

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | 25 DECEMBER 2020



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Australia all charged up



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WEATHER



Max: 31.0°C
Min: 16.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy.
Max/Min temp.
31/16 °C

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
218
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Ekadasi till 1.53 am (Saturday)
Star: Ashwini till 7.35 am
Variyam: 6.22 pm to 8.10 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.59 am to 9.42 am; 12.38 pm to 1.22 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
HJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 9, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 6:00 am
Zohar: 1:30 pm
Asar: 4:30 pm
Maghrib: 5:45 pm
Isha: 8:15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.42 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 2.13 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 3.06 PM

COUNTER POINT



Psst! Corona vaccine...

SHORT TAKES

HC strikes down judge's order

Vijayawada: The AP High Court on Thursday struck down a single judge order that directed the Registrar (judicial) to resolve problems being faced by advocates in listing cases. Earlier, reacting to complaints of advocates, Justice M. Venkata Ramana directed Alapati Giridhar, the Registrar, to list cases on dates as dictated by judges and take steps to avoid trouble to advocates in getting their cases listed.

■ Full report inside

UNSOCIAL | MEDIA

Pedda Reddy suspects JC's men of nasty posts

MLA's men ransack JC house

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, DEC. 24

Tension prevailed in Tadipatri town after followers of YSRC legislator K. Pedda Reddy ransacked the residence of his rival and TD leader J.C. Diwakar Reddy and attacked Dasari Kiran, close aide of Prabhakar Reddy, for allegedly having posting against the MLA's wife on social media.

Prabhakar Reddy and his family members were not in the house at the time of the attack. However, the situation turned violent when he rushed home and

● **MLA PEDDA REDDY** stopped his convoy in front of Diwakar Reddy's house and rushed into it, accompanied by more than 30 close aides along with armed gunmen and the local sub inspector, according to the police.

both groups began pelting stones at each other.

Two vehicles, including that of Pedda Reddy, were damaged while some party workers from both sides suffered injuries.

Sources said a post against Pedda Reddy's wife

about collection of money from sand reaches went viral. In fact, they have been viral for the past one month. Pedda Reddy's rented party office is in the same colony where Diwakar Reddy's house is located.

Pedda Reddy stopped his convoy in front of Diwakar Reddy's house and rushed into it, accompanied by more than 30 close aides along with armed gunmen and the local sub inspector.

None of the family members was around. Aides of the MLA attacked Dasari Kiran and beat him severely for the social media post.

The MLA sat on a chair and came out after issuing a stringent warning to Kiran to quit Tadipatri.

On being informed, Prabhakar Reddy rushed to the house. Meanwhile, many followers of JC and TD party cadre gathered at his residence.

In the subsequent pelting of stones, the MLA's car was damaged while the police rescued his son Harshanvardhan Reddy.

SP Satya Esubabu rushed to Tadipatri and monitored the situation.

■ Page 2: Prabhakar Reddy not to file complaint

Merry Christmas



A child and his mother take a look at the nativity scene on Lord Jesus which was set up on the eve of Christmas celebrations at St Anthony Church in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. *Deccan Chronicle* wishes all its readers a Merry Christmas, joy and peace for all.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

PM praises Tagore's vision

ANIMESH SINGH & RAJIB CHOWDHURI
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, DEC. 24

With the upcoming West Bengal Assembly election on his mind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attributed the essence of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative to Bengal icon Rabindranath Tagore at the centenary celebrations of Visva-Bharati University at

Santiniketan.

The speech was made in the absence of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who later claimed that she was not invited though Visva-Bharati vice chancellor Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty's letter on December 4 inviting her went viral.

Modi said, "Guided by Gurudev, Visva-Bharati presented a strong image of Indian nationalist sen-

timent during the Independence. Gurudev wanted the entire humanity to benefit from India's spiritual awakening. Atmanirbhar Bharat vision is also a derivative of this sentiment."

He invoked the famous poem, *Chitto jetha bhoj shunyo, uchoho jetha shir* (Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high), he also pitched for the National Education Policy.

DENIED LOANS, STAFF DUMP GARBAGE IN FRONT OF BANKS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

Sanitary staff angry over denial of loans dumped garbage in front of banks at Vuyyuru in Krishna district. The applicants lamented that the banks were reluctant to give small loans.

According to reports, several nationalised banks refused to give loans under Jaganna Thodu and Cheyutha schemes infuriating applicants, who took the issue to the notice of ruling party leaders and officials. The angry people reportedly dumped garbage in front of three bank branches in Vuyyuru on Thursday. They informed their higher officials and municipal authorities. Later, the garbage was removed. Leaders of All India Bank Employees Association condemned the act.

Krishna collector A. Md Imtiaz expressed sorrow and asked the bankers to cooperate with the government towards sanctioning loans to poor through various government welfare schemes.

Row over curbs at Tirumala turns political

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 24:

The row over restricting the Vaikunta Dwara Darshan free tokens to locals and stopping non-local devotees without tickets at Alipiri turned a political fight.

The Opposition is charging the government and the TTD with failure to ensure free darshan to devotees from far-off places. Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu slammed the YSRC for "not taking steps" to ensure darshan for non-local devotees and alleged that the police at the behest of the ruling party resorted to a lathi-charge on the devotees.

In a statement, Naidu said, "Everyone has a right to have darshan at the Tirumala temple. The government and the TTD are responsible for ensuring hassle-free darshan to all. The YSRC has been tarnishing the image of Tirumala ever since it came to power."

BJP leaders also joined Naidu to target the TTD.

Party spokesperson G. Bhanuprakash Reddy criticised the TTD's decision to allow former Rajampeta MLA Akepati Amarnath Reddy to reach Tirumala via 'Annamayya Bata' on Tuesday along with over 3,000 devotees without security checks.

"TTD has been preventing entry for devotees who don't have tickets at Alipiri. At the same time, they allowed over 3,000 YSRC devotees to reach Tirumala and extended darshan to them. Is Tirumala a dharmic place or a ruling party office," Bhanuprakash asked.

