


DECCAN Chronicle




THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SATURDAY | 19 DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER

 **Max:** 31.0°C
Min: 20.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL
Forecast: Mostly Cloudy.
Max/Min temp.
31/20 °C

COVID-19 CUNT

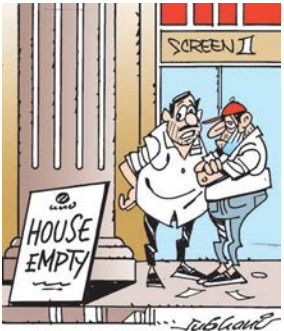
CASES	DEATHS
(+26,860)	(+338)
1,00,04,620	1,45,167
<i>covid19india.org</i>	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+551)	(+1)
TS: 2,80,195	1,506
(+458)	(+1)
AP: 8,77,806	7,070

CASES AROUND THE WORLD	
 7,56,26,856	
 DEATHS	
16,74,385	
 COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES	
218	
<i>worldometers.info/coronavirus</i>	

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Panchami till 2.19 pm
Star: Dhanistha till 7.14 pm
Varjyam: 3:20 am to 5:51 am(Sunday)
Durmuhurtam: 6:44 am to 8:12 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10:30 am
HILIRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Aakhir 3, 1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5:30 am
Zohar: 1:30 pm
Asar: 4:15 pm
Maghrib: 5:38 pm
Isha: 8:30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.27 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.33 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 10.31 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 23.03 PM

COUNTER POINT



When will we get to see 'House Full' boards again?

SHORT TAKES

AP showers sops on cine theatres

Vijayawada: A meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, presided over by Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, has approved a package for restarting the film industry. Disclosing details about Cabinet decisions, information minister Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani said many theaters closed in March are yet to reopen. Hence, the government has decided to waive fixed power charges of theaters for three months (April, May, and June). Further, payments for six months have been postponed for multiplexes and other theaters.

■ Full report on Page 2

Covid spread due to lack of SoPs

New Delhi: It is a “world war” against Covid-19 and the unprecedented pandemic has spread like a “wildfire” due to lack of implementation of guidelines and standard operating procedure (SoPs) issued by authorities to contain it, the Supreme Court said on Friday while expressing concern that the treatment for coronavirus was not affordable to the common people. The SC, suggested either more provisions are to be made by the states and the local administrations or there shall be a cap on the fees charged by private hospitals.

NATION | 4

Sonia to meet Cong letter writers



WORLD | 5

Pence takes vaccine, Trump sparks confusion

SPORTS | 8

Ashwin bowls India back into game



Defending farm laws, PM says talk of ending MSP biggest lie

Claims Oppn parties are envious of him getting credit for farm reforms

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/BHOPAL, DEC. 18

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a scathing attack on the Opposition for “peddling lies” to mislead farmers on the new agricultural reform laws, which have triggered nationwide protests, and said he was ready “with folded hands” to “discuss every issue” with the farmers and allay their fears.

Addressing a “kisan samelan” (farmers’ conference) at Raisen, Madhya Pradesh, via video-conferencing on Friday, the PM claimed the measures were discussed by every government over the past two decades, and that the talk about Minimum Support Price (MSP) ending with the new laws “is the biggest lie ever”.

“These laws were not brought in overnight. In the past 22 years, every government, every state has discussed these in detail. Farmers’ groups, agricultural experts, economists, scientists and progressive farmers have called for reforms. Parties opposing these laws today promised these reforms in their manifestos,” Mr Modi said.

“If anyone has any concerns, then with our heads bowed and our hands folded, with humility, we are willing to discuss with them and assuage their fears,” he added. “The (Opposition) parties are pained today. They are asking themselves how Modi could achieve what they couldn’t do in all this time. They are worried Modi will get credit. My reply to them is — you keep the credit. I don’t want credit. I only want farmers’ lives to improve. Stop misleading the farmers.”

The PM has in most of his recent speeches tried



Hundreds of farmers along with their family members protest against the new farm laws on Friday, at Kundli border in Sonipat on the Delhi-Haryana border.

— PTI

Agitating farmers set to celebrate R-Day in Delhi

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

With negotiations between the farmers’ unions and the Centre locked in an impasse, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Friday said the government was hopeful of resolving the farmers’ agitation over the three new farm laws before the new year and was continuing its informal dialogue with various groups to defuse the crisis. Speaking to a news

agency, Mr Tomar reiterated that the new laws were beneficial for farmers. Asked about his recent remark that he would engage with “genuine” farm leaders, the minister said: “When I say genuine, I mean those who are really concerned about farmers. There is no point to talking with those who want to shoot from the shoulders of farmers.”

Despite the government’s repeated assurances that the new laws were for the benefit of

farmers, thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana have been protesting at Delhi’s borders for over three weeks. Several protesting leaders have even threatened to step up the agitation and have said they are prepared to celebrate Republic Day next year with a tractor rally on Delhi’s borders.

Farmers at the Singhu border have started making further arrangements to face the increasing cold weather conditions.

State approves APMERC, Rythu Bharosa Phase III

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 18

The State Cabinet has approved setting up of Andhra Pradesh Medical Education and Research Corporation (APMERC), third phase of Rythu Bharosa, apart from several other benefits and concessions.

The Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan

● **THE CABINET** also okayed release of ₹1,009 crore, which will be directly deposited into the bank accounts of 54.47 lakh farmers under the Rythu Bandhu scheme

Mohan Reddy, also okayed release of ₹1,009 crore, which will be directly

deposited into the bank accounts of 54.47 lakh farmers under Rythu Bandhu.

Briefing media about decisions of the Cabinet meeting, information minister Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani said APMERC will be set up over 40 acres in Tirupati.

■ **Page 2:** Decision taken on reopening hotels

Ammonium nitrate ships to go to Odisha

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 18

Once the last of four ships unloads its ammonium nitrate cargo at the Visakhapatnam Port, further unloading of consignments, if permitted by the government, may be only from Paradeep Port in Odisha, shipping sources said.

They maintain that the government is in two minds, whether to contin-

ue importing the nitrate or cut down imports and increase domestic production.

Currently, only about seven lakh tonnes of nitrate is being manufactured within the country.

Meanwhile, the last ship carrying ammonium nitrate will berth at Visakhapatnam Port in a week.

■ **Page 2:** Heavy curbs on storing nitrate

RIPPLE | EFFECT

Even after unlock, people fail to cope with lifestyle changes; psychiatrist consultations on rise

Covid-19 fear triggers cases of mental illness

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Months of ‘unlocking’ the lockdown has not brought down anxiety, adjustment disorders and chronic loneliness in a section of people who still fear that they could contract Covid-19.

Anxiety and adjustment disorders are being noted in all age groups, doctors said. People are having problems coping with the change in lifestyle, continuing to stay together and dealing with online sessions.

Out-patient departments of city hospitals have seen a 20-per cent increase of people with mental health problems.

Online consultation has

seen an increase by 45 per cent.

The most common complaint is fear of the disease, anxiety in those who suffered from Covid-19, stigma suffered by family, inability to cope with loss of a family member, financial constraints and staying together which caused recurrent clashes between family members.

Take the case of Sangeetha (name changed), a working woman, who is finding it difficult to deal with the demands of family members. Work from home is difficult for her as each family member is dependent on Sangeetha and no one is willing to share household chores.

This led to constant

Bright kids find eClasses tough

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Coping with online education is turning out to be a challenge not only for teachers but also students even as examinations, especially the Class 10 and 12 Boards, are approaching. Those who are academically inclined are also complaining of inabi-

lity to keep up with the lessons. Some of them are facing challenges in online tests and find that the exam papers are tough.

Teachers are suffering from stress as they are constantly working and attending school meetings online. The work has stretched to 12 hours.

There are also complaints of online pranks

by students, which many of the teachers are not able to understand or control. Students who are not from the school are logging into online sessions. The major complaint is of the number of absentees. Schools state that their efficacy is down by 50 per cent in their assessment to understand the impact of online classes.

figths. Fed up, Sangeetha took an overdose of sleeping pills. At the hospital, she narrated her dilemma of interpersonal and anxi-

ety problems. Those working from home are not able to concentrate on work as there are many disturbances and this is affecting

their productivity. Dr Charan Tej, psychiatrist at KIMS Hospital, said adjustment disorders were being seen in people as they are

CJI finds AP HC’s order ‘disturbing’

Stays HC order on breakdown of constitutional machinery

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 18

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the order issued by the AP High Court asking the Andhra Pradesh government whether there was breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde observed that they had not seen any order issued like this by the AP High Court in any case and the apex court found it to be disturbing. Justice Bobde directed issue of notice and stay and ordered the registry to list the case after the Supreme Court vacation.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, arguing for the AP government, said that the power to examine whether constitutional machinery had broken down or not was vested with the executive and not with the judiciary. It may be mentioned that a AP HC division bench led by Justice Rakesh Kumar had rejected an application filed by the AP government asking for recall of its October 1 to examine the breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state. The AP HC while hearing habeas corpus petitions on that day asked the state government’s counsel to come prepared to assist the court to record the finding whether there was a constitutional breakdown in the state or not.

In response, the AP government had challenged the order, contending that

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● **SOLICITOR GENERAL** Tushar Mehta, arguing for the AP government, said that the power to examine whether constitutional machinery had broken down or not was vested with the executive and not with the judiciary.

● **APHC** division bench had rejected an application filed by AP seeking recall of its Oct. 1 to examine breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state.

it impinges on the doctrine of separation of powers. It is the President who is empowered to go into the question of breakdown of constitutional machinery under Article 356 and not the judiciary. The petition filed by advocate Mahfouz Nazki said that under the constitutional framework, it is not for the courts to decide as to whether there is a constitutional breakdown in a state or not.

On Friday, the AP High Court adjourned the hearing on the issue following the Supreme Court stay order.

■ **Page 2:** After SC order, HC adjourns hearing

Bifurcation blues haunt AP food lab

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 18

Bifurcation blues are still haunting Andhra Pradesh in acquiring a state-level food laboratory for itself.

Though the Institute of Preventive Medicine (IPM), under which AP’s food laboratory works, is incorporated under Schedule X of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, so far, the IPM’s assets, equipment and staff have not been bifurcated between Andhra

Pradesh and Telangana. Thus, Andhra Pradesh still has to send all its food samples to IPM in Hyderabad for analysis.

This is mainly because the TS government is reportedly continuing to buy time before going ahead with division of IPM between both AP and TS. Sources say this is mainly because IPM has huge assets in Hyderabad, whose value is very high.

■ **Page 2:** No progress on lab plan in Vizag

SHORT TAKES

TD DEMANDS YSRC DISCLOSE POSTS GIVEN TO BCs

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 18

Former minister and Telugu Desam politburo member Kalva Srinivasulu on Friday accused YSR Congress government of betraying backward classes and weaker sections. He charged that the BC Sankranti is being organised only to make false claims and empty statements about welfare of backward classes.

Mr Srinivasulu went on to allege that Jagan Mohan Reddy regime has started a political vendetta by cutting reservations for BCs by 10 per cent in local bodies. As a result, BC communities have lost nearly 6,000 posts, including those of sarpanches, MPPs, ZPPs, MPSTCs and ZPTCs.

The TD leader demanded that YSRC BC ministers give figures as to how many backward class people have been given nominated and advisory posts in the state. He accused that all key posts have been given to only one caste; that of the CM. He further said the government has withdrawn over ₹15,000 crore funds that would otherwise be allotted annually under the BC sub-plan.

Mr Srinivasulu objected to YSRC BC ministers and MLAs heaping praises on Chief Minister when they have failed to give office addresses of 56 corporations that the government has announced for BCs. He said the corporations have been created to only to allot posts to YSRC supporters without granting any funds that would go to the poorer sections. He charged that persons belonging to CM's own caste have got 80 per cent of nominated and advisory posts.

The TD leader said BCs have been subject to political oppression after YSRC came to power 19 months ago because they have traditionally been supporters of the Telugu Desam. He accused YSRC of running a "Reddy Raj" that was trampling on the constitutional and democratic rights of backward classes and other weaker sections.

Cabinet showers sops on theatres

Permission granted to Chintalpudi LI scheme to borrow a loan of ₹1,931 crore

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 18

A meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, presided over by Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, has approved a package for restarting the film industry.

