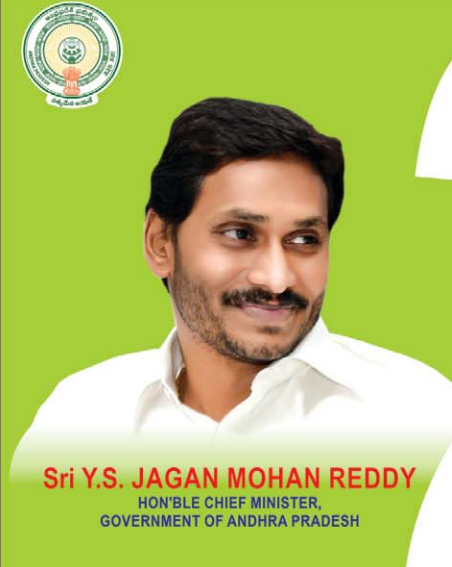


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VISAKHAPATNAM | WEDNESDAY | 23 DECEMBER 2020

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Sri Y.S. JAGAN MOHAN REDDY
HON'BLE CHIEF MINISTER,
GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH



2 DAYS TO GO...

HOUSE SITE 'PATTAS' TO 30,75,755 WOMEN BENEFICIARIES
DREAM OF OWN HOUSE TO COME TRUE..

Distribution of house site pattas to 30,75,755 women beneficiaries free of cost across the state in 68,361 acres of land having market value of Rs. 23,535 crores. Programme to be organised in festive atmosphere for 15 days from 25th December, 2020 onwards. House sites admeasuring 1.5 cents in rural, and 1 cent in urban areas will be distributed to all eligible women beneficiaries...

Construction of 28.30 lakh houses at an estimated cost of Rs. 50,940 crores in two phases to provide permanent houses to all eligible women beneficiaries in the State..Construction of 15.60 lakh houses at an estimated cost of Rs. 28,080 crores in the first phase will begin on 25th December, 2020... Construction of houses in 17,005 YSR-Jagananna Colonies across the State..

Jagananna Government also to distribute sale agreements of 2.62 lakh TIDCO houses worth Rs. 21,345 crores, to eligible women beneficiaries, across the State on 25th December, 2020... Our Government to hand over 300 sft TIDCO houses to 1,43,600 beneficiaries for just Re.1.. For 365 sft & 430 sft houses, Jagananna Government itself will bear 50% share of upfront contribution of beneficiaries... Total additional financial burden of Rs. 4,287 crores to be borne by our government on behalf of beneficiaries...

Issued by Commissioner, Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh

WEATHER

Max: 29.6°C
Min: 13.8°C
RH: 69%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Mist.
Max/Min temp.
29/13 9C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+23,942)	(+324)
1,00,99,021	1,46,458

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+617)	(+3)
TS: 2,82,347	1,518
(+402)	(+4)
AP: 8,79,339	7,082

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

7,80,61,507

DEATHS
17,16,170

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Navami till 8.40 pm
Star: Revati till 4.32 am (Thursday)
Variyam: 3.05 pm to 4.52 pm
Durmuhurtam: 11.53 am to 12.36 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
HILIRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 7, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.50 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.45 pm
Maghrib: 6.15 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.24 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.28 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 00.53 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 00.34 AM

COUNTER POINT



Double bonanza... you will get party ticket and Cabinet berth if you bring 2 MLAs along with you!

STUDENT | CASE | Telangana High Court's direction to Kaloji varsity Allow 1 more for MBBS counselling

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 22

The Telangana High Court on Tuesday directed the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences to allow another NEET ranker for the phase-2 counselling into first year MBBS course.

The court had already given directions with regard to one ranker on Monday. A division bench comprising Justices M.S. Ramachandra Rao and T. Amarnath Goud gave the interim direction in this

regard based on the plea of the rankers that they were denied opportunity to participate in the phase-2 counselling following their admission in Siddhartha Medical College, Vijayawada, a state-wide institute, where Telangana has quota for 10 years after bifurcation.

Counsel for the rankers Vedula Srinivas brought to the notice of the court that the varsity had communicated to all rankers on Monday that the allotments made during the phase-2 counselling were cancelled.

Deccan Chronicle had filed reports highlighting the faulty approach of KNRUHS and NTR University of Health Sciences, with regard to students taking admission in state-wide institutes.

It is a norm that students who take admission in the phase-1 would move to a better college in sliding in phase-2.

But Kaloji University authorities treated students who took admission in Siddhartha in the "not joined anywhere" category and denied them an oppor-

tunity to take part in phase-2 counselling.

"The court directions shall be an eye-opener to the university authorities. Its a grave injustice done to Telangana students because the NTR University is allowing students from Andhra and Rayalaseema to slide to better college in Andhra Pradesh even after they took admission in Siddhartha while the same is denied by Kaloji University to students from Telangana," a parent pointed out.

Fighting on



Farmer leaders address a press conference regarding their protest against the new farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Aditya Nath Das is AP's new Chief Secretary

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

Senior bureaucrat Aditya Nath Das will be the new Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh. He will assume charge on December 31 following the superannuation of incumbent Nilam Sawhney. Das' term could have been one year if he took charge in July, 2020.

However, it is now cut short to five months, till May 31 to be precise, as Sawhney managed to cling on to the top post with two extensions of three months each, thanks to the pandemic which came in handy to cite as a reason for extension and get approval from the Centre.

The 1984 batch no-nonsense officer was the first choice of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to head the CMO but he was posted in the irrigation department as it didn't materialise. Das has vast experience in irriga-

When Das was hit by a Naxal's bullet

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 22

"So far so good. May be this is what was destined to happen," was the first thought that entered the ever-smiling young bureaucrat Aditya Nath Das when he realised that he was hit by a bullet on the shoulder some two decades ago.

The sound of continuous firing and the smell of gun powder made him realise that the outlawed People's War Group Naxalites (which later were rechristened as



Aditya Nath Das

Maoists) were attacking his car. As collector of Warangal he went to the forest village of Yeturunagaram to attend the ITDA meet on that fateful day.

■ Page 2: Car driver hit, but drove Das to safety

back to head the irrigation department in 2019.

■ Page 2: Sawhney yet another principal adviser

GVMC evicts encroachers

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 22

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) officials, led by deputy city planner K Rambabu, demolished several sheds and thatched houses on 15 acres of land in Krishnapuram and Srikrishnapuram areas here on Tuesday.

The GVMC has over 276 acres of land between Mudasarlova reservoir and Central Jail. Most of the land is vacant and temporary houses were built to an extent of 15 acres. Official sources said tribal and Dalit families were given one acre each for cultivation in 1975 but over the years agricultural activities came to a halt as the

city's urban area grew and BRTS road was laid from Hanumanthawaka Junction on the National Highway to Simhachalam temple.

In the meantime, ownership of this D patta land changed hands and temporary houses came up in a big way. Indian Railways also sought some land for construction of a shed.

AP to resume screening four airport passengers

People who visited UK over last 2 months may be having virus

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

The State government may have to resume screening of air passengers at its four airports as a precautionary measure in the wake of the highly infectious strain of Coronavirus in the United Kingdom.

Though India has imposed a ban on arrival of flights from the UK from midnight on Tuesday, a flight which arrived at Delhi airport from London on Monday night, was found to have carried eight passengers infected with Covid-19, indicating the chance of a spread of the virus.

State health authorities

CM sounds alert over virus strain

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has asked officials to be wary about the second wave of Covid-19. He sounded the alert

after some nations, including the UK, have imposed restrictions following a second wave of the virus in their respective countries.

■ Page 2: Officials brief CM about vaccine

maintain that it might have taken at least two months for the British government to confirm discovery of the new strain of the virus fol-

lowing observations of gradual spike in Covid-19 positive cases and resultant deaths in parts of the UK. They say that those

who visited the UK during the two months period and travelled to other countries and finally intended to reach their home town in AP, find a chance of carrying the virus or not and some of them may even be asymptomatic even if infected with the virus.

The authorities say that passengers flying in international flights and landing in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai airports and from there catching domestic flights and reaching Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Tirupati and Rajamahendravaram may become super-spreaders.

■ Page 2: AP needs to keep tab on all passengers



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SHORT TAKES

TENANT FARMER TRIES TO END LIFE BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

A tenant farmer Sk Saleem tried to end his life by suicide in the agriculture fields in Potumarri village of Guntur district on Tuesday. Saleem said that he had supported the YSRC in elections. He claimed that he took the farmland on lease but the ruling party leaders are forcefully restraining him from cutting the yield cultivated by him to grab the farmland.

Saleem said that he took about 7.5 acres of land from Padmavathi from Potumarri village in the district for cultivation as a tenant farmer. He said that there was a land dispute among Padmavathi and Sivareddy and a case was pending in the court.

Meanwhile, the MRO issued a notice that the agricultural land will be under the MRO and no one shall cut the harvest till the court issues an order and imposed entry restriction to Saleem to enter farmland.

Saleem alleged that the local MLA henchmen were also involved in the issue. He said that he has the right on the yield as a tenant farmer but the authorities and YSRC leaders are restraining him from cutting his harvest. The tenant farmer started deeksha in the farmland on Tuesday and later tried to end his life by inflicting injuries with two knives. However, locals stopped his bid while police and revenue officials rushed him to a hospital for treatment. Police are carrying out investigation.

CAR DRIVER HIT, BUT DROVE DAS TO SAFETY

FROM PAGE 1

What followed was a miracle. The driver who was hit more grievously slumped on the steering and but managed to drive the vehicle for a few more seconds that turned out to be crucial in Das' life.

Surprising as it may sound, but there was another person who saved his life — a member of the Naxal group who took his finger off the remote of the explosive in the nick of the moment realising that Das was not the intended target. The member was assigned to set off claymore mines planted all over the area.

Once normalcy was restored, Das rushed his driver to a private hospital for timely treatment even as he got himself admitted to the Warangal MGM.

"It's a miracle and I strongly feel Sammakka Saralamma saved my life," Das told this correspondent in a tête-à-tête on his elevation as chief secretary smiling in his inimitable style.

"Das is known in bureaucratic circles for his positive approach towards dispute resolution providing a win-win situation for government and the agitating parties. He played a key role in former chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's Jala Yagnam," a massive programme of constructing irrigation projects in the combined state of Andhra Pradesh.

In various capacities in the irrigation department including as special chief secretary, Das spearheaded the Polavaram project and established a strong case with the Centre on the need for enhancing the project cost of the multipurpose irrigation project. He also makes a strong case of AP in the inter-state river water disputes.

Das also figured in the quid pro cases filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation against the Chief Minister during the UPA regime. As irrigation secretary he issued orders for enhancing the water allocation to a private cement company when it doubled its capacity. He later got discharged from the case by the High Court.

YSRC LEADERS TURNED CORONA SUPER-SPREADERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

Telugu Desam MLC B. Chagalarayudu on Tuesday accused the ruling YSR Congress leaders of acting like super-spreaders of Coronavirus infections by not following preventive guidelines during the rallies held to mark the birthday celebrations of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at over 500 locations across the State.

DBT turns a boon for lakhs

Jagan has changed the system and also brought in transparency into it

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) has come like a boon for beneficiaries, as money is directly getting deposited into their bank accounts following the initiative of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in this regard.

Not very long ago, the system was very different. Old, sick and disabled, including daily wage earners had to stand in long queues to get their pension or other benefits from disbursing offices.

More often than not, the biometric system failed to work or there would be no power supply.

The person would have to go home disappointed to return the next day, which could as well be a replay of the previous day. Middlemen made a lot of money in the process.

However, the Chief Minister has changed the system and also brought in transparency into it,

transferring the amount directly into the accounts of beneficiaries.

