

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SUNDAY 14 | FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 34°C
Min: 19°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Maasi 2
Tithi: Thrithiyai
Star: Puratathi
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.22 am
Zohar: 12.28 pm
Asar: 3.43 pm
Maghrib: 6.12 pm
Isha: 7.25 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.15 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 8.22 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 8.31 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+6,171)	(+67)
1,08,98,721	1,55,655

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+477)	
TN: 8,44,650	12,413

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

10,88,98,364

DEATHS

23,98,227

219

worldometers.info

Avian flu: 151 birds found dead in Maha, samples being tested

Mumbai: A total of 151 birds were found dead in Maharashtra on Friday amid the avian influenza scare and samples have been sent for tests, a state animal husbandry department official said on Saturday. These include 134 poultry birds from Buldana, Amravati and Jalgaon, he said. Bird flu tests are being run on the samples in the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal, as well as Pune based Disease Investigation Section, he added.

Strong quake hits Japan's northeast coast

Tokyo: A strong earthquake hit off the coast of northeastern Japan late Saturday, shaking Fukushima, Miyagi and other areas, but there was no threat of a tsunami, officials said. Tokyo Electric Power Co. said there were no irregularities at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, which experienced meltdowns following a massive quake and tsunami 10 years ago.

COUNTER POINT



He got a job at last. His work is 1,000 tweets per day for the party and its leaders!

Any Cupid-struck Valentines behind Lovedale?



NMR railway station at Lovedale near Ooty.

Lovedale has a hidden love story of Valentines. D. Venugopal, the director, Nilgiris Documentation Centre, said that Lovedale is a locality established during the early days of British colonisation of the Nilgiris.

B. Ravichandran
IDC
Ooty, Feb. 13

Lovedale, a scenic suburb near Ooty, is certainly a valley of love. But, historians are yet to find out how this place got its name during the British era and whether

■ P3

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Woman's suicide: Sena minister under lens



WORLD | 5

Biden: Govs, mayors need \$350 bn to fight virus

SPORT | 8

Muchova sends Pliskova packing



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TOP COURT JUNKS SHAHEEN BAGH REVIEW PLEA

Right to protest can't be anytime, anywhere: SC

New Delhi, Feb. 13: The right to protest cannot be 'anytime and everywhere', the Supreme Court said as it dismissed a plea seeking review of its verdict passed last year in which it had held the occupation of public ways during the protests against Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, at Shaheen Bagh here was not acceptable.

The top court said there may be some spontaneous protests but in case of prolonged dissent or protest, there cannot be continued occupation of public place affecting the rights of others.

"We have perused the review petition and record of the civil appeal and are convinced that the order of which review has been sought, does not suffer from any error apparent warranting its reconsideration," a bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Aniruddha Bose and

● **The top court said there may be some spontaneous protests but in case of prolonged dissent or protest, there cannot be continued occupation of public place affecting the rights of others**



Kirshna Murari said. The bench, which passed the order recently, said it has considered the earlier judicial pronouncements and recorded its opinion that the constitutional scheme comes with a right to protest and express dissent but with an obligation to have certain duties, the bench said, while dismissing a plea by one Shaheen Bagh resident Kaniz Fatima and others seeking review of last year's verdict of October 7.

The top court, which considered the matter in the judges' chambers, also

rejected the prayer for open court hearing in the matter.

The apex court had on October 7 last year held that public spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely and demonstrations expressing dissent have to be in designated places alone.

It had said occupation of public ways in the anti-CAA protests at Shaheen Bagh locality here was not acceptable.

Observing that democracy and dissent go hand in hand, the apex court had said constitutional scheme comes with the right to protest and express dis-

sent, but with an obligation towards certain duties.

It had said the mode and manner of dissent against colonial rule during India's freedom struggle cannot be equated with dissent in a self-ruled democracy.

However, while appreciating the existence of the right to peaceful protest against a legislation, "we have to make it unequivocally clear that public ways and public spaces cannot be occupied in such a manner and that too indefinitely," the top court had said.

The apex court's verdict had come on a plea by lawyer Amit Sahni against blockade of a road in Shaheen Bagh area by those protesting against the CAA, which aimed to provide Indian citizenship to persecuted minorities of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. —PTI

We have no cronies, asserts Sitharaman

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, FEB. 13

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday hit back strongly on the critics and Opposition who have been accusing the Narendra Modi government of 'crony capitalism' ignoring the poor and mishandling the farmers' protest.

Responding to the points made by Opposition MPs during the discussion on the Union budget in the Lok Sabha, the finance minister singled out the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi who has been regularly hitting out at the government. Ms Sitharaman said Mr Gandhi is probably becoming "doomsday



man for India". Mr Gandhi had while participating in a discussion on the Union budget on Thursday accused the government crony capitalism saying its policies are meant to benefit the rich.

"In spite of what we are doing for the poor and the steps taken for helping the poor and needy of this country, a false narrative is created," the minister said. ■ P4

U'khand flash flood: 64 people still missing

Lucknow, Feb. 13: A total of 64 persons from Uttar Pradesh are still missing, while five from the state have died after the flash floods caused by possible glacier burst in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, officials said on Saturday.

In a statement issued here, Relief Commissioner of Uttar Pradesh Sanjay Goyal said, "As of February 13, five persons from the state have died in the glacier burst at Joshimath in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, while 64 persons are still missing. A total of 23 persons from the state have been found alive."

The deceased have been identified as Awadhesh (19) of Lakhimpur Kheri, Ajay Sharma (32) of Aligarh, Suraj (20) of Lakhimpur Kheri, Vicky Kumar, a resident of Saharanpur and Vimlesh (22), of Lakhimpur Kheri. Of the 64 missing persons,



BRO workers work for construction of a bridge connecting Mallari with Raini village, in flood hit Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, on Saturday.

— PTI

30 are from Lakhimpur Kheri, followed by 10 from Saharanpur, five from Shravasti, four from Gorakhpur, two each from Raebareli and Kushinagar and one each

from Sonbhadra, Mirzapur, Shahjahanpur, Moradabad, Mathura, Gautam Buddh Nagar, Deoria, Chandauli, Bulandshahra, Azamgarh and Amroha, the state-

ment said.

A portion of the Nanda Devi glacier possibly burst through its banks in Chamoli district on February 7.

It appeared to have triggered an avalanche and a deluge that ripped through the Alakananda river system in the upper reaches of the ecologically fragile Himalayas.

Earlier on February 9, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had sent a team of three ministers to Uttarakhand for better coordination with the state in carrying out relief works after the disaster.

The chief minister had formed a committee of three ministers and sent them to Uttarakhand for better coordination with the state.

The ministers are Suresh Kumar Rana, Vijay Kashyap and Dharam Singh Saini. —PTI

Sidhu taken to Red Fort

New Delhi, Feb. 13: The Delhi Police Crime Branch, probing the Red Fort violence on Republic Day, took the arrested accused Deep Sidhu and Iqbal Singh to Red Fort on Saturday to recreate the crime scene.

The Crime Branch is studying the route taken by Sidhu and Iqbal to reach Red Fort when the violence broke out on January 26 during the farmers' tractor rally. The Crime Branch is probing if it was part of a larger conspiracy.

— Agencies



PM in Chennai today; traffic curbs imposed

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stones for several projects in cluding Chennai metro's extension in North Chennai at an event at the Jawaharlal Nehru indoor stadium on Sunday.

Mr Modi is expected to land in Chennai at 10.30 am and proceed to Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor stadium for the event.

In the view of the Prime Minister's visit, the traffic police has issued advisory and appealed to the public to follow them. Vehicle movement has been restricted on arterial stretches such as Anna Salai, Poonamallee High Road and Rajaji Road from 8 am to 1 pm on Sunday. MTC buses and other vehicles coming from Koyambedu towards Central railway station will be diverted via Nair Bridge, Pantheon Roundana, Annasalai via Chitra Point. ■ P2

Man kills two sons, ends life

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

A 32-year-old AC mechanic allegedly strangled his two children to death before ending his life at his house in Korukkupet on Friday night. The deceased has been identified as Vinoth (32), a resident of Jeeva Nagar in Korukkupet, and his two sons Kavin and Pravin, aged three and one.

According to the police, Vinoth's wife Kavitha allegedly took her life at her maternal home a month ago after leaving home following an argument with him. Vinoth was later found lonely and depressed.

Police said the neighbours late on Friday night spotted the bodies and alerted the R.K Nagar police. The police recovered the bodies and sent them for post-mortem examinations to Government Stanley Hospital.

Hitman's sumptuous treat for Chepauk fans

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

Spectators returned to the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in droves and they were served a sumptuous feast on the opening day of the second Test between India and England on Saturday.

It was Rohit Sharma who dished it out for the week-end crowd, around 10,000 of them, who had been craving for live cricket action. Rohit's seventh Test century, a classy 161 cooked on clay, was made of delicious sweep shots.

His knock has put India in a strong position. The hosts were 300 for six at stumps. The brilliant hundred has pushed Rohit's Test average at home to 83.55.

The Mumbai batsman said it was one of the most satisfying knocks in his career. "I am not going to rate my knocks because each one comes under different kinds of pressures and this, too, came from different circumstances," he said.

India opener Rohit Sharma celebrates his century against England in the second Test on Saturday.

— BCCI ■Report on P8



OTHER STORIES

Case against auto driver for assaulting former DGP's son

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

The city police have launched a search for an auto driver who allegedly attacked former DGP Vaikunth' son on 'TTK road in the city.

According to the police sources, the victim V Vijay, a doctor by profession and resident of Raja Annamalaiapuram, has alleged in his complaint that the auto driver and his friend attacked him.

The incident happened on January 12, sources said. The complainant told that he had boarded an auto from Alwarpet. Upon reaching home, he and the driver named Billa had an argument. Billa allegedly invited his friend Karuppan over the phone and both reportedly attacked Vijay before fleeing the spot.

Police sai, as Vijay was out of town after the incident, he has lodged a complaint on Friday after returning to the city. Abhiramapuram police have registered a case and have launched a search for the auto driver and his friend.

Train mishap averted in Chennai-Howrah Mail Special

Bhubaneswar, Feb. 13: A major train mishap was Saturday averted as the guard of Chennai-Howrah Mail Special detected an hot axle in the general second class coach at Sompeta in Andhra Pradesh under East Coast Railway, a railway official said.

The officials took prompt action and detached the coach (second from the rear) at Sompeta, he said. There were about 90 people in this coach, the official said adding the passengers were accommodated in other coaches till Bhubaneswar.

In Bhubaneswar a general second class coach will be attached to the train and passengers will be shifted to it for the onward journey, he said.

Asked the official said the axle connects wheels on each side of a train car and keeps the two wheels moving together at the same speed when the train is moving.

A hot axle affects the function. This and may even lead to the train catching fire if it is not detected in time.

— PTI

Ahead of PM visit, traffic police issue advisory

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

In the view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Chennai, the traffic police have issued advisory and appealed to the public to follow them. The PM is expected to inaugurate and lay the foundation stones for several projects at an event at the Jawaharlal Nehru indoor stadium on Sunday.

According to an official press release from the Greater Chennai Traffic Police, vehicle movement has been restricted on arterial stretches such as Anna Salai, Poonamallee High Road and Rajaji Road from 8 am to 1 pm on



Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate the Chennai metro's extension in North Chennai.

MTC buses and other vehicles coming from Koyambedu towards Central railway station will be diverted via Nair

Bridge, Pantheon Roundtana, Annasalai via Chitra Point.

Vehicles coming from Royapuram to Annasalai/Kamarajar Salai can reach their destination via Ibrahim Road, Mint Junction, Basin Bridge, Erukkancherry Road, Ambedkar Road, Purasavakkam.

Vehicles coming from Anna Salai towards Royapuram will be diverted via Spencer Plaza, Benny Road, Marshal Road, Nair Bridge, Dowton, Perambur Barracks road.

Vehicles coming from South Canal Road towards Gandhi Statue can reach their destination by going

through Kutchery Road, Luz Junction, Royapettah High road. Heavy vehicles and goods carriers will not be allowed to enter inside the Greater Chennai limit on Sunday, said police.

Prime Minister Modi is expected to land in Chennai around 10.30 am on Sunday and proceed to Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor stadium for the event. Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam will also be at the event and will interact with the Prime Minister informally on the sidelines. Prime Minister Modi will leave for Kochi by 1.30 pm.

Chennai metro still costly for common commuters

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

Even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurates phase-I extension of metro rail project from Washermanpet to Wimco Nagar on Sunday, the Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) service still remains costly for the common commuters.

A study carried out by Traffic and Transportation Forum (TTF), a city-based NGO, says that even during the pre-pandemic era the footfall of passengers was only 1.80 lakhs per day. When the CMRL service began in June 2015, connecting Alandur to Koyambedu, it was expected to carry 3 lakh passengers daily. Later when the services were extended up to Washermanpet, St. Thomas Mount, Guindy Teynampet, Annasalai, and Central, it was expected to have 7 lakh commuters per day. But the CMRL's daily stride has not even touched 2 lakhs', the study says.

According to CMRL, a total of 13.43 lakh passengers travelled on metro in January. As many as 44.96 lakh passengers have used the metro service in the post pandemic era - from September 7, 2020 to January 31, 2021.

A study carried out by Traffic and Transportation Forum (TTF), a city-based NGO, says that even during the pre-pandemic era the footfall of passengers was only 1.80 lakhs per day

V. Ramarao, project director, TTF said that one of the reasons people dislike CMRL rides is its expensive ticket fares. Kolkata metro rail carries around 7 lakh passengers daily. Delhi Metro plied with 47 lakh daily passengers during May-June 2019. It shows that commuters prefer the mode of transport with affordable fares. The authorities must realise that operational cost is the same whether it carries 10 or 100 percent of the capacity. Hence CMRL must cap the fares at Rs 35 and rationalise stages for fixing the rate.

