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SC for setting up panel to resolve farmers' stir

Farmers to protest till three laws are repealed

SANJAY KAW and PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

Noting that the Centre's negotiations with the farmers protesting against the agricultural reform laws have not yielded any results, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said it could form a committee to work out a solution between the two sides. The court said the proposed committee will comprise representatives from the government and farmers' unions across the country in an attempt to break the deadlock.

The protesting farmers described the court's suggestion on forming such a committee as their "moral victory" but remained firm on their stand that they will continue with their agitation till the three laws are repealed by the Centre. The ongoing protests, that are now in their third week, have seen thousands of farmers, primarily from Punjab and Haryana, gathering at the borders of the national capital.

"Even if a committee is formed, our agitation will continue until the three laws are withdrawn," the All India Kisan Sangarsh Coordination Committee, a pan-India organisation of 250 farmers' groups, said. The AKSSC said the formation of the committee would be fruitful only if it has the representatives of all national and regional farmers' outfits.

The farmers' unions also sent a written reply to the Centre rejecting its December 9 proposal in which it offered significant concessions. In an email to agriculture ministry joint secretary Vivek



Farmers shout slogans during their protest against the new farm laws, at Singhu Border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

PG 4 | PILs FILED TO REMOVE FARMERS

Agrawal, Sanyukt Kisan Morcha leader Darshan Pal said: "With reference to the proposal and letter received from you, we want to inform the government that the farmers' unions had held a joint meeting on the same day and discussed your proposal and rejected it because it was the written format of the proposal verbally offered by the government representatives on December 5, 2020."

Mr Pal also asked the government to stop maligning the farmers' movement. "We want the government to stop maligning farmers' movement and stop parallel negotiations with other

farmer organisations," he said. The written response from the protesting farm unions came a day after agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the government was awaiting a written response on its proposal sent to the farmers. Five meetings have taken place between the protesting farmers and the minister. Union home minister Amit Shah also met the farmers once, but the deadlock has persisted, with both sides sticking to their stance.

Hardening their stand further, the farmers' groups have now completely blocked the Delhi-Noida border at Chilla.

PM sets off 50th jubilee fete of victory over Pak

Lights victory torch; Year to be called Swarnim Vijay Varsh

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday lit up the "Swarnim Vijay Mashaal" from the National War Memorial's eternal flame marking the launch of the 50th anniversary celebrations of India's decisive victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war, which led to the creation of Bangladesh.

This year is also being celebrated as "Swarnim Vijay Varsh".

"On Vijay Diwas we recall the unwavering courage of our armed forces that resulted in a decisive victory for our nation in the 1971 war. On this special Vijay Diwas, had the honour of lighting the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' at the National War Memorial," Mr Modi said in a tweet.

Four Victory Mashaals (flames) will be carried to different parts of the country, including to villages of Param Vir Chakra and Maha Vir Chakra awardees of the 1971 war.

The soil from the awardees' villages and from the areas where major battles were fought in 1971 are being brought to the National War Memorial.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi lights the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' on 'Vijay Diwas' which commemorates the victory over Pakistan during the 1971 war that led to the independence of Bangladesh at the National War Memorial in New Delhi.

Each year, December 16 is celebrated as "Vijay Diwas" to commemorate India's historic victory over Pakistan.

The swift and professionally planned operations executed by the Indian armed forces led to one of the greatest military victories recorded in the annals

of world history. It was on this day that the largest military surrender after World War II took place in Dhaka when Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, accepted the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani troops from Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi of the Pakistan Army.

This year various commemorative events will be held across India in which war veterans will be felicitated and events like band displays, seminars, exhibitions, equipment displays, film festivals, conclaves and adventure activities are planned.

SC TO HEAR PLEA FOR UNIFORM GROUNDS TO GRANT DIVORCE

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear a plea seeking "uniform grounds of divorce" for all citizens of the country keeping with the spirit of the Constitution and international conventions.

A bench of Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian orally observed that it may consider prayer for directing the Law Commission of India to examine the laws relating to divorce and suggest 'Uniform Grounds of Divorce' for all citizens in spirit of Articles 14, 15, 21, 44 of the Constitution within three months.

The top court issued notice to the Centre on the plea and sought its response. The plea sought directions to the Centre to take steps to remove anomalies in divorce laws and make them uniform for all citizens, without any prejudice on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

He pointed out that due to inadequate aid, the project's revised cost has gone up to ₹55,656 crore. The Chief Minister requested Shekhawat to instruct finance and Jal Shakti departments to consider the Second Revised Cost Estimate as per the 2017-18 index and okay the ₹55,656 crore escalated cost.

— PTI

CM wants aid for Polavaram fast

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday urged Union Jal Shakti minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat to provide adequate assistance for completing the Polavaram project expeditiously.

He pointed out that due to inadequate aid, the project's revised cost has gone up to ₹55,656 crore. The Chief Minister requested Shekhawat to instruct finance and Jal Shakti departments to consider the Second Revised Cost Estimate as per the 2017-18 index and okay the ₹55,656 crore escalated cost.

In this regard, he explained that the number of families to be evacuated has risen considerably in 2017-18 as compared to 2005-06 — from 44,574 to 1,06,006 families. As a result, the land acquisition and relief and rehabilitation costs have gone up.

He reminded that an amount of ₹1,779 crore spent on Polavaram

works is still pending, along with December 2018 bills.

Jagan Mohan Reddy pointed out that any delay in releasing funds will further delay Polavaram and escalate costs of the national project, which is going to be the lifeline of Andhra Pradesh.

The Chief Minister told Shekhawat that the Andhra Pradesh government plans to interlink the Godavari and Kaveri rivers.

Responding to this request of Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Union Minister asked Jalasakti department advisor Sri Ram to discuss such interlinking of rivers with the AP government.

Taking this opportunity, AP CM invited Sri Ram to visit the state for detailed discussions over the linkage.

CM Jagan presented a replica of Venkateswara Swamy to Shekhawat on the occasion. He subsequently returned to the state and held review meetings with officials on Eluru mass illnesses and other issues at his camp office in Tadepalli.

DATABASE TO STORE SUSPECT FINGERPRINTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

The Union home ministry has initiated an ambitious project to automate the collection, storage and matching of fingerprints for expeditious identification of suspects. This will be part of the Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CTNS) a database of criminal record being used by different states and courts.

Ministry sources said that this database, the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System, would be available to all police and other investigative agencies across the country. The move, officials added, would help the investigating agencies expedite their investigations in cases of heinous and criminal cases.

Officials claimed that the initiative would prove to be a major development in helping investigate criminal case and this database would be available online across a total of 16,098 police stations in the country.

APACHE TO BUILD ₹70 CR LEATHER UNIT IN KADAPA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, DEC. 16

A sign of state government's keenness in developing Kadapa district as an industrial zone is Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy laying the foundation stone for a unit of Apache Intelligent SEZ, a well-known footwear manufacturer, in Pulivendula on Christmas Eve, December 24.

Apache will be investing ₹70 crore in the leather industry, which will provide employment to around 2,000 local people, officials disclosed.

■ **Page 2: CM to celebrate Christmas in Pulivendula**

JEE Mains four times annually

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The JEE-Mains for admission to engineering colleges will be held four times a year starting 2021 to offer flexibility to students and a chance to improve their scores, Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank announced on Wednesday.

The first edition of the Joint Entrance Examination-Mains (JEE-Mains) will be held from February 23 to 26, followed by rounds in March, April and May. "We have examined the suggestions received from students and various quarters, and it has been decided that JEE-Mains will be held in four ses-

sions in February, March, April and May," Nishank said.

The first session will be held from February 23 to 26 and the results will be declared within five days from the last date of exams, he said.

"The move will ensure that students do not miss out on opportunities due to clash of exams or due to the COVID-19 situation at present," the minister said.

Nishank also said that students will be given a choice to answer 75 questions — 25 each in physics, chemistry and mathematics — out of 90 in the JEE-Mains paper. — PTI

GOING | CAUTIOUS

CM directs officials to conduct tests to avoid repeat, wants drinking water samples to be tested

Pesticide suspect in Eluru illness: AIIMS, IICT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Pesticides could be a reason for outbreak of the mysterious disease in Eluru. This emerged during a video conference Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had with experts from various fields. Incidentally, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) and other reputed institutions have confirmed that residues of pesticides could be the reason for such an

outbreak. The Chief Minister wanted all types of tests conducted at other places in the state, so that incidents like Eluru do not repeat. He asked officials to focus on proper maintenance of yards, where pesticides and other chemicals are stored all across West Godavari and other districts. He instructed that drinking water samples from each source in all districts of the state be tested. He asked Chief Secretary Neelam Sawhney to prepare an action plan for the same.

In this context, Jagan

Mohan Reddy said, "Awareness about organic farming should be encouraged through Rythu Bharosa Kendras. Agriculture Department should focus on ordering withdrawal of harmful pesticides from the market. Public health labs should be strengthened in every district, samples tested regularly and necessary measures taken accordingly. Incidentally, AIIMS, New Delhi, reported that lead has been detected in blood of patients, apart from nickel in all milk samples. AIIMS doctors said

organochlorine was the reason for illness in patients and pesticides could be the reason for their presence. Organochlorine would have entered the human body through the food cycle. They, however, said a long-term study is needed on these aspects. The exact reason for the "mystery" illness would be known after analysing samples of food, drinking water and vegetables for a few months.

IICT experts said 21 samples of water have been collected along with blood

samples of people and animals. No traces of heavy metals like lead, nickel and arsenic were found in water samples as well as pesticides. Endosulfan and DDD were traced in blood samples. Lead was found in some of the blood samples. There were, however, no traces of organophosphates, they said.

National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Hyderabad, also conducted tests on the air pollution in Eluru. Its experts said pollution within the Eluru atmosphere is within per-

missible limits. They have tested underground and surface waters and found that all metals are within permissible limits except mercury. They said samples of soil are being tested.

Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, said no bacteria or virus has been found in the samples. National Institute of Virology, Pune, reported that no evidence has been found to prove any viral infection.

National Institution of Nutrition, Hyderabad, stated that residues of pesticides have

been found in samples of tomato and brinjal and these could be the reason for the illness.

Representative of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr. Ashish, said the focus should be on finding how residues of pesticides could enter the human body. The committee constituted by the government should work on this aspect, he emphasised.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, West Godavari district collector Mutyalaraaju participated in the video conference from Eluru.

WEATHER

Max: 27.0°C
Min: 17°C
RH: 75%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 27/17°C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+18,708)	(+377)
99,51,072	1,44,487
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+536)	(+3)
TS: 2,79,135	1,502
(+478)	(+4)
AP: 8,76,814	7,067

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

7,41,15,931
DEATHS
16,48,567
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218
worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana

Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Tadiya till 3.23 pm

Star: Uttaraashada till 7.17 pm

Varjyam: 11.16 pm to 12.51 am (Friday)

Durmuhuratam: 10.22 am to 11.06 am; 2.46 pm to 3.29 pm

Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

HJURI CALENDAR

Jamadi-ul-Aakhir 1, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.08 am

Zohar: 12.05 pm

Asar: 4.11 pm

Maghrib: 5.47 pm

Isha: 7.02 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM

MOONSET 7.04 AM

MOONRISE 7.06 PM

COUNTER POINT



People are anxiously counting the days to get rid of the Covid year!

IN BRIEF

Farmer injured in leopard attack

Anantapur: A leopard attacked and injured an old villager Pathanna at Nachepalli village in Rolla mandal of Anantapur district early on Wednesday. According to residents of Nachepalli village, located close to a hillock near a forest, Pathanna came out of his house to answer nature's call early in the morning. Suddenly, a leopard attacked him. Pathanna started screaming which alerted the villagers who ran towards the leopard. Following this, the wild cat vanished into the nearby hillock area. The old man suffered injury in his knee region. He was shifted to Hindupur hospital for treatment, where he is stated to be out of danger. Villagers demanded that the forest department put cages with bait around the forest, as the leopard was frequently visiting the village.

LPG prices hiked by ₹50 a cylinder

New Delhi: Cooking gas LPG price on Wednesday was increased by ₹50 per cylinder, the second hike in rate this month following firming of international prices. Non-subsidised LPG price was increased to ₹694 per 14.2-kg cylinder from ₹644 earlier, according to a price notification of state fuel marketing companies.

SHORT TAKES

COMPLAINT LODGED IN PS AGAINST SEC ON FALSE CLAIMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

A complaint was lodged against State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar alleging that he was taking wages and house rent allowance from the Andhra Pradesh government while staying in Hyderabad.