During his 3,648-km Praja Sankalpa Yatra as opposition leader, Jagan Mohan Reddy had seen people complaining of rampant corruption in distribution of pensions and other benefits. That experience made him bring in the DBT and Village Secretariat system, which made disbursement easy and transparent.

Prominent schemes under DBT for the year 2020 are Amma Vodi, which provides ₹15,000 as assistance to 42.33 lakh mothers involving ₹6,349.63 crore.

YSR Kapu Nestham provides ₹353.81 crore to 2.36 lakh women belonging to Kapu, Telaga, Vontari and Balija communities in the age group of 45-60.

On YSR Cheyutha, the state government spends ₹4,179.20 crore annually, benefitting about 22.29 lakh women belonging to SC, ST, BC, and minorities



Minister Taneti Vanitha shows the books to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the Nadu-Nedu review meeting at the camp office in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

in the age group of 45-60. Under YSR Matsyakara Bharosa scheme, 1,09,231 fishermen are being given total ₹109.23 crore at the rate of ₹10,000 each during their off-season (April 15-June 14), when there is a ban on fishing in high seas.

The Jagananna Vasati

Deevana scheme, costing ₹1,220.99 crore, benefits 1,556,956 students. However, the money goes to their mother's bank account.

Jagananna Vidya Deevana is another total fee reimbursement scheme involving ₹3,857.39 crore, including ₹1,880

Homeless overnight



Residents at the unauthorised houses inconsolable while their house was being dismantled by the GVMC staff on encroachment charges opposite Central Jail near Mudasarlova in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

Sawhney yet another principal adviser

FROM PAGE 1

Sawhney joined the long list of advisers to the Chief Minister as a post-retirement benefit. She will be yet another principal adviser to the Chief Minister in addition to Ajeya Kallam.

Ironically, the government decided to allot subjects of health, Covid-19 management, Centre-state relations and bifurcation

Another senior bureaucrat Y. Srilakshmi was posted as secretary in the Municipal Administration and Urban Development

issues, administrative reforms and survey after it stripped other adviser Kallam of all the subjects. It is not known whether she would be looking into files. Another senior bureaucrat Y. Srilakshmi who reported to AP cadre taking advantage of a CAT order was posted as secretary

in the Municipal Administration and Urban Development department. The incumbent J. Syamala Rao will become water resources secretary after Das takes charge as CS. K. Sunitha was moved out of finance and made secretary, social welfare.

AP to keep tab on all passengers

FROM PAGE 1

Though the Union Government has made it mandatory for all passengers arriving from the UK in all transit flights to undergo RTPCR test on arrival at the airports itself and if found positive be sent to institutional quarantine and if found negative, to be advised for home isolation for seven days, the AP government has to keep monitoring closely on both the positive and negative cases.

Moreover, it also faces a tough task to handle those who test negative and subsequently turn positive and asymptomatic, as they pose the danger of becoming super-spreaders of the virus.

In this backdrop, the state health authorities suggest resuming of screening of air passengers like it was during the peak Covid period.

On the other hand, the number of arrival/departure of air passengers at all the four airports in the state is gradually rising to pre-Covid days. In Visakhapatnam airport, the passenger arrivals was 1.40 lakh in November and 1.60 lakh in December and on an average 2.20 lakh passengers were arriving in a month on domestic flights.

Visakhapatnam airport director M. Raj Kishore said, "We are ready to facilitate screening of passengers for Covid-19 if asked to do so in the wake of finding a new strain of virus in the UK."

In Vijayawada airport, international flights under Vande Bharat Mission are arriving and this underlines the need for screening for Covid-19.

In Tirupati airport, on an average 30,000 passengers are arriving/departing on domestic flights in a month.

In Rajahmundry airport, 22,500 passengers arrived in November while 18,000 came this month till

Tuesday. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) authorities maintain that once they get guidelines from the Union ministry of home affairs or from Union ministry of civil aviation, they will go by it with regard to screening of passengers for Covid-19 in airports.

A senior health official from the state said, "We may have to resume screening of air passengers at our airports as some passengers move from one nation to another mainly in Europe. Their return may cause spread of the new variant in case they are infected."

Vaikunta dwara darshan from December 25

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 22

For the first time in the known history of Lord Venkateswara temple, the TTD is organising a 10-day Vaikunta dwara darshan to devotees commencing on Vaikunta Ekadasi day on December 25 up to January 3.

As part of the festivities, Thiruppavai parayanams will be held in the temple between 12.05 am and 1.30 am on that day. Since it will be a Friday, Abhishekam will be performed in Ekantham at 1.30 am followed by Thomala Seva and Archana at 2.30 pm.

The Vaikunta dwara darshanam will commence at 4.30 am. Later, the TTD will organise a Swarna Ratham between 9 am and 11 am in which Lord Malayappa Swamy and his consorts will be taken out along the four mada streets.

Later in the evening, Sahasra Deepalankara seva will be conducted between 5 pm and 7 pm, followed by Adhayanotsavams in Ranganayakula mandapam between 9 pm and 10 pm.

The next day Vaikunta Dwadasi, Chakrasnanam

will be performed at the Swami pushkarini.

Meanwhile, the traditional temple cleansing festival — Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam — was performed at Tirumala temple on Tuesday. Additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy said that this traditional fete is observed four times in a year on Tuesdays occurring before Brahmotsavams, Vaikunta Ekadasi, Ugadi and Anivara Asthanam festivals. After the fete, TTD EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy and the additional EO inspected all the token issuing centres for Vaikunta dwara darshan in Tirupati.

Speaking to media persons here, the EO said that the offline tickets for Vaikunta dwara darshan would be issued from December 24 in Tirupati.

He said because of the prevailing Covid-19 situation, the TTD has made repeated appeals to devotees that this time, offline tokens will be issued to only locals of Tirumala and Tirupati. Raising an alarm over that the latest stain discovered in the UK he cautioned devotees to follow all the Covid-19 norms while obtaining tokens at offline counters.

‘Probe Naidu in Amaravati lands’

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

The Andhra Pradesh High Court urged to order an inquiry into the role of former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and his Cabinet colleagues for alleged conspiracy in the purchase of lands in Amaravati.

High Court division bench comprising justice C. Manavendranath Roy held the hearing on Tuesday by reopening the case based on an appeal from advocate-general S. Sriram representing the CID. The AG informed the court that the government orders issued for setting up the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA), fixing its purview, handing over the responsibility for taking up developmental works and other works, were having no note files prepared in the department of municipal administration.

He said that the employees of the department testified before the magistrate saying that such note files and six GOs were not prepared in the department and added that despite the regular practice of note files being put up for perusal of higher authorities, it went in the reverse direction with regard to Amaravati development issue.

He informed the court that no details pertaining to villages falling under the purview of capital region Amaravati before December 30, 2014, were mentioned in the note files and in violation of the norms and decisions pertaining to such important matters having their impact on state's economy, were not mentioned in records. He said that the employees agreed before the magistrate that they were subjected to

severe pressure for issue of six GOs on December 30, 2014.

Referring to such development, the AG informed the court that it was proved beyond doubt that there was a huge plot on purchase of lands and also on the decision to fix Amaravati as the capital city for AP.

He also said that the testimony of employees before the magistrate also provided that the decision to develop Amaravati as capital city was taken to benefit the former CM Naidu and those who were close to the Telugu Desam and to the companies owned by them. He submitted to the court that even before announcement of the state government's policy decision on location for development of capital city, such information was leaked to select people resulting in such people purchasing lands at nominal price.

AG also informed the court that some persons resorted to abuse of power in Amaravati land scam apart from flouting every norm in fixing Amaravati as capital city. Referring to the petitions filed to strike off FIR registered by the CID on purchase of lands in Amaravati by TD national general secretary N. Lokesh and others, the AG asked how could it be possible to avoid inquiry on the issue. He asked the court to strike off the petitions filed by Lokesh and others and continue the inquiry on the issue.

Supreme Court senior advocate Siddharth Luthra representing the petitioners said that it was unfair to attribute crime when two persons involved in transaction of land and added that the petitioners purchased the lands located away from the capital city in compliance with all norms.

Get clarification on Polaravam: Ex-MP

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, DEC. 22

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy should seek clarifications from the Union government regarding the Polavaram project's execution, which has been declared a national project in Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, demanded former MP Vundavalli Arunkumar. He told the media on Tuesday and came down

heavily on the Central government and Niti Aayog. He said that Mr Jagan was mishandling the whole issue and letting things drift.

In response to an RTI enquiry from an Amalapuram advocate Mr Rameshchandra Varma, it was stated by the authorities in reply, that Niti Aayog had only approved that the cost of the project should be borne in a ratio of 70:30 by the Centre and the state respectively.

SHORT TAKES SPECIAL BUSES FOR SANKRANTI SEASON

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 22

The Vizag region of APSRTC will operate special buses for the Sankranti season, said regional manager M.Y. Danam. He said arrangements were made keeping in view the last year Sankranti rush during which 1,672 buses were deployed. This year 1,000 buses would be operated following the Covid-19 protocol from January 7 to January 19.

The long distance destinations include Hyderabad (109 buses), Vijayawada (250) and Chennai (03). Similarly 13 buses will operate for Amalapauram, Narsapuram and Bhimavaram, 350 buses to Srikakulam, Rajam, Palakonda, Parvathipuram, Sompeta, Bobbili and Palasa, 15 buses from Narsipatnam to Vijayawada, 200 buses from Viskahapatnam to Rajahmundry and 85 buses from Visakhapatnam to Kakinada.

RAMA RAO IS NEW CHAIRMAN OF DCIL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 22

K. Rama Mohana Rao has been appointed as director and chairman of the Dredging Corporation of India Ltd. Mr Rao is also the chairman of Visakhapatnam Port Trust. This decision was taken at the 44th annual general meeting held on Tuesday.

The annual general meeting of the company also approved the financial results for the year 2019-20.

A release said the profit after tax of the company was ₹551 lakh for the year as compared to ₹3,803 lakh for the previous year.

The operational income of the company is ₹74,969 lakh as compared to ₹69,174 lakh for the previous year. The other income is ₹560 lakh as compared to ₹678 lakh for the previous year. The total income for the year ₹75,529 lakh as compared to ₹69,852 lakh for the previous year.

The company has been performing the dredging at the Visakhapatnam Port for the past 30 years and also caters to the maintenance dredging requirements of other major ports and Indian Navy. The company has been taking capital dredging assignments on the availability of the vessels and other logistic requirements.

● **THE PROFIT** after tax of the company was ₹551 lakh for the year

CHANGE OF NAME

I RUKAIYA MADRASWALA (Old Name), D/o. Behlah Madraswala, R/O. Door No.9-42-44, Baitul Farhat, Balaji Nagar, Siripuram, Visakhapatnam-530003. Changing my name from RUKAIYA MADRASWALA (Old Name), to Rukaiya Behlah Madraswala (New Name). Henceforth I am being called as **RUKAIYA BEHLAH MADRASWALA** (New Name) for all purposes.

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All set for housing to poor scheme launch

House-sites will be distributed from Dec. 25 to Jan. 1 '21

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC. 22

Deputy Chief Minister and also district incharge minister Dharmana Krishna Das said that Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will be launching the 'housing for all' scheme from Komaragiri village of U. Kothapalli mandal in East Godavari district on December 25 to provide house sites to 30 lakh homeless poor.

He minister along with agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu, Rajya Sabha member Pilli Subhashchandra Bose, BC welfare minister Chelluboyina Venugopalakrishna, Kakinada MP Vanga Gita, district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy, Kakinada MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy, Pithapuram MLA Pendum Dorababu and superintendent of police Adnan Nayeem Asmi visited the house site area at Komaragiri on Tuesday.