Rao also said the CMRL has not constituted the Price Fixation Committee mandated by the Metro Railways (Operation and Maintenance) Act 2002.

'It is difficult for an officegoer to spend Rs 140 for a daily commute, and impossible for a daily labourer', he said.

No one can be prevented from erecting cellphone tower on mere apprehension: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

The Madras high court has said no one can be prevented from erecting the cellphone towers on a mere apprehension about the effect of radiation from the cellphone tower.

Passing orders on a petition from M/s Indus Towers Limited, Justice N.Anand Venkatesh said, "This court has consistently taken the view that no one can be prevented from erecting the cell phone towers on a mere apprehension about the effect of radiation from the cellphone tower. The apprehension does not have a scientific backing. Till a positive finding is given in this regard, cell phone towers cannot be prevented to be installed on mere apprehensions".

In its petition, Indus Towers Limited sought a direction to the authorities to provide effective police protection to it to erect transmission cell phone tower and to install all the telecommunication electrical and electronic equipments, OFC Cable and its maintenance work on the BTS transmission tower at No.92, Bangalapudur road, first street, Kangeyam, Tiruppur.

According to the petitioner, it was engaged in the business of Operation and Maintenance of Mobile Phone towers across India for all the mobile phone operators/service providers providing broadband internet services and other allied services. For the said purpose, cell phone tower was going to be erected. It also entered into a lease agreement with the owner of the property and had taken steps to install the cell phone tower. Already,

BDS student with serious health problem gets reprieve

J. STALIN
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

A girl student, who developed serious health problems while pursuing her first year BDS course in Chennai but denied approval for migration to continue her studies in a Dental College in her native place, got reprieve with the Madras high court remitting her case back to the Dental Council of India for taking a decision afresh relating to her migration from Saveetha Dental College, Chennai to Sri Mookambika Institute of Dental Science in Kanyakumari district, taking into consideration her acute health condition.

Disposing of a petition from the girl student, Justice B.Pugalendhi set aside the order of the DCI dated September 14, 2020, rejecting her request for migration.

According to petitioner, she is the native of Nagercoil and got admission in Saveetha Dental college in Chennai for the five year BDS course in the academic year 2018-2019. During the end of the first year course, she was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovaries and she suffered abnormal uterine bleeding at irregular intervals with severe muscle cramps. She was under serious medication and on frequent follow up from the Doctor at

Kanyakumari district and she completed her first year course. She made a request for migration from Saveetha Dental College to Sri Mookambika Institute of Dental Science. Considering her health condition, both colleges agreed and gave No Objection for migration. However, the DCI rejected her request on the ground that the petitioner does not fulfil the provisions of BDS Course Regulations, 2007. As per the Regulation, migration is permitted from recognized Dental college to recognized Dental college only when the candidate apply for migration within a period of one month after passing the first year BDS on compassionate ground criteria i.e., (i) Death of supporting guardian and (ii) Disturbed conditions as declared by government in the dental college area. Hence, she has filed the present petition.

The judge said the First bench of this court in Lakshmi Bhuvaneswari Preethi's case had observed that it was time for the DCI to revisit the Regulation and comprehensively make amendments with regard to migration on compassionate grounds by prescribing the grounds that would fall within the ambit of compassionate grounds and not to go

merely on the present prescription as the facts and circumstances of each and every case requires to be looked into in proper perspective before a decision was taken by the DCI on the request for migration. Even according to the DCI, the matter relating to amendment was pending before the Government for necessary action since long. "In such a scenario, it would not be prudent for the DCI to keep the issue in the present case pending, awaiting the outcome of the amendment to be made by the government and instead, the DCI, taking into consideration the medical condition of the petitioner requires to act immediately so that the petitioner's health condition does not deteriorate any further", the judge added.

The judge said pn a careful consideration of the totality of the circumstances, it reveals that the petitioner was suffering from Polycystic Ovaries, and in spite of the acute medical condition, which harms her health, the petitioner was intending to pursue her studies, which has necessitated her to take the pains to approach both the colleges for necessary NOC and the two colleges, having found the medical condition of the petitioner warrants permitting the migration, has given the NOC to her . It

was also to be borne in mind by the DCI that the future prospects of the petitioner hinges on the approval that was to be granted by the DCI, else the studies of the petitioner would be gravely affected and she would be prejudiced if she was deprived the migration from Saveetha Dental college to Sri Mookambikai Institute of Dental Science, which would have a detrimental effect on her education and further career. "Red tapism in the form of Regulations, as noted above, should not be a stumbling block for the motivated candidates to pursue their education. In such a backdrop, the DCI, cutting across the red tape, is bound to take a decision keeping in mind the overall medical condition of the petitioner in the light of the decisions of the court referred to above and take an affirmative and positive decision in favour of the petitioner relating to her migration from Saveetha Dental college to Sri Mookambikai Dental college", the judge added and directed the DCI to take steps to have the amendment to the Regulations carried out at the earliest so that the deserving candidates be not made to run from pillar to post seeking for migration which will have a detrimental effect on their studies.



A bouquet shop in Egmore ahead of Valentine's Day.

— DC

Pondy adds 24 fresh cases to its Covid-19 tally

Puducherry, Feb. 13: Puducherry recorded 24 new coronavirus cases, taking the overall infection count to 39,440, the health department said on Saturday.

No fresh fatality was reported from any of the four regions in the union territory and number of fatalities remained 656.

Puducherry, Karaikal and Mahe reported a cumulative

number of 24 cases during the last 24 hours.

A release from Director of Health and Family Welfare Services S Mohan Kumar said of the total new cases, Puducherry region accounted for 18, Karaikal two and Mahe four cases.

While there were 284 active cases, as many as 38,500 patients recovered and were discharged so far.

The Director said 24 patients recovered and were discharged in the last 24 hours from hospitals.

The new cases were identified at the end of examination of 2,582 samples.

The fatality and recovery rates in the union territory were 1.66 percent and 97.62 percent respectively.

The Director said as many as 6.03 lakh samples have

been examined so far and it was found that 5.6 lakh out of them turned out to be negative. Meanwhile, 5,256 health care and 254 front line workers have been vaccinated against Covid-19 so far in the Union Territory.

The official said February 20 has been fixed as the deadline for the health care and front line workers to get inoculated.

— PTI

Losing track of values on a highway



G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

Jamborees are not new to Tamil Nadu politics. But the roadshow on the Bengaluru to Chennai highway on Monday was unprecedented not in terms of the crowds that turned up or the political significance it had but for the bad taste. Welcoming a convict back home is perfectly okay for family and friends even if the crime has been abominable. If traditional societies ostracized liberated jailbirds, it is not a good thing to emulate since such

an attitude signifies a lack of humanism and narrow mindedness. Yet, even the most broad-minded person would not appreciate a public celebration for someone who went to jail for stealing public money and it was that cultural value that was run over on the Bengaluru-Chennai toll road.

That it was a toll road, on which motorists pay through their nose, was one of the niggling factors that made Monday's grand reception despicable other

than it showcasing an apparent decline of ethics in society. When someone hits a toll road, after undergoing pains in opening a Fastag account and recharging it or waiting in a long queue to pay cash, there is definitely a purpose behind the journey. They would want to reach their destination on time and may have a million things lined up for the day. That the plans of thousands of motorists went awry on Monday was a tragedy that the government could have avoided through diligence. Since the toll-payer has a legitimate right to expect a smooth and fast drive in lieu of the money shelled out, it is the responsibility of the government to ensure free movement of traffic.

But it was not the government alone that failed the

people. Even the media goofed up. All the crew that were there to report what it perceived as an earthshattering event did not zoom their lenses on the vehicles that brought in the hordes of people to the highway or report on 'recycling' of crowds by transporting them from one point of welcome to another. The lack of ground reporting gave rise to an erroneous perception that those crowds had spontaneously come out to welcome Sasikala. To add insult to injury, the media latched on to the popular misconception that it created and started a discussion on the political impact of it. The discussions went to the extent of telling viewers that the people were waiting for her to return from jail as she alone can save the State from impending doom.

In fact, some of the participants of the television debates, which were held even as the eventful journey from Bengaluru to Chennai was covered live, should have given goose pimples to viewers with their comments on Sasikala's capabilities in devising electoral strategy and on his entitlement to spearhead the AIADMK. But what was unsavoury about those discussions was the complete gloss over of Sasikala's shenanigans and the proven crime for which she was packed off to jail four years ago. It was indeed nauseating to note that so many participants in television channels, including anchors, found something great in the woman, whom the courts found to be in cahoots with the former Chief Minister, whose confi-

dante she was, in amassing wealth through devious means.

True, corruption is not an issue in the electoral scene with people not rejecting candidates based on their slimy past. But can it be overlooked by the media? How can people educated enough to take part in a debate not take into consideration the track record of a person and not call out the sleight in her attempt to establish dominance? Even if one were to have a common cause with Sasikala, who identified an 'enemy,' how can there be a perception that she alone can lead the fight against that enemy. So, when BJP leaders interpret Sasikala's roadshow as unprecedented display of popular support that even AIADMK's former leaders like MGR did not enjoy, one

could see a hidden agenda.

Despite all the hopes that Sasikala gave to many people, fortunately, skeletons started tumbling out. Not only newspapers exposed that close to Rs 200 crore was blown up on stage managing the outpouring of popular support on the highway, State Ministers openly endorsed the charge. So from what has been revealed, if it took 23 hours for the convoy of Sasikala to cross the 420 km distance, stopping at 120 places, it was only because those behind the show had loads and loads of money to splurge. Not because lakhs and lakhs of people, particularly AIADMK members, wanted to catch a glimpse of the woman who was not only the shadow of their supreme leader J Jayalalithaa but had also

sacrificed her life. If thousands of vehicles joined the convoy that moved at snail's pace and caused inconvenience to other motorists, it was not because they were enduringly loyal to the ousted general secretary and desperately wanted her back as their leader but because there was someone to pay the bills. And no one put up the banners and posters welcoming her to express their feelings but the printing was taken care of. The whole drama was to hoodwink people and threaten the AIADMK.

Despite these revelations, if there are people out there still wanting Sasikala to make an 'impact' on the political scene and change the electoral dynamics, so be it. Every society has the right to get the government it deserves.

OTHER STORIES

TN govt rolls out ₹12,110 crore crop loan waiver scheme

Chennai, Feb. 13: Marking the rollout of the ₹12,110 crore crop loan waiver scheme for over 16 lakh ryots in Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Saturday gave away certificates to nine farmers here.

The certificates state that loans taken from cooperative banks and due on January 31, 2021 have been waived.

Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam, Agriculture Minister K P Anbalagan and senior officials led by Chief Secretary Rajeev Ranjan participated in the event at the state secretariat, a government release here said.

On February 5, Palaniswami had announced waiver of Rs 12,110.74 crore crop loans availed by 16,43,347 farmers from cooperative banks.

The move was considering damage to crops following back to back cyclones 'Nivar' and 'Burevi' last year, besides the heavy unseasonal rains.

The waiver would pave the way for farmers to continue cultivation without any hassles, Palaniswami had said.



Eechangadu flyover on 200 feet radial road, opened by CM through video conferencing on Saturday.

— DC

Seventh phase of excavation begins at Keeladi archaeological site

Chennai, Feb. 13: The seventh phase of excavation at the ancient archaeological site of Keeladi on the banks of the Vaigai River in Sivaganga district began on Saturday. Besides Keeladi, the excavation is also being carried out in nearby villages like Manalur, Kondhagai and Agaram.

During the sixth phase of excavation, interrupted for a couple of months due to the COVID-19 lockdown, archaeologists had found human skeletons, precious stones, weighing measures and ringwell structures. Artefacts obtained from the site revealed that people who lived in the region around

3,000 years ago had advanced knowledge and skills and could have been involved in trading activities.

Chief Minister K Palaniswami inaugurated the seventh phase through video conference from the state secretariat here in the presence of Tamil Culture and Archaeology minister K Pandiarajan, to facilitate the state archaeology department gain more evidence on the ancient Tamil civilisation.

A Tamil Nadu State Archaeology department release said the Central Advisory Board for Archaeology has given it the nod for excavations in

Keeladi and nearby areas, Adichanallur, Sivakalai and Korkai in southern coastal Thoothukudi district, Kodumanal in Erode district, Gangaikondacholapuram in Ariyalur district and Mayiladumparai in Krishnagiri district.

In addition, a field study will be done in Krishnagiri, Vellore, Dharmapuri, Tiruvannamalai and Salem districts to find new Stone Age sites, it said.

CABA has accorded permission to take up another field study in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts on the Thamirabarani river civilisation, the statement added.

— PTI

CM opens foot overbridge facility on GST road

P.A. JEBARAJ | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 13

Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Saturday inaugurated the foot overbridge with escalator facility at the GST road. The state highways department constructed the 60-meter long foot overbridge at the cost of ₹9.4 crores. However, the estimated 242 meters with escalator facility and a skywalk connecting the Tambaram bus stand with the Tambaram railway station is under construction.

Thousands of passengers use the Tambaram railway station on a daily basis and find it difficult to cross the GST Road, a national highway 45, due to heavy traffic on the stretch all the time round the clock. There have been several fatal accidents on this stretch.

To make it convenient for the commuters, the state highways department planned to construct a 242 meters long foot over



Tambaram foot overbridge opened to public on Saturday by CM through video conferencing.

bridge at an estimated cost of ₹19.75 crore. The project also involves the installation of CCTV cameras and the construction of a ticket counter.

The works for the bridge began in 2018 and construction was delayed for many months due to the Coronavirus pandemic. However, the construction

picked up post lockdown. The Chief Minister on Saturday inaugurated the 60-meter stretch through videoconferencing from the secretariat.