Disclosing details about Cabinet decisions, information minister Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani said many theaters closed in March are yet to reopen. Hence, the government has decided to waive fixed power charges of theaters for three months (April, May, and June).

Further, payments for six months have been postponed for multiplexes and other theaters. This would benefit 1,100 theatres across the state.

Nani explained that through this package, A and B class theaters can avail working capital loans of ₹10 lakh while C class ones can get ₹5 lakh. There will be a moratorium of six months on payments and interest subsidy of 4.5 per cent will be borne by the state government, which will cost the exchequer ₹4.18 crore.

The minister said the Cabinet has approved



sanction of 147 lab technician posts and 147 posts of lab attendants on contract basis at the constituency level. They will work in animal disease diagnostic laboratories in the state and help farmers in getting their cattle treated. The Cabinet approved set-

ting up of Andhra Pradesh Institute of Rural Management (APIRM) at Pulivendula with a budget of ₹83.59 crore. This will empower rural women and youth by providing them training and certification courses.

Nani stated that the Cabinet has accorded permission to give 41.19 acres land in Chennaiahgunda in Tirupati Urban mandal for establishing a Survey Training Institute. 410.30 acres of land at Chinapavani village in Lingasamudram mandal of Prakasam district will be given to Acharya N.G.

Ranga University for establishment of an Agricultural Research station for researching on pulses and millets.

The minister said the Cabinet has approved compensation to people who gave land for the industrial park of APIIC at Vikruthamala village in Yerpudu mandal in Chittoor district. Further, transfer of 11.83 acre land at Sunkesula village in Owk mandal has been approved for the Forest Department. Permission has also been granted to Chintalpudi lift irrigation scheme to borrow a loan of

₹1,931 crore from NABARD.

Nani said the Cabinet has approved development of micro irrigation projects under Pulivendula branch canal, CBR right canal (Lingala canal) Phase 2, and implementation of Rejuvenating Watersheds for Agriculture Resilience through Innovative Development (REWARD) programme in six districts.

The Cabinet has also ratified appointment of Jasti Naga Bhushan as additional Advocate General of the state.

Decision taken on reopening hotels

FROM PAGE 1

He said decisions have also been taken with regard to restarting of hotels, restaurants, and tourism and cine projects, apart from modalities of administering Corona vaccine to people of the state.

Nani said the Cabinet approved release of input subsidies to farmers who have suffered crop damage due to Nivar Cyclone from November 24-28 and on December 29. The state government has estimated that 8,06,504 farmers suffered losses over 13,01,000 acres, of which 12,38,000 acres involves paddy and 70,000 acres horticulture crops. ₹718 crore of input subsidy will be released to these farmers on December 29, within a month of the natural calamity, the minister maintained.

He said through

APMERC, the government will spend ₹16,000 crore for strengthening the existing 11 medical colleges, apart from construction of 16 new medical colleges across the state.

Nani said in all, incentives worth ₹400 crore will be provided to tourism projects, including some mega ones. He explained that these incentives include 100 per cent subsidy in SGST, 100 per cent reimbursement of stamp duty, electricity at ₹2 per unit and 100 per cent waiver of land use conversion charges. He further announced that the Cabinet okayed increasing the period of leasing land from 33 years to 99 years for mega tourism projects.

The minister said responding to hospitality sector's plight, the Cabinet has approved ₹198.50 crore

relief for restarting of hotels, function halls and restaurants, which have been in crisis due to outbreak of the pandemic. Loans ranging from ₹50,000 to ₹50,00,000 will be provided to each unit with moratorium of six months on payments, apart from 4.5 per cent of interest subsidy for the first year.

Nani said the Cabinet has okayed conducting of a comprehensive land resurvey in Andhra Pradesh from December 21, 2020. The Cabinet has made five amendments to Andhra Pradesh Survey and Boundary Act, 1923. Resurvey of land will be carried out accordingly. Maps will be made available for every piece of land based on its subdivision. Boundary of the land will be tagged with GPS coordinates, he added.

AFTER SC ORDER, HC ADJOURNS HEARING

FROM PAGE 1

When the High Court division bench comprising Justice Rakesh Kumar and Justice Umadevi continued the hearing on the issue earlier in the day, government pleader Y.N. Vivekananda informed the court that the government had appealed in the Supreme Court.

As Justice Rakesh Kumar expressed his intent to continue the hearing in the afternoon, government senior counsel C.V. Mohan Reddy asked the court to adjourn the hearing to Monday as he was having some personal issue. The court ruled it out.

When the court resumed the hearing in the afternoon, Justice Rakesh Kumar asked about the development in the Supreme Court. Government pleader Y.N. Vivekananda informed the court that the Supreme Court had issued a stay order. Based on this, the judge adjourned the hearing on the issue of constitutional breakdown indefinitely.

Mr and Mrs AP



Men and women participate in Mr and Mrs AP competitions at a star hotel in Vijayawada on Friday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

CBI REGISTERS FRAUD CASE ON TRANSSTROY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

The CBI has registered bank fraud case to the tune of ₹7,926.01 crore on Friday, against the Hyderabad-based Transstroy India Ltd of former MP Rayapati Sambasiva Rao.

The CBI booked Transstroy's CMD Cherukuri Sridhar, additional directors Sambasiva Rao and Akkineni Satish, among others on a complaint filed by Canara Bank.

Searches were conducted at the premises of Transtroy and the accused at Hyderabad and Guntur, which led to recovery of incriminating documents, the CBI stated.

"It was alleged that the private firm based at Hyderabad and its directors had availed credit facilities on multiple banking arrangements. It was further alleged that the accused had involved in falsification/fabrication of books of accounts, fudging of stock statements, tampering of balance sheets, round tripping of funds etc," the CBI said.

The accused misappropriated bank funds and allegedly diverted the loan amount sanctioned by the banks and caused loss of approximately ₹7,926.01 crore to Canara Bank and other member banks. The account had become a non-performing asset and the fraud was reported.

According to the CBI, diamondaire Nirav Modi had allegedly siphoned off ₹6,000 crore while his uncle Mehul Choksi had swindled ₹7,080.86 crore.

● Searches were conducted at the premises of Transtroy and the accused at Hyderabad and Guntur, which led to recovery of documents

CM felicitates CS



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy felicitates Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney at the Cabinet meeting on Friday. Ms Nilam Sawhney was the first woman chief secretary of AP government and she will retire by the end of this month. — BY ARRANGEMENT

East Godavari all set for resurvey of lands

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC. 18

Land and Survey Records Department is making all arrangements for resurvey of lands in East Godavari district from December 21. Officials are training all surveyors about the newly formulated guidelines.

The District Administration has deployed 288 teams to conduct the resurvey. The village surveyor will be responsible for conducting the survey. National Survey of India and Mandal survey personnel will support village surveyors in this task. In the initial stage, the administration will experimentally undertake survey of a village in Pithapuram mandal on December 21. Later, one village in each mandal will be selected. After surveying these villages, next villages will be surveyed.

Farmers are, however, expressing several doubts on the resurvey. According to sources, the survey will be conducted on the basis of existing border stones. But, there are several disputes among farmers over border stones being relocated by some unscrupu-

● The survey will be conducted on the basis of existing border stones. But, there are several disputes among farmers over border stones

lous elements to usurp others' lands. But the new guidelines say existing border lines can be fixed as the final border.

Thus, if the survey is conducted on the basis of existing guidelines, farmers who have been cheated by adjacent farmers will lose their land. There will thus be a difference in the extent of land of surveyed land and the document currently with farmers.

Joint Collector G. Lakshminisha said all arrangements have been made for launching the resurvey of lands. He reiterated that farmers need not pay single paisa for the survey. They also need not worry about their extent of lands. Survey will be done as per the existing documents available. However, if a farmer feels injustice is being done to him in the survey, mobile courts will be arranged. Farmers can approach these mobile courts and then also appeal to higher courts for justice.

Heavy curbs on import and storing of nitrate

FROM PAGE 1

This follows Petroleum, Explosives and Safety Organisation (PESO) according permission to unload the nitrate from foreign ships stranded in mid sea since August mid-week.

Storage of this nitrate was heavily curtailed within India after an ammonium nitrate warehouse near the Beirut City

of Lebanon witnessed a major blast, killing at least 220 people, injuring more than 5,000 people and rendering 300,000 people homeless in August 2020. Since then, only the public sector Indian Detonators Limited and Special Blasts, a private entity, got permission from PESO to unload and evacuate ammonium nitrate from ships. Unloading and quick evacuation of the

product was one of the safety norms prescribed by PESO for import of the product.

Shravan Shipping Services was the sole agent to handle ammonium nitrate and Visakhapatnam Port was the only port to import the nitrate.

Visakhapatnam Port Trust chairman K. Rama Mohan Rao said a 29-point check list was given, which importers had to

comply with for importing ammonium nitrate, a major input in fertilisers.

Merchant vessel *Krasezeusaki* carrying the Cyprus flag with 19,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate had remained anchored on high seas since August 11 after Visakhapatnam Port Trust refused permission for unloading the nitrate on instructions of the AP Pollution Control Board

following the Beirut blast. The second ship *MV East Ayuthaya* bearing Thailand flag with 14,000 tonnes of nitrate arrived on August 29. The third vessel *MV Diana* carrying 10,000 tonnes arrived on September 9. All three ships had loaded the ammonium nitrate at Ukraine Port.

IDL and Special Blasts are the major importers of nitrate in India.

SEC files contempt petition against state govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 18

AP State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar filed a contempt petition in the High Court on Friday, stating that it was not getting any support to conduct gram panchayat polls in February and asked it to direct the government to cooperate and provide assistance to conduct the polls.

The SEC filed the petition holding chief secre-

tary Nilam Sawhney and panchayat raj principal secretary G.K. Dwivedi as respondents stating that the respondents had wilfully and deliberately violated the directions of the court to the state government to help the SEC to conduct gram panchayat polls in February.

In his petition, the SEC said that the respondents failed to provide a budget for conducting the polls even though proposals were sent to them to sanc-

tion an additional fund of ₹40 lakh. He said that the administrative sanction was accorded for release of funds and added that they had started preparatory process for rural local bodies polls, including panchayats and municipal bodies in consultation with the state government. He said that with the outbreak of Covid-19, the SEC had postponed the elections.

He said that the SEC had written a letter to the

respondents on 04.08.2020 and a reminder for release of funds on 24.08.2020 as it was facing paucity of funds.

The respondents failed to act on the urgent request for releases of funds. A representation was submitted to the Governor on 25.08.2020 seeking his intervention.

The SEC filed a petition stating that the respondents were not releasing funds. Accordingly, the court passed an interim

order asking SEC to submit all details of requirement of cooperation with regard to financial and non-financial issues and asked the chief secretary to ensure that the respondents comply with the order. The SEC requested the state to take steps to comply with its requests to facilitate publication of gram panchayat electoral rolls, to ascertain requirement of funds and to instruct collectors and SPS to be available for con-

sultations for conducting the polls in February.

The SEC said that the act of the respondents in disobeying the orders passed by the High Court amounted to contempt and they were liable to be pressured for contempt of clear orders of the court. He asked the court to summon the respondents and punish them under Sections 10 and 12 of Contempt of Courts Act for wilfully violating the order dated 03.11.2020.

SHORT TAKES

PM'S VARANASI OFFICE LISTED FOR 'SALE' ONLINE

Varanasi (UP), Dec. 18: Four people have been arrested for allegedly posting an online advertisement listing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi office for "sale", police said on Friday.

The accused had taken a picture of the "Jansampark Kaaryalay (public relations office)" of Modi, who represents Varanasi in the Lok Sabha, and put it "up for sale" on OLX website, they said.

The office is located in the Jawahar Nagar locality of the city, and it falls under the Bhelupur police station limits, Varanasi Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Amit Pathak said. "Yesterday, it came to our notice that the Prime Minister's office here has been put up on sale on OLX website. An FIR was immediately lodged at the Bhelupur police station, and the matter is being investigated," Pathak said.

"Four people involved in the case have been taken in custody," the SSP said, adding that the person who took the picture and put it on the website is among them. The accused are being questioned, and further legal proceedings are being carried out, he said.