The minister inspected the layout plot, model house, dias and other works. He instructed officials of concerned departments not to create any inconvenience to the people and the beneficiaries on the launching day. He said that 16,500 plots are getting ready in Komaragiri village for distribution to the people. He said that Mr Jagan was fulfilling all the promises given during his Praja Sankalpa Yatra.

Mr Muralidhar Reddy said that the East



Ministers Dharmana Krishna Das, Kurasala Kannababu and Ch. Venu Gopal Krishna inspect the arrangements on Tuesday, for Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's programme on December 25 at Komaragiri of U. Kothapalli Mandal in East Godavari district.

— DC

Godavari district stood first in selection of beneficiaries and also in the land acquisition process. He said that the district administration has taken the distribution of house sites as a challenge and the launching of house sites programme would be remembered forever.

He said that there are 3,84,218 beneficiaries including 2,58,236 rural and 1,25,982 urban areas. He said that in the first phase, 1,53,236 houses were sanctioned out of which 30,156 Schedule Caste, 6,399 Schedule Tribes, 69,186 Backward Castes and 47,885 Other Castes. He said that there has been required 7,218.62 acres of land for them out of which

1,856.55 acres of has been acquired and 5,362 acres was acquired from the farmers who have come forward to give their land voluntarily and ₹3,167.97 crore funds have been released for the land acquisition out of which ₹2,566.39 crore was spent. He said that ₹2,160 crore would be spent for housing scheme in coming 18 months. He said that 1,532 layouts with ₹540.92 crore have been ready under NREGS. He said that all house sites expected court litigations would be distributed from December 25 to January 1, 2021.

Mr Muralidhar Reddy said that 13,585 houses of Kakinada rural, 13,188 for Pithapuram, 12,500

houses to Kakinada Urban, 11,774 for Anaparthi, 11,277 houses for Mandapeta, 11,076 houses for Tuni, 9,713 houses for Peddapuram, 9,649 houses for Peddapuram, 9,649 houses for Ramachandrapuram, 9,216 houses for Rajanagar, 8,490 houses for Prathipadu, 8,193 houses for Rajamahendravaram, 7,523 houses for Jaggampet, 6,794 houses for Mummidiavaram, 4,497 houses for Kothapeta, 4,472 houses for Amalapuram, 3,767 houses for Rajamahendravaram Rural, 2,431 houses for Razole, 381 houses for P. Gannavaram and 5,100 houses for Rampachodavaram Assembly constituency were sanctioned.

Covid pandemic to impact cockfights

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC. 22

Covid-19 virus is likely to cripple cockfights in the ensuing Sankranti festivities. Firstly, there is very little money with the potential gamblers. Even though some of the organisers are ready to conduct cockfights, as usual, the prevailing conditions are not conducive for the event, despite a steady slump in new corona cases, including in East and West Godavari districts.

However, the fear of a second Covid wave is

casting a shadow on cockfights. The big players may stay away this season while the relatively smaller ones may try to keep the show going. Many are hoping that there would be cockfights at least for a three-day Sankranti period.

On their part, the organisers are apprehensive about overcrowding, which could lead to a viral outbreak, even if there are some silent carriers.

However, some organisers have already started cockfight gambling in the remote areas. WG district police have already

booked cases against some organisers and seized cock-knives, cash and cocks. "There were no fears of police cases as they become mute spectators and the organisers can continue their betting. But, now, the problem is Covid-19 virus," said one of the organisers. He said people did not have enough money to bet on cockfights.

Meanwhile, prized cocks, which appear in sandy markets six weeks before Sankranti, are yet to make their presence, implying low-key cockfights, if at all.

OFFICES OF SUB-REGISTRAR TO WORK ON DEC. 25

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

The state government on Tuesday declared December 25 as a working day for all the sub-registrar and district registrar offices in the state and they will function from 10.30 am to 5 pm. December 25 is a public holiday.

The state government issued GO RT No. 969 stating that as the government had launched its flagship programme of Navaratnalu and to implement one of the programmes — Pedalandiriki Illu — sale agreements of 2.62 lakh beneficiaries will be registered for distribution of G+3 flats on December 25.

The AP Township and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited's houses have to be registered in the name of beneficiaries and accordingly, the state government issued the order to make December 25 a working day to facilitate such registration.

● The state government issued GO RT No. 969 stating that as the government had launched its flagship programme of Navaratnalu and to implement one of the programmes

AP registers 402 new Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

Andhra Pradesh registered 402 new Covid-19 cases and four deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities release Covid-19 bulletin on Tuesday reporting that out of 56,425 samples tested, 402 persons were found infected with Coronavirus and out of a total number of 1,13,57,530 samples tested so far, 8,79,339 persons were found infected with Covid-19 positive while 8,68,279 infected patients were recovered and 3,978 infected patients are still active with the virus.

Among the daily cases of Covid-19, Chittoor recorded the highest number of 86 followed by 72 in Krishna, 38

in East Godavari, 35 in Visakhapatnam, 34 in West Godavari, 32 in Guntur, 25 in Kadapa, 19 in Anantapur, 18 in Prakasam, 16 in Nellore, 14 in Srikakulam, eight in Vizianagaram and five in Kurnool.

Krishna district topped the state by registering the highest number of cumulative Coronavirus active cases with 687 followed by 555 each in Guntur and Nellore, 433 in Chittoor, 422 in East Godavari, 257 in Visakhapatnam, 236 in West Godavari, 176 in Prakasam, 171 in Srikakulam, 163 in Anantapur, 148 in Kadapa, 99 in Kurnool and 76 in Vizianagaram. With regard to the daily Covid-19 deaths, Krishna registered two followed by one each in Guntur and Kadapa.

NEW SURVEY WILL PROTECT LAND: MINISTER

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 22

Minister for culture and tourism Mutamsetti Srinivasa Rao said the new comprehensive survey under Mee Bhoomi Maa Hami would protect the land encroachers while addressing a public meeting in Ramayogi Agharam in Bhimili mandal on Tuesday. RS member V. Vijay Sai Reddy and collector V. Vinay Chand were present.

An aerial survey was conducted with the help of drones, and stones marked boundaries. The minister said under the YSR Jagananna Saswatha Bhuhakku and Bhurakshana Pathakam will protect the landowners.

He said secretariats were being established in the villages to solve all the land disputes and render other basic services.

Collector Vinay Chand said the last survey was conducted in 1920 under the British regime and the new survey was being conducted with the latest technology.

Stating that the Chief Minister took an important decision to protect the lands from encroachment, the collector said Survey of India, Survey and Settlement Department, registration office, local panchayats and local municipalities would coordinate this survey.

GUNTUR, VIJAYAWADA MUNICIPAL CORP GET PLATINUM, SILVER SKOCH AWARDS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 22

The Vijayawada and Guntur Municipal Corporations secured the SKOCH awards 2020.

The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) got the Silver

SKOCH award for the MSW dumpsite at Ajith Singh Nagar for its bio-mining process and the Guntur Municipal Corporation got the Platinum SKOCH award for plastic waste to synthetic fuel conversion. 1,000 cities and towns compete for SKOCH awards.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE NAVAL DOCKYARD, VISAKHAPATNAM

(Telephone: 0891 2816350, 6366 Fax: 0891 2816688)

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SHORT TAKES

BOARD EXAMS ON HOLD TILL FEB. 2021: MINISTER

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Union minister of education Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' on Tuesday ruled out conducting board examinations for classes 10 and 12 till February next year in view of the Covid-19 situation.

Usually, the practical exams are conducted in January and theory exams begin every year in February and conclude in March. The minister said a decision about when the exams will be conducted will be taken later after assessment of the situation and consultation with stakeholders.

"Keeping the current situation in mind, it has been decided that the board exams for classes 10 and 12 will not be conducted till February next year. CBSE is making necessary preparations for conducting the 2021 examinations. A decision on the exam schedule will be taken later after assessment of situation and more consultations with stakeholders," Nishank said in an online interaction with teachers.

With no clarity on the board exam dates yet, several schools have already conducted pre-board exams online to keep the students prepared. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had earlier this month announced that board exams in 2021 will be conducted in written mode and not online.

Schools across the country were closed in March to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. They were partially reopened in some states from October 15.

However, a few states have decided to keep them closed in view of a spike in the number of infections. The board exams had to be postponed mid-way in March. They were later cancelled and the results announced on the basis of an alternative assessment scheme.

VIT STUDENTS GET 7,403 JOB OFFERS DESPITE COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 22

Though it is Coronavirus pandemic times, Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) has emerged as the top educational institution in India getting 7,403 job offers at campus recruitments conducted by 382 companies. All campus recruitments at the institute's four locations have been conducted virtually and 4,503 students have received multiple offers.

IT majors Cognizant, Infosys, Wipro and TCS held their annual campus recruitments at VIT's four campuses in Vellore, Chennai, Amaravati and Bhopal. Results of the recruitments were announced by Dr. G. Viswanathan, chancellor of VIT. Other IT service companies like Virtusa, Hexaware, CapGemini and Mindtree also recruited in big numbers from VIT.

TCS and Wipro, like earlier, have recruited students with high CTCs ranging over ₹6.5 lakh to ₹10 lakh per annum. Microsoft has recruited several students with a highest CTC of ₹44 Lakhs per annum.

Wipro and VIT hold Limca Book of Records for highest number of Dream offers (278 offers from 2020 batch). Wipro and VIT broke their own record by having 419 offers from the 2021 graduating batch. VIT has already entered into Limca Book of Records 10 times for highest number of placements with post graduate (PG) internship and placements in May 2020. 144 companies have already completed their remote hiring process and have selected 1,028 PG students from 2-year M. Tech, MCA and M. Sc courses.

India must work for Naya Bharat, says PM

Modi claims nation is on a path today where everyone is assured of their constitutional rights

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that for the sake of development, ideological differences should take a back seat and these should not be seen through a political prism.

Addressing the Aligarh Muslim University's centenary celebrations via video conferencing, Modi said that the nation was on a path today where everyone, irrespective of reli-

gion, was assured of their constitutional rights and their future, and where no community was left behind.

The government's schemes for the poor were reaching all sections of the people "without any religious bias", he claimed.

"Whatever religion we are born in, it is important to see how to blend our aspirations with national goals. There can be ideological divides in society but when it comes to the



WHATEVER RELIGION we are born in, it is important to see how to blend our aspirations with national goals. There can be ideological divides in society but when it comes to the nation's development, everything else is secondary. When it comes to the nation, there is no question of ideological differences.

— NARENDRA MODI Prime Minister

nation's development, everything else is secondary. When it comes to the nation, there is no question of ideological differences. It is logical for me to

say this here because AMU produced many freedom fighters — they had their ideological differences but they set that aside for freedom. Like freedom united

them, we have to work on a common ground for 'Naya Bharat'," he said.

The PM said that "when our thoughts are focused on a new India foremost,

then such elements will have diminished space. Politics and society can wait, but the country's development cannot wait. In the last century, a lot of time has been lost over differences. There is no more time to lose".

Modi also referred to the law banning triple talaq. "There was a time when the dropout rate of our Muslim daughters was over 70 per cent. This was a big impediment to the development of Muslims. For 70 years, over 70 per

cent of Muslim daughters were forced to drop out. The government got toilets made in schools. The Muslim girls' dropout rate is now reduced to 30 per cent," he said.

The AMU, which was known as the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College initially, was renamed Aligarh Muslim University on December 1, 1920. However, it was formally inaugurated as a university on December 17 that year.

Japan backs India against stand-off with China

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

In a message to China, India and Japan on Tuesday strongly opposed any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo in the region by coercion or any activities that escalate tensions, during defence minister Rajnath Singh telephonic conversation with his Japanese counterpart Nobuo Kishi.

