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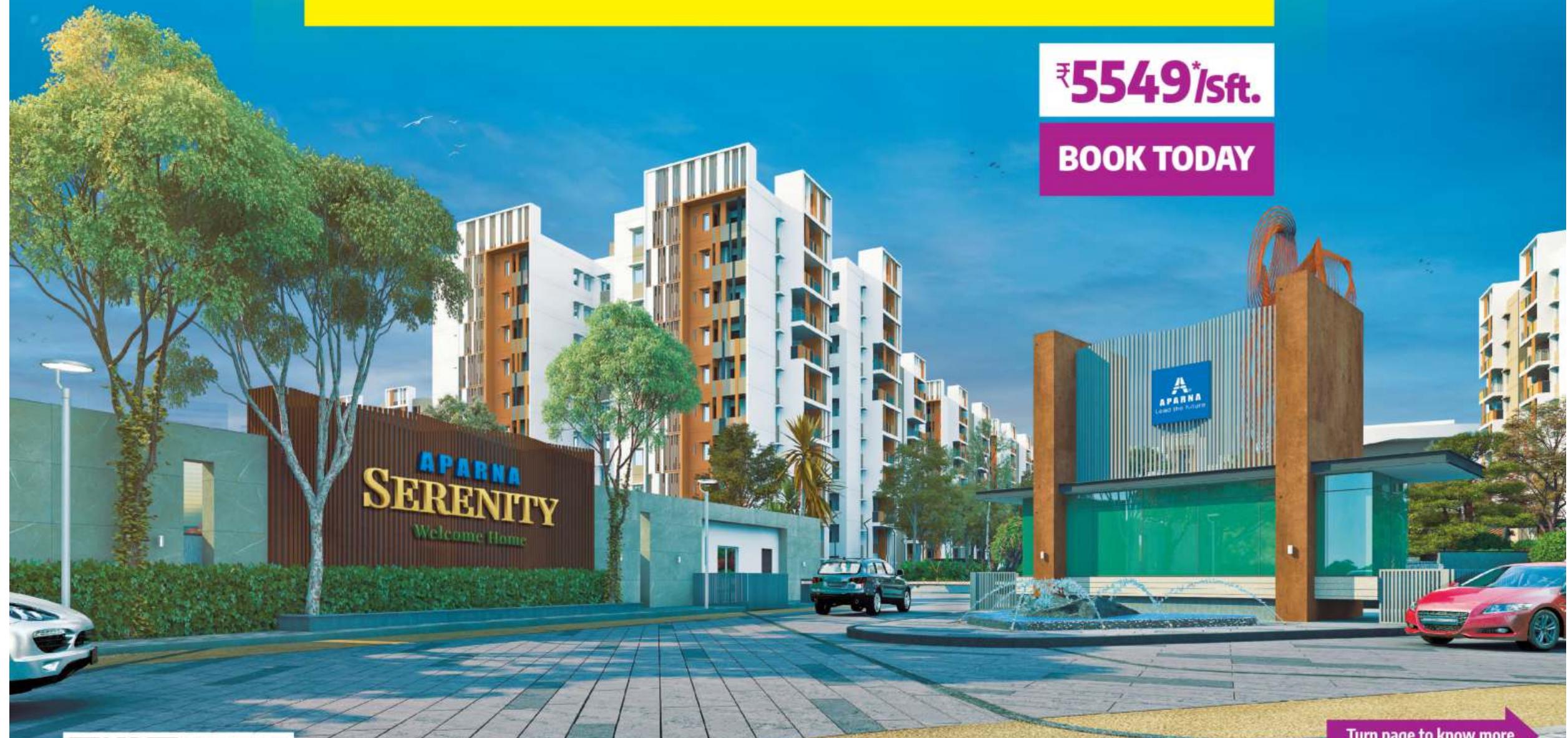
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  - Close to DRS, Suchitra Academy
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  - Close to Tech Mahindra & Gland Pharma
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- (Turn page for location map)

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  - Special sports complex & indoor games
  - Fully-equipped Gym & Spa
  - Banquet Space & Party Lawn
- (Turn page for full list of amenities)

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## APARNA SERENITY

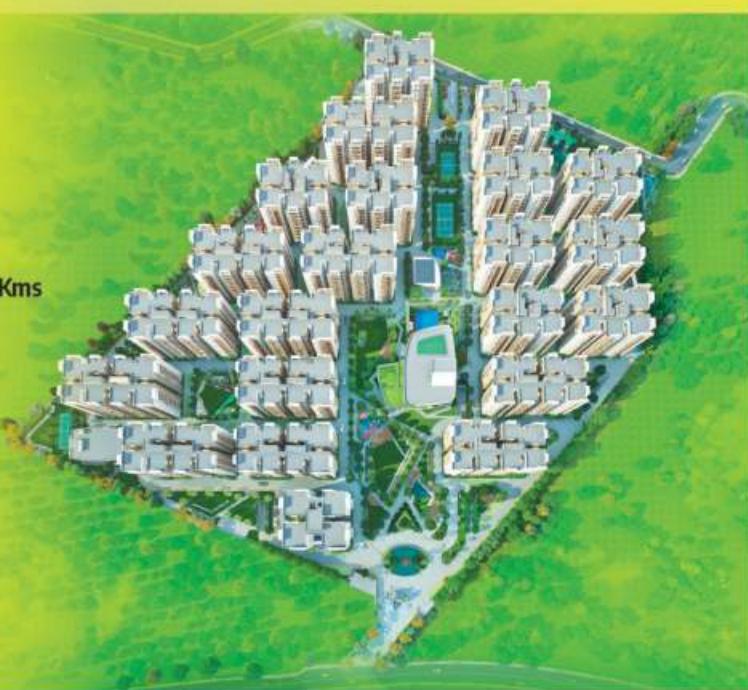
Welcome Home

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**PRIME LOCATION**  
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Decathlon – 2.3 Kms  
Suchitra Junction – 2.9 Kms  
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Siva Sivani Institute of Management – 3.6 Kms  
Suchitra MMTS Station – 4.7 Kms  
Bowenpally – 6.7 Kms  
DRS International School – 7.6 Kms  
Mallareddy University – 8.7 Kms  
Paradise Circle – 10.4 Kms  
**Exit ORR 6 – 10.7 Kms**  
CMR Colleges – 11.3 Kms  
Ranigunj – 12.4 Kms  
Tech Mahindra – 12.7 Kms  
Gland Pharma Limited – 13 Kms

\*Distances approx. as per Google maps



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- Kids Pool
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- Aerobics
- Yoga & Meditation Room
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- Library
- Preview Theater
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- Table Tennis
- Billiards Lounge
- Chess / Carrom / Foosball / Air Hockey

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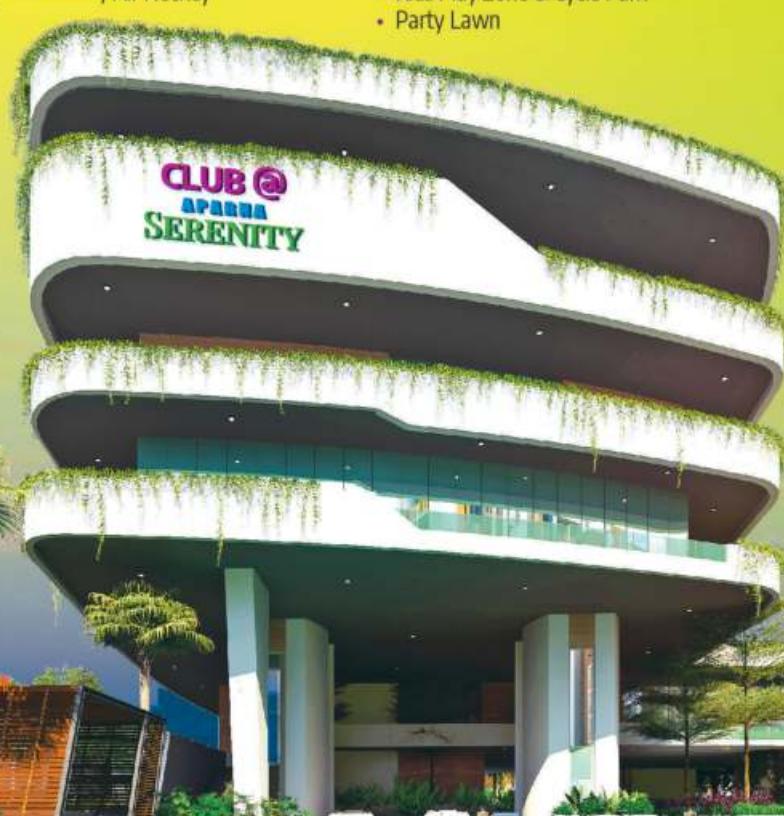
- Basketball Court
- Tennis Court
- Cricket Nets
- Cycle & Jogging Tracks
- Fitness Zone
- Kids Play Zone & Cycle Park
- Party Lawn

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on Sunday



Controversy over my house a political issue, says Amartya Sen  
page 8



CBSE exam dates to be announced on December 31: govt.  
page 7



EU begins vaccine roll-out as new virus strain spreads  
page 9

Bumrah, Ashwin give India upper hand on day one of Boxing Day Test  
page 14



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## NEARBY

Two more UK returnees test positive

**HYDERABAD**  
Two more persons who came to Telangana from UK tested positive for coronavirus on Saturday. From December 9, 1,216 people have come to the State from UK. Of them, 937 were tracked and tested and 18 tested positive so far.

**TELANGANA ▶ PAGE 4**

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**Five die after lorry rams auto**

**STAFF REPORTER HYDERABAD**

Five persons, including three teenagers were killed, while a few others suffered severe injuries after a speeding lorry rammed the stationary autorickshaw they were seated in near Ezra Chittampally of Mominpet mandal in Vikarabad district on Saturday morning.

While Sona Bai (17), Sani Bai (55), Sandhya (15) and Nithin (17), died on the spot, another person Renuka (30) succumbed while undergoing treatment at a private hospital.

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6**

**CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGES 2 & 5**  
**SUNDAY MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES**

## Farmer unions to resume talks

Repeal of three farm laws, legal guarantee for MSP top four-point agenda

**ASHOK KUMAR  
NEW DELHI**

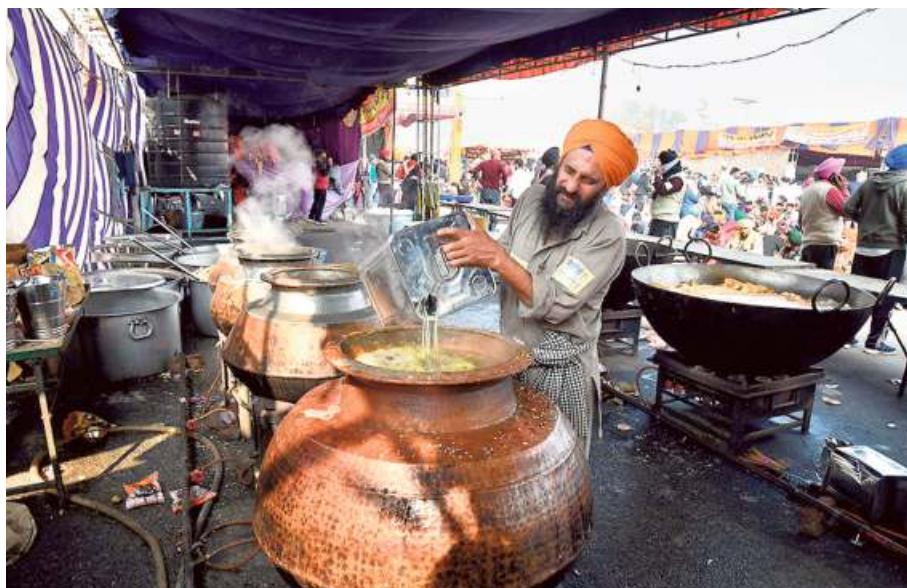
As the farmers' agitation for the repeal of the three farm laws completed a month, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), a joint front of farmer unions, on Saturday accepted the Centre's offer for talks, putting forth a four-point agenda that includes modalities for the revocation of the laws and a mechanism for legal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP).

The SKM proposed to hold the talks on December 29 at 11 a.m., Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav announced at a press conference.

Besides the farm laws and MSP, the agenda includes the amendments to be made and notified in the "Commission for the Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020" to exclude farmers from its penal provisions and changes to be made in the draft Electricity Amendment Bill, 2020, to protect the interests of farmers.

"We want these four items on the agenda and in the same sequence. It means the first item to be discussed will be the modalities to repeal the three laws," Mr. Yadav said.

He added that farmer organisations were, and had al-



**Feeding the fire:** Langar (a communal meal) being prepared at the Singhu border in Delhi on Saturday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

ways been, open to a sincere dialogue.

The proposal by the unions came in reply to a letter from the government on December 24 inviting them for talks and reiterating its commitment to a logical solution to all the issues raised by the agitating farmer groups.

**'Stop misleading public'**  
In a letter addressed to Vivek Aggarwal, Joint Secretary, Agriculture Ministry, the unions, however, said the government continued to mislead the public by suppressing facts about the deliberations in the meet-

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6**

ings. "We have consistently demanded the repeal of the three Central farm laws, whereas the government has distorted our position as if we were asking for amendments to these Acts. If you are sincere about respectfully listening to the farmers, as you say in your letter, the government must not indulge in misinformation about the previous meetings. The campaign launched by the entire state machinery to defame and malign the farmers' movement must stop forthwith," the letter read.

## More farmers head to Delhi

Thousands of farmers under the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugrahan) banner on Saturday began their march from Punjab to Delhi to join the protest against the farm laws. BKU general secretary Sukhdev Singh said more than 16,000 farmers, including women, on several tractor-trolleys, buses, trucks and other vehicles left from Punjab's Kharauri border for Delhi. ■ PAGE 7

## PM: DDC polls a new chapter in democracy

Modi praises Jammu & Kashmir officials

**PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday praised the Jammu and Kashmir administration for the "peaceful and successful" conduct of the maiden District Development Council (DDC) elections, and said the people of the Union Territory had written a new chapter in India's democracy by participating in large numbers.

"I was observing how people stood in long queues outside polling booths despite the COVID-19 pandemic and cold. Every voter was wearing a smile and exuded hope for a better tomorrow," Mr. Modi said after launching the Ayushman Bharat-Sehat scheme in Srinagar via videoconference.

He described the elections as a step towards "strengthening the roots of democracy" in the Union Territory. "The completion of DDC polls puts in place a three-tier Panchayati Raj system, fulfilling Mahatma Gandhi's Gram Swarajya dream. I don't have words to felicitate the officials. You have made entire India proud," he said.

He said "the only reason" the BJP pulled out of the alliance with the Peoples De-

mocratic Party in 2018 was because "we wanted panchayat elections to be held". "These elected people belong to the grassroots and have suffered equally. They will work for the people in villages and districts."

On the frequent shelling by Pakistan along the Line of Control, Mr. Modi said, "It has always been a concern for us. We have taken a series of steps to protect the border residents and to ensure development of border areas. Security forces, however, have been given a free hand."

Referring to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Mr. Modi said, "Vajpayee would always talk of *Kashmiriyat, Jamhooriyat and Insaniyat*. We are following the mantra today."

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6**

**Virus variant: advanced test on 5% positive samples**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

A meeting of the National Task Force (NTF) on COVID-19, convened by the Indian Council of Medical Research, has concluded that while there was no need to change the existing treatment protocol in view of the mutations emerging in the SARS-CoV-2 strain, 5% of the positive cases from all the States and Union Territories would now be sent for whole genome sequencing.

"This is in addition to the more than 50 samples of U.K. returnees which are currently under sequencing at the designated laboratories," the NTF said.

**Various strains**

The NTF also recommended the setting up of a 'Genomic Surveillance Consortium' (INSACOG) to map the various strains circulating in India.

As per the earlier direction of the Union Health Ministry, all passengers who arrived from the U.K. between December 21 and 23 were tested at the airports. Only those testing negative in the RT-PCR test are permitted to exit the airports.

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6**

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BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

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## INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

## BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

## BRIDES WANTED

## BRIDES &amp; GROOMS WANTED

Classification common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides &amp; Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defence

Doctor

Engineer

Finance / Banking

Government / Quasi-Govt.

IAS / Allied Services

Information Technology

MBA / CA / ICWA

NRI

Cosmopolitan

Divorcee

Physically Challenged

MARRIAGE BUREAUS

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

## COSMOPOLITAN

ARISTOCRATIC, BEAUTIFUL Girl from Kerala, Ezhava, Aiyallian, 35 years, 5'3" fair, masters from Britain in computer designing. Now in Kerala seeks alliance from well educated and well placed boys. Ph: 960575138, 9809233008

GROOM NEEDED, Caste no bar. Girl's details are: DOB: 20 Mar 1990, Birthplace: Sultanpur (UP), Caste - kori, Height: 5'2", Working in MNC in Hyderabad as SW Engg. To know more, please call at 787976659.

BE(CS)-PILANI, MS(CS)-USA, Reddy/ Reddiar girl, unmarried, Nov 90.5", H1B, Full time software professional, &gt; 1.5 LPA, San Jose, CA. USA. Well settled Parents seek married bridegroom. Email: ksnsr.88@gmail.com Ph: +91 99855 84816

SC - AD, Widow issueless, Teacher Pvt. Chennai seeks suitable Widower/ Divorcee - 8825553678

DOCTOR

SAIVA PILLAI - Doctor, doing PG in Psychiatry at Chennai/Star Uthirattai, 26/18, Father Doctor having reputed Hospital, only daughter seeks Doctor. Groom from Saiva Pillai / subset with good family background. Contact: 9443301151.

SLIM BEAUTIFUL, homely girl 31/165 final Yr MD, Anaesthesia Chennai. Father Karala Nair, Mother Tamil. Doctors family. Looking for smart MD DS DM MCh boys from good families in Kerala &amp; Tamil Nadu. Ct: 9840050381

PRIYANKA MBBS 25/178CM Fair Kannithi Works@Hospital,Seeks Doctor/ Chettai/Any Other

THE HINDU

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## DOCTOR

HINDU PADMAHALI , Doctor , M S (OBG) ongoing , smart Girl, Age 25, H 5'6", seeks handsome , smart groom from doctors/ civil service / well settled Businesses &amp; other equal cadres. Boy should be below 29 yrs/ Height 5'10"- 6'1", preferably Padmahalil community from Hyderabad , Telangana &amp; Andhra Pradesh state, strictly well settled Rich family. Ct: 951844920

23, MBBS, Dr groom only. Gounder / Hindu. Contact 9791033470

VISWAKARMA GIRL 28/MS seeks MD/MS Groom well settled from same/other equal caste. Whatsapp BHP 944563880

HINDU NADAR Age 27 MBBS Seeks Groom in same casts with MBBS.Ct: 9345233601/ 944482424

Remarriage-Seeking Alliance from Doctor/Engineer for our Daughter 38yrs/ IIT/ IIM. Caste no bar. Contact: 9865795874.

ENGINEER

SM 25/ 5'2" Guruda/ B Tech working private sector in Jaipur preference IIT/ IIM. 9414055008

IAS / ALLIED SERVICES

27/51 BRAHMINS government civil engineer girl wants groom vegetarian 1st and 2nd grade government officer. 9425622028, 9993837564

MALAYALAM

NAIR GIRLS MBBS, MD 33 Makayiram &amp; MBBS 28 Makam working in Delhi proposals invited from well qualified grooms employed in Delhi/other parts. Contact: 9434289192

DIVORCEE

DIVORCEE NAIR girl 37 MSc SE SWE at Toronto fair, non-vegetarian 158 cm athletic. Proposals from boys of Comparable Profile, preferably from Canada/US/UK. Mobile 9446022706 nairjk54@gmail.com

ALLIANCE FOR 41yrs. Star Hastham, Kann Rasi, M.E.(Ph.D) Fair,Homely, Thuluvai Velalai Mudaliar. Girl Seeks Qualified &amp; Employed Groom from Same Caste. 9840477890/ 044-42647373

HINDU NADAR Poosam Kadagam 23/B.Tech (IT) 153cm, Homely. Well do family. Seeks Suitable educated Chennai based Groom. Ct: 9444273011.