Naidu and Reddy alleged that the YSRC leader and his followers held a procession and flew drone cameras on the Papavinasanam road, violating the security norms at Tirumala.

TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy rejected Naidu's allegation of the police resorting to a lathi-charge.

■ Page 3: TTD chief hits back at Naidu

AUROBINDO GETS 41.1% OF KAKINADA DEEP WATER PORT

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS I DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 24.

Aurobindo Realty and Infrastructure Holdings Pvt Ltd on Thursday became the major shareholder in the Kakinada deep water port by acquiring 41.12 per cent stake in the company which is currently operating the port.

The pharma giant already bought GMR group's stake in the proposed Kakinada SEZ and proposed green field port connected to the SEZ. *Deccan Chronicle* reported on September 26 about Aurobindo setting its eyes on the Kakinada deep water port.

The government built the port with its funds and privatised it in 1999 and it has become a tradition that people or companies close to the party in power enjoy a major stake in the operator company.

Aurobindo bought the entire share of Kakinada Infrastructure Holdings Pvt Ltd in Kakinada Sea Ports Limited, the operator company, while the remaining shares are held by other companies.

■ Page 2: Aurobindo takeover may kill probe

No stay on Jagan's housing scheme: HC

Post-Delhi return, CM gears up party for polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday refused to stay CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's welfare scheme for distribution of house sites to the poor. The government had repeatedly postponed the launch of the programme due to legal hurdles.

The division bench comprising Chief Justice J.K. Maheshwari and Justice J. Uma Devi took up a public interest litigation against the launch on Thursday. The bench said it did not find any valid reason to entertain the plea for a stay and asked the state government to file a counter. The court posted the matter for January 21.

D.S.N.V. Prasad, counsel for petitioner M. Nagasankar of Vijayawada, argued that the government's decision to allot house sites in far off places would affect the livelihood of these people and also change the demographics. This would have a direct bearing on the reservation of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, he said. "No one is forcing them (beneficiaries) to take possession of the sites. It's

Jagan to give away house sites today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

After almost seven postponements, the much-awaited flagship welfare scheme of YSR Congress government Navaratnalu — Pedalandariki Illu — is all set for its launch on Friday marking this year's Christmas. Spread over 15 days, house pattas would be distributed to 30 lakh women across all districts barring those having court cases.

This is in keeping with the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's padayatra promise of providing pucca houses to the poor.

The Chief Minister will initiate the programme at Komaragiri layout of U Kothapalli mandal in East Godavari district. The day will also mark the commencement of construction of 15.60 lakh houses in the first phase. In addition to these, the government will also distribute sale agree-

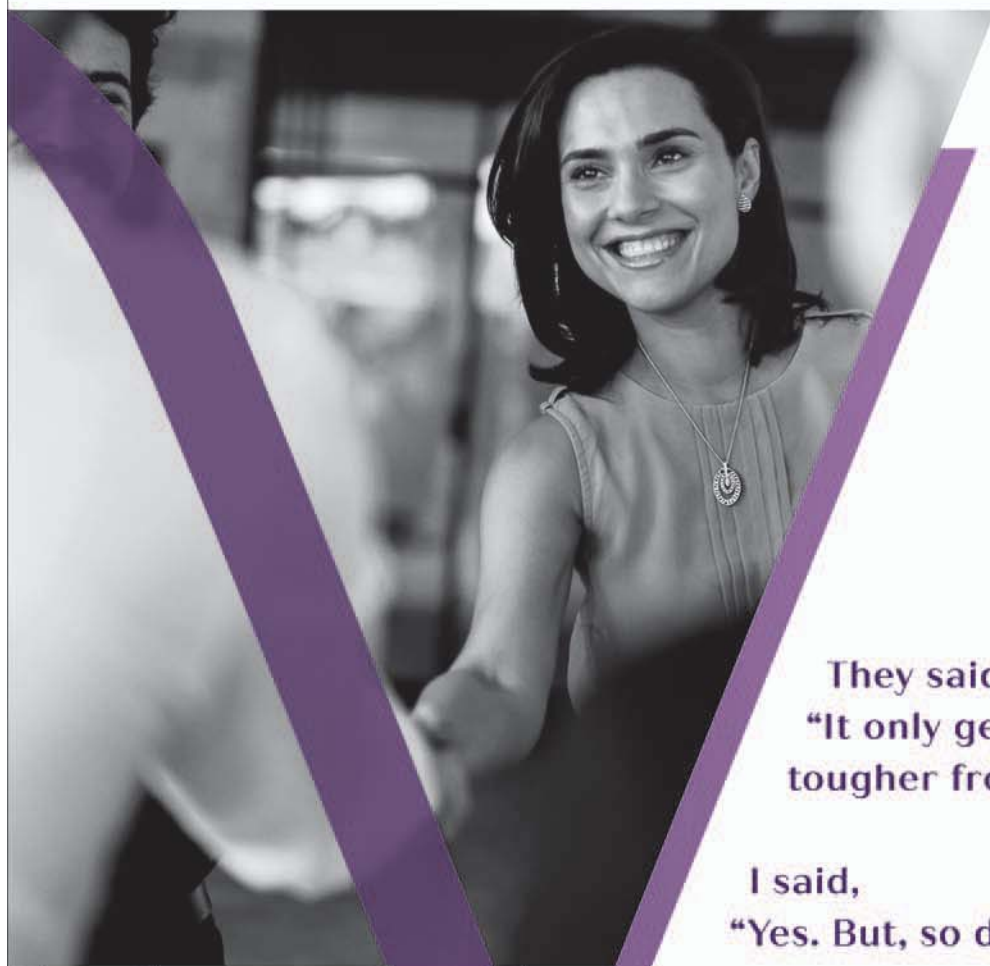
ments for 2.60 lakh TIDCO houses.