AP Praja Nyaya Vedika president B. Srinivasa Rao lodged a complaint at Suryaraopeta police station on Wednesday seeking action on the SEC for abusing public money stating that the SEC was taking wages and allowances claiming that he was residing in Vijayawada even though he was staying in Hyderabad.

CM TO ATTEND SEMI-CHRISTMAS AT VIJAYAWADA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

AP Deputy CM and minority welfare department minister Amzath Basha inspected the arrangement at the A1 Convention centre for Semi-Christmas celebrations that will be attended by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on December 18.

Basha said that arrangements were under progress following Corona protocol and the government is taking all precautions.

The Deputy CM along with government programme coordinator T. Raghuram, minority welfare managing director Raj Kumar, district collector A. Mohammed Intiaz, Pammuru MLA K. Anil Kumar and joint collector K. Mohan Kumar inspected the arrangements and interacted with the officials.

Basha instructed officials to make arrangements in accordance with Covid regulations for the celebrations. He said that the state government is organising the annual Christmas High Tea event on Friday December 18 at 5.30 pm at the A1 Convention in Vijayawada. He said that invitees were limited to only 300.

JANA RANABHERI MEETING TODAY AT AMARAVATI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Jana Ranabheri public meeting demanding cancellation of three capitals decision would be held on the Amaravati Seed Access Road at Rayapudi on Thursday.

Amaravati Parirakshana Samiti JAC conveners Gadde Tirupathi Rao and A. Siva Reddy said that one year would be completed of the beginning of they called the Amaravati Movement on December 17 hence Jana Ranabheri public meeting will be conducted in which pro-Amaravati activists, leaders, farmers, supporters and sympathisers and leaders of various political parties will participate.

APSJAC leaders said that Telugu Desam national president, N Chandrababu Naidu, BJP AP president Somu Veerraju, AP Congress Committee president Dr Sake Sailajath, senior Congress leader N. Thulasi Reddy, Jana Sena leader and former Speaker Nadendla Manohar, CPM state secretary P. Madhu, CPI state secretary K. Ramakrishna and leaders of the AAP, MIM and the Loksatta along with a few other parties will address the public meeting.

The two leaders lamented that though the Amaravati Movement was launched a year ago protesting against the state government's decision on three capitals there has been no response from the government.

The public meeting will be held from 10 am to 2 pm and the APSJAC making foolproof arrangements following Covid-19 protocol.

Meanwhile, the police has accorded permission for the meeting. Guntur range DIG Trivikram Varma and Guntur rural SP Vishal Gunni addressing a press meet in Guntur and said that the meeting should be held peacefully. They clarified that the police will not allow any violation of norms and would cooperate for the smooth conduct of the meeting.

Varma and Gunni said the public meeting organisers were instructed to take measures to restrain any untoward happenings as there were chances of provocations during the meeting.

Covid-19: Govt gears up to administer vaccine

50k-litre capacity storage facilities to be dedicated for storing vaccine

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Andhra Pradesh is gearing up for the Covid-19 vaccination programme with a target to complete the training schedule on how to administer vaccine to beneficiaries (health personnel) by December 24.

State health authorities said that soon after the completion of the training for top health officials at the national level, a state-level programme for training trainers involving additional directors, joint directors and other senior officials of various wings of the health department was completed recently.

At present, authorities have started district level training programme with joint collectors, district medical and health officers, district immunisation officers to train the medical officers working in primary health centres and community health centres.

Trained medical officers in turn will train health workers like ANMs, ASHA workers and others who

● State health authorities said that soon after the completion of the training for top health officials at the national level, a state-level programme for training trainers involving additional directors, joint directors and other senior officials of various wings of the health department was completed recently.

are to be actually involved in administration of the Covid-19 vaccine in a phased manner.

As the entire training programme is being done virtually, health authorities are taking it up in an aggressive manner to ensure that all health workers understand requisite protocols for administration of the vaccine.

Apart from conducting training programmes, authorities are also looking for sites to store and administer the vaccine. As three rooms are required to store and administer vaccine as per protocol, health authorities are checking out both government and private buildings to convert them into sites for taking up vaccination programme.

Each site will be utilised for administration of Covid-19 vaccine to 100

persons per session.

For instance in Krishna district, health authorities have identified nearly 43,026 beneficiaries to administer Covid-19 vaccine in phase-I.

Krishna district medical and health officer Dr M. Suhasini said, "We have identified the beneficiaries for administration of Covid-19 in phase-I and coming up with an action plan on storage and transport of the vaccine for its administration to the targeted beneficiaries."

AP is having cold storage facilities with a total capacity of 1,00,620 litres to store several varieties of vaccines for routine immunisation programme and out of it, nearly 50,000 litres capacity storage facilities are to be dedicated for storing Covid-19 vaccine.

According to an esti-

mate, 50,000 litres capacity of cold storage facilities will help store 1.50 crore vaccines.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had already announced in the Assembly that the state might get nearly one crore Covid-19 vaccine doses from the Centre.

Moreover, as the Covid-19 vaccine will not be having any expiry date and also no vaccine veil monitoring, on the lines of vaccines meant for routine immunisation, health authorities are getting ready to store it between two plus and eight plus degrees centigrade.

A senior health official said, "We are making all necessary arrangements ranging from providing proper cold storage facilities to transport until administration of the vaccine to the targeted beneficiaries. At present, we are not having any idea as to when the Centre will release Covid-19 vaccine to AP and also the quantum except for expected one crore doses of vaccine."

Minister slams BJP for silence over demolition of temples

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Minister for endowments Vellampalli Srinivas slammed leaders of the BJP for protesting against the demolition of Hindu temples in Vijayawada city which took place during the previous government and said that the state government had already given an order to reconstruct them.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, the minister said that BJP leaders were intentionally creating ruckus over the demolished temples and started protests after seeing the GO released by the government with political motives. He questioned BJP leader Somu Veerraju as to why he did not respond at the time of demolition when their own party leader was the endowments minister in the TD coalition government.

Srinivas stated that BJP leaders are playing cheap politics by taking this protest and trying to create communal disputes in society. He said that hundreds of acres of temple lands were distributed during the previous TD government. He said that almost 14 acres of temple lands which are worth of ₹437 crore were given to Siddhartha Educational Institution for just ₹21 lakh, similarly, the same BJP minister who was in

BJP TO GOVT: RESTORE DEMOLISHED TEMPLES DURING KRISHNA PUSHKARALU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Several BJP leaders and activists staged a protest at Saniswara temple demanding that the state government restore demolished temples during the Krishna Pushkaralu in the state here on Wednesday.

Addressing the agitators, AP BJP president Somu Veerraju slammed the previous Telugu Desam regime for demolishing the temples during conduct of Krishna Pushkaralu and also for failing to reconstruct them. He flayed both the ruling YSRC government and the Opposition Telugu Desam for adopting anti-Hindu policies.

The BJP senior leader targeted the minister for

endowments Vellampalli Srinivas Rao for failing to act to restore the demolished temples. He also turned critical against Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for having no faith and respect towards Hindu traditions and objected to the release of funds to the tune of ₹5 crore to dargahs and ₹24 crore for churches for their development.

Maintaining that a large number of Hindu temples were not being maintained properly for want of funds, he demanded that the minister for endowments quit his position as he failed to pay attention to the temples.

Veerraju later said that their party would extend support to the Amaravati stir scheduled to be held on December 17.

He claimed that unlike in the TD government, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had not awarded even a single cent of temple land to any person or institution.

Srinivas asserted that the state government has been relentlessly striving for the development of Hindu temples and thus allocated ₹70 crore for developing Kanaka Durga temple in Vijayawada.

While addressing a huge gathering at Venkatachalam, Deputy Chief Minister K. Naryana Swamy claimed that each person among the downtrodden in the state are benefited to the extent of ₹1.50 lakh to 2 lakh through 'Navarathnalu,' the flagship programme of the state government.

Srinivasa Reddy, Mekapati Goutham Reddy and P. Anilkumar Yadav.

While addressing a huge gathering at Venkatachalam, Deputy Chief Minister K. Naryana Swamy claimed that each person among the downtrodden in the state are benefited to the extent of ₹1.50 lakh to 2 lakh through 'Navarathnalu,' the flagship programme of the state government.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy offers Prasadam to Jalashakti minister Gajendra Singh Shekavath at New Delhi on Wednesday.

Naidu demands Jagan explain motive of his visits to Delhi

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday demanded that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy explain to the public whether his Delhi visits were aimed at protecting himself from his cases or for protecting the state's interests.

He questioned as to what the Chief Minister had achieved for the state out of his visits to Delhi for over 10 times. He recalled that the Chief Minister spoke loudly of bending the necks of the Centre but now is prostrating in Delhi for his own selfish interests.

Addressing a video conference with party leaders of Rajahmundry parlia-

mentary constituency, Naidu said that the Chief Minister failed to bring Central funds for the Visakhapatnam Railway Zone and could not take forward the Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor (VICIC) or the Bangalore Chennai Industrial Corridor (BCIC).

He alleged that the CM did not care about the Petroleum Complex and also did not try to recover the first year's revenue

deficit from the Centre.

Naidu accused the YSRC of using the vaccination as a pretext to postpone the local body elections. He alleged that false tweets were being posted in the name of starting Coronavirus vaccinations from December 25. He deplored that each and every section of society fell victim to the YSRC atrocities with attacks continuing on persons and property.

Naidu said that if the meters were fixed on the agricultural motors, then the upland farmers would have to sell away their lands at cheaper rates. He alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy had committed breach of trust by denying the lawful rights of Amaravati farmers and now, he was taking back the farmers' right.

CM TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN PULIVENDULA

From page 1

Incidentally, the Chief Minister will be in Pulivendula, his home town, to participate in Christmas celebrations on December 25.

Representatives of Apache Group had recently met District Collector Chevuri Hariikiran to discuss various issues related to establishment of their unit in Pulivendula.

Anil Kumar Reddy, special officer, Pulivendula Area Development Agency (PADA), last week showed company representatives the space allotted to Apache in the Industrial Development Park (IDP) of the town. Company deputy general manager Muthu Govindaswamy and his team inspected the 27.94 acres area allotted to their unit.

The Apache site is behind Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU) College of Engineering. Landscaping work at the industry is already underway. District industries general manager Chand Basha, APIIC general manager Vijayalaxmi, and other officers interacted with the team led by Govindaswamy on Wednesday.

Company representatives have entered into an agreement with an event organiser based in Hyderabad regarding arrangements for the inaugural ceremony on the Christmas Eve.

Apache's headquarters is at Inagaluru near Srikalahasti in Chittoor district. District collector Hariikiran reiterated that the CM is determined to develop Kadapa district industrially.

A.K. Goswami was a Ranji Trophy player

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 16

Arup Kumar Goswami who is likely to take over as the Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court was a cricketer and had represented Assam in Ranji Trophy.

He also represented the East Zone in the Under-19 and Under-22 teams as also at the senior level.

The profile of the Chief Justice mentions that he was born on March 11, 1961 at Jorhat, Assam, and graduated in Economics (Hons.) from Cotton College of Gauhati University in 1981. He obtained his LLB degree from the Government Law College, Gauhati in 1985. He enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Council of Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh and practised civil, criminal, constitutional and service matters.

He was designated as senior advocate by the Gauhati High Court on December 21, 2004, and was a standing counsel of Gauhati HC, Karbi-Anglong Autonomous Council and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council.

He was appointed as an additional judge of the Gauhati HC on January 24, 2011, and became a permanent judge from November 7, 2012. He



served as executive chairman of Nagaland State Legal Services Authority from April, 1, 2011 to August 12, 2013. He also served as executive chairman of Assam SLISA from June 6, 2018, to October 14, 2019, and also served in the same capacity for Arunachal Pradesh SLISA from March 8, 2016, to October 14, 2019.

Goswami was the Chief Justice (Acting) of the Gauhati HC from September 6, 2018, to October 29, 2018, and also from May 24, 2019, to October 6, 2019. He was the editor of ATMAN, a biannual new bulletin of the Gauhati HC from October 2018 to October 14, 2019. He also served as the secretary-general of the Gauhati HC Bar Association between 2000 and 2001. He was appointed as the Chief Justice of the High Court of Sikkim from October 15, 2019.

Boat rides back in Krishna at Srisaalam

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL DEC. 16

Boating on Krishna river is back with the AP Tourism Corporation at Srisaalam launching trips to Akkamahadevi caves from Wednesday at Srisaalam reservoir.

The round trip costs ₹320 for adults and ₹220 for children, said an official. Life jackets, fire extinguishers, water guns and other safety gear were made available on the boat, AP Tourism Srisaalam unit manager B. Penchal Reddy.

Officials had stopped the boat trip on Krishna river near Srisaalam in September 2019 following a tragedy. Soon after the Covid-19 pandemic struck a blow to the tourism department.