SHIV SENA MAY OPPOSE PM'S PET PROJECTS IN MAHA

PRASAD PATIL | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 18

The Shiv Sena, rattled by the Bombay High Court's stay on the construction of Metro car shed at salt pan land in Mumbai, is preparing for direct confrontation with the Union government led by the BJP.

The HC stayed the Metro car shed work after the Centre's salt pan department challenged the state's decision in the court. Now, as part of its strategy to take on its erstwhile alliance partner head-on, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party has decided to oppose the proposed port in Palghar district. The ₹65,000 crore project was approved by the Narendra Modi government in February this year.

The Maharashtra government is also considering moving the Metro car shed to a site earmarked for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project — another pet project of PM Modi.

The locals are opposing the Vadhvan port project, which is part of Centre's Sagarmala initiative, in Palghar district. According to reports, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray met groups opposing the Vadhvan port as well Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project — another pet project of PM Modi — and assured them that he will not allow any project against the wishes of locals.

SC NOTICE TO KAMRA, TANEJA IN CONTEMPT CASES

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The Supreme Court issued show-cause notices to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and cartoonist Rachita Taneja on Friday for their alleged scandalous tweets against the apex court.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah sought response from both in six weeks on the notices issued in two separate cases. It, however, exempted them from personal appearances in the cases.

Issue notice returnable within six weeks. The contemnor respondent not to appear in person, the bench said in its order passed in a plea against Kamra.

Similar order was passed by the bench in the plea against Taneja.

The top court in its two orders noted that Attorney General K.K. Venugopal has given his consent to initiate contempt proceedings against both the comic artists in separate cases.

Venugopal had granted consent for initiation of criminal contempt proceedings against Kamra, saying the comedian's tweets were in "bad taste" and it was time that people understand that attacking the apex court brazenly would attract punishment.

The attorney general had also given consent to initiate criminal contempt proceedings against Taneja, stating that the caricatures posted by her on social media were intended to denigrate the Supreme Court and lower its authority in the eyes of the public.

Dissent in Bengal BJP over TMC exodus

Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul are up in arms against the TMC deserters' overnight induction to BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 18

The sudden trend among heavyweights deserting the ruling Trinamul Congress to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ahead of the Assembly election in West Bengal has triggered strong dissent within the saffron party in the state.

Prominent BJP leaders like Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul and even state president Dilip Ghosh are up in arms against the TMC deserters' overnight induction to their party without any assessment of their past.

They have started voicing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari, Pandabeshwar MLA and former Asansol Mayor, left the TMC on Thursday.

Referring to Tiwari, Supriyo, Asansol MP and Union minister, wrote on Facebook, "What my Top Bosses decide is a different thing but I will try my very best with all my might & honesty to ensure that NO #TMC leader who tormented, tortured (both physically & mentally) my grass root level BJP colleagues in Asansol, don't get an entry in BJP!!!"

Paul, the state BJP women wing chief, said, "Suddenly after nine years

● **BJP LEADERS** started voicing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari left the TMC on Thursday.

Tiwari felt that he could not do his welfare work for Asansol as crores of money for projects were returned. Where were these thoughts in him? These came to his mind four months before the Assembly elections. He opposed Supriyo. Moreover the people of Asansol do not like him. Many told me to ensure he does not come to our party (sic)."

Ghosh, the Midnapore

BJP MP, said, "There is a tiff between Supriyo and Tiwari because when Tiwari was the Asansol Mayor and TMC district president, he did not allow Supriyo to work in his Lok Sabha constituency. Bricks were hurled on Supriyo on the road. So Tiwari was his rival there. Now when he shows a prospect to join the BJP, it is natural for Supriyo to voice his complaint against him."

Tiwari, however, claimed that he had no plan to join the BJP.

On Barrackpore MLA Silbhadra Datta's prospect Ghosh observed, "Quitting the TMC and joining the

BJP are two different issues. We have seen that many leaders left the TMC earlier. That does not mean all of them came to the BJP or they were roped into our party."

In Bankura, a group of BJP workers came out on road and organised a demonstration near their party office after former state textiles minister Shyamapada Mukherjee quit the TMC on Thursday evening and hailed his ex-party colleague Shubhendu Adhikari as his leader with a hope to join the BJP. They made it clear that Mukherjee should not be allowed to join the BJP.

AMID GROWING REBELLION IN TMC, SHAH ON TWO-DAY VISIT TO BENGAL

Kolkata, Dec. 18: Home Minister Amit Shah will arrive in Kolkata on Friday night on a two-day visit to Bengal and take stock of the BJP's affairs and activities in the districts, ahead of 2021 Assembly elections.

According to a press statement issued by BJP national media in-charge, Anil Baluni, Shah will participate in various programmes and functions during the weekend.

"In the wake of ensuing

Assembly elections, Amit Shah will also hold strategic and preparatory meetings," he said.

Shah will be putting up at a hotel in Newtown after arriving in Kolkata around 11 PM, another BJP leader said.

Shah will also review election management work during a meeting with central ministers from West Bengal, organisation secretaries, zonal observers and BJP state general secretaries. —PTI

Mobile phones now have longer reach than missiles, says Rajnath

DC CORRESPONDENT With agency inputs NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, while referring to the impact of social media on conflicts between nations, on Friday said the reach of the mobile phone now is bigger than that of a missile.

Addressing the annual Military Literature Festival here, Singh warned that different kinds of security threats may emerge in the future. This event is important from another point of view, he said through video conference.

"As times change, the nature of threats and wars is also changing. In the future, other security-related issues may come before us."

He added that conflicts are gradually becoming comprehensive in the manner never imagined earlier. Possibly alluding to the power of social media and mobile apps, he said, Today the range (*marak Kshamta*) of a mobile has crossed even the reach of a missile, he said. He added that the enemy can now reach people even without crossing any borders, and urged everyone to play the role of a soldier.

We should remain alive



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh handovers Border Surveillance System (BOSS) to Chief of Army Staff General M.M. Naravane, during the DRDO awards function, in New Delhi on Friday.

— PTI

to these dangers and save ourselves from wrong and misleading information and save others too, and festivals like this can play a key role in this, he said, urging literary figures to make use of their talent to the full for this. The defence minister did not specifically refer to China.

But in recent months, since the standoff between the two sides began at the Line of Actual Control, India has

banned several Chinese mobile apps, citing concerns related to national security and privacy. These included the popular TikTok and WeChat apps.

Meanwhile, a satisfactory resolution on the ground to the situation in the Ladakh sector between deployed Chinese and Indian troops still remains elusive despite several rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military

level in the past several months.

Nevertheless, India and China on Friday decided to "continue to work towards ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the LAC in the Western Sector at the earliest" and noted that the 7th and 8th rounds of Senior Commanders meetings held recently "had also contributed to ensuring stability on the ground".

DAGGERS OUT IN KERALA'S CONG, BJP UNITS

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 18

Blame game has begun in the Kerala units of Congress-led UDF and BJP following the defeat in local body elections.

The Congress-led UDF which expected to do well riding on the anti-government sentiments, ended up with a disappointing performance. In the political affairs committee meeting held a day after the results were announced, the leadership drew flak for its failure to cash in on the favourable political conditions.

Quite understandably, daggers are out in BJP as well. At least two factions in the party have demanded the removal of state president K. Surendran.

CBI confirms Hathras gangrape, murder

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The CBI on Friday filed a chargesheet against the four men accused of the gangrape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit woman in a village in Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh, officials said.

After nearly two months of probe, the agency concluded in its final report that the accused — Sandeep, Ravi, Luv Kush and Ramu — allegedly gangraped and murdered the woman when she had gone to the fields to collect fodder on September 14 in her village Bhulgarhi, they said.

In its findings submitted before the competent court in Hathras, the agency has slapped Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections pertaining to rape, murder and gan-

● **CBI HAS** slapped IPC sections pertaining to rape, murder, gangrape apart from those under the SC/ST Act against the four accused.

grape apart from those under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act against the four accused men from the village, they said. The maximum sentence in the above charges is capital punishment.

The agency has based its findings on the dying statement of the woman in which she is understood to have named the accused, besides scientific and forensic evidence collected by the CBI and statements of witnesses and the victim's family members recorded by it. The findings submitted

by the CBI have left red faced the top officials of Uttar Pradesh Police who had claimed that no evidence of rape was found in forensic tests.

Uttar Pradesh's additional director general (law and order) Prashant Kumar had said, "The report of the FSL has come. It says clearly that samples did not contain semen. It makes clear that there was no rape or gangrape".

The ADG had also claimed that the woman in her statement to police "did not mention rape but talked about 'maar-peat' (beating) only". An embarrassed UP government had to hand over the case to the CBI after the incident triggered massive public outrage and a political slugfest. —PTI

CONDUCT FIRE SAFE AUDIT IN COVID HOSPS: SC

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The Supreme Court on Friday directed all the states to carry out fire safety audit of dedicated Covid-19 hospitals across the country to prevent fire incidents in medical institutions.

The apex court also directed dedicated Covid-19 hospitals to take a no objection certificate (NOC) from the fire department within four weeks and said that failure to do so will invite punitive action.

A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that those hospitals, whose fire NOC has expired, will have to get it renewed within four weeks.

The top court said that all the states will follow Covid-19 guidelines, including on wearing of face mask and adherence to social distancing measures, and the standard operating procedure issued by the competent authority.

The SC had earlier taken cognisance of a fire incident in a designated Covid-19 hospital in Gujarat's Rajkot in which several patients had died. —PTI

COVID VACCINE IS VOLUNTARY, SAYS MINISTRY

SHASHI BHUSHAN | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

India on Friday registered a landmark achievement in its fight against the Covid-19 when total recoveries in the country crossed a crucial peak of 95 lakh. Union health ministry, meanwhile, said that getting vaccinated for Covid-19 will be voluntary, while emphasising that the vaccine introduced in India will be as effective as any vaccine developed by other countries.

The Union health ministry listed a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) on Covid-19 vaccine. Replying to a question whether it is mandatory to take the vaccine, the health ministry said that vaccination for Covid-19 is voluntary, however, it is advisable to receive the complete schedule of Covid-19 vaccine for protecting oneself against this disease and also to limit the spread of this disease.

Failed political players misleading farmers, says Naqvi

New Delhi, Dec. 18: Slamming Opposition leaders for their stance against the new farm laws, Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi has alleged that "failed political players" who have been rejected repeatedly by the people are acting under their "depression of defeat" and "misleading" the farmers.

The minority affairs minister also lashed out at Opposition leaders Rahul Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal, alleging that the Congress leader was "posing" as a farmers' leader despite knowing little about farming, while the Delhi Chief Minister was "karne mein zero, dharne mein hero (zero in work, but hero in sit-ins)".

Farmer's throughout the country are satisfied that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worked for their empowerment and interests after coming to power, Naqvi said.

The farmers' issue involves Minimum Support Price (MSP), *kisaan mandis* and protection of farmers' land and the government has given a 100 per cent guarantee on the three fronts, he said.

Naqvi asserted that neither the MSP will go, nor the mandis and there was no threat to farmers' lands.

The "Modi bashing brigade" instead of talking about issues of farmers, has started abusing Modi, he said, adding that questions arose with the entry of these "traditional Modi bashers".

On farmers' issues, the government has always believed in talks not 'takraav' (confrontation), Naqvi asserted.

"The government moved forward to resolve the issue through talks. When farmers were also satisfied that what the government was saying was logical and genuine, those people who were indulging in criminal conspiracy thought their game was going awry and they started misleading people," he said.

The whole matter is one of "criminal conspiracy ka sandook aur kisano ke kandhe par bandook (a box of crim-

inal conspiracy and firing from farmers' shoulders)", Naqvi said, hitting out at the Opposition parties demanding a repeal of the farm laws.

Farmer's have also understood that the issues have been solved and neither the farmers nor the country has any doubts about the honesty of Modi, Naqvi claimed.

Attacking the Congress-led Opposition, the minister alleged that "failed political players" are "misleading" farmers.

"These failed political players who have been rejected repeatedly by the people are acting under their depression of defeat. Farmers are genuine people, we respect them, there is no problem," Naqvi said.

"This (farmers) movement has been going on for long and the BJP was born out of a movement, so we respect it. That is why no force was used and the farmers were facilitated here. Rahul Gandhi does not know much about farming, but is posing as a leader of the farmers," he said.

The Opposition has been accusing the government of working for the interests of corporates by bringing the legislations, a charge denied by the government that has maintained that the laws will be beneficial for farmers in every way.