The government had initially decided to launch the massive event on Ugadi (March 25). Corona and later PILs in courts thwarted the programme, including those planned for Ambedkar Jayanti, Gandhi Jayanti and Independence Day.

The government finally decided to distribute house site pattas in those areas, where there were no court cases. The remaining beneficiaries will be given D-form pattas. Once the legal cases are resolved, land deeds will be given in the name of women beneficiaries.

So far 30,75,755 beneficiaries have been identified for the scheme, of which 23,37,067 will be given houses in over 17,000 areas developed as YSR Jagananna Colonies.

■ Page 2: Beneficiaries get 1.5 cents each in rural areas



They said,
"It only gets
tougher from here."

I said,
"Yes. But, so do I."

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SHORT TAKES

AUROBINDO
TAKEOVER MAY
KILL PROBE

FROM PAGE 1

These companies include V.R. Investments Pvt Ltd which retained its 30.4 per cent. A non-descript company with non-descript directors, South India Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, holds 11 per cent.

The takeover by Aurobindo is expected to give a silent burial to the present government's initiative to unearth financial irregularities and alleged short payments to the government in the 22 per cent revenue share.

Soon after Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy took over, the infrastructure and investment department ordered forensic audit and engaged two companies to find out if there are any discrepancies in the amounts originally charged by the operator and those shown to the government. While the findings of the audit were not known, the initiative culminated into Aurobindo becoming major shareholder.

PRABHAKAR
REDDY NOT TO
FILE COMPLAINT

FROM PAGE 1

Additional forces have been deputed and Section 144 has been imposed.

Expressing anger over the MLA's behaviour and the failure of police, Prabhakar Reddy threw out the sofa chair on which the MLA sat and set it on fire.

"How did the MLA dare enter my house when we were not there? The sub inspector instead of preventing the attack actually aided the attackers. The sub inspector and armed gunmen of MLA acted against the law."

However, Prabhakar Reddy said he would not lodge any complaint. Meanwhile, Pedda Reddy said he went to Diwakar Reddy's residence to question about the posts against his wife.

TD alleges graft
in house sitesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

There has been a war of words between the opposition and ruling party leaders over alleged corruption in the mega housing programme. Opposition parties, including main opposition Telugu Desam, allege huge corruption by ruling party MLAs and leaders in land acquisition, levelling and allotment process of the mega housing scheme. TD leaders alleged that YSRC legislators and leaders have looted ₹6,500 crore worth public money in the name of the housing scheme but the ruling party refuting the same claimed that unable to digest the good name of YSRC, the opposition parties are trying to defame the government with baseless allegations.

Meanwhile, the TD conducted a photo exhibition in the party State office on Thursday showing photos of low-lying areas, hilly places, graveyards and alluvial soils, which were unfit to construct houses and which are selected for house site distribution programme. Former minister Devineni Umamaheswara Rao said that the Chief Minister had got many

BENEFICIARIES TO BE GIVEN 1.5
CENTS EACH IN RURAL AREAS

FROM PAGE 1

About 4,86,820 people who are already living in unauthorized sites, will be legalised and the remaining 2,51,868 will be allocated TIDCO houses. For the first time in the country, a house site patta is being given for just one rupee and it will be registered in the name of a woman member of the household. The beneficiaries will be given 1.5 cents in rural areas or one cent in urban areas.

The state government had

palaces in different metro cities but his regime was giving just one and half-cent in rural areas and one cent in urban areas. He stated that if the State was spared from the ₹6,500 crore looting of public funds, then over 13 lakh families could have got one additional cent. He alleged that the ruling party legislators and leaders had committed corruption in 40 Assembly segments and looted ₹4,000 crore in land acquisitions, ₹2,000 crore in levelling of lands and

acquired 68,361 acres of land worth ₹23,535 crore. Of this 25,120.33 acres belongs to the government, which is valued at about ₹8,000 crore and 25,359.31 acres were purchased at a cost of Rs 10,150 crore. Also, 4,457.05 acres was acquired under land pooling scheme in Visakhapatnam, 1,074.18 acres owned by AMRDA in Amaravati, 2,550.96 acres was acquired for TIDCO housing, and another 9,800 acres for those living in occupied lands have also been acquired.

another ₹750 crore in the form of collections from the allottees.

Minister Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao, Perni Venkataramaiah and other leaders of ruling party refuted the allegations of TD. They claimed that the TD government committed corruption in the house construction and failed to provide houses to beneficiaries.

The YSRC government is offering house sites free of cost and in a transparent manner.

15.60L houses in first phase

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

The government has proposed to construct 28.30 lakh houses at an estimated cost of ₹50,944 crore. Out of these, 15.60 lakh houses will be taken up in the first phase at a cost of ₹28,084 crore and the remaining 12.70 lakh houses will be taken up in the second phase at a cost of ₹22,860 crore.

The first phase works will commence on Friday,

where 15.60 lakh houses will be constructed in 8,929 layouts in 175 constituencies, while in the second phase, 12.70 lakh houses will be constructed in 7,141 layouts in all constituencies.

The government has decided to have the quality of houses inspected by experts from IITs and NIT.

Each house will consist of one bedroom, living room, kitchen, toilet and verandah, with a total plinth area of 340 sq.ft.

and will be provided with basic facilities like lights, fans, overhead tank and water connection. AP Tideo has already undertaken the construction of 2,62,216 houses across the state. The houses are being constructed on three floors with an area of 300, 365, 430 sq. ft.

In an innovative act, the State government is only charging ₹1 for a 300 sq ft house. The sale agreement would be issued on the occasion.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy prays at samadhi of Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy at Idupulapaya on Thursday.

CM extends Christmas greetings

Vijayawada: Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy extended Christmas greeting to the people. Mr Jagan in his Christmas

message said that love for fellow human beings, compassion for the helpless, limitless patience, boundless sacrifice, peaceful

coexistence, forgiveness even for the enemies were the extraordinary messages that Christ had given to the world.