FILM

REVIEW

This anthology works only in parts

KUTTY STORY

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: VIJAY SETHUPATHI, AMALA PAUL, ADITI BALAN, MEGHA AKASH, VARUN

DIRECTION: GAUTHAM MENON, VIJAY, VENKAT PRABHU, NALAN KUMARASAMY

RATING: 2.25/5

Kutty Story shot during the lockdown phase is a new effort in Tamil cinema where an anthology is being directed by four different filmmakers namely Gautham Menon, Vijay, Venkat Prabhu and Nalan Kumarasamy. 'Love' is the common thread for all the four shorts.

The first story Edhirpaara Mutham directed by Gautham Menon revolves around two college students and talks about platonic relationship between a man and a woman. Gautham plays a middle-aged man Aadhi who at his house party tells his wife and friends about his relation-



ship with Mrinalini (Amala Paul- brilliant). While his buddies believe that a man and woman cannot be mere friends, Aadhi claims otherwise.

However, a twist takes place at a later stage, which disproves his theory. Yes, Gautham is a master storyteller of urban romance, but there's a slight exaggeration in execution, which makes it an average watch. Vinod Kishan as the younger ver-

sion of Gautham is good.

Vijay's Avatum Naanum featuring Amitash (Vikram) and Megha Akash (Preethi) deals with the problems related to abortion. Seemingly an extension of Vijay's earlier flick Karu, the film ends on a predictable note. Magha Akash's performance is noteworthy.

Venkat Prabhu's Logam revolves around two avid gamers Adam (Varun) and

Eve (Sangeetha) who meet through the game Logam. Over a period, Adam falls in love with Eve and when he tries to find out the whereabouts of his girlfriend to profess his love, her avatar in the game perishes. Does Eye exist at all?

The idea is very creative and interesting, but the problem is it didn't get translated on to the screen as envisioned.

Nalan Kumarasamy has chosen his favorite star Vijay Sethupathi for his short Aadal Paadal, which is refreshing and the best of the lot. It revolves around extramarital affairs and how men show their chauvinistic attitude and expect their adultery to be pardoned while making a big issue if the women slipup. A happily married couple faces a rough patch when the wife (Aditi Balan) comes to know of her husband (Vijay Sethupathi) cheating on her. The confrontation leads to a twist. Nalan's writing is solid which is aided by superb performances by VSP and Aditi. However, the ending is somewhat underwhelming.



Appealing romantic drama worth a watch

C/O KAADHAL

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: VETRI, DEEPAN, ARYA

DIRECTION: HEMAMBAR JASTI

RATING: 3.5/5

Debutant director Hemambar Jasti's C/O Kaadhal, which narrates multiple love stories from school romance to 49-year-old bachelor falling in love with a widow is cute and true to its original Telugu blockbuster C/O Kancharapalem.

Set in a small town in Madurai, the film starts with Palani (Deepan), an attender in a government office who is often ridiculed for being unmarried. A 42-year-old widowed Malayali officer Radha (Sonia Giri) gets transferred to the same office and develops a liking for Palani. Soon their friendship turns into love.

Then we see Velu (Nishesh), an 8th grade student from a government school having a crush on his classmate Sunita (Shwetha). Then there is this Bhargavi (Arya), a college girl belonging to an orthodox Brahmin family

and circumstances leading her to fall in love with Joseph (Karthik Ratnam), a henchman to the local counselor. In a story, there is Dhadi (Vetri) who works at a wine shop falling in love with a sex worker Saleema (Mumtaz Sorcar) even after knowing her background. All these four love stories get connected to a point towards the end.

With several subplots, the film might seem too heavy, but thankfully the director who has retained the core essence of the original including the dialogues and has seamlessly narrated it with humorous touches. Of course, there are few tear-jerking moments. The film is not about people falling in love, but it talks about the societal issues that are still prevalent at large. The climax will leave a smile on your face.

It is a fitting re-entry to Deepan who returns after a long hiatus following his stint in Mudhal Mariyadai. He gives a realistic performance and Sonia Giri is equally effective. Vetri does a neat job and all others like Arya, Mumtaz extend their support.

Technically, music by Agasthi and cinematography by Gunashekar are big pluses to the proceedings.



Santhanam carries PJ with his swagger

PARRIS JEYARAJ

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: SANTHANAM, ANAIKA SOTI, PRUDHVI RAJ, MOTTA RAJENDRAN

DIRECTION: JOHNSON

RATING: 2.75/5

The hit combo of AI-Santhanam and Johnson is back with yet another comedy caper Parris Jeyaraj.

Set in North Chennai, Parris (Santhanam) is a popular gaana singer and a mini YouTube celebrity in the neighborhood. He has a villain at home in the form of his dad Prakash Raj (Prudhvi Raj), a lawyer who separates couples for a huge sum. He plays a spoilsport in Jeyaraj's love matter as well after getting money from the girl's family.

Post breakup, the hero once again gets into a relationship with Divya (Anaiika Soti) who is also recouping from a love failure. But his father comes in his way again, and this time around it is not routine business. There's something more serious, a

major twist around which the story is woven.

Santhanam, through his signature style of rhyming counters and comedy, shines throughout the film. Although a sense of deja vu prevails at times, with Santa around, it still works to some extent. The actor aces in dance sequences, especially the intro Bacha Bachikei song in a moving bus. Santhosh Narayanan's captivating gaana tunes and Sandy master's choreography deserves mention as they seriously elevate the song sequence.

Though the film moves in an uninspiring manner in the first half, during the mid-point, it picks up momentum when the intriguing plotline is revealed. From here, the humor portions work superbly.

Anaiika Soti's lip-sync goes for a toss and she struggles in a film that is heavily dialogue-oriented. Prudhvi Raj with a well-defined character arc does a great job. Motta Rajhendran and Tiger Thangadurai chip in their bits. Santhosh Narayanan's songs and BGM aids the proceedings. Arthur Wilson's camera is functional.

Name Lovedale was first recorded in 1854 in Nilgiris

From P1

The locality refers to an inverted, rectangular area with the famed Lawrence School running in the middle.

The name 'Lovedale' was first recorded in 1854. The local Badaga name for the place was 'Baruhane', meaning 'verdure meadow'. The Nilgiri Guide and Directory of 1916 described the place as 'one of the most beautiful parts of the Nilgiris, and, with its tiny lake, rustic scenery and charming surroundings, merits its name'. Arguably, it is still one of the localities in the Nilgiris which retains its old charm.

How the place got its name is not clear. There is a South African Mission station and educational centre by that name but there is no evidence how that could be

linked to its namesake in the Nilgiris, he said.

The railway station at Lovedale on the world heritage Nilgiri Mountain Railway is not less known than the famous school associated with the place. The station and its surroundings are one of the picturesque and convenient on the NMR line which has made it a favourite shooting location for films.

The connection between Lovedale and John Sullivan, the founder of Ootacamund and builder of modern Nilgiris, is not known widely. His last known house was Richings Lodge in Lovedale on the Richings road.

The house, now renamed Richings Hall, and the nearby Richings colony form part of Lovedale, Mr Venugopal added.

Man sentenced to 20-yr RI for sexually assaulting minor daughter

Erode, Feb. 13: A daily wage worker has been sentenced to 20 years Rigorous Imprisonment by a Mahila Court here for sexually assaulting his nearly three month old daughter some months back at Vellitiruppur village.

District Mahila Court Judge, Malathi, while sentencing the 50-year-old labourer on Friday, also slapped a fine of Rs 1,000 on him and ordered the Tamil Nadu government to pay a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the mother. The prosecution case was that the man, who has a 10-year-old son, sexually assaulted the infant when the mother was away.



Temple elephants happily take bath with the help of its mahout at rejuvenation camp in Mettupalayam on Saturday.

—DC



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IN BRIEF

WOMAN'S SUICIDE: SENA MINISTER UNDER LENS

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 13

Maharashtra forest minister Sanjay Rathod from Shiv SENA has found himself in trouble as the BJP has demanded his arrest in connection with the death of a 22-year old girl in Pune. Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has said that a detailed probe will be carried out and those found guilty will be punished.

On February 8, deceased Pooja Chavan, hailing from Beed district, allegedly committed suicide by jumping off a building in the Wanwadi area of the city. Her death has stirred up a political storm in the state, as several audio clips of her purported conversation with two persons have gone viral linking the incident to Mr Rathod.

The opposition party BJP has become aggressive on the issue demanding the arrest of the minister and his sacking from the cabinet. BJP leader Kirit Somaiya said, “Mr Rathod should not only be sacked as a minister but also be arrested immediately. What is Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray waiting for as it clearly shows that the minister has a hand in Pooja Chavan's death.”

Mr Rathod has not commented on the issue yet. According to sources, he has sought time to present his case to Mr Thackeray, who has reportedly taken a serious cognizance of the matter. However, Mr Rathod and other party leaders have been advised not to speak to the media on the issue.

'WE HAVE NO CRONIES'

From Page 1

“Who are our cronies? Our cronies are the common 'janta' (people) of this country. We don't do work for any cronies, we work for the common citizen who believes in the Prime Minister. Where are the cronies? They are hiding probably in the shadow of that party which has been rejected by the people. The shadows, who were invited to even develop a port. No open tenders, no global tenders. These tendencies of the Congress makes it clear their belief in a democratic system is finished. He (Rahul Gandhi) is probably becoming a doomsday man for India,” she added.

Her remarks irked the Congress and sources said its members have moved a privilege motion against the FM. “It would have been nice if he (Mr Gandhi) who talked about ‘Hum do Hamhare do’ also talked about damads returning land, but didn't say anything about this,” she said while referring to investigations into land deals involving Mr Vadra.

Defending the government on the contentious farm laws, the minister said nothing has been done so far that would adversely affect the farmers. She accused the Congress of misguiding the farmers and changing its previously-held

COVID: NATIONAL RECOVERY RATE STANDS AT 97.32%

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 13

In a significant development on the Covid-19 front, 17 states and union territories have not reported a single death in the last 24 hours while 13 states and UTs had deaths ranging between 1 and 5. Total fatalities due to coronavirus in the last 24 hours were 103.

The new cases too are on a decline as 12,143 fresh cases were detected in the last 24 hours. India's total active case-load currently stands at 1.36 lakh consists of just 1.25% of country's total positive cases.

A total of 1.06 crore people have recovered so far out of which 11,395 patients have got discharged in the last 24 hours. The National Recovery Rate at present is 97.32%.

Kerala, with highest number of positive cases (5,397) has also reported the maximum number of single day recoveries (5,332). In Maharashtra, 2,422 people recovered in the past 24 hours followed by 486 in Tamil Nadu. Kerala continues to report the highest daily new cases at 5,397. It is followed by Maharashtra with 3,670, while Tamil Nadu reported 483 new cases.

Meanwhile, India has vaccinated 80.52 lakh healthcare and frontline workers with the first dose and the second dose to complete immunization against Covid-19 has started.



Rescue and restoration work at Raini village after a glacier burst on February 7 in Joshimath triggered a flash flood, in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on Saturday.

Rescue hole at Tapovan tunnel being widened to reach workers

38 bodies have been recovered from affected areas while 166 are missing

Joshimath, Feb 13: Rescue teams on Saturday began widening a hole drilled into an approach tunnel on the way to the possible location of over 30 people trapped inside a sludge-choked tunnel of the NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project after a flash flood ravaged the area on Sunday.

“We are working under a three-pronged strategy to reach to those trapped in the tunnel. The hole we drilled on Friday is being widened to one foot so as to reach a camera and a pipe inside the silt flushing tunnel where the trapped are said to be located,” General Manager of the NTPC project, R P Ahirwar, said.

A hole with a diameter of one foot will help send in a camera to ascertain their location and a pipe to flush out accumulated water from the tunnel, Ahirwar said. The other two parts of the strategy are clearing the desilting basin of the NTPC barrage

through which muck is constantly flowing into the tunnels and restoring the flow of the Dhauliganga to the right which has tilted to the left after the flash flood hampering the sludge clearing operation, he said.

Describing the rescue of people as a priority, he said the NTPC has put more than 100 of its scientists on the job.

When asked whether an attempt could also be made to send rescue personnel to the possible location of those trapped inside the tunnel through the hole, the GM said it will need to be widened further for that and will be done if the need arises.

“More than 100 of our scientists are on the job. They are devising strategies and having them implemented,” Ahirwar said.

He said all resources and mechanical equipment required for the operations are available at the project site.

● **THE STATE** Emergency Operation Centre said scientists of the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing during an aerial survey of the Rishiganga found that the glacial lake formed due to the avalanche over it has begun to release water which reduces chances of its breaching or causing a fresh flash flood.

However, citing the conditions inside the tunnel, he said, “We can operate only with a few machines at a time. Rest of them have to be kept on standby because our strategy is to keep the operations under-way round the clock.”

If for some reason an equipment stops working, there are alternatives on the standby to ensure that the operations do not stop, he said.

He said many experienced workers of the project went missing in the calamity and those put on

the job are new people but still they are working with total dedication.

Talking about the biggest challenge being faced by the rescue team, the NTPC official said, “The rescue personnel are going to the tunnel where the men are likely to be trapped via HCC Adit where muck is constantly coming down from the NTPC barrage and its desilting basin to hamper the rescue efforts. The water of Dhauliganga too is coming into our tunnels through the desilting basin as it has tilted to the left after the avalanche.”

“Hence, restoring the flow of the Dhauliganga to the right is a big part of our strategy,” Ahirwar said. The sludge choked contours and conduits of the barrage's desilting basin can also be removed more effectively only if the flow is restored back to its earlier position.

The work on restoring the flow of Dhauliganga has begun already with

the help of heavy machines, he said. So far, 38 bodies have been recovered from the affected areas while 166 are still missing.