Reddy said that the government has given per-

mission for operating boats to various tourist destinations across the state recently paving way for resuming water travelling by boat at Srisaalam reservoir.

After getting permission from governments from both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the AP tourism department resumed boat trips for Akkamahadevi caves from Srisaalam reservoir in Krishna River on Wednesday.

Akkamahadevi caves are located on the left side of the reservoir in Nallamala forest under Telangana state limits. To reach the caves from Patalaganga of Srisaalam temple town it takes at least four hours per every trip, officials said.

Trips to Akkamahadevi caves started with 20 passengers.

ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL
RK PURAM FLY OVER, SECUNDERABAD
Telle : 040 - 27796757/27794729 www.apspkrpuram.edu.in

VACANCIES OF TEACHERS - 2021-2022

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SHORT TAKES

WASNIK WARY OF CHANGE IN MP LEADERSHIP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, DEC. 16

All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge of Madhya Pradesh affairs Mukul Wasnik on Wednesday remained non-committal on change of guard in state Congress amid growing demand in the party here to replace Kamal Nath as PCC chief.

Wasnik who arrived here in the morning on a 3-day-visit to the state to review preparations of the party for the upcoming civic body polls, told reporters that the party needed senior leaders for their experience and the young ones for revitalisation of the organisation.

He was replying to a question as to if change in leadership in MP Congress was imminent.

When insisted by reporters to clear the air on the matter, he quipped “Do you expect me to answer all your questions today itself”.

Nath’s recent statement that he needed ‘some rest’ and wanted to stay at home has given birth to speculation that he may pave the way for a new PCC chief.

J&K SOUTHERN DISTRICTS SEE LOW VOTER TURNOUT

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, DEC. 16

The seventh phase of Jammu and Kashmir’s first ever District Development Council (DDC) elections recorded an overall 57.22 per cent voting on Wednesday.

State election commissioner (SEC) K.K. Sharma said that the polling was by and large peaceful in the 31 constituencies where voting took place.

He said Jammu division recorded an average voter turnout of 71.93 per cent with frontier district of Poonch highest 80.12 per cent followed by Reasi district with 76.75 per cent and Udhampur 75.63 per cent voting.

The lowest 58.82 per cent turnout in Jammu division was reported from hilly Doda district.

The Kashmir Valley reported 39.52 per cent average voter turnout with Bandipora district recording the highest polling at 70.47 per cent followed by Baramulla with 59.53 per cent and Kupwara district recorded 59.23 per cent polling, he added.

Once again, the southern districts of the Valley — Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama and Shopian— considered to be the hotbed of militancy saw majority of voters staying away from the polling.

As per the official statistics, Anantnag recorded 22.46 per cent, Kulgam 17.98 per cent, Pulwama 11.06 per cent and Shopian just 6.55 per cent polling.



Ex-servicemen join farmers' protest against the new farm laws at Singhu Border in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

Govt clears ₹3,500 cr aid for sugarcane farmers

Move to benefit 5 crore farmers, 5 lakh workers in sugar mills

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

The government on Wednesday cleared financial assistance of ₹3,500 crore to sugar mills for the export of 60 lakh tonnes of sweetener during the ongoing marketing year 2020-21 as part of its efforts to help them clear outstanding dues to sugarcane farmers. Briefing media after the meeting, information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved a subsidy of ₹3,500 crore on exports of 60 lakh tonnes of sweetener and the subsidy amount will directly be given to

● THIS SUBSIDY aims at covering expenses on marketing costs including handling, upgrading and other processing costs and costs of international and internal transport.

farmers.

The dues will be directly credited to their accounts on behalf of sugar mills against the cane price dues, and the subsequent balance, if any, will be credited to mills’ accounts.

Farmers sell their sugarcane to the sugar mills, however, they don’t get their dues from the sugar mill owners as they have surplus sugar stock. To address this concern, the government has facilitated the evacuation of surplus sugar stock. This will enable payment of dues of

the sugarcane farmers.

The CCEA has approved the subsidy at the rate of ₹6 per kg for the current year, much lower than about ₹10.50 per kg in the 2019-20 marketing year keeping in view favourable international prices

According to official sources, the government will incur about ₹3,500 crore for this purpose, and this assistance would be directly credited into farmers’ accounts on behalf of sugar mills against cane price dues and subsequent balance, if any, would be

credited to mill’s account.

The decision will benefit five crore farmers and 5,00,000 workers employed in sugar mills and related ancillary activities. Sugar mills will be able to earn ₹18,000 crore revenue from the export, said Javadekar, who is also Union environment minister.

This subsidy aims at covering expenses on marketing costs including handling, upgrading and other processing costs and costs of international and internal transport and freight charges on the export of up to 60 LMT of sugar limited to Maximum Admissible Export Quota (MAEQ) allocated to sugar mills for the sugar season 2020-21.

Adhikari resigns as TMC legislator

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 16

Dealing yet another blow to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s Trinamul Congress, rebel leader Shubhendu Adhikari quit as Nandigram MLA a day before his visit to New Delhi and likely induction in the BJP. Adhikari, fearing a “political vendetta” against him by the TMC, also sought Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar’s “intervention” in a letter for his and his aides’ protection from being implicated by

the state police in false cases.

At around 4 pm on Wednesday Adhikari, accompanied by Congress MLA Sudip Mukherjee from Purulia, went to the West Bengal Assembly and handed over his resignation letter to Assembly secretary Abhijit Som, in the absence of Speaker Biman Banerjee. He also sent a copy of his resignation letter to Banerjee via email. His move came nearly three weeks after he had resigned from the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet.

A drama, however, unfolded later as Adhikari’s resignation was not immediately

accepted till reports last came in, according to sources, since an MLA is required to submit his resignation letter physically in front of the Speaker to ensure that there is no pressure on him for his decision. Adhikari remained silent. But his loyalists under the banner of *Dadar Onugami* (elder brother’s followers) hoisted the BJP flag at his office in Heria in East Midnapore in jubilation.

In the evening Dhankhar tweeted Adhikari’s letter, which states: “I am constrained to seek your inter-

vention as constitutional head so that the police and the administration apparatus in the state is dissuaded from implicating me and my associate followers in criminal cases out of political motivation and vendetta. I am in public life now for 25 years, during which my prime focus has been and is to be in service of the people. I have passionately involved myself with commitment and dedication to serve the people in all positions, including as a minister in the government till my resignation on 27.11.2020.”

CPM-led LDF registers big win in local body polls

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 16

The CPM-led ruling Left Democratic Front in Kerala on Wednesday registered a significant victory in local body polls considered as the semifinals ahead of crucial Assembly elections next year.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan termed the success of ruling front as “peoples victory.”

“It’s a befitting reply from the people of Kerala to the forces who tried to destroy our achievements, central agencies which worked with ulterior motive, communal forces which wanted to weaken the unity of the people and the forces which unleashed lies against the government,” he said.

The Chief Minister said the people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, region extended wholehearted support to LDF.

“The mandate reflects the secular mindset of

RESULTS 2020	TOTAL SEATS	LDF	UDF	BJP	OTH
G. Panchayats	941	514	377	22	28
B. Panchayats	152	108	44	0	
D. Panchayats	14	10	4	0	
Municipalities	86	35	45	2	4
Corporations	6	5	1	0	

(G) Grama; (B) Block; (D) District

the people of the state,” he said.

For the LDF the victory is vital as it comes in the backdrop of serious allegations related to gold smuggling, corruption in mega projects faced by the government and Chief Minister’s office.

Almost all central agencies including CBI, ED, Customs, NIA are camping in the state in connection with the investigations into various cases forcing even Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to accuse the BJP-led government at the Centre of misusing these agencies to derail the pro-people projects and topple democratically elected state government.

Despite facing such

an adverse political situation, the LDF managed to keep its rural base almost intact winning 514 grama panchayats.

The UDF which was expected to do better this time, ended up with 377 grama panchayats.

However, the UDF maintained its upper hand in municipalities winning 45 of the 86. The LDF won 35 while BJP added one more to its 2015 tally.

Meanwhile, Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala claimed that the UDF had improved its performance compared to 2015. “LDF cannot claim a big victory as its tally in grama panchayats and municipalities has gone down,” he said.

SC SEEKS CENTRE’S REPLY ON PILS FOR REMOVING FARMERS

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued a notice to the Centre and others on a batch of petitions seeking removal of farmers camping at several roads near Delhi borders in protest against the three new agri laws.

A bench comprising Chief Justice S.A. Bobde, and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian also indicated that the court may form a committee having representatives of the government and the farmer unions across the country to resolve the deadlock over the legislations.

In a hearing conducted via video conferencing, the bench directed the petitioners to make protesting farmer unions parties to the pleas and posted the matter for hearing on Thursday.

“Your negotiations with protesting farmers have not worked apparently till now,” the bench told the Centre.

Meanwhile, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench that the government will not do anything against the interest of farmers.

Multiple pleas have been filed in the SC seeking a direction to authorities to immediately remove the farmers, saying commuters are facing hardships due to the road blockades and the gatherings might lead to an increase in the number of Covid-19 cases.

— PTI

India, UK panel to study recognising of degrees

New Delhi, Dec. 16: India and the UK on Wednesday agreed to set up a joint task force consisting of designated higher education organisations from both the countries to work towards mutual recognition of academic qualifications.

Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank’ said. A decision in this regard was taken in a bilateral meeting between Nishank and UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab here on Wednesday.

“India and the United Kingdom have agreed to set up a joint task force consisting of designated higher education organisations from both the countries to work towards mutual recognition of academic qualifications. This will support India’s agenda for internationalisation of higher education. “The agreement to work towards mutual recognition of academic qualifications aligns with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for creating a globally mobile workforce and internationalisation of Indian higher education, as proposed in the National

Education Policy (NEP) 2020 rolled out in July this year,” Nishank said.

The meeting was also attended by minister of state for education Sanjay Dhotre and senior officials of the education ministry. Raab hailed India’s National Education Policy 2020 as visionary and said the proposed reforms will open up opportunities for students, the economy and for deeper engagement and collaboration between the two countries.

“This policy will help make the bridge of education between India and the UK stronger. The UK has a lot of respect for the academic rigour coming out of India, and the contribution of the Indian student community is highly valued by our country. The UK has made several changes in its visa and immigration rules to facilitate student mobility,” he said.

Both sides expressed hope and confidence that they would further enhance mutual engagement in the field of education, research and innovation, leading to deeper and stronger bilateral relations. — PTI

Sangh suffers from Islamophobia but sincerely wants to eradicate caste animosity: Vinay Sitapati

SRIRAM KARRI HYDERABAD



Vinay Sitapati

QIn your back-ground regarding the birth of Hindutva, you emphasise a historical irony, maybe even an anomaly, that Ambedkar supported Partition siding with Jinnah against Gandhi and Congress but for exactly an opposite view, possibly keeping his quote on Islam being a close corporation, its brotherhood not being universal, or that Islam being incompatible with self-government.

How do you then perceive the argument that a Muslim-Dalit coalition, or as Asaduddin Owaisi would say – Jai Bheem, Jai Meem – is the most likely formidable answer to Modi’s Hindutva? How would India’s first law minis-

ter, Dr Ambedkar, have responded to acts like CAA or the NRC?

Ambedkar was critical of every kind of religious bigotry. But in a different way Ambedkar too was focussed on the welfare of his own community, the Dalits. It is the nature of democracy in a group-based society that different ideologies subscribing to electoral politics will try to fashion their own coalition. Democracy in India has always been largely about the arithmetic of group numbers.

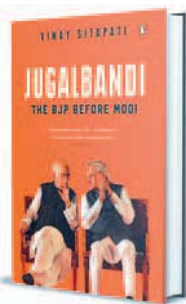
For example, Savarkar had simple task. Hindus are 80 per cent of India, and can easily dominate election. The problem for him is that Hindus don’t think of themselves as

one. If they did, it would be easy for any Hindu party to win elections. But his math was right – get the Hindus to feel united and win power. In the process, the Muslims are alienated, even demonised. But lower caste Hindus are co-opted, and made partners.

The underlying logic – trying to form coalitions for the sake of a numerical majority – is not unique to the BJP. Every party does it. The Communist party says we will unite the have-nots, workers and farmers, and win, while demonising capitalists, traders and businessmen. All OBC and Dalit parties have this formulation of a majority too. They demonise the upper caste, in a bid to consolidate the SCs, STs and OBCs; to which then you add Muslims.

