Rachel Torgerson, fashion features director for *Cosmopolitan*.

The sorority's founders are referred to as the "Twenty Pearls." Every new member receives a badge adorned with 20 pearls.

Harris attended Howard University, one of the nation's historically PoC colleges and universities.

"There's no doubt that every part of her look today celebrates who she is, where she came from and where she hopes to lead the country. Every piece was carefully considered and packed with meaning," Torgerson said.

Like Harris, Rosado is the child of immigrants. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders drew fashion praise on social media for his cozy, comfortable inauguration wear: His signature beige parka and a pair of knit patterned mittens. The look earned him his own inauguration Bobblehead to mark his viral fashion moment. It's now on pre-sale for \$25 at the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum's online store.

Jill Biden wore an ocean blue wool tweed coat over

a dress by American designer Alexandra O'Neill of the Markarian label. Aides said Harris was dressed in Christopher John Rogers and Sergio Hudson. Both are Black designers, Rogers from Louisiana and Hudson from South Carolina. Harris' husband, Doug Emhoff, wore a Ralph Lauren suit.

Michelle Obama, a fashion icon, drew praise from fans on social media for her belted pantsuit in plum, also by Hudson.

— AP



Michelle Obama

DECCAN

Chronicle

22 JANUARY 2021

A return to decency in US

will be good for the world

Young American poet Amanda Gorman may have stolen the show at the inauguration of the new US President with her words in verse: “And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.” In a sense, the poetic line summarises Joseph Robinette Biden Jr’s fundamentally reassuring message that the United States can heal while it recovers and rebuilds even as he attempts to reconcile and rectify the stark differences brought to the fore in four years of the Donald Trump era. The sense of calm resolve that Mr Biden, America’s 46th President, conveyed amid rhetoric and realism in bringing up “white supremacy” and “domestic terrorism” might have been just what was required after the tumultuous events of just two weeks ago when the same US Capitol, a pillar of democracy, was under siege.

Mr Biden’s ability to find the right words as he plays the healer who can stitch together the seemingly unbridgeable divide was the highlight. His talk of “American aspiration”, as opposed to the “America First” that his predecessor had emphasised at his 2017 inaugural, was tempered by post-pandemic humility after the US has been scarred more than any other nation with 400,000 deaths and millions more sick. The advent of the new presidency is not so much a transition as a sea change from the rule of his predecessor who showed scant regard for basic science and who upended news cycles with untruths distributed on social media platforms. In the face of crass challenges to democratic traditions, Mr Biden’s call for public comity was comforting: “Let’s begin to listen to one another again, hear one another, see one another.”

“Without unity there is no peace, only bitterness and fury, no progress, only exhausting outrage,” helped echo the ringing truth of old maxims on unity amid diversity that the world seems to have forgotten, thanks to the cascade of crises carried by the virus including the disruption of large parts of the global economy. In a welter of executive action, Mr Biden is bringing the United States back into the Paris agreement on climate change and into the World Health Organisation, besides stopping the construction of the “Mexican Wall” and addressing immigration issues thrown up by a racist and insular predecessor. The liberal revival promises more towards repairing hurt allies and equitable trade deals, obviating the need for tariff or sanctions-ridden confrontations that Mr Trump’s Washington had so preferred.

The dazzling optics of fireworks lighting up Capitol Hill was in keeping with the celebration of the inauguration while celebrity entertainers ushered in sobriety in view of the Covid-riddled times we are living in. There were messages to be read too in the ascension of vice-president Kamala Devi Harris, the first Black American and first person of Indian descent who was sworn in with her hand on two Bibles. The absence of the outgoing President Trump seemed inconspicuous, though he had the decency to leave a “generous letter” for his successor. In the end, the oldest democracy did survive the threat even as the “Proud Boys”, who were eulogised by Mr Trump, began mocking him as “a total failure”. One can only hope the return to decency and truth in America might ease the path to a global revival too.

Is Lone playing BJP games?

The recent decision of Sajjad Lone, the founder-leader of the small Kashmir valley party, the People’s Conference, to leave the People’s Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) not long after the PAGD parties performed well in the recent District Development Council (DDC) election cannot but cause surprise.

The impression it is likely to leave in Kashmir is that Mr Lone didn’t have the stomach for the fight ahead. The PAGD was created to struggle peacefully — using all democratic means — for the restoration of Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave constitutional autonomy to J&K and was squelched by the Centre in August 2019.

Since the PC has pulled out of what is an anti-BJP alliance, the surmise apt to be drawn in the valley is that the PC leader has been brought to his knees by the Centre, possibly through a deft mix of incentives and intimidation — the sorry fate of many in the country.

Mr Lone’s PC is limited to a corner of north Kashmir. Since the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the scene six years ago, the PC leader became the first valley politician to cozy up to the PM and the BJP. But in the environment created when the BJP scuttled its own alliance government with the People’s Democratic Party in J&K (in which Mr Lone was a minister), the latter joined the Gupkar Alliance founded by National Conference and PDP a day before Article 370 was read down and hundreds of valley politicians pushed into jail.

By breaking from the Gupkar group, Mr Lone would appear to have gone back to his position of affinity with BJP. Splitting away from PAGD carries the optics of the weakening of the anti-BJP forces in J&K. But in Kashmir valley such optics are likely to be derided in the present atmosphere. Mr Lone chose a lame explanation for his departure, saying PAGD parties had put up proxy candidates against official PAGD candidates in the DDC polls. This is true enough, but the remedy would seem to lie in taking steps to politically invigorate PAGD, not flit away from it. This is why the sense in the Valley is that Mr Lone’s tail has been twisted by the Centre.