DIG Nilesh Anand Bharne said 11 of the dead have been identified. Eighteen body parts had also been recovered from the flood-hit areas, of which 10 have been cremated after taking their DNA samples so far, he said.

The State Emergency Operation Centre here said scientists of the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing during an aerial survey of the Rishiganga found that the glacial lake formed due to the avalanche over it has begun to release water which reduces chances of its breaching or causing a fresh flash flood.

The lake which has formed over the Rishiganga after the flash-flood had increased the concern of experts on Friday. -PTI

RECALL MAHA GOVERNOR: SHIV SENA

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, FEB. 13

The Shiv Sena on Saturday accused the BJP of using Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's shoulders to target the Maha Vikas Aghadi.

Accusing the governor of acting like a political puppet for the Centre, the Shiv Sena urged the Centre to recall him.

The Sena said that ever since Mr. Koshyari became the governor, he has been in controversy for several reasons. “He should behave like a mature person,” an editorial in *Saamana* said.

LEGAL | MATTER

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 13

Bombay High Court judge Pushpa Ganediwala, who delivered two controversial orders on sexual assaults in the recent weeks, on Saturday took oath as the high court's additional judge for one more year.

The decision to extend Justice Pushpa Ganediwala's fresh tenure by only one year, instead of two years as recommended by the Supreme Court collegium, was taken by the Centre. The government on Friday put out a notification on her

Militant accused of killing 3 BJP activists, policeman arrested

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, FEB. 13

The Jammu and Kashmir police on Saturday claimed that a ‘The Resistance Front (TRF)’ militant involved in the killing of three BJP activists and a policeman in southern Kulgam district last year was arrested from Samba area of Jammu region overnight.

Inspector General of Police (Jammu range), Vijay Kumar, said that a most wanted militant Zahoor Ahmed Rather alias Sahil alias Khalid was hiding in the frontier

district for some time and was arrested following receiving specific information about it from the Anantnag police. TRF which the police insist is a front of outlawed Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) surfaced in J&K last year and has claimed responsibility for several violent acts that took place across the Valley over a period of time.

On the night of October 29, 2020, a group of militants had killed Fida Hussain Itoo, general secretary of the J&K unit of BJP Yuva Morcha, and two other party workers

Umar Ramzan Hajam and Umer Rashid Beigh in Kulgam's Yaripora village. Earlier in July last year, a police head constable Abdur Rashid Dar was shot dead from point blank range by gunmen outside his Kulgam's Furrah village.

A statement issued by the police here said that Rather, a resident of Anantnag's Jalkreeri Dooru village, who was involved in these killings was arrested from Teli Basti of Samba's industrial township Bari Brahmana during a “covert operation”

launched jointly by Samba police and Anantnag police.

“Besides involved in target killings in south Kashmir, he was instrumental in recruiting innocent youth into terrorist ranks and was along with another terrorist Abbas Sheikh running the LeT in the name of TRF,” the statement alleged.

The police said that Rather was earlier associated with Kashmir's indigenous militant organization Hizb-ul-Mujahideen but quit it in 2020 to join the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba.

Ganediwala faced flak for interpretation of sexual assault

Reduced term for controversial judge

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 13

new term. Justice Nitin Jamdar, the seniormost judge at the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court, administered the oath of office to her.

The oath-taking ceremony was attended virtually by the Bombay High Court's Chief Justice Dipankar Datta.

Additional judges are usually appointed for two years before being elevated as permanent judges. The decision was taken after the judge faced flak for her interpretation of sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

● **LAST MONTH**, the SC panel, in a rare instance, withdrew its recommendation to the government to confirm the permanent status of Justice Ganediwala as a Bombay HC judge after two controversial orders were passed by her.

Justice Ganediwala's fresh term comes into effect from Saturday after her earlier tenure as an additional judge ended on Friday.

Last month, the Supreme Court panel, in a rare instance, withdrew its recommendation to the government to confirm the

permanent status of Justice Ganediwala as a Bombay High Court judge after two controversial orders were passed by her. The collegium headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde, at a meeting held on January 20, had okayed the proposal for making Justice Ganediwala a permanent judge.

In a January 19 ruling, Justice Pushpa Ganediwala, 51, ruled that groping a minor's breast without ‘skin-to-skin contact’ cannot be termed as sexual assault as defined under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Days later, the Supreme

Court put that order on hold, allowing the government's top lawyer to file a petition against it.

The order was “disturbing” and would create a dangerous precedent, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal had said.

In another case last month, Justice Ganediwala ruled that “the acts of ‘holding the hands of the prosecutrix’ (female victim), or ‘opened zip of the pant’...does not fit in the definition of ‘sexual assault’,” and quashed the conviction of a man under child sexual assault laws. The survivor in this case, was a five-year-old minor.

PM wants to hand over farm biz to his 2 friends: Rahul

Jaipur, Feb. 13: Continuing his scathing attack against Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the farm laws on the second day of his visit to Rajasthan, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday alleged that the Prime Minister wants to “hand over” the entire agriculture business to his “two friends”.

Mr Gandhi addressed two farmers' rallies at Rupangarh in Ajmer and Nagaur's Makrana. He had addressed farmers' rallies in Hanumangarh's Pilibanga and Sri Ganganagar's Padampur on the first day of his two-day Rajasthan trip on Friday.

At the Rupangarh rally, Mr Gandhi said 40 per cent people of the country are stakeholders in the farming business.

“It is the business of 40 per cent people, which includes farmers, small and medium businessmen, traders and labourers. Narendra Modi wants to give this entire business to his two friends. This is the objective of the farm laws,” he claimed but did not name anyone.

“Narendra Modi said he is giving options but the options are: hunger, unemployment and suicide,” he alleged.

Mr Gandhi, wearing a Rajasthani safa or turban, reached the rally venue driving a tractor with Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and state Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra sitting with him.

He spoke while standing on a platform made of two tractor-trailers while the farmers sat or stood on tractor-trailers around the platform.

Later in another rally at

Nagaur's Makrana, Mr Gandhi said the backbone of the country is being broken, which started with demonetisation.

“Future is being snatched from the youth. In front of your eyes, the backbone of the country is being broken. It began with demonetisation, after which the GST Gabbar Singh Tax was brought and small businesses were hit,” Mr Gandhi said in the farmers' rally.

Farmers, labourers and traders are being sidelined and the path is being cleared for two-three businessmen. During the coronavirus lockdown, labourers requested the Prime Minister to give them tickets to go home but he did not yield to it and waived loans of Rs 1.5 lakh crore of the rich, he alleged.

Mr Gandhi said it was his responsibility to tell the truth and it is for the people to listen or not to listen.

“In February last year, I had said 10-15 times that Bharat Mata is going to suffer drastic losses due to coronavirus. Farmers, labourers and the poor are going to be badly hit but ‘press wale’ (media) said he is not a farmer, he is anti-national,” he said.

Mr Gandhi said he kept silence in Parliament as a mark of respect to 200 farmers who died during the agitation against the farm laws but not a single BJP MP stood for it.

“The Speaker said I should give in writing. Now, I will give in writing to the Speaker that all members in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha should observe a two-minute silence,” Mr Gandhi said. -PTI

SC ISSUES WARRANTS AGAINST NGO CHIEF FOR NOT DEPOSITING FINE

New Delhi, Feb 13: The Supreme Court has issued bailable warrants against the chairperson of an NGO for not depositing the cost of ₹25 lakh imposed on it for filing 64 PILs over the years without any success and “repeatedly misusing” the jurisdiction of the top court.

A bench comprising Justices S.K. Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy said the petitioner-Trust and its

chairperson Rajiv Daiya were playing “ducks and drakes” with the court.

The top court on December 5, 2017, refused to modify its earlier order against NGO Suraz India Trust for filing 64 PILs.

It had dismissed the plea filed by the NGO to modify the apex court's May 1 order which also barred the organisation from filing any plea before any court across the country. -PTI

SHORT TAKES

FED AGENTS
FATALLY SHOOT
MAN IN FLORIDA

Coral Gables (Florida), Feb. 13: Federal agents investigating a financial scheme fatally shot a man in South Florida on Friday, authorities said.

The shooting occurred in Coral Gables and involved agents from the US Department of Homeland Security, the Miami Herald reported. Coral Gables is located just southwest of Miami.

During a large-scale financial investigation, an individual brandished a weapon at special agents with Homeland Security Investigations, as a result agents fired at the suspect, agency spokesman Nestor Yglesias said in a statement. The agents were treated at a local hospital for injuries that were not life-threatening, Yglesias said.

Investigators recovered a weapon at the scene, Yglesias said. Florida state law enforcement officials were investigating the shooting.

The man wasn't immediately identified.

BROKER TO BE
EXTRADITED TO
VENEZUELA

Madrid, Feb. 13: Spain's National Court has approved the extradition of a financial broker wanted in Venezuela on charges of fraud and embezzlement of funds.

The ruling on 40-year-old Ernesto Quintero triggered protests Friday among the Venezuelan community in Spain and Venezuelan opposition representatives.

Protesters, including Quintero's wife, demonstrated near the court in Madrid, calling for Spain to stop the extradition given the political instability in the Caribbean country. Quintero worked in a stock exchange in the western Venezuelan city of Maracaibo that was seized by authorities in 2010 owing to alleged fund-management irregularities, the unauthorised sale of client investments and for funneling money to Britain's Virgin Islands. He was arrested in Spain early in 2019 but released with conditions while his extradition was studied. He was detained again this week.

The court's three-judge panel rejected Quintero's argument that there were political motivations behind Venezuela's extradition request and that he would be in physical danger if handed over.

Antonio Ecarri, a Venezuelan politician designated as ambassador to Spain for the parallel government of Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó, claimed that any extradition now was a virtual death sentence given Venezuela's human rights record. Spain has previously rejected other extradition requests.

1 PEACEKEEPER
HURT IN MALI
HAS DIED: UN

United Nations, Feb. 13: One of the 28 UN peacekeepers wounded in an attack on a temporary United Nations base in central Mali has died from his injuries, the United Nations announced Friday.

Mali remains the deadliest of the UN's 12 far-flung peacekeeping missions and the peacekeeper from Togo was the sixth killed just since January in hostile acts in which 46 peacekeepers were also injured.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, who announced the peacekeeper's death, extended the UN's deepest condolences to his family and the people and government of Togo and wished a speedy recovery to the 27 other peacekeepers.

The UN has condemned Wednesday's complex attack using direct and indirect fire against the temporary base in Kerena, near Douentza. There have been no claims of responsibility for the attack, but Islamic extremists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have staged regular attacks on UN peacekeepers and soldiers. Dujarric said the Kerena base was set up recently to better protect the local population, bring back calm in areas impacted by intercommunal violence, as well as to reduce the threat of improvised explosive devices.

Mali has been in turmoil since a 2012 uprising prompted mutinous soldiers to overthrow the president. The power vacuum that resulted ultimately led to an Islamic insurgency and a French-led war that ousted the jihadists from power in 2013.

The country has also been plagued by a series of coups, the latest in August that overthrew President Ibrahim Boubacar.

7 injured in fuel tanker blast
at Afghanistan-Iran border

The blaze consumed more than 500 trucks carrying natural gas and fuel

Herat (Afghanistan), Feb. 13: A fuel tanker exploded Saturday at the Islam Qala crossing in Afghanistan's western Herat province on the Iranian border, injuring at least seven people and causing a massive fire that consumed more than 500 trucks carrying natural gas and fuel, according to Afghan officials and Iranian state media.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the blast. Wahid Qatali, Herat's provincial governor, said Afghan first responders did not have the means to put out the fire and had requested support from Iran in the form of fire-fighting aircraft.

"For the time being, we can't even talk about the casualties," Qatali told The Associated Press.

The intensity of the flames meant ambulances were having trouble reaching the wounded or getting

07 people injured by the fire have been admitted to the hospital so far, said Mohammad Rafiq Shirzy, spokesman for the regional hospital in Herat's provincial capital.

02 explosions, around half-an-hour apart, at the border crossing were powerful enough to be spotted from space by NASA satellites.

75 miles is the distance of the Islam Qala border crossing from the city of Herat. It is a major transit route between Afghanistan and Iran.

close to the site of the blast, said Mohammad Rafiq Shirzy, spokesman for the regional hospital in Herat's provincial capital, also named Herat.

Seven people injured by the fire have been admitted to the hospital so far, he said.

Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency quoted truck drivers as saying more

than 500 trucks carrying natural gas and fuel have been burnt so far.

Two explosions at the border crossing were powerful enough to be spotted from space by NASA satellites. One blast erupted around 1:10 p.m. Afghan time (0840 GMT), the next around a half hour later at 1:42 p.m. local (0912 GMT). The fire continued to

burn after nightfall, and forced Afghanistan to shut down its electrical supply from Iran, leaving Herat in the dark, said Wahidullah Tawhidi, spokesman for the Ministry of Power Supply.

The road between the city of Herat and Islam Qala is a dangerous stretch of highway that Afghans rarely travel at night for fear of attacks by criminal gangs. Taliban insurgents also travel freely in the area. Afghan security services had set up checkpoints and were assisting ambulances and emergency vehicles traveling to and from the border crossing.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that following the request from Herat's governor, Iranian "rescue forces and fire fighters are underway to extinguish the fire inside Afghanistan," according to Mohsen Nejat, director-general of crisis manage-

ment in Iran's Khorasan Razavi province.

The fire spread to the Dogharoon customs facilities on the Iranian side and first responders — including the fire department, the Iranian army and border forces — were assisting in extinguishing the blaze, according to Iranian state television. Trucks carrying natural gas and fuel were directed to leave the scene.

The Islam Qala border crossing is around 120 kilometres (75 miles) west of the city of Herat. It is a major transit route between Afghanistan and Iran.