No Coronavirus strain cases
in AP, says health ministerDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

Health minister Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas said that there is no report of the Coronavirus second wave in AP and the government is taking precautionary measures following guidelines of the Centre to prevent spread of Covid-19. He said that recently a woman arrived in the state from Britain and her samples were sent for tests. Results of the test are awaited, on whether she was carrying the new mutant strain of the virus.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, Mr Srinivas said that people should not be worried as no new Coronavirus strain cases has been found in the state. He said that mother and son had landed in Delhi from the United Kingdom on the night of December 21. They were tested for Covid-19 at the IGI International Airport and the mother was found to be positive. He said that she was kept in the isola-

tion ward in the government hospital at Rajamahendravaram and her condition is normal.

He stated that her samples were sent to the National Institute of Virology laboratory in Pune for tests to confirm if she was carrying the new strain. The results would come in two days, Srinivas said.

In New Delhi, the Union health and family welfare ministry on Thursday denied reports that a woman from Vijayawada who had returned from the United Kingdom was found to have been detected with the new mutated strain of Covid-19 virus circulating in the UK. The MoHFW said that all such news reports about her being positive to the mutated virus are "false" and "genome sequencing of the lady's samples are yet to be done."

Mr Srinivas said that all basic amenities would be developed in the government hospitals in the state to provide good services to the people. The minister conducted a review meet-

ing on Nadu-Nedu works in GGH Srikakulam, Victoria Government Hospital at Visakhapatnam, and the government hospitals at Guntur, Kadapa and Kurnool.

He directed the officials to start the tender process for civil works for the modernisation of government hospitals under Nadu-Nedu. Srinivas said that he will inspect government hospitals and medical colleges in Tirupati, Guntur, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam in the first week of January.

Mr Srinivas stressed on the need to provide facilities to medical students according to the number of seats in the institutions. He directed that facilities for patients be improved on par with state hospitals. Medical and health department chief secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, principals of government medical colleges, superintendents of government hospitals and other officials participated in the review meeting.

VIZAG: VIJAY SAI
EXPOSES TD MLA'S
ENCROACHMENTSDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 24

Rajya Sabha member V. Vijay Sai Reddy listed out the land encroachments made by TD Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and reiterated that the government would be the custodian of state-owned lands.

He said the TD leaders, led by Ramakrishna Babu, resorted to largescale encroachment of government lands under survey number 26 and 27 in Zone -2 of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC). The corporation has about 837 acres of land of which 136.36 acres are in legal disputes. Around 213.13 acres were given on lease to various government departments. TD leaders grabbed 73.01 acres.

Political leaders of the previous regime built sheds and thatched houses in 40 acres of land. The GVMC officials demolished 50 thatched houses and 13 sheds in the recent drive.

Listing out the MLA's encroachments, Vijay Sai Reddy said the MLA built poultry farms in Kommadi in an extent of four acres of land in the name of his benami Sona Prasad. In another acre of land in Ramakrishnapuram, he has been running a piggy farm in the name of another benami. His aide Duvvuri Tata Rao developed layouts in two acres of land in the same area and has been selling plots.

The MLA tried to construct a building in MVP Colony in the land encroached but the GVMC officials stopped it on time. His followers sold sheds in front of Central Jail each for ₹10 lakh.

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50% + UPTO 40% OFF Travel Trolley (On wide range)	₹899 ONWARDS Range of Mink/Flannel Blankets & Comforters	₹11990 Sansui 32(80cm) Android LED TV	

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DECCAN
Chronicle

25 DECEMBER 2020

PM's platitudes at AMU
play up contrast to reality

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University the other day offered Indians a reassurance that this nation belongs to all of its citizens, that India is on the path of progress and that no citizen would be left behind because of their religion. "Everyone would get equal opportunities so that everyone can fulfill their dream," the Prime Minister told the young people, and through them, to the nation, rekindling the spirit of the speech the first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru delivered on January 24, 1948, months after India's Independence and days before the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. "The basic objective," Pandit Nehru had said, "is to build up a free India of high ideals and noble endeavour where there is equality of opportunity for all and where many variegated streams of thought and culture meet together to form a mighty river of progress and advancement for her people." Mr Modi went on to say, quoting the university's founder Sir Syed, that "for the body to remain healthy, every body part should be healthy." Mr Modi also urged people not to look at everything from a political lens.

One may have points of difference with the Prime Minister when he compartmentalises politics and development but none would quarrel with him when he says nobody would be left behind because of their religion as the nation makes progress. All that one would doubt is whether the Prime Minister is reflecting the realities his fellow citizens experience in their daily lives. Uttar Pradesh, where the AMU stands, has a different story to tell. The recently introduced, patently discriminatory, anti-conversion law that militates against the basic tenets of our Constitution has been used indiscriminately against interfaith couples. It's nothing less than horrendous to learn that the Uttar Pradesh police have arrested 17 persons under the provisions of the law when the Allahabad high court, and several other high courts, have made it abundantly clear that the state has no business intervening in the decision of two adults on how they would live their lives. The fundamental rights to equality, life and religious freedom are violated by the state even as the Prime Minister wants to remind us that we have a shared future.

The Central Bureau of Investigation recently chargesheeted four persons for the gangrape and murder of a teenage dalit girl in Hathras in the state. It may be recalled only with trepidation that a very senior police official of the state had stated that there was no rape in the case as no semen was found in the body of the victim, displaying extreme insensitivity and complete ignorance of the law. The same state police had burnt the body in the dead of the night against the wishes of her family, sending all right thinking people to doubt whether Indian laws are in force in the state or not when it comes to minorities and dalits.

When the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy speaks of equality, then everyone has a duty to listen to him and work towards fulfilling that ideal. It must be a national endeavour, and not a national pastime.

Curtains for Netanyahu?