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Transparency needed to

remove all vaccine fears



Karan Thapar

As I See It

I’m used to school-boys squabbling, hacks quarrelling and, even, fish-wives shouting like alley cats but doctors and scientists lunging at each other’s throats came as a complete surprise. Unfortunately, that’s what we have witnessed as differences of opinion, particularly over Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin vaccine, transformed into vicious disputes and nasty divisions. The fact that this is not edifying is the least of my concerns. More important, I fear it is fuelling vaccine hesitancy, not just among the uninformed general population but also among those who are well aware of the need for vaccination.

In its main front-page story, Tuesday’s *Hindustan Times* reported that the average turnout was “less than 50 per cent” for the first three days of vaccination. Out of 7,704 sessions, where 100 people per session should have been vaccinated, only 381,305 people have taken the jab. What makes this low turnout worse is that at this stage it is health workers who are getting vaccinated. These are the people who understand the importance of vaccination. Normally, they don’t need to be convinced. So, if they’re backing off, that would suggest a possibly bigger problem.

It’s this problem that I want to focus on today. At its heart, I would say, is the controversy over the efficacy of Covaxin which, in turn, has been made considerably worse by an inexplicable attack by 49 doctors and scientists on the experts who were the first to raise legitimate questions about the vaccine. Far from allaying the concerns, which are

legitimate and need answering, these 49 gentlemen seem to suggest it is anti-national to raise valid doubts and it is our patriotic duty to grit our teeth and take the vaccine. Well, that is an attitude almost calculated to rile people. And it certainly had that effect on doctors, nurses, ward boys and other health workers.

To understand my point, let’s come to the perceived problem with Covaxin and then turn to the inflammatory critique it has unnecessarily provoked.

The problem arises from the fact Covaxin has been cleared “for restricted use in emergency situations ... in clinical trial mode” although its efficacy data from Phase 3 trials is not available. Two of India’s top virologists, Gagandeep Kang and Shahid Jameel, have questioned this. Their reasons for doing so are simple. Though safe, we still don’t know how efficacious it is. As they have explained, without

credibly established efficacy data we don’t know if Covaxin works or how well it works. It’s being given in the belief that it will but if that turns out not to be the case not only will that seriously damage trust in vaccination, but it could also mean many recipients, who think they are protected and inevitably drop their guard, could end up getting needlessly infected. If this happens, it can only add to our problems.

However, the case against using Covaxin goes further. Experts also say the argument it is an acceptable shortcut in a pandemic doesn’t hold. First of all, both cases and deaths are a fraction of what they were when they peaked in September. So, there’s no emergency now.

Second, we have other vaccines with credibly established efficacy that we could use. And they’re available in sufficient quantity. So, as Dr Kang told me in a recent interview: “I would ask why would you want to give a vaccine without efficacy emergency-use authorisation in these circumstances?”

Now the government’s doctors have advanced a third reason for prematurely pushing Covaxin. They claim it could be better at tackling new strains of the virus. The problem is that there’s absolutely no data to support this. Both Dr Kang and Dr Jameel say it is simply “an hypothesis”. This time Krishna Ella, chairman of Bharat Biotech, which has made Covaxin, agrees. On January 4, he publicly admitted that “it’s only an hypothesis right now”. Isn’t it odd that the government should think otherwise?

In fact, on January 4, Dr Krishna Ella went one step further. Most people have forgotten about this additional point which is why it’s worth recalling. “Just give me one week’s time (and) I’ll give confirmation data”, he said. Two weeks and more have passed but he hasn’t done so. Instead, he’s gone silent on the subject.

It was in the face of such well-established concerns that 49 doctors and scientists decided to vindictively pounce on those who initially raised them. In a statement released on January 14 and within hours tweeted by the health ministry, they attacked what they

called “irresponsible statements by vested interests ... defaming (the) Indian scientific community and casting aspersions upon its integrity by making politicised statements about the recent research in the field of Covid-19 vaccines”. Referring to doubts about Covaxin as “reprehensible utterances”, the 49 sought to wrap themselves in the flag by asserting they have “a vision to make India a global leader in scientific research” and “a name to reckon with”. And, presumably for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s benefit, they added they are “*atma nirbhar*”.

Frankly, it’s not just bizarre but deplorable to frame differences over the efficacy of Covaxin as issues of national pride or as an attempt to run down Indian achievements. Yet that is what the 49 did. No doubt the sound of the patriotic drum they tried to beat was music to their ears, but it turned out to be a discordant and disturbing note for the doctors, nurses and assorted health workers who they imagined would be reassured. It seems to have put them off in very sizeable numbers. As I said earlier, they’ve probably made matters much worse.

So, if we are going to ensure that Indians in their hundreds of millions get willingly vaccinated, we must be fully transparent about the vaccines we are using and their efficacy and not attack as “anti-national” all those who raise legitimate concerns. But if that doesn’t suffice to resolve the spreading doubts, we might have to consider temporarily withdrawing Covaxin till its efficacy is sufficiently and credibly established. Remember, the important goal is to get the largest number of people vaccinated. Which vaccine is used should be a mere detail.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

WE DID IT

Napoleon Bonaparte once said “Impossible is a word in the dictionary of fools”. When our 10 best players were not available, 10 others played with equanimity and from ‘36 all out’ debacle, rewrote history with a 2-1 victory against the Australian team in full strength in their own backyard. It is a cut-throat competition in cricket with “perform or perish”. Today’s heroes will be branded villains tomorrow, if they fail against UK.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

It is heartening to see the Indian team winning against Australia in their backyard. Breaking Australia’s winning streak at Gabba is not an ordinary feat. This series turned a platform for several reliable young players. Many fans had lost hopes after the loss in the first Test in Adelaide. Let us hope the Indian team continues its success.