HINDU SC PR Kongu 36, MBBS DCH Doctor, working in Govt Hospital seeks suitable Groom. Ct: 94346-80973.

MONEN / Nair Girl - 34 yrs, 165 cms. Strict Vegetarian, Architect. Dual Masters in Interior Design from Italy. Well employed in Dubai as Design &amp; Art Consultant for a European Co. Seeking alliance from Umarred, Well Educated Professionals &amp; Highly Placed Menon / Nair / Tamil Brimmers ( under 39 ) preferably settled abroad. Contact 973694192

NRI

REQ USA Settled Godly Man for USA Employed born again fair Slim Good Looking Girl 34s 161cm. 9448852772

TAMIL

RC CHRISTIAN 36yrs/167cms Software Good looking Unmarried. Seeks suitable unmarred groom. Caste No Bar. Contact. After evening 7 PM : 9708633581

PRETTY ARCHITECT, US-based, 25, 5'4", teetotaler, affluent family, seeks highly well-settled south Indian

MUDALIAR/CASTE NO BAR, 32/158 MS Dr, seeks well-settled PG Doctor/Engr/ Reputed Business groom. Caste Nobar. 7338843003

VANNIA KULA SHAKTHIRIYAR Fair, Slim, 27/65, Revathy Star , BDS Doctor working at Chennai middle class, seeks Groom B.D.S / M.S / B.E / M.E from samecaste, Ct: 9840940760, 7550245659

GODLUAR/CASTE NO BAR, 27, 188 cms, crows, Advocate, LL.M from a premier Institute. Lives in Chennai. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a well educated match from any community. Contact: 6366448346

VANNIA KULA KSHATRIYAR Fair, 29, 178 cms, Businessman, Bachelor from a premier Institute. Lives in Dharmapuri. Father is a Doctor. Looking for a compatible and well educated match from the same community. Contact: 6366448346

GODLUAR/CASTE NO BAR, 34, 173 cms, Advocate, LL.M from a premier Institute. Lives in Chennai. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a well educated match from any community. Contact: 6366448346

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KAMMA/CASTE NO BAR, 22, 165 cms, Doctor, MBBS from a reputed Institute. Lives in Nellore. Father is a Businessman. Looking for a well educated match from any community. Contact: 6366448346

KAMMA/CASTE NO BAR, 26, 158 cms, Doctor, Masters in Medicine. Lives in Madurai. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a well educated match from any community. Contact: 6366448346

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## TAMIL

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29/183 Seeks Well Educated Bride

Descent Family Ct: 917620067/68

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KUMARINI

KUMAR

Timings HYDERABAD		
SUNDAY, DEC. 27		
RISE 06:44 SET 17:50		
RISE 15:40 SET 04:07		
MONDAY, DEC. 28		
RISE 06:45 SET 17:51		
RISE 16:24 SET 04:59		
TUESDAY, DEC. 29		
RISE 06:45 SET 17:51		
RISE 17:13 SET 05:53		

Hyderabad Weather	max	min
Sangareddy	29	14
Warangal	29	14
Hyderabad City	29	14

Hyderabad City Today
28°C The day would be warm and humid with partly cloudy sky. A comfortable morning.

Hyderabad City Tomorrow 28°C A pleasant morning. The day would be warm and humid. The sky will be partly cloudy.

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## IN BRIEF



### Award for IICT scientist

HYDERABAD A senior principal scientist at the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) Chada Raji Reddy has been selected for the prestigious 'NASI-Reliance Industries Platinum Jubilee Award (2020) for application oriented innovations covering under physical sciences'. He has been selected for his contributions in the development of processes of APIs for drugs, including Favipiravir, Remdesivir and others.

### 'No NY celebrations'

HYDERABAD Sangareddy DSP A. Balaji said that there was no permission for New Year celebrations and those who violate would be sent to remand. Speaking to reporters on Saturday, Mr. Balaji said that in view of the prevailing coronavirus pandemic, it was decided not to allow any celebrations. Public is warned not to violate restrictions, he said.

THE HINDU  
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# India needs consensus because of its diversity: Vice President

Venkaiah Naidu speaks at the third Atal Bihari Vajpayee Memorial Lecture

#### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu on Saturday called for an introspection about co-existence exemplified by 'Vasudeva Kutumbakam' during the time of COVID. "Introspect about our philosophical roots during COVID pandemic. Let's reset our minds. India needs consensus because of the diversity," said Mr. Naidu while speaking at the third Atal Bihari Vajpayee Memorial Lecture organised by a think tank.

#### Memories

The Vice President shared his memories about Vajpayee when he helped organise public meetings for him in Nellore.

"Vajpayee is the father of coalition practices. He held power for 13 days, then 13 months and then for a full term. The coalition had 23 parties," said Mr. Naidu, who saw the inner workings of the Vajpayee government as Minister for Rural Development.

Identifying the economic reforms during Mr. Vajpayee's regime, Mr. Naidu said, "P.V. Narasimha Rao initiated the economic reforms but it was Mr. Vajpayee who



Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu during the 3rd Atal Bihari Vajpayee Memorial Lecture organised by India Foundation in the city on Saturday. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

pushed them through along with infrastructure projects like Golden Quadrilateral, electrification and PM Gram Sadak Yojana. He created Ministry of Disinvestment and

Vajpayee is the father of coalition practices. He held power for 13 days, then 13 months and then for a full term. The coalition had 23 parties.

VENKAIAH NAIDU

Vice President

brought in laws to bring in fiscal discipline."

#### Consensus building

Mr. Vajpayee's parliamentary career was a lesson in consensus building with shared democratic values, Mr. Naidu said.

"We need to raise the level of debates and speeches in Parliament. Avoid unruly behaviour. Disturbance gets prominence in the media. Unruly behaviour, destructive and obstructive things are reported. The smoothly functioning part goes unnoticed. You are destroying the health of the nation," said Mr. Naidu during the course of the 50-minute lecture.

The VP went on to add that people should elect their representatives on the basis of character, calibre, capacity and conduct and not caste, community, cash and criminality.

## New attraction



As part of the beautification of Hussainsagar, a small island is being developed by Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

# Adilabad firing: ex-councillor succumbs to bullet injuries

'Accused to be charged with murder now'

#### STAFF REPORTER

HYDERABAD

A former councillor of Adilabad municipality, Syed Zameer (55), who suffered bullet injuries after Adilabad's AIMIM president opened fire on December 18, succumbed while undergoing treatment at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) here on Saturday morning.

The bullets hit him on the chest and abdomen, and he succumbed at around 3 a.m. His body was taken to his house at Tatiguda in Adilabad town after the autopsy at OGH.

Zameer's death had escalated tension in the Tatiguda

area, which forced the police personnel to deploy additional forces to pacify the issue and maintain peace. Before the body reached Adilabad, Ramagundam Commissioner of Police and Adilabad in-charge Superintendent of Police V. Satyaranayana and Officer on Special Duty M. Rajesh Chandra spoke to Zameer's family and assured them justice.

On the evening of December 18, the accused, Farooq Ahmed, who was also the former vice chairman of Adilabad municipality, opened fire following a brawl between two groups of children over a cricket match.

"Soon, parents of the chil-

dren from the two groups picked up an argument, and when Farooq Ahmed saw some people from another political party at the spot, he suddenly opened fire," Mr. Chandra said.

He said that one Syed Mannan suffered head injuries after the accused attacked him with a knife.

A case of attempt to murder was registered against Ahmed and he was remanded to judicial custody. "Now, we will alter sections, and he will also be charged with murder," Mr. Chandra said, adding that they have already requested the District Collector to cancel the accused's firearm licence.

## Firing range in Jagtial inaugurated

#### STAFF REPORTER

HYDERABAD

A dedicated firing range for Jagtial district police was inaugurated by Karimnagar range in-charge DIG P. Pramod Kumar on Saturday.

The spacious firing range, which has come up near Venugummatla village in Gollapalli mandal, about 25 km from the district headquarters, is first-of-its-kind in the north zone.



The firing range, which has come up near Venugummatla village in Gollapalli mandal, is the first-of-its-kind in the north zone. ■ ARRANGEMENT

rearms. He paid compliments to District Superintendent of Police Suresh Kumar and all those who made efforts to set it up.

#### MUSIC DANCE DRAMA

Samprada & HOPEAD TV Present Sankeertanotsav 2021 from 27-12-2020 to 3-1-2021. Day 1: 27-12-2020 at 6.00 pm Vocal Concert by Sri Sriram Jonnalagadda. Watch Live on <https://www.youtube.com/hopeadtvPhone:9440258683>

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#### REPLY NOTICE

In response to the notice published under the caption 'Caution Notice Vooty Golf County' in the newspaper on 19th & 20th of December 2020 by Pappu Nageshwar Rao Advocate on behalf of M/s. Hira Multi Construction Pvt. Ltd and others, my clients (i) M/s. Kanchala Constructions Pvt. Ltd, regd. office at 8/2/577/B, MAAS Heights, 3rd Floor, Road No.8, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad (ii) Kanchala Prithvi Reddy, (iii) Kanchala Akash Reddy, (iv) Shloka and (v) Kanchala Santosh Reddy Managing Director of M/s. Dream Valley R/o, Hyderabad have instructed me to notify and inform the public that the allegations made against my clients in the said notice are false, baseless, malicious and outside the scope of the Agreements executed by landowners. My clients have developed the venture 'Vooty Golf County' in an area of Ac-193-00 Gts., at huge costs and expense and meeting the specifications of the agreements. The Development agreements-cum-GPAs enable my clients to sell away their share in the venture property at any stage of the project and hence, the alienations made by my clients in respect of their undivided share in the venture property are legal, valid and binding on the land owners. The Arbitration Proceedings initiated by M/s. Hira Multi Constructions Pvt. Ltd & Others for cancellation of DAGPAs were rejected. By suppressing the true facts, the captioned notice is published with ill motive to misguide and mislead the people and to bring disrepute to the venture and reputation of my clients in particular. Detailed reply has been sent to M/s. Hira Multi Construction Pvt. Ltd, & Others and Counsel.

Sd/-  
C. SHANTHAPPA, Advocate  
H.No. 1-8-1, Plot No.34, Adj. LIG Block No.53,  
Baghlingampally, Hyderabad-500 044. Cell No. 9948436962

# Honey trap to rob men

Woman and three aides arrested; one still at large

#### ABHINAY DESHPANDE

HYDERABAD

Striking a family chord with unknown 'wealthy' men in busy public areas and drawing them to a secluded place to rob them of their valuables has become the latest trend in Jagtial district.

A woman accosting seemingly wealthy strangers by posing questions like 'You just look like my husband, and What is your name?' has thrown a salacious net that has come to the light.

Jagtial police have arrested a woman and three of her aides, who were involved in tricking men into believing that they had a 'relationship' that eventually ended in looting them.

Though the gang robbed around a dozen men, the victims could not reveal the matter with anyone, not even with the police, fearing social stigma and break up from families.

To hide the matter and to avoid family disharmony, some even went to a jewellery shop and purchased the same model of ornaments by shelling out huge amounts of money. Others followed suit by purchasing similar models of mobile phones, which they 'lost' in the honey trap laid by the con woman's gang.

The daylight robbery by the gang came to light earlier this week after one of the victims approached Medipalli police in the district by lodging a complaint of chain-snatching.

But it was not long before the police realised that his chain was not snatched and it was a cock and bull story that he had been weaving all along to divert the attention of police and to placate his family. When police started questioning about the se-

#### UNSUPECTING VICTIMS

ON OCTOBER 29, the gang targeted a resident of Dharmapuri on the outskirts of Rechpalli and robbed his 5 tolas gold ornaments and one cell phone.

ON NOVEMBER 7, the gang robbed a resident of Dharmapuri of one and half tolas gold and one cell phone.

ON NOVEMBER 12, a Dharmapuri resident was relieved of one tola gold near Sri Rama Theatre in Jagtial

ON NOVEMBER 16, the gang trapped a resident of Bheemaram on the outskirts of Rampur-Kacharam village and robbed him of Rs. 28,000.

SINDHU SARMA, SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE, JAGTIAL

Thulasi (21) and Kolapaka Dinesh (21), all residents of different villages in the district.

According to Ms. Sarma, the accused has been committing the offences for the past two months and so far, they have robbed more than eight men. She said that Jamuna met Rajkumar in October and hatched a conspiracy to rob men by luring them with sexual favour.

"Initially, we apprehended Jamuna after tracking the looted mobile phone of one of the victims, and after analysing her call records, the other three were picked up," she said, adding that another woman from Raikali was still at large.

Police recovered 145 grams of gold ornaments, three mobile phones and a bike, all worth ₹8 lakh, from the possession of the accused.

students. NAAC had withdrawn the accreditation because of this documental error. There was no intentional forgery of any official signatures from the certificates of certain organisations or letterheads.

The management was looking forward to verify the documents and was in the process of sending compliance in response to the letter received from NAAC.

## College denies discrepancies

#### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Malla Reddy College of Engineering has denied discrepancies in the self-study report submitted to the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, which led to its blacklisting from accreditation for five years.

The college management clarified that it had applied for NAAC accreditation and received B ++ ranking for

2018. NAAC certification was only an additional accreditation status for the college rankings.

So, the college reapplied for NAAC for reassessment for getting better grade.

In response to this, the college submitted a list of students who did internships or project work in certain organisations. Later, it was found that there was a mismatch in the number of

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## IN BRIEF

## One more dies of food poisoning

SANGAREDDY  
Anasuya, who was admitted to a private hospital in Hyderabad for food poisoning, and getting treated for the past three days, passed away on Saturday. On December 21, as many as three people - two at Sangareddy hospital, and another in Hyderabad, had food poisoning at Palvatala in Vatpally mandal. One more person is being treated at the hospital and it was stated that the condition is serious.

## Rythu Bandhu through post office ATMs



A post office.  
■ REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD

In view of release of Rythu Bandhu amount for rabi to farmers' bank accounts by Telangana government on December 27, India Post has made Micro ATM arrangements to make cash payments to needy farmers at 4,860 post offices in the State.

The Micro ATM services could be availed by farmers having Aadhaar linked accounts in any of the banks. They could withdraw the amount credited to their accounts from village post offices, said a release of Postmaster General of Hyderabad, P.V.S. Reddy.

The Micro ATM facility is very useful to farmers who are not in a position to visit banks/fixed ATMs. For using the facility, they have to visit the nearest post offices with their Aadhaar card and mobile phones linked to their bank accounts. They could withdraw cash by impressing finger print and informing the OTP received on their phones to the post master.

A maximum of ₹ 10,000 could be withdrawn in a day. The service is free of cost.

## Two more UK returnees test positive for coronavirus

Three immediate contacts of the COVID-positive returnees also test positive

## Phone nos., addresses of 184 UK returnees incorrect

Give details by calling 040-24651119 or WhatsApp on 91541 70960

STAFF REPORTER HYDERABAD

Two more persons who came to Telangana from United Kingdom (UK) have tested positive for coronavirus on Saturday. They are from Medchal-Malkajgiri district.

From December 9, a total of 1,216 people have come to the State from UK.

Of them, 937 were tracked and tested and 18 have tested positive (including the two on Saturday).

The 18 patients include six from Medchal-Malkajgiri, four from Hyderabad, two from Jagtial, one each from Mancherial, Nalgonda, Rangareddy, Sangareddy, Siddipet, Warangal Urban.

They were admitted in separate wards in different hospitals. Besides the coronavirus-positive patients, their immediate contacts too were traced.

**In quarantine**  
The 18 positive patients have 79 immediate contacts. Of

ble. Their addresses and phone numbers are not correct.

The State's Director of Public Health Dr. G. Srinivasa Rao said that efforts are on to trace them.

From December 9, 1,216 people have come. Out of them, 937 were traced and tested. And 18 have tested positive for coronavirus. Of the remaining 279, 184 are yet to be traced, while 92 more belong to other States.

sults are expected in two days, said Telangana Director of Public Health Dr G Srinivasa Rao. Telangana Health department's officials and staff who were caught up with hectic work related to COVID-19 vaccination had

Officials of the respective States were informed about it. The Health Department did not specify the status of three more.

Dr. Srinivas appealed to people who have returned to the State from the UK or via UK after December 9 to provide their details by calling on 040-24651119, or send them through WhatsApp on 91541 70960. Samples for coronavirus tests would be collected at their home.

to focus on the UK returnees after news about a new variant of coronavirus reached them. The exercise of identifying the contacts was similar to the one taken up in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.



A health worker collects a swab sample from a child for COVID-19 coronavirus test at a health centre in Secunderabad. ■ FILE PHOTO

## Novel initiative



Minister of State for Home Affairs flagging off 'no food waste ambulance' in Hyderabad on Saturday. ■ RAMAKRISHNA G

## Tension in Jagtial during Bandi Sanjay's tour

Government diverted central soil testing funds to the tune of ₹120 crore

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD

Tension prevailed in Jagtial town on Friday during a visit of BJP State president Bandi Sanjay Kumar on the occasion of former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's

birth anniversary observed by the party.

**TRS cadre stage protest**  
TRS workers comprising several sarpanches of Jagtial constituency led by the local MLA Sanjay Kumar and Zilla Parishad chairperson D. Vasanth staged a protest on Jagtial - Tharoor road ahead of the BJP leader's arrival demanding release of ₹ 1,024 crore due by the Centre to gram panchayats for National Rural Employment Gu-

arantee Scheme works.

The TRS workers entered into an argument with the police seeking the arrest of protesters but the latter insisted they would not leave until they submit a memorandum to Mr. Bandi Sanjay as he is also an MP. The police later arrested the MLA and other TRS workers to clear the obstacles for the BJP programme.

**CM faulted**  
Addressing a farmers aware-

nness meeting later, the BJP leader charged Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao of "shedding crocodile tears" as his government has not bothered to come to the rescue of the farmers who had grown fine rice, on official orders, and are now facing difficulties in selling the produce.

"None of the TRS leaders tried to meet or console the farmers affected during the recent floods but they are cheating them by opposing

the new Farm Acts blindly without even studying them. Farmers are going to benefit from freedom to sell at any place or price throughout the country now. I wish to ask the Chief Minister if he is selling his farm produce to corporates or in the market yards," he asked.

Mr. Sanjay Kumar accused the government of diverting funds to the tune of ₹120 crore which the Centre had released for conducting soil testing.

They have pointed out that the practice during the

## Union faults TS-Genco for hasty issuance of artisans' service rules

Immediate withdrawal of 'lopsided' service rules demanded

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD

Telangana Electricity Employees' Union (TEEU-1104) has faulted the managements of four power utilities - TS-Genco, TS-Transco, Southern Discom and Northern Discom - for issuing the "standing orders, service rules and regulations for artisans" without even consulting the trade unions. The trade union has demanded withdrawal of the lopsided service rules immediately.

President of the union N. Padma Reddy and general secretary G. Saibabu said on Saturday that they had been demanding the unconditional implementation of APSEB service rules for the artisans since the day one when the State government had agreed to absorb all the artisans working for the four power utilities. However, TS-Genco has issued the service rules for artisans unilaterally on December 19.

The managements of the power utilities are trying to create rift between the regular employees and artisans by increasing the variation

in pay and service rules, they alleged.

They have also mentioned that all employees working in the power utilities under the tripartite agreement of February 1999 and others recruited later were extended the APSEB service rules.

Requesting the managements to re-examine the service rules for artisans and implement the APSEB rules, they threatened to take up an agitation in case they prefer to continue with the discrimination.