There are many ways to get to a majority in elections and each ideology is a reflection of a particular calculation to reach it. Owaisi is trying to fashion his own majority. The BJP is playing the same game, with a different set of blocks. In that sense, every political party pursuing power in a democracy is therefore

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW PART - 2



Title: Jugalbandi: The BJP Before Modi
Author: Vinay Sitapati
Category: Non-fiction narrative, Indian politics
Publisher: Penguin Viking
Pages: Hardback / 424
Price: ₹799

majoritarian in that sense. They are all playing a game of stitching together a sustainable majority and advocating and justifying policies to benefit constituents of their groupings.

QBut how viable is Owaisi’s argument of Muslims and Dalits – in argument both victims of upper caste Hindus – to create a subaltern’s government?

The BJP, at this point of time, under Narendra Modi has already succeeded in stitching together a sustainable majority, which is across the caste hierarchy of Hindu society. My critique of Owaisi is that he is not a liberal counter-argument against the RSS, merely the other side of the coin.

He says he opposes a ban on beef but not because he believes every individual must have the right to eat what she or he wants. Owaisi says there should be no ban on beef because lots of people eat beef, especially Muslims and Dalits. The BJP beats him and the likes of him at this game because there is no significant liberal constituency in India, who want to keep the state away from their private choices.

QA strong critique of RSS is it is a thinly-veiled Brahmanical hegemony?

I don’t agree. If that was the case, why are OBCs, Dalits and Tribals voting for the BJP more than for any other party? Do they not know their own interests? The RSS idea of India has, for over a century, has been

articulated by upper-castes who nonetheless have rejected a Hinduism that is only for upper-castes. In fact, no one wants the abolition of caste differences between Brahmin and Dalits more than the RSS and the BJP. Of course this was initially entirely for electoral reasons – to create a Hindu ‘vote-bank’. But if you wear a mask for a 100 years, that mask becomes your face. And today, with a Dalit President and OBC Prime Minister ruling the country, it is obvious the mask has become the face. The correct criticism of Hindu nationalism is that they are anti-Muslim. There is no way to dilute this charge. But don’t group Muslims and lower-castes Hindu together. That is, in a way, creating another kind of vote-bank politics in India. And that vote-bank has failed.

QLet us understand your argument correctly. You are saying RSS is anti-Muslim but not anti-Dalit. It means it wants unity between all castes and polarisation only on communal lines? So the allegation they are anti-Dalit and anti-Muslim is half

wrong?

Absolutely. Take the example of the Janata government in 1977 which the Jana Sangh (precursor of the BJP) was the largest component of. They could have become prime minister, but they chose not to. They really wanted Jagjivan Ram to become PM. Why? Simple reason: he was a Dalit. And the RSS wanted to make sure that India had a Dalit prime minister. Critics of the BJP must reconcile themselves with these facts.

On the other hand, they have always been suspicious of Muslims. The ‘Love Jihad’ laws of today give you a great insight in RSS thinking. They do not want Hindus to marry Muslims. They want those religious boundaries to be maintained. On the other hand the sangh parivar even pays money as incentive for inter-caste marriages, for example between a Brahmin and a Dalit. The VHP has actively rejected Manu Smriti for upholding caste oppression. In this sense, they are progressive.

Tomorrow: Modi’s Economics



SHORT TAKES

ANIME STUDIO ARSON: JAPAN DETAINS MAN

Tokyo, Dec. 16: Japanese prosecutors on Wednesday charged a man with murder over the 2019 arson attack on Kyoto Animation that killed 36 people, the country's deadliest violent crime in decades.

Shinji Aoba, 42, was detained in the aftermath of the July attack, but has been under constant medical supervision since then after sustaining severe burns in the incident.

The charges include murder, attempted murder, arson, trespass and breach of the arms-control law, the Kyoto prosecutor's office said, without giving further details.

More than 30 people were also injured in the attack, in which Aoba is accused of breaking into the studio's building, spreading gasoline around the ground floor and setting it alight.

TRYING TO FLEE: CHINA INDICTS 10 HK RESIDENTS

Hong Kong, Dec. 16: Chinese prosecutors on Wednesday announced the indictment of 10 people from Hong Kong over an attempt to flee the city amid a crackdown on opposition political activity.

The Yantian district prosecutor's office in the city of Shenzhen just across the border from Hong Kong said on its microblog that 10 of the suspects were charged with illegally crossing the border while two were also charged with organising the attempted journey.

Two others are minors and a decision on how to handle their cases will be made at a later time, the office said. Relatives of the 12 say they have been prevented from hiring their own lawyers and that the accusations against them are politically motivated. The 12 were arrested at sea in August while they were apparently attempting to flee to Taiwan after a tough national security law took effect in Hong Kong.

FIJIANS TOLD TO SEEK SHELTER FROM CYCLONE

Suva, Dec. 16: Fijians living in the path of an approaching super cyclone were told to hunker down at home or head to emergency shelters immediately on Wednesday, as authorities warned of the storm's potential to uproot buildings and cause mass destruction.

The Fiji Meteorological Service said Cyclone Yasa had intensified into a top-of-the-scale category five storm, with gusts of up to 280 kilometres per hour (174 miles per hour). It is on track to hit Fiji late Thursday and the National Disaster Management Office said around two-thirds of the island nation's population of 900,000 were in its path.

National Disaster Management Office director Vasiti Soko said anyone who doubted their home's structural integrity should prioritise survival over protecting their property and flee right away.

"If you need to move to an evacuation centre, we are pleading that you move before it gets dark."

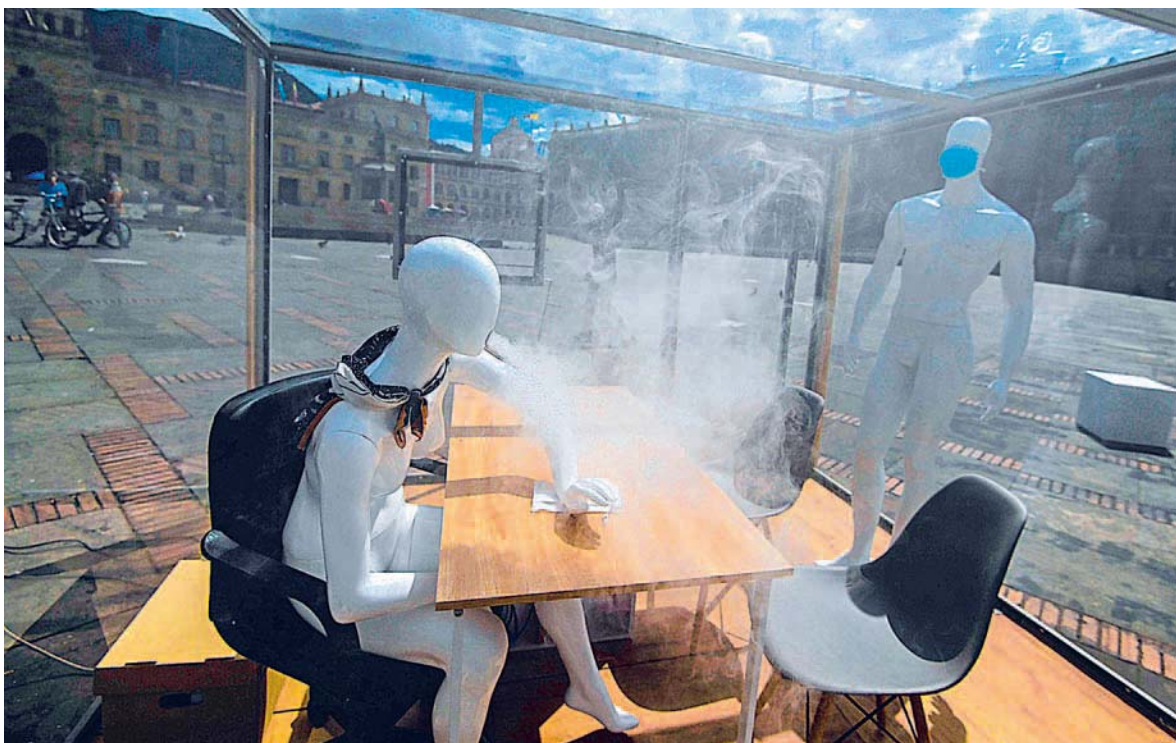
PIG GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOR FOOD GETS NOD

New York, Dec. 16: US regulators have approved a genetically modified pig for food and medical products, making it the second such animal to get the green light for human consumption.

But the company behind it says there are no imminent plans to sell it for meat. The pig is genetically engineered to eliminate the presence of alpha-gal, a type of sugar found in many mammals. The sugar makes its way into many products — including medications, cosmetics and food — and can cause allergic reactions in some people.

The main goal of the company behind the pig, United Therapeutics Corp., is to develop medical products, such as blood thinners, that won't set off such reactions, said its spokesman Dewey Steadman. Eventually, the Silver Spring, Maryland-based firm hopes to develop a way for the pig's organs to be transplanted into people.

The pig, called GalSafe, also has commercial potential as food, but Steadman said the company doesn't know when it might be able to secure an agreement with a meat producer to process and sell it.



Smoke comes out of a mannequin's mouth to show how bacteria can spread in the air during a campaign to raise awareness for the prevention of the Coronavirus, in Bogota on Tuesday.

Many European nations impose pre-Christmas virus restrictions

Berlin, Dec. 16: Several European countries on Wednesday imposed tighter Coronavirus restrictions ahead of Christmas, as the United States reported another record number of new infections.

Hopes for an end to the pandemic were boosted by positive assessments of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine, but a study warned that at least a fifth of the world's population in poorer nations may not have access to vaccines until 2022.

With the virus resurgent in Europe, Germany closed non-essential shops and schools, swathes of England came under tighter curbs, and Denmark extended its restrictions.

"It's very good that we're closing the shops, it's for our health. We can't wait for things to fall apart," said shopper Jurgen in Berlin, where people were rushing to finish their Christmas purchases before the shutdown.

Germany had coped relatively well with the first wave in the spring, but it has struggled to contain a resurgence in recent months and its health minister said it wanted the European Union to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine "before Christmas".

Calls have been growing for the EU health regulator to speed up its vaccines decision process, with the bloc lagging behind a growing number of nations that have authorised the drug.

Britain has already started using it, but high infection numbers forced London on Wednesday to join large parts of central and northern England under tough, economically painful restrictions. Pubs, bars, restaurants and other hospitality sites will close, apart from take-aways, as will theatres and other entertainment venues. "The hospitality business needs this week, and it's devastating. It is devastatingly awful," said Lesley Lewis, owner of The French House, a London pub. "But if this is what it takes to save lives, that's what we have to do."

Record death toll in Germany

Frankfurt Am Main, Dec. 16: Germany registered a record number of deaths from Covid-19 on Wednesday, the first day of a new partial lockdown to try and cope with a surge in infections.

A total of 952 people died in the previous 24 hours, according to the Robert Koch Institute disease control centre.

It said 27,728 new Coronavirus cases were registered, a figure close

to the daily record of nearly 30,000 infections reported on Friday.

The previous daily record for fatalities was also reached Friday, when almost 600 people were reported to have died as the number of those in intensive care in the country reached alarming levels. Some 83 percent of intensive care beds in hospitals were occupied on Wednesday, the Interdisciplinary Association for In-

tensive Care and Emergency Medicine (DIVI) said. The latest figures come as a new partial lockdown was imposed, with non-essential shops and schools closed in a bid to halt an "exponential growth" in infections.

The restrictions will apply until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or to offer extended company holiday.

WTO mulls how to ease food aid

Geneva, Dec. 16: World Trade Organisation negotiators were debating Wednesday a proposal to lift all trade barriers inhibiting the delivery of international food aid as the Coronavirus pandemic pushes humanitarian needs to new heights.

Dozens of WTO members, including the United States, the European Union and China, support the proposal put forward by Singapore and the World Food Programme, which won the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize for its humanitarian work.

"This is a very important proposal," EU ambassador to the WTO Joao Aguiar Machado told reporters.

If adopted, the proposal would "ban export restrictions on these foodstuffs which hinder the World Food Programme's ability to procure (food products for) the populations most in need across the world."

But while the draft text enjoys strong support, it could struggle to secure unanimous backing which is required for all decisions at the global trade body.

According to a Geneva-based trade official, who asked not to be named, India has hinted it would be reluctant to back a blanket exemption on

US AUTHORISES FIRST AT-HOME COVID-19 TEST

Washington, Dec 16 : The United States on Tuesday authorised its first rapid at-home test for Covid-19, which is available over-the-counter and produces a result in around 20 minutes.

The test, made by California-based Ellume, will sell for around \$30 and the company plans to roll out three million units in January 2021, and millions more in subsequent months. Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said the emergency use authorization represented a "major milestone."

trade barriers affecting WFP, pointing to the need to protect "national food security".