Dr Mejari Mallikarjuna
Chittoor

BIDEN MEANS BIZ

The new American President Joe Biden lost no time to reverse the controversial decisions of his predecessor. It may be a world record for any Head of the state to issue 15 executive orders on their inauguration day. Thus, the POTUS has signalled his intention. It will go a long way to bring changes in a positive way for the US and the world.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN

Chronicle

Cong-O front to contest all 41 seats in State

VIJAYAWADA, JANUARY. 21

The Congress (O)-led Democratic National Front has decided to contest all the 31 Parliamentary constituencies in Andhra Pradesh in the forthcoming elections.

Representatives of the four State political parties forming the front — Congress (O), Swatantra, Jana Sangh, SSP — met here today and finalised 25 out of 27 constituencies falling within the Andhra area. Out of the 14 constituencies in the Telangana region, the meeting finalised seven, leaving the remaining seven to be decided at a meeting of the four-party front in Hyderabad on January 23, according to a spokesperson for the front.



Rafia Zakaria

How Big Tech

giants finally

dealt crushing

blow to Trump

Donald J. Trump spent the last days of his presidency sulking in the White House residence, isolating himself from nearly everyone and busying himself in making an enemies list, which included his own vice-president. One of the few people seen visiting him was a man who made a small fortune selling pillows on television and is a consumer of the most bizarre conspiracy theories possible.

Washington D.C. was a ghost town peopled only by National Guardsmen called up to defend the Capitol against the angry mobs unleashed by the President’s caustic vitriol. Even these men weren’t quite trustworthy; they weren’t vetted again to ensure they weren’t secret Trump supporters who would compromise the new President’s security.

Of all the humiliations Donald Trump has been subjected to, however, the worst hadn’t come from his political opponents. It came not on the day of the Capitol insurrection or even the impeachment that followed, but on the day that Twitter suspended his account. In an instant, the President who had goaded his supporters to fight

hard, feeding them a steady diet of lies, conspiracy theories and deceit for years, had no means to get in touch with them.

Mr Trump himself was likely stunned when this finally happened. For years, his detractors were hounding social media giants Twitter and Facebook to boot him out from their platforms. None of their entreaties worked: Mr Trump kept lying, riling up supporters, destroying careers, firing high-level Cabinet members, threatening politicians, instigating his supporters to deliver death threats, and his accounts were untouched. Even as he was actively spreading lies before and after the election, lies about mail-in voting, lies about who had won, and lies about rigging, Twitter and Facebook did nothing.

That changed after the Capitol Hill insurrection. Facebook and Twitter finally jettisoned Mr Trump. When an irate President tried to access the official POTUS account and started to tweet from there, that account was also suspended. In a belated purge, the two platforms began to delete pages and other accounts that were pushing for further attacks on the Capitol.

Extreme right-wing Trump supporters, members of militia groups like the Boogaloo Boys or neo-Nazi groups like The Proud Boys and many others immediately cried foul. Twitter and Facebook were engaging in censorship, they claimed, trying to quash speech on the right even as they let left-oriented groups operate without restrictions. The argument reflected just how far Trump supporters are from the one-time conservatives who used to make up the Republican Party. The latter group, with many who have long turned away from Donald Trump, would know, for instance, that freedom of speech and censorship rights do not apply to private companies but to governments. Free enterprise, a cherished conservative principle, stands for the freedom of Twitter and Facebook, both private companies, to kick out whomever they wish.

Annoyed at being booted out, Mr Trump’s MAGA supporters turned to a different quasi-Twitter service called Parler that was geared towards just those conservatives who were against Twitter’s rules of content and moderation. Parler doesn’t moderate any of its

content, allowing anything and everything to be said and shared on the site. In the minds of Mr Trump’s staunchest supporters, this was the ideal free-speech zone, where the harm words can cause was simply no consideration at all. Mr Trump’s faithful, many of whom already had Parler accounts, trooped off. If the liberals in charge of Twitter and Facebook would kick them out, Parler was there to welcome them.

The tentacles of Big Tech, however, could reach longer and deeper than they imagined. Parler may have been a separate service that didn’t moderate its content, but it used Amazon Web Servers to host content, and the app was distributed via the Apple App Store and Google Play. These made it subject to the rules of service of Apple, Amazon, Google, etc. These other tech giants stepped in. If Parler wouldn’t moderate its content, they would refuse to host the site or allow the app to be sold. Ultimatums were handed down; they couldn’t be met, and so the week after the Capitol insurrection Parler went dark. The conservatives who funded it vowed the site would be back, but without web server hosting it appeared this would be a tall order.

Big Tech’s role in first pushing and then ultimately (belatedly) removing Mr Trump will be debated for decades to come. It’s hard not to wonder about how many people would still be alive if Twitter and Facebook had done what they did this January a year ago; they would have denied Mr Trump a platform to spread lies about Covid-19 and the election. A study completed by the *Washington Post* found that in the two weeks since Mr Trump was suspended from Twitter, misinformation on the election and the events that followed had been reduced by a whopping 72 per cent.