Will it be curtains for the artful survivor Benjamin Netanyahu who will soon be facing an even greater existential crisis? His former allies Naftali Bennett of the Yamina party and Gideon Saar, who broke away from the Likud party to set up his "New Hope" party, are setting their sights on March 23, 2021, the day of reckoning in the fourth election in two years, as an ideal opportunity for them to dethrone the longest serving Israeli Prime Minister.

Endearingly called "Bibi", the master political strategist has been brought down this time as an unorthodox coalition between his right wing Likud and Benny Gantz heading the centrist Blue and White party gave way under the weight of near impossible contradictions. The two rivals had been brought together in May 2020 to resolve a 17-month political stalemate after Israel's top court had ruled that Mr Netanyahu could head a government while under indictment for corruption charges.

Glowing in the benign warmth of his friend Donald Trump at the White House, Mr Netanyahu had prospered in the eyes of the world as his country wiped away years of solemn history to gain the diplomatic recognition of four Arab states. A prominent face in Bibi's last election campaign had been Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi whose friendship the Israeli had flaunted to win votes and remain in power amid the political minefield that Israel has become in its Left and Centrists versus the Right politics that has been dragging the country into bitter electoral battles, which are known not to yield clear mandates.

Indicted for fraud, breach of trust and graft in a series of scandals involving quid pro quo with wealthy media moguls, Bibi has displayed phenomenal dexterity. The court ominously said its legal ruling did "not diminish the severity of pending charges for violations of moral integrity". Blame it on the times we live in but leaders with conflicts against the highest moral and ethical standards seem to constitute the "New Normal" on the world's stage. It is in standing up to the coronavirus sweeping nations across the globe that they seem to be failing.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

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Matt Ridley

Why the mRNA
vaccines could
revolutionise
medicine soon

Almost 60 years ago, in February 1961, two teams of scientists stumbled on a discovery at the same time. Sydney Brenner at Cambridge University and Jim Watson at Harvard independently spotted that genes send shortlived RNA copies of themselves to little machines called ribosomes where they are translated into proteins. "Sydney got most of the credit, but I don't mind," Watson sighed last week when I asked him about it. They had solved a puzzle that had held up genetics for almost a decade. The shortlived copies came to be called messenger RNAs — mRNAs — and suddenly they now promise a spectacular revolution in medicine.

The first Covid-19 vaccine given to the British people earlier this month is not just a welcome breakthrough against a grim little enemy that has defied every other weapon we have tried, from handwashing to remdesivir and lockdowns. It is also the harbinger of a new approach to medicine altogether. Synthetic messengers that reprogramme our cells to mount an immune response to almost any invader, including per-

haps cancer, can now be rapidly and cheaply made.

Katalin Karikó, the Hungarian-born scientist who doggedly pursued the idea behind this kind of medication for decades at the University of Pennsylvania before joining BioNTech, and her collaborator Drew Weissman may be the Watson and Brenner of this story. They figured out 15 years ago how to send a message in a bubble into a cell and have it read. For years they had tried putting in normal RNA and found it did not work; the body spotted it was an alien and destroyed it.

But by subtly modifying one of the four letters in the message (replacing uridine with pseudouridine, a chemical found in some RNAs in the body anyway), they made a version that escaped the attention of the cell's M15 agents. Further refinements five years ago produced a recipe that worked reliably when delivered to cells inside a tiny oily bubble. The pandemic is the first time the technique has been tried in anger, and it worked: the first two Covid vaccines, BioNTech's and Moderna's, rely on these messengers.

The message tells the cell to make

part of one of the virus's proteins which then alerts the body's immune system. Once invented, the thing is like a general-purpose vaccine. You simply rewrite the message between the same opening and closing sequences, put it in the same kind of bubble, and fire it off — almost as easy for genetic engineers these days as writing a text is for teenagers. It is faster, cheaper, safer and simpler than the old ways of making vaccines.

More conventional vaccine designs may still make a vital contribution to defeating the pandemic, Oxford's included. And the messenger method has its drawbacks, such as the need for extreme cold storage. But in the long run, messengers probably represent the future of vaccines. Now the principle has been approved by regulators, there may be no need to go through the same laborious and expensive three-phase clinical trials every time.

What if 2020 went down in history as the year synthetic biology dealt a mortal blow to future viruses?

What is more, at the cost of a few billion dollars, the world may now be able to build a library of messenger

vaccines for every plausible coronavirus and influenza virus with pandemic potential we can find, test them in animals and store the recipes on a hard disk, ready to go at a moment's notice. Moderna's vaccine was first synthesised in mid-January, before we even knew the coronavirus was coming out of China.

There are already improved variations on the messenger theme too: self-replicating messengers, for example. Vaccine development has long been the Cinderella of pharmaceuticals, and this would not have happened without the pandemic. But nor would it have happened without the 30-year scientific slog Dr Karikó undertook.

A fast, adaptable vaccine platform has long been the dream. Let's try it against hepatitis, Zika and several kinds of common cold. We may begin to do to viruses what we have already done to most intestinal worms, many blood parasites and not a few bacteria: abolish them from the human experience. If the message is the recipe for a protein characteristic of particular tumours, the immune system may learn to mount a devastat-

ing attack on a cancer. How about Alzheimer's?

There will be setbacks, side effects and unintended consequences. There always are with innovation. There will be scares based on false fears spread by unscrupulous cranks. Already some worry that these vaccines might cause infertility. It's nonsense, but with just enough plausibility to alarm some people.

One problem we will probably face if this RNA dream comes true is a rise in allergies, asthmas and autoimmune problems. These are caused by the loss of parasites which used to suppress our immune systems. The more infections we get rid of, the more likely we are to get intolerant reactions to things like pollen and gluten. But then messenger vaccines may also be a way to tackle these and teach the immune system to behave.

What if 2020 went down in history as the year synthetic biology dealt a mortal blow to future viruses and illnesses in general, rather than the year a virus ruined our health, well-being and livelihoods?