This is seen as a strong backing of India's position that China should restore status quo at the line of actual control (LAC) in Ladakh where both armies are involved in a military stand-off from last eight months.

In recent years there has been an increase in defence co-operation between India and Japan both of which are dealing with an aggressive China in the region. India and Japan are part of the Quad which Beijing sees as an anti-China alliance. Indian and Japanese navies have been conducting exercise bilaterally and were also part of "Malabar Naval exercise" along with US and Australia.

During the conversation, Singh and Kishi shared their views on highlighting the importance of a free and open maritime order based on the rule of law, said a statement by Japanese defence ministry.

The two ministers also exchanged views on regional situations, including the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and reaffirmed their continued close cooperation. "In this context, the ministers affirmed their intention to continue

Underground hosp. along China border

RAJNISH SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

In a first and an unprecedented ramping up of security infrastructure development along the Indo-China border, security agencies are constructing underground state-of-the-art bunker hospitals complete with operation theatres, weather proof dormitories and storage for arms, ammunition and other equipments.

What is significant is that all these facilities will be in underground "explosion proof bunkers" that are being constructed all along 3,500 km long Indo-China border. Sources claim what makes this hugely strategic project even more unique is that these "bunker facilities" will not be easily traceable by enemy surveillance. So far bunkers are normally used on other borders like along with Pakistan and Bangladesh for merely surveillance duties at forward location. But the security infra-

structure being developed along the China border is going to be unique and different as not only will it be extremely state-of-the-art but also would be underground so that these "assets and the security personnel using them can be well protected from enemy forces."

Considering the highly strategic nature of the entire project it is being kept as a closely guarded secret, specially the location of these bunkers, so that they cannot be targeted.

Even the implementation of the entire project is being monitored at the highest levels in the Government with senior officials from multiple security forces personally supervising it.

These all weather bunkers will also provide much needed respite to the troops who have to face harsh and adverse weather conditions, with temperature at times dropping to -30 degrees, in forward locations at high altitudes.

exchanging views in light of the current events occurring in the region and concurred in sending a clear message that they strongly oppose any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by coercion or any activities that escalate tension," said the statement issued by Japanese defence ministry.

Singh and Kishi affirmed that they would continue to vigorously promote defense cooperation and exchanges to uphold and reinforce the free and open Indo-Pacific while maintaining close communication between respective defense authorities, said Japanese defence ministry statement.

Kerala Gov. turns down spl session on farm Laws

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 22

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has declined permission to convene special session of Assembly to discuss Centre's new farm laws.

The Governor rejected the Cabinet's recommendation saying that there is no urgency for convening a special session on December 23. The state government was planning to pass a resolution against the farm laws.

Earlier, the Governor asked the state government

to furnish reasons for convening the session at such a short notice. Even though the reasons were conveyed to him, the Governor reportedly denied permission for second time.

Agriculture minister V.S. Sunil Kumar said that the Governor's action was highly unexpected. He said the Punjab and Delhi governments had convened special sessions of Assembly to protest against the farm laws. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had even torn the copies of the bill on the floor of the House in protest. The opposition Congress

led UDF has also criticised the Governor's decision to decline permission for the special session of Assembly.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who was on a tour to Kollam and Pathanamthitta district, returned to Thiruvananthapuram in the evening. However, instead of insisting on the session, the ruling LDF is planning to fight the Governor's action politically.

Earlier, Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan also sent a communication to the Governor listing out the reasons for convening the special session.



A health worker guides passengers to a quarantine centre on their arrival from the United Kingdom, at the Chennai International Airport on Tuesday.

— PTI

8 passengers found Covid +ve on arrival from Britain

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

Eight passengers were found to be Covid-19 positive upon their arrival from Britain in late Monday night flights in different Indian cities. These passengers had arrived on different flights from London in Delhi (5), Kolkata (2) and Chennai (1), and have been sent for institutional quarantine. The Central health agencies are closely monitoring their health and their samples have been picked up for genome sequencing to see if they are infected with the new mutated virus detected in the United Kingdom. Several states have quarantined all those with recent travel history to the UK and collected their swabs for testing.

India has intensified its airport surveillance in view of the new, fast-spreading mutated strain of the Sars-CoV-2 (Coronavirus) detected in the United Kingdom. The Centre on Tuesday also issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) for Epidemiological Surveillance and Response in the context of a new SARS-CoV-2 virus variant detected in the UK.

The new SOPs say that all positive cases of incoming passengers have to be sent for genome sequencing, and if the report of the sequencing is consistent with the current SARS-CoV-2 virus

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 22

The Maharashtra government on Tuesday issued an SOP (Standard Operating Protocol) for the passengers arriving from Europe, South Africa and Middle East countries and flights coming from the airports of these countries. As per the SOP, The passengers, who do not have symptoms, will have to undergo 14 days of 'mandatory paid' institutional quarantine at arrival city.

Even while going to quarantine centers, the passengers need to pay for the transportation facilities. These passengers shall not be allowed outside the designated quarantine facility before 14

days in any condition. The state has also asked municipal commissioners to appoint a nodal officer in order to ensure the implementation of the SOP in a letter and spirit.

The SOP also mentioned that an area at the far end of the airport terminal should be identified and prepared for receiving these flights. The designated area should have adequate air-bridges, so as to receive the flights in a staggered manner, to avoid overcrowding.

The SOP, which has been issued by Maharashtra's chief secretary Sanjay Kumar, stated, "Sudden emergence of a fast-spreading variant of Covid-19 in UK, believed to be up to 70% more transmissible than the original strain is

a cause of concern. In view of this, the Government of Maharashtra has formulated SOP, which will come into effect immediately."

It further said, "Municipal commissioner of the city where an airport is located shall identify different category hotels as institutional quarantine facility and shall also earmark a dedicated health care facility for identified suspects. He shall also appoint a nodal officer to see implementation of these SOPs."

The state has instructed the Airport authorities that the designated area should have adequate separate, immigration, luggage and custom centers/areas for managing these flight passengers.

genome circulating in the country, the ongoing treatment protocol including home isolation, treatment at facility level as per case severity may be followed. However, if the genomic sequencing indicates the presence of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2 then the patient will continue to remain in a separate isolation unit.

"While necessary treatment as per the existing

protocol will be given, the patient shall be tested on the 14th day, after having tested positive in the initial test. In case the sample is found positive on the 14th day, further samples may be taken until his two consecutive samples taken 24 hours apart are tested negative," the SOP said.

Niti Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul said on Tuesday that though the mutation found in the UK

is an "adverse development" as it enhances the transmissibility or the spread of the Covid-19 virus by 70 per cent and acts as a super spreader, the mutated virus is of no immediate threat in terms of affecting the disease's severity or increasing deaths of Covid patients.

He added there was no need to panic as the mutated virus was yet to be traced in India.

POLL RESULTS

BJP won an election for first time from any seat in predominantly Muslim Valley

Gupkar alliance poised to win big in DDC polls

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, DEC. 22

The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), a conglomerate of J&K's mainstream regional Opposition parties and their allies from the national Left parties, is poised to win big in the Union Territory's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections.

However, its arch-rival, the BJP, has also performed well, mainly in the Jammu region. What is also spectacular for the saffron party is that it has won an election for the

first time from any seat in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley.

The PAGD led by former chief minister Farooq Abdullah won 70 of the 177 seats the results of which were declared till this report was filed and is leading in over 40 seats. A total of 48 seats have gone to the BJP, while its candidates have a comfortable lead over their rivals in over 30 seats.

The Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP), known in local political circles as the BJP's tacit ally, has bagged seven seats and the

Congress 14 seats. One seat has gone in favour of the National Panthers Party. The Independents — some known to be proxies of the BJP — and others too have made a mark by winning as many 38 seats so far.

Former chief minister Omar Abdullah termed the results an eye-opener for the BJP and its "proxy political party" (an obvious reference to JKAP), and said the people had rejected the Centre's move to strip J&K of its special status and splitting it up into two Union territories in August last year.

Earlier, in a tweet, he also said: "The trends that have emerged in the DDC polls in J&K are very encouraging for the @JKPAGD. The BJP had made this election a prestige issue about Art 370 & J&K's special status. The people have now spoken & it's for those who believe in democracy to pay heed to these voices"

Among the PAGD winners is Waheed Ur Rehman Parra, a youth leader of its constituent People's Democratic Party (PDP), who was arrested by the National Investigation Agency on

charges of helping separatist militants on November 25, a day after he filed his nomination papers from home district Pulwama.

Parra polled 1,323 votes, defeating his nearest BJP rival Sajad Ahmad Raina by a margin of 1,002 votes. PDP president and former CM Mehbooba Mufti tweeted: "Couldn't be prouder of PDP's @parawahid who won his maiden election by a huge margin of votes. Despite being arrested on baseless charges right after filing his nomination people have shown their love &

trust for Waheed. Hope justice prevails."

The BJP's victors from the Valley are Aijaz Hussain (Khonmoh-II seat in DDC Srinagar), Aijaz Ahmad Khan (Tulail seat in Bandipora district) and Minha Latief (Kakapora (Pulwama).

After being declared winner, Hussain told reporters outside the counting centre: "This is a win for the BJP. The propaganda has been bust as people have shown their faith in the Prime Minister and his policies. This is a message that nationalists are prospering in Kashmir."

Maoists force Odia family to flee home

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 22

A family of Totaguda village, part of Swabhimana Anchal in Odisha's Malkangiri district on Tuesday left their home after the Maoists threatened them to leave the village suspecting them to be police informers. According to reports, Maoists suspected Manu Galeri as a police informer and asked him to leave the village along with his wife and daughter in a praia court held on Monday.

The extremists alleged that Manu is passing information to the police about their move-

ment in the area. They also held him responsible for the encounter by the security personnel in the area on Nov. 26.

The Left-Wing Extremists threatened him of death punishment against disobeying their decision. Following the development Manu and his family took refuge in one of their relative's house.

"The Maoists asked me about my role as a police informer. When I refuted their allegation, they didn't pay any heed and threatened me of dire consequences if I didn't leave the village immediately. I had no other option but to leave my home," said Manu.

SHORT TAKES

PLANE CRASHES
ALONG TEXAS
ROAD, 1 KILLED

Grand Prairie, Dec. 22: At least one person was killed when a small plane crashed along a highway service road in North Texas shortly after taking off Monday afternoon, authorities said.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the single-engine Wheeler Express CT crashed about 1 miles (1.61 kilometres) west of the Grand Prairie Municipal Airport, located in the city just west of Dallas.

Grand Prairie Fire Chief Robert Fite said witnesses said the plane came down rapidly, hit a telephone pole and then struggled another 500 feet (152.40 metres) hitting the concrete multiple times before hitting a pickup truck traveling on the service road.

Fite said the person in the truck was slightly injured and was taken to the hospital.

RIVER SURGE
HITS CANYON
GROUP, 4 DEAD

Mexico City, Dec. 22: Rain unleashed a surge of water that swept away most of a 21-member group on a canyoning expedition in southern Mexico, killing at least four people and leaving three missing, authorities said Monday.

The civil defence office of Veracruz state said five more people were injured in the Rio Oro canyon, near the Gulf of Mexico. The accident occurred Sunday, and the office said searches continued Monday with police, volunteer rescue groups and firefighters participating.

The office did not release the names or nationalities of the victims, but such expeditions are popular among young Mexican tourists.

Canyoning involves hiking, climbing, rappelling and swimming through river canyons. The Rio Oro canyon includes waterfalls and relatively narrow rock passages.