The United States allows Afghanistan to import fuel and oil from Iran as part of a special concession that exempts Kabul from sanctions against Iran. Satellite photos taken Saturday showed dozens of tankers parked at the border crossing before the explosion. — AP

Charge against
Trump a lie,
say his lawyers

Washington, Feb. 13 : Donald Trump's insurrection incitement charge is a "monstrous lie" and the impeachment proceedings against the former president a "politically motivated witch hunt" by the Democrats, his lawyers said as they presented evidence in the US Senate. Trump, a Republican, is accused of inciting riots in the US Capitol on January 6 which left five people, including a police officer, dead.

Trump's lawyers Bruce Castor, David Schoen and Michael van der Veen each took turns addressing the Senate members on Friday, day four of Trump's impeachment trial, to describe Trump as a staunch supporter of law and order, not someone who incited the chaos at the Capitol.

His attorneys had up to 16 hours over the course of two days to push back on House impeachment managers' case that Trump should be convicted and barred from running for future office for inciting the attack on the Capitol to try to stop Joe Biden's presidential election victory being certified.

There is a complete lack of evidence on the article of impeachment against Donald Trump, his lawyers told the United States Senate. "We have a complete lack of evidence for the article of impeachment presented by the House managers," Trump's lawyer Castor said.

The impeachment by the House, the case for which was laid out by the House managers in the Senate during the last two days, was political.

"Their goal is to eliminate a political opponent, to substitute their judgment for the will of the voters," he said as he showed clips of various Democratic leaders. Castor said that the critical issue in this case is the very narrow issue that is charged against the 45th president.

"That issue is did the

AS VOTE DRAWS
NEAR, McCONNELL
REVEALS LITTLE

Washington, Feb. 13: Seldom has Mitch McConnell signaled so little about such a consequential vote.

While many expect the Senate's top Republican to back acquitting former President Donald Trump of inciting rioters who assaulted the Capitol last month, no one is really sure. The Washington political universe and the world beyond will collectively hold its breath when the Senate impeachment trial roll call reaches the Kentuckian's name.

Over 36 years in the Senate, the measured McConnell has earned a reputation for inexpressiveness in the service of caution. This time, the suspense over how he'll vote underscores how much is at stake for him. — AP

45th president engage in incitement of — they continue to say — insurrection. Clearly there was no insurrection," he said. Trump's lawyer van der Veen used his opening remarks to dispute the Democrats' case that the former president had incited violence during his speech to supporters on January 6.

Trump had made allegations of voter fraud and urged his supporters to converge at the Capitol building a short while before the riot broke out.

"To claim that the president in any way wished, desired or encouraged lawless or violent behaviour is a preposterous and monstrous lie. In fact, the first two messages the president sent via Twitter once the incursion at the Capitol began were 'Stay Peaceful' and 'No violence because we are the party of law and order,'" the lawyer said.

— PTI

Paint on Thai riot cops



Riot police covered in red paint thrown by pro-democracy protesters stand guard during an anti-government demonstration next to the Grand Palace in Bangkok on Saturday as demonstrators scaled a Bangkok monument, draping it in a crimson cloth and calling for the kingdom to abolish its draconian royal defamation laws. — AFP

Biden: Govs, mayors need \$350 bn to fight virus

Washington, Feb 13: President Joe Biden met with a bipartisan group of governors and mayors at the White House on Friday as part of his push to give financial relief from the coronavirus pandemic to state and local governments — a clear source of division with Republican lawmakers who view the spending as wasteful.

As part of a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus package, Biden wants to send \$350 billion to state and local governments and tribal governments. While Republicans in Congress have largely objected to this initiative, Biden's push has some GOP support among governors and mayors.

"You folks are all on the front lines and dealing with the crisis since day one," Biden said at the start of the Oval Office meeting. "They've been working on their own in many cases."

Republican lawmakers have stressed that some past aid to state and local governments remains unspent and revenues have rebounded after slumping when the coronavirus first hit. But state governments have shed 332,000 jobs since the

outbreak began to spread last February, and local governments have cut nearly 1 million jobs, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics.

Republican Govs. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas and Larry Hogan of Maryland attended the Friday meeting, along with Democratic governors, including New York's Andrew Cuomo and New Mexico's Michelle Lujan Grisham. The mayors of Atlanta, Detroit, Miami and Arlington, Texas, also were at the meeting. New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell was set to attend, but she could not due to White House health screening and safety protocols, according to her press secretary. Under the relief package being crafted in House committees this week, every state and the District of Columbia would get at least \$500 million, but most of the money going to states would be distributed based on their share of unemployed workers nationally.

Local governments would also get \$130.2 billion and tribal governments would get \$20 billion. The money could be used to

US: China must make available
data of outbreak's earliest days

Washington, Feb. 13: The US on Saturday demanded that China must make available its Covid-19 data from the earliest days of the outbreak to the world to better understand the pandemic and prepare for the next one.

China reported the first Covid-19 case in the central city of Wuhan in late December 2019 and since then the disease has snowballed into a pandemic, affecting 108,822,502 people with 2,396,283 deaths worldwide. According to Johns Hopkins Coronavirus tracker, the US, which is the worst affected country in the world, has reported over 27,189,188 cases

and 468,103 deaths from the deadly virus.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, in a strongly-worded statement, expressed deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the Covid-19 investigation by the World Health Organisation (WHO) were communicated. "We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the Covid-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them. It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by

the Chinese government," he said.

"To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak. Going forward, all countries, including China, should participate in a transparent and robust process for preventing and responding to health emergencies — so that the world learns as much as possible, as soon as possible," Sullivan demanded. The mission of the WHO has never been more important, and the US has deep respect for its experts and the work they are doing every day. — PTI

AIRLINES PUSH
WH TO REJECT
TESTS FOR FLYERS

Washington, Feb. 13: Leaders of several major US airlines met online Friday with White House officials to press their case against requiring Coronavirus tests for passengers on domestic flights, saying it would undermine the already fragile industry.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki downplayed speculation that the Biden administration could soon impose a requirement that passengers on domestic flights first pass a Covid-19 test. But she stopped short of taking the idea off the table.

"Reports that there is an intention to put in place new requirements such as testing are not accurate," Psaki said. A person familiar with the discussions said the airline CEOs talked with White House Coronavirus-response coordinator Jeff Zients. — AP

NO | SHOWS

A testament to the grit of organisers who followed French rules

Circus festival adapts to Covid-19 rules

Marseille, Feb. 13: It's been a tough year for the performing arts in most countries, with virus lockdowns cancelling shows and shuttering venues.

But the world's top circus festival has found a way to flourish between the cracks in the rules — even without the huge crowds that would normally have attended. Ending Saturday in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille, the fourth edition of the Circus Biennale (BIAC), held every two years in the south of France, celebrates

the injury-defying and spine-stretching arts that fuel the storied spectacle. More than 110,000 people attended the last BIAC, in 2019. This year it had up to 2,000 visitors, all professionals who work in the circus or are looking to buy shows. Even that is a testament to the grit and determination of the organisers, who skillfully adapted their festival to the French authorities' rules and regulations.

"We started with a plan A, then plan B, then plan C, then plan D, and finally

● IN FRANCE, theatres, concert halls and other venues have been shuttered since Oct. 30 due to Covid-19.

we decided to do plan E which was a Biennale for professionals. That was possible, we were allowed to do it," said BIAC organizer Raquel Rache de Andrade. The dozens of performances featured upside-down tutus, acrobatic bicycles, multicolored parachutes and enough contortionism to shock

a chiropractor.

Virus safety signs put up at the port-side venue showed a clown with red nose, bow tie and mask, and the accompanying text: "Having a big nose does not exempt you from wearing one." In France, theatres, concert halls and other venues have been shuttered since Oct. 30 due to Covid-19. Before that, they were shut from mid-March to late June.

No one knows when the performing arts will be allowed to begin again. But it's important to show

that culture is essential, according to Yoann Bourgeois, a dancer and choreographer who trained in the circus arts and is the flagship artist of this year's BIAC.

"The management of this crisis has had an extremely violent impact on poets, artists, people who dedicate their lives to culture in general," Bourgeois said. "It has categorised what is considered essential or non-essential. We are convinced that poetry is essential to live." — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

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Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Off the beaten track

A bottom-up view of the annual Budget

Despite the hoopla around the Union government's Budget, for citizens, allocations in their state budgets matter more. Nearly two thirds of total government expenditure is done by states and for capex, this proportion increases to 90 per cent (FY 2020-21 BE data).

Twenty-eight states and eight Union Territories share the enlarged pie at their level. No individual state matches the fiscal power of the Union finance minister's signature releasing budget allocations. But for citizens, at the receiving end of the pipe, what matters most is the efficiency and effectiveness of the last-mile expenditure management by the state governments.

Living in a well-performing state matters and not just for employment. Progressive "states" bend with the breeze blowing from Delhi, to tap the flow of funds, their way. Telangana is a good example. More importantly, enjoying decent levels of basic public services — subsidised food, education, public health, drinking water electricity and public transport, direct income transfers to farmers, women, old age pensioners and support to the specially-abled, subsidised credit — depends crucially on the efficiency of the local administration.

The primary federal fiscal role of the Union is to collect tax and pass through a mandated share (41 per cent XV Finance Commission) to the states. The Union government, however, games how much it passes through. The mandatory sharing applies only to tax not cess (say on petroleum products). Increasing the cess on imported liquor, as done in the Budget, whilst lowering the duty rate, avoids sharing the extra revenue with states. This is in bad faith.

Voluntary adoption of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 enhanced centralisation of fiscal power in the Union. The GST council collectively determines tax rates. But the Union has veto power. Happily, the benefits, despite the convoluted design (multiple rates) of the GST, far exceed the costs from dilution of state tax autonomy. The avoided cost of pancaked sales tax on goods sold across state borders and the ease of movement — most recently via e-tax invoices — will reduce tax leakage and benefit both the Union and the states.

Significant "tax gouging" potential, however, remains with states via punitive tax on the non-virtuous (excise duty on alcohol) and the well-off (exorbitant sales tax on petroleum products and registration fee on purchasing a personal motorised vehicle or property). Less developed states use this mechanism pervasively. The share of "tax gouging" sources was just 46 per cent (2020-21 BE) in well-developed Maharashtra as compared to 63 per cent in Telangana and 57 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. Significantly, Maharashtra and Delhi — both high-income states — recently reduced the registration fee on property purchase, hoping to boost real estate transactions.

Less developed states rely heavily on tax receipts shared by the Union government, per the formula of the quinquennial finance commission, which compensates states with low tax potential to promote "balanced development". For Maharashtra and Telangana, central tax transfers are only 21 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, of own tax revenue. Conversely, in Uttar Pradesh, central tax transfers are 87 per cent of own tax revenue.

Irrespective of the state you live in, if your annual income is more than Rs 1 million you are in the top quintile (20 per cent). Be prepared to finance delivery of common use public services to the bottom 40 per cent for some time. Aspirers (40 per cent) in the middle do not pay income tax either. But they consume more and thereby pull their tax weight by paying GST, sales tax and excise and bear the impact of customs duties (indirect taxes). It ranks that honest taxpayers also subsidise fraud and tax evasion. Their rightful outrage was mellowed by the Union Budget retaining this year's tax regime including the income tax relaxations and rationalised GST rates. But watch out for your state budget levies coming soon!

A "soft tax" regime rides majorly on the government's ability to ramp up tax collections using big data analytics to make tax evaders and their in-government colluders accountable. It does not help when ideologically driven e-privacy paranoia results in data "privacy" being privileged over better tax collection! The only upward bias in the Budget is in import taxes to protect domestic manufacturing under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat program, possibly to finance the new performance linked financial incentives for 13 industrial sectors. The intent, as also behind the proposal to set up three new textile parks, is to encourage global entrepreneurs to set up manufacturing hubs in India and create good new jobs — on the template of China three decades ago.

The big push is on capital investment, financed by imported capital. Foreign investment in insurance is now liberalized, raising the limit from 49 per cent to 75 per cent. Private Banks (ICICI, HDFC and Axis Bank) already operate under majority foreign ownership. There are also plans for restarting privatisation after a lapse of 15 years creating new opportunities for inward financial flows.

The International Financial Centre at GIFT city got another round of special incentives to ramp up business. Asset reconstruction and management companies are proposed to deal with the swollen non-performing assets (13.5 per cent of assets per RBI), giving public sector banks a clean slate to restart lending. Less convincingly, a Development Finance Institution is to re-engage with long-term project finance to compensate for an absent corporate bond market. Fintech, meanwhile, awaits formalisation, through legislation, of the hitherto ambivalent regulatory regime for cryptocurrency.

The revised FY 2020-21 Budget is expansionary with government borrowing a "never before" net ₹18.5 trillion (fiscal deficit 9.5 per cent of GDP). For the moment inflation is moderating as the RBI curtails excess liquidity and the economy heals steadily.

What follows next depends on the course of the pandemic. There is enough fiscal power in the FY 2021-22 Budget (fiscal deficit 6.8 per cent of GDP) for enhancing demand and facilitating growth. This comes at the expense of pandemic-related relief measures, which are skimpy and will be missed by the bottom 40 per cent who are also the least able to deal with inflation and suffer most from the downturn in employment. In the meantime, fingers crossed.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



De-escalation at LAC: Is a real solution in sight?



K.C. Singh

Former Army Chief and now Union minister V.K. Singh's rash comment on the Line of Actual Control having often been breached by both India and China caused an uproar, with Beijing seizing on it as proof that India was the aggressor. But when news emerged of a likely coordinated de-escalation in Ladakh, after the nine-month standoff between Indian and Chinese forces, Gen. Singh's downgrading of the LAC acquired an intent. It was to ensure any withdrawal deal would not draw attention to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion last year that no one had intruded into India.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh told Parliament on Thursday that a mutual and calibrated withdrawal of forces, north and south of Pangong Tso, was underway, but unwisely refused to share details, pleading their "sensitive and operational" nature. This naturally raised questions whether the likely buffer-zones ceded space historically and traditionally patrolled by Indian soldiers. Some speculated whether China had managed by subterfuge to push the LAC closer to its 1959 claim-line.