By arrangement with the *Spectator*

Subhani



Christmas, like Diwali,
is a special day in India



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Something I have always been proud of is the fact that India celebrates Diwali, Christmas as well as Id. Regardless of our faith, we keenly anticipate each occasion and participate with enthusiasm. There aren't many countries that can make a similar boast.

The Gymkhana, Rotary and Lions Clubs across the country hold special Christmas tea parties for their members' children. There is always a Santa Claus, dressed in red, with a straggly white beard and a discordant ho-ho-ho! Most of us can sing *Jingle bells* and many can hum *Silent Night*. And no matter how many they make, our bakeries always run out of Christmas cake. The truth is that Christmas in India may be different but it's also special. Christmas is as much our festival as it is that of the majority Christian world. Unfortunately, however, the Narendra Modi government neither understands this nor respects it.

If a report put out by the ANI news agency and published by a number of leading newspapers turns out to be correct, "the Bharatiya Janata Party is planning to dedicate December 25, the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee, to farmers". The report suggests that the Prime Minister will make this announcement on Christmas Day itself when he will also speak on the controversial issue of the new farm laws.

Frankly, this would be terrible. It would be reprehensible and deplorable. It amounts to a blatant and unforgiveable

breach of India's valued tradition of respecting every religion. Worst of all, it ignores the fact that Christmas is as important a festival in India as it is for the countries of Europe and America.

Unfortunately, this will not be the first time that the Modi government has denigrated Christmas Day by trying to convert it into something else. Narendra Modi had barely been in power for six months when in December 2014 he decided to designate Christmas as Good Governance Day. That, too, was done in memory of Atal Behari Vajpayee. Because December 25 is Vajpayee's birthday the Modi government feels it can designate the day in any way it wants. The fact that it is Christmas Day is either secondary or irrelevant.

This logic is not just bizarre, it's offensive. December 25 is Christmas Day, first and foremost. Vajpayee's birth on that date was a coincidence. It cannot take priority or prominence over the birth of Jesus Christ. Nor can India's farmers, who are the purported excuse for the new dedication this year.

If you disagree with me, just ask yourself a simple question — would Narendra Modi dare to designate Diwali or Holi as Good Governance Day or dedicate it to India's protesting farmers? Even the thought of it would not occur to him. Why? Because, as a Hindu, he knows too well that he would deeply upset his co-religionists.

Why then as the Prime Minister of a secular country does he feel free to proclaim Christmas as Good Governance Day? Or, as ANI sug-

gests, dedicate December the 25 to India's farmers? Nothing could hurt our Christian brothers and sisters more. Our Prime Minister should be protecting and defending their emotions and sentiments, not wilfully and repeatedly disregarding them.

In 2014 the Archbishop of Bengaluru publicly questioned why Christmas had been chosen as Good Governance Day. The government's response was that it happens to be Atal Behari Vajpayee's birthday. What the government did not address was the obvious next question — is that a sufficient reason for redesignating the holiest day in the calendar for Christians? The same question will occur again if today is dedicated to India's farmers. And I'm pretty sure we'll probably get the same hurtfully dismissive reply.

The irony is that were he alive Atal Behari Vajpayee would be as upset as I am. He would not applaud the government. Instead, he would lacerate it with his stinging criticism. He was, after all, a secular man with great respect for Christians. He would hate to be the excuse for this affront to them. And although I have not checked with her, I do not believe this would please Vajpayee's daughter Namita either.

Let me make one further point. This year the attempt to redesignate Christmas is likely to be more hurtful to India's Christians than the 2014 redesignation as Good Governance Day. This is because fear of the virus

This year the attempt to redesignate Christmas as Atal Behari Vajpayee's birthday is likely to be more hurtful to India's Christians than the 2014 redesignation as Good Governance Day

has already changed the character of this special day. We may not be locked indoors as the British are, but we are equally fearful of congregating in churches or celebrating in large family gatherings. For many Christmas is likely to be spent "home alone". Redesignating Christmas Day will only increase the sense of loss.

Again, this is something that Mr Modi's government should readily understand. Diwali was no different for India's Hindus. The virus ruined it for tens, if not hundreds of millions. But on that occasion the government was only too aware of the need to lift spirits. Why is that not the case now?

I know mine is not a lone lament. Millions — indeed the vast majority — of my countrymen are likely to echo my concern. For them, the sanctity of a day of God is beyond questioning. Then why are our politicians silent? If I recall correctly, in 2014 I did not hear a clear protest or even criticism from the Congress Party. I suspect this year too its voice will be silent. But why? I really want to know.

If there is a politician in India who understands the importance of Christmas and what it means to Christians, it has to be Sonia Gandhi, who was born a Catholic. Yet she said nothing in 2014 and I fear that could be the case again.

Today, I wait to see if the India I am so proud of is changing for the worse. I so much want to be proven wrong. In fact, I would really like the day to end with readers of this column proclaiming that I was terribly mistaken. This is one occasion when I sincerely want to be totally incorrect... well, we'll soon know.

Finally, and if it's not too late, Merry Christmas.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

WELFARE SCHEMES

States implementing welfare schemes without generating matching revenue are falling a prey to the draconian reforms of the Centre which will have a back-breaking effect on the people. While welfare schemes help poor people in a certain way, they cannot be fed in the long run. Taking advantage of the financial status of the states, the Centre is going the whole hog forcing the reforms which will have a debilitating effect.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

PV'S REFORMS

This refers to your editorial *BJP's new politics fails to get off the ground in J&K* (DC, Dec. 24). The decision of the mainstream J&K parties for contesting and coming together putting aside their differences is welcome and appreciated. The polls are a sign of victory for democracy in the region. It needs to be seen as a launching pad towards normalisation in J&K.

Dr Shankar Chatterjee
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN
Chronicle

NGRI devises cheap
aerial survey for
minerals

By a staff reporter

HYDERABAD, DEC. 24.

The National Geophysical Research Institute here has developed instrumentation and methodology for air-borne magnetic surveys for mineral reconnaissance, this saving for the country considerable foreign exchange.