Donald Trump, who tweeted hundreds of times a day on some days and whose tweets are now a part of history, will never have access to a Twitter account again. His is a lifetime ban applied not to a particular account but to him as a person regardless of which account he uses. The story of Mr Trump’s end is in this sense as much a tale of how giant tech companies now have the power to make or break governments, even in the most powerful country in the world.

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	49624.76	-0.34
Nifty 50	14590.40	-0.37
S&P 500*	3,854.89	0.08
Dollar (₹)	72.98	0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.02	-0.04
Euro (₹)	88.44	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,125.575	1.17
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.95	-0.23
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.956	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.114	0.024

* As of 8:30 PM IST

SBI Cards net profit plunges 52% to ₹210 cr

SBI Cards and Payment Services Ltd reported nearly 52 per cent dip in its net profit to Rs 210 crore in the December quarter on higher provisioning. The pure-play credit card firm had posted a net profit of Rs 435 crore in the year-ago quarter. Its total income grew marginally to Rs 2,540 crore from Rs 2,563 crore. SBI Cards said its total management overlay provision stood at Rs 1,113 crore in Q3 against Rs 758 crore in Q2.

Asian Paints Q3 profit jumps 62% to ₹1,265 crore



Asian Paints reported a 62.28 per cent jump in its consolidated profit to Rs 1,265.35 crore for the third quarter against Rs 779.71 crore a year ago. Revenue from operations stood at Rs 6,886.39 crore, up 25.43 per cent, against Rs 5,490.11 crore. Amit Syngle, MD & CEO, said demand conditions continued to exhibit a strong recovery across business segments, spread over most regions in the third quarter.

Bajaj Auto PAT jumps 23% to ₹1,556 crore

Bajaj Auto reported a 23 per cent jump in profit after tax at Rs 1,556 crore for the December quarter on the back of higher volumes and exports against a PAT of Rs 1,262 crore in the year-ago quarter, the firm said. Its sales from operations rose 17 per cent to Rs 8,910 crore, compared with Rs 7,640 crore in the year-ago period. The firm sold 13,06,810 vehicles during the third quarter, a rise of 9 per cent.

Cyient Q3 net profit falls 12% to ₹95 crore

IT firm Cyient reported a 11.9 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 95.4 crore for the December quarter. The Hyderabad-based firm had posted a net profit of Rs 108.3 crore in the year-ago period. Its revenue fell 5.6 per cent to Rs 1,044.3 crore from Rs 1,106 crore YoY. On sequential basis, net profit was higher by 13.8 per cent from Rs 83.9 crore, while revenue was higher by 4.1 per cent from Rs 1,003.3 crore in the September quarter.



■ It has taken 30 years for index to go from 1K to 50K Sensex retreats after breaking 50000 barrier

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 21

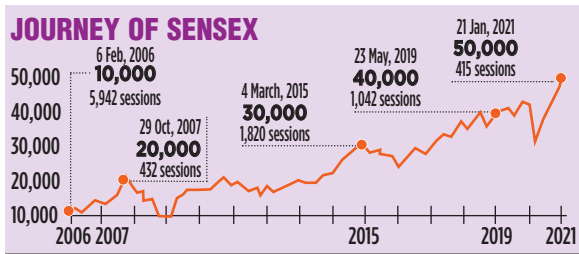
The Sensex breached the 50,000 barrier for the first time ever in early morning trade and made a new all time high of 50,184 on positive global cues.

However, due to profit taking in the last hour of trading, the benchmark index fell sharply from the historic highs and closed at 49,624, down by 167 points or 0.34 per cent.

The broader Nifty-50 Index also made a new all-time high of 14,753 but closed lower at 14,590.35, down by 54.35 points.

Provisional data showed profit taking by the domestic institutions of Rs 1,039.48 crore while the foreign portfolio investors were net buyers by Rs 1,614.66 crore.

The market's rally has been driven by ample liquidity, as foreign portfolio



investors have pumped the highest ever money into Indian market of Rs 2,41,021 crore so far in this financial year; far more than the previous high of Rs 1,40,033 crore in 2012-13. This month, too, they have bought equities worth over Rs 22,730 crore.

From 1990 when the index crossed the 1000-mark the first time ever, it took 30 years for the Sensex to reach 50,000, analysts said.

Apart from the sharp rebound from the Covid-19 inflicted dislocation of eco-

nomics activity, liquidity and low interest rate have been major drivers of the current bull market rally, analysts said.

"The combination of strong capital inflows, low interest rates and leaner balance sheet of Indian corporates along with government measures for growth is expected to lift the economic growth ahead. The same is likely to resonate in capital markets, thereby keeping the markets buoyant in the long term," said Vijay Chandok-MD & CEO, ICICI

Securities.

Nilesh Shah, group president & MD, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company, said, "The Sensex touching 50,000 in 2021 is like Indian cricket team winning test series in Australia against all odds of Covid-19. While economic data is about the past which is improving month-on-month, the Sensex is reflecting the positivity about the future."

"As the sensex crosses the 50K, the valuations do look stretched. The valuations are a function of earnings and earnings not coming through remains the key risk at the current juncture. The continuous up-move not backed by fundamentals may make the rally fragile, going ahead," said Joseph Thomas, head of research-Emkay Wealth Management.