The short text up for discussion says WTO members "shall not impose export prohibitions or restrictions on foodstuffs purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme."

VIRUS HUNT: WHO TO SIFT CHINESE SAMPLES, DATA

Falkensee, Dec. 16: A German scientist who is part of a small team of experts assembled by the World Health Organisation to investigate the origins of the Coronavirus says they plan to sift through samples and medical data from China to help determine where the bug first jumped from animals to humans and which species it came from.

The search for the source of the new Coronavirus has sparked claims of cover-ups and fuelled political tensions, particularly between the US administration of President Donald Trump and Beijing.

Most researchers think that the virus, also known as SARS-CoV-2, originated in animals in China, probably bats, and the WHO has put together a 10-person team to examine the science. Mission member Fabian Leendertz, a biologist at Germany's Robert Koch Institute who specialises in emerging diseases, said that the goal is to gather data to be better prepared for possible future outbreaks.

"It's really not about finding a guilty country," Leendertz said.

Senate run-offs: Biden campaigns

Nominates Buttigieg as transportation secy

Atlanta, Dec. 16: President-elect Joe Biden threw his weight into the Democratic battle for control of the US Senate on Tuesday, as his White House win was finally acknowledged by top Republicans and holdout foreign leaders.

Biden flew into Georgia — a southern state he won in an upset against President Donald Trump — to host a rally for two Democratic candidates in runoff races that will determine the Senate's balance of power.

"Honk for your next United States senators Jon Ossoff and Rev. Raphael Warnock," Biden told the crowd at the drive-in event in Atlanta — urging voters to turn out in force on January 5.

"Send me these two men, and we will control the Senate!" One day after the Electoral College affirmed Biden's victory, attention shifted to the looming Senate battle — and to the shape of the incoming administration, as Biden also announced he had nominated Pete Buttigieg, a former Indiana mayor and presidential rival, as secretary of transportation. He would be the first openly gay person confirmed by the Senate to a presidential cabinet post — in sync with Biden's pledge to usher in the most diverse cabinet ever when he takes office on January 20.

Rouhani: 'Happy' Trump leaving

Tehran, Dec. 16: President Hassan Rouhani said Wednesday that Iran was "very happy" over the looming departure from office of US counterpart Donald Trump, who led a campaign of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic republic.

President-elect Joe Biden, who defeated Trump at the ballot box in November, has signalled a willingness to return to diplomacy with Iran after four tense years under the outgoing president.

"Some say you are over-excited by the advent of Mr. Biden. No, we are not, but we are very happy to see Trump leave," he said in televised comments at a cabinet meeting.

"Thank God, these are his final days," Rouhani added, calling Trump a "tyrant", "the most unruly, lawless president" and a "terrorist and murderer." The electoral college confirmed Biden as the next US president on Monday even as the incumbent continues to refuse to accept defeat.

The formal handover of power will take place on January 20 when Biden is sworn in.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington soared during Trump's presidency as his administration sought to bring Israel and the Gulf Arab states closer together with a hard line against Iran.

Afghan, Taliban in Pak to talk peace

Islamabad, Dec. 16: A high-level Afghan-Taliban delegation arrived here on Wednesday to hold talks with the top Pakistani leadership as part of efforts to push forward the reconciliation process, amid growing incidents of violence in Afghanistan.

The Taliban Political Commission (TPC), headed by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, is on a December 16-18 visit to Pakistan, according to the Foreign Office (FO).

"During the visit, the delegation will meet with the Foreign Minister and

call on the Prime Minister," the FO said. The visit comes after a delegation led by US special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, on Monday met Pakistan's Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and discussed with him the ongoing Afghan peace process.

AP reported that Baradar and his delegation were summoned to Islamabad from Qatar, where they have been negotiating since September with Afghan government representatives.

ERDOGAN: U.S. CURBS ATTACK SOVEREIGNTY

Ankara, Dec. 16: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday called US sanctions against Ankara over its purchase of a Russian missile defence system an "open attack" on the NATO member state's sovereignty. The United States made good on months of threats to punish Turkey for buying the S-400 system under a 2017 law known as CAATSA, which aims to limit Russia's military influence and punish it for its behaviour abroad.

Siddharth Chatterjee is UN's China Resident Coordinator

United Nations, Dec. 16: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appointed senior UN official Siddharth Chatterjee of India as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in China. Resident Coordinators are the UN Secretary-General's representatives for development at the country level.

They lead UN teams supporting countries to recover better from the Covid-19 pandemic through the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Guterres appointed Chatterjee as the Resident Coordinator in China, with the host government's approval.

Chatterjee's appointment follows confirmation from the Host Government, where he will take up his post in the middle of January of next year. Spokesman for the Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday as he made the announcement.

"We congratulate our friend Siddharth," Dujarric said.

"We proudly remain with full gender parity and North-South balance among all of our Resident Coordinators, who cover 162 countries and territories," he said. Chatterjee has more than 25 years of experience in international cooperation, sustainable development, humanitarian coordination and peace and security.

PRICELESS | TREASURE Hoarder risks facing colossal fine, jail time

27K artefacts seized in France

Paris, Dec. 16: French authorities have seized a "priceless" haul of over 27,000 archaeological artefacts ranging from Bronze Age bracelets to Roman coins that had been secretly amassed by a single person in the east of the country, customs said Wednesday.

The seizure of the 27,400 objects was the result of a year-long investigation conducted by French customs, Belgian authorities and the French culture ministry.

The hoarder, who has not been named and now faces a criminal probe, had built up the collection for personal and trading purposes, the French customs service said.

He had amassed the collection himself using metal detectors as well as what appears to be a deep archaeological knowl-

edge. The man had first aroused suspicion in 2019 when he told authorities he had found almost 15,000 Roman coins by chance on land he had acquired in Belgium.

The French customs service then confirmed that this haul had actually been built up through "the looting of various sites in France", it said.

The case has now been handed to the judiciary, with the man risking a colossal fine and possibly jail time.

This seizure is "a clear message to those who — for the profit and the self-interest pleasure of a few — deprive us of our shared heritage and erase entire sections of our history", Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said in a statement.

He described the haul as a "priceless treasure". The collection includes



A picture taken on December 14, 2020 shows Customs seals of some of 27,500 archeological items in Metz, eastern France, seized by Customs officers and which were held by a man from France northeastern region Lorraine who tried to sell them in Belgium.

thousands of rare Roman coins, many of them rich in silver.

Also among the looted objects are bracelets and torques dating from the Bronze Age and the Iron

Age, a rare Roman dodecahedron of which there are only around 100 known examples in the world, as well as objects from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

BEZOS'S EX-WIFE GIVES \$4 BILLION IN CHARITY

San Francisco, Dec. 16: MacKenzie Scott, the ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, said Tuesday she has given \$4.2 billion to groups helping the vulnerable as the pandemic hits lives like "a wrecking ball."

Scott, who formerly went by the name MacKenzie Bezos, last year signed a "giving pledge" to donate the bulk of her wealth to charity.

In a round of donations early this year, Scott gave nearly \$1.7 billion to groups devoted to race, gender and economic equality, as well as other social causes.

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DECCAN Chronicle

17 DECEMBER 2020

Facts don't back PM's theory on farmers' stir

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech in Kutch on Tuesday, in which he spoke of "a great conspiracy to mislead farmers, in and around Delhi", can be said to mark a new stage in the agitation of farmers of North India, in the vanguard of which are Punjab farmers. This stage bespeaks the hardening of the government's stand against the farmers knocking on the doors of the nation's capital for the past 20 days.

After six rounds of dialogue between the government and the farmers' representatives, including a session with Union home minister Amit Shah, the food growers maintain their opposition to the three controversial agri-laws, passed in controversial circumstances last September. The government is just as adamant and will not agree to their repeal, the farmers' key demand. The farmers have rejected the government's implied offer of amending specific sections of the three laws if farmers can pinpoint them.

In Parliament, and in various statements made by the government's representatives outside the legislature, not excluding the remarks of the PM at various forums, the government is yet to cogently explain to the need for the laws that have created a storm, other than to say that these represent much-needed "reform" that will benefit farmers and the farm sector, and will not leave them worse off. The agriculturists are not persuaded, however. The government's bland assurances have done nothing to reassure farmers that the real reason for these "reforms" was to not to benefit big industry, rather than the owners of farmland.

Ironically, even as Mr Modi attacked the Opposition parties — and when he does that he specifically means the Congress since he says "they" were unable to bring reforms when in power — the real attack on the government has come from Akali Dal president Sukhbir Badal on the same day that the PM was accusing the Opposition of misleading farmers and playing politics in the guise of backing farmers. The Akalis depend principally on the votes of agriculturists.

Such was the force of the Dal's opposition to the three farm laws that its announcement of leaving the Narendra Modi government came on the floor of the Lok Sabha, in the course of the discussion on the controversial farm laws. Subsequently, the Punjab party left the ruling alliance. Therefore, the notion of innocent farmers being "misled" by the Opposition — assiduously propagated by the government and the BJP — does not square with the facts. In the first instance, this opposition to the agri-laws came from the Akali Dal when it was a member of the ruling NDA until three months ago. This was clearly a case of opposition from within.

In a newspaper interview, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the BJP under Mr Modi came back with an increased majority in 2019 because of the "transformative" policies of demonetisation and GST. The extremely negative economic effects of these policies did not concern him and he equated more seats in Parliament with approval of these policies by the people. In the same way, he noted, the farm laws, that have triggered a tsunami of protest, will also be backed by the electorate.

The farmers seem to be up against the strength of ideology rather than economic logic.

Naked power grab

The fracas in the Karnataka Legislative Council may be par for the course in many a legislature, but it did nothing for the reputation of a House of Elders. The physical pushing and shoving of the deputy chairman, who was the presiding officer at the time and the kind of street language members used against each other made this a new low so far as meetings at the majestic Vidhana Soudha building in Bengaluru goes. The issue does run deeper and the incident only further illustrates the naked power grabbing politics gripping places reserved for people's representatives.

It appears the ruling party BJP was in a tearing hurry to pass the contentious Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill 2020 and the Congress, afraid of losing the chairmanship and control of the council, was hell bent on stopping the proceedings and the Bill. But the Congress chairman had no right to duck legislative business in adjourning the House on December 10 even as the BJP and JD(S) had no right to forcibly occupy the chair through deputy chairman Dharmegowda to try and pass the Bill.

The Congress' fear of losing the last vestige of power in Karnataka it had enjoyed in its alliance of convenience with the JD(S) till 2019 may have led it to such subterfuge in blocking legislation the BJP is keen to enact. The cattle protection laws are in keeping with BJP's pursuit of Hindutva, to enable which it has been seen enticing the JD(S) into its sphere of influence by dangling the carrot of an alliance that may stretch into the next Assembly elections.

The JD(S) is a past master in the art of gravitating towards political power as evidenced in its supreme H.D. Devegowda once becoming Prime Minister of India in a large coalition with a minuscule number of MPs. Its effort to remain relevant in Karnataka politics today is understandable. However, the least expectation is presiding officers of legislatures will meticulously follow the rule book so as not to deny a majority from having its say, such majority always being on the floor of the House.

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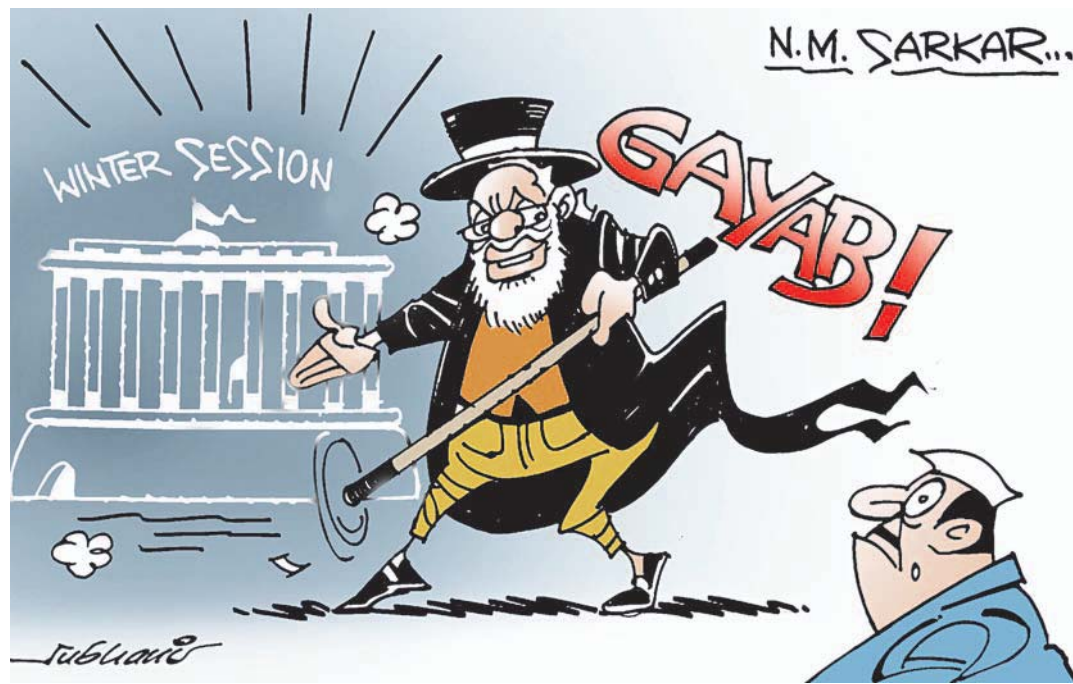
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Subhani



Child nutrition crisis may derail India's aspirations



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

It can be tempting to blame every crisis on the Covid-19 pandemic. But quite often, facts get in the way. Many things were bad enough even prior to the onset of the pandemic, that gutted so many lives and livelihoods.