A delegation of opposition parties including Rahul Gandhi, Sharad Pawar and Left leaders had last week met President Ram Nath Kovind seeking repeal of the three farm laws against which thousands of farmers have been protesting on various borders of the national capital. —PTI

Odisha 'love jihad' victim rescued

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHBANESWAR, DEC. 18

Odisha police on Thursday night rescued a 21-year-old woman of Jajpur district who was allegedly kidnapped by a youth around two weeks ago from Cuttack. The girl's family members had alleged it was a case of 'Love Jihad'.

In a telephonic conversation between the young woman and her mother that came to fore earlier in the day, the young woman was heard informing her mother that she was being tortured and kept by the abductors at a hotel near beach in Puri.

Also, the young woman said she will be taken to a Masjid at Sutahtat in Cuttack for solemnisation marriage with the abductor in accordance with Islamic rituals.

According to reports, the

young woman had gone to VN College, Jajpur Road on December 5 for obtaining her migration certificate. Later in the evening, she went missing while her mobile phone was found to be switched off.

As per the complaint lodged by the young woman's family members, one Shaikh Abdul Sehmat Khan alias Bobby of Choramuhan village under Dharmasala police limits abducted her.

Khan was earlier forcing the girl to have a love affair with him and change her religion. As the girl refused to do so, Khan threatened to kidnap her.

On Thursday, the police had arrested Shaikh Abdul Hamid Khan, father of Shaikh Abdul Sehmat Khan, for his alleged involvement in the abduction and threatening the parents of the girl to kill them.

SHORT TAKES

15 KIDS KILLED
IN AFGHANISTAN
BOMB BLAST

Ghazni, Dec. 18: At least 15 children were killed when a motorbike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in eastern Afghanistan on Friday, officials said.

The children had gathered at a home in Ghazni province to recite *Quran* verses, a regular activity on the Islamic holy day of Friday, when the blast happened. "Unfortunately, as a result of this incident 15 people, all children, were martyred," said Wahedullah Jumazada, spokesman for the province's governor.

Ghazni police confirmed the blast and that all victims were children. Twenty other people, including some children, were wounded.

Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian earlier said the group had gathered in Gilan district to recite the *Quran*.

SUPER CYCLONE
YASA FLATTENS
VILLAGES IN FIJI

Suva, Fiji, Dec. 18: Super cyclone Yasa flattened entire villages as it tore through Fiji, aid agencies said on Friday, with a baby among two confirmed deaths and rescue workers racing to the worst-hit communities.

Yasa made landfall at the Pacific Island nation late Thursday as a top-of-the-scale Category Five cyclone, lashing Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu.

The storm triggered floods, landslides and blackouts before moving out to sea early Friday, where it rapidly weakened to a Category Three system.

Zalim Hussein of Savusavu, a small town of a few thousand people on Vanua Levu, said he feared for his life sheltering at home in the dark as screeching winds ripped apart houses around him.

"I could hear roofs of neighbouring houses flying, trees falling and branches breaking outside and big waves crushing on the shore," he said.

UN SAYS 'DEEPLY
TROUBLED' OVER
THAI DETENTIONS

Geneva, Dec. 18: The UN human rights body expressed alarm on Friday over Thailand's detentions of democracy activists, including a minor of 16 years, under royal defamation laws.

"We are deeply troubled by the move by Thai authorities to charge at least 35 protesters in recent weeks, including a 16-year old student protester, under Article 112 — the lese majeste provision of Thailand's criminal code," the UN Human Rights Committee said in a statement.

The activists are facing charges for headlining recent demonstrations demanding reforms to the monarchy and more scrutiny of the royal family's financial arrangements. The kingdom's lese majeste laws shield the super wealthy King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the royal family from criticism.

"The offence carries sentences of between three and 15 years' imprisonment for defaming, insulting or threatening the country's royal family," the committee's spokeswoman, Ravina Shamdasani said.

MEGHAN SETTLES
CASE OVER
ARCHIE PHOTOS

London, Dec. 18: Meghan Markle has settled a claim against a news agency which took photographs of her and her young son Archie in a Canadian park, the High Court in London was told on Friday.

The Duchess of Sussex brought privacy and data protection claims against the Splash News and Picture Agency in March over the long-lens photographs.

A lawyer for the American former television actress, who married Prince Harry in 2018, said Splash UK went into administration after the claim was issued and served. Judge Matthew Nicklin told the hearing: "In light of the administration, the parties have agreed to settle the claim against Splash UK."

"The administrators of Splash UK have undertaken that, should the entity come out of administration, Splash UK will not take any photographs of the duke and duchess or their son in the future." The photographs were taken on January 20 this year, showing Markle walking with Archie in a baby sling, and her two dogs, in North Hill Regional Park on Vancouver Island.

Pence gets Covid jab on live
TV, Trump sparks confusion

Don jumps gun on FDA, says Moderna vaccine 'overwhelmingly approved'

Washington, Dec. 18: The US vice president received a Covid-19 vaccine shot live on television on Friday in a public display designed to boost national confidence in the drug even as President Donald Trump sparked confusion over approval for a second anti-Covid drug.

"Building confidence in the vaccine is what brings us here this morning," VP Mike Pence said after being injected at the White House, quipping: "I didn't feel a thing." Pence, his wife Karen and the lead public health official in the country, Surgeon General Jerome Adams, were all given the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in the annex to the White House.

Signalling the importance given to the event, top infectious diseases Anthony Fauci and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Robert Redfield were also in the room.

The notable absence was Trump himself. He has sent mixed messages about the seriousness of Covid-19 throughout the crisis, even as the US death toll topped 3,00,000 this month.

However, he has been keen to take credit for the historic speed of vaccine development. Early Friday he tweeted that a second drug made by Moderna had been "overwhelmingly approved" and that "distribution to start immediately." This sparked some confusion — while an advisory panel recommended emergency use approval for Moderna's vaccine on Thursday, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to give the final verdict allowing distribution — expected later Friday.

US President-elect Joe Biden's incoming White House senior advisor, congressman Cedric Richmond, has tested positive for Covid-19 after having open-air "interactions" with Biden, the transition team said on Thursday.

Richmond traveled independently to the state of Georgia to campaign Tuesday with Biden for a pair of Democrats in tight



Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria, state health secretary Jean Gorinchteyn and Butantan Institute director Dimas Covas pose for photographs holding doses of the CoronaVac vaccine against Covid-19 next to a container unloaded from a cargo plane that arrived from China at Guarulhos International Airport in Guarulhos, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, on Friday. Brazil on Thursday recorded more than 1,000 deaths from Covid-19 over a 24-hour period for the first time since September, according to a government tally.

Macron rides out virus,
fever at Versailles retreat

Paris, Dec. 18: As French President Emmanuel Macron rides out the Coronavirus in a presidential retreat at Versailles, French doctors are warning families who are heading for the holidays to remain cautious because of an uptick in infections — especially at the dinner table.

While Macron routinely wears a mask and adheres to social distancing rules, he hosted or took part in multiple group meals in

the days before testing positive on Thursday.

Critics say that's a bad example for compatriots advised to keep their gatherings to six people. Macron is suffering from fever, cough and fatigue, officials with the presidency said on Friday.

They wouldn't provide details of his treatment. He is staying at the presidential residence of La Lanterne in the former royal city of Versailles. Macron's positive test

comes as French health authorities are again seeing a rise in infections and warning of more as French families prepare to get together for Christmas and New Year festivities.

France reported another 18,254 new infections on Thursday and its death toll is just under 60,000. France's Pasteur Institute released a study on Friday suggesting that meal times at home and in public are a major source of contamination. — AP

runoff elections against incumbent Republican senators.

Biden, 78, tested negative for Covid-19 on Thursday, his team said.

The head of the World Health Organisation said on Friday that the UN

health agency's programme to help get Covid-19 vaccines to all countries in need, whether rich or poor, has gained access to nearly 2 billion doses of several "promising" vaccine candidates.

WHO Director-General

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the agreements mean that some 190 countries and economies taking part in the COVAX initiative will have access to vaccines "during the first half of next year." — AFP/AP

LOCKDOWN LOOMS
OVER CHRISTMAS
IN BETHLEHEM

Ramallah (West Bank), Dec. 18: The Palestinian prime minister announced a two-week lockdown in the West Bank that appears certain to curtail Christmas celebrations in the town of Jesus' birth.

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said that with a Coronavirus outbreak raging, there will be a nighttime curfew from 7 pm to 6 am throughout the West Bank.

On Fridays and Saturdays, the local weekend, the lockdown will be around the clock. The restrictions, which are to be in effect through January 2, will greatly restrict travel throughout the West Bank. Most businesses, with the exception of pharmacies and bakeries, will be forced to close during the curfews, Shtayyeh said. — AP

Kidnapped boys
freed in Nigeria

Katsina, Dec. 18: Exhausted and dishevelled, several hundred Nigerian schoolboys seized in a mass abduction claimed by Boko Haram experienced their first full day of freedom on Friday after a nearly week-long ordeal.

But relief at their survival mingled with concern that many others could still be captive, and the circumstances of their release remained unclear.

Looking dirty, worn-out and distraught, and most of them without shoes, the boys were brought to the governor's office in Katsina, the capital of Katsina state in north-western Nigeria, after being released late Thursday.

One boy broke down in tears as he was being led into the hall for the reception by state governor

Bello Masari. An official took a handkerchief and wiped the tears.

"I am happy, very happy that I will see my father, mother and junior brothers," said another, 14-year-old Ibrahim Sani, smiling but looking tired.

Hajia Bilikis, a mother who been waiting anxiously with other parents, spoke of her exultation when she caught sight of her boy, Abdullahi Abdurasaq, 15.

"I'm so excited... I have to cry, the cry of joy when I saw him," she said.

Governor Masari said the youngsters had been traumatised by what they had been through.

"You suffered physically, mentally and psychologically, but let me assure you that we suffered more and your parents suffered more." — AFP

US warships to be 'more
assertive' against China

Washington, Dec. 18: The US military warned on Thursday its warships would be "more assertive" in responding to violations of international law, citing in particular Beijing, which has expansionist ambitions in the South China Sea.

In a document setting objectives for the US Navy, Marines and Coast Guard for the coming years, the Pentagon stressed that several countries, notably Russia and China, "are contesting the balance of power in key regions and seeking to undermine the existing world order."

"Our globally deployed naval forces interact with Chinese and Russian warships and aircraft daily," the document said, noting their "growing aggressiveness" and calling

the region including Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei. To counter China, the US has been sending ships to the region more frequently to carry out what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations.

To maintain strategic advantage over the Chinese Navy whose "battle force has more than tripled in size in only two decades," the US Navy plans to modernize with smaller, more agile and even remotely piloted ships.

US ships will also "accept calculated tactical risks and adopt a more assertive posture in our day-to-day operations," the statement said. For Navy Rear Admiral Jay Bynum that means being "more responsive, more assertive." — AFP

The latest incident between the US and China naval forces took place in late August, when Beijing said it had driven an American warship from the disputed Paracel archipelago.

The Asian power claims almost all of the islands of the South China Sea, territorial claims disputed by other countries in

the region including Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei.

To counter China, the US has been sending ships to the region more frequently to carry out what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations.

The company said the tanker's nautical chart provided little information about depth and other necessary information.

Crewmembers on duty also failed to conduct safety checks visually or by radar, it said. The captain and crewmembers were also using their cellphones while on duty, the company said. It said it will invest about 500 million yen (\$4.8 million) to provide electronic nautical charts, training to strengthen safety culture and other systems to

enhance safety. The environmental disaster began July 25 when the ship MV Wakashio strayed off course and struck a coral reef a mile (1.6 kilometers) offshore. After being pounded by heavy surf for nearly two weeks, the ship's hull cracked and on Aug. 6 began leaking fuel into a lagoon, polluting a protected wetlands area and a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

The company apologised for the damage and in September offered 1 billion yen (\$9 million) to fund environmental projects and support the local fishing community in Mauritius.

Biden backs son
Hunter after tax
probe revealed

Washington, Dec. 18: US President-elect Joe Biden has expressed full confidence in his son Hunter, a frequent target of Republican attacks, after it was revealed last week that he was under a federal tax investigation.