CABINET
RESHUFFLED IN
INDONESIA

Jakarta, Dec. 22: Indonesia's president announced a Cabinet reshuffle Tuesday following the arrest of two of his ministers on corruption charges and his administration's lackluster pandemic response.

The Cabinet shake-up comes amid surging Coronavirus cases in the world's fourth most populous nation. Indonesia's economy has fallen into recession for the first time since the Asian financial crisis more than two decades ago as the country struggles to control the pandemic.

Four ministers lost their jobs, including Health Minister Terawan Agus Putranto, and two others were rotated to more important positions, ending weeks of speculation about the possible changes. President Joko Widodo chose the mayor of Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, to become the social affairs minister, replacing Julianti Batubara, who was detained by anti-corruption commission on December 6. Batubara was accused of taking bribes related to the government's COVID-19 aid distribution.

U.S. POST OFFICE
NAMED AFTER
SLAIN SIKH COP

Washington, Dec. 22: US President Donald Trump on Monday signed into law a legislation to name a Texas post office after slain Sikh police officer Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal, who was gunned down in the line of duty during a routine traffic stop in Houston a year ago.

Trump signed H R 5317, which designates the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 315 Addicks Howell Road in Houston, Texas, as the Deputy Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal Post Office Building, the White House said in a statement.

The post office named after Dhaliwal in Houston is only the second US post office to be named after an Indian American. The first one was named after the first Indian American Congressman Dalip Singh Saund in Southern California in 2006. The House of Representatives and the Senate had recently passed the legislation in this regard. In his remarks on the Senate floor, Texas Senator Ted Cruz had said that Dhaliwal was a hero and a trailblazer whose commitment to his faith will inspire generations of Sikhs and other religious minorities.

Vax may work on UK virus: Pharma

But CEO of BioNTech says further studies are needed to be completely certain

Berlin, Dec. 22: German pharmaceutical company BioNTech is confident that its Coronavirus vaccine works against the new UK variant, but further studies are needed to be completely sure, its chief executive said Tuesday. The variant, detected mainly in London and the southeast of England in recent weeks, has sparked concern worldwide because of signs that it may spread more easily. While there is no indication it causes more serious illness, numerous countries in Europe and beyond have restricted travel from the UK as a result.

"We don't know at the moment if our vaccine is also able to provide protection against this new variant," CEO Ugur Sahin told a news conference the day after the vaccine was approved for use in the European Union. "But scientifically, it is highly likely that the immune response by this vaccine also can deal with the new virus variants." Sahin said that the proteins on the UK variant are 99% the same as on the prevailing strains, and therefore BioNTech has "scientific confidence" that its vaccine will be effective.

"But we will know it only if the experiment is done and we will need about two weeks from now to get the data," he said. "The likelihood that our vaccine works ... is relatively high." Should the vaccine need to be adjusted for the new variant the company could do so in about 6 weeks, Sahin said, though regulators might have to approve the changes before the shots can be used.

Having to adjust the vaccine would be a blow for the rollout of immunisation campaigns and rein in the pandemic that has so far killed more than 1.7 million people worldwide. BioNTech's vaccine, which was developed together with US pharmaceutical company Pfizer, has been authorised for use in more than 45 countries, including Britain, the United States and the EU.

Hundreds of thousands of people have already received the shots. The companies submitted data to regulators showing the vaccine, which goes by the brand name COMIRNATY in Europe, is 95 per cent effective in preventing infection with Covid-19.

"All countries across the EU that have requested doses will receive them in the next five days, the very initial supply, and that will be followed up next week with further supplies," said Sean Maret, BioNTech's chief commercial officer. Several EU countries have said they plan to start vaccinating on Sunday.

Germany's health minister, Jens Spahn, said he expects the country to receive more than 1.3 million doses by the end of this year. Germany is among European countries that have banned flights from the UK because of the new variant there.

We don't know at the moment if our vaccine is also able to provide protection against this new variant. But scientifically, it is highly likely that the immune response by this vaccine can deal with the new virus variants.

— UGUR SAHIN
BioNTech CEO



US President-elect Joe Biden receives a Covid-19 vaccination from Tabe Mase, Nurse Practitioner and Head of Employee Health Services, at the Christiana Care campus in Newark, Delaware on Monday.

Probe finds Trump officials
attacked CDC virus reports

Washington, Dec. 21: Trump administration political appointees tried to block or change more than a dozen government reports that detailed scientific findings about the spread of the Coronavirus, a House panel investigating the alleged interference said Monday.

Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C., said his Coronavirus committee investigators have found evidence of a "political pressure campaign" to "bully" professionals at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in what may have been an attempt to "cripple the

● INVESTIGATORS HAVE found evidence of a "political pressure campaign" to "bully" professionals at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in what may have been an attempt to "cripple the

nation's Coronavirus response in a misguided effort to achieve herd immunity." Herd immunity is shorthand for a theory — rejected by most public health experts — that soci-

ety can be best protected by allowing younger people to get infected and develop natural immunity until vaccines are widely available.

Accusing Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield of stonewalling his investigation, Clyburn issued subpoenas compelling them to turn over reams of documents and emails by Dec. 30. The committee's findings were detailed in a letter to Azar and Redfield that centred on the actions of two political appointees earlier this year.

— AP

Spain holds Christmas lottery

Madrid, Dec. 22: Children from Madrid's San Ildefonso school have begun calling out prize-winning numbers in Spain's bumper Christmas lottery known as "El Gordo" (the fat one), which is being held under tight conditions because of the Coronavirus

pandemic.

The lottery will shell out 400,000 euros (\$489,000) or some 325,000 euros after tax, to holders of 20-euro tickets bearing the top-prize number.

The incredibly popular lottery dishes out a total of 2.4 billion euros in prizes

this year, much of it in small prizes. Other lotteries have bigger individual top prizes but Spain's Christmas lottery, staged each year on Dec. 22, is ranked as the world's richest for the total prize money involved.

— AP

Scientists probe virus variant's spread in kids

London, Dec. 22: Scientists in the UK are investigating the impact of a new mutant variant of Coronavirus, named VUI-202012/01, on children and whether its faster transmission in parts of England is down to the younger segment of the population.

The government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) is monitoring the data to analyse this arc of the variant,

which has led over 40 countries, including India, to suspend travel to and from the UK in order to try and contain the more infectious mutation.

Earlier strains of Coronavirus found it harder to infect children than adults, with one explanation being that children have fewer of the doorways called the ACE2 receptor the virus uses to enter a human body's cells.

Professor Wendy Barclay,

● EARLIER STRAINS of Coronavirus found it harder to infect children than adults, with one explanation being that children have fewer of the doorways called the ACE2 receptor the virus uses to enter a human body's cells.

from Nervtag and Imperial College London, said the mutations to the virus appeared to be making it eas-

ier to breach those doorways. "Therefore children are equally susceptible, perhaps, to this virus as adults, and therefore given their mixing patterns, you would expect to see more children being infected," she explained.

Experts do not believe that the new version is any greater threat to children's health and the scientist behind the world's first approved vaccine against Covid-19 has said the

Pfizer/BioNTech jabs will work against the strain, though further investigation remains underway.

"The likelihood that our vaccine works is relatively high," said Ugur Sahin, chief executive of the German co-developer of the vaccine BioNTech.

Speaking on Bild TV in Germany, Sahin said his company would investigate the mutation in the coming days and that he viewed the matter with a

degree of soberness.

His message of some confidence comes as the UK reached the half a million milestone for vaccinations of the jabs, delivered to the elderly and most vulnerable sections of the country's population.

"I can today announce that over half a million people, more than 500,000 people in the UK, have now received their first dose," Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced.

— PTI

EDUCATION | AFFECTED

Drop in kindergarten enrolment is 30% of total reduction across the 33 states

Covid-19: Enrolment in US public schools dips

Washington, Dec. 22: Fearful of sending her two children back to school as the coronavirus pandemic raged in Mississippi, Angela Atkins decided to give virtual learning a chance this fall.

Almost immediately, it was a struggle. Their district in Lafayette County didn't offer live instruction to remote learners, and Atkins' fourth grader became frustrated with doing worksheets all day and missed interacting with teachers and peers. Her seventh grader didn't receive the extra support he did at school through his special education plan and started getting failing grades. After nine weeks, Atkins switched to home

schooling.

It got to the point where it felt like there was no other choice to make, she said. I was worried for my kids' mental health. By taking her children off the public school rolls, Atkins joined an exodus that one state schools chief has warned could become a national crisis. An analysis of data from 33 states obtained by Chalkbeat and *The Associated Press* shows that public K-12 enrolment this fall has dropped across those states by more than 500,000 students, or 2%, since the same time last year.

That is a significant shift considering that enrolment overall in those states has typically gone up by

● AN ANALYSIS of data from 33 states obtained by Chalkbeat and The Associated Press shows that public K-12 enrolment this fall has dropped across those states by more than 500,000 students, or 2%, since the same time last year.

around half a percent in recent years. And the decline is only likely to become more pronounced, as several large states have yet to release information. Chalkbeat and AP surveyed all 50 states, but 17 have not released comparable enrolment numbers yet.

The data, which in many states is preliminary, offers the clearest picture yet of the pandemic's devastating toll on public school enrolment a decline that could eventually have dire consequences for school budgets that are based on headcounts.

But even more alarming, educators say, is that some of the students who left may not be in school at all. I would like to hope that many of them are from homes where their parents have taken responsibility on their own to provide for their education, said Pedro Noguera, the dean of the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, adding that affluent fami-

lies will have an easier time doing that. My fear is that large numbers have simply gotten discouraged and given up. So far, many states have held off on making school budget cuts in the face of enrolment declines. But if enrolment doesn't rise, funding will be hit.

We've been trying to scream from the hilltops for quite some time that this is happening, Kirsten Baesler, North Dakota's schools superintendent, said of the enrolment declines. And it could be a national crisis if we don't put some elbow grease into it.

The declines are driven by a combination of factors brought on by the pandemic. Fewer parents enrol-

led their children in kindergarten, and some students left public schools for other learning environments. At the same time, students who are struggling to attend classes, as many are right now, may have been purged from public school rolls for missing many days in a row. That is a typical practice, though there is some more flexibility now.

The Chalkbeat/AP analysis shows that a drop in kindergarten enrolment accounts for 30% of the total reduction across the 33 states making it one of the biggest drivers of the nationwide decline. Kindergarten is not required in over half of states.

— AP

4.6K FROM UK
QUARANTINED
IN TURKEY

Ankara, Dec. 22: Turkey has identified and quarantined 4,603 airline passengers who arrived from the United Kingdom on and after December 14, Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said Tuesday.

Flights from the UK, South Africa, Denmark and the Netherlands were suspended on Sunday evening in response to a new strain of Coronavirus said to be circulating there.

Koca tweeted that 335 passengers flying from those countries at the time of Sunday's announcement were tested for the virus on arrival in Turkey and isolated.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

23 DECEMBER 2020

Act quickly to stave off new virus strain threat

The decision of the Union government to take pre-emptive steps against the spread of a mutated version of SARS-CoV-2 that plunged Britain into an unprecedented crisis and the rest of the world into the fear of another wave is welcome. The stoppage of the air traffic to and from Britain till December 31 and the strict conditions on those who travel to India after a visit to that country should be able to help India save itself from another devastating attack of the virus. Several other European nations, which are already into the second phase of national lockdown due to surge in the Covid numbers, are also taking early steps to keep the new virus off its limits by virtually stopping all contacts with the island nation.