The defence ministry decried the next day "mis-informed and misleading comments". It reasserted India's old claims, including the illegal occupation by China of 43,000 sq km in Aksai Chin, as shown in Indian maps. The LAC passes through Finger 8, north of Pangong. Mutual withdrawal will create a buffer-zone between Fingers 4 and 8. India will retain its Dhan Singh Thapa outpost near Finger 3, while Chinese troops shall stay beyond Finger 8.

The intrusions at Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang Plains will be tackled after current withdrawals are completed. The 255-km Durbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road runs at places alongside the LAC, giving connectivity to the Karakoram Pass. At Depsang plains, the flat terrain allowed China to make deep intrusions, threatening the highway.

Multiple questions on about the timing and depth of the Chinese intrusions from April-May 2020, in the middle of a global pandemic it caused. Also, why the flexibility now after months of sabre-rattling, China may have had multiple motives for the sudden, heavily armed and wide-fronted intrusion, under the subterfuge of spring military exercises in Tibet. It had strongly objected in August 2019 to the unilateral revocation of Article 370, affecting the status of a "disputed territory", where China had a stake. In September, the "Howdy Modi" Houston rally with President Donald Trump signalled a growing India-US proximity. Meanwhile, US-China relations mired in trade sanctions. Then came Mr Trump's return visit to India in February 2020, in an US election year, indicating a deeper Trump-Modi connect. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 epidemic began swirling as Wuhan was locked down. In mid-March 2020 President Trump termed the new pandemic "China Virus". All these would have heightened Chinese paranoia. China also saw a chance for strategic gain by repositioning as the world was distracted by the pandemic.

Thus, China also began ratcheting up its aggressive behaviour towards US allies Australia and Japan, that along with the

US and India are part of the "Quad". In May 2020, as the Ladakh LAC heated up, China hit Australian barley and beef exports. In August, Australian wine faced anti-dumping duties. By September, China fully suspended barley imports, ordering stricter controls on wheat. The next month, the squeeze was extended to Australian coal. Similarly, regarding Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands held by Japan, in the 17-month period from April 2019 to August 2020, Chinese vessels were inside contiguous zone 456 days out of 519, as against half that in the previous period. Chinese President Xi Jinping's Japan visit, due for early April 2020, was postponed, ostensibly due to the pandemic. In July, Japan's ruling party cancelled it over China's imposition of a new national security law on Hong Kong.

Initially surprised, the Indian Army quickly mirrored Chinese deployments, by inducting armour, drones, etc backed by air power and artillery. It upped the ante by seizing heights overlooking Spanggur Gap, south of Pangong, stymieing any Chinese thrust towards Chushul, besides dominating Chinese deployments in the sector. India, despite the financial cost, also dug in for the winter, demonstrating resolve. India also began raising the economic and reputational cost for China by banning several "apps" and tightening trade. China in May 2020 imposed draconian controls over Hong Kong, in breach of its international commitment to Britain. China also sharpened its tone on Taiwan, as the US began upgrading its Taiwan ties. The US-China verbal exchanges exacerbated as US presidential

elections neared. After Mr Trump's defeat, outgoing secretary of state Mike Pompeo directly alleged genocide by China in Xinjiang against the Uighurs.

Having opened multiple flashpoints against its continental and maritime neighbours, China awaited the outcome of US presidential elections before reassessing tactics. The Biden administration's endorsement of the Trump approach to China, but with smarter tactics like outreach to key allies for building an "alliance of democracies", put China on notice. India's success in handling the Covid pandemic and its economy recovering rapidly also showed that the Chinese browbeating had faltered. China in any case had succeeding in underscoring Indian vulnerability to determined Chinese pressure at the LAC, especially with an irate Pakistan acting in tandem. India also needed to buy peace abroad, with farmers agitating at home and a Biden administration murmuring nervously about human rights and democracy breaches in India.

Will buffer zones be a precursor to a mutually acceptable delineation of the LAC or just a Band-Aid solution to a deeper problem of China seeking Asian hegemony and bipolarity with the US globally? Are there some unwritten understandings on India scaling back its border infrastructure upgrade, handling of the Dalai Lama, non-militarisation of the "Quad"? It is unlikely China will curb its South Asian ingress, using the Belt and Road projects. It is unimaginable that a nationalist Indian government will concede Chinese hegemony. Thus, the Ladakh de-escalation may just be both sides stepping back, having tested each other's "red lines", to try rebuilding trust and resume the usual path of cooperation, competition and calibrated friction.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambksingh.

India's success in handling the Covid pandemic and its economy recovering rapidly also showed that the Chinese browbeating had faltered

LETTERS

CRACKER UNIT BLAST

It is with reference to the news 12 workers killed in cracker unit blast (Feb.13).

Casualties from fire cracker unit accidents recur as match stick factories and fire cracker units are proliferating in hamlets around Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu defying the government fire hazard norms. The chemicals used for manufacturing fireworks are highly inflammable to friction, impact, heat and static electricity. Most of the accidents occur due to impact and friction. As most of the workers in the industry are unskilled, to prevent accidents it is imperative that they are well trained in handling explosive chemicals. Stringent action should be taken against those who violate Indian Industry Act and Tamil Nadu factory rules. Government should organise delegates to visit China and Taiwan to adopt modern machines in such a way that no human casualties should take place.

P. Victor Selvaraj, Palayamkottai

THIS IS not the first time such accidents are happening in Tamil Nadu. Many such accidents are caused due to human error and lack of responsibility on the part of owners of such units to abide by safety guidelines issued by the government from time to time. There is certain amount of laxity on the part of labour department officials also who fail to inspect the cracker manufacturing factories from time to time to ensure adequate maintenance of safety standards as prescribed under Factories Act. Irresponsibility and irreverence to laws of the land have become a part of our culture and the hapless victims pay for the sins of others with their lives.

B.S. Jayaraman, Coimbatore

KAMAL'S BLACK HUMOUR

APROPOS YOUR editorial *Kamal's black humour* (Feb. 13). It has rightly been pointed out that detractors of Kamal Haasan and his party Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) who are always on the lookout to find fault with the action and statements of Kamal have now raised questions as to what is the general council of MNM and how they were elected which are out of sync with the mirth prevailing oblivious of the fact that it is an internal party matter. Kamal's detractors have no right to pick holes either with his statements, actions, decisions etc., as Kamal has dedicated his time, health, money and energy by starting a party on his own with courage and sense of dedication.

M.C.Vijay Shankar, Chennai

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

Claude Arpi



Trusty old allies India, France can bond over big research

President Xi Jinping recently affirmed that "time and momentum are on China's side". The Great Helmsman believes in the "great rejuvenation of Chinese nation" led by the soon-100 years old Communist Party of China; he, however, cited challenges, adding: "The world is in a turbulent time that is unprecedented in the past century."

Only the future will ascertain if the "momentum" is indeed on China's side, but there is no doubt that the world is going through uncertain and difficult times. As this is bound to continue in 2021 and probably beyond, India has to find reliable and unwavering support abroad.

Addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, Mr Xi recently asserted, somewhat ironically: "The misguided approach of antagonism and confrontation... will eventually hurt all countries' interests and undermine everyone's well-being."

For over 20 years, France and India have been practising cooperation. Recently, India had supported France when the country was attacked by Islamic fundamentalists: "India stands with Paris at this difficult

moment and fully supports the French government on this issue," affirmed New Delhi.

Trust is the key in every relationship. When President Jacques Chirac came to India in 1998, he proposed a strategic partnership. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee readily agreed to give a concrete shape to one based on shared values.

The 1998 Indo-French partnership is deep for many reasons; one of them is a shared vision of the world. Further, France has never tried to bully India into accepting its views, while standing by India during the nuclear tests, in favour of a UN Security Council seat and on terrorism. This has not always been the case with other countries, including the United States.

The recently-concluded "Exercise Desert Knight-21" held in Jodhpur is another example of sharing. With 11 Rafale aircrafts having already joined that Indian Air Force (IAF), the collaboration has been a game changer for India in the confrontation with China in Ladakh.

Speaking in Jodhpur, Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Bhaduria said the first priority had been for the IAF to

integrate the fighter planes in the existing fleet: "It has been done and the current exercise Desert Knight is the result of that." French Ambassador to India, Emmanuel Lenain, noting that the first French aircraft landed in India in 1953, observed "the partnership has persisted through good and bad times".

New Delhi and Paris also held their annual Strategic Dialogue on January 7. National security advisor Ajit Doval met his French counterpart Emmanuel Bonne, the French President's diplomatic advisor (known as the "Sherpa"). According to a South Block press release: "The two sides held discussions on... counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, defence cooperation, maritime security, regional and global issues, and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region."

According to some sources, France agreed to an Indian request that defence technologies will not be shared with Pakistan. Further, Mr Bonne would have offered that 70 per cent of the assembly line for future Rafales could come under "Make in India" scheme, with technology transfer.

During the recent India-France-Japan Workshop on the Indo-Pacific field in

Delhi, the foreign secretary said: "The Indo-Pacific has become an essential concept in international relations today." It is certainly a field where Paris and Delhi could collaborate, however a "turbulent-time" partnership means more than joining a new grouping or buying a few combat aircrafts. Of course, sharing advanced technology is difficult; years ago, Safran, the French company which has developed the engine for the Rafale, tried to work with DRDO on a new engine for the Tejas, nothing has materialised.

One still remembers how difficult has been the cooperation and transfer of technology under the "75 Project" for six Scorpene submarines. The fifth Scorpene, *INS Vagir*, built by the Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL) with technology transfer from France was launched in November 2020; MDL will manufacture a total of six submarines with technology assistance from the Naval Group under a US \$3.75 billions deal signed in October 2005.

Concrete collaborations are, and will be, undoubtedly difficult, they will face obstacles, which in the end can only help deepen bilateral relations.

It is ironic that for years Paris

believed in the depth of its relations with China, so much so that a P4 Lab was "offered" to China in Wuhan, with consequences that are suspicious today. The P4 lab episode is an example of what should never be done — work with untrustworthy partners.

What is required for France and India is to take their relations to the next level; for this, both nations need to work on a "big" research project.

I am thinking of an armed drone of the next generation; another field could be quantum communication, yet another could be a sixth-generation aircraft. In Jodhpur, the Air Chief said, "Our present vision is to incorporate all the latest technologies and sensors in our fifth-generation aircraft" and at a later stage work on a sixth-generation plane, a project in which both nations could collaborate.

For this, the thrust of the leaders of both countries is necessary — but can they find time to "dream" in these turbulent times?

The writer is based in South India for the past 42 years. He writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations.

KAUSHIK MITTER Editor, R. MOHAN Resident Editor

OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

When gibberish pretends to have meaning

SUPARNA SHARMA

The year 2021 hasn't begun well for Malayalam film director Lijo Jose Pellissery. First, his film *Jallikattu*, India's entry to the Oscars, didn't impress the Academy judges, and now the director, who has acquired a cult following, seems to have disappointed his devoted fans with his latest film, *Churuli*, which premiered at the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) on Thursday.

There was palpable enthusiasm in the lead up to the film's show at Thiruvananthapuram's Kairali theatre, causing much anxiety to IFFK organisers who are determined to maintain social distancing in theatres. But, daunted by the long queues of young boys and girls as well as unannounced guests of the state government, some adjustments had to be made in the cinema hall where alternate seats had been taped up to avoid Corona spread. For *Churuli*, the audience sat elbow-to-elbow in a few rows.

The director's loyal fans applauded cheerily at all of the film's piffing jokes, but as the film progressed they seemed bewildered. The mandatory clapping at the end of the film was tentative and weak, as if they were all wondering whether they didn't get it, or it just didn't make sense.

Churuli, billed as a science fiction horror film, begins with gorgeous and haunting aerial shots

Churuli

CAST: Chemban Vinod Jose, Vinay Forrt, Joju George, Soubin Shahr, Jaffar Idukki

DIRECTOR: Lijo Jose Pellissery

RATING: ★★

of a bus winding its way on a serpentine road that cuts through a lush green forest. The eagle eye view injects mystery and suspense to the film which seems to be getting into the thick of the forest in search of a fable-like tone.

This eerie note accompanies the two cops — one experienced and cynical, the other a younger, enthusiastic sort — who are en route, in mufti, to nab a criminal hiding in the misty forest.

Anthony (Chemban Vinod Jose) and Shahjiva (Vinay Forrt), their assumed names, tell the villagers that they are labourers who have come looking for work. But the man on whose rubber plantation they are to dig pits is away. So they get hired as helping hands at an arrack bar-cum-restaurant run by a husband and wife duo. There is no pay, but there's boarding, lodging and drinking.

The film is light and fun as long as it stays with the two bumbling, bantering cops. Shahjiva is keen to get the job done quickly, but his senior, Anthony, is treating this as a relaxed retreat. As the film goes on a hunting



trip and then ventures into a rather strange sauna-cum-massage parlour run by a *paan*-spewing lady, we are amused en route by Pellissery's delightfully subversive politics where the bar gets turned into a temporary chapel. But then, the inexplicable intervenes — an axe-wielding resident, a drunk man, a tree hugger, a game of slapping and a death. There

are also two alien-like creatures with torch-lights for eyes who keep meandering about.

Churuli, based on a short story, opens with a fable about a Brahmin going to a forest to capture a phantom named Perumadan. But the shape-shifting phantom tricks him and the Brahmin, the story goes,

is still wandering the forest looking for Perumadan while carrying the phantom on his head.