On the one hand the managements had been assuring the trade unions of examining into the aspects of given variable dearness allowance instead of dearness allowance, house rent allowance, maternity leave, dependent jobs on compassionate grounds and others and on the other hand they issued service rule unilaterally in a hurry, Mr. Padma Reddy and Mr. Saibabu said.

## Plastic recycling industry coming up at Narayankhed

Rural innovator's best-out-of-waste idea for single-use plastic to be applied here

## R. AVADHANI POTHULAPALLY (SANGAREDDY DISTRICT)

Kantale Pandu Ranga Rao, a class 3 dropout, made headlines back in March 2017 when he received an award from former President Pranab Mukherjee for developing sealant for motorcycle and autorickshaw tyres. He is back in the news now for making the best of plastic waste.

Mr Pandu Ranga Rao, a resident of Sukkaltheer, a remote village in Kangti mandal about 10 km from the constituency headquarters of Narayankhed, recycles single-use plastic along with silt collected from drains. The material prepared by him is three times stronger than the original plastic, according to tests conducted by a private engineering college.



Finance Minister T. Harish Rao laying foundation stone for the construction of plastic recycle unit with rural innovator K. Pandu Ranga Rao at Pothulapalli, near Ryakal, in Sangareddy district. ■ MOHD ARIF

Usually, single-use plastic like wrappers of biscuit packets or gutka packets are not collected by ragpickers as they are difficult to collect and fetch less price in the

market. So, they find their place in roadside drains. Mr. Pandu Ranga Rao uses that as raw material for his innovation. He has fashioned flower pots that can be used for growing saplings. He claims that roadside stoppers and soak pit tanks can also be prepared with that material.

On December 23, Finance

Minister T. Harish Rao laid foundation stone for the construction of a plastic recycling unit in Narayankhed at an estimated cost of ₹48 lakh under Rurban Mission. J.

## OBITUARY &amp; REMEMBRANCE

## DEATH

## SAD DEMISE



Mrs. S. NAGARATHNAM

D.O.B. 28.04.1929 D.O.D. 23.12.2020

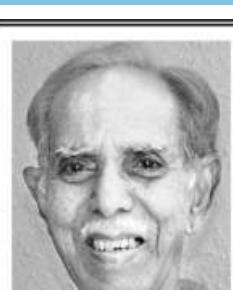
Retired Principal of Seethalakshmi Ramaswami College, Trichy.

Attained Sivaloka Prapti on 23.12.2020.

Deeply Mourned by Family Members

9941912713 / 9940517208

## REMEMBRANCE



Dr. V.R. Narayanaswami

Teacher, Author, Polyglot.

Passed away peacefully on Dec 19 2020. Age 90.

Remembered by Padma, Shoba & Narayan,

Sangeeta, Harsha, Malini.

narayanshoba@gmail.com

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# BJP activist stabbed to death in Wyra

'He was targeted for trying to expose scams by RTI Act'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM

A senior BJP activist, who was also party State RTI Cell co-convenor, was stabbed to death in Wyra town on Saturday.

The deceased was identified as N Rama Rao, 45, of Wyra. The incident triggered tension in the town as local BJP leaders alleged that the murder was politically motivated.

#### 'No political angle'

However, the Wyra police ruled out any political rivalry behind the murder. Preliminary inquiry suggested

that personal enmity owing to financial disputes between the deceased and the accused was the motive, police said.

Sources said M Rajesh, 35, of Wyra allegedly barged into the house of Rama Rao and stabbed him with a knife repeatedly, leaving the latter critically injured in a pool of blood.

As the frightened mother of Rama Rao raised an alarm, the accused fled from the spot. A profusely bleeding Rama Rao was rushed to the district headquarters hospital in an ambulance. But he succumbed to the

stab wounds soon after reaching the hospital, sources said.

BJP Kisan Morcha State president K Sridhar Reddy and BJP district president G Satyanarayana paid their last respects to the slain BJP activist.

In a statement, Mr Sridhar Reddy alleged that Rama Rao was targeted by vested interests for trying to expose scams by the RTI Act.

"There is conspiracy behind his murder," he charged, demanding that a detailed investigation be ordered into the incident to unravel the facts.

# Averest to set up shop in Hyderabad next month

First property coming up at Gachibowli

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Averest Hotels and Resorts India on Wednesday formally announced foray into the hospitality sector and plans to open its first property, coming up in the city, next month.

A Hyderabad-headquartered entity, it aims to have 20 Averest branded properties in the country and abroad in three years.

The first property, which is coming up at Gachibowli is a mid-segment hotel and targeted at both corporate and leisure travellers with pocket friendly luxury offerings, a release said.

It plans to expand in a phased manner, including

opening three properties in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttarakhand in six months.

#### Going international

The brand will spread wings to an international destination by early 2022, while entry into premium luxury segment will be by 2024, the release said.

Averest Hotels and Resorts India founder MD N. Rajendra Prasad said, "With an able team of experts from the hospitality industry, the group will soon have its footprint in multiple States in India and also make an international debut with a property in Gulf or European region."

# Rajinikanth's condition stable, informs hospital

A decision on discharge of the superstar is likely today

STAFF REPORTER  
HYDERABAD

There was nothing alarming about the health of superstar Rajinikanth in the reports of some investigations performed on him at Apollo Hospital on Saturday.



Rajinikanth

He had been shooting for a movie in Hyderabad for the past 10 days. "A couple of people on the sets tested positive for COVID-19. Mr Rajinikanth was tested on December 22 for COVID-19 and he was negative," the hospital stated.

In a bulletin issued on Saturday morning, the hospital's management stated that he had had an uneventful night (on Friday) and his blood pressure was still on the high side although under better control than Friday. They added that he was progressing well. And on Saturday evening, they said that he was stable.

# CPI's 96th foundation day celebrated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

The 96th Foundation Day of CPI was celebrated by party leaders and workers with a procession being taken out from the office of the All India Trade Union Congress at Narayanguda to Makhdoom Bhavan, where a public meeting was held later.

Addressing the meeting, CPI former general secretary Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy said there was no need for leaders of Left parties to be demoralised at electoral losses since those were part of the game. After the Congress, it was only the CPI that has the longest history.

National council member of CPI Azeez Pasha said the struggle of farmers against farm laws will succeed. CPI State secretary Chada Venkat Reddy also spoke.

Artists of Praja Natya Mandali staged cultural performances during the meeting.

# COVID, combing hit Maoists hard in AOB region

They kill 2 tribals in the month to gain lost ground

SUMIT BHATTACHARJEE  
VISAKHAPATNAM



The banned CPI (Maoist) in the Andhra-Odisha Border region has been facing a tough task to keep their movement afloat, as the COVID-19 pandemic and intensified combing by the security forces of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, have hit them hard.

During the initial days of the pandemic, they were forced to lie low and in April the Left Wing Extremists (LWE), even circulated a letter declaring an informal ceasefire.

But this was violated by them, when in July during the Martyrs Week, they placed landmines near Chinthalavedi village in Pedabavalu mandal, and two innocent tribals were killed, when they accidentally stepped on them.

On the other hand, joint operations, aided by intelligence sharing, by the security

forces of A.P., Odisha and Chhattisgarh, have pushed them on the back foot.

As a result of the joint operations, security forces of Odisha and A.P. had gunned down about 18 Maoists, including a couple of ACM and DCM ranked leaders, in the cut-off region of AOB. Odisha alone contributed close to 16 men.

Both A.P. and Odisha have gained considerable foothold in the AOB region by setting up a number of Compa-

ny Operating Bases and Armed Outposts, as deep as Jantapai and Gurasethu on the Odisha side of the cut-off area.

This has pushed them back to a small tract of land in the Gumma region on the Odisha side and a few villages in Pedabavalu mandal on the A.P. side, said a senior officer from AP-SIB.

#### Waning support

There is a feeling that the popular support base is wan-

ing in the AOB region, with tribals coming forward for development activities such as construction of roads, PHCs, school and mobile towers.

Tribals had come out openly in many villages such as in Vakapalli, Balapam and Busuputlu which were once Maoist strongholds, supporting the development agenda of the government. This practically dried up the recruitment base, and to gain some lost ground through the element of fear, the Maoists in this month killed two tribals, Gemmelli Krishna in Vakapalli and Chikkudu Satish in Chintagaruvu in Pedabavalu, after branding them as police informers.

To beef up their depleted cadre strength, they have been importing manpower from Chhattisgarh, which again has become a problematic affair for the leaders in the AOB. It is learnt that the Chhattisgarh cadres are not able to adjust to the terrain and are facing cultural issues with the local tribals. There are issues over acceptance and many of the imported cadres are opting to go

back," said a senior officer engaged in anti-Maoist operations.

The Malkonda Area Committee, which has been suffering setbacks since last couple years, was hit further in this year with a number of surrenders and arrests of hardcore cadres and militia members. In total, there were about 104 surrenders and arrests, with majority of them from Galikonda area.

From a point of time, when the Maoists boasted of maintaining companies in AOB with over 30 cadres in each company, they are now left with a few platoons with 15-odd men in each, said Superintendent of Police, Visakhapatnam, B. Krishna Rao.

Another area of concern is lack of tribal leadership in the AOB region. After the deaths of tribal leaders such as Bakkuri Venkataramana, Kudumula Ravi and Jambri,

who were worshipped as heroes, there has been a dearth of tribal leaders. Now it is left to Kakuri Pandana alias Jagann, Sudheer and Kora Nagaswara Rao, who do not enjoy that status as the former.

# Eight cross-dressers held for extortion

Two autorickshaw drivers also in police net



The autorickshaw drivers and the cross-dressers at the Bachupally Police Station after their arrest. ■ ARRANGEMENT

STAFF REPORTER  
HYDERABAD

Eight cross-dressers and two autorickshaw drivers were arrested by Bachupally police of Cyberabad on charges of extortion and creating nuisance.

On Friday morning, a Pragathi Nagar resident, Panchangam Chalapathi, approached police stating that a group of cross-dressers had barged into his house a day after his son's wedding and demanded ₹20,000.

They even threatened him and created nuisance by removing their clothes and using foul language.

When Mr. Chalapathi refused to pay money, they started abusing them in vulgar language, creating panic among his family members, Madhapur in-charge DCP M. Venkateshwarlu said.

"His family got frightened and paid ₹16,500, after which the cross-dressers left the place," he said.

Based on Mr. Chalapathi's complaint, a case was registered and eight cross-dressers and autorickshaw drivers Karan Gupta and Mohd. Masi were arrested

If one doesn't pay money, the cross-dressers create nuisance and threaten and abuse them in front of all the relatives and friends.

M. VENKATESHWARLU,  
Madhapur in-charge DCP

by the police.

According to Mr. Venkateshwarlu, the gang members get information about weddings, shop inaugurations, and other functions through autorickshaw drivers and rush to the spot demanding money.

"If one doesn't pay money, the cross-dressers create nuisance and threaten and abuse them in front of all the relatives and friends," the DCP said.

#### Call police for help

Mr. Venkateshwarlu requested people not to fall into the trap of cross-dressers. Instead, people should inform the police about the nuisance by calling up the nearest police station or lodging a complaint on 'Dial 100', he added.

#### WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Sunday: Dense fog very likely in isolated pockets over Assam and Meghalaya

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-25.8	11.0	1.0	Kozhikode	...-34.5	25.2	1.0
Ahmedabad	...-30.3	16.7	1.0	Kurnool	...-29.6	17.1	1.0
Aizawl	...-21.0	5.1	1.0	Lucknow	...-23.2	7.5	1.0
Allahabad	...-24.3	7.1	1.0	Madurai	...-31.7	21.4	1.0
Bengaluru	...-28.4	16.0	1.0	Mangaluru	...-34.0	22.0	1.0
Bhopal	...-26.8	8.9	1.0	Mumbai	...-32.4	21.6	1.0
Bhubaneswar	...-27.7	13.8	1.0	Mysuru	...-28.9	17.0	1.0
Chandigarh	...-19.0	4.0	1.0	New Delhi	...-21.9	4.4	1.0
Chennai	...-29.7	20.5	1.0	Patna	...-22.8	8.2	1.0
Coimbatore	...-30.0	19.7	1.0	Port Blair	...-22.7	24.2	1.0
Dehradun	...-23.7	4.6	1.0	Puducherry	...-29.4	19.0	1.0
Gangtok	...-10.8	4.2	1.0	Pune	...-30.3	14.8	1.0
Goa	...-34.0	21.2	1.0	Raipur	...-28.2	11.6	1.0
Guwahati	...-25.3	10.8	1.0	Ranchi	...-24.6	9.7	1.0
Hubballi	...-29.0	17.0	1.0	Shillong	...-15.7	5.0	1.0
Hyderabad	...-28.6	14.2	1.0	Shimla	...-20.2	8.2	1.0
Imphal	...-21.8	3.5	1.0	Srinagar	...-8.8	4.5	1.0
Jaipur	...-24.4	8.4	1.0	Tiruchi	...-32.9	22.9	1.0
Kochi	...-32.6	24.4	1.0	Vijayawada	...-28.8	19.0	1.0
Kohima	...-17.2	5.4	1.0	Visakhapatnam	...-28.6	20.2	1.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

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CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	23	.76	60	107	105	■■■■■
Bengaluru	.4	.34	29	115	101	■■■■■
Chennai	.5	.28	-	124	105	■■■■■
Delhi						

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Farmer unions agree to resume talks

Krantikari Kisan Union president Darshan Pal said the farmers would take out a tractor rally on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway on December 30 and all toll gates in Haryana and Punjab would remain permanently open. He also gave a call to residents of Delhi to celebrate New Year with the protesting farmers at the border points on January 1.

All-India Kisan Sabha finance secretary and former CPI (M) MLA P. Krishna Prasad said the farmers' agitation had exposed the "pro-corporate" face of the Modi government. He added that the BJP governments in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, despite their best efforts, had failed to stop the pouring in of farmers to Delhi from across the country.

On the completion of one month of the Delhi sit-in, more than 7,000 protest programmes observed "Dhikkar Diwas" (Day of Shame) at various places to condemn the government's obstinate attitude towards the demand for the repeal of the Acts, the statement added.

## PM: DDC polls a new chapter in democracy



Speaking on the occasion, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the Prime Minister's efforts since 2014 had started bearing fruit.

"J&K is witnessing the most peaceful atmosphere, for the first time since the 1990s," Mr. Shah said.

He said the DDC polls were the first such elections where not a single drop of the blood was shed. "By conducting peaceful polls, the Government of India has fulfilled its promise of taking democracy to the grassroots level in J&K. The local representatives will take up the

governance related issues and resolve them on priority. Money will directly reach villages and districts."

He said since August 5, 2019, when the Centre ended J&K's special status, developmental initiatives and infrastructure building received a major push. "Times ahead will be known as the most peaceful era in J&K," he added. Under the new health scheme, every member of a family in J&K will get ₹5 lakh health insurance cover in 229 government hospitals and 35 private empanelled hospitals.

## Advanced test on 5% positive samples

The NTF recommended that in addition to the existing surveillance strategies, it is critical to conduct enhanced genomic surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 specially in incoming passengers from the U.K.

"Besides, it will also be critical to conduct genome sequencing in samples where there is dropout of the S gene in lab diagnosis, proven cases of re-infections etc. Routine genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 from representative samples all across the samples needs to be a continuous and well planned activity," it said. "Since ICMR has always advocated use of two or more gene assays for testing SARS-CoV-2, it is unlikely to miss infected cases using the current testing strategy," said a release from the Health Ministry.

The meeting was convened to discuss evidence-based modifications in testing, treatment and surveillance strategies with the emergence of the new virus variant in the U.K.

The Ministry noted that

## 5 die as lorry rams auto

Mominpet police said the accident took place around 7 a.m. when the victims, all daily wagers, were on their way to Shankarpally in an auto-rickshaw for picking cotton. "The auto was parked on the wrong side of the road and the lorry coming in the opposite direction at a high speed hit the vehicle in an attempt to avoid ramming into an TSRTC bus moving in the same direction," Mominpet Sub-Inspector Ravi Kumar said.

He said the laterite-laden lorry grazed past the RTC

bus, and went on to ram the auto, which toppled on the left. It came to a halt after damaging a roadside house. The victims were residents of Ezra Chittampally. Their bodies were shifted to Government Hospital in Tandur. Auto driver V Hari had a lucky escape as he was inside his house when the accident took place, and lorry driver Rafeeq too escaped unhurt. A case under Section 304-A (Causing death by negligence) of IPC was registered against both Hari and Rafeeq.

## Karnataka IPS officer alleges irregularities in tender drafting

Controversy over D. Roopa seeking classified information on Safe City project

STAFF REPORTER  
BENGALURU

Responding to the controversy that has exploded over an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer allegedly trying to seek classified information without authorisation, D. Roopa, Principal Secretary-Prisons, Civil Defence and Auxiliary Services (PCAS), Home Department, in a letter to the Chief Secretary on Saturday, has accepted that she did make a call to the Project Management Consultant (PMC) for the Safe City Project tender.

The State government instituted a probe into the matter on Friday.

However, describing herself as a "whistleblower", Ms. Roopa claimed that she was trying to find out "serious irregularities in tender



D. Roopa

drafting". Hemant Nimbalkar, Additional Commissioner, Administration, Bengaluru City Police, and Member Secretary of the State Level Apex Committee overseeing the ₹619 crore tender, had lodged a complaint with the Chief Secretary that the officer, who is not a member of the Apex Committee, imper-

sonated the Home Secretary, called up the PMC and tried to procure a copy of the classified Request for Proposal (RFP) before it was published, "which amounted to a criminal act". The State government has instituted an inquiry by Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Kamal Pant.

Accused of "unauthorised intervention in the tender process", Ms. Roopa has now claimed in the letter to the Chief Secretary: "The file was given to me by the Additional Chief Secretary, Home Department, himself to study. While studying I found serious irregularities in the tender drafting. In this context, I spoke to Ernst & Young in my capacity as Home Secretary to ascertain more facts on the matter."

Rajneesh Goel, ACS, Home Department, also a member of the Apex Committee, was not available for comment.

She has also denied the charge of impersonation and said she was indeed the Home Secretary. While she is Principal Secretary-PCAS, Home Department, the post is commonly referred to as that of "Home Secretary".

Ms. Roopa has alleged that an earlier tender for the project that was cancelled was "biased and was drafted to favour a particular vendor".

However, sources in the State government said that the earlier tender was cancelled in January 2020 over Chinese-made components being part of the supply chain by bidders.

## Kerala hopeful of Governor's assent

Assembly session sought on Dec. 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

very purpose because he felt the State legislature lacked the "jurisdiction to offer a solution" to the farmers' strike.

In the past, Mr. Khan had expressed scepticism over whether the Assembly could discuss or hazard a judgment on the Constitutional validity of laws enacted by Parliament. He aired a similar sentiment when the Assembly passed a resolution against the Citizenship Amendment Act in December 2019.

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar said the government had answered the questions raised by Mr. Khan satisfactorily. Law Minister A.K. Balan and Mr. Sunil Kumar called on Mr. Khan on Friday in a bid to iron out differences. Speaker P. Seeramakrishnan followed suit on Saturday.

## M.P. Cabinet nod for anti-conversion Bill

It provides for a jail term of up to 10 years; strictest law in country, says Minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2020, which provides for a prison term of up to 10 years and a fine of ₹1 lakh for conversion through "marriage or by any other fraudulent means" got the State Cabinet's approval on Saturday, Home Minister Narottam Mishra said.

The Bill, in some ways, is similar to the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, notified by BJP government in Uttar Pradesh last month, which too provides for a maximum punishment of 10 years' imprisonment for "fraudulent conversions", even for sake of marriage.