India has of late been witnessing a steady decrease in the daily number of caseload though states such as Maharashtra and Kerala show no signs of a thaw. In fact, Maharashtra, which has the highest total caseload, has imposed night curfew and tightened some other controls. Kerala, which

The governments should not hesitate to impose restrictions on gatherings wherever necessary before it gets too late; political, social and religious events and festivals offer no excuse to be lax

managed to contain the virus in the initial stages and has kept the fatality rate low even now, has already warned of a major spike in the coming days. The state government fears that the elections to the local bodies held last week could turn a super spreader event. Delhi government has already imposed a slew of controls and augmented the healthcare facilities to successfully ward off a major outbreak. Fortunately, India looks like having averted a major outbreak which experts feared would visit us after the festival season.

It is in this background that the new threat has emerged. The mutant version, now referred to as VUI (Variant Under Investigation) 202012/01 or known as B.1.1.7, is not more dangerous than the original one but can spread faster, according to experts. Scientists are yet to decode the virus, first noticed in Southern England in December, whether the mutation makes it spread faster. According to Public Health England, the executive agency of the British department of health and social care, the mutations in the spike protein of the virus can change how the micro-organism interacts with human cells. Scientists insist that the vaccines, which have been given emergency authorisation, and those which are in the pipeline, will work against the new variant, too.

While science and scientists grapple with the pandemic and its causes, the non-medical measures come into the focus more than ever. Public health experts insist on the importance of Covid-appropriate protocols such as social distancing, wearing of masks and washing of hands to keep the virus away. The governments should not hesitate to impose restrictions on gatherings wherever necessary before it gets too late; political, social and religious events and festivals offer no excuse to be lax. The message the mutated virus would like to pass on to humanity is that no amount of caution is too much until such time when vaccines have been made available and a sufficient number of people are inoculated to attain herd immunity.

Tumble and roll

The reports of the emergence of a new highly-transmissible strain of coronavirus in the United Kingdom and a resultant suspension of air connectivity to London by several countries, including India, sent shockwaves across the global financial world. Being a part of the global financial system, India's key stock market indices — the Sensex and the Nifty — too suffered blow-backs, wiping out over ₹6.5 lakh crore worth investor wealth in just one day.

For the general public, the market reaction may appear insane. Having grown phenomenally after the worst crash during the pandemic, one may wonder as to why should investors be so panicky. However, since the investors bet their money on the foreseeable future, the investors always react ahead of the curve. Similarly, the Monday mayhem in the stock markets too could be a premature panic-driven reaction to the new strain of coronavirus. They may return to the stock markets soon as reports suggest that the new strain may be highly transmissible, but it is not more virulent than the previous versions.

While the world's toughest lockdown had wiped out nearly a quarter of economic productivity in the April-June quarter, the economic growth showed a robust recovery in September.

ended the talk of doomsday scenarios since the economy is largely driven by domestic consumption. While the developments in the UK may not have an immediate impact on India, full economic recovery, however, is predicated on the successful containment of coronavirus. Until normal economic activity remains unchecked in the country, external developments may not have a lasting impact on the economy. The government and people, therefore, must not lower their guard against the highly-transmissible pathogen.

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KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
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DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax: 040-27805256

Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhavalewaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Rammagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255

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Subhani



Bhoomi putra for Bengal: Has BJP made a mistake?



Shikha Mukerjee

The man for all election seasons, Amit Shah, Union home minister and the BJP's craftiest leader, came to West Bengal and radically revised the strategy for conquest. The state's saffronisation has been Mr Shah's goal for years.

With the acquisition of a "bhoomi putra" — an experienced, violence-hardened, mass leader with charismatic appeal in Suvendu Adhikari from Trinamul Congress, Mr Shah has found a face to challenge Mamata Banerjee. Bengali identity, Mr Shah has had to acknowledge, transcends all the different ways in which the BJP slices and splices Hindutva issues to produce electoral victories with remarkable regularity.

It's a belated realisation that neither the communal card, nor polarisation, nor verbal assaults against dynastic politics, would pose a serious threat to the fiery, feisty political war veteran Mamata Banerjee, who has charisma in loads and local knowledge that can outmatch the collective brains of the BJP machine. It's also an admission that light-weight Bengalis as proxies for Narendra Modi would be dismissed with contempt by a culturally and politically fanatically proud people.

From one visit to the next in the space of a month, Mr Shah has finally realised that he has to back away from two issues he had identified as bestsellers in the West Bengal election market. The first is aggressively selling the Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens as a cleanup mechanism to weed out Muslim illegals on the plea that it will be "considered" for action only after the Covid-19 vaccines are rolled out. The second is shooting down the idea that President's

Rule was being seriously considered before the West Bengal elections. Pulling no punches, Mr Shah seems to have told BJP state party chief Dilip Ghosh and West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to pipe down.

These are sure signs that Mr Shah is only now beginning to gauge that West Bengal is the most complex undertaking he has ever had to handle. There is no template in the BJP's playbook that can be copied and pasted over West Bengal.

To convince the voter that the BJP is not indeed an "outsider", Mr Shah had to roll out Mr Adhikari and set him to work, the day after Christmas. The speed with which Mr Shah and the home ministry approved "Z" category security for Mr Adhikari even before he was formally inducted into the party at the Midnapore rally is an indication that it has a lot of catching up to do.

If the BJP was too complacent that its formula of communal polarisation, identity politics, homogenisation and mainstreaming within the Hindutva fold would be enough to convert the Bengali into a loyalist and thus reliable voter, the Trinamul Congress was just as smug. Obviously Mamata Banerjee can read the pulse of the people better than the BJP, which has inadequate leaders in West Bengal and out of state bosses who are clueless about the fiercely proud Bengali.

For both the TMC and the BJP, the defection of Suvendu Adhikari and nine other MLAs and MPs, as well around 100 lesser functionaries, is a turning point. As a young leader who led the Nandigram movement against the CPI(M)-led Left Front's strategy for industrialising West Bengal, Mr Adhikari shot into the limelight. He became known for his capacity to

Bengalis can be a fanatically proud and snooty people. Suvendu Adhikari may be too local, too small time as a CM face. Every chief minister of West Bengal has been a national leader first and a local leader as well. Most were at loggerheads with the Centre, including Siddhartha Shankar Ray on occasion. Has the BJP made a mistake in stooping to conquer?

match violence with violence and for his capacity to mobilise, equip and deploy the small army of TMC loyalists. He was rewarded for his work and elevated as a youth leader, as part of the successor generation to be groomed for the party after Mamata Banerjee.

So indispensable was he, that in the 2016 Assembly elections, when Mamata Banerjee needed a robust organisation to win her seats in Purulia, Bankura and Jhargram and she felt Mukul Roy, now with the BJP, would not be as effective, Mr Adhikari was given responsibility for 60-plus seats. It was also her way of placating Mr Adhikari after the induction of Abhishek Banerjee, her nephew. The move angered many, including Mr Roy, who saw it as heaping favours on the Adhikari clan. Regardless of how her preference annoyed others in the TMC, Ms Banerjee continued to pamper Suvendu with greater responsibilities, like observer for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls for crucial districts in Malda and Murshidabad, long considered Congress bastions.

The network that Mr Adhikari built across at least seven districts out of a total of 23 in West Bengal, and his popularity, made him an asset for the Trinamul Congress. The BJP's gain is thus the TMC's loss. To capitalise on this, Mr Shah has drastically revised the BJP's campaign content and strategy.

The plan is crude, and the BJP hopes it will be effective — luring Mamata Banerjee into a personal fight against Mr Adhikari, who she was wont to see as a loyalist turned disgruntled defector with an insider's knowledge of how the TMC government and organisation failed, its corruption, its depen-

dence on a partisan bureaucracy and the police. It would challenge Mamata Banerjee's credibility and her legitimacy as a leader.

The other advantage of a Mamata Banerjee versus Adhikari fight would mean there would be two foes against the lone chief minister. It would serve to situate the BJP's best star campaigner, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, above the fray, with a solution to the problems of West Bengal by mainstreaming the marginalised, deviant locals.

The insider-outsider game set up by the BJP is theoretically neat. The question is — will it be effective? West Bengal has always seen itself as a leader in national politics. To sink to the ranks of laggard followers could be unsatisfactory. The state's chief ministers have always punched way above their weight, as they were politically important national leaders to begin with. Even though Mamata Banerjee was not a member of the social elite to which all her predecessors in office belonged, she was still a national leader, the successful leader of a party that she had founded, when she became chief minister. In contrast, Mr Adhikari is a local, perhaps too local.

The localisation of the BJP is far from complete. Adding a *bhoomi putra* is a design element and does not indicate a structural transformation. If localisation has indeed begun, it was difficult to find it, when Mr Shah's roadshow snaked through Bolpur, with a DJ managing the event, and dancers and bands preceding the leader as though it was a carnival, and not a political rally.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

RIGHT DECISION

India has done the right thing by halting the flights till the end of this year (*India halts UK flights as Covid mutations surface, DC, Dec. 22*). The fast-spreading mutated virus from the UK is posing new challenges. In order to avoid the influx of carriers, several countries are in a hurry to ban flights from the UK. Truly said, once bitten, twice shy.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

CM'S BIRTHDAY

Not only in Tirupati but all over AP the birthday celebrations of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was celebrated in a grand manner. Certain programmes like blood donation and food distribution was also seen. Now the questions is during a pandemic, how far is it right to conduct rallies in a big way? Is this a politically motivated event for coming elections?

P. Govardhana Rao
Krishna district

LAND SURVEY

Ostensibly, this is a gigantic task rarely taken up in a country like ours (*CM launches land survey to help property owners, DC, Dec. 22*). All kinds of malpractices took place since the last survey in 1920s. Though the objective of the new exercise is to help property owners, a lot of skeletons from the cupboards of land registrar offices all over the state would stumble out. Mainly the history of land grabbers, benamis of the powerful would get exposed. One hopes that the people would not be fleeced of their hard earned money.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Da Vinci award for Concorde men

LONDON, Dec. 22.

The Concorde supersonic jetliner, now being flight tested in readiness for airline service at the end of 1973 had won an international award for its contribution to the development of civil aviation.

The Leonardo da Vinci prize awarded annually by the Italian Air Transport Development Centre, was presented in Rome on Monday to the builders of the Concorde — the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) and Aerospatiale of France.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Centre spars with Mamata in bid to turn Bengal babus into stool pigeons

The battle for the West Bengal Assembly elections looms ahead but skirmishes have already started. After the attack on BJP president J.P. Nadda's convoy in the state, the Centre retaliated against the Trinamul government by recalling three IPS officers from the state on Central deputation. Further, to perhaps underline the "message", the ministry of home affairs summoned state chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay and director general of police Virendra to Delhi to explain the law and order situation in Bengal.

A defiant chief minister Mamata Banerjee refused to comply with the summons. Also, she declined the Centre's demand to send the three IPS officers — Bholanath Pandey, Rajeev Mishra and Praveen Kumar Tripathi — on deputation saying there was a dearth of good officers in the state, and the state could not spare the

three officers.

There is a precedent here. The then chief minister of Tamil Nadu J. Jayalalithaa had similarly denied the Centre in 1991 when the state police had conducted a raid on the house of former state chief minister and DMK leader M. Karunanidhi, her archrival. The Centre had asked the Tamil Nadu government to relieve the three officers involved for Central deputation. Like Mamata now, she had refused to spare those officers.

Apparently, there is little the Centre can do against civil service officers who are posted under the state government. For any action to be taken on an officer, the state and the Centre both need to agree.

REBELS FOR A CAUSE?

Outliers are far and few between in the civil service, which runs on obedience rather than resistance. But sometimes momentous events reveal "rebels" with a cause.

Punjab DIG (Prisons) Lakhminder Singh Jakhar has resigned from service in support of farmers who are in Delhi protesting against the three new farm laws. There are politicians, sports people, even ex-defence forces officers who have renounced their awards and medals in protest, but an IPS officer resigning from service for the farmers' cause is a first in the state.