During his unsuccessful re-election campaign, President Donald Trump launched repeated accusations against Hunter and said the Bidens were a "corrupt" family and a "criminal enterprise." "We have great confidence in our son," Biden said, sitting next to his wife Jill, in an interview on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," which aired Thursday on CBS.

"I am not concerned about any accusations that have been made against him. It used to get to me. I think it's kind of foul play but... as long as he's good, we're good," he said in his first full remarks on the issue since the tax probe became public.

Trump and his allies have regularly assailed Hunter for his business dealings in Ukraine and China.

From 2014 to 2019, while his father was vice president, Hunter, a lawyer and lobbyist, served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

Trump has accused Biden of seeking the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect Burisma — and his son — from a corruption investigation.

Hunter, 50, now an artist based in Los Angeles, has admitted to displaying "poor judgment" in some of his business dealings, but denied any wrongdoing.

Human error
behind oil spill
in Mauritius

Tokyo, Dec. 18: The Japanese operator of a bulk carrier that struck a coral reef and caused an extensive oil spill off the coast of Mauritius said Friday that the accident occurred after the ship shifted its course two miles (3.2 kilometers) closer to shore than planned so its crewmembers could get cellphone signals.

Mitsui O.S.K. Lines said its investigation showed the accident was caused by human error, including inadequate nautical charts, navigation systems and risk awareness, and a lack of supervision and safety monitoring. The company said the tanker's nautical chart provided little information about depth and other necessary information.

Crewmembers on duty also failed to conduct safety checks visually or by radar, it said. The captain and crewmembers were also using their cellphones while on duty, the company said. It said it will invest about 500 million yen (\$4.8 million) to provide electronic nautical charts, training to strengthen safety culture and other systems to

enhance safety. The environmental disaster began July 25 when the ship MV Wakashio strayed off course and struck a coral reef a mile (1.6 kilometers) offshore. After being pounded by heavy surf for nearly two weeks, the ship's hull cracked and on Aug. 6 began leaking fuel into a lagoon, polluting a protected wetlands area and a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

The company apologised for the damage and in September offered 1 billion yen (\$9 million) to fund environmental projects and support the local fishing community in Mauritius. More than 1,000 tons of oil spilled into the coastal waters.

About 3,000 tons that remained on the ship was pumped into barges before the Wakashio broke in two several days later. — AP

BIDEN NAMES 1st
NATIVE AMERICAN
TO CABINET

Washington, Dec. 18: US President-elect Joe Biden unveiled his environment team on Thursday, choosing congresswoman Deb Haaland to serve as the first Native American interior secretary and Jennifer Granholm, a former Michigan governor, as energy secretary.

He also nominated Michael Regan, a North Carolina environmental regulator who is Black and brokered the nation's largest coal ash cleanup, to be administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The choices fit with Biden's much-publicised pledge to form the most diverse White House cabinet in history.

"This brilliant, tested, trailblazing team will be ready on day one to confront the existential threat of climate change with a unified national response rooted in science and equity," Biden said in a statement. — AFP

Colbert asked Biden if there was anything he could "sincerely" thank Trump for accomplishing during his time in the White House.

After a short pause, Biden responded: "There are some things... Getting the vaccine moving has been positive, but by and large, he has been a president who's decided that the way he succeeds is by dividing us." — AFP

INNOVATION | HONOUR Virtual ceremony will be attended by senior officials from Israel, India, UAE on Dec. 21

Israeli peace, sustainability award for Ratan Tata

Jerusalem, Dec. 18: Veteran industrialist Ratan Tata will be honoured by the Indo-Israel Chambers of Commerce for promoting innovation that supports sustainability and peace in the region, including with the Palestinians.

The chairman emeritus of the Tata group will be honoured with 'Global Visionary of Sustainable Business and Peace' award during the launch of the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber of Commerce's international chapter in Dubai on December 21.

The virtual ceremony will be attended by senior officials from Israel, India and UAE. "Tata has done a lot for India-Israel ties. He has generously contributed towards promoting innovation that supports sustainability and has been a promoter of peace in the region, including with the Palestinians. He has visited Israel a few times which has been extremely beneficial in promoting ties between the two countries. He very well deserves this honour," Raviv Byron, President of Israel-India Chamber of



Ratan Tata

Commerce, said. The 82-year-old industrialist and philanthropist is the recipient of two of

India's highest civilian awards — Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan. The opening of the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber of Commerce's international chapter in Dubai is the first such initiative aiming at tapping business opportunities together in other countries, and developing trilateral collaborations.

This is expected to pave the way for several other such international chapters for the bilateral Chamber in other parts of the world, Byron noted. "There is a large presence

of Indian diaspora in the UAE and Bahrain which includes top professionals who are well established and respected. Given the close ties between Israel and India, we can definitely work together to develop a framework for trilateral cooperation in the Gulf", he added.

The Tata Group has invested millions of dollars in Tel Aviv University's (TAU) Technology Innovation Momentum Fund. As the lead investor in the fund, Tatas have the right of first opportunity to negotiate licence agreement on areas that have

been defined as start-up fields like automotive, point of care for medical devices, cleantech, etc.

In 2018, TAU and Tata Trusts announced the launching of the Indian Centre for Agri & Allied Tech (I-CAT) that would facilitate bringing Israeli know-how and innovation to the farmers of the state of Andhra Pradesh, initially, and was to be later extended to all the other parts of India.

The initiative, supported by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, includes creating an advanced R&D centre, as well as

promoting activities of agricultural experts in villages and farms — aiming to overcome various technological, agronomic and economic barriers, and promote sustainable agriculture and food security.

During his visit to Israel in 2013, Tata had signed an agreement with Israel Aerospace Industry (IAI) to jointly develop, manufacture and support a wide range of defence and aerospace products including missiles, UAVs, radars, electronic warfare systems and homeland security systems. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

19 DECEMBER 2020

Kerala: Big triumph for LDF, Cong rudderless

The brilliant show put up by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala in the elections to the local bodies is sure to offer the ruling front a solid base to prepare for the state Assembly elections hardly four months away while raising the bar higher for the Opposition, United Democratic Front (UDF), to win the race. The LDF has won 11 of the 14 district panchayat councils, 108 of the 152 block panchayats (the state has 140 assembly seats), 42 of the 86 municipalities and five of the six municipal corporations. Among the gram panchayats, the leftists won 514 of the 941, leaving 375 to the UDF and 23 to the National Democratic Alliance (BJP).

That the LDF has improved its own tally of 2015 local bodies elections when it was in the Opposition indicates that it faces little anti-incumbency threat in a state which alternates its ruling dispensation in every election without fail ever since 1977. While the Pinarayi Vijayan government's creditable performance in fighting virus attacks, first by Nipah in 2018 and by the coronavirus in 2020, its successful handling of two successive floods in 2018 and 2019, its focus on improving infrastructure especially in education and healthcare, its determined efforts to push through mega projects which includes the natural gas pipeline and the national highway project gave it the image of a government that works, its focus on welfare measures, which includes the construction of 2.5 lakh homes for the poor, the timely distribution of enhanced welfare pensions for the elderly and food kits during the pandemic, Covid-19, convinced the people that it is a government that cares.

This image, coupled with the failure of the central investigation agencies to come up with a credible case against people associated with the government vis-a-vis gold smuggling, has helped the LDF keep its head above water. The smart political manoeuvring with which it got a section of the Kerala Congress which held sway in central Kerala to its side has paid rich dividends for the LDF while denting the prospects of the UDF of which the regional party was a major part for the last 50 years.

The Congress, which leads the UDF, has party machinery that covers the entire spectrum, starting from the booths but a rudderless leadership squandered them all away, thinking that the relentless and one-sided media scrutiny of the government will carry the day for them. The UDF, which recorded a spectacular victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections on the back of the entry of then Congress president Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad constituency and the Sabarimala issue which put the LDF in a dock, was a house divided this time. It would take enormous efforts on the part of the leadership to put it in order and take on the resurgent LDF if it were to keep its hope of returning to power. As for the NDA, its hopes replacing the Congress after decimating it lie shattered with the poor showing, especially in the capital Thiruvananthapuram. The party needs to cover a lot of ground before it gains a critical mass to emerge a major force in the state politics.

‘Punishing’ a state

While it is not yet clear what elements attacked the car convoy of BJP president J. P. Nadda at Diamond Harbour near Kolkata recently — one theory points the finger at hooligans sponsored by the ruling Trinamul Congress and the other says it is an internal BJP job to discredit the Mamata Banerjee government as an excuse for punitive action — the Union government brought the hammer down on three IPS officers of the West Bengal cadre. Their services have been compulsorily requisitioned by the Union home ministry.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee has responded with fury. She has threatened to take recourse to legal action. Ordinarily, the Centre requests a state to release a particular officer when there is special need since an officer of the IAS or the IPS is assigned to a state on being selected.

There may be scope for emergency procedures if a particular officer is badly needed with the Centre. But here the Union home ministry is forcing three IPS officers out of the state in one go. Is this dictatorial? Is it a “colourable” exercise of power, as the CM has observed? How the judiciary deals with the issue will be keenly watched if Ms Banerjee goes to court. It will be a precedent-setting order and will have a bearing on the broader question of Centre-state relations.

Before the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there was an instance of violence at a poll rally of then BJP party chief Amit Shah in Kolkata. The police commissioner was relieved of his charge by the Election Commission and subsequently asked by the state to report to the Centre. The officer who replaced him was also changed, along with three other IPS officers. These were not decisions of the Union home ministry as in the present instance, but of the EC. And yet it is the bulk nature of transfers, which makes these cases look like punishment.

Political antagonism between the Centre and a particular state government has probably not gone in this direction before and it is not a good sign for federalism, “cooperative” or otherwise, although Prime Minister has made renewed avowals of cooperative federalism.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

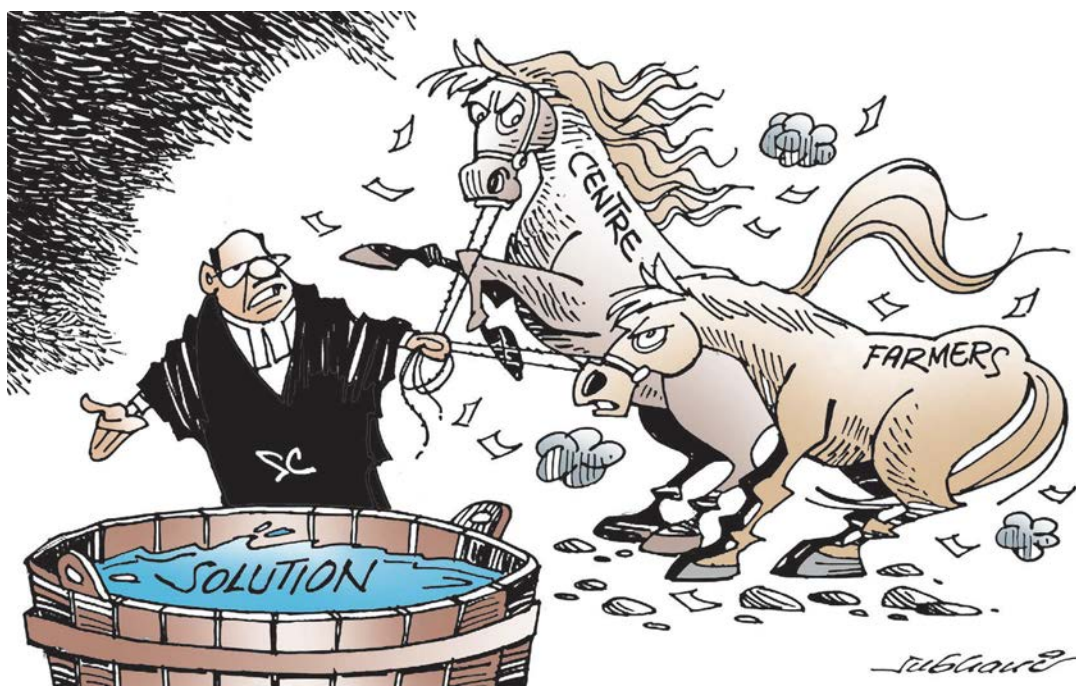
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Printer & Publisher

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Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. HSD-348/2006-08

Subhani



As schools reopen, try to bridge digital divide



Rukmini Banerji

The digital divide is layered on to existing divisions in our society

By January 2021, schools will have been closed for almost 300 days. Even when school systems reopen, it will take time for parents to feel comfortable in sending children daily to school. The longer schools stay shut and the more uncertain we are about the next steps, concern grows about the impact and implications of what looks like a year-long closure.