He said once enacted, the law in MP would be the most stringent in the country. Offences under the proposed law would be cognisable and non-bailable. The Bill, which seeks to replace the Religious Freedom Act of 1968, would be tabled in the Assembly, he said. "The new legislation will prohibit religious conversion or such efforts by misrepresentation, allurement, force, undue influence,

## Stringent norms

A look at the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2020

- Up to 10 years in jail for conversion through misrepresentation, allurement, force, undue influence, coercion, marriage or any other fraudulent means
- Offences will be cognisable and non-bailable
- Those willing to convert will need to apply to the district administration 60 days in advance
- Religious leaders facilitating the conversion will also have to inform about it 60 days in advance
- In cases of conversion of members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minors, a provision has been made for imprisonment of two to 10 years and ₹50,000 fine
- In case of mass conversions (of two or more persons), a provision of five to 10 years of imprisonment and minimum fine of ₹1 lakh has been made
- Parents, legal guardian or custodian and brothers and sisters of the converted person can lodge a complaint

fluence, coercion, marriage or any other fraudulent means. Abettment and conspiracy for religious conversion will also be prohibited under it," he said.

Any marriage solemnised in violation of the proposed law would be considered null and void.

Those willing to convert would need to apply to the district administration 60 days in advance. The reli-

gious leaders facilitating the conversion would also have to inform about it 60 days in advance. Violation of these provisions would attract a jail term of three to five years and a fine of ₹50,000.

In cases of religious conversion of members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minors, a provision has been made for imprisonment of two to 10 years and ₹50,000 fine, he said.

Offences would be investigated by an officer not lower than sub-inspector's rank, and it would be the responsibility of the accused to prove his innocence, he said.

A child born to the victim women will be entitled to get maintenance under the proposed law. Such children will be entitled to inherit the father's properties too.

## AP's vaccine dry run from tomorrow

STAFF REPORTER  
VIJAYAWADA

Officials of Andhra Pradesh Health Department and the Krishna district administration are gearing up to conduct an end-to-end COVID-19 vaccine distribution dry run on December 28 and 29. AP is one of the four States selected by the Centre for the exercise.

According to the Department of Health and Family Welfare Commissioner Kattamneni Bhaskar, the dry run would be conducted at five session sites - Government General Hospital, Vijayawada; Public Health Centre (PHC), Uppuluru; Purna Heart Institute, Vijayawada; PHC, Pemamaluru; and Urban PHC, Prakash Nagar, Vijayawada, +

Each beneficiary would pass through five vaccine officers at the site and their details would be verified with the Co-WIN application, get vaccinated and stay under observation for 30 minutes before leaving.

Parents, legal guardian or custodian and brothers and sisters of the converted person can lodge a complaint.

Offences would be investigated by an officer not lower than sub-inspector's rank, and it would be the responsibility of the accused to prove his innocence, he said.

A child born to the victim women will be entitled to get maintenance under the proposed law. Such children will be entitled to inherit the father's properties too.

## Kannada actor's bust vandalised

Fans of late Vishnuvardhan stage protests

STAFF REPORTER  
BENGALURU

A bust of Kannada actor late Vishnuvardhan at the Magadi Road-Chord Road junction here was found vandalised on Saturday, sparking off protests by the actor's fans, leading to tension in the area. It had been installed by the actor's fans around a year ago.

The issue was later resolved with the intervention of local MLA and Housing Minister V. Somanna. The Vijayanagar police registered a case and launched a probe to identify the vandals. The police are examining CCTV footage from the area to identify the miscreants.



Tension abates: Fans of late actor Vishnuvardhan on the Magadi Road in Bengaluru on Saturday. ■ SUDHAKARA JAIN

Puttaraju, one of the actor's fans protesting at the site, told mediapersons that the bust was fine when he saw it on Friday night. "There had been pressure on us to relocate the bust to a nearby place and we had agreed to it as well. But van-

dalising the bust like this is extremely sad. The police should arrest those behind this," he said.

The civic body recently agreed to name the Magadi Road-Chord Road junction as Balangadharanatha Swamy Circle. Devotees of

Adichunchanagiri Mutt, located nearby, wanted a statue of the late seen installed at the circle. However, a few people installed the bust of Vishnuvardhan overnight without any authorisation, leading to confusion. Even those from the mutt had mediated and the fans had agreed to relocate the actor's bust, a senior police officer said.

Mr. Somanna condemned the incident and said given that the actor's fans were willing to relocate the bust, vandalising it in the midnight was uncalled for. "Vishnuvardhan and Balangadharanatha Swamy have contributed immensely to the State. We will talk to all sides and peacefully resolve the issue and install the actor's bust at another location soon," he said.

The review stated that the PIP was declared a national project under Section 90 of the A.P. Reorganisation Act, 2014. The project, with 2,454 m of earth-cum-rock fill dam and a 1,128.40 m

long spillway, is aimed at irrigating 2.91 lakh hectares in East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, West Godavari and Krishna districts, besides ensuring several other benefits.

The Centre is funding 100% of the remaining cost of the irrigation component, and the government of Andhra Pradesh is executing it.

After designation as a national project, ₹8,614.16 crore has been released. Of this, ₹1,850 crore had been released since January 2020.

## IN BRIEF



Chakrasnanam performed in Tirumala

TIRUMALA

Chakrasnanam marked the Vaikunta Dwadasi celebrations at the Lord Venkateswara temple here on Saturday. The idol of Lord Chakrathalwar was taken in a grand procession to the pushkarini (temple tank). The priests then immersed the idol in the water. In view of COVID-19 restrictions, no devotee was allowed there.

**Ayyappa temple closed after Mandalapuja**

PATHANAMTHITTA

Marking the culmination of the 41-day annual Mandala pilgrimage season at Sabarimala, *Mandalapuja* was performed at the Ayyappa temple here on Saturday. The rituals during the day were led by the chief priest (Tantri), Kandararu Rajeevulu. The temple will remain closed till 5 p.m. on December 30. Devotees will be permitted from December 31.

## Red sandalwood logs worth ₹3 crore seized

CHITTOR

A lorry loaded with 227 logs of B-grade red sanders was seized near Pichatur on the Chennai NH early on Saturday by a special party of the Andhra Pradesh State Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force. The logs, said to be worth over ₹3 crore in the international market, was moved to the task force office at Tirupati. While the lorry driver was arrested, others in the vehicle had escaped.

## Deve Gowda dismisses JD(S)-BJP merger talk

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

Spiking speculation about his party's merger with the BJP, former Prime Minister and JD(S) national president H.D. Deve Gowda said on Saturday that his focus was on keeping the regional party alive and on trying to take it to power on its "own strength" in the 2023 Assembly election.

Breaking his silence on the issue at a press conference, he dismissed the talk of merger as an "entertainment programme".

## 2 engineering colleges blacklisted

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has blacklisted two colleges – the Dhanekula Institute of Engineering and Technology (DIET) at Guntur in Andhra Pradesh and the Malla Reddy College of Engineering (MRCE) in Telangana – for five years for submitting fabricated certificates. The NAAC has sent letters in this regard to the two principals.

The review stated that the PIP was declared a national project under Section 90 of the A.P. Reorganisation Act, 2014. The project, with 2,454 m of earth-cum-rock fill dam and a 1,128.40 m

IN BRIEF



'Haryana govt. scared of no confidence motion'

**CHANDIGARH**  
The Leader of Opposition and former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Friday said that the ruling BJP-JJP government in Haryana was scared of facing a 'no confidence motion' and therefore was not convening a special session of the State Assembly.

**Hanuman Beniwal's RLP pulls out of NDA**

**JAIPUR**  
Miffed with the BJP over its "obstinate stance" on the recent agriculture sector laws, the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP), a constituent of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from Rajasthan, on Saturday withdrew its support to the BJP-led government at the Centre.

**Horse trading destroying democracy in J&K: Omar**

**SRINAGAR**  
National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah on Saturday said democracy was being discredited in Jammu and Kashmir by "brazen horse trading", a day after two newly elected District Development Council (DDC) members belonging to the NC and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) joined the Apni Party. Winning candidates are being threatened and coerced by the State administration, he charged.

**Bangladesh convict arrested in Delhi**

**NEW DELHI**  
A 40-year-old man from Bangladesh, who had been sentenced to death and was living in India illegally, has been arrested, the police said on Saturday. Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) Shubesh Singh said the man, identified as Masum, a resident of Bagirhat in Bangladesh who was living in India since 2010, was involved in many criminal cases. Police said the accused and his associates kidnapped a man in 2005 and killed him later. In 2013, they were sentenced to death.

# Numbers swell at Delhi border

After many years, farmers have come together for their rights, say union leaders

**ANUJ KUMAR**

GHAZIABAD

As the farmers' protest against the farm laws completed almost a month at the Ghazipur border, the numbers are swelling at the Delhi-Ghaziabad border. The row of tractors behind the stage on the Delhi-Meerut expressway has suddenly become longer in the last two days. Among those who have joined in the past couple of days are peasants from Punjab.

"We were at the Singhu border for some time but now we have been told to come here as this site needs more numbers," said Joga Singh, a farmer from Ludhiana. "If all goes well, tomorrow 200 tractors are expected to come here from the Delhi side as well," said Mr. Singh, sitting on a divider.

On Saturday, farmers blocked both the carriageways on the expressway for around five hours. The traffic from Delhi was diverted via Anand Vihar. "We do it when the administration doesn't allow our tractors to come to the protest site. Once they allowed, we opened the traffic from Delhi," said Gurpreet Singh from Udhampur Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand. "At this point, the tractors have covered at least 4 km of the



**Daily bread:** Farmers waiting for a meal on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway. ■ ANUJ KUMAR

Meerut carriageway," said Mr. Gurpreet, adding the protesters did not stop the flow of essential services.

Responding to the Prime Minister's address on Friday, Mr. Singh said the PM's comparison between poultry and dairy farmers and those growing foodgrains was misplaced. "Eggs and milk could be sold in small quantities to different buyers. I can't keep selling a quintal of grain and I don't have the facility to hoard," he said.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait, who negotiated with the administration during the day, said, "Jab tak Bill wapsi na-hin, tab tak ghar wapsi na-hin" (as long as the Acts are not repealed, we will not return home.)

He said the protest was leaderless and being run by farmers. "After many years, farmers have come together for their rights. We can't allow it to be sabotaged," he stressed.

He appealed to temple trusts to support the protest. "The way they do during the kawad yatra, they could provide meals to farmers."

Serving milk and jaggery to farmers before they retired for the day, Manoj Chaudhary, vice-president of the Ghaziabad unit of the BKU, observed, "The best thing that these black Acts have done is that they have united Sikh and Jat farmers, and landowners and less-farmers."

# PM nudges Puducherry on polls

Local body elections are yet to be held in the Union Territory, says Modi

**NISTULA HEBBAR**

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday gave a very public nudge to the Puducherry administration for not facilitating local body polls in the Union Territory, even as he commended the successful conclusion of the District Development Council polls in Jammu and Kashmir.

He made the point during his address at the time of launching a government

health insurance scheme, the PMJAY-SEYHAT, for Jammu and Kashmir.

**Praise for J&K**

"Jammu and Kashmir has proven its confidence and faith in democracy but on the other hand, I want to attract the attention of the country to another fact – despite a Supreme Court order, local body polls haven't been held in Puducherry," he said.

The nudge was also a res-

ponse to Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's statement a couple of days ago that there was "no democracy" left in India. Mr. Modi's pointing out of Congress-ruled Puducherry's reluctance to hold local polls, whereas Centrally-ruled Jammu and Kashmir had done so, was aimed at the Congress' own patchy record. Mr. Modi also said that "some people in Delhi teach me lessons in democracy morning and evening".

The SC had ordered in 2018 that local body polls be held in Puducherry, where local body polls hadn't been held since 2006. The terms of those local bodies came to an end in 2011.

The Union Home Ministry has been urging the Puducherry administration to hold local body polls for the last 10 years but it hasn't happened.

The appointment of Roy Thomas as Election Commissioner there has raised hopes of polls soon.

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# Three months on, wounds remain raw in Hathras as family faces uncertainty

The CBI chargesheet has brought small comfort to the victim's family, still living in fear and unable to return to work amid tight security

ANUJ KUMAR  
HATHRAS

The towering bajra crops have given way to wheat saplings. The change in season is palpable in the fields of Boolgarhi.

And three months after his 19-year-old daughter was brutalised in the millet fields by four upper caste men, there is a semblance of a smile on the face of the victim's father. Her death and midnight cremation without the family's consent shook the conscience of the nation.

"Doodh ka doodh, paani ka paai kar diya (the wheat has been separated from the chaff)," he says, referring to the recent Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) chargesheet filed in a Hathras court.

In the chargesheet, Sandeep, 20, Ramu, 26, Ravi, 35, and Luvkush, 21, have been arraigned under Sections 376, 376D, and 302 of the Indian Penal Code and

relevant sections of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The four accused are lodged in the Aligarh district jail and have undergone a narco test at a government lab in Ahmedabad.

#### Under watch

"We haven't seen the document, but we have been told that it is a step in the direction to send the culprits to the gallows," says the father, sitting in the inner courtyard of his residence, covered by eight CCTV cameras, concertina wires from two sides, and a posse of CRPF.

The CBI investigation is not the only ray of hope for the traumatised family. Despite the tense and polarised atmosphere in the village, the neighbouring Brahmin family has agreed to sharecrop on their fields.

The neighbour, Jagdish Chandra Pachauri, says so-



**On guard:** The CRPF post outside the victim's house at Boolgarhi in Hathras, where every visitor has to sign on a register. • ANUJ KUMAR

cial hierarchies remain in the village but adds, "We stand for each other as well."

"They needed somebody to cultivate their fields. I agreed and sowed wheat in his field. We will share the harvest. There is nothing wrong in this and nobody could stop me from doing this. Those who have done wrong will have to suffer," Mr. Pachauri says.

However, concerns of the victim's family remain. "Neither the *pradhan* (headman) of the village, the elected representative, nor her son has cared to come and commiserate with us," the father says. "We have received a threat over the phone that 'you would not be safe anywhere,'" he says.

And he reiterates the family's demand born out of

fear: "We want the case to be shifted to Delhi and arrangements be made for our stay there."

It doesn't mean surrendering the land of their forefathers, he says but reflects the impact of the tragedy. "We respected social hierarchy and many in the village acknowledge this... We didn't cross the line. All these years, we folded hands from outside the tem-

ple. We offered Ganga water to our *peepul*, our *tulsi* (holy basil). Still, our daughters are not safe and we can't cremate our dead with dignity," he says with bitterness.

The victim's younger brother points out that no action has been taken against the "insensitive" district magistrate who took the decision on the cremation.

#### SPECIAL

The family is also worried about the future.

"The ex-gratia compensation of ₹25 lakh has come but we are yet to hear on the job for a family member and a house that the Chief Minister promised. My younger brother and I were working in Delhi-NCR before the lockdown. Each of us were earning around ₹10,000. We want to return to normal life. My father also made around ₹3,000 working as a

sanitary supervisor in a local private school. For how long, will we remain confined," the brother asks.

The victim's elder brother refutes allegations that the girl was having an affair with one of the accused, Sandeep, as the CBI chargesheet reportedly says, on the basis of call records.

At the homes of the accused, there is an atmosphere of despondency and aggression. Family members use expletives to refer to the victim's family and refer to the alleged "affair" between Sandeep and the victim.

"The truth will prevail. The CBI might have found our sons guilty, but the case is yet to be fought in the court," says Rakesh, father of Ramu. He claims the CBI didn't take into account the presence of his son at the local dairy at the time of the incident because of a lack of CCTV footage.

Atar Singh, the father of another accused, Ravi, says rape laws had changed after the Nirbhaya case.

questions the dying declaration of the victim. "In her first statement, at the Chandpa police station, she named only Sandeep. Her mother also blamed Sandeep. The girl later named the other three at the behest of the daughter of the local MP who belongs to their community," he alleges.

Locals say support for the families of the accused diminished after the CBI chargesheet but caste-based groups are still trying to fan emotions. On Thursday, five members of Karni Sena Bharat were arrested by the Hathras police as they planned to hold a panchayat in support of the accused.

Seema Kushwaha, lawyer for the victim, says she hasn't received a complete copy of the chargesheet but the sections that have been invoked suggest it is a step towards justice. She admits the trial would be tough but says rape laws had changed after the Nirbhaya case.

#### IN BRIEF



Trinamool supporters target Suvendu

KOLKATA  
Protests erupted outside the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) office in the Hastings area of Kolkata when newly inducted party leaders Suvendu Adhikari and Sunil Kumar Mondal, MP, arrived at the office on Saturday. The new inductees, earlier with the Trinamool Congress, had come for a welcome ceremony. After being inducted into the BJP last week, this was the first visit of the former Trinamool Congress leaders to the BJP party office.

Congress starts 'Save Cow' yatra in U.P.

LUCKNOW  
Additional SP Lalitpur Brijesh Kumar Singh said 55-60 Congress workers were detained and released in the evening for violating COVID-19 protocols and taking out a yatra without seeking permission. The Congress party on Saturday started a foot march from Lalitpur to highlight the plight of cows and farmers in Uttar Pradesh.

#### Correction

The strapline of the report "BJP aims to make India a homogeneous monolith" in these columns on December 26 should read as "D. Raja seeks efforts to end divisiveness" and not A. Raja as published.

## 150 soldiers test positive for COVID-19

They came to Delhi for R-Day parade

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Around 150 soldiers who travelled to Delhi to take part in Republic Day and Army Day parades have tested positive for COVID-19, according to an Army source.

"The soldiers who arrived to participate in various parades were tested before putting them into a safe bubble. Some of them tested positive. Almost all are asymptomatic," the source said. They are among the few thousand soldiers who have been tested.

The soldiers have been quarantined at Delhi Cantonment. Plans to hold the parade at Rajpath on January 26 this year are on despite the pandemic. India has invited U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson as the chief guest.

The Ministry of External Affairs has already clarified that the British Prime Minister will be visiting despite the scare of the new virus strain in U.K.

Protocols have been put in place for conducting the parade safely, a second source said.

Thousands of soldiers travel to the national capital every year to take part in the annual Republic Day as well as Army Day parades.

Plans to hold the parade at Rajpath on January 26 this year are on despite the pandemic. India has invited U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson as the chief guest.

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## 3 charged in Shopian killings

Army captain, two locals accused of staged encounter of three youth

PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR

The J&K Police's Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Saturday filed a chargesheet against an Army officer and two others before a local court in the alleged staged encounter in Kashmir that left three "locals" dead in Shopian's Amshipora on July 18 this year.

The SIT, headed by a Superintendent of Police (SP), presented a 300-page chalan before a local judge and named three persons, including Captain Bhupinder of 62 Rashtriya Rifles; Tabish Ahmad, a resident of Shopian; and Bilal Ahmad, a resident of Pulwama.

The trio allegedly played a



**Standing guard:** Army jawans near the encounter site in Amshipora after the incident in July. • FILE PHOTO

role that led to the encounter. Three missing youth from Rajouri in the Pir Panjal Valley – Abrar Ahmed, 25, Imtiaz Ahmed, 20, and Moh

hammed Ibrar, 16 – were left dead in the encounter. The police had said weapons were recovered from the dead, passed off as "uniden-

tified militants" then.

Later, DNA samples established their identities and the bodies were returned to the families of the youth, who were working as labourers in south Kashmir.

Meanwhile, the Army said the process of summary of evidence was completed with regard to the Shopian "fake encounter". The same is being examined by the authorities concerned in consultation with legal advisers for proceeding further. The Army is committed to the ethical conduct of operations," a spokesperson said in a statement on Thursday.

He said the inquiry had brought out "certain *prima facie* evidence".

## Two militants killed in Shopian

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

Two local Al-Badr militants were killed and two soldiers were injured in a two-day operation at Shopian on Saturday.

A joint cordon and search operation was launched on Friday evening. The presence of terrorists was ascertained and they were given the opportunity to surrender. They fired indiscriminately and two Army personnel got injured. On Saturday, both the hiding terrorists were killed," Inspector-General of Police Vijay Kumar said.