Lijo's film is like that Brahmin. Trying to get somewhere but never quite getting there.

Churuli means a helix, a spiral, and the film's story by Vinoy Thomas, which was turned into

a screenplay by S. Hareesh, is about losing the way and one's self while in pursuit. *Churuli* drops obscure hints about its theme but is so taken in with bizarre happenings and characters that it doesn't care to join the dots. We are left to fend for ourselves, to piece together a disjointed narrative.

The forest is the film's stage but also a character in *Churuli*. It breathes, observes and reacts. Much like the jeep which makes a fuss every time it has to cross a bridge to the forest.

Churuli is shot in High Range, Kerala, and is gorgeous. It also has the chops and atmospherics — sharp, high-strung montages, a cool background score, random absurdities and lots of forestry. But its long, pointless sequences are exhausting and nothing to the story. In skilled hands, the random, the inexplicable, the absurd can be fun. Here it feels amateurish, forced, self-conscious.

Churuli carries that silly, childish misconception which besets many students' films — that obtuse dialogue, vague characters and badly shot scenes can somehow be sold as something deep and clever coming together. When, in fact, it's just a bad script transmuted to cinematic gibberish.

Lijo, who has made *Ee. Ma. Yau.* and *Angamaly Diaries*, is a fine director when he is tethered to the ground and reality. Here he takes flight and loses the plot.

A resurrection, a hanging and a father in search of a home for his son

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb. 13: Attending film festivals is like taking a trip across the world — visiting places, meeting people, soaking in cultures — all from a reclining, cushioned seat. That's why film festivals ought to be on everyone's "things to do before I die" list. And among all the many international film festivals in India and abroad, the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), now in its 25th year, is up there with the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in its fabulous choice of films. It has the best of world cinema, showcases several indie Indian filmmakers, and, like TIFF, it is easily accessible. Register, book tickets, watch films.

Organised by the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy, the Covid pandemic has both been a bane and a boon for IFFK.

The crowds outside theatres have shrunk to a single-file queue, the number of days and films have shrunk, but the festival is also, for the first time, traveling around the state.

Headquartered and held annually in Thiruvananthapuram, this year IFFK is folding its *mundu* knee-high and venturing into untested waters. Fingers are crossed and chairman Kamal and artistic director Bina Paul's team, seemingly calm, is constantly at work coordinating shows, tickets, seats, dinners, invites.

It's a well-oiled machine supported by a dedicated team of enthusiastic volunteers. Eager, efficient and so pleasant. The general decency that resides south of Vindhyas is in full bloom at IFFK. I am not romanticising. I am stating a fact.

Here are five stand-out films that you can catch when the festival travels to Ernakulam (from February 17-21), Thalassery (February 23-27) and Palakkad (March 1-5).

Night of The King

Directed by Philippe Lacôte

In the forest of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), squats "La Maca", a prison run by its inmates. It's a real setting for a fictional tale that draws inspiration from the story of Scheherazade and Arabian Nights, while dipping generously into all sorts of traditions of theatre — Shakespeare's tragedies and the Greek chorus — for its narrative structure.

Lord Blackbeard (Steve Tientcheu), a towering but dying inmate, runs La Maca. Other factions, less honourable ones, are itching to take charge. But Lord Blackbeard spots a new inmate (played by Bakary Kone) and designates him to be the new "Roman". As tradition goes, he must tell a story to other prisoners. It must begin with the rising of the red moon, and must not finish till dawn. Else he will be killed.

As the young inmate narrates the story of a legendary outlaw named "Zama King", Night of the King turns into a dizzy, trippy ride that plays simultaneously at three levels. There's the inmate telling the story in a hyper masculine, violent prison, then there's the story of Zama King which transports us back



■ Night of the kings



■ There is no Evil

in time to a village where a tribal queen with magical powers fought her brother and a potential coup, and offstage is the attempt for a hostile takeover of La Maca.

This is not a Burial, It's a Resurrection

Directed by Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese

Indians have nothing in common with Basothos, people native to Lesotho and South Africa, and yet our human experience is eerily similar.

This is Not a Burial, It's A Resurrection is Lesotho's first ever submission to Oscars. Though it didn't make the cut this year, the film is a moving and empowering tribute to people's movement to resist a takeover of their land and rights.

This is Not a Burial... tells the story of Mantoa (Mary Twala Mlongo), an 80-year-old woman who lives in what her people call "Plains of Weeping". She has lost every family member and is now making arrangements for her burial and preparing to die.

Mantoa's physical fragility is often foregrounded beautifully against rich, vibrant backgrounds. Her house has deep blue walls and she reclines on a red quilt in a bronze silk dress.

Every morning Mantoa takes out the batteries from her radio and puts them in the sun to be recharged. And when her village is threatened with forced resettlement due to the construction of a reservoir, she comes back to life, finding the strength to resist and defy.

The film's final moment is reminiscent of what happened years ago when 12 mothers in Manipur shed their clothes and walked to the gates of Assam Rifles and screamed, "Indian Army, rape us". And it's a reminder of



■ Nowhere Special



■ This is not a Burial



■ The Wasteland

"no".

There Is No Evil won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival last year and a month later Iranian authorities sentenced Rasoulof, who lives in Germany, to jail on the charge that his films were "propaganda against the system". He is yet to present himself for incarceration.

The Wasteland

Directed by Ahmad Bahrami

Shot in black and white, Ahmad Bahrami's *The Wasteland* tells a relentlessly bleak story in a cinematic style that is stunning and unforgettable.

Set in an old brick kiln, the film is constructed around one episode that is shown repeatedly, from the perspective of each employee, and the owner.

The kiln is not making money and the owner calls a meeting to give everyone a day's notice to leave. There is the assurance that their dues will be cleared soon, but no guarantee. As the employees retire to their rooms for a meal, the camera follows each one, one by one, to listen to the women talk of being exploited, of wages pending for months, and the helpless men escaping reality with a nap.

Helping each worker is Lotfollah, the manager-caretaker. In between bringing ice for Sarvar, a young, beautiful woman who works at the kiln and lives with her son, he tells each one to go meet the boss and discuss their dues. These scenes too plays in a loop. There's the request for money followed by empty assurances, and before leaving they all complain about Lotfollah and the special treatment he reserves for Sarvar.

The film is set in the sort of dry, ruthless places we often pass by when driving on highways. The

wind is constantly blowing, never letting the dust settle on the many mounds of earth dug up. A lot of time is spent in showing the very physical hard labour involved in making bricks. The camera, like a keen, mute observer, follows each character as they turn mud into bricks, have a fight, or when Ebrahim calls Gohar over for a meeting in Lotfollah's room.

At the end just Lotfollah is left at the kiln. With no hope.

Nowhere Special

Directed by Uberto Pasolini

John (James Norton) is a 35-year-old window cleaner who lives with his four-year-old son Michael (Daniel Lamont).

John is quiet, reserved, a dedicated father and he is dying. His last few days are consumed by meeting and interviewing prospective parents for Michael.

Time is short, Shona, the social worker, is trying her best, but she is running out of options for John.

No family feels like a good fit for Michael. Not the very rich couple who plan to send Michael to a posh boarding school, and not the strange woman who wants Michael to return the stuffed bunny he has been playing with.

Director Uberto Pasolini says that he wanted to make this film as soon as he read about the case of a terminally ill father attempting to find a new family for his toddler son before his death. But that he didn't want to turn it into a melodrama.

Nowhere Special is very special because it tells the story of the father and his son with care and dignity. It doesn't exploit a devastating story, neither does it reduce characters to pitiful creatures. It just stays with them as they go about their life, in search of a home for Michael.

Potent history in Judas and the Black Messiah

JAKE COYLE

Forces of revolution and oppression collide and entangle in Shaka King's blistering *Judas and the Black Messiah*, a potent and vividly acted drama about the FBI's subversion and assassination of Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton.

King's film, which he wrote with Will Berson, plunges into the dark chapter in American history when J. Edgar Hoover's FBI used surveillance, infiltration and worse to check the ascent of Black movements both peaceful (as in the case of Martin Luther King Jr., chronicled recently in *Sam Pollard's MLK/FBI* documentary) and more militant.

Hampton, played by *Daniel Kaluuya*, was just 21 when he was shot and killed in an FBI raid in 1969. The raid was carried out, in part, due to information from Hampton's own security chief, William O'Neal (LaKeith Stanfield), a car thief turned informant four years earlier by the FBI's Roy Mitchell (Jesse Plemons). In the movie's first scenes, O'Neal storms into a bar in a trench coat and fedora, flashing a fake badge — a ruse that nearly scores him a car. When he's caught, the police ask him why not use a knife or a gun.

"A badge is scarier than a gun," he answers. Faced with a lengthy prison term or going undercover with the Black Panthers, O'Neal opts to work for Mitchell. This brings us into the heady orbit of Hampton. As played by Kaluuya, he is a forceful, magnetic orator who, through toil and charisma, is building a "rainbow coalition" of the oppressed in Chicago. So commanding is Kaluuya that *Judas and the Black Messiah* (on HBO Max and in theaters Friday) loses some of its punch when he's not around. (For a spell, Hampton is jailed.)

It's not that the rest of the cast isn't superlative; especially good as Hampton's partner, Deborah Johnson, is Dominique Fishback — a memorable presence on *The Deuce*, and, I suspect, a future star. But "Judas and the Black Messiah" is best

when Kaluuya's Hampton is in full, fiery voice and King's film is directly channeling the Black power movement of the era.

If Kaluuya gives *Judas and the Black Messiah* its strength, Stanfield supplies its unease. King doesn't dwell on O'Neal's psychological stress as an informant the way that Sidney Lumet's police corruption opus *Prince and the City* does. King relies on juxtapositions of O'Neal's time among the Panthers and sit-downs with Mitchell. The FBI agent believes he's on the side of justice. Comparing the Black Panthers to white supremacists, he says: "You can't cheat your way to equality and you certainly can't shoot your way to it."

But Mitchell is an operative in Hoover's FBI. When Hoover (Martin Sheen) makes an appearance, *Judas and the Black Messiah* hints at a wider war of oppression — a war, Hoover says, over "our way of life." This makes King's film a clear counterpoint to Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman*, which showed the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (Cointelpro) aiding, not sabotaging, Black radicals.

Caught in between the Panthers and the feds is O'Neal. For Stanfield, the gifted actor of *Sorry to Bother You* and *Knives Out*, it's a compelling tightrope of a slippery performance, poised between empathy and judgment for the pitiable O'Neal. As damning as the film's title is, Stanfield's O'Neal is never quite aware of the seriousness of the game he's playing until its gruesome and appalling end.

It's a balance reflective of King's film overall. *Judas and the Black Messiah*, resurrecting a painful saga of police racial injustice, is a self-evidently timely film without stating its contemporary resonance literally. If anything, you want to draw Stanfield and Kaluuya together more often than it does. Instead, the movie devolves and grows more sorrowful as Hampton's movement is stymied, and we're left feeling the loss of a history that might have been.

—AP



A still from *Judas and the Black Messiah*

SHORT TAKES

Sandeep, Priyanka break nat'l records

Ranchi: Three Indian race walkers qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics during the National Open Race Walking Championships here on Saturday, with Sandeep Kumar and Priyanka Goswami shattering national records in the men's and women's 20km events respectively. With the three new entrants, the total number of Indian race walkers who have qualified for the Tokyo Games has swelled to five as K T Irfan (men's 20km) and Bhawana Jat (women's 20km) have already made the cut earlier. Sandeep clocked 1 hour 20 minutes and 16 seconds to win the men's group 'A' 20km event while Goswami emerged victorious in the corresponding women's group 'A' event with a time of 1:28:45. Rahul, who finished second in the men's group 'A' 20km race walk event with a time of 1:20:26, also qualified for the Tokyo Olympics. — *PTI*

Navdeep, Arvind secure Oly berths

Dubai: Para-athletes Navdeep and Arvind secured quotas for the upcoming Tokyo Paralympics as India's gold medal tally swelled to nine after the third day of competitions at the 12th Fazza International World Para Athletics Grand Prix here. Overall, India has claimed 17 medals including nine gold, with four of them coming on Friday. The day was lit up by brilliant shows by Indian men's javelin throwers — reigning world champion Sandeep Chaudhary (F44), Ajeet Singh (F46) and Navdeep (F41). However, javelin thrower Sundar Singh Gurjar (F46) had to settle for a bronze. Arvind attained the Minimum Qualification Standard with a distance of 14.05m in men's shot put final F35/36 to clinch Tokyo Paralympics spot. — *PTI*

Leicester humble Liverpool 3-1

Leicester: Slumping champion Liverpool fell to a third straight loss in the Premier League after a dramatic late collapse against Leicester, conceding three goals in seven minutes in a 3-1 defeat at King Power Stadium on Saturday. Leading 1-0 through Mohamed Salah's league-high 17th goal of the season, Liverpool was pegged back in the 78th when James Maddison's low free kick crept in and then went behind by another blunder by goalkeeper Alisson Becker. Jamie Vardy and Harvey Barnes netted the next two goals for Leicester and tilted the mach in their favour. Fourth-place Liverpool dropped six points behind Leicester, which climbed above Manchester United into second place. — *AP*

Utah put Bucks through wringer

Los Angeles: Rudy Gobert and Joe Ingles scored 27 points each as the league-leading Utah Jazz used an explosive and balanced attack to beat the Milwaukee Bucks 129-115 and continue their dominant run through the NBA on Friday. The Jazz had four players score 25 points in a game for the first time in franchise history as Donovan Mitchell (26) and Jordan Clarkson (25) also got into an offensive flow in front of a pandemic-limited crowd of almost 4000 at the Vivint Smart Home Arena. It was the sixth straight win and the 17th victory in 18 games for the Jazz, who became the first NBA team to reach the 20 win mark when they beat Boston on Tuesday. — *AFF*

Chepauk Ro-mance

Rohit cracks whip with 161 to lift India against England

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 13

As expected, the ball gripped, bounced and turned sharply. It was a tricky pitch to bat on, but an elegant Rohit Sharma made it look easy. The opener's classy 161, his seventh Test century, put India in the driver's seat against England in the second Test here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Saturday. At stumps, India were 300 for six in 88 overs with Rishabh Pant (33 not out) and Axar Patel (5 not out) threatening to pile on runs.