Starting 2005, every year in mid-January India sees the release of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). From 2005 to 2014, the ASER report tracked the status of schooling and provided estimates of basic reading and arithmetic skills. After 2014, the nationwide ASER report is done every other year and in the gap year we look in depth at a specific age group. For example, ASER 2017 focused on the 14-18 age group, while ASER 2019 dealt with the 4-8 age group. The year 2020 would have seen the regular country-wide report. But given the Covid crisis, it was appropriate to change the focus and timing of ASER to explore what children were doing while the schools were closed.

There are several key features of the ASER architecture that are worth highlighting. ASER has always been a rural survey with information collected from households. The children's sample is representative at the district and state levels. During Covid-19, where the only way to reach families was through phone calls, and it was essential to maintain the representativeness of the sample. Luckily, as part of the usual ASER process, phone numbers are collected from each surveyed household. In a normal year, this information is

used for monitoring and cross-checking. For ASER 2020, the 2018 sample was used as the frame. To rely on numbers, the sampling process must be scientific and rigorous. Despite the Covid-19 challenges, ASER even in this difficult year remains based on a meticulous sampling process.

Timing-wise, September seemed the right time to do the ASER 2020 survey. Many schools have summer holidays in April-May-June-July. This year, July and August was used by state governments to plan and implement their Covid response. By September, school systems across India had settled into providing whatever support they could to their students.

ASER 2020 Wave 1 was anchored around a set of interconnected questions. These included: what resources did families have, who in the family was able to help children, what inputs and learning opportunities did children receive and what were children able to do with respect to learning. Many of these questions were designed not only to explore how families dealt with the Covid crisis on the education front, but also to provide inputs into thinking about opportunities that could be leveraged beyond the crisis. Close to 120,000 households were sampled. Approximately 58 per cent households were reached, of which 75.8 per cent completed the survey. Thus, the ASER 2020 Wave 1 survey obtained information for about 60,000 children.

Here are some of the highlights. First, the availability of ASER 2018 data allowed comparisons to be made. For example, the proportion of households who own televisions or motorised vehicles remained similar from 2018 to 2020, but a sharp

increase in smartphone ownership is visible across states. Nationally, in 2018, 29.6 per cent families whose children went to government schools owned smartphones. This number rose to 56.4 per cent by 2018. For families who send their children to private schools, the figure in 2018 was 49.9 per cent, which increased to 74.2 per cent in 2020. A significant rise in access to smartphones in rural families is a striking feature of the last two years.

Overall, households reported that about 75 per cent children get some help at home in terms of learning support, and despite the crisis, close to 30 per cent children continued to attend paid tuition classes. Obviously, in families where parents have more education, they are able to help children more. However, even in families where both parents have less than five years of schooling, close to 25 per cent parents help children. Significant help in low education families also comes from siblings (in households where both parents have not even studied up to Class 5, 23.2 per cent children get help from older brothers and sisters.)

In the reference week before the survey in September, about a third of all children reported receiving learning materials and activities from their school. 67 per cent families whose children go to government schools and 87 per cent of those whose children go to private schools reported receiving materials via WhatsApp. Interestingly, 31.8 per cent of government school children's families also added that materials came via visits (either to the school by parents or by teachers to the child's home).

Interestingly, 80 per cent of all children in the sample had textbooks of their current grade. This number was slightly higher for

government school children. State governments across India made extensive efforts to deliver textbooks to children, and this statistic is testament to these endeavours. Asked about where children were learning at home during the reference week, 70 per cent families said their children did some learning activities in that week. While a majority of these activities were with traditional materials like textbooks and worksheets, fewer children (usually below 20 per cent) accessed learning programmes on television, radio or online.

Five major takeaways from this year's ASER exercise: First, the situation is likely to remain fluid for some months. With the clear inequities in our society, it is essential to track who is getting what opportunities and to assess what kind of learning loss is experienced. Second, ASER 2020 gives clear evidence of parental engagement and willingness to support children's learning. This family support must be leveraged by the school system in a systematic way. Third, traditional teaching-learning methods should be combined effectively with newer ways of reaching/learning. Fourth, in-depth assessments of “what works and how” is needed to improve digital content and delivery for the future. Just because families have devices and connectivity doesn't automatically mean learning is happening effectively. Finally, the digital divide is layered on to existing divisions in our society. Mechanisms to reach and teach children who are on the dark side of the divide must be worked out so their educational disadvantage can be ameliorated over time.

ASER 2020 completed the first wave in September. It's likely that a follow-up wave may be planned later in the current school year to track how children's learning journeys are progressing.

Rukmini Banerji is the CEO of Pratham Education Foundation

LETTERS

KUDOS TO ISRO

Isro chairman Dr K. Sivan deserves a Bharat Ratna for his relentless endeavours along with his scientists (PSLV places comm satellite in orbit after perfect launch, DC, Dec. 18). He has made the country proud with a series of earlier achievements in Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

END ACRIMONY

There seems to be no end to the mutual mudslinging between the ruling and Opposition parties in AP. This casting of aspersions has reached feverish proportions and is belittling the image of the MLAs. Under the present circumstances, it is better to have patience and let people decide what is right or wrong in the next elections. In the meantime, they must maintain status quo.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

AP'S LOCAL POLLS

It seems like holding polls is the panacea for the AP SEC. It was he who had actually 'created' a problem by not holding those elections when they were due in 2018. He again unilaterally postponed the poll midway in March 2020 citing Covid. Now, he is out to create a major problem to the state government by taking yet another unilateral decision to hold polls in February, 2021.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Probe into Shastri's death rejected

NEW DELHI, Dec. 18. The Government today rejected the demand for a probe into former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's death in Tashkent five years ago. The demand for setting up a Commission of enquiry was made in the Rajya Sabha by Opposition Members of Congress(O), BKD, Jana Sangh and SSP while seeking clarifications on government statement relating to Shastri's death laid on the table of the two Houses of Parliament in the morning.

Minister of State for Home Affairs R.N. Mirdha said that no facts had come to light which called for an enquiry and that there was no question of any doubt in this case.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"If our hands bent both ways
There'd be lines marked on the back.
We'd call them life, fate and fortune
Predicting ruin and rack.

With our palms already foretelling
It'd be a sort of heads and tails
And palmists would be confounded
Not knowing which fortune prevails."

— From Come, Say 'Come' by Bachchoo

Researching Wikipedia on the origins of toxic words

Idle days, my friend, idle days in terms of worldly commerce, but busy as a woodpecker tapping the imagined computer keys of a tree-trunk. And as random questions occur, sometimes pertaining to work. Sometimes thoughtful wanderings from questions about how one dodges British tax by registering companies in Nassau, to the origins of phrases one has used and never stopped to etymologise.

Praise be to Ahura Mazda for inspiring the founders and conspirators of Wikipedia. And yes, I do contribute small sums to their coffers now and then. We must all will their incredibly comprehensive and by-

and-large-accurate encyclopaedia(e) as the world has never known, to continue — till time and ingenuity replace the ethereal store of knowledge with some other scientifically invented miracle.

The triviality of what I resort to Wiki for will or may, gentle reader, prompt you to judge me harshly. Today it occurred to me that I had never investigated the origins of the phrase “oopsy daisy”! I am now fairly knowledgeable about the meanings of certain nursery rhymes such as Humpty Dumpty which wasn't an egg as mistakenly portrayed by cartoonists, but a cannon in the service of His Majesty's artillery. I also proudly know that ring-a-ring-a-roses is about the plague that swept Britain and nothing to do with necklaces of blossoms as I had imagined when we played holding hands and forming a ring, at the age of three in the joyous hours of infant birthday parties.

And now Wikipedia corrects my lifelong notions and says the phrase is “Whoopsy Daisy”. There are several notes on the origin of the phrase, and they contradict each other and still leave the attribution of alarm, at an accidental slip, or as an encour-

agement to a child as you fling it into the air, mysterious. The appearance of this Daisy, presumably a girl and not a flower, doesn't figure in the explanations.

And in my idle researches I find that there are places where Wikipedia doesn't fear to tread. It very bravely, if casually, tells the literal meaning of the “F” word while incorporating the various expressions which use the single syllable without in any sense invoking its literal meaning. It is, as Bagwash Shri Ragwort noted in one of his rambles, used to express dismissal, disdain, disappointment and other “d”s, not to mention the moods and utterances whose descriptions begin with other letters of the alphabet.

And so, with other words which we, in our graciously inoffensive era, shorten to their first letters. And in that context, after a few minutes of research in these idle hours, I have discovered, gentle reader, that Wikipedia gives us definitions and connotations of very many common Hindi or Urdu swear words, including those which the victims of the abuse may object to as “going on mothers/sisters”.

One stereotype for us Parsis is that

we punctuate our sentences with the MC and BC words. I sincerely protest that my family and their acquaintances never fell into the particular linguistic habit, but a friend in college was universally known as Adi “MC” Manekshaw. He would freely use the expletives and was famous for his expression of surprise or disbelief, which was “Good Lord MC!” — (the mouth-filling words not just initials).

The intriguing word, which I grew up hearing in the Parsi and wider Indian community, was “saala”. The word literally means brother-in-law, and of course can mean that the speaker had carnal relations with the sister of the one to whom the word is directed. That could be provoking and insulting, but in my hearing, it was often used as an endearment. How in such discourse has its negativity turned into its opposite? (All answers to this newspaper's letters page! — fd. Sub-editors: Delete this line, we have enough unprintable nonsense stimulated by his columns anyway — Ed)

And wandering outside the possible remit of Wikipedia, I have taken to wondering whether the Parsi surname Siganporia, based on an associ-

ation with place, as with Adenwalla and Billimoria, should really be “Singaporía”. It is easy to see how the eastern tongue twists the sound of “x” or “ks” into “sk”, as in the transformation of Alexander to Sikander, or as boys in school would say “I'll aks my bro”!

And so with the word signal, again in English two consonants “g” and “n” thrown together and rendered very often by the general Indian public as “singal”. Which is why I suspect, as there is no place in Gujarat called Siganpor, that the surname derives from some ancestor who pursued the opium trade, banking or some such in the far eastern colony.

Again, in idle intellectual mode, I wonder why my grandmother demonised the vegetable which we call “brinjal” and Europeans refer to as aubergine or eggplant, by characterising anyone who fell ill with the phrase “vengna khaddha”, meaning “ate brinjals”. In my short and happy life, I have never known the vegetable to be toxic or poisonous.

Where are the Parsi etymologists and phraseological historians when you need them? Come back, all is forgiven.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,960.69	0.15
Nifty 50	13,760.55	0.14
S&P 500*	3,699.28	-0.62
Dollar (₹)	73.56	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	0.66
Euro (₹)	90.10	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,644.21	0.042
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	52.17	0.67
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.959	0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.926	-0.004

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India Inc's FY21 FDI outflow at \$12.25 billion

Indian firms have committed overseas investments worth \$12.25 billion between April and November this year. Of this actual outflow would be \$6.35-2.97 bn through equity and \$3.38 bn in loan commitments. The rest, \$5.90 bn, would be in guarantees. Main investors are OVL (\$1852 million), JSW Steel (\$865 mn), Haldia Petro-chem (\$599 mn), HCL Tech (\$587 mn), M&M (\$551 mn) and Adani Properties (\$391 mn), Care Ratings said.

No cane price cut; Goyal asks mills to be efficient



Food minister Piyush Goyal said the government cannot reduce the fair and remunerative price (FRP), the minimum price at which sugar mills buy cane from farmers, and asked the industry to be efficient, profitable and diversify product portfolio with less dependency on the central subsidy. Addressing Isma, Goyal said the central subsidy of Rs 3,500 crore for exports will help in liquidating surplus sugar stocks.

Bank credit rises 5.73%, deposits move up 11.34%

Bank credit grew by 5.73 per cent to Rs 105.04 lakh crore while deposits increased by 11.34 per cent to Rs 145.92 lakh crore in the fortnight ended Dec. 4, RBI data showed. In the fortnight ended Dec. 6, 2019, bank credit had stood at Rs 99.35 lakh crore and deposits at Rs 131.06 lakh crore. In the previous fortnight ended Nov. 20, credit grew by 5.82 per cent to Rs 104.34 lakh crore and deposits by 10.89 per cent.