He said the operation was suspended on Friday evening due to darkness.

## Row over house a political issue: Amartya Sen

Nobel laureate says he will certainly act on the issue when Visva-Bharati tells him what the issue is

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

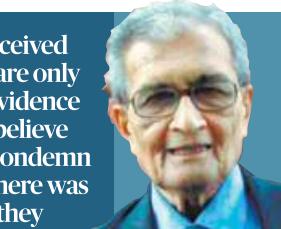
Nobel laureate Amartya Sen on Saturday broke his silence on the controversy around Visva-Bharati allegedly putting his name in the list of illegal occupants of its lands.

Professor Sen described the development a political matter, and said if the Vice-Chancellor of Visva Bharati Bidyut Chakraborty feels happy to take part in such political matters, then there was nothing to be done.

"Till now, I have not received a single letter. There

Till now I have not received a single letter. There are only talks in the media. This is evidence of uncivilised behaviour. I believe there are good reasons to condemn this kind of behaviour... If there was really any complaint, then they should have written to me

AMARTYA SEN,  
NOBEL LAUREATE



are only talks in the media. This is evidence of uncivilised behaviour. I believe there are good reasons to condemn this kind of behaviour... If there was really any complaint, then they should have written to me," he told a local television news channel from

Visva-Bharati. On Friday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had written to Professor Sen expressing solidarity with him against the "bigotry of the majoritarians in this country". He said there may be a political reason for the war that was being waged from the office of the Vice-Chancellor. "I have often been the target of criticism for the political party to whom Bidyut Babu (the Vice-Chancellor) is beholden to," he said.

The Nobel laureate said the allegations come after 50 years. "How did you discover that? What is the proof? Do you have the necessary papers? I have certainly talked to my lawyers. I will not do anything now, but I will certainly act on it when they tell me what the issue is," he said.

The West Bengal BJP leadership jumped into the controversy and State BJP president Dilip Ghosh said Prof.

Sen is a respectable person but he should not appear as a "spokesperson of a party that running a dictatorship in West Bengal".

He did not take names but made it clear that his attack was directed at the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP). Leaders of the AASU and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJYCP), who led the anti-CAA movement, floated the AJP in September.

"Electoral is coming up. Some people will try to take you to the path of agitation. Did their agitation lead to development or creation of

## Shah targets new Assam party formed by activists

'It is a conspiracy to help Cong. in polls'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday targeted some anti-CAA activists for "leading the people of Assam on the path of agitation" to eventually float a political party as part of a "conspiracy" to help the Congress win the 2021 Assembly election.

He did not take names but made it clear that his attack was directed at the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP). Leaders of the AASU and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJYCP), who led the anti-CAA movement, floated the AJP in September.

"Electoral is coming up. Some people will try to take you to the path of agitation. Did their agitation lead to development or creation of

employment or infrastructure? Only the youth of Assam became martyrs," he told a gathering in Guwahati at a programme where several State government projects were launched.

"Some of them today floated a political party by changing their colours. It is a conspiracy to cause a split of BJP votes and help the Congress win the polls," Mr. Shah said.

## Energy will be focus of Jaishankar's Qatar visit

MEA keen on Afghan peace process

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

In his second visit to the Gulf region during the coronavirus pandemic, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will travel to Qatar on Sunday for a two-day visit and talks with Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani. Energy trade, investment opportunities, discussions on conditions for Indian expatriate labour and the ongoing Afghanistan dialogue process taking place in Doha will be on top of the agenda.

"During the visit [Mr.

Jaishankar] will hold talks with his counterpart on bilateral issues as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest. He will convey special gratitude to the State of Qatar for taking care of Indians during the COVID-19 pandemic," said an MEA statement on Saturday.

It also pointed out that the two countries had maintained strong ties during the pandemic, and that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken to the Qatari Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani three times in the past few months.

#### SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆



## No deaths in rail accidents since April '19

DEVESH K. PANDEY  
NEW DELHI

No passenger fatality in train accidents has been reported since April 2019.

The accidents progressively have also declined from 107 in 2015-16 to 55 in 2019-20, with only 12 such cases reported this year so far, according to Railway Board Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Vinod Kumar Yadav.

At a press conference, Mr. Yadav said all the unmanned level crossings on broad gauge were eliminated by January 2019. The process of doing away with manned level crossing gates was also accelerated.

While safer coaches were being manufactured since January 2018, the replacement of old mechanical signalling with the electronic system had been intensified.

Locomotive pilots were being given simulator-based training.

## New species of sun rose found in the Eastern Ghats

*Portulaca laljii* discovered in Prakasam district of A.P.

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA

# Britain and EU release full text of post-Brexit trade deal

The document lays out details on trade, law enforcement and dispute settlement

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON

Britain and the European Union on Saturday published the full text of the post-Brexit trade agreement aimed at governing their relationship when the U.K. definitively leaves the bloc's single market in just five days' time.

The document, which is more than 1,200 pages long, lays out detail on trade, law enforcement and dispute settlement among other arrangements between Britain and the EU after the U.K. leaves the single market and customs union on December 31.

In the forward to the copy of the text published by the U.K. government, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the agreement had been "carefully judged to benefit everyone" and preserve "free trade for millions



**Way forward:** Boris Johnson says the pact will preserve "free trade for millions in the U.K. and across Europe". • AFP

of people in the United Kingdom and across Europe".

"While we made our fair share of compromises during the negotiations, we never wavered from the goal of restoring national sovereignty," he added.

Senior U.K. government Minister Michael Gove wrote in *The Times* newspaper that Thursday's agreement would allow Britain to bring "innovation and investment

to parts of the country that have endured economic decline".

He added there were still "significant changes" to be prepared for by businesses in the short term.

To ratify the deal, Britain's Parliament has been recalled to sit on December 30. U.K.'s main opposition Labour Party said its MPs would back it.

In Brussels, the European Commission has proposed

the agreement be applied on a provisional basis until 28 February.

The European Parliament will be asked for its consent to the deal in 2021 and for the process to be concluded by the Council, which brings together the executives of all 27 member states, must adopt the decision.

The EU has offered Britain unprecedented tariff- and quota-free access to its single market of 450 million consumers.

But it has in return secured London's commitment to respect its always-evolving rules in some areas such as environmental protection, labour regulation and tax, aiming to avoid Britain undercutting companies inside the bloc.

The U.K. has also signed up to guarantees that it will not abuse state aid to firms to seek an unfair advantage.

## Major blast hits Nashville after bomb warning

A message playing from a motorhome warned that a bomb would go off

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

A huge blast tore through a section of downtown Nashville early on Friday, after police responding to reports of gunfire discovered a parked motorhome blaring a warning that it carried a bomb.

The powerful explosion shattered windows and ripped apart trees, wounding several people when it detonated at 6.30 a.m. (0230 GMT) in a section of the southern U.S. city that was

largely deserted due the Christmas Day holiday.

Police chief John Drake said there were no confirmed fatalities, but authorities were examining tissue found at the blast site that they believe could be human remains. He added the city – known as a hub for American country music – had not received any threats, and a possible motive for the attack was unknown.

The explosion could be felt miles away and damaged dozens of businesses – scat-



**Massive damage:** Emergency personnel near the site of an explosion in downtown Nashville, Tennessee, on Friday. • AP

tering glass, debris and bricks as well as provoking the collapse of one building in an area with numerous bars, restaurants and shops.

In a dramatic sequence of events that shattered the Christmas morning calm,

police rushed to the area after getting reports of gunshots and noticed the vehicle as they arrived on the scene.

A recorded message playing from the motorhome warned that a bomb would detonate within 15 minutes – enough time for a bomb squad to clear the area before the explosion, Mr. Drake told reporters.

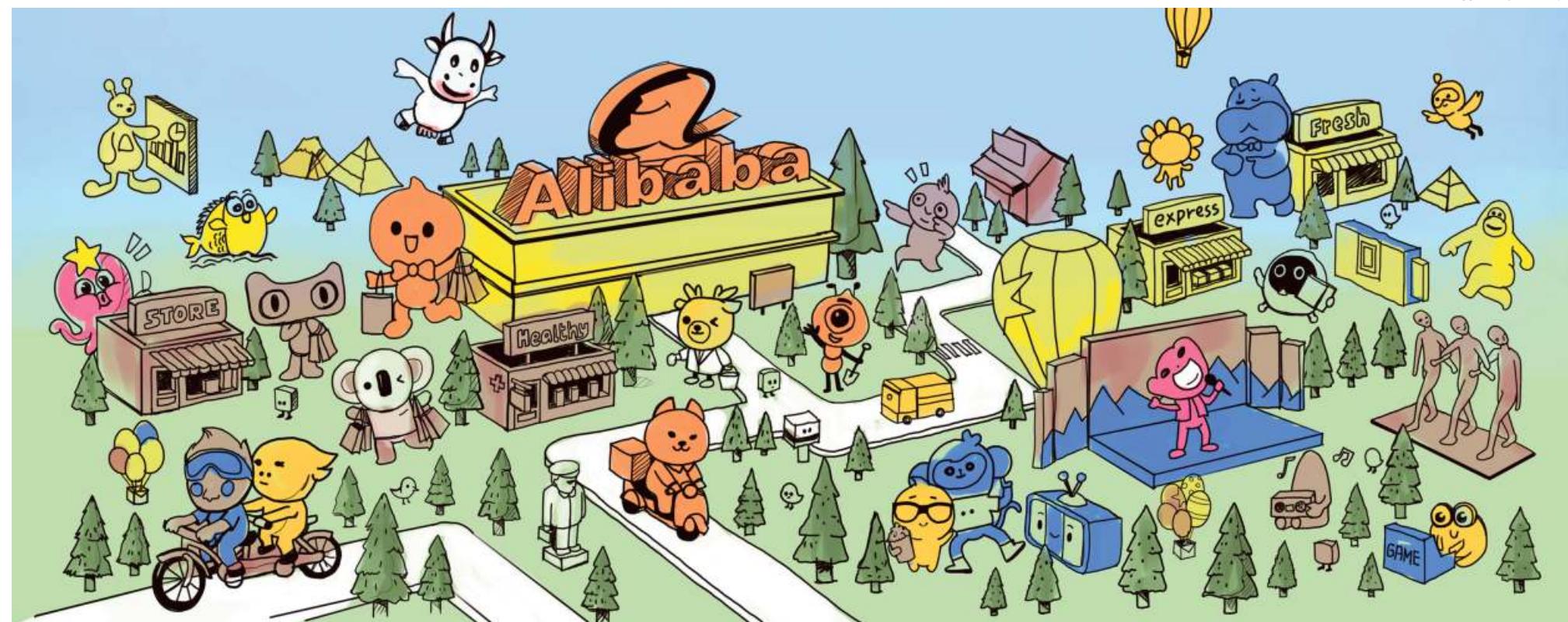
Witnesses told the *Tennessean* newspaper the warning, spoken in a woman's voice, counted down to the blast. "Evacuate now. There is a bomb. A bomb is in this vehicle and will explode," one recalled the chilling recording saying.

## As new virus strain spreads, EU begins vaccine rollout

Hungary starts vaccination ahead of the bloc's schedule

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
PARIS

Scientists in the U.K. have begun trials of innovative antibody drug treatments that they hope could provide instant protection against COVID-19.



## ALIBABA

# Close sesame for China's Internet giant

The ruling Communist Party of China takes aim at the tech conglomerate and its charismatic founder, Jack Ma

ANANTH KRISHNAN

**S**ince the stunning rise of the e-commerce giant Alibaba, few people have strode China's political and economic landscape with the swagger of Jack Ma.

A household name in his country – where he is known by his Chinese name, Ma Yun – and perhaps the most well-known Chinese personality in the world along with the country's President, Mr. Ma isn't merely China's richest man and the founder of a tech behemoth.

He is in every sense a public figure who has neither shied away from the limelight, unlike many of his publicity-wary peers, nor refrained from voicing his views on matters of national interest that the members of China Inc. usually scrupu-

lously avoid. Mr. Ma would perhaps happily describe himself as a man for all seasons – after all, he has starred in a Kungfu action film with Jet Li and just this October, crooned a duet with the most famous singer in China, Faye Wong.

Unfortunately for Mr. Ma, it wasn't only the duet with Ms. Wong that he lent his vocals too that month. Speaking at a high-profile financial forum in Shanghai on the eve of the planned world record-breaking \$35 billion IPO of his Ant Group – the financial arm of the Alibaba empire which is behind China's biggest digital payments company Alipay – Mr. Ma, in his characteristic no-holds-barred style, slammed the state of China's financial ecosystem, with the country's top regulators in attendance,

and described not-so-tactfully China's powerful State-run banks, whose monopolies his Ant Group has eroded, as "pawn shops".

Whether or not the speech was the tipping point remains unclear, but regulators stunned the world by promptly suspending the IPO. Then came the second hit. On December 24, authorities said they would launch an antitrust investigation into alleged monopolistic practices of the Alibaba Group and Tencent Holdings, the other Internet giant and Alibaba-rival behind WeChat.

"If monopoly is tolerated," said the *People's Daily*, the Communist Party's official newspaper, "and companies are allowed to expand in a... barbarian manner, industry won't develop in a healthy way."

The regulators may well have had a point. The stunning success of Alipay and WeChat has certainly made China's fintech ecosystem reliant on two apps without which digital finance in China would come crashing down. Alipay, in 2019, crossed 1.2 billion users, with WeChat recording more than 1 billion. The great irony, of course, was that the Alibaba Group had, more than any other, fought the monopolies of State-controlled banks.

The grouse of entrepreneurs like Mr. Ma was that for the State, some monopolies appeared more welcome than others.

## Rags to riches

Mr. Ma (56) is a former school-teacher whose rags to riches story is emblematic of the China boom after the turn of the century. Founded in 1999 in Hangzhou, a beautiful city of lakes in eastern Zhejiang, a province famed throughout Chinese history for its enterprising businesspeople, Alibaba rose to fame as a business-to-business portal. It expanded into direct sales with consumers just as China's Internet boom took off, with Taobao and Tmall carrying the growth of the world's fastest-growing ecommerce market.

Alibaba was more than a business. It became a cultural and social phenomenon. It even birthed its own festi-

vals – "Singles Day", celebrated every year on November 11, has become China's biggest celebration of consumption. Alibaba recorded \$74 billion in sales this year when the daily festival was extended to an 11-day extravaganza in November, which is more than India's estimated online sales in an entire year.

The launch of Alipay in 2003 was the real game-changer. The payments portal grew into a financial behemoth in its own right, becoming not just the favoured method of payment for commercial transactions but also the go-to funding choice for millions of small businesses that were shunned by conservative Chinese banks.

A decade later, Mr. Ma would launch Yuebao, a money market fund offered through the Alipay app that by 2017, in a span of just four years, amassed assets worth \$170 billion making it the world's largest.

The success of both underlined the limitations of China's own State-controlled banking sector, which offered lower interest rates for its customers and, as Mr. Ma put it memorably in October, imposed demands on small businesses in a way that a "pawn shop" would.

**Targeting billionaires**  
If, for a decade, Mr. Ma was beloved by Chinese authorities as a poster-boy of the

country's economic success, the mood towards China's billionaires has, of late, taken a darker turn.

Mr. Ma isn't the only one in the Party's crosshairs. The Dalian Wanda Group, started by the industrialist who was previously China's richest man, Wang Jianlin, was reined in by regulators in 2017 and forced to curb its rapid overseas expansion because of concerns over its debt. The group was then forced to sell assets and was cut down to size.

**Alibaba recorded \$74 bn in sales this year when 'Singles Day' was extended to an 11-day extravaganza in November, which is more than India's estimated online sales in an entire year**

The following year, the Anbang Insurance Group which had, like Wanda, gone on an overseas expansion spree, came under the lens of regulators, and its billionaire chairman, Wu Xiaohui, was sentenced to 18 years in prison for corruption.

No one expects Mr. Ma to suffer a similar fate, but the recent moves certainly suggest a warning shot that un-

derlines the Communist Party's discomfort with companies that have grown too powerful, and in their own ways, have begun to challenge a system it prefers to tightly control.

"It's clearly an escalation of coordinated efforts to rein in Jack Ma's empire, which symbolised China's new 'too-big-to-fail' entities," Dong Xiaomiao, a researcher at Zhongguancun Internet Finance Institute, told Bloomberg. "Chinese authorities want to see a smaller, less dominant and more compliant firm."

## Patriotism first

Compliance is precisely what President Xi Jinping has made clear he expects from China's private sector. Under Mr. Xi's watch, the Party has robustly defended State-owned enterprises (SOEs) – which have long been criticised by China's entrepreneurs for the preferential treatment they receive which, they say, has bred inefficiency – as one of the unique institutional advantages of the Chinese system.

The post COVID-19 situation has only deepened that impression, with Chinese officials praising State-run firms for their role in China's economic recovery this summer. "Unlike risk-averse private firms, SOEs tend to rush to the forefront during difficult periods by increasing investment, cementing their main business and providing more jobs," Dong Dengxin, an economist, told the Party-run Global Times, which reported in July that during the first of a pandemic-hit year, fixed-asset investment by State firms was up 7.2% and firms had stepped in to provide 1 million jobs.

That same month, Mr. Xi chaired a meeting with entrepreneurs, and called on them "to seek self-improvement in terms of patriotism, innovation, integrity, social responsibility and global vision, in order to lead enterprises out of the immediate plight and toward a brighter future."

Mr. Xi also "demanded that entrepreneurs set a good example for society as a whole by their honest and law-abiding practices".

And "a good example", it increasingly appears, means not growing too big for the comfort of China's ruling party.

## In Focus

■ Founded in 1999 in Hangzhou, a beautiful city of lakes in eastern Zhejiang, Alibaba rose to fame as a business-to-business portal

■ The company expanded into direct sales with consumers just as China's Internet boom took off, with Taobao and Tmall carrying the growth of the world's fastest-growing e-commerce market

■ A multi-billion-dollar group, Alibaba is now under regulators' scrutiny for alleged monopolistic practices

## BLACKWATER

# Mercenaries from America

Despite convictions and controversies, the security firm remains powerful in U.S.

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM

**B**lackwater Worldwide, the Virginia-based private security firm, whose four convicted contractors were last week granted clemency by President Donald Trump, is arguably the most high-profile embodiment of what is described as the outsourcing of warfare by successive U.S. administrations. Contracted by the State Department to protect American diplomats, the firm, since renamed Xe Services and more recently as Academi, has seized on the new avenues thrown open by the global war on terror following the September 11, 2001 attacks and snapped up security deals. It has in the process acquired increasing notoriety for contempt for the rule of law and violations of human rights.

The 2007 Baghdad massacre of 17 civilians for which these former U.S. service members were pardoned by President Donald Trump, is one of many instances that Blackwater has been criminally implicated. Months before the notorious killings, one of its employees fatally shot a bodyguard of a top Iraqi politician, leading to his dismissal. Families of four Blackwater employees killed in Falluja in 2004 sued the firm for wrongful deaths. In 2018, under former chairman Erik Prince, Blackwater was manoeuvring hard to privatise Washington's war effort in Af-



ghanistan as a third option between a prolonged U.S. military presence and complete withdrawal of troops.

A UN investigation this year revealed that Mr. Prince equipped Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the de facto ruler of the UAE with private militia. The UN has also linked Blackwater's involvement in another botched mercenary mission in Libya. Nearer home, there have been reports that Mr. Prince, a close ally of President Trump, and the brother of U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, was recruiting former spies to infiltrate the Democratic campaign and politically liberal organisations opposed to the Trump agenda. Mr. Prince, whose clandestine operations span several continents, has all along denied any wrong-doing by the security firm.