Of course, IAS officer Kannan Gopinathan resigned from the service to protest against the restrictions imposed in Jammu & Kashmir following the abrogation of Article 370. Similarly, Shah Faesal, the young IAS officer from J&K resigned from the service in 2019 to start a political party. And just a few months ago, the DGP of Bihar Gupteshwar Pandey opting for VRS in a bid to contest the state Assembly poll (his position is still vacant), but that was not for a public cause.

Meanwhile, Jakhar who had served the Army joined the IPS as a 1994-batch officer and was slated to superannuate in August 2022. Interestingly, he had been suspended in May earlier this year on alleged corruption charges but was reinstated within a month. Clearly, outliers defy easy definition!

TN WON'T LET GO OF CHIEF SECY

By seeking the extension of the tenure of Tamil Nadu chief secretary K. Shanmugam, the state government has stirred up a hornets' nest in the upper echelons of the administration. An extension of tenure for Shanmugam could mean that several senior Tamil Nadu cadre officers eligible to succeed him may find their chances fading.

According to sources, Shanmugam, a 1985-batch IAS officer, has already received two

extensions.

Meanwhile, there are 30 IAS officers in the state in the additional chief secretary rank, including four who are secretaries to the Central government. For them, the third extension for Shanmugam seems to indicate that the state government doubts their abilities to handle the top job.

Interestingly, when chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami first sought an extension of tenure for Shanmugam, it was for one year, but the Centre granted approval only for three months. The second extension was for another three months. Now the state government has requested a six-month extension for the babu who reportedly is playing a "critical role in Covid management in the state". Will the Centre oblige again?

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

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	46006.69	0.99
Nifty 50	13466.30	1.03
S&P 500*	3,692.94	-0.05
Dollar (₹)	73.84	-0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	-1.81
Euro (₹)	90.28	-0.48
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,936	480 0.95
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.21	-0.70
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.951	-0.005
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.923	-0.018

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Trust AMC eyes ₹10,000 cr AUM in next 2 years

Trust Asset Management Company, the latest to enter the already cluttered ₹30-lakh-crore mutual fund industry with 44 payers, plans to launch its maiden fund within a couple of weeks and garner an AUM of around ₹10,000 crore in the first two years of operations, says a top official. The fund house, which had announced a soft launch earlier this month, is awaiting the Sebi nod for its maiden scheme.

Gold prices fall amid weakness in global mart



Gold prices fell ₹243 to ₹49,653 per 10 gram in Delhi on Tuesday, reflecting the weakness in global price of the precious metal. In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at ₹49,896 per 10 gram. Silver prices also declined Rs 216 to ₹67,177 per kg from ₹67,393 per kg in the previous trade. In the global market, gold and silver were trading lower at \$1,868 per ounce and \$25.70 per ounce, respectively.

Manappuram raises ₹400cr via issue of bonds

Manappuram Finance on Tuesday said it has raised ₹400 crore by issuing bonds on private placement basis. The Financial Resources and Management Committee of the board of directors of the company has approved the allotment of 4,000 rated, secured, redeemable non-convertible debentures aggregating to ₹400 crore, Manappuram Finance said in a regulatory filing.

Reliance Capital gets 10 more bids for subsidiaries

Reliance Capital Ltd, part of the debt-ridden ADAG Reliance Group, has received 10 more bids, including from SBI Life, for its subsidiaries, sources said. Earlier this month, the Committee of Debenture Holders had extended the last date for submission of expression of interest to December 17. Following this, 10 new bids have come in for Reliance Capital's assets, taking the total number of bids to 70.



Apple eyes car rollout by 2024

iPhone maker's self-driving car will have battery with better technology

POWER BATTERY

Central to Apple's self-driving car strategy is a new battery design that could radically reduce the cost of batteries and increase the vehicle's range.

The tech major plans to use a unique "monocell" design that bulks up the individual cells in the battery and frees up space inside the battery pack by eliminating pouches and modules that hold battery materials.

The company is also examining a chemistry for the battery called or lithium iron phosphate, which is inherently less likely to overheat and is thus safer than other types of lithium-ion batteries.



Central to Apple's strategy is a new battery design that could "radically" reduce the cost of batteries and increase the vehicle's range, according to a third person who has seen Apple's battery design.

Apple declined to comment on its plans or future products.

Making a vehicle represents a supply chain challenge even for Apple, a company with deep pockets that makes hundreds of millions of electronics products each year with

parts from around the world, but has never made a car. It took Elon Musk's Tesla 17 years before it finally turned a sustained profit making cars.

"If there is one company on the planet that has the resources to do that, it's probably Apple. But at the same time, it's not a cell-phone," said a person who worked on Project Titan.

It remains unclear who would assemble an Apple-branded car, but sources have said they expect the company to rely on a man-

ufacturing partner to build vehicles.

And there is still a chance Apple will decide to reduce the scope of its efforts to an auto-nomous driving system that would be integrated with a car made by a traditional automaker, rather than the iPhone maker selling an Apple-branded car, one of the people added.

Apple has decided to tap outside partners for elements of the system, including lidar sensors, which help self-driving

cars get a three-dimensional view of the road, two people familiar with the company's plans told Reuters.

As for the car's battery, Apple plans to use a unique "monocell" design that bulks up the individual cells in the battery and frees up space inside the battery pack by eliminating pouches and modules that hold battery materials, one of the people said.

Apple's design means that more active material can be packed inside the battery giving the car a potentially longer range. Apple is also examining a chemistry for the battery called LFP, or lithium iron phosphate, the person said, which is inherently less likely to overheat and is thus safer than other types of lithium-ion batteries.

"It's next level," the person said of Apple's battery technology. "Like the first time you saw the iPhone," he said.

— Reuters

Centre begins process to sell stake in SCI



New Delhi, Dec. 22: The government on Tuesday invited expressions of interest for strategic disinvestment of its 63.75 per cent stake in Shipping Corp of India along with the transfer of management control.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has issued Preliminary Information Memorandum (PIM) inviting Expressions of Interest (EOI) from potential buyers by February 13, 2021.

Shares of Shipping Corp were trading at ₹86.30, up 4.54 per cent over its previous close on the BSE. At the current market price, the government's stake sale in Shipping Corp is valued at about ₹2,500 crore.

The government has appointed RBSA Capital Advisors LLP as its transaction advisor to manage the disinvestment process.

Shipping Corporation of India is largest Indian shipping company with a fleet strength of 59 vessels. It operates a fleet of 59 ships, including crude oil tankers, very large crude carriers, petroleum product carriers, liquefied petroleum gas carriers, bulk carriers, container ships and off-shore support vessels.

The state-owned shipping company owns and operates around one-third of the Indian tonnage, and has interests in practically all areas of the shipping business; servicing both national and international trades.

Prominent among the companies that have shown interest in acquiring a stake in Shipping Corporation of India are Vedanta Resources Ltd and Dubai's DP World.

Shipping Corporation of India is largest Indian shipping company with a fleet strength of 59 vessels. It operates a fleet of 59 ships, including crude oil tankers, very large crude carriers, petroleum product carriers, liquefied petroleum gas carriers, bulk carriers, container ships and offshore support vessels.

Recently, Vedanta Resources has teamed up with Centricus Management Ltd to create a warchest of \$10 billion to acquire the state-run companies.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in November last year gave in-principle approval for the strategic divestment of Shipping Corp.

However, the plans were delayed due to the pandemic. The 2020-21 Budget has set a record divestment target of ₹2.1 lakh crore.

The government has so far raised ₹12,380 crore through minority stake sale in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and share buybacks this fiscal year. Strategic sale process of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Air India is ongoing and both the companies have received "multiple" EOI from potential buyers.

— Agencies

Industry bodies to ask Centre to relook at new wage definition

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Representatives of industry bodies, including from CII and Ficci, will hold a meeting with the labour ministry top brass on Thursday to make a case for holding back implementation of new definition of wages, which would increase social security deductions and reduce take-home pay of workers.

"The representatives of CII and Ficci among other industry bodies would meet union labour ministry top brass on December 24, 2020 to discuss the new definition of

● Lobbyists want the government to hold back the new definition and fear that this would result in major cut in take-home salaries and also put additional burden on employers.

● The new definition will lead to a cut in workers' take-home pay while an increase in the employer's provident fund contribution liability.

wages which is likely to be implemented by April 1, 2021," an industry source said.

The source also said that lobbyists want the government to hold back the new definition and fear that this would result in major cut in take-home salaries

and also put additional burden on employers.

The new definition of wages is part of the Code on Wages, 2019 passed by Parliament last year. The rules to enforce the law was also firmed up last year. Now, its implementation is planned from April

Firms step up hiring after Covid impact

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Adapting to the new hybrid normal of remote and office work, cautiously optimistic corporates are looking to hire more people and provide better appraisals in the new year as they step out of the pandemic-ravaged 2020.

The coronavirus pandemic emerged as the biggest inflection point for the Indian job landscape. For the corporates, work-from-home and remote workers became the new normal and for the professionals, online learning and digital skills took the centre-stage.

In 2020, most companies "deprioritised" their hiring plans amid uncertain economic outlook while industries like travel, hospitality, retail, aviation, real estate, construction and automobile were severely hit.

Nevertheless, there is a cautious optimism among

corporates and it is getting reflected in their recruitment plans for the new year. "Yes, the market is showing positive signs of recovery with almost all industries showing growth in hiring but with caution. Overall, the intent to hire recovered smartly from 11 per cent during the lockdown period to 18 per cent for HY (half year) and this number is growing," Deval Singh, business head, Mobilization (hiring) at TeamLease Services.

While there is caution in hiring, the market is displaying optimism.

He said there is a 50 per cent increase in employment opportunities from the lockdown days.

Pay cuts have been reversed since Diwali in most organisations and bonuses were issued in few. Some IT companies even declared early appraisals, he noted.

— PTI

Daimler AG picks Infosys to manage automotive IT infra

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 22

German auto major Daimler AG and Infosys on Tuesday entered into a long-term strategic partnership to drive hybrid cloud-powered innovation and IT infrastructure transformation in the automotive sector. Daimler is the company that manufactures Mercedes-Benz cars.

"After the receipt of all regulatory approvals, Daimler AG will transform its IT operating model and infrastructure landscape across workplace services, service desk, data centre, networks and SAP Basis together with Infosys," said a joint statement issued by the two companies.

"The partnership will enable the company to deepen its focus on software engineering and to



establish a fully-scalable on-demand digital IT infrastructure and anytime-anywhere workplace. The collaboration will empower Daimler to strengthen its IT capabilities, and Infosys, its automotive expertise."

"Daimler will work towards a model that ensures a robust IT infrastructure across its plants and regions, and supports consolidation of its data centers, scaling its IT operations, and bringing innovations to the fore," the joint statement said.

"As a part of this partnership, automotive IT

3.75 CR ITRs FILED FOR 2019-20 FISCAL

New Delhi, Dec. 22: As many as 3.75 crore taxpayers have already filed their Income-Tax returns for Assessment Year 2020-21 (fiscal year 2019-20) till December 21, the Income Tax department said on Tuesday.

"Do you know that 3.75 crore taxpayers have already filed their Income Tax Returns for AY 2020-21 till 21st December, 2020? Have you filed yours yet? If not, File NOW!," the Income Tax department tweeted.

This includes 2.17 crore taxpayers filing ITR-1, 79.82 lakh filing ITR-4, 43.18 lakh ITR-3 and 26.56 lakh filing ITR-2. The deadline to file I-T returns by individual taxpayers for 2019-20 fiscal (Assessment Year 2020-21) ends on December 31, 2020, while

the same for taxpayers whose accounts require to be audited is January 31, 2021.