The latest data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) is a case in point. It shows that several states across the country are doing worse since the last NFHS was conducted in 2015-16. They have reversed course and are showing worsening levels of child malnutrition despite improvements in sanitation and better access to fuel and drinking water.

Arguably, the first set of findings from the NFHS-5, conducted in 2019-20, four years after the last one (2015-16), relates to only 22 states and Union territories and does not include major states like Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Data for these states will be released sometime in the middle of next year.

It is also true that not everything in NFHS-5 reeks of gloom.

Immunisation coverage has expanded in many states, the number of households using clean fuel has improved. Ditto with sanitation facilities. The total fertility rate (TFR) across most Indian states is also declining.

All this is good news. But we can't afford to take the eye off the ball and gloss over the heart-breaking reality of growing numbers of stunted and undernourished children in India.

In Maharashtra, the percentage of children in the 6-59 months group who are anaemic has shot up from 53.8 per cent (2015-2016) to 68.9 per cent in 2019-2020. Rural children are more severely affected. In the same period, the percentage of children under five who are stunted (low height for age) has gone up from

34.4 to 35.2.

What leapt out at me was the data from Mumbai. Children in the 6-50 months group who are anaemic has risen from 65.7 per cent in 2015-2016 to 72.8 per cent in 2019-2020.

Or take Gujarat, a relatively affluent state. The percentage of children under five who are stunted has risen from 38.5 (2015-2016) to 39.0 (2019-2020). In the same period, children under five who are severely wasted has gone up from 9.5 per cent to 10.6 per cent and those between 6-59 months who are anaemic has shot up from 62.6 per cent in 2015-2016 to 79.7 per cent in 2019-2020.

Nutrition experts point out that out of 22 states and Union territories for which we have data, there is a surge in severe acute malnutrition cases in 16 states/UTs, compared to NFHS-4 conducted in 2015-2016.

Even Kerala, that usually leads in social policies, has problems: anaemia is growing among children.

The underfed hugely outnumber the overfed but alongside the crisis of child under-nutrition, we are also seeing a rise in child obesity, perhaps due to more junk food consumption.

All this is exacerbated by widespread under-nutrition and anaemia among women, including those who are pregnant.

What is going wrong and what has changed between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020?

"We don't have granular data for all states and Union territories as yet but the first lot of data from NFHS-5 points to worsening malnutrition and anaemia in several states. From the data that's available, it's hard to pinpoint why malnutrition worsened even before the pandemic set in, but it's important to note that the period when it worsened coincides with the time India suffered economic shocks. We had demonetisation in 2016, which gutted much of the informal sector which dominates the Indian economy. We don't know to what extent those who took a severe hit during demonetisation have recovered. The GST rollout also affected small businesses and rural wages have stagnated," says Dipa Sinha, assistant professor of economics at New Delhi's Ambedkar University and a key figure in India's Right to Food Campaign.

"The other unknown for which we don't have much data is the impact of the weakening of the social protection framework with inadequate budgetary support and no expansion in response to the economic slowdown which could have affected affordability of diets. PDS (public distribution system) provides only rice and wheat in most states. Some states also give pulses and oil, but many poorer states don't," she adds.

Some experts point out that the work of the Narendra Modi government's flagship National Nutrition Mission and Anaemia Mukta Bharat (AMB) campaign, with an ambitious target of reducing anaemia by three percentage points per annum till 2022, are not really captured in the NFHS-5 data because they really got going only recently.

Even if that is so, it is vital to review what is actually happening on the ground. There are enough indications that all is not well with many programmes. Take the mid-day meals, for example — the Central government's flagship school-based feeding programme aimed at improving the nutritional status of students and promoting the universal

isation of elementary education.

According to the Accountability Initiative of the Centre of Policy Research, only 14 states in India could utilise 100 per cent of the funds allocated to them for mid-day meals for the year 2018-2019, and states like Telangana, Assam and Goa used only two-third of the money allocated to them under this head. Gujarat and Haryana used only 40 per cent of the funds allocated to them for mid-day meals. All this goes to show that there is a lot that is dysfunctional on the ground.

India's child nutrition crisis should give policymakers sleepless nights.

Stunting is a marker of chronic or recurrent undernutrition, usually associated with poor socioeconomic conditions, poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness, and/or inappropriate infant and young child feeding and care in early life.

Children who suffer from stunting may not only not grow to their full height, there is also a risk that they would not develop their full cognitive potential.

Experts say mothers who suffer from under-nutrition are more likely to have children who suffer from stunting or wasting, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and undernutrition. Anaemia is also hugely debilitating. It can affect children's cognitive performance and physical growth. In women, anaemia can adversely impact the capacity to work and can lead to poor pregnancy outcomes.

Children are India's future, on whom the country's dreams rest, but they are paying the price of adult bungling and apathy. We can't afford that. Nor can we afford diversions like the needless hullabaloo over serving boiled eggs, a source of protein, to poor children in government programmes.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com

LETTERS

WINTER SESSION

It is not a good idea to scrap the Winter Session of Parliament. The Covid numbers are declining gradually these days. It's not hard to conduct the session for a few hundred members by taking appropriate measures to control the spread of virus. As social life is functioning around the country, it's expected that the government runs its business as usual. There are many important issues of national importance waiting for in depth deliberations.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

CJ SHIFTED

The "decision" to shift CJ of Andhra Pradesh High Court, "following" a written complaint by AP CM two months back, vindicates the stand of Chief Minister. The rarest of the rare instance of a Chief Minister lodging a complaint against a Chief Justice is not something simple. The issue concerning misconduct of a Supreme Court judge is serious. The mutual recrimination slowly built up and reached its peak with both the CM and HC "refusing" to budge. The transfer should end the mutual recriminations and usher in a cordial atmosphere so that justice prevails, not political bias.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

S.C. VERDICT NO DEFEAT OF GOVT. — PM

NEW DELHI, Dec. 16

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi emphatically declared amid cheers in the Rajya Sabha today that the Supreme Court judgement striking down the princes derecognition order did not constitute any defeat of the Government.

Hitting back firmly at interpellation from the Jana Sangh and Swatantra benches on a calling attention motion tabled by Mr Bhupesh Gupta (CPI) about the judgment and the situation arising from it, Mrs. Gandhi also declared that the Government was not in any predicament as a result of the court order. The discussion which lasted two hours was marked by noisy interruptions by various members. To the thumping of desks from her colleagues, Mrs. Gandhi said the Government fully anticipated "obstacles in every path in the march to progress".

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Gymkhana divided on suspension of ex-cop

Due to various complex rules around admission, the Delhi Gymkhana Club has maintained its exclusive "aura" for 107 years. Its governing body is comprised of various retired government and defence officials as well as other private citizens. Its elections are a hotly contested affair, often leading to accusations of use of "illegal" and "unlawful" means between the contestants.

These days the club is roiled by a letter written by 50 members collectively to the club president expressing their outrage at the "arbitrary decision" of the governing body. One of the issues that has riled members is the proposed suspension of a member, Dr Parvez Hayat, a retired IPS officer, for a day and further debarring him from contesting the club elections. Sources say that the member's suspension was the result of allegations levelled against him by vice-admiral B.S. Randhawa. The letter alleged that the club authorities did not observe the rules and due process before taking the decision to suspend the retired IPS officer.

Such controversies are not new. Earlier this year, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had ruled that the club was acting in a manner "prejudicial to public interest" and, therefore, must be probed. It said that a five-member central government appointed panel should investigate the affairs of the club, including land usage and its admission policy for members.

UPRIGHT BABU RILES
UTTARAKHAND MINISTER
These days your average babu can rarely say "no" to a minister. Blind obedience is what is expected from them, leaving little room for independent decision-making.

But like always, there are exceptions to the rule. An instance from Uttarakhand has recently come to light. There is even a touch of the bizarre about it!

The state's minister of women and child welfare, Rekha Arya, reportedly wrote to the DIG of Dehradun, Arun Mohan Joshi, inquiring about her additional secretary V. Shanmugam, who, she said, was "missing". And since the officer was "incommunicado", she feared he might have been kidnapped!

As it turns out, according to sources, trouble had been brewing between the minister and the IAS officer for some time. Matters came to a head sometime in September when Mr Shanmugam awarded a contract in a tender possibly against the wishes of the minister. Subsequently, he went into a two-day "self-isolation" and did not take any calls from his

office or the minister.

The irate mantri forced chief minister Trivendra Rawat to order an inquiry into the award of the contract, but additional chief secretary Manisha Panwar has reported that the probe did not find any misconduct by Mr Shanmugam. Further, Mr Panwar has stated that the officer had followed due process while awarding the contract and while going on leave. This is where matters rest, for now. It remains to be seen whether the minister will pursue the issue further or let it fly. It would also be interesting to see if the babu manages to hold on to his post or gets transferred elsewhere.

Contrast this with a powerful babu in Delhi who did not vanish after his "gaffe". Immense sweeping powers and other capabilities were exercised in Delhi and his statement vanished instead. What

One issue that has riled up members is the proposed suspension of a member, Dr Parvez Hayat, retired IPS officer, for a day and further debarment of him from the club elections. The member's suspension was the result of allegations levelled against him by vice-admiral B.S. Randhawa.

was reported in the media (of course, the story was promptly withdrawn, though the video exists!) on questioning the credentials of democracy itself led to much speculation whether this was just a gaffe or something more!

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,666.46	0.87
Nifty 50	13,682.70	0.85
S&P 500*	3,703.40	0.24
Dollar (₹)	73.58	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	-1.25
Euro (₹)	89.49	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,059.215	0.43
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.70	-0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.944	0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.928	0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

SBI: GDP to dip only by -7.4%, full recovery in 7 qtrs

India's GDP growth is expected to be at (-) 7.4 per cent in FY21 on better than projected recovery, said a SBI research report, upgrading its earlier forecast of (-) 10.9 per cent. The report also said it would take seven quarters from the fourth quarter of FY21 for GDP to reach the pre-pandemic level in nominal terms. It said the revised estimates are based on SBI 'Now-casting Model' with 41 high frequency indicators.

LPG price raised again by ₹50; ATF costlier by 6.3%



Cooking gas LPG price was increased by Rs 50 per cylinder, the second hike in rate this month following firming of international prices. Also, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was raised by a steep 6.3 per cent. Non-subsidised LPG price was increased to Rs 694 per 14.2-kg cylinder from Rs 644 earlier, according to a price notification of state fuel marketing companies. On Dec. 1, price was hiked by a similar Rs 50 per cylinder.

Reforms window for states open till February 15

The finance ministry has extended the deadline till February 15 for states to implement reforms—one-nation one ration card, ease of doing business, urban local body/ utility and power sector reforms—to become eligible for additional borrowing this fiscal. To meet the extra fund requirements of states on account of Covid-19, the Centre in May had decided to raise the states' borrowing limit by 2 per cent of GSDP.

Kia Motors sells 1 L 'connected cars' in India

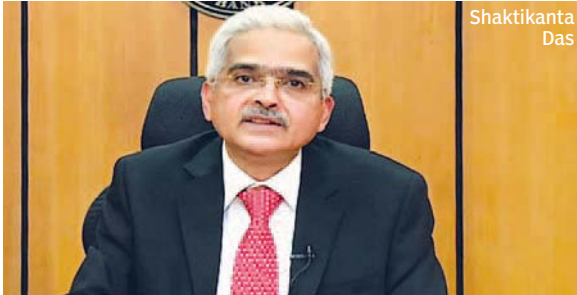
South Korea's Kia Motors said it has crossed 1 lakh cumulative sales milestone of its 'connected cars' in India within 16 months of starting operations in the country. One out of two Kia cars sold in India is a connected car—equipped with Kia's UVO connect system, an advanced and dynamic solution that seamlessly integrates smart-phone or smartwatch with the car and its infotainment system into a single unit, the firm said.