Govt okays closure of Scooters India

New Delhi, Jan. 21: The company that manufactured famous scooters like Lambretta and Vijai Super will be shut down after the Cabinet gave its nod to a proposal to close the loss-making state-owned firm, sources said.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) is believed to have given consent to shutting down Lucknow-based Scooters India Ltd at its



meeting on Wednesday, they said.

The Scooters India brand name shall be sold separately as the company holds famous brands such as Lambretta, Vijai Super, Vikram and Lambro,

shared an official. The company produces several types of three-wheelers under the Vikram brand.

The government's go-ahead to the closure proposal paves the way for the heavy industry ministry to begin the process of winding up of the firm.

As per the proposed plan presented to the Cabinet, Rs 65.12 crore required for closure of Scooters India is being sought as loan

with interest from the Government of India, sources said.

The proposal also entails offering voluntary retirement scheme/voluntary separation scheme (VRS/VSS) to the regular employees. The firm has around 100 employees.

Moreover, 147.49 acres of the company's land shall be returned to the UP State Industrial Development Authority. —PTI

France to shut 40% of cash-handling centres

WILLIAM HOROBIN
JAN. 21

The Bank of France will shut down more than a third of its cash handling centres by the end of 2022 as the Covid-19 pandemic accelerates a decline in the use of notes and coins.

Operations will cease at 14 of the 37 centres that stock currency and replace damaged notes and coins. The central bank estimates the network would be 40 per cent underused if it remained as expansive as it is now.

Lockdowns to curb virus infections have pushed more shoppers onto online platforms, while the raising of the ceiling for contactless payments has encouraged card use. There are also concerns over contagion via bank notes, although the central bank has denied there are risks.

That's given extra impetus to the decline in cash usage, which already fell 20 per cent between 2012 and 2019. The central bank expects a further 25 per cent drop by 2022 from last year's levels.

France, along with the Netherlands and Finland, is one of the euro-area



countries where consumers have traditionally favoured cards over cash, said Erick Lacourrege, managing director of cash, branches and services at the Bank of France. In contrast, Germany, Spain and Italy have been much slower to move away from notes and coins.

"There's a generalised decline in the use of cash throughout the world," Lacourrege said, but "the speed of decline isn't the same in every country, and France is one place where it is falling the fastest in the euro area."

The closures will impact 134 people at the Bank of France, he said. They'll be offered early retirement packages, retraining for other jobs, or posts in cash centres that remain open. —Bloomberg

NSE arm takes over Cogencis

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 21

NSE Data & Analytics Ltd, a 100 per cent subsidiary of the National Stock Exchange of India, has acquired Cogencis Information Services Ltd, which provides real-time market data terminals to institutional customers.

"NSE Data has acquired 100 per cent equity in Cogencis from Samara Capital and minority shareholders, including the company's founder, co-founder, and an employee welfare trust," the NSE said.

The Cogencis Work-Station provides data on all asset classes, including foreign exchange, fixed income, equities, commodities, as well as macro-economic data, either generated on its own or aggregated through various sources.

As a part of the transaction, the news department of Cogencis has been sold to Informist Media Private Ltd. Cogencis has entered into a five-year exclusive commercial arrangement with Informist Media to source news.

IndiGo is now world's 7th biggest by capacity

ADITI SHAH & JAMIE FREED
NEW DELHI/SYDNEY, JAN. 21

IndiGo has emerged as one of the world's biggest airlines by capacity, aided by a swift recovery in the domestic aviation market to nearly 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels and the financial strength to boost market share as rivals struggle.

The airline is now the world's seventh biggest by capacity and the largest outside the United States and China, according to data firm OAG. It is a rare bright spot in a battered global aviation industry, providing a lifeline to squeezed lessors and aircraft manufacturers by paying bills on time and in full.

IndiGo took 44 planes from Airbus SE last year—the most of any customer—and topping Delta Air Lines Inc and China Southern Airlines Co Ltd—as it replaced older planes with more fuel-efficient newer models. It is also gearing up to expand its fleet further from 2023.

With a 52 per cent domestic market share in 2020



versus 47 per cent in 2019, and profitability in sight after a loss last fiscal year, IndiGo is expanding its reach to smaller cities such as Ranchi, Patna and Gorakhpur to replace a fall in business travel on larger routes like New Delhi-Mumbai, CEO Ronojoy Dutta told Reuters.

It is also betting that faster growth and higher margins will come from non-stop flights to international destinations like Moscow, Cairo and Manila, which it can reach with its narrowbody planes, eliminating the need to complicate its fleet with widebody aircraft.

"As things stabilise, I'm very optimistic that by the end of 2021, I think we'll be totally back to normal,"

Dutta said, referring to the calendar year rather than the financial year ending March 31.

"And I think 2022 will be a great year for us in terms of growth and profitability," he added.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought global air travel to a halt, plunging airlines into the red. India imposed one of the toughest lockdowns and even now airlines can only fly 80 per cent of their capacity on domestic routes.

IndiGo already had free cash of Rs 9,330 crore (\$1.22 billion) as of March 31, 2020, a week after India went into lockdown, which it bolstered by raising more than Rs 3,000 crore over the next six months through the sale and leaseback of some assets and other cost-cutting measures.

Once IndiGo can operate at full capacity, it wants to ramp up its utilisation rate to a breakeven level of around 12 hours per day, compared with 10 hours currently, said Dutta, adding it would also be able to fill more seats and reduce unit costs.

—Reuters

Nasscom keen to help US on STEM skills gap

New Delhi, Jan. 21: IT industry body Nasscom said it is looking forward to working with the new US administration to find solutions to the STEM skills gap and enable America to be more competitive and create more jobs.