Dr. Hari Narain, Director of the Institute, told a news conference today that highly sensitive and sophisticated instruments developed and perfected in the Institute were now having good demand, both among the sister research institutes in the country and the Universities.

The Director also claimed that the Institute was now in a position to undertake aerial survey for mineral location at a cost which would be one-fifth of what the American Survey Team had charged or what had been quoted by the French Party which was due to undertake an air-borne survey early next month.

SHORT TAKES

Tatum leaves Bucks in tatters

Los Angeles: Boston Forward Jayson Tatum banked in a game-winning three pointer over Giannis Antetokounmpo with 1.5 seconds left to give the Celtics an 122-121 NBA season-opening victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday.

Antetokounmpo, the two-time defending NBA Most Valuable Player, had a chance to tie it from the free-throw line with four-tenths of a second left, but the Greek superstar missed his second free throw after being fouled at the rim and the Celtics came away with the win on their home floor. "Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be in that position," Tatum said.

Tatum, who said he "played terrible" after making only 12 of 28 shots from the floor, still finished with 30 points with seven rebounds and two assists. Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 33 points, five rebounds and four assists. Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee with 35 points, 13 rebounds, two assists and two blocked shots. — AFP

Oly-bound athletes get vaccine priority

New Delhi: A parliamentary panel on Thursday recommended putting athletes, coaches and support staff going for the 2021 Japan Olympics in the priority group for the Covid-19 vaccination process.

The committee also voiced concern over large number of vacancies of coaches, saying they should be filled up in a time-bound manner so that Olympic preparations do not suffer. The Japan Olympics are slated to be held from July next year. The panel has also recommended identifying training facilities, stadia and sports centres for Olympic qualified athletes which have not opened yet. It said the closed centres should be reopened "at the earliest" or theatletics should be relocated to alternate centres which have opened. — PTI

Odisha to have new hockey stadium

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced that a new world-class hockey stadium would be constructed at Rourkela in Sundargarh district as part of preparations for the 2023 Hockey World Cup which will be hosted by the state.

The proposed stadium would be the largest hockey stadium in India with a sitting capacity of 20,000 people. This is going to redefine the sports landscape in the region, the chief minister said.

The stadium along with the allied facilities will be developed as a benchmark for other hockey stadiums around the world, he said, adding that it would be constructed over 15 acres of land in the Biju Patnaik University of Technology campus in Rourkela. — PTI

BCCI AGM approves 10 teams for 2022 IPL

Ahmedabad, Dec. 24: The BCCI's governing body on Thursday ratified the entry of two new franchises in the IPL to make it a 10-team affair from 2022 and also decided to back the ICC's push for cricket's inclusion in the 2028 Olympics, during its Annual General Meeting (AGM) here.

"Two new teams will be introduced in the 2022 IPL," a Board source said. It is learnt that time at hand is too short for even a nine-team IPL next year as an elaborate tender-floating process, increase of matches and ensuring that all foreign player' international calendars are adjusted, would be prove to be a herculean task.

T20 CRICKET IN OLYMPICS

In another major development, the Board, in principle, decided to back the ICC's bid for inclusion of cricket, in the T20 format, in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics "after getting some clarifications from the International Olympic Committee".

"Look, the BCCI is an autonomous body and it would like to maintain its autonomy. Our legal team

is looking to get a few clarifications. Obviously, cricket in Olympics is great for the game. Let's hope we can move in the right direction," the member, who attended the AGM, said.

The Board, however, did not reveal the nature of its queries with regards to the matter.

BCCI LIKELY TO LOSE \$123 MILLION

The BCCI has decided that if its does not get full tax exemption from the government of India to host the World T20 next year, as sought by the ICC, then it would agree to deduction from its annual revenue of \$390 million from the global body.

"We have told the ICC that we will approach our government for tax rebate but if we don't get that exemption, the amount, which is around \$123 million, will be deducted from our annual revenue, so we will get around \$267 million. But India is hosting the 2021 T20 WC," the source said.

COMPENSATION FOR DOMESTIC PLAYERS

Also, it was decided that all first-class players, both



(from left) BCCI treasurer Arun Dhimal, president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah pose after the 89th Annual General Meeting in Ahmedabad on Thursday. — PTI

men and women, will be suitably compensated for the curtailed domestic season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The BCCI plans to get the domestic season underway, after several months' delay, in January with the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 championship.

Asked about the money to be set aside for this, the Board source said: "The BCCI will give a lump-sum compensation amount to the state units. Now they will draw up their own list

and accordingly compensate their male and female players."

JUNIOR AND WOMEN'S CRICKET DURING IPL

The BCCI has decided that women's tournaments (senior and junior) along with age-group tournaments (U-23, U-19, U-16) will be held simultaneously at the time of IPL-14 which, in all likelihood, will be held in India despite the raging Coronavirus pandemic-related concerns.

SHUKLA BECOMES NEW VP

In other decisions, veteran Congress leader Rajiv Shukla was officially anointed the Board's vice president in place of his protege Mahim Verma from Uttarakhand.

Brijesh Patel will continue as the chairman of the IPL Governing Council.

GANGULY-SHAH, INDIA'S FACE AT ICC

It was also learnt that the general body decided in favour of BCCI President

CHETAN SHARMA IS NEW CHAIRMAN OF SELECTORS

Ahmedabad, Dec. 24: Former India pacer Chetan Sharma was on Thursday appointed chairman of the senior national selection panel by the BCCI's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC), which also picked Abbey Kuruvilla and Debashis Mohanty in the five-member team.

The selection panel also has former India players Sunil Joshi and Harvinder Singh.

As per the BCCI constitution, the candidate with the most Test caps becomes the chief selector. — PTI

Sourav Ganguly continuing as a director in the ICC Board. Secretary Jay Shah will be the alternate director as well as India's representative at the Chief Executive Committee meets of the global body.