■ Guv's advice for raising credit-GDP ratio Lend by cash flow, not collateral: Das

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 16

Banks should rely less on collateral security for lending and instead focus more on cashflow-based lending to help improve the credit-to-GDP ratio in the country, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das said on Wednesday. The credit bureaus and the proposed public credit registry (PCR) are expected to improve the flow of credit as well as credit culture, the apex bank chief added. India is ranked amongst the most financially underpenetrated economies, which suffered from a bad loan problem with industrial credit while also having an underpenetration in last mile credit. As per RBI data, the scheduled commercial banks' credit as a per cent of GDP came down to 50.99 per cent in FY20 from 51.51 per cent in FY19. On the other hand, the credit-to-GDP ratio in advanced economies and China is in the range of 150 to 200 per cent. "To improve the credit to GDP ratio, access to credit and cost of credit need to be addressed by lesser reliance on collateral security and greater cash-flow based lending. Credit bureaus and the proposed Public Credit Registry (PCR) framework are expected to improve the flow of credit as well as credit culture," Das said in his keynote address titled the National Address on Financial Education 2020-



Shaktikanta Das

25 at the webinar on 'Investing in investor education in India: Priorities for action' organised by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). The views had earlier been put forth by former deputy governor Viral Acharya, who, in July this year, said that an estimated 50 per cent of Indians were employed informally and remained invisible to the banking system despite earning as much as their peers in the formal system. "When they want a loan, the bank denies them credit unless they provide a hard asset collateral, which is not easy to come by if you are the last mile and below the poverty line," Acharya had said. He said the average Indian could not provide collateral and hence resorted to informal finance which remained infamous for 'extraordinary high rates, onerous terms and inhuman collection policies'. Acharya had cited the example of micro entrepreneurs and said that "if the formal financing system can observe the cash flow patterns of

micro entrepreneurs through other transactions that they are doing, they can start doing cash flow lending and can start serving the unique needs of the customers based on the specific maturity profile and their cash flows." India, with a large section of population in the working age group, is already the third largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity and is aiming to become a \$5 trillion economy. "We need to harness the demographic dividend by meeting the aspirations of a large young population. This necessitates creating an enabling environment and infrastructure in the form of education, training and opportunity. Among all the prerequisites for achieving demographic dividend and accelerated growth, quality of human resources, greater formalisation of economy, a higher credit to GDP ratio and greater financial inclusion are the differentiating factors that would elevate our economy to the desired level," Das added.

400 foundries stop work over high raw material price

Coimbatore, Dec. 16: About 400 small and tiny foundries in the district remained silent on Wednesday as part of their indefinite strike to draw the attention of the Centre to the spiralling price of raw materials in the last two months. The foundries, affiliated to the Coimbatore Tiny and Small Foundry Owners Association (Cosmafan), stopped production indefinitely, resulting in a loss of Rs 30 crore daily, its president Shiva Shanmugha-kumar said. The increasing prices would not only affect the foundries but also related industries such as wet grinder, pump & motors, textiles and automobiles, who are the large-scale customers of foundry products, he said. The price increase ranged from 30 to 55 per cent compared to the pre-lockdown period, he said. Hoarding by the traders, thus creating artificial scarcity of the materials, also contributed to the price hike, he said, adding the entire industrial sector is seeking the intervention of the Centre to bring down the prices for its survival. The Coimbatore and Tirupur Medium Industries Association, with nearly 50,000 units, has also given a call to down shutters for a day on Wednesday to express solidarity with striking foundries. Nineteen SME associations had already staged a demonstration here on Tuesday. —PTI

Sebi relaxes norms for CIRP firms, MF sponsors

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 16



The Sebi board on Wednesday made changes to the shareholding norms for corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) companies, relaxed mutual fund sponsor eligibility criteria and also decided to relax minimum promoter contribution in follow-on public offer. The regulator said firms that remain listed due to implementation of resolution plan under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code will be required to have at least 5 per cent public shareholding at the time of their admission to deal on a stock exchange. There is no such minimum requirement now. Further, such companies will be provided 12 months to achieve public shareholding of 10 per cent from the date shares are admitted for dealings on the stock exchange and 36 months to achieve pub-

lic shareholding of 25 per cent. For this, the current timelines are 18 and 36 months, respectively. The Sebi also decided to relax the profitability criteria for becoming a mutual fund sponsor, aiming to facilitate innovation and expansion in the sector. The regulator has also decided to segregate and ring-fence assets and liabilities of mutual fund schemes. This is in addition to the existing requirement of segregating bank accounts and securities accounts. On sponsor eligibility, the Sebi said sponsors that

are not fulfilling the profitability criteria when applying will also be considered eligible to sponsor a fund. "This is subject to having a net-worth of not less than Rs 100 crore for the purpose of contribution towards the net-worth of the Asset Management Company (AMC)." The net-worth of the AMC has to be maintained till it makes profit for five consecutive years. The new rules will open the gates for new players to come in as mutual fund-sponsors with high net-worth but no profitability. At present, a sponsor has to show profits in three out of the immediately preceding five years. The board approved the proposal to do away with the applicability of minimum promoters' contribution and the subsequent lock-in requirements for the issuers making a Further Public Offer of specified securities subject to conditions.

Covid steals 81 mn jobs in Asia-Pac

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 16

Covid-19 wiped out some 81 million jobs in the Asia-Pacific while 364-429 million casual workers were affected by the Indian lockdown measures, says the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in a study. The report estimates that in Asia and the Pacific, the Covid-19 crisis has led to a gap of 81 million jobs compared with the pre-crisis numbers. The regional jobs gap in 2020 is largely

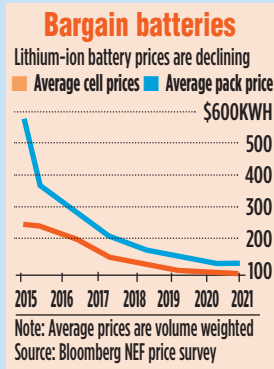
driven by South Asia, where the employment estimate is nearly 50 million jobs below the pre-crisis baseline, corresponding to a 7.4 per cent drop in employment. "India implemented one of the strictest lockdowns among the large middle-income countries...An estimated 364-429 million workers have been adversely affected by the lockdown measures," the report said. While India's total Covid-19 fiscal response package as a percentage of GDP

was higher than the median among the Asia-Pacific countries, government support to income or revenue, as part of the Covid-19 policy expenditure, was on the lower side and lesser than countries like Pakistan, China and Australia. Overall, in Asia-Pacific, labour income is estimated to have declined by 9.9 per cent in the first three quarters of 2020. An additional 22-25.4 million persons could be added to working poor or those living on less than \$1.90 a day.

Electric cars to get cheaper as battery costs plunge

DAVID R. BAKER DEC. 16

Electric vehicles may cost about the same as their fuel-guzzling brethren in just three or four years—and only get cheaper from there, shows a new report from Bloomberg-NEF. Electric cars and buses have long been saddled with bigger up-front costs than those burning petrol or diesel, due to the cost of batteries. But researchers say that price premium will disappear once battery packs reach \$100 per kilowatt-hour—a tipping point BNEF expects to occur in 2023, according to its Battery Price Survey. Battery costs have



power grid—cost even less. They now average \$126 per kilowatt-hour. The survey also found examples of batteries for electric buses in China selling below \$100 per kilowatt-hour, said lead author James Frith. China's average pack price for electric buses is only slightly higher, at \$105. "Within just a few years we will see the average price in the industry pass this point," said Frith. "What's more, our analysis shows even if prices for raw materials were to return to the highs seen in 2018, it would only delay average prices reaching \$100/kWh by two years." —Bloomberg

WHATSAPP TO HELP BUY 'SACHET-SIZED' HEALTH POLICIES

New Delhi, Dec. 16: WhatsApp on Wednesday said it expects to facilitate the purchase of "affordable sachet-sized" health insurance through its platform by the end of the year as part of its efforts to provide users in India with

greater access to financial solutions. The Facebook-owned company noted that its 'Payments' feature is now available to users across the country (having 20 million users) with support from banking partners

State Bank of India, HDFC, ICICI and Axis Bank. "WhatsApp is deeply committed to India with over 400 million active users, this is our largest market," said WhatsApp India head Abhijit Bose at an event. —PTI

Double-digit dip in growth likely: Acma

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 16

The Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India, or Acma, on Wednesday said the sector will see a double-digit decline in growth this fiscal, after a 34 per cent drop in the first half of the year due to coronavirus-induced disruptions. The industry body said it would take two to three years, depending on how steep the recovery is, for the component makers to work out a whole-sector capex planning. In the first half of the fiscal, Acma said, the turnover of the automotive components industry stood at Rs 1.19 lakh crore (\$15.9 billion), registering a de-growth of 34 per cent as compared to Rs 1.82 lakh crore (\$26.2 billion) in the first half of the previous fiscal. The performance was mainly affected by the first quarter when the auto sector had almost "zero revenue" due to the nationwide lockdown, with restrictions continuing in

the second quarter as well. "Going forward, obviously this year as well, because of the lockdown and the challenges we continue to face, we will have a double-digit contraction. As you know 34 per cent, we have already contracted in the industry in H1. "Although we are optimistic about our H2 performance, we will not be able to completely recover from the Q1 and Q2 fiascos," Deepak Jain, president at Acma told reporters in a video conference. The auto components sector has been set back by three to four years due to the pandemic and it could take two to three years for the sector to reach the peak levels of 2018-19. Jain, however, said the performance of the industry during the festive season has been heartening and there are indications the vehicle demand would be sustained. According to Acma, exports of auto components declined by 23.6 per cent to Rs 39,003 crore (\$5.2 billion) in H1 FY21.

Term plan purchases taper down from July



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 16

In the initial months of the pandemic the fear for life was higher among Indians, especially the youth. The term insurance buying pattern shows this fear tapered down as the country started coming out of the lockdown. Between March and July, when the country was under the lockdown, the purchase of term insurance policies surged 60 per cent year-on-year. However, after July when the country started opening up, the growth came down to 30 to 40 per cent, as per data from Policy Bazaar. "When the pandemic was spreading fast in China, Europe and the US, the fear was higher in India. The lockdown further increased the fear. This saw people rushing to secure their lives. However, the lower mortality rate in India alleviated the fear among the citizens and the country also had started opening up by July," Amit Garg, business head, term insurance, PolicyBazaar told Financial Chronicle. The trend was largely seen in metros and tier-I cities, which have a larger share of educated and employed people. Tier II cities also saw 40 per cent growth between March and July and then it fell to 20 to 30 per cent post-July. Term insurance purchases by self-employed people saw the highest surge, accounting for 30 per cent of the term insurance buyers. The number has now gone up to 40 per cent.

Beware of these pests coming to eat your crops

AGNIESZKA DE SOUSA & MICHAEL HIRTZER DEC. 16

Climate change is opening up new habitats to old pests, transforming them from a nuisance into a growing menace and placing unprecedented threats on the global food supply. Here are bugs to keep an eye on. ■ Fall Armyworm—Spodoptera frugiperda Found in: Africa, Australia, East and South Asia, and North and South America Eats: Corn, rice, sorghum, sugar cane, wheat Native to tropical areas of the Western Hemisphere, this invasive species has spread rapidly, causing "major damage to economically important cultivated grasses," according to CABI, the non-profit Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International. The pest infested about 15 per cent of Zambia's corn crop this year. It also contributed to a 4 per cent decline in China's corn harvest—a difference of about 11 million tonnes—sending prices skyrocketing and

forcing the country to open its strategic stockpile, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

■ Coffee Berry Borer—Hypothenemus hampei Found in: Tropical climates i.e., almost all coffee-producing countries Eats: Coffee These tiny beetles make their home inside the fruit of coffee plants, eating them from the inside out. The bug used to stick around lower, warmer elevations, but rising temperatures have coaxed them higher uphill. That's affecting the more expensive arabica coffee varieties, which prefer to grow on the slopes. Controlling the beetle population requires careful, labour-intensive monitoring. And farmers, who are already seeking higher ground because of climate change-coffee plants are particularly sensitive to temperatures—are running out of room. ■ Desert Locust—Schistocerca gregaria Found in: Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; plus a few cases in Europe Eats: Pretty much anything



This pest has a Biblical appetite. In the past year it's ravaged crops in regions as far-flung as East Africa and northern India. Both outbreaks were made possible by warmer seas, which generate more hurricanes and typhoons, which in turn create the perfect breeding ground for locusts. Ample rains moisten the soil, helping eggs thrive and encouraging vegetation growth in typically arid regions. As the climate gets more volatile, locust swarms are expected to become both more frequent and more severe. ■ Soybean Gall—Midge Riesel-iella maxima Found in: US Great Plains, creeping into the Midwest Eats: Soybeans This tiny up-and-comer has been appearing in soybean fields in some US states. Its larvae attack the stems of soy plants that are in flower. There's no known effective defence. "Nothing was significant enough to suppress the larvae," says Erin Hodgson, associate professor of entomology at Iowa State University. "Plants can experience straight-up death."