Forex reserves down by \$778 mn to \$578.56 bn

The country's foreign exchange reserves declined by \$778 million to \$578.568 billion in the week to Dec. 11, RBI data showed. In the previous week, the reserves had touched a lifetime high of \$579.346 bn after increasing by \$4.525 bn. Foreign currency assets dropped by \$1.042 bn to \$536.344 bn. The gold reserves rose by \$284 mn to \$36.012 bn. The SDRs with IMF dipped by \$3 mn to \$1.503 bn.



Instructed to clear goods fast, credit drawback in 3 days Customs asked to behave

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 18

In a major relief to exporters and importers, customs officials have been asked to credit duty drawback to the exporter in three days. They have also been asked to reduce unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices during the custom clearance of imported goods.

The Action Plan of CBIC 2020- 21 directs officials that at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback should be credited within three days. Further, the refund may be deposited into the customer account in T+2 days.

"The government's instruction to further reduce the timeline for crediting at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback claims to the exporters from seven days to three days, will definitely help



improve the cash flow of various industry players involved in exporting goods out of India, especially in these Covid times when a large number of businesses are still facing liquidity crunch," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner, EY.

Moreover all the remaining duty drawback claims should be positively disposed of by March 31, 2021 and while doing so the target of disposing of draw-

back in seven days should be achieved, said Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

A major cause of worry for importers has been the delay in clearances.

Exports, after a positive growth in September, once again started de-growing in October and November. Delays in the clearance of goods at the customs department have been one among the various reasons for this. "Most of the

imports from Free Trade economies have been receiving queries and were getting delayed for days as well as months," said the Federation of Indian Exporters Association.

The customs officials have now been advised to ensure judicious application of Carotar 2020, which are rules pertaining to country of origin, without causing disruption to the supply chain. They were also advised to review the function of customs ports to ensure that unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices are not being resorted to during custom clearance of goods.

The CBIC observed that importers are often asked to directly seek clarifications of the exporting country on country of origin verifications. "Officers under your charge may also be sensitised to ensure that enquiry on origin of

imported goods is initiated only where there are sufficient grounds to suspect origin of a good, or where the same has been identified as a risk by the Risk Management System. They should be suitably supervised to ensure that unnecessary queries are not raised on account of goods origin," said CBIC.

"In order to resolve industry concerns around the Carotar 2020, CBIC has issued instructions to ensure that queries under the said rules are issued only when sufficient grounds to question the origin of goods are present. This is a smart move on the part of the government and will be much appreciated by the industry, as this, while preventing revenue leakage, will ensure that the shipments are not unnecessary delayed at customs ports," said Jain.

Logistics' competitiveness gap may cost \$500 bn by 2030

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 18

With the supply chain inefficiencies remaining high, the competitiveness gap of the Indian logistics sector is expected to go up from \$180 billion to \$500 billion in 2030.

The logistics cost in India stands at 14 per cent of GDP, compared to the global average of about 8 per cent, creating a competitiveness gap of \$180 billion and this could increase to \$500 billion by 2030, finds a report by global management consultancy Arthur D. Little.

India's supply chain and logistics sector is valued at \$215 billion and is growing at a CAGR of 10.5 per cent. It is marred by an unbalanced logistics modal mix, high indirect costs, poor infrastructure,

fragmented networks and lack of technology adoption. The pandemic further accentuated supply chain weaknesses.

Indirect logistics costs in India are four times the average of those in developed countries. The main reasons are excessive layers in distribution channels and inventory mismanagement. Inadequate demand forecasting due to lack of technology adoption leads to inventory mismanagement. It also leads to high inventory carrying costs, which include costs for holding and storing unsold goods. These costs alone amount to 15-25 per cent of inventory costs or \$120 to \$180 billion.

Transportation by road is at the root of the unwarranted logistics costs. Transportation represents

about 40 per cent of logistics costs, and heavy dependence on the road networks, combined with poor transportation infrastructure, makes transportation costs balloon. India's rail and sea network are highly under-utilised due to lack of supporting infrastructure.

Failing to address India's competitiveness gap of \$180 billion could expand it to \$500 billion by 2030. Greenfield manufacturing will not be viable because high logistics costs are a barrier to entry. High logistics costs will continue to impede local manufacturing and reduce demand for Indian products in the global markets.

"To bridge the current competitiveness gap of \$180 billion, India needs to halve logistics cost from 14 per cent of GDP to 7 per cent,"

said Barnik Chitran Maitra, managing partner of Arthur D. Little India and South Asia.

The study finds that India will have to optimise the logistics modal mix to global benchmarks, with roads constituting 25-30 per cent, railways comprising 50-55 per cent and waterways accounting for 20-25 per cent of transportation modes. It will have to reduce indirect or "hidden" costs to 20-25 per cent through efficient inventory management and monitoring. In addition, turnaround time should be optimised to 700-800 km per day, with the target of increasing truck trips by 50 per cent. The throughput of the road network has to be raised with better quality roads and a higher proportion national highways in the road network.

World's richest banker Kotak made \$16 bn after a brush with death

SUVASHREE GHOSH & ANTO ANTONY DEC. 18

If it weren't for a cricket accident that almost killed him, Uday Kotak probably wouldn't be the world's richest banker.

A ball that hit him in the head and led to an emergency surgery pushed a 20-year-old Kotak to abandon his dream of becoming a professional player. After a brief stint at the family's cotton-trading business, he went on to pursue his MBA at the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies in Mumbai before starting out in finance in 1985 at the age of 26.

Kotak, now 61, has a fortune estimated at around \$16 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

While India has been grappling with a shadow-lending crisis, his Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd has been able to rise through the crowd, gaining investors' trust by starting to slow lending to riskier sectors more than two years ago and keeping good corporate governance. When the coronavirus pandemic added to the industry's woes by eroding borrowers' ability to repay, the firm was one of the first to raise capital to fortify its balance sheet, helping boost investors' confidence.

The strategy paid off: Kotak Mahindra Bank shares are up 17 per cent



this year, the most among Indian peers, and Kotak just gained an extension to his chief executive officer term for another three years. A representative at the firm didn't respond to requests for comment.

"As far as I'm concerned, becoming the world's richest banker is only a proxy for Uday being one of the world's smartest bankers," said Anand Mahindra, the chairman of Mahindra Group in Mumbai, whose tie-up with Kotak back in 1986 led to the firm's name. "More importantly, he's understood that what makes a bank sustainable and durable is not just smart strategies but unsailable governance."

Kotak's company stands out in a country where lenders have some of the worst bad-loan ratios in the world. While its bad-loan ratio has risen in 2020, it ranked as the second lowest among peers, with its capital-adequacy score being the highest. The nation's second-largest lender by market value reported an unex-

pected 27 per cent profit surge in the September quarter.

The firm got another boost last month, when the central bank proposed increasing the ownership limit for founders, effectively reducing the risk that Kotak will be forced to dilute his 26 per cent stake in the lender as previously demanded by the Reserve Bank of India.

Kotak, a native of Gujarat, set up an investment company in 1985 with a Rs 30 lakh (\$41,000) loan from family and friends and partnered with Mahindra the following year. The firm, which started off discounting bills, later expanded its loan portfolio, got into stock brokering, investment banking, insurance and mutual funds. It converted into a lender in 2003 after getting the RBI's nod.

He has been Kotak Mahindra Bank's CEO since its beginning and gained more control of it in 2006 by ending a partnership of more than a

decade with Goldman Sachs Group Inc. Kotak rose through the ranks by keeping strong underwriting practices and avoiding lending to riskier sectors, focusing instead on expanding collateral-backed loans for farm equipment, mortgages and vehicles, according to Deepak Jasani, head of retail research at HDFC Securities Ltd.

While the RBI just approved the extension of Kotak's CEO term investors are starting to wonder what will happen after he hands over the reins.

Unlike many family-owned enterprises in India, Kotak has avoided enrolling family members into the lender's board or at top executive positions. That helped maintain investors' and depositors' confidence in a country where the lack of corporate governance and transparency has already brought down three banks and pushed two shadow lenders to bankruptcy in less than two years.

"It's been all Uday," said Ananth Narayan, a former banker and now an associate professor of finance at the S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research in Mumbai. "There are a lot of good people under him, but frankly, they are all overshadowed by Uday. Anybody who has to step into Uday's shoes has a tough job because he is an institution by himself."

—Bloomberg

Sensex hits 47000 in opening trade



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 18

The Sensex breached the 47000-mark for the first time ever on Friday in opening trade, led by gains in the IT sector stocks post-Accenture's strong first quarter performance and US Federal Reserve's decision to keep rates unchanged.

The unrelenting bull run is now seen taking the benchmark index closer to 50000 points, the target set by some brokerages.

The index opened at 47026 as against the previous close at 46,890.34. But it closed below 47000 at 46,960.69, up 70 points or 0.15 per cent, as the market turned volatile post the big opening move and touched a low of 46,630.31.

The Nifty-50 also closed at a new all-time high of 13,760.55, gaining 0.14 per cent, or 19.85 points.

Recently BNP Paribas set a target of 50500 for 2021, earlier Morgan Stanley had said that the Sensex would cross 50000 by December 2021.

Who knows it may come even earlier by March 2021, going by the pace of index movement.

At the same time risks are increasing as the foreign money pouring into the equity market is large-

ly short-term funds, which could fly out on monetary policy tightening by global central banks like the US Fed.

Large-scale foreign buying continued, with Rs 2,720.95 crore net purchase reported by the exchanges on Friday.

"The Fed's decision to keep rates unchanged will help FIIs to maintain a positive view on emerging markets like India," said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services.

Strong first quarter FY21 performance by IT major Accenture led to a rally in Indian IT stocks.

The BSE IT index gained 1.70 per cent, led by gains for Infosys (2.64 per cent), Wipro (1.89 per cent), HCL Technologies (1.32 per cent) and TCS (0.87 per cent).

"Accenture's Q1 performance and guidance came in well ahead of expectations largely due to continued strong demand in outsourcing and recovery in the consulting business," said Emkay Global Financial Services. "A broad-based demand recovery and sustained healthy growth momentum in revenue/order booking of the outsourcing business augur well for Indian IT peers."

TS DEET TIES UP WITH EQUIFAX FOR STAFF VERIFICATION

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Digital Employment Exchange of Telangana (DEET) has officially collaborated with consumer credit rating agency Equifax to streamline the process of employment verification.

"This strategic collaboration, through the introduction of new digital services on DEET app, will open gates for swift employment & ID verification for employees, easing out the tedious process of hiring," DEET said in an official release.

The current system of employee verification takes upto 10 days. With this collaboration, DEET and Equifax aim at enhancing the employment ecosystem in Telangana and make the process of recruitment and verification instant.

Equifax Analytics is the only significant employer-contributed employment data repository in the country, enabling instant employment verification.

Speaking on the collaboration, IT minister K.T. Rama Rao said, "I see this collaboration of DEET and Equifax as another stepping stone by the government towards a brighter future for the employment sector."

—PTI

Copper tops \$8,000 as Goldman points to commodities super-cycle

Dec. 18: Copper topped \$8,000 a tonne for the first time in more than seven years, with Goldman Sachs Group Inc and BlackRock Inc pointing to the start of a new long-term bull market as supply lags an expected demand boom.

The market is witnessing the sharpest rally in more than a decade, with China's appetite for commodities and supply snags early on in the Covid-19 pandemic

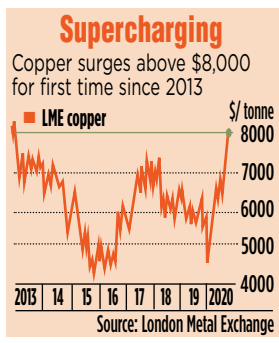
lifting copper about 80 per cent from its March lows.

Expectations for a deficit, the weaker dollar, and its role in green technology have also fuelled gains. Some banks and investors are now drawing comparisons to the spike in the early 2000s, when a jump in Chinese orders ushered in the last super-cycle for commodities.