Winning a crucial toss on a bunsen track, India suffered an early jolt when England pacer Olly Stone trapped Shubman Gill in the second over of the day. But Rohit, in the calm company of Cheteshwar Pujara, steadied the ship by stitching together a brisk partnership of 83 runs.

India, however, found themselves on the back-foot again shortly before lunch. Pujara's dismissal — after poking a shot away from his body off left-arm spinner Jack Leach — triggered a mini collapse. Virat Kohli's stay in the middle lasted just five balls. Off-spinner Moeen Ali knocked down the Indian skipper's off-stump to dismiss him for a duck. Kohli stood there in disbelief before trudging back to the pavilion. At this juncture, India were 86 for three.

Mumbaikars Rohit and Ajinkya Rahane forged a delightful stand for the fourth wicket (162 runs off 310 balls) to put an end to their lean patch. With Rahane (67 off 149) playing the perfect second fiddle, Rohit took the responsibility of unsettling the bowlers.

Rohit set the tone for the day by pulling Ben Stokes for back-to-back boundaries, including a six. Skipper Joe Root had to take Stokes off the attack and he never returned to bowl.

Against spinners, Rohit used his feet effectively. His sweep shots were perfect examples of controlled aggression. It was a treat for the weekend crowd that walked through the turnstiles of a cricket ground in India for the first time since January 2020. Rohit took just 130 balls to complete his century, with a paddle shot towards fine leg.

Moeen, playing his first



India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot against England during the first day of their second Test at M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Saturday.

— *BCCI*

Test after an 18-month break, struggled to offer the same control that Leach provided from the other end. The productive sweep shot proved to be Rohit's undoing in the end as he holed out at deep square leg off Leach.

Rahane, too, followed suit. He was bowled while trying to sweep a full-length delivery shortly after England's appeal for a bat-pad catch was

wrongly turned down by the third umpire.

Rahane said the plan was to play with positive intent. "You can't be too defensive on this pitch and need to be one step ahead of the opposition. We had discussed, in our batting meeting, what shots to play and had to make them change their game plan. And that's what Rohit did by playing sweeps," said Rahane.

NUMBERS GAME

ROHIT SHARMA'S FOURTH 150+ SCORE IN TESTS:

● Rohit Sharma became the 20th Indian batsman on 26 occasions to score 150 plus runs in an innings against England by making 161 off 231 balls with 17 fours and two sixes on the first day of the second Test match at Chennai on Saturday (February 13).
● It was Rohit Sharma's fourth 150 plus knock in 60 innings of 36 Test matches.
● After this innings, Rohit Sharma's Test average in India reached to 83.55. Among the 203 batsmen who have scored at least 1500 runs at home, Rohit Sharma reached that milestone today — only one batsman, Don Bradman, has a managed better.
● Sharma has seven hundreds in 23 innings in India, of which four have been 150-plus scores. Only once has he been dismissed for less than 150 after he has passed 100.
● Rohit Sharma made 19 hundreds in international cricket since the beginning of 2018, the most among all batsmen. Virat Kohli (18) and Joe Root (13) are next in the list. Rohit Sharma has struck four hundreds in Tests, 13 in one day internationals and two in Twenty-20 internationals; no other batsman has struck multiple hundreds in each format in this period.
● Rohit Sharma's 161 was seventh hundred in Tests at home for Sharma, without a single overseas century. Among all batsmen without an away hundred, only one — Mominul Haque — has more centuries at home (10). Only two other batsmen have scored their first away hundred after making more than seven centuries at home: Allan Lamb (nine) and Mahela Jayawardene (eight). Robin Smith had seven centuries in England before scoring his first one away from home.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISAR*

SCORECARD

India 1st Innings: Rohit Sharma c Moeen b Jack Leach 161, Shubman Gill lbw b Olly Stone 0, Cheteshwar Pujara c Stokes b Jack Leach 21, Virat Kohli b Moeen 0, Ajinkya Rahane b Moeen 67, Rishabh Pant batting 33, Ravichandran Ashwin c Ollie Pope b Root 13, Axar Patel batting 5. Extras 0. **Total: (for six wickets in 88 overs) 300.**

FoW: 1-0, 2-85, 3-86, 4-248, 5-249, 6-284.

Bowling: Stuart Broad 11-2-37-0, Olly Stone 15-5-42-1, Jack Leach 26-2-78-2, Ben Stokes 2-0-16-0, Moeen Ali 26-3-112-2, Joe Root 8-2-15-1.

Rohit happy with fans' return DRS REVIEW KICKS UP ROW

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 13

Rohit Sharma knew he had to be "proactive and not reactive" on a challenging Chepauk pitch that offered bounce and spun sharply. Calling his seventh Test century one of the most satisfying knocks, Rohit said it was the result of subtle adjustments he made in his game.

"When you play on turning pitches, you have got to be proactive. We wanted to make sure we used our feet more and swept the ball," said Rohit.

"Getting on top of the bowler and making sure you are ahead of him is very crucial. The preparation helped. We knew how the pitch was prepared and that it would turn. We had a few good training sessions before the game and trained according to what we were going to expect in the middle," he added.

Rohit said he had worked out plans for each bowler. "What helped me was the preparation I did before the game. Understanding the line that Moeen Ali was bowling. He was trying to bowl in the rough outside

the off-stump. So there was very little chance of being out lbw when you are sweeping from outside off. With two fielders on the boundary line, even if I top-edged it, I knew it was going to land in a safe area. Against Leach, I wanted to make sure I played with an angled bat with the turn," he explained.

Asked to rate Saturday's knock, Rohit said: "I am not going to rate any of my knocks because every knock comes with a different kind of pressure and this too came from different circumstances. I am

not one to rate my knocks. A little disappointing to get out like that but I'm happy the team is in a good position." Rohit said the return of spectators changed the atmosphere. "It was great to have them back. It's something that lives up the whole atmosphere. Without spectators, the intensity was a bit low in the first game. It's been a long time since fans enjoyed live action at the stadium. I am happy they witnessed some good cricket today. I am sure they're going to enjoy the rest of the days as well," he said.

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 13

A third umpire decision which wrongly went against the visiting England team has kicked up a controversy, England asked for a DRS review when the on-field umpire gave 'not out' to the appeal against Ajinkya Rahane for a bat-pad catch. The third umpire, Anil Chaudhary, upheld the decision without seeing the full video. It emerged that Chaudhary missed out on seeing another angle which

clearly showed that Rahane was indeed out. The ball touched Rahane's gloves before landing in the hands of short-leg fielder Ollie Pope.

England spinner Jack Leach said that the DRS behaved like a Video Assistant Referee (VAR), which has been a controversial addition to football. "We were trying to get the third umpire to roll it through, they were checking LBW, we knew that would have been not out, we were just trying to get them to look at what

happened after the ball hit his pad. It is a bit like VAR today, still controversial, it is what it is," said Leach.

"They said they were checking it, then the LBW picture came up, we were saying no. We wanted them to check the other one. I got the impression that they hadn't checked it (the other angle). There was nothing I could do about it. I was angry but to get Rahane's wicket in the next over made things a little easier," further added the England spinner Leach.

City CLIPS

BARATH, JESWIN & BABISHA SHINE AT JUNIOR NATIONALS

Tamil Nadu's S. Barath clinched the 400m gold medal in the under-18 category of the 36th national junior athletics championship at Guwahati.

In the under-20 long jump event, Jeswin Aldrin emerged winner with an effort of 7.74m while P. Babisha won the under-20 triple jump (12.31m). Tamil Nadu ended the championship with 13 gold, 12 silver and 12 bronze medals. It also bagged the overall runner-up title.

TRIPLICANE FC EMERGE CHAMPS

Triplicane FC thrashed Pulianthope FC 4-0 to emerge winners of the DAP Shakti Cup, a newly launched football tournament, on Friday. Slum Soccer, a Nagpur-based NGO with Australian Consulate-General organised this tournament with an aim of developing women's football. The tournament had six teams consisting of 60 girls, divided into two groups.

Live on TV

TENNIS

Australian Open: Matches from 5.30 am on Sony Six, from 1.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

CRICKET

India vs England: Second Test, Day Two, from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1

Pakistan vs South Africa: Third T20 from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 1

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Prithivraj, Sai guide Comrades CC to win

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 13

S. Prithivraj (104) and K. Sai Balaji (89) guided Comrades Cricket Club to an easy win over C. Appaiah Chettiar Memorial Cricket Club in a TNCA fifth division 'E' league match.

II-Division 'Plate'

Sir M.Ct.M. Old Boys Sports Association 96 in 32.5 overs (Venkatesh Iyer 38, C. Gourav Sharma 35; A. Veerababu 3/11) lost to Southern Railway Institute 97 for no loss in 10.4 overs (Jafar Jamal 58 (not out), A. Baskar 39 (not out)); SPIC Recreation Club 251/9 in 50 overs (G. Surendra 78, M. Dinesh Veda Guru 53, S. Sudhan Sanjeevi Kandepan 34) lost to Crom Best Recreation Club 253/4 in 45.4 overs (Sachin Baby 102, N. Mohammed Ashik 55, Pranshu Vijayan 38 (not out)).

III-Division 'B': Prem Cricket Club 192 in 39.2 overs (B. Nathan Khumar 63, D.

Bala Subramani 40; Aashiq Kaleel Rahman 6/52) bt Triplicane Sports Club 168 in 45 overs (D. Govindaraj 54; A. Vivek 7/43).

IV-Division 'C': City Central League 244/9 in 50 overs (Syed Sadiq Pasha 67, R. Dinesh Kumar 38, M.D. Saad Hussain 33; Sandeep Praveen Kumar 3/32) bt Perambur United Club 114 in 45 overs (B. Anirudh 62; L. Sonu Singh 4/30, S. Madhavan 3/28); Cosmopolitan Club 168 in 46.2 overs (N. Aashish 41, V. Siddanth 33; D. Alexander David Raj 4/35, M.R. Prahaladh 3/60) lost to Hunters XI 170/6 in 44.4 overs (S. Sudhan Prargunan 45, Rishabh Sudhir 36 (not out); Bharathi Cricket Club 313/8 in 50 overs (H. Aadithya Narayanan 81, Abhinav Ramesh 76, K. Palani Samy 52; S. Rajesh 4/78) bt Kohinoor XI 148 in 34.1 overs (S. Logesh 65, K. Ajayashankar 48; N. Sunil Krishna 4/14, Abhinav Ramesh 3/23); Bharath Petroleum Corporation Club 184 in 47.3 overs (B. Bharath 48, S. Gowtham Raj 44, V.K. Nivedhan 30; K.R. Shreyas

Raghavan 4/19, C.S. Santosh 3/55) bt Vigneshwara Cricket Club 139 in 43.5 overs (Abinandh Ravi 38, A.R. Siva Murugan 32 (not out); D. Sushil Raj 6/29); Madras Emmanuel Cricket Club 250/3 in 50 overs (V. Saravanan Guru 73 (not out), M. Sakthivel 67 (not out), S. Mohamed Ali 43) lost to Sounder Cricket Club 252/9 in 49.5 overs (V. Krishna 90, M.V. Vishal Sundar 46; B. Gopi 4/60).

V-Division 'C': Triplicane Recreation Club 286/3 in 50 overs (S. Vasanthraj 78 (not out), P. Sujay Subhraj 77, M. Rahul Rangarajan 77) bt Minerva Cricket Club 164 in 37.4 overs (S. Sunil 50, E. Malcolm Thiagaraj 30; N. Saiprasad Reddy 3/12); Unicorn Cricket Club 148/9 in 50 overs (M. Arun Kumar 63; A. Dhanaraj 3/32) lost to Nungambakkam Sports Club 149/6 in 41 overs (T.K. Tamizharasan 54, K. Balaji 50 (not out), B. Ramasethu 3/41).

V-Division 'E': Venkat Cricket Club 256/5 in 50 overs (R. Ram Kumar 66 (not out), K. Gokula Krishnan 50 (not

out), P. Prithivi Rajan 44, A. Santhosh Kumar 35; C. Suresh 3/55) bt Harnath Cricket Club 148 in 35.4 overs (R. Vasanth Gnanaraj 44, G.B. Sathish Kumar 32, T. Baskar 32; Vijay Mariya Doss 3/41, A. Santhosh Kumar 3/6); Indian Oil Sports and Recreation Club 65 in 32 overs (G. Akash 5/19) lost to Triplicane Friends United Cricket Club 66/4 in 13.2 overs; Shivaji Cricket Club 128 in 30.4 overs (M. Kalai Selvan 4/41) lost to Milkyway Cricket Club 129 for no loss in 17.1 overs (K. Manikandan 72 (not out), Y. Aswath Kumar 42 (not out)); Comrades Cricket Club 279/6 in 50 overs (S. Prithivraj 104, K. Sai Balaji 89; V. Bharath 3/42) bt C. Appaiah Chettiar Memorial Cricket Club 152 in 46.3 overs (G.P. Anish Vishagan 34; S. Karthik 3/27, V. Logeshwaran 3/47); Triplicane Cosmopolitan Club 193 in 48.2 overs (S. Prabhu 46; S. Ashwath Narayanan 42, K. Salman Khan 30; P.V. Ravi Teja 4/40) bt Vijay's Recreation Club 138 in 45.2 overs (K. Salman Khan 7/32).