■ Spotted wing drosophila—Drosophila suzukii (Matsumura) Found in: Asia primarily, but increasingly in the Americas and Europe Eats: Summer fruits, such as berries, cherries, and grapes The flying pest's small larvae feast on soft, expensive fruit varieties, rendering them non-saleable and costing farmers millions of dollars. Although it showed up in North America only a decade ago, it's already wreaked havoc on US berry farmers. Rising temperatures will expand the drosophila's potential habitat, allowing it to push farther north each year. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Moody is SRH director of cricket

New Delhi: Australian Tom Moody has been appointed director of cricket at Indian Premier League side Sunrisers Hyderabad, who are captained by his compatriot David Warner.

Moody, 55, was the Hyderabad coach for seven years and led them to their only IPL title in 2016. He was replaced by another Australian, Trevor Bayliss, last year and late on Tuesday the franchise announced that Moody would be returning. The former batsman switched to coaching and TV commentary after retiring in 2001 and helped Hyderabad reach the play-offs five times during his stay as coach. Hyderabad, who also have New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson and Afghanistan spin ace Rashid Khan in their ranks, failed to reach this year's final when they lost to DC in the playoffs in November. —*AFP*

Shutter Foo Kune banned for doping

Geneva: Mauritian badminton player Kate Foo Kune, her country's flag-carrier at the 2016 Rio Olympics, was banned for two years for doping on Wednesday after failing to prove her drink was spiked. Foo Kune tested positive for a banned steroid last year but she escaped a ban when the Badminton World Federation's anti-doping panel accepted her explanation that she was the victim of sabotage. But after a BWF appeal against its own panel's decision, the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport said there was no evidence of foul play. "The CAS panel found the athlete's assertion of intentional spiking during the 2019 African Badminton World Championships devoid of supporting evidence," said a statement from the court, announcing a two-year ban from December 15. —*AFP*

Floyd, Laila voted to Hall of Fame

Canastota, New York: Floyd Mayweather, who captured 11 world titles in five weight divisions and retired unbeaten, former heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko, and Laila Ali have been elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame and Museum. The Class of 2021 announced Tuesday also includes former Olympic champion Andre Ward, Ann Wolfe, Marian Trimiari, and Dr. Margaret Goodman. Elected posthumously were: Davey Moore, Jackie Tonawanda, cut man Freddie Brown, manager-trainer Jackie McCoy, journalist George Kimball, and television executive Jay Larkin. Honorees were selected by members of the Boxing Writers Association and a panel of international boxing historians. Induction day is scheduled for June 13 and also will include last year's class. —*AP*

Prez candidate wants Leo to stay

Barcelona: Barcelona presidential candidate Jordi Farre said on Tuesday he would work to make sure Lionel Messi stays at the Catalan giants should be elected next month, and hinted at a improbable bid for Neymar by the cash-strapped club. Farre was promoter of the motion that led to previous club chief Josep Maria Bartomeu's resignation and with elections set for January 24 has been trying to attract support for his candidacy by offering free tattoos and pizzas with the Barca crest to fans who supported his bid for the top job.

The 45-year-old businessman and engineer said his priority is convincing Messi to stay despite the disillusioned Argentina forward's bid to leave in the close season and the fact he can begin negotiating a departure next summer in the new year. —*AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: First Test — Day One from 9.30 am on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

Big Bash League: Hobart Hurricanes vs Melbourne Renegades from 5.40 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Odisha vs Bengaluru from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: Aston Villa vs Burnley from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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

IT'S SHOWTIME

Tough India face Australian might in Pink Ball affair

Adelaide, Dec. 16: A peerless Virat Kohli and his "fearless" India would look to unleash their might on an Australian team which is ready for revenge but not exactly in 'pink of health' ahead of the first Day/Night Test starting here on Thursday.

Media mogul Kerry Packer, while promoting his path-breaking 'World Series Day/Night Test matches' on Channel 9 back in late 1970s, had an unforgettable caption "Big Boys Play At Night".

Even in 2020, there couldn't have been a more appropriate catch-line for a series where Kohli's magnificence meets its match in Steve Smith's manic consistency.



Shubman Gill of India dives to catch a ball during a practice session in Adelaide on Wednesday ahead of the first Test against Australia. — *AFP*

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA TO PLAY 1ST DAY/NIGHT TEST AWAY FROM HOME

● The first day/ night Test match of the four-match Border-Gavaskar series between India and Australia will be played at Adelaide Oval from Thursday (December 17). It will be the 99th Test match between the two teams and on 49th Test match on Australian soil.

● Australia have a good record against India in previous Test matches played between the two teams. They have won 42 and lost 28 in 98 previous encounters between the two sides. The remaining 27 matches ended with out a result which include one tied match. They have won 29, lost seven and drew 12 in 48 Test matches played against India at home.

● India have a better record against Australia since 2000. They have won 17, lost 15 and draw 10 in 42 Test matches from January 2000 to January 2019.

● Australia have won seven, lost two and draw three in 12 Test matches played against India at Adelaide Oval. India's victories here came in 2003-04 and 2018-19.

● Adelaide Oval is hunting ground for Indian skipper Virat Kohli, who has scored 431 runs at 71.83 in six innings of three Test matches with three hundreds at this ground.

● India are in third place in the Test Team rankings with 114 rating points, whilst Australia top the rankings with 116.46 rating points. New Zealand follow closely in second with 116.37 rating points. India will feel the pressure as the race to the World Test Championship final heats up.

— *S. PERVEZ KAISER*

bowlers are at their peak once the sun sets, allowing the pink kookaburra to pick its pace up.

Never has an Indian team been so spoilt for choices with multiple options in place for various positions.

But Indian skipper Virat Kohli made it clear that Shubman Gill and KL Rahul will have to wait for their chances with the management deciding to stick to an out-of-form Prithvi Shaw in the opening slot.

— *PTI*

Prithvi to open as Saha keeps

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India have kept faith with opener Prithvi Shaw while opting for Wriddhiman Saha ahead of Rishabh Pant as wicketkeeper for the opening day-night Test against Australia in Adelaide starting Thursday.

Selectors also confirmed Umesh Yadav as the third seamer alongside Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah in the absence of the injured Ishant Sharma, while Ravi Ashwin won the race to be their frontline spinner ahead of Kuldeep Yadav.

The flamboyant Shaw was under pressure from another young talent — Shubman Gill, also 21 — to open the innings alongside Mayank Agarwal after just one decent knock in four warm-up innings.

But he will take the field

for his fifth cap on Thursday while Gill continues his wait to earn a first.

"Prithvi has performed at the Test level, but he would be playing in Australia for the first time. I think it is very exciting to see his progress as well," the Indian captain Kohli said.

The dogged and experienced Cheteshwar Pujara will come in at number three, followed by Kohli in his only Test of the tour before heading home for the birth of his first child.

Pant, an explosive batsman who became a viral sensation on India's last tour of Australia with his banter behind the stumps, also stroked a quickfire ton against Australia 'A', but he was surprisingly overlooked in favour of Saha. India won their maiden series 2-1 in Australia in 2018-19. —*PTI*

I am representation of new India: Kohli

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India captain Virat Kohli on Wednesday declared himself a "representation of new India", forever ready to take up challenges with optimism, as he responded to Greg Chappell's view that he is "the most Australian non-Australian cricketer of all time".

On the eve of the first Test against Australia,

Kohli was asked about his aggressive brand of cricket coupled with a fighting attitude that the former Australia captain, who also served as India coach, found similar to the mindset of his countrymen.

"I would like to say that I have always been myself," the skipper said during a virtual media conference ahead of the opening Test against Australia here

starting Thursday.

"The way my personality and character is, I am the representation of new India. For me, that's how I look at it," he asserted.

"In my mind, it's not (about) being compared to the Australian mindset as such. It's how we have started to stand up as the Indian cricket team and my personality has been like this from day one,"

the Indian captain added.

The new India, according to one of the country's most followed sporting icons, is the one that's not afraid to take up challenges.

"The new India takes up challenges and is filled with optimism and positivity. We make sure that we are ready for any challenges that come our way," he added. —*PTI*

I would like to say that I have always been myself. The way my personality and character is, I am the representation of new India. For me, that's how I look at it.

— **VIRAT KOHLI**
Indian cricket captain

City held; Wolves peg back Chelsea

Manchester, Dec. 16: Manchester City's faltering Premier League title challenge suffered another setback on Tuesday as lowly West Brom held out for a 1-1 draw at the Etihad.

City could have moved to within three points of leaders Tottenham and Liverpool, who face each other on Wednesday, but threw away two points against the side sitting second bottom of the table.

Ilkay Gundogan opened the scoring for Pep Guardiola's men but Ruben Dias's own goal just before half-time proved costly as City's problems in front of goal continued in a goalless second-half despite a siege on the West Brom goal.

A point edges City up to fifth on goal difference, while West Brom move to within two points of safety at the other end of the table.

West Brom had the first big chance of the game when the ball ricocheted off Joao Cancelo into the path of Karlan Grant and he forced Ederson into a fine save low to his left.

City's probing was finally rewarded on the half hour as Raheem Sterling got to the by-line and his cut back was fired home from the edge of the area by Gundogan.

Guardiola's men shot themselves in the foot by conceding for the first time in seven games two minutes before half-time as they failed to clear a free-kick into the box and Semi Ajayi's shot was deflected into his own net by Dias.

It was one-way traffic

THE RESULTS

Manchester City 1
(Gundogan 30)
West Bromwich Albion 1
(Dias 43-og)

Wolverhampton 2
(Podence 66, Pedro Neto 90+5)
Chelsea 1
(Giroud 49)

after the break as City set up camp in the West Brom half but lacked the imagination or pace to open the visitors up.

Meanwhile, Frank Lampard believes Chelsea have become complacent after the Blues blew a lead to lose 2-1 at Wolves and suffer back-to-back Premier League defeats for the first time during his reign in charge.

Daniel Podence produced a moment of magic as he twisted and turned inside the Chelsea box to find space for a shot and his effort deflected off Reece James and inside Edouard Mendy's near post.

Neto thought he had won a penalty when driving past James, but after a VAR review referee Stuart Attwell overturned his original decision as there was no contact on the Portuguese winger.

However, Neto was not to be denied on the counter-attack deep into stoppage time as he accelerated past Zouma and drove low into the far corner to move Wolves into the top half of the table and within three points of the top four.

—*AFP*

Benzema on the double as Real win

Barcelona, Dec. 16: Karim Benzema scored two late goals to give Real Madrid a 3-1 win over 10-man Athletic Bilbao, helping lift his team level on points with the front-runners of the Spanish league on Tuesday.

Bilbao proved to be tough opponent at Alfredo Di Stefano stadium despite playing most of the match with only 10 men.

But when the Basque Country team was threatening to at least salvage a point, Benzema scored his team-high ninth and 10th goals of the season.

Madrid was in third place behind league leader Real Sociedad and second-place Atletico Madrid on overall goal difference. Atletico has two more games in hand to play.

Bilbao lost Ral Garca in the 14th minute after the forward earned his second yellow card for a stomping the foot of Toni Kroos during a tackle.

Kroos put Madrid ahead on the last kick of the first half.

Madrid has won four matches in a row, three in La Liga and one in the Champions League.

Meanwhile, Sevilla won 3-0 at Ciudad de Lucena, Osasuna routed Tomares 6-0, and Valladolid beat Cantolagua 5-0 in the first round of the Copa del Rey.

LAZIO, BENEVENTO PLAY OUT A DRAW

Elsewhere, Lazio continued their patchy Italian League form with a 1-1 draw at Benevento on Tuesday as the Inzaghi brothers faced off on the sidelines.

Simone Inzaghi's Lazio qualified for the knockout stages of the Champions League for the first time in over two decades midweek but have been wildly inconsistent domestically and sit eighth on 18 points after 12 matches.

Promoted Benevento, led by former AC Milan, Juventus and Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi, move up to 13th after the draw, six points above the relegation zone.

—*Agencies*

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