WOMEN'S TEST MATCHES

The house deliberated on having women's Test matches and there could be a two-Test series in the offing next year but a final call in this regard will be taken by the BCCI Apex Council.

GM SACKED

The BCCI has sacked GM (Game Development) KVP Rao, who was asked to

resign. While Rao termed leaving BCCI as his "happiest day", it is learnt that in general, his lack of proper action plan amid the Covid-19 pandemic was one of the big reasons for his ouster.

RETIREMENT AGE OF UMPIRES INCREASED

The BCCI's affiliated scorers and umpires will now retire at 60 instead of 55 years after the governing body ratified the move.

"We believe that both umpires and scorers are physically fit enough like any other profession to continue till the age of 60 years," source said. — PTI

Aussies charged up

Hosts look to pile misery on Kohli-less India in Melbourne

Melbourne, Dec. 24: Coach Justin Langer said the mark of a great team was to keep winning as he threw down a challenge to Australia Thursday against a depleted India desperate to restore pride in the second Test this week.

Australia head into the Boxing Day clash at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on a high after crushing the visitors by eight wickets inside three days in the opening Test at Adelaide.

The dramatic victory was built on the back of devastating spells from pace spearheads Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, who skittled India in the second innings for their lowest Test score of 36.

Langer said it was an incredible effort, and he wants to see it repeated.

"I've said that to become a great team we have got to get better at winning after we win. Really good teams keep winning and winning ... it's an area that we have addressed," he said.

With star opener David Warner again ruled out with a groin injury, Langer said Australia would stick with the same XI, barring last-minute



Australian players take a break during a training session ahead of the second Test against India, in Melbourne on Thursday. — AFP

issues. That means the under-pressure Joe Burns retains his spot as opener after a handy 51 not out in Adelaide, with Matthew Wade again moving up the order to accompany him, while all-rounder Cameron Green earns his second cap.

India have far more selection dilemmas, with captain Virat Kohli missing the final three Tests for the birth of his first child. Either the experienced KL Rahul or the uncapped Shubman Gill are tipped to take his place at number four;

while Ajinkya Rahane assumes the captaincy.

Although India haven't officially confirmed it, Mohammed Shami is also expected to be absent after reportedly fracturing his wrist after being hit by a Cummins thunderbolt in Adelaide. — AFP

INDIA SWEAT IT OUT AHEAD OF BOXING DAY TEST

Melbourne, Dec. 24: The Indian cricket team on Thursday tried a hitherto unseen training drill that vaguely resembled a wrestling bout, with a pair of two players each seemingly striving to outdo each other.

New Zealander Nick Webb, India's strength and conditioning coach, had introduced a few drills in the past and among them is a wrestling-like strength training activity. But the players haven't really been seen performing this particular drill in the past.

One of the purposes of this activity is to help players get ready for high-intensity duels. There was also a bit of touch rugby-like session happening.

Ravindra Jadeja was the first to arrive at the nets for the training session and he was put through a fitness test as he ran between the wickets with a bat on his hand. — PTI

Warne serves a warning to India

Melbourne, Dec. 24: Spin legend Shane Warne believes Australia will "blow away" India in the Boxing Day Test as the visitors are still a "bit shocked" by the Adelaide humiliation.

"I think Australia is probably going to blow them away," Warne, who claimed a record 708 Test wickets for Australia, told Fox Cricket.

"Having said that, they have some class players to come in like KL Rahul. Young Gill will come in. (Ajinkya) Rahane is a class act. We know what (Cheteshwar) Pujara can do," he said.

"(Mohammed) Shami is a huge loss as well. He's such a quality bowler. And if you look at bowlers for the Melbourne conditions drop in pitches Shami hits the seam and stands it up and bowls a good length and straight," he added.

Indian batsmen drew a lot of flak after the Australian bowling unit, including Pat Cummins (4-21) and Josh Hazlewood (5-8), bamboozled the visitors in the opening Test.

However, Warne believes the Australian pace battery deserves more credit for the win in the series-opener than the criticism faced by the Indian batsmen.

"Yeah, you can have a go at the Indians but I think you would rather give cred-



Shane Warne

it to the Australians and how well they bowled," the 51-year-old former leg-spinner said.

"They were outstanding, that bowling attack. The four bowlers plus Green, they have been good bowlers for a long time. They are turning themselves into great bowlers now. To watch them go to work in Adelaide was fantastic."

Warne believes the current quartet of Cummins, Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon is already on track to become Australia's greatest bowling unit.

"They are definitely in the conversation (to compare them to my era). They are outstanding those four bowlers and they have been for a while," Warne further said. — PTI

Man Utd, Spurs cruise into semis

London, Dec. 24: Manchester United left it late to book their place in the League Cup semifinals with a dramatic 2-0 win at Everton, while Tottenham joined them in the last four after beating Stoke 3-1 on Wednesday.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side dominated for long periods of their quarter-final at Goodison Park, but it took until the 88th minute before Edinson Cavani broke the deadlock.

The former Paris Saint-Germain striker's fourth goal for United since joining on a free transfer in October came at the same venue where he opened his account for the club last month.

Anthony Martial bagged United's second goal in stoppage time.

After a rocky period that raised questions about Solskjaer's future following their exit from the Champions League, United have recovered their equilibrium.

They are third in the Premier League and have

won their last three matches in all competitions.

United joined holders Manchester City, Tottenham and second-tier Brentford in the League Cup semi-finals.

Meanwhile, Jose Mourinho accused Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli of creating "problems" for his own team during their win against Stoke.

Wales forward Gareth Bale made the most of a rare start to put Mourinho's team ahead at the Bet365 Stadium.

But Alli was at fault when his flamboyant flick was intercepted in the build-up to Jordan Thompson's equaliser for Stoke. Alli's latest mistake drew an angry response on the touchline from Mourinho, who rebuked the star before substituting him minutes later.

Ben Davies put Tottenham back in front with his first goal since 2017 before Harry Kane sealed Spurs' place in the semifinals. — AFP

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