The due date has been extended from July 31 and October 31, 2020, respectively in view of the Covid pandemic.

At the close of deadline for filing ITR without payment of late fees for fiscal 2018-19 (assessment year 2019-20), over 5.65 crore returns were filed by taxpayers.

The deadline last year too was extended till August 31.

Giving a comparative analysis of the ITRs filed, the Income Tax department said 3.63 crore income-tax returns were filed till August 21, 2019, compared to 3.75 crore filed till December 21, 2020.

— PTI



SHORT TAKES

Cole's goal settles point for Odisha

Goa: It could have been another defeat but Odisha FC clawed back a point despite taking the lead early against NorthEast United, drawing 2-2 in a Indian Super League game at the GMC Stadium, here on Tuesday. Odisha took the lead through Diego Mauricio (26') before Benjamin Lambot (45+1') drew parity. Kwesi Appiah (65') then converted a penalty to put the Highlanders ahead but soon saw his goal cancelled out by Cole Alexander (67'). Odisha named an unchanged eleven from the side that lost to Bengaluru FC while NorthEast coach Gerard Nus rang in four changes with Federico Gallego handed a start. The first half saw a cagey contest with both sides heading into the break level after creating plenty of chances. The first big chance of the game arrived during the 10th minute but Odisha keeper Arshdeep Singh produced a fine save to deny an opener for the Highlanders.

Don's Test cap sells for \$340k

Sydney: An Australian businessman has purchased Donald Bradman's first baggy green Test cap for 450,000 Australian dollars (\$340,000) at auction, the second-highest price paid for a piece of cricket memorabilia. Peter Freedman, the founder of Rode Microphones who earlier this year paid 9 million Australian dollars (\$6.8 million) at an auction for a guitar used by Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain, plans to tour Bradman's Test debut cap around Australia. "The price for Bradman's 1928 Australia cap sits behind the 1,007,500 (\$760,000) paid at auction for Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne's Test cap earlier this year the world-record price for an item of cricket memorabilia," auction officials said. — AP

Sindhu hopeful of travelling from UK

New Delhi: Unfazed by the worsening Covid-19 situation in England where she is training right now, world champion shuttler P.V. Sindhu on Tuesday said that she remains hopeful of travelling to Thailand for tournaments in January despite countries increasingly banning flights from the UK. Sindhu, who has qualified for the Tokyo Olympics, has been training in London for the last two months and is scheduled to play her first tournament since the break in Thailand. She will have to be in Bangkok by January 3 to compete in the two Super 1000 events (January 12 to 17 and January 19 to 24). "I plan to travel in the first week of January. There is no travel ban from UK in Thailand, so I can travel from Doha. The idea is to use the Gulf route to reach Thailand," said Sindhu. — PTI

Pakistan win third T20 in NZ

Napier, New Zealand: New Test captain Mohammad Rizwan showed his leadership quality in a bold innings of 89 which steered Pakistan to a four-wicket win over New Zealand in the third Twenty20 on Tuesday. Rizwan will lead Pakistan in the two-match Test series against New Zealand starting on Sunday in place of Babar Azam, who is injured. With Rizwan's leadership, Pakistan surpassed New Zealand's moderate total of 173-7 with two balls to spare. Rizwan batted his team within sight of victory when he was out in the final over at 171-6. — AP

Brief scores: New Zealand 173/7 (Conway 63, Ashraf 3-20) lost to Pakistan 177/6 (Rizwan 89, Southee 2-25).

Live on TV

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Brisbane Heat vs Adelaide Strikers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Jamshedpur vs Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Verona vs Inter Milan from 11 pm; AC Milan vs Lazio from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Napoli vs Torino from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1; Roma vs Cagliari from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Six, HD

WWE

NXT: Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

KOHLI SIGNS OFF

After pep talk, Virat leaves Australian shores for India

Adelaide, Dec. 22: Indian captain Virat Kohli left Australian shores on Tuesday after a pep talk with his beleaguered teammates, handing over the mantle of leading the side to Ajinkya Rahane in the remaining three Tests. Kohli is coming back to India for the birth of his first child in January. Before boarding his flight back home, the star batsman met his teammates and encouraged them to give their all in the remainder of the series, which the visitors trail 0-1 after the heavy defeat in the opening Test.

Long before setting foot on Australia, Rahane had been entrusted with the responsibility of leading in the team in Kohli's absence after the star had approached the BCCI for paternity leave.

The idea behind organising the pep talk was to boost the confidence of the players and keep them in a positive frame of mind heading into the crucial Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

India lost the lung-opener here inside three days after crumbling to their lowest Test score of 36 which drew a lot of eyeballs across the cricket galaxy.

The second Test is scheduled to be held at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) from December 26-30.

Kohli, who has been leading the Test team since 2014, urged his players to show intent and express themselves on the field without any inhibition.

While Kohli has departed for India, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma is quarantining in Sydney.

Kohli was India's best performer with the bat in the series opener, top-scoring with a sedate 74 in their first innings before being run out following a misunderstanding with Ajinkya Rahane. — PTI

● **Before boarding his flight back home, Virat Kohli met his teammates and encouraged them to give their all in the remainder of the series**



Australia's Steve Smith (left) and Virat Kohli during the first Test in Adelaide.

— AFP

Virat deserves respect: Smith

Adelaide, Dec. 22: Australian batsman Steve Smith on Tuesday said Virat Kohli deserves credit for prioritising the birth of his child over cricket as "there would have been a lot of pressure" on the India skipper to stay for the entire duration of the ongoing Test series.

India are 0-1 down in the four-match rubber after losing the opening Test by eight wickets during which they also collapsed to their lowest Test score. Kohli will head home on

Tuesday. "Obviously, it's a big loss for India, not having him for the rest of the series. We just have to look at the way he played in the first innings. That was a pretty class display against some good bowling on a wicket that was doing a bit," Smith said during a virtual press conference.

"I just fist-pumped him at the end (of first Test) and said 'Mate safe travels, hope everything goes well with the baby, and pass on my best to your wife.' That was about it,"

Smith said.

"I'm sure there would have been a lot of pressure for him to stay but to stand up and want to go home for the birth of his first child, it's a credit for him. It's a milestone that he certainly wouldn't want to miss."

Kohli's 74 was the highest score by any batsman on either side in the first innings of the pink-ball day/night Test while Smith was out for 1.

Smith was also asked about legendary Australian spinner Shane

Warne's view that red ball is "pathetic" and pink ball should replace it in all Tests. He disagreed with the idea.

"Personally I'd like to keep red-ball cricket alive. I think one series or something like that is a good amount. We've seen in Adelaide for instance it's worked exceptionally well, it's a great spectacle. We played some really good day/night games."

"But I think overall, I'd like to personally play red ball cricket a lot," Smith said. — PTI

Waugh sees 'no hope' of India bouncing back

Melbourne, Dec. 22: The Indian cricket team has "no hope" of making a comeback after the humiliation in Adelaide and will suffer a 4-0 whitewash in the four-match Test series against Australia, feels former batsman Mark Waugh.

India were bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the series.

Asked if India could bounce back after losing the first Test, Waugh said: "No hope, no hope."

"I thought Adelaide was the Test that they could win on paper and with Virat Kohli here for just the one Test. I thought the conditions would suit them."

"I just can't see how they



Mark Waugh

can bounce back (after) Australia whitewashed them on the third day. So 'no' is the answer four-nil to Australia," he said on Fox Cricket.

CA SAYS SMITH NOT ONLY CAPTAINCY CANDIDATE

Batting mainstay Steve Smith's reappointment as Australia's Test captain is far from certain as the sport's governing body in the country feels there are

some "great young leaders" coming through the system. Smith was removed from captaincy due to his involvement in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal, with Cricket Australia (CA) appointing Tim Paine to the top job.

However, there have been speculations recently that Smith could be reinstated as skipper. Asked about the board's view, CA chairman Earl Eddings told *ESPNCricinfo*: "First of all we've got three great captains in Meg, Aaron and Tim. We've got some great young leaders coming through. So it's not just about should Steve take over, it's about what's best overall. Steve's a great young man and he was a good captain when he was there. Like any succession there's planning in place." — PTI

ENG TOUR ON DESPITE COVID WAVE

Colombo, Dec. 22: The new strain of Covid-19 that has hit the United Kingdom will not jeopardise England's upcoming tour of Sri Lanka even though the development is a cause of concern, the country's cricket board (SLC) said on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka Cricket's (SLC) medical team feels that the tour starting January 14 is on schedule but additional Covid-19 protocols might be enforced for the visitors either before leaving their country or after arriving here.

According to *ESPNCricinfo*, SLC's medical team is expected to hold discussions with their English counterparts on Tuesday on the matter. — PTI

Raina sorry for code violation

Mumbai, Dec. 22: Former India cricketer Suresh Raina, who was among 34 people arrested and released on bail by Mumbai Police for violating COVID-19 social distancing norms at a club here, has regretted the "unintentional and unfortunate" incident.

A statement issued by the former batsman's management team said the 34-year old was not aware of the local timings and protocols at the time of the incident.

"Suresh was in Mumbai for a shoot which extended to late hours and was invited by a friend for a quick dinner post the same prior to him taking his flight back to Delhi. He was not aware of the local timings and protocols," said the statement.

"Once pointed out, he (Raina) immediately complied with the procedures laid out by the authorities and regrets the unfortunate and unintentional incident."

"He (Raina) always holds rules and laws laid down by governing bodies with the highest regard and will continue to do so in the future as well," it added.

Thirty-four people including Raina and celebrity



Suresh Raina

Sussanne Khan were arrested after a raid at a posh club near the Mumbai airport on Tuesday for violating social distancing norms.

According to the police, those arrested in the raid at the Dragonfly Experience included seven staffers of the club.

The 13 women, who were arrested, were allowed to leave after being served notices. The men were shown as arrested and granted bail later.

Police said the raid was conducted after the club remained open beyond the permissible time limit and violated Covid-19 norms.

Raina, who has played 18 Tests, 226 ODIs and 78 T20s, announced retirement from international cricket in August earlier this year. — PTI

Andhra Pradesh State Co-operative Marketing Federation Ltd.,
55-17-2 to 4, 5th Floor, Stalin Corporate Building, Road No -2
Autonagar, Vijayawada-520 007, Ph: 9866237328 & 9031421312
Applications are invited for HR-Payroll services for Consumer Division of AP MarkFed, Govt of AP. Applications will be open till 05/01/2021 3.00 PM. RFP containing detailed description of the Tender is available on AP MarkFed's Website, www.apmarkfed.in under "Tenders" section. Firms are advised to go through the detailed RFP, and ensure their eligibility and other details before submitting the tender. Sd/-
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NOTICE INVITING TENDER	
Tender Enquiry / Specification No.	MQP-170 / 2020-21/PR
Short Description	Procurement of 1-in-1 Metal Meter Boxes for incorporating Single Phase Energy Meters
Start date of downloading of tender documents/ Bid submission start date	22.12.2020 at 11.00 Hrs
Last date of downloading / Bid submission	25.01.2021 till 11.00 Hrs
Bid opening date (Part-I & II)	01.02.2021 at 11.30 Hrs
Intending officer and Contact No.	SE/HMC, PSPCL, Patiala 96461-18774

Detailed NIT and set of specification/ tender documents can only be downloaded from website <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>. Tender ID is 2020_POWER_57662_1
Note: Corrigendum, if any, after the publication of this tender enquiry shall only be uploaded on site and will not be published in any newspaper.
C-379/2020 RO No PR-Advt. No :- 76155/12/2021/56 SE/HMC
PSPCL, Patiala

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