The statement by Nasscom, which represents the over \$190-billion Indian IT sector, comes after Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th US President and Kamala Harris took oath as America's first woman vice president on Wednesday.

Nasscom said a key challenge the technology sector faces is the lack of required STEM talent in the US and noted that despite a high degree of overall unemployment in the US, demand for high-tech skills continues to remain robust, endorsing the argument that there are just not enough workers with relevant skills to fill them. —PTI

STOVE KRAFT IPO FROM JAN.25

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 21

Kitchen appliances maker Stove Kraft's initial public offering in the price band of Rs 384 to Rs 385 per equity share of Rs 10 face value opens on January 25.

The IPO comprises a fresh issue of shares aggregating to Rs 95 crore and an offer for sale by promoters and private equity investors of up to 82.50 lakh equity shares to raise Rs 412 crore in total.

The net proceeds from the fresh issue would be utilised in repayment of certain borrowings (Rs 76 crore) and for general corporate purposes.

Only 10 per cent share in the public issue will be offered to retail individual investors.

IN RECOVERY | MODE

Luxury car-maker targeting double-digit growth this year

BMW plans to launch 20 cars this year

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JAN. 21

BMW, India's second largest luxury car-maker, is targeting double-digit growth this year, for which it has lined up over 20 new car launches this calendar year in Asia's third biggest economy.

"This year our strategy is in place aimed at double-digit growth. We are launching 20 new cars to create market excitement and sales strategies," Vikram Pawah, president at BMW Group India told *Financial Chronicle*.

He said "the worst is behind us and we are now in the recovery mode at a

higher rate" and new car launches would give fillip to sales.

"Our sales have not yet touched pre-Covid era but we have reached 90 per cent and we expect the demand for luxury cars to come back," Pawah pointed out.

He said India was a strategic and growing market for the German parent company, which continues to invest money in various businesses for growth. At its factory near Chennai, BMW has an installed capacity to produce 14,000 cars annually with 50 per cent localisation, which helps reduce prices.



Vikram Pawah

On Thursday the German car-maker launched its second product, the new BMW 3 Series Gran Limousine priced between Rs 51.50 lakh and

Rs 53.90 lakh at pan-India showroom.

BMW 3 Series Gran Limousine is the second car launch this year and the first out of the 20 new cars for this year was the BMW 2 Series 220i M Sport petrol variant introduced in the first week of this month.

BMW's new product offensive is higher compared to the market leader and its compatriot arch-rival Mercedes-Benz, which plans to bring out only 15 new cars this year.

Audi, Jaguar Land Rover, Swedish Volvo Cars and Lexus are other luxury brands in the country, which experienced a steep

decline in sales last year due to Covid-induced dull market.

Pawah said sales at BMW had dropped only by about 35 per cent to 6,604 units in calendar year 2020 while the luxury car market had slumped much higher between 40 and 50 per cent. Mercedes sold 7,893 cars last year, which is a 42.7 per cent drop compared to 2019.

But Pawah is confident the economy would bounce back and sales volumes would be stronger than before due to pent-up demand. "And we are confident to outperform the luxury segment in India," he said.

SHORT TAKES

Women hockey side stun Chile

Santiago, Chile: The Indian women's junior hockey team rallied from a goal down to script a stunning 3-2 win over the Chilean senior side at the Prince of Wales Country Club here. Deepika (39th), Sangita Kumari (45th) and Lalrindiki (47th) scored for India after Fernanda Villagran (21st) had given the hosts the advantage. Chile's Simone Avelli (56th) pulled one back late in the match, but it was not enough to force a comeback as the Indian junior team secured a creditable win. It was India's third consecutive victory on the tour. They had defeated Chile's junior side twice earlier this week. India started the match on the front-foot, twice penetrating inside Chile's striking circle, but without causing much damage. The home side's first real attack came in the 10th minute when they earned a penalty corner, but to no avail as the visitors defended it well. — PTI

Lewa shines to stifle Augsburg

Berlin: Robert Lewandowski scored his 22nd Bundesliga goal of the season as Bayern Munich stayed four points clear, helped by a late penalty miss from Alfred Finnbogason in a 1-0 victory at Augsburg on Wednesday. Lewandowski's 13th-minute penalty was enough for a win which kept the reigning champions clear of second-placed RB Leipzig, who edged out Union Berlin 1-0 thanks to an Emil Forsberg goal. But Bayern survived a late scare in the Bavaria derby as Finnbogason could only hit the post from the spot with 14 minutes to play. Poland striker Lewandowski has scored 10 goals more than his nearest rival, Dortmund's Erling Braut Haaland, in the Bundesliga this term. Bayern battered the hosts' goal with 15 first-half shots while Augsburg did not trouble the European champions with a single attempt in the first 45 minutes. — AFP

Collin's 42 puts Nets in shambles

Los Angeles: Collin Sexton scored a game-high 42 points as the Cleveland Cavaliers overcame a James Harden triple double and spoiled the debut of the Brooklyn Nets' Big Three with a 147-135 double overtime victory. Wednesday's marathon contest was supposed to showcase the Nets' star trio of Harden, Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving playing together for the first time together. Irving finished with 37 points, Harden had a triple double of 21 points, 10 rebounds and 12 assists and Durant tallied a team-high 38 points and 12 rebounds, but it wasn't enough as the Cavaliers had seven players in double-figure scoring at the Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse arena in Cleveland. Elsewhere, Dallas Mavericks got the better of host Indiana Pacers 124-112. — AFP