In a 2007 testimony to a House oversight committee relating to the gruesome shootings of unarmed civi-

lans in the Iraqi capital, Mr. Prince alleged that judgment was being pronounced based on inaccurate information. Instead, he insisted that the legal immunity from prosecution of contractors should be protected because a fair trial for foreigners was highly unlikely in the country. Henry Waxman, a democratic legislator and chairman of the House oversight committee, and another Republican member criticised the State Department's failure to enforce accountability on Blackwater.

**Tax evasion allegations**  
In October the same year, Mr. Waxman, based on an Internal Revenue Service ruling, accused Blackwater of evading millions of dollars in federal taxes. The agency had found that the company's designation of its personnel as independent contractors rather than an employee as was the practice in other security firms,

Ironically, the tide began to turn against Blackwater after the 2009 dismissal of charges against the company in a U.S. court. In response, Jo Biden, then Vice-President in the Obama administration, promised to reopen the trial. The protracted process that followed in the next decade resulted in the more recent convictions and the relentless pursuit to exonerate them, culminating in last week's clemency. The new administration's dealings with Blackwater is sure to attract closer Congressional scrutiny.

ARYA RAJENDRAN

# From the classroom to Corporation

The 21-year-old B.Sc. student is set to become the Mayor of Kerala's capital

S. ANANDAN

**H**ardly a stone's throw away from actor Mohanlal's house at Mudavannuram is a narrow byline inaccessibile by car where resides the newly-elected Corporation councillor of the division, Arya Rajendran, a 21-year-old B.Sc. Mathematics student of All Saints College in the city.

Her modest dwelling with a monthly rent of ₹6,000 will soon be a prestigious address in the capital city with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) State secretariat endorsing, in a day or two, the district formation's recommendation of Ms. Rajendran as the next Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation where the Left front secured a simple majority in the recent elections. That will make her arguably the country's youngest Mayor.

But she's not wide-eyed degree student gingerly taking the reins of the city administration as a debutant. The CPI(M) is believed to have counted on her performance record as State president of its children's organisation, Balasangham, and in the State committee of its students' wing, the Students' Federation of India (SFI). The nomination is also in line with the party's meticulous effort to reach out to the youth which worked to its advantage following the installation of V.K. Prasanth as the youngest Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram in



ILLUSTRATION: SATHEESH VELLINENZHI

2015 when the burgeoning influence of the BJP in the Corporation area stared the Left in the face. His work won applause and he went on to wrest the Vattiyoorkavu assembly segment from the Congress in a closely-fought triangular bypoll contest last year.

**Party loyalists**  
Ms. Rajendran is from a family of CPI(M) loyalists. Her mother Sreelatha, an insurance agent; her father Rajendran, an electrician; and elder brother Aravind, who's recently secured job as an engineer in Abu Dhabi; are all members of the party's Kesavadev Road Branch. After completing her schooling at Carmel Girls Higher Secondary School and at the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Cotton Hill, she toyed with the idea of becoming an engineer for some time before taking up Mathematics.

Mayor or not, dropping

jayan, took on the unpleasant surprises and challenges of the last few years without batting an eyelid, is inspiring and reassuring," she said. On her first day at the corporation to take oath as Councillor, veteran BJP leader Ashok Kumar walked over to her to congratulate her. "Political differences apart, being young helps strike a chord with everyone," she said.

The roadmap has already been laid by her predecessors and the Left front's election manifesto. She refuses to respond to sceptics who wonder whether she'll just remain a mascot, with the party pulling the strings from behind.

"It's best answered through actions," she said, promising to discharge her duties in a consultative manner, with an ear to the ground and to the party's counsel.

Working with the Balasangham from a very young age, Ms. Rajendran rose in the ranks to helm it for the last two years when the crises faced by the State tested her organisational mettle, resolve and resourcefulness. Several Left organisations, including the SFI, closed ranks with the State administration to help set up community kitchens, arrange emergency medicines, create awareness about the pandemic protocols and pool funds to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund when COVID-19 sought to plough through the State, she pointed out.

"The way the State, led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vi-

lakhan, took on the unpleasant surprises and challenges of the last few years without batting an eyelid, is inspiring and reassuring," she said. On her first day at the corporation to take oath as Councillor, veteran BJP leader Ashok Kumar walked over to her to congratulate her. "Political differences apart, being young helps strike a chord with everyone," she said.

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ghanistan as a third option between a prolonged U.S. military presence and complete withdrawal of troops.

A UN investigation this year revealed that Mr. Prince equipped Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the de facto ruler of the UAE with private militia. The UN has also linked Blackwater's involvement in another botched mercenary mission in Libya. Nearer home, there have been reports that Mr. Prince, a close ally of President Trump, and the brother of U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, was recruiting former spies to infiltrate the Democratic campaign and politically liberal organisations opposed to the Trump agenda.

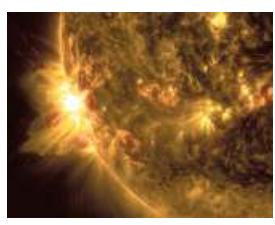
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## SNAPSHOTS



## Cuisine matters

A study meant to investigate the cuisines of the Bronze age (approximately from 3000 BCE to 1200 BCE), found that Asian spices such as turmeric and fruits like the banana had already reached the Mediterranean more than 3000 years ago. This shows long distance trade was active even then. The study, published in *PNAS*, examined the food residues in tooth tartar of excavated remains.



## Creative flares

Stellar flares, such as the solar flares of our Sun, which disturb space weather are often viewed as detrimental to life. A new study published in *Nature Astronomy* shows that these can have creative effects by driving the planets atmospheric composition to a new equilibrium. Some space weather events can help scientists detect signatures of gases that may signify biological processes.

# Is the first wave coming to an end in India?

There is no spike nationally despite the festival season, winter and large gatherings without masks, physical distancing

R. PRASAD

India, Bengaluru, and a member of the Karnataka COVID-19 Technical Advisory Committee says in an email.

The cumulative test positivity rate should be less than 5% to say that transmission has been contained. The reason: the seven day or monthly positivity rate only indicates active surge in cases as seen now in some north-east States, while the cumulative test positivity rate reflects the overall containment in transmission.

## Note of caution

Gautam Menon, Professor of Physics and Biology at Ashoka University and co-author of COVID-19 modelling studies cautions in an email that test positivity is large in a number of States, including Kerala and Maharashtra, which were hard hit earlier as well. "This suggests that the disease is still spreading, although more slowly. I think this is mainly evidence that COVID-19 is no longer primarily spreading in more urban areas, so this should be expected to mark a qualitative change. In that sense, it can be thought of as an end to the 'first wave,'" he says.

"The decline has been steady and prolonged, with the fall somewhat slower than the rise. Within this fall in national figures there are small regional spikes and that will continue to happen in the days to come," says virologist Dr. Shahid Jameel, Director of the Trivedi School of Biosciences at Ashoka University.

Explaining that natural infection (both detected and undetected) has not reached the level to confer herd immunity and cause a slowdown in daily cases, Dr. Menon says: "My own guess



**Hopeful decline:** The only reasonable explanation is that besides other factors, the threshold for population immunity has been reached, inefficient testing strategy, better compliance to regulations or a combination of these. • GETTY IMAGES

would be that about 40-50% of urban India, in particular tier-1 and tier-2 cities has been infected at this point, while an India-wide number is more likely in the range of 30-40%. This is still below what might be a herd immunity threshold, although it would be consistent with a decrease in the number of daily cases, as is being seen."

Dr. Jameel too feels only about 30% of people across India have been infected

while positivity is somewhere in the range of 50% in large dense cities. "It is hard to say [if natural infection has come close to providing herd immunity] unless another more representative serosurvey is carried out," Dr. Jameel says.

## Reasonable explanation

The only reasonable explanation for a drop in daily cases without any spike even after Durga puja and Diwali is

that besides other factors, the threshold for population immunity attributed to has been reached, inefficient testing strategy, better compliance to regulations or a combination of these, feels Dr. Babu.

## Sufficient adherence

"My only guess is that adherence to NPIs, although not ideal, was sufficient to slow down the spread and state governments did institute some reasonable measures to curb spread during festivals. Certainly, anecdotal evidence suggests that although crowds did build up in festival season, mask wearing was reasonably common," says Dr. Menon. "The other possibility is that in regions which saw the largest crowds, as for example Kolkata's Durga Puja pandals, this was in the background of large fraction of people with prior infections already, so this would have also hampered unrestricted spread."

Explaining why daily cases in Kerala are still high while other States including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka that had earlier reported high number of cases have seen a sharp drop, Dr. Menon says: "I would attribute this to the fact that the

## How coronavirus interacts with human cell proteins

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Scientists have charted the first atlas showing how the genetic material of the novel coronavirus interacts with the proteins in human cells, which may provide a starting point for the development of new treatments against COVID-19.

According to the researchers, one of the most urgent tasks is to understand all the molecular interactions between the virus and the cells it infects.

They explained that a detailed understanding of these interactions will help identify the processes in host cells which favour the multiplication of the virus, and the ones which activate the host immune system.

While the SARS-CoV-2 virus uses host proteins to replicate, the scientists said until now, there has been no detailed understanding of all the proteins occurring in human cells which interact with the viral genetic material - its RNA.

In the research, published in the journal *Nature Micro-*

**biology**, the scientists created the first global atlas of direct interactions between the SARS-CoV-2 RNA and the proteins present in human cells.

Based on the findings, the researchers also identified important regulators of viral replication.

The scientists said the atlas of RNA-protein interactions offers unique insights into SARS-CoV-2 infections, enabling the systematic breakdown of factors influencing the replication of the virus, and host defense strategies - a crucial prerequisite for the development of new therapeutics.

From the results, the scientists identified 18 host proteins that play an important role during SARS-CoV-2 infection, and found 20 small molecules that may inhibit these proteins.

They believe the two proteins CNBP and LARPI are particularly interesting.

The researchers also identified target sites in these proteins that could be used to inhibit its replication.

These have hydrophilic outer shell and hydrophobic interior, making them perfect carriers for delivering drug molecules

## ASWATHI PACHA

With the advance in nanotechnology, researchers across the globe have been exploring how to use nanoparticles for efficient drug delivery.

Similar to nanoshells and nanovesicles, nanomicelles are extremely small structures and have been noted as an emerging platform in targeted therapy. Nanomicelles are globe-like structures with a hydrophilic outer shell and a hydrophobic interior. This dual property makes them a perfect carrier for delivering drug molecules.

## Drug delivery

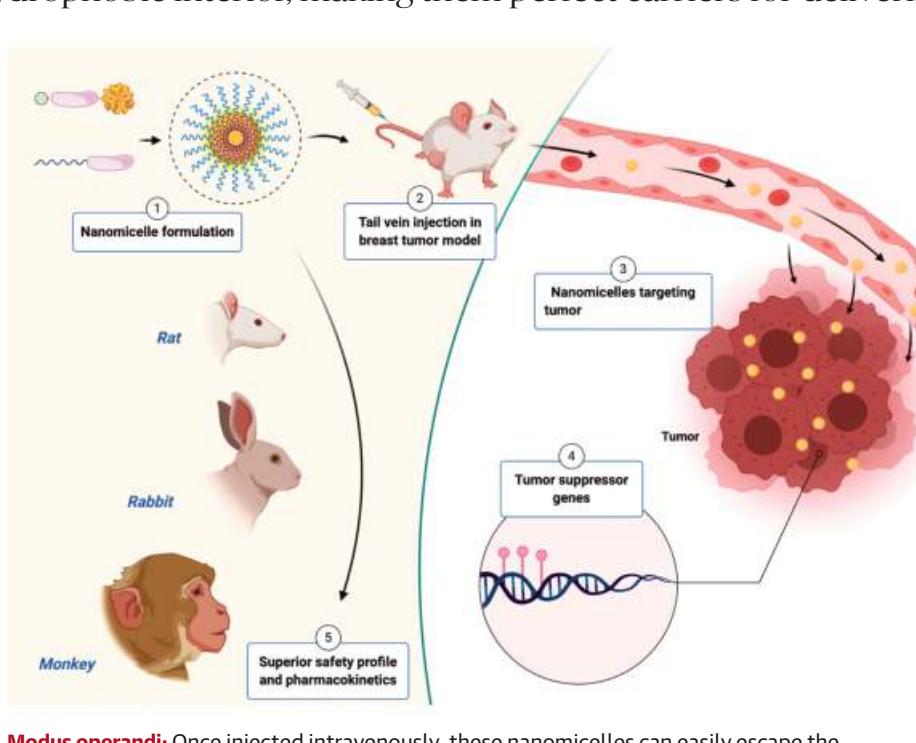
Now a multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional team has created a nanomicelle that can be used to deliver a drug named docetaxel, which is commonly used to treat various cancers including breast, colon and lung cancer.

"The ideal goal for cancer therapy is destroying the cancer cells without harming

healthy cells of the body, and chemotherapeutics approved for treatment of cancer are highly toxic. The currently used docetaxel is a highly hydrophobic drug, and is dissolved in a chemical mixture (polysorbate-80 and alcohol). This aggravates its toxic effects on liver, blood cells, and lungs. So, there was an urgent and unmet need to develop effective drug delivery vehicles for docetaxel without these side effects," explains Avinash Bajaj, from the Laboratory of Nanotechnology and Chemical Biology at the Regional Centre for Biotechnology, Faridabad. He is one of the corresponding authors of the paper recently published in *Angewandte Chemie*.

## Small but active

The nanomicelles are less than 100nm in size and are stable at room temperature. Once injected intravenously these nanomicelles can easily escape the circulation and enter the solid tumours where the blood vessels are



**Modus operandi:** Once injected intravenously, these nanomicelles can easily escape the circulation and enter the solid tumours. Picture created in BioRender.com •

found to be leaky. These leaky blood vessels are absent in the healthy organs. "Chemical conjugation would render the phospholipid-docetaxel prodrug to be silent in the circulation and healthy organs. But once it enters the cancer cells, the enzymes will cleave the bond to activ-

ate the drug, and kill the cancer cells," adds Dr. Bajaj.

The team tested the effectiveness of the nanomicelles in a mice breast tumour mo-

del and was found to help in tumour regression. Its toxicity was compared with the currently used FDA approved formulation and found to be less toxic. Similar promising results were seen when tested in higher model organisms including rats, rabbits and rhesus monkeys.

The team further studied the mode of action of the nanomicelles and found that they work by enhancing the expression of tumour suppressor genes.

"We are currently working to develop a nanomicelle which can carry multiple drugs and increases the effectiveness of individual drugs.

Previously we developed a hydrogel drug delivery system to carry a combination of three drugs. These nanomicelles are extremely cost-effective and can prove to be next-generation chemotherapeutic," adds Ujjaini Dasgupta from the Amity Institute of Integrative Sciences and Health, Amity University, Gurgaon.

## Ramanujan: from his last letter to the lost notebook

How George Andrews found Srinivasa Ramanujan's last and compelling work

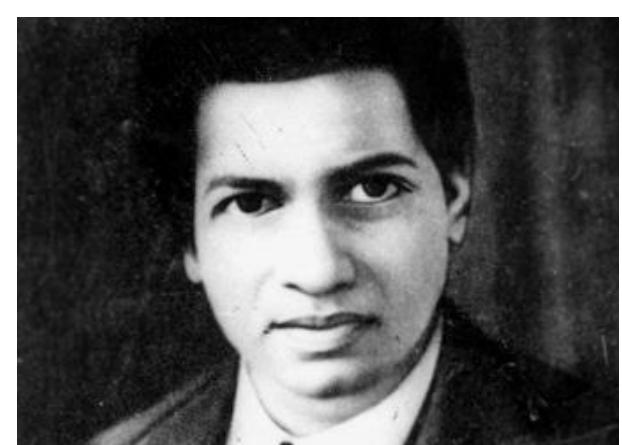
## SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

In honour of "magical" mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan who died exactly a hundred years ago, in 1920, Vigyan Prasar organised events under the name "Ramanujan Yatra" which included a series of talks held monthly on Ramanujan's work.

"Ramanujan's life carries the message that perseverance leads to results, and that one should not give up in the face of adversity," says T.V. Venkateswaran of Vigyan Prasar.

## Chance discovery

In 1976, almost entirely by chance, George E. Andrews, who is Evan Pugh professor of mathematics, Pennsylvania State University, found Ramanujan's notes written during his last few years in England. Prof. Andrews, along with Bruce C. Berndt went on to compile the contents of this lost notebook into a five-volume book entitled *Ramanujan's Lost Notebook*. This book, which is a mathematical treasure trove, took them twenty years to bring out, such was



**Reaching out:** In his last letter to Hardy in 1920, Ramanujan wrote, I discovered very interesting functions recently, which I call 'mock' theta-functions. • THE HINDU

its complexity. Prof. Andrews gave a lecture in the Ramanujan Yatra wherein he described how he discovered the lost notebook - and the gems embedded in it.

"We wanted to invite noted Ramanujan scholars from all over the world, with the idea that undergraduate students would be inspired by Ramanujan's mathematics, and hopefully study more on their own," says R. Ramanujam, computer scientist from The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, who co-organised the lecture series.

**Last letter**  
In Ramanujan's last letter to G H Hardy, dated January 12, 1920, he had written, "I discovered very interesting functions recently, which I call 'mock' theta-functions". Unlike the 'false' theta-function (studied partially by Prof Rogers in his interesting paper) they enter into mathematics as beautifully as the ordinary theta-function." He proceeds to give some examples and relationships. He

proceeds to give some examples and relationships, and

was invited to look at the collection that the former had left behind and to take his pick. The collection "covered the floor of a fair-sized room to the depth of a foot and were to be incinerated in a few days," observed Prof. Andrews. It consisted of mathematical documents, but also receipts, tokens etc. Prof. Watson was an avid collector.

With his "lucky dip" Prof. Andrews came up with a set of notes. The equations there were written without any introduction or explanation - just numbers and bare equations. As luck would have it, Prof. Andrews had studied

solved this problem in his PhD thesis.

As Prof. Andrews noted, "Frank Garvan's thesis is devoted to an expanded study of this page [from the *Lost Notebook*] and proof of the identities." Garvan showed that a later proof of Dyson's conjecture by Atkin and Swinnerton Dyer was equivalent to what Ramanujan had noted. He also revealed that the function Ramanujan had noted down was indeed the "crank" famously predicted by Dyson.

The pages were full of equation after equation, some related, many not related, some pages in organised form and nearly 40% were chaotic, according to Prof Andrews, who also narrated an interesting story of how Ramanujan had worked in advance on conjectures made later by other mathematicians, such as Freeman Dyson. **Dyson's conjectures**  
In 1944, Freeman Dyson had made an extremely unusual conjecture related to Ramanujan's partition congruences. This was called the "crank" of the partition function. Australian-born mathematician Frank Garvan, presently at University of Florida, who was Prof. Andrews' PhD student re-



## Question Corner

## Evergreen firs

## How do conifers keep their green needles over the boreal winter?

During boreal winter most trees shed their leaves. However, conifers such as Christmas trees keep their green needles intact. Scientists believe that a phenomenon called sustained quenching offers photoprotection and enables their survival, but its precise molecular and physiological mechanisms are not understood. Researchers have now found that the photosynthetic apparatus is wired in a special way which allows pine needles to stay green all year long. In winter, green chlorophyll molecules harness light energy, but that energy cannot be used in the photosynthetic machinery as very low temperature halts most

biochemical reactions. However, in early spring, even as temperatures are low, there is plenty of sunlight. The excess light energy can damage the photosynthetic machinery's proteins. Under normal

conditions, the two photosystems, the two functional units where light energy is absorbed and converted into chemical energy, are kept apart from each other to prevent a short-cut and allow efficient photosynthesis. According to a study published in *Nature Communications*, a team of researchers found that in winter, the two photosystems are brought in physical contact with each other through reorganisation of the structure of the thylakoid membrane, where the two photosystems are located. Photosystem II donates energy directly to photosystem I and this short-cut mode protects the green chlorophyll and the needles when conditions become harsh.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



## India and its neighbours

What were the major challenges to India's Neighbourhood First Policy this year?