No threat to CWG in 2022

New Delhi: The Commonwealth Games Federation is confident the 2022 Birmingham CWG will go ahead as scheduled next year despite the host city's council leader's recent expression of doubts in view of a surge in Covid-19 cases in the UK. The Commonwealth Games are still 18 months away and Birmingham City Council leader Ian Ward last week said "we can't be certain" that the Games will go ahead amid concerns over pandemic. The council leader of town Walsall, Mike Bird, has also expressed concerns over the staging of the Games and has called for contingency plans. — PTI

Live on TV

BADMINTON

Thailand Open: Quarterfinal matches from 9.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Hobart Hurricanes vs Perth Scorchers from 10.35 am; Sydney Sixers vs Sydney Thunder from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: East Bengal vs Mumbai City from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Benevento vs Torino from 1.15 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Warm welcome for warriors

Nation's pride Rahane and victorious Indian team back home

Mumbai/ New Delhi, Jan. 21: Chants of 'aala re aala Ajinkya aala' headlined a red carpet welcome for Ajinkya Rahane as the stand-in captain, along with coach Ravi Shastri and some other members of the team, returned to the country on Thursday after India's epic triumph in Australia. The chants (meaning here comes our Ajinkya) were heard amid the beating of the traditional dhol tasha and showering of flower petals at Rahane's residential complex. Besides Rahane and Shastri, also arriving in Mumbai were star bats-

man Rohit Sharma, pacer Shardul Thakur and opener Prithvi Shaw, while Brisbane Test hero Rishabh Pant landed in the national capital early this morning.

T. Natarajan, who was originally picked as a net bowler but became the first Indian cricketer to make his international debut across all three formats during the same tour, landed in Bengaluru and then took off for his village in Tamil Nadu's Salem.

The players from Chennai, including veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, rookie

Washington Sundar and bowling coach Bharat Arun are currently in Dubai and are expected to reach the country early morning on Friday.

On arrival in Mumbai, Rahane, Shastri, Rohit, Shardul and Shaw were felicitated by Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) officials, including President Vijay Patil and Apex Council members Ajinkya Naik, Amit Dani and Umesh Khanvilka.

Rahane also cut a cake to celebrate the team's win.

However, more surprises awaited the reticent batsman after he drove straight to his housing

society in suburban Matunga, where residents had made elaborate preparations to accord their hero a royal welcome.

Rahane was welcomed with the beats of dhol, while others showered the cricketer with flower petals. Rahane was also joined by his wife and two-year-old daughter in the celebration.

Soaking in the carnival-like atmosphere, Rahane acknowledged the love and adulation showered on him by the people of the city, many of whom waited for his team at the airport wearing masks amid the Covid-19 pan-

demic. In his society, residents and videographers jostled to capture the moments and the unassuming batsman posed happily for them.

Rahane was then greeted in a traditional manner as he walked towards the entrance of the building.

Dhol tasha is usually played to celebrate special achievements and during joyous occasions.

An injury-ravaged India beat Australia by three wickets in the series-deciding fourth Test in Brisbane on Tuesday to clinch the Border Gavaskar Trophy 2-1.

— PTI

Paul punches big as Man U on top

London, Jan. 21: Paul Pogba produced a moment of magic as Manchester United came from behind to beat Fulham 2-1 and reclaim the Premier League lead on Wednesday, ending Manchester City's short stay at the top.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's in-form team started the match third in the table after 24 hours of chopping and changing at the summit.

The win sent the Red Devils two points clear and equalled the club record of 17 Premier League away games without defeat set by the treble-winning side of 1999.

United were forced to dig deep after Ademola Lookman punished them for an untidy start before Edinson Cavani pulled them level with a poacher's goal later in the first half.

Pogba — back in the starting line-up in recent weeks after a spell on the periphery of Solskjaer's team — put United in front with a stunning left-foot curling effort from outside the area in the second half.

United have now won seven Premier League games after going behind this season.

The Premier League race is shaping up to be a thriller, with just eight points separating United from seventh-placed West Ham. United knew they had to respond after City beat Aston Villa 2-0 earlier on Wednesday to leapfrog Leicester.

JUVENTUS NICK PAST NAPOLI TO BAG SUPER CUP

Reggio Emilia (Italy), Jan. 21: Andrea Pirlo won his first trophy as a coach on Wednesday as Juventus beat Napoli 2-0 in the Italian Super Cup.

Cristiano Ronaldo blasted in his 20th goal of the season following a corner on 64 minutes in Reggio Emilia, before Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne missed a penalty and Alvaro Morata added a second deep into injury time.

Pirlo, 41, clinched his first silverware five months after taking over at his former club where he won four league titles.

Juventus won the annual trophy, played between the league champions and Italian Cup holders, for the ninth time, having finished runners-up last year to Lazio.

Juventus sit fifth in the league, 10 points behind leaders AC Milan, after losing 2-0 to second-placed Inter Milan last weekend.

It was the first meeting between Pirlo and Napoli coach Gennaro Gattuso, who won the 2006 World Cup together and spent a decade as AC Milan teammates, winning two Serie 'A' titles and two Champions League crowns together.

Sindhu, Sameer, Satwik in quarters

Bangkok, Jan. 21: Indian shuttlers P. V. Sindhu and Sameer Verma stormed into the quarterfinals of the Toyota Thailand Open after registering straight-game wins but HS Prannoy bowed out of Super 1000 tournament here on Tuesday.

Olympic silver medallist Sindhu expectedly outclassed Malaysia's world No. 92 Kisona Selvaduray 21-10, 21-12 in a lop-sided second-round contest that lasted just 35 minutes. She will face either Thailand's Ratchanok Intanon or Korea's Sung Ji Hyun next.

World No. 31 Sameer also continued his impressive run, stunning world no. 17 Rasmus Gemke 21-12, 21-9 in just 39 minutes for his third victory over the Danish player.

The Indian, who had shocked Malaysia's eighth seed Lee Zii Jia in the opening round, will face third seed Anders Antonsen of Denmark, who received a walkover, in the quarterfinals.

The mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa

also made it to the quarter-finals with a stunning 22-20, 14-21, 21-16 win over world No. 17 German duo of Mark Lamsfuss and Isabel Hertrich in a match that lasted close to an hour.

Satwiksairaj also paired up with Chirag Shetty in the men's doubles to notch up an upset 21-18, 23-21 win over seven seeds Korean combination of Choi Solgyu and Seo Seung Jae.

Prannoy, however, failed to cross the second round hurdle, going down 17-21, 18-21 to Malaysia's Daren Liew.

Meanwhile, Indonesian fifth seed Anthony Ginting suffered an unexpected defeat to Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk-yiu, who moved into the quarter-finals with a 21-19, 13-21, 21-12 win.

— PTI

3rd-tier Alcoyano humiliate Madrid

Madrid, Jan. 21: Real Madrid suffered an extraordinary defeat in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday as La Liga's reigning champions lost 1-2 to Alcoyano, who play in Spain's third tier and had a man sent off in extra-time.

Zinedine Zidane threw on the likes of Eden Hazard, Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos as substitutes, while Alcoyano's Ramon Lopez was sent off in the 109th minute for a late challenge on Casemiro.

But against all the odds, Alcoyano still scored the winner, Juanan diverting in at the near post to pull off an incredible upset that continues a worrying dip in form for Madrid.

After a surprise loss to

Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Super Cup semi-final last week, Madrid have now responded with an embarrassing exit in the cup.

Alcoyano were comfortable in the first period but Madrid scored with their first chance on the stroke of half-time as Marcelo's delivery to the back post found a diving Eder Militao, who headed in.

But Madrid still laboured in the second half, even after Benzema replaced Mariano Diaz, and Alcoyano equalised in the 82nd minute, a corner flicked on by Lopez to the back post, where the sleeping Vinicius allowed Solbes a simple finish.

— AFP



India's stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane (centre) carries his daughter while his wife walks behind as they are welcomed by family and supporters on his arrival at his residence in Mumbai on Thursday.

— PTI

5 Team India members advised home isolation

Mumbai, Jan. 21: Five members of the Indian cricket team arrived here from their Australia tour on Thursday morning and they have been advised to remain in seven-day home quarantine, officials said.

The cricket team members will have to undergo RT-PCR test on arrival at the international airport here, Brihanmumbai Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal said.

"The players are also advised to remain in home quarantine for

● **Ajinkya Rahane, Rohit Sharma, Shardul Thakur, Prithvi Shaw and coach Ravi Shastri have been advised to remain in seven-day home quarantine after arriving in India.**

next seven days," Chahal said.

The Indian cricket team's stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane, players Rohit Sharma, Shardul Thakur and Prithvi

Shaw, and head coach Ravi Shastri landed in Mumbai in the morning, after their momentous Test series victory over Australia, an official from the BCCI said.

An injury-ravaged India beat Australia by three wickets in the series-deciding fourth Test in Brisbane on Tuesday to clinch the rubber 2-1 and retain the Border Gavaskar Trophy.

On their arrival in Mumbai, the players were felicitated by Mumbai Cricket Association officials.

— PTI

ROOT WANTS BEST OUT OF ENGLAND

Galle, Jan. 21: India's come-from-behind series win over Australia was a "great advert" for Test cricket and his side will have to be at their "absolute best" to challenge them at home, said England captain Joe Root.

"It was a fantastic series to watch from start to finish with some brilliant cricket played," Root told reporters on the eve of England's second Test against Sri Lanka.

— PTI

Pant wants to make his own mark in the game

New Delhi, Jan. 21: The comparisons with the iconic Mahendra Singh Dhoni are flattering but young Indian wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant on Thursday said he wants to carve his own identity in the game after playing a key role in the side's historic Test series win in Australia.

Pant is often compared with the two-time World Cup winning former captain and wicketkeeper batsman, who retired last year after a glorious international career.

"You feel amazing when you are compared to someone like MS Dhoni and you compare me with him," Pant told reporters after landing here from Australia where his match and series-winning effort of 89 in the second innings of the fourth Test won him all-round praise.

"It's amazing but I don't want to be compared with anyone, I want to make myself as a name in Indian cricket, because

You feel amazing when you are compared to someone like MS Dhoni and you compare me with him. It's amazing but I don't want to be compared with anyone, I want to make myself as a name in Indian cricket, because it's not good to compare some legend with some youngster.

— **RISHABH PANT**
India star cricketer



Adelaide and went on to win the series despite their captain not being available for the remainder of the contest and many key players lost to injuries.

They won the second Test in Melbourne and drew the next at the SCG before pulling off a remarkable victory at the Gabba — where Australia had not lost since 1988 — to clinch the series.

— PTI