SUHASINI HAIDAR

**The story so far:** This year, India faced a trifecta of challenges in its neighbourhood from China: the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing competition for influence in South Asia, and aggressive actions at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

### How has India helped tackle the regional COVID-19 challenge?

The COVID-19 pandemic that originated in China has led to one of the biggest health challenges, causing heavy economic damage in South Asia. India ranks second after the United States in terms of number of cases, and the worst-hit economy among G20 nations. But India is also one of the best poised nations to aid recovery efforts in the region, given its status as one of the world's leading producers of pharmaceutical drugs and vaccines. In March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a special virtual summit of eight SAARC nations and proposed a COVID-19 package, for which India provided about half of the \$20 million funding for relief. India's military ran a series of missions to SAARC countries and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with supplies of food and medicines, and India's 'Vande Bharat' mission flew home nationals from neighbouring countries, along with lakhs of Indians who had been stranded during the lockdown.

India was not the only country in the region providing help. China, too, stepped up efforts to extend its influence in the South Asian region through COVID-19 relief. Chinese Vice-Minister in-charge of the region, Luo Zhaohui, held meetings with different groups of SAARC countries, including one with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal, and another with Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to coordinate relief efforts, and promised to provide the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine to them when it is available. China also shipped relief to South Asia, sending out PPE suits and other medical equipment. Given that all SAARC countries except India and Bhutan are part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and owe different amounts of debts to Chinese banks, Beijing stepped in to provide partial debt waivers to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. It also extended a massive \$1.4-billion Line of Credit to Pakistan.

**The government's response to the challenges has been to assert its Neighbourhood First and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) strategies as foreign policy priorities**

**Did the military standoff impact regional ties?**  
China doubled down on territorial claims and its transgressions along its borders with South Asia: from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh, PLA soldiers amassed along various sectors of the LAC, leading to violent clashes. The deaths of 20 Indian soldiers at the Galwan valley was the first such casualty in 45 years. China also laid claim to Bhutan's Sakteng natural reserves and pushed along the boundary lines with Nepal, all of which changed India's strategic calculations along its Himalayan frontiers. That India and Nepal saw their worst tensions in decades over the construction of a road to Lipulekh, leading to Nepal amending its constitution and map to claim Indian territory, added to the already fraught situation. Meanwhile, a new defence pact this year between China and Pakistan vis-à-vis a sharp rise in ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan to the highest levels since 2003, has made it clear that India must factor in among its military challenges at the LAC the possibility of a two-front war.

### How has India dealt with a three-pronged challenge?

The government's response to the challenges has been to assert its Neighbourhood First and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) strategies as foreign policy priorities. Apart from the COVID-19 relief and neighbourhood visits, Mr. Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar have been in frequent touch with their counterparts in the region. Mr. Modi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina held a virtual summit on December 17. India has also upped its game on infrastructure delivery, particularly for regional connectivity in the past year, including completing railway lines to Bangladesh and Nepal, riverine projects, ferry service to the Maldives, identifying other services to Sri Lanka and IOR islands, while also considering debt waiver requests from its neighbours.

Unlike in the past, India has also become more flexible about the entry of other powers to help counter China's influence in the region – it recently welcomed the U.S.'s new military dialogue with the Maldives. America's Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) projects in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh are also finding more space.

Furthermore, as part of its Indo-Pacific policy, New Delhi is also encouraging its Quad partners – the U.S., Japan and Australia – to collaborate on security and infrastructure initiatives in the neighbourhood, along with promoting forays by other partners like the U.K., France and Germany in the region. It is also significant that despite considerable security challenges from China, India has not sought to elicit support from its neighbours, which might have put them in a difficult position. Thus, the Modi government has made it clear that despite the provocations, it intends to resolve the nearly ten-month-long military standoff diplomatically and bilaterally.

# A slump and green shoots of recovery

How is the Indian economy faring and what are the predictions on growth for 2021?

VIKAS DHOOT

**The story so far:** The year 2020 upended India's economy as much as it disrupted the rest of the world, along with all aspects of normal life, thanks to the novel coronavirus. But unlike most other peers, India's economy had already been hurtling downhill before the pandemic hit, and a snap national lockdown announced in late March scuppered virtually all activity for a while to come. There were two quarters of negative growth and widespread mayhem across the economy, barring some solace from agriculture. But as the year draws to a close, there is a glimmer of hope that the economy may see some recovery in 2021.

### Why was India hit hard?

By the beginning of 2020, India had already gotten off the 8% growth track for several quarters. From 8.18% growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) recorded between January and March of 2018, India decelerated steadily till it was trundling along at half the speed by the end of 2019, growing at just 4.08% this time last year. The lingering effects of demonetisation and a flawed implementation of the Goods and Services Tax were seen as some of the reasons for this sustained decline. Just before the pandemic struck, the government had already made multiple attempts to try and revive the economy. Post March, like in all other aspects of life, the pandemic managed to moderate expectations about the economy as well.

From condemning the slowdown in the economy a year ago, after two quarters of negative growth, even a zero-to-slow growth scenario seemed better.

### What happened in the quarter between January and March?

India's growth slowed to 3.09% between January and March this year, its lowest quarterly growth rate since 2012. This meant the country's growth for financial year 2019-20 was an insipid 4.2%. Several vital signs, including private consumption and exports, were at their worst levels in five or more years, suggesting that even if one were to discount the national lockdown announced at four hours' notice and implemented in the last week of March, the economy was not getting any better than before.

However, COVID-19 and the lockdown accelerated its collapse and unleashed widespread distress for households and wage-earners as almost all movement and economic activity was stopped.

### How were the States affected?

While officials used the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897, the rules of the lockdown were tweaked, altered and modified multiple times by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The rules were interpreted differently by State and local administrations. These differences also made inter-State movement tricky for goods as well as the millions of migrant workers who were stuck in their respective urban bases and trying to go back home, as cities and the opportunities they offered ground to a halt along with all trains, flights and buses.

### Who benefited from the stimulus package?

From an initial clampdown on all manufacturing sectors, barring essential goods like food and medicines, the government gradually realised that even pharma firms cannot make medicines without access to raw material and support services from ancillary industries, from ice factories to transporters, and most importantly, employees who were unable to reach their workplaces in the absence of public transport. Thus, many course corrections were made on the way – E-passes were launched for employees to reach their workplaces and



The RBI has estimated that India may register 14.2% growth between April and September, 2021. ■ AP

Several high-frequency indicators clocked remarkable improvements over October and November. The RBI believes growth in the first quarter of 2021 will be healthier as COVID-19 cases continue to dip

due to businesses and retail borrowers, the direct stimulus effect of this package was limited. In fact, some of the reforms it promised, like a new strategic disinvestment policy for public sector enterprises, are still awaited.

### Why did the April-June quarter see a sharp fall?

The economy contracted nearly 24% in the April-June quarter – the sharpest fall since quarterly growth began to be recorded in 1996. The only sector to deliver positive growth in the period was agriculture. But manufacturing output falling nearly 40%, services 20% and construction 50% from a year ago had a deep impact as these sectors generate the maximum employment. The strict lockdown had taken its toll, with job losses and salary cuts becoming the norm in the formal sector, while the informal sector silently withered. The rest of the world had also gone into the lockdown mode, but the damage to the economy in India was the sharpest among major economies. And despite this, the virus was far from contained and inflation crossed the 6% mark led by rising food prices.

### How did unlocking the economy help?

Marked by a progressive unlocking of the economy, by the end of the July-September quarter, the Home Ministry had even permitted the resumption of public transit systems, including metros. As subsequent data suggest, official COVID-19 cases in the country also peaked around

September. While most rating agencies and economists predicted that the economy would shrink by around 10%, India managed to record just a 7.5% contraction in the July-September quarter. Agricultural growth remained constant, while manufacturing managed to record positive growth. However, the rough patch was far from over for services such as retail trade and hotels (particularly impacted by social distancing norms) and sectors such as mining and construction. Among other things, rating agency CRISIL attributed the better-than-expected growth to pent-up demand finding expression after months of being locked up at home, cost savings for corporates (read 'retrenchments lowering staff costs') and a 'learning to live' attitude. Government spending – critical for India to get out of this economic rut – collapsed, even as inflation remained high.

### What is the RBI's view on growth prospects?

With the economy in a 'technical' recession after two successive quarters of contraction, the government unveiled a fresh round of support measures over October and November, and has pinned its hopes on breaking out of negative growth in the October to December quarter.

A 'nowcast' released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday suggests that it may indeed be possible, with a slender 0.1% growth. Indeed, several high-frequency indicators clocked remarkable improvements over October and November. But their coincidence with India's festive season, and a reported flattening in activity after the Deepawali festival, make it difficult to assess if this recovery is real and sustainable. The RBI believes that growth in the first quarter of 2021 will be even healthier as COVID-19 cases continue to dip.

The six months between April and September 2021 could register 14.2% growth, the central bank estimates (no doubt helped by the negative growth in the comparative period of this year). That optimism, and the hopes of an imminent vaccine option for Indians, should ideally help the economy leave 2020 and its worst manifestations behind.

# Understanding the new COVID-19 variant

Are viruses expected to change form and will vaccines protect against a mutating SARS-CoV-2?

RAMYA KANNAN

**The story so far:** A year after the novel coronavirus announced itself in China, there was yet another critical update in December this year – the emergence of a new strain of the virus, caused by mutations, that seemed to be 70% more transmissible. Mutations were reported from different parts of the world, including Denmark, Australia, England and South Africa, but the rapid domination of the new strain – lineage B.1.1.7 – in the south of England set off a chain of events, including curbs on travel and Christmas celebrations in the country, and several nations temporarily suspending flights originating from the United Kingdom.

### What is the WHO saying?

Speaking about the new English variant, World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus cited a basic fact of virology, that viruses mutate over time and it is natural and is to be expected. Trying to counter many ill-informed discussions triggered by panic from the usage of the word 'mutation', he said the U.K. had reported that the transmission was higher, but there was no evidence that it causes a more severe disease. Ongoing studies will clear the air on this angle.

### Why do viruses mutate?

Mutation is part of the life cycle of a virus. Once the virus latches onto a host, it begins to replicate and make copies of itself. During the process of virus replication, random errors arise, one or two protein molecules change, possibly induced by the immune response mounted within infected people, explains P.B. Rajesh, vice-president, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, U.K. These changes in the genomic structure of the virus can be considered mutations. Not all mutations are significant, but those that affect the virus's ability to survive or replicate are important.

### How was the new strain identified?

The English variant was identified in genomic surveillance by COVID-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK), a consortium that analyses genome sequencing data from the U.K. On its website, COG-UK says, "Mutations arise naturally in the SARS-CoV-2 genome as the virus replicates and circulates in the human population ... As a result of this on-going process, many thousands of mutations have already arisen in the SARS-CoV-2 genome



The increase in cases linked to the new variant first came to light in late November when PHE was investigating why infection rates in Kent were not falling despite national restrictions. They then discovered a cluster linked to this variant that was spreading rapidly into London and Essex.

### Can it be detected through PCR tests?

Does the PCR test done to detect the virus also pick up this variant, or is it harder to detect? Answering the oft-asked question, Dr. Rajesh says the PCR test is used to identify a number of gene targets and will pick up this variant too. The U.K.'s Chief Medical Officer, Chris Whitty, has said that current swab tests are able to identify the new variant.

### Is it known how a vaccine will react?

While studies are on to determine the impact of the vaccine on severity of disease or mortality, Dr. Rajesh explains, "What we need to know about the new variant is its implication for the vaccine, but at this point of time, it is unknown. It is still early to be certain. Ongoing work is something we are looking forward to. What does this variation do for a vaccine which will any way stimulate a broad antibody response? The hope is that it won't be significantly hampered by the mutation."

Vincent Rajkumar, haematologist and oncologist at Mayo Clinic, in Minnesota, United States, however, urges nations to soldier on with vaccination. "The worry is whether the vaccine will have an impact on the new variant strain because the amino acid sequence in the spike is altered. But my response to this is: vaccines, vaccines, vaccines. Vaccines will reduce the number of people who get infected, reduce the number of people spreading the infections, lower the number of hosts, lower the chances of further mutations, and allow us to get things under control."

Vaccines will offer protection even from a mutant virus. By their very nature, they will make a variety of different antibodies and memory cells that will help fight off the infection, he adds.

### How can you protect yourself?

Simply by following the original advice on COVID-19 hygiene. Using a face mask, regularly washing hands, and maintaining distance with others when in a public setting will continue to be the best practical ways to prevent the infection, experts insist.

DLF arm to buy out Hines in Gurugram unit for ₹780 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Realty major DLF's rental arm DCCDL has agreed to acquire the entire 52% stake of U.S.-based Hines in a premium commercial project in Gurugram for ₹780 crore.

In a regulatory filing, DLF said its joint venture firm DLF Cyber City Developers Ltd. (DCCDL) had "entered into a securities purchase agreement with funds managed by Hines for acquisition of their stake in Fairleaf Real Estate, which owns and operates 'One Horizon Center'."

DCCDL is a joint venture firm of DLF and Singapore's sovereign wealth fund GIC. DLF holds 66.66% stake in DCCDL while GIC has the rest.

"The purchase consideration for this acquisition is approximately ₹780 crore, subject to customary closing adjustments," DLF said.

**Income of ₹150-160 cr.**  
The commercial tower 'One Horizon Center' has a leasable area of about 8,13,000 sq. ft. The acquisition is expected to be completed in the next quarter.

DLF's MD-Rental Business, Sriram Khattar, said, "We will fund this acquisition from internal accruals and bank loans." The deal is likely to be completed by February, he said, adding that the firm would get an additional annual rental income of ₹150-160 crore after this deal is concluded.

Market sources said the deal had been struck at an enterprise value of ₹2,000 crore. The project has debt of ₹500 crore. Post acquisition, DCCDL will have 34 million sq. ft of operational rental portfolio.

# Rule of 1% GST liability payable in cash may impact 45,000 units

Input tax credit may be used for up to 99% of GST due; rule meant to check fraud

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The mandatory requirement of 1% cash payment of GST liability effective January 1 would be applicable to about 45,000 taxpayers, Revenue Department sources said on Saturday. This comes to only 0.37% of the total businesses registered in the Goods and Services Tax system, they added.

To curb tax evasion by way of fake invoicing, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) had recently made it mandatory for businesses with monthly turnover of more than ₹50 lakh to pay at least 1% of their GST liability in cash. The new rule restricts



**Plugging the leaks:** Brought in recently, the rule may affect about 0.37% of the GST taxpayer base, say sources. ■ AFP

use of input tax credit (ITC) for discharging GST liability to 99% effective January 1, 2021.

However, this restriction will not apply in cases where the managing director or any

partner has paid more than ₹1 lakh as income tax or the registered person has received a refund amount of more than ₹1 lakh in the preceding financial year on account of unutilised input tax

credit. Sources said data analysis showed that of the total GST taxpayer base of 1.2 crore, only about 4 lakh have monthly supply value greater than ₹50 lakh. Of these, only about 1.5 lakh pay less than 1% of their GST liability in cash. "When exclusions in the rule are applied, around 1.05 lakh taxpayers get further excluded from these 1.5 lakh taxpayers. Thus, the rule would apply only to 40,000 to 45,000 taxpayers," sources said.

The CBIC has booked about 12,000 cases of ITC fraud and arrested 365 persons in such cases so far. In the last 6 weeks alone, more than 165 fraudsters have been arrested.

The Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has appointed Taruvai Subaya Krishnamurthy, former Chief Election Commissioner of India, as observer for the process of e-voting by unitholders of six schemes of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund. Voting is scheduled to take place between December 26 and December 29, it said in a statement.

## SEBI appoints ex-CEC as observer for FTMF voting

Panel to assist T.S. Krishnamurthy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Supreme Court had December 9 directed SEBI to appoint an observer for the e-voting and had asked for the results of the e-voting to be produced before it in a sealed cover, along with the report of the observer appointed by the SEBI. In a statement, SEBI said Mr. Krishnamurthy had been



appointed on December 18 as observer. SEBI has also constituted a technical assistance team comprising B.N. Sahoo, CGM, SEBI; Nayana Ovalekar, COO, Central Depository Services Ltd.; K. Sriram, practising company secretary and Scrutiniser; and M. Krishna and Ch. E. Sai Prasad, Assistant Directors of the Central Forensic Science Laboratory, Hyderabad, to assist the observer.

Rajasthan may borrow ₹2,731 cr. more'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Saturday said it had permitted Rajasthan to borrow an additional ₹2,731 crore after the State successfully undertook ease-of-doing-business reforms.

Rajasthan joined five others – Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana – that have completed the reform to be eligible for additional borrowing. The six States have been granted permission for additional borrowing of ₹19,459 crore. Ease of doing business is indicative of the investment-friendly business climate. The Centre had in May decided to link grant of additional borrowing approval to States that undertake these reforms.

## India to become fifth-largest economy in 2025: think tank

To occupy 3rd slot by 2030; China to outpace U.S. in 2028\*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

India, which appears to have been pushed back to being the world's sixth-biggest economy in 2020, will again overtake the U.K. to become the fifth-largest in 2025 and race to the third spot by 2030, a think tank said on Saturday.

India had overtaken the U.K. in 2019 to become the fifth-largest economy. India has been knocked off course somewhat through the impact of the pandemic. As a result, after overtaking the U.K. in 2019, the U.K. overtakes India again in this year's forecasts and stays



ahead till 2024 before India takes over again," the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) said in an annual report published on Saturday. The U.K. appears to have overtaken India again during 2020 as a result of the weakness of the ru-

pee, it said. CEBR forecast that the Indian economy would expand by 9% in 2021 and by 7% in 2022. "Growth will naturally slow as India becomes more economically developed, with annual GDP growth expected to sink to 5.8% in 2035."

India would overtake "Germany in 2027 and Japan in 2030," it said. The U.K.-based think tank forecast that China would overtake the U.S. to become the world's biggest economy in 2028, five years earlier than estimated due to the contrasting recoveries of the two countries from the pandemic.

## Demand for home-relocation, storage services rising due to WFH trends'

Agarwal Packer and Movers capitalising on the opportunity, says CEO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Work-From-Home (WFH) norms and the preference to move to hometowns – to save on rent or to seek alternative sources of livelihood amid the COVID-19 pandemic – has led to a spurt in demand for relocation and storage services, said Anjani Kumar Agarwal, CEO, Agarwal Packers and Movers (DRS Group, Hyderabad).

"Although there was no activity in the initial period of the lockdown, the real action started from August with the easing of lockdown. WFH has been driving the relocation business over the



last three months," he said. "During the pandemic, people have realised the importance of owning a house and many of them also temporarily moved homes to other towns and cities. The need for hygiene and safety measures during the pan-

demic has moved some of the relocation business from unorganised to organised players as we have pre-defined safety measures and undertaken audits," he added.

He said the company had also seen more demand for storage solutions and capitalised on the opportunity.

### Secure storage

"We have seen a massive increase in storage solutions usage in the last few months. Some individuals are moving back to their hometowns, pushing up demand for storage solutions, where household items and other belongings are stocked securely in

warehouses for a desired period at a nominal rental cost," he said.

"We are witnessing an increase in usage by 25% during the last couple of months, indicating the trend is here to stay. Some of our patrons have been from banking, defence, ITeS, and public sector," Mr. Agarwal added.

Generally, 80% of the relocation business comes from defence, ITeS, PSU and private sector employees moving from one city to another following transfers. Now, the work-from-home trend is driving the business, according to the company.

## Year 2021 to see massive digital acceleration: HCL Tech

Tech, life sciences, financial services to see strong growth'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

Technology service companies are seeing strong interest across sectors to invest and capitalise on the opportunities created through faster cloud migration, cybersecurity, blockchain, analytics and Internet of Things-based solutions and managed services, according to HCL Technologies.

"The year 2021 will see massive digital acceleration across all sectors. COVID-19 has proven that technology can be the single greatest factor in enabling businesses to survive and thrive," said the company.

Sectors such as energy, manufacturing and auto may see slower recovery while others such as technology, telecom, life sciences and financial services would continue to record strong growth, it said.

Additionally, sectors heavily impacted by the pandemic, such as retail and hospitality are in the process of transforming and redefining their business models and customer engagement for 'zero-touch' interactions, by leveraging conversational AI, analytics and numerous digital innovations, as per the company.

In its outlook, the firm

said the COVID-19 pandemic had been responsible for a year of uncertainty and fear across the world, yet the tech sector as a whole, and tech services in particular, had been able to manage through the turbulence and will emerge stronger overall.

Global IT companies, including those of Indian origin, are experiencing business recovery and strengthening outlook as clients seek and shift their investments to more technology and automation to drive their businesses forward, enable remote working and ensure that their data is secure, the firm added.

## SPORT

### IN BRIEF

## Williamson drops anchor

Taylor and Nicholls provide support; Afridi shines



**On the ball:** Kane Williamson's grit was on display once again much to Pakistan's chagrin. ■ AP

### PAKISTAN IN NZ

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MOUNT MAUNGANUI

An unbeaten 94 by a gritty Kane Williamson had New Zealand at 222 for three in the face of a concerted Pakistan attack at stumps on day one of the first Test here on Saturday. The Kiwi captain and Ross Taylor put on 120 runs for the third wicket.

Henry Nicholls was the other not out batsman (on 42) as New Zealand recovered from 13 for two after Pakistan's baby-faced pacer Shaheen Afridi removed openers Tom Latham and Tom Blundell cheaply on a green, seaming wicket.

Meanwhile, injured opener Imam-ul-Haq has been ruled out of the second Test due and will return home on Sunday, the Pakistan Cricket Board said in Karachi.

### SCOREBOARD

New Zealand – 1st innings: T. Latham c Azhar b Afridi 4, T. Blundell c Yasir b Afridi 5, K. Williamson (batting) 94, R. Taylor c Rizwan b Afridi 70, H. Nicholls (batting) 42; Extras (lb-3, nb-4); 7; Total (three wkts. in 87 overs): 222.

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-13, 3-133.

Pakistan bowling: Afridi 20-5-55-3, Abbas 21-11-25-0, Ashraf 13-5-30-0, Naseem 15-1-51-0, Yasir 16-2-56-0, Shan 2-1-2-0.

Toss: Pakistan.

## Conscious Gift for Crack Regiment Plate

HYDERABAD: L. D' Silva-trainee Conscious Gift, who ran third in his last start, should make amends in the Crack Regiment Plate, the main event of Sunday's (Dec. 27) races. Rails will be announced one hour before the first race.

1. GALACTICA PLATE (I, 1,200m), Maiden, 2-y-o only (Cat. II), 1.30 p.m.: 1. Ashwa Raudee (9) Trevor 56, 2. Baudelaire (5) Zeran 56, 3. Grand Duke (8) Nakhat Singh 56, 4. Indian Glory (3) Irvan Singh 56, 5. Paladino (10) Arshad Alam 56, 6. Special Effort (12) Surya Prakash 56, 7. Ashwa Pushkin (1) Ashad Asbar 54.5, 8. Galwan (2) Suraj Narredu 54.5, 9. Golden Amar (6) A.A. Vlakrant 54.5, 10. Lifes Song (II) Akshay Kumar 54.5, 11. New Look (7) Ajit Singh 54.5 and 12. Southern Thir (4) Kuldeep Singh 54.5.

1. AMYRA, 2. CASTLEROCK, 3. JUST INCREDIBLE

2. SOLITAIRE PLATE (DIV. I) (1,600m), rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 2.30: 1. Horus (6) Suraj Narredu 62.5, 2. Nova Scotia (9) Gaurav Singh 60.5, 3. Royal Pal (1) Nakhat Singh 59, 4. Platinum Classz (5) Afroz Khan 58.5, 5. That's My King (2) Md. Ismail 55.5, 6. Healthandhi (7) Gopal Singh 54.5, 7. Farmville (3) Kuldeep Singh 53, 8. Shanti Shantu (7) Santosh Raj N R 54.5, 9. Diesis Dream (8) Arshad Alam 53.5, 10. A Hundred Echoes (4) B. Kumar 50.

1. HORUS, 2. ROYAL PAL, 3. LIFES SONG

3. ZURBARAN PLATE (DIV. II) (1,400m), Maiden, 3-y-o & upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 2.00: 1. Amryra (6) Trevor 56, 2. Just Incredible (5) Suraj Narredu 56, 3. Lightning Pearl (16) Ajeeth Kumar 57, 4. Belle Springs (3) Arshad Alam 56, 5. Sterling King (12) Gaddam 55.5, 6. Echoes Of Heaven (9) Kuldeep Singh 55, 7. King Roger (4) Akshay Kumar 55.5, 8. Thunder Road (10) Gaurav Singh 55, 9. Greek Soul (1) Irvan Singh 54.5, 10. Turf Monarch (11) M.R.I Sun (12) Irvan Singh 56.5, 11. Look Of Love (7) Gaurav Singh 55, 12. Look Of Love (7) Gaurav Singh 55, 13. Certitude (1) Santosh Raj N R 55, 14. Art In Motion (16) Ajit Singh 54.5, 15. Melting Ice (9) Nakhat Singh 54, 16. Sweet Brandy (14) B.R. Kumar 51.5.

1. SAFFRON ART, 2. CRAZY HORSE, 3. AIBAK

4. CRACK REGIMENT PLATE (PLATE) (I, 200m), rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II), 4.00: 1. Her Legacy (4) Kiran Naidu 60, 2. Meka's (2) G. Kiran 60, 3. Marinetti (6) Kuldeep Singh 59.5, 4. King Maker (11) Surya Prakash 58, 5. Loch Stetla (9) Jitendra Singh 58, 6. Apollo (14) Ashad Asbar 56, 7. Incredulous (1) A.A. Vlakrant 55.5, 8. La Mer (7) Md. Ismail 55, 9. Ashwa Arjun (3) Gaurav Singh 54.5, 10. Conscious Gift (13) Akshey Kumar 55.5, 11. Royal Avenger (5) G.Nareesh 55, 12. Twenty Two (2) Kuldeep Singh 57, 13. Sporting Smile (8) B.R. Kumar 53.5, 14. Flamenco Fame (5) Santosh Raj N R 52.5 and 15. Mind Reader (15) Nakhat Singh 52.5.

1. CONSCIOUS GIFT, 2. CRAZY HORSE, 3. WAH MS ZARA

5. ZURBARAN PLATE (DIV. III) (1,400m), Maiden, 3-y-o & upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 4.30: 1. Explosive (2) Irvan Singh 61.5, 2. Forever Splendour (2) Team Player (12) Nakhat Singh 59.5, 3. Lifetime (3) Ajeeth Kumar 58.5, 4. Peaky Blinders (4) Akshay Kumar 58.5, 5. Fashion Universe (5) Koushik 57.5, 6. Amaretto (10) Gaddam 57, 7. Charcoal (9) Ajit Singh 57, 8. Dead Centre (11) Jodha R S 57, 9. Grand Finale (8) A.A. Vlakrant 57, 10. Machismo (Ex. Rathasapthami) (13) Gaurav Singh 57, 11. Twenty Two (2) Kuldeep Singh 57, 12. Beautiful Luv (7) Afroz Khan 56.5, 13. Kenya (14) Trevor 55.5, 14. Queen Blossom (4) Kiran Naidu 55.5 and 15. Moringa (15) Surya Prakash 55.

1. PEAKY BLINDERS, 2. CHUCKIT, 3. GRAND FINALE

Day's best: AMYRA  
Double: HORUS

– PEAKY BLINDERS

Jackpot: 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7; Mini jackpot: (i) 1, 2, 3 &

# India skittles out Australia for 195

Bumrah, Ashwin show the way as bowlers hold sway on the opening day

## INDIA IN AUS

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
MELBOURNE

A resilient India bounced back from an embarrassing first Test debacle to bundle out Australia for just 195 and take a grip on the second Test after a riveting opening day here on Saturday.

After their horror show in Adelaide last week, where they lost by eight wickets and were skittled out for 36 in their second innings, the visitors were desperate to start well. And they delivered after Australia captain Tim Paine chose to bat in front of 27,615 socially-distanced fans, just short of the maximum allowed under coronavirus restrictions at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

### Tough going

On a pitch offering turn and bounce, the hosts found it hard going against a high-quality attack led by Jasprit Bumrah (4/56), Ravi Ashwin (3/35) and impressive debutant Mohammed Siraj (2/40).

Marnus Labuschagne top-scored with 48. It left India openers Shubman Gill, also on debut, and Mayank Agarwal needing to negotiate 40 minutes at the end of the day. Mayank was trapped lbw by a Mitchell Starc inswinger in the first over.

Gill was dropped on five by Labuschagne, but otherwise looked comfortable, smacking five boundaries to reach 28 and help steer India



**Setting the tone:** Jasprit Bumrah lands the first of his four victims, Joe Burns for a duck. ■ AFP

to 36 for one at close with the experienced Cheteshwar Pujara unbeaten on seven.

With Ajinkya Rahane captaining in place of Virat Kohli, who has returned home for the birth of his first child, India got off to a perfect start, getting Burns (0), Matthew Wade (30) and Smith (0) before lunch.

It left Australia in trouble but Labuschagne rode his luck, surviving two review decisions, to lead a recovery, putting on 86 with Travis Head (38). Head had a nervous start but grew in confidence before Bumrah enticed an edge which carried to Rahane at gully.

Labuschagne looked set for a ninth half-century but a

## STATOSPHERE

**1** Ashwin is the first spinner with multiple wickets in the very first session of a Boxing Day Test. The last finger spinner before Ashwin to claim three or more wickets on day one of a Test at the MCG was Shastri in 1985-86

**1** First time Smith has been dismissed for a duck in Tests since Nov. 2016. This is also the first time he has got out without scoring in the first innings of a Test

brilliant catch by Gill ended his vigil and handed Siraj his first Test wicket. All-rounder Cameron Green ground out

**5** Gill has the fifth highest average (68.78, 23 matches) in First Class cricket among Indians at the time of Test debut

### The top four:

**88.37 Kamblu (27 mat)**

**81.23 Amre (23)**

**71.28 Modi (38)**

**70.18 Tendulkar (9)**

**9** Siraj and Gill are the ninth Indian pair of Test debutants whose first wicket and first dismissal came together (Labuschagne)

12 before he too fell to Siraj, then an excellent catch by Hanuma Vihari off Ashwin accounted for Paine (I3).

## SCOREBOARD

### AUSTRALIA – 1ST INNINGS

Joe Burns c Pant b Bumrah 0 (10b), Matthew Wade c Jadeja b Ashwin 30 (39b, 3x4), Marnus Labuschagne c Gill b Siraj 48 (132b, 4x4), Steve Smith c Pujara b Ashwin 0 (8b), Travis Head c Rahane b Bumrah 38 (92b, 4x4), Cameron Green lbw b Siraj 12 (60b), Tim Paine c Vihari b Ashwin 13 (38b, 2x4), Pat Cummins c Siraj b Jadeja 9 (33b, 1x4), Mitchell Starc c Siraj b Bumrah 7 (8b, 1x4), Nathan Lyon lbw b Bumrah 20 (17b, 2x4, 1x6), Josh Hazlewood (not out) 4 (1b, 1x4); Extras (b-10, nb-3, w-1): 14; Total (in 72.3 overs): 195.

### FALL OF WICKETS

1-10 (Burns, 4.2 overs), 2-35 (Wade, 12.5), 3-38 (Smith, 14.3), 4-124 (Head, 41.5), 5-134 (Labuschagne, 49.3), 6-155 (Green, 61.4), 7-155 (Paine, 62.6), 8-164 (Starc, 67.1), 9-191 (Lyon, 71.5).

### INDIA BOWLING

Bumrah 16-4 56-4, Umesh 12-2-39-0, Ashwin 24-7-35-3, Jadeja 5.3-1-15-1, Siraj 15-4-40-2.

### INDIA – 1ST INNINGS

Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc 0 (6b), Shubman Gill (batting) 28 (38b, 5x4), Cheteshwar Pujara (batting) 7 (23b, 1x4); Extras (nb-1): 1; Total (for one wkt. in 11 overs): 36.

### FALL OF WICKET

1-0 (Mayank, 0.6 overs).

### AUSTRALIA BOWLING

Starc 4-2-14-1, Cummins 4-1-

14-0, Hazlewood 2-0-2-0, Lyon 1-0-6-0.

### Toss: Australia.

## Dean Jones remembered



**Paying tribute:** Allan Border walks with Dean Jones' wife and daughters. ■ GETTY IMAGES

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
MELBOURNE

Dean Jones was paid tributes at his home ground, the MCG, on Saturday by Indian and Australian players, who were joined by his wife, daughters and former Australia captain Allan Border.

Jones' family and former Australia captain Border participated in the farewell during the tea break.

Border, Jones' wife Jane, and daughters – Augusta and Phoebe – walked to the centre, carrying his baggy green, sunglasses and Kookaburra bat and laid the items on the stumps at the Great Southern Stand end of the ground.

Later, the 12th men from both sides – K.L. Rahul and James Pattinson – collected the items and rested them on a seat by the boundary.

## Good interaction paid off, says Bumrah

**S. DIPAK RAGAV**

Jasprit Bumrah, who starred with four-wicket haul on Saturday, said good communication amongst the bowlers helped India seize the advantage on day one of the second Test.

"We decided to help each other and have good communication with regards to how the wicket is changing and what the batsman is doing," said Bumrah.

Commenting on the game-plan of trying to squeeze the Australian batsmen with a heavy leg-side field, a ploy that came under praise from Marnus Labuschagne, Bumrah said "there was a constant discussion between the bowlers and the captain. The wicket got better to bat on after the first session as the moisture had dried out.

"When there was less

help, we tried to change the line and set fields accordingly."

Explaining the strategy of using a spinner as the first-change, when R. Ashwin was introduced in the first hour of play, Bumrah said "there was some moisture on the wicket and you saw Ashwin and Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja) get some spin. Ashwin was getting good bounce as well."

The 26-year-old pacer praised Siraj, who got the crucial wickets of Labuschagne and Cameron Green, for his efforts.

"He was eager to bowl in the first session. When he started after lunch, there wasn't a lot happening but he bowled with a lot of control. Then he started getting some movement and tried to make the best of it.

"He had the confidence in using all his skills," Bumrah added.



**What a start!** Mohammed Siraj celebrates his maiden Test wicket with skipper Ajinkya Rahane after having Marnus Labuschagne caught by fellow-debutant Shubman Gill. ■ AFP

## Lakers make merry

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
LOS ANGELES

Anthony Davis scored 28 points while LeBron James added 22 as defending NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers routed Dallas Mavericks 138-115 in Friday's feature game of a record-setting Christmas slate.

James rose to second on the NBA's all-time Christmas points list with 383, passing Oscar Robertson by six to pull within 12 of matching the late Kobe Bryant's career record.

**The results:** Los Angeles Lakers bt Dallas Mavericks 138-115; Boston Celtics lost to Brooklyn Nets 123-95; Miami Heat bt New Orleans Pelicans 111-98; Milwaukee Bucks bt Golden State Warriors 138-99; Denver Nuggets lost to Los Angeles Clippers 121-108.

## De Silva and Chandimal come good

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
CENTURION

Dhananjaya de Silva and Dinesh Chandimal put Sri Lanka in a strong position on the first day of the first Test against South Africa here on Saturday.

De Silva made 79 (105b, 11x4, 1x6), before retiring hurt with what appeared to be a left-hip injury, and former captain Chandimal hit 85 (161b, 11x4) as the visitors reached 340 for six at the close.

Their stand of 131 stabilized the Lankan innings after a helter-skelter start in which it lost the first three wickets for 54 runs.

Chandimal and Niroshan Dickwella (49) added another 99 runs before

## SCOREBOARD

**Sri Lanka – 1st innings:** D. Karunaratne b Ngidi 22, K. Perera c de Kock b Mulder 16, K. Mendis c Ngidi b Nortje 12, D. Chandimal c du Plessis b Mulder 85, D. de Silva retd. hurt 79, N. Dickwella lbw b Mulder 49, D. Shanaka (batting) 25, W. Hasaranga b Sipamla 18, K. Rajitha (batting) 7; Extras (b-8, lb-8, nb-5, w-6): 27; Total (for six wkts. in 85 overs): 340.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-28, 2-54, 3-54, 4-284, 5-296, 6-320.

**South Africa bowling:** Ngidi 16-2-54-1, Sipamla 14-1-68-1, Nortje 18-3-60-1, Mulder 18-3-68-3, Maharaj 19-3-74-0.

**Toss:** Sri Lanka.

## Leicester ends United's away streak

**REUTERS**  
LEICESTER

Leicester City came back twice to end Manchester United's away winning streak in the Premier League with a 2-2 draw at the King Power stadium on Saturday.

**The result:** Leicester 2 (Barnes 31, Vardy 85) drew with Manchester United 2 (Rashford 23, Fernandes 79).

## Harikrishna holds Vachier

**RAKESH RAO**  
NEW DELHI

P. Harikrishna drew with Frenchman Maxime Vacher-Lagrave, following perpetual checks in 27 moves, and made a quiet start in the \$200,000 Arithings Masters online rapid chess tournament.

But within moments, CFC surrendered the lead yet again from a set-piece when goalkeeper Vishal Kaith failed to collect a header from Daniel Fox, the ball falling in front of Steinmann, who drilled it in without trouble.

Hikaru Nakamura emerged as the lone winner at the expense of Alexander Grischuk.

**The results (first round):** P. Harikrishna drew with Maxime Vacher-Lagrave (Fra); Magnus Carlsen (Nor) drew with Levon Aronian (Arm); Alexander Grischuk (Rus) lost to Hikaru Nakamura (USA); Anish Giri (Ned) drew with Nepomniachtchi (Rus); David Anton Guijarro (Esp) drew with Wesley So (USA); Daniil Dubov (Rus) drew with Teimour Radjabov (Aze).

## EB draws with Chennaiyin

**ISL 2020-21**

**SPORTS BUREAU**

A brilliant brace from Matti Steinmann allowed SC East Bengal to come back from behind twice to salvage a 2-2 draw against Chennaiyin FC in the Boxing Day match of the Indian Super League at the Tilak Maidan Stadium, Vasco, on Saturday.

In the 13th minute, Sylvestre lobbed one from the centre-line to release an unmarked Lallianzuala Chhangte. The latter then used his speed to produce a good run on the left side and shot through the pursuing defender and keeper to put CFC ahead.

It was Chhangte's first goal of the season and a much-needed one for the Indian who has squandered more than half a dozen chances so far in this tournament.

East Bengal's best chance came in the 38th minute when Mohammed Rafique received a ball over the CFC defenders and dodged the

keeper to get into an open goal position. However, Deepak Tangri produced a sliding clearance from behind as Rafique delayed taking his shot to steady himself.

In the 59th minute, Steinmann, who was unmarked, headed in a corner from CFC Crivellaro and Sylvestre, who gave the final assist to the Indian striker.

But within moments, CFC surrendered the lead yet again from a set-piece when goalkeeper Vishal Kaith failed to collect a header from Daniel Fox, the ball falling in front of Steinmann, who drilled it in without trouble.

**The result:** SC East Bengal 2 (Steinmann 59, 68) drew with Chennaiyin FC 2 (Chhangte 13, Rahim 64).

**Sunday's match:** Kerala Blasters vs Hyderabad FC, 7.30 pm.

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