"You have all the tell-tale signs of a super-cycle," Jeff

Currie, head of commodities research at Goldman Sachs, told Bloomberg TV. He cited metals hitting multiyear highs, the weaker dollar, crude oil reaching \$50, and rising global liquidity.

Copper spiked to \$8,028 a tonne, the highest price since 2013, on Thursday, on the London Metal Exchange. Most other metals also gained, with aluminum rising 0.5 per cent.



Singapore iron ore futures pushed above \$160 a tonne, hitting the highest level since trading began in 2013.

Goldman pointed to the start of a positive feedback loop between commodities, the dollar and emerging-market growth that has driven past structural bull markets. At the centre is strong, synchronized, policy-driven demand focused on wealth redistribution

and renewables and, with commodity supply-side spending outside of renewables still at very low levels, this demand growth should keep markets tight for the foreseeable future, it said in a December 17 note.

BlackRock expects copper to hit new all-time highs in the upswing of the cycle, Evy Hambro, the firm's global head of thematic investing, said.

China's success at containing the pandemic and optimism about global economic growth next year is fuelling gains across industrial commodities from iron ore to oil. It's been a remarkable turnaround for copper, which fell more than 50 per cent from a record high in 2011, trading below \$5,000 a tonne during a slump in 2015-16 and again earlier this year.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Rooney's son Kai signs for Man U

London: Wayne Rooney's son Kai has followed in his father's footsteps by signing for Manchester United. United's record goalscorer posted a picture on social media of the 11-year-old, the oldest of Rooney's four sons, signing a contract at his father's former club. Rooney accompanied the image with the caption: "Proud day. Kai signing for @manchestertunited. Keep up the hard work son." Rooney, 38, now in interim charge of Championship club Derby, joined United from Everton in 2004 as a teenager. The former England striker had a glittering 13-year career at Old Trafford, scoring 253 times in 559 appearances and breaking Bobby Charlton's long-standing goals record in January 2017. — AFP

NBA keeps coach challenge rule

New York: The NBA is keeping the replay rule allowing coaches one challenge of certain officiating decisions per game, the league said Thursday. The coach's challenge was introduced last season on a one-year trial basis. The league said Thursday that the board of governors had approved a recommendation from the competition committee to retain the challenge going forward. "Our coaches were receptive to the pilot version of the Coach's Challenge, increasing usage and becoming more comfortable with the concept and strategic aspects as the season progressed," Byron Spruell, NBA President of League Operations, said in a statement. During the 2019-20 season, NBA head coaches challenged 633 calls in the regular season and 67 in the playoffs. — AFP

Smith gears up for Alvarez bout

Los Angeles: Britain's Callum Smith will be out to prove that size does matter on Saturday when he defends his World Boxing Association super-middleweight crown against pound-for-pound king Saul "Canelo" Alvarez in Texas. The unbeaten Smith (27-0, 19 knockouts) will take sizeable height and reach advantages into the ring at the Alamodome in San Antonio against the naturally smaller Alvarez (53-1-2, 36 KOs). Alvarez, who has not fought since he jumped up to light-heavyweight to score an 11th round knockout of Sergey Kovalev in November 2019, starts as favourite for Saturday's bout where he will once again move up in class. The 30-year-old Mexican superstar faced off against Smith this week where the striking height difference between the two men — Smith is 6ft 3in, Alvarez 5ft 8in — was plain to see. — AFP

Aniket scores as Jamshedpur win

Vasco: NorthEast United FC slumped to their first defeat in the ongoing Indian Super League as they went down 0-1 to Jamshedpur FC, here on Friday. Aniket Jadhav's strike (53rs minute) was the difference between the two sides in what was the 500th game of the ISL. T. P. Rehresh also pulled off a terrific penalty save in the second-half to keep Jamshedpur's unbeaten streak against NorthEast intact. Both sides were unable to break the deadlock in the first half as they managed to cancel out each other's threat. As a result, no shots on target were registered. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Crystal Palace vs Liverpool from 6 pm; Southampton vs Manchester City from 8.30 pm; Everton vs Arsenal from 11 pm; Newcastle vs Fulham from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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

Italian League: Fiorentina vs Verona from 7.30 pm; Sampdoria vs Crotone from 10.30 pm; Parma vs Juventus from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

UFC
Fight Night: Leon Edwards vs Khamzat Chimaev and other bouts from 5.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

ASHWIN ON FIRE

Spinner takes four to tie Aussies in knots on Day 2

Adelaide, Dec. 18: Ravi Ashwin bagged four wickets as a dominant India held a 62-run lead at stumps on day two of the Adelaide day-night Test after Australian captain Tim Paine ran out of batting partners.

Paine was left stranded on 73 not out when the Australian innings ended at 191 to trail India's 244 by 53 runs.

Ashwin had figures of 4-55 while Umesh Yadav took 3-40.

At stumps, India in their second innings were one down for nine with Mayank Agarwal on five and nightwatchman Jasprit Bumrah yet to score. The under-pressure Prithvi Shaw, who was out for a duck in the first innings, was bowled by Pat Cummins for four.

Fifteen wickets fell on the day which started when Cummins and Mitchell Starc took just 25 deliveries to knock off the final four India batsmen.

Australia in turn struggled to make headway as Bumrah, Ashwin and Yadav worked their way through the batting order.

Even with India spilling five chances, they never allowed Australia to settle apart from a determined Paine who plugged on to his eighth half century, aided in part by being dropped by Agarwal on 26.

It was Paine's only misstep and he brought up his 50 off 68 deliveries with an assured cut to the boundary.

As his confidence grew he produced a reverse sweep to move into the 60s with a four off Ashwin.

After Australia took 28 balls to get their first runs on the board, Jasprit Bumrah stepped up to remove Matthew Wade and the out-of-form Joe Burns for eight each before dinner.

Ravichandran Ashwin's spin captured the wickets of Steve Smith, Travis Head and debutant Cameron Green between dinner and tea.

— AFP

SYDNEY TEST STILL ON CARD, ASSERTS CA

Melbourne, Dec. 18: Cricket Australia on Friday asserted that the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India is not threatened by a fresh Covid-19 outbreak in Sydney even though the situation is being closely monitored.

CA officials were put on alert after the number of cases in the northern beaches outbreak in Sydney reached 28 on Friday. The third Test at the SCG is on January 7.

"There's been lots of discussion and meetings of our medical experts, but this is the reason why throughout the summer we've had our players in bubbles in the hub," CA's interim chief executive Nick Hockley said.

On whether the SCG Test was in doubt, Hockley said: "I don't think so — this is the very reason why we have the hubs in place..."

— PTI

Russia hails no ban on athletes

Moscow, Dec. 18: Russia's Olympic Committee on Thursday expressed its satisfaction with the Court of Arbitration for Sport's decision not to ban the country's athletes from participating in the Olympics.

Sport's highest court on Thursday barred Russia from the international stage for two years including the rearranged Tokyo Olympics and Beijing Winter Games, but halved a four-year ban for systemic doping imposed by the WADA.

The country will also miss out on the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, the Russian



Ravichandran Ashwin (second from left) of India celebrates with teammates after dismissing Australia's Steve Smith during their second day of the first Test in Adelaide on Friday. — AFP

SCORECARD

India 1st Innings: (overnight 233 for 6): Saha c Paine b Starc 9, Ashwin c Paine b Cummins 15, Yadav c Wade b Starc 6, Bumrah not out 4, Shami c Head b Cummins 0. Extras (B-2, LB-8, NB-7, WD-1) 18. **Total (all out in 93.1 overs) 244.**

FOW: 1-0, 2-3, 3-100, 4-188, 5-196, 6-206, 7-233, 8-235, 9-240, 10-244. **Bowling:** Starc 21-5-53-4, Hazlewood 20-6-47-1, Cummins 21-7-48-3, Green 9-2-15-0, Nathan Lyon 21-2-68-1, Marnus Labuschagne 1-0-3-0.

Australia 1st Innings: Wade lbw b Bumrah 8, Burns lbw b Bumrah 8, Labuschagne lbw b Yadav 47, Smith c Rahane b Ashwin 1, Head c&b Ashwin 7, Green c Kohli b Ashwin 11, Paine not out 73, Cummins c Rahane b Yadav 0, Starc run out 15, Lyon c Kohli b Ashwin 10, Hazlewood c Pujara b Yadav 8. Extras (LB-3) 3. **Total (all out in 72.1 overs) 191.**

FOW: 1-16, 2-29, 3-45, 4-65, 5-79, 6-111, 7-111, 8-139, 9-167, 10-191. **Bowling:** Yadav 16.1-5-40-3, Bumrah 21-7-52-2, Shami 17-4-41-0, Ashwin 18-3-55-4.

India 2nd Innings: Prithvi b Cummins 4, Mayank not out 5, Bumrah not out 0. **Total (for 1 wicket in 6 overs) 9.**

FOW: 1-7. **Bowling:** Starc 3-1-3-0, Cummins 3-2-6-1.

NUMBERS GAME

R. ASHWIN'S BEST BOWLING IN AUSTRALIA:

● Ravichandran Ashwin recorded the best bowling performance in Australia by taking four for 55 off 18 overs. It was only second time when this off-spinner took four wickets in an innings in Australia. His previous best in Australia was four for 105 off 19 overs at Sydney in January 2015. The 34-year old's best bowling against Australia is seven for 103 at Chennai in February 2013.

● Ravichandran Ashwin also became the third highest wicket taker for India against Australia in Tests after Anil Kumble (111 wickets in 38 innings of 20 Tests) and Harbhajan Singh (95 wickets in 35 innings of 18 Tests). He took 81 wickets at an average of 31.00 in 29 innings of 16 Tests by end of the Australian first innings.

● Steven Smith made just one run off 29 balls in 45 minutes. It was his fourth single in 132 innings of 74 Tests. His previous slowest single was against England at Lord's in July 18, 2013, off 14 balls in 19 minutes.

● Tim Paine's unbeaten 73 was fifth half century in 31 innings of 20 Tests as skipper. Overall, it was his eighth fifty in 51 innings of 32 Tests.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

BIG SQUADS TO FIGHT BUBBLE FATIGUE: IAN

London, Dec. 18: Former Australia captain Ian Chappell believes teams such as India will need increasingly large squads to help them combat "bubble fatigue" as they press ahead with extensive touring schedules amid the Coronavirus pandemic. Leading Indian players have been in a series of bio-secure bubbles since September, initially while taking part in an IPL moved to the United Arab Emirates on health grounds.

Travelling to Australia, they again underwent quarantine ahead of the ongoing Test series.

"I have never experienced anything like this, and I am not surprised some players have started to talk about bubble fatigue. If you look at what India have got coming up, they are going to need a huge squad of players," Chappell said.

— AFP

Man U ride on Rashford's brace

Sheffield (United Kingdom), Dec. 18: Manchester United mounted yet another rescue mission on Thursday, beating Sheffield United 3-2 to maintain their perfect away record in the Premier League this season.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's Jekyll-and-Hyde team now have 18 points from six matches on the road — coming from behind to win each one of them.

Two goals from Marcus Rashford and an Anthony Martial strike lifted United to sixth in the table, five points behind leaders Liverpool with a game in hand.

But Sheffield United are staring into the abyss — with just one point to their name, Chris Wilder's side have fewer points after their first 13 games of a league season than any other team in English top-flight history.

The visitors outclassed Sheffield United for long periods at Bramall Lane but faced a nervy final few minutes before celebrating their 10th consecutive away victory in the league. Sheffield United started brightly as Manchester United struggled to find

THE RESULTS

Manchester United (Rashford 26, 51, Martial 33)	3
Sheffield United (McGoldrick 5, 87)	2
Aston Villa	0
Burnley	0

their rhythm and it was no surprise when they scored just their sixth league goal of the season in the fifth minute.

United appeared to be in cruise control but McGoldrick headed home from a corner in the 87th minute to make life uncomfortable and Henderson had to dive to his right to keep out a powerful shot by substitute Lys Mousset. But the visitors clung on for the win.

Meanwhile, Aston Villa squandered multiple chances as they were held to a frustrating 0-0 draw by battling Burnley on Thursday.

The hosts dominated without being at their best but were thwarted by the Claret, who climbed out of the Premier League relegation zone.

— AFP

Roma rout Torino in Italian league

Milan, Dec. 18: Roma moved level on points with champions Juventus in third place in Italian League on Thursday with a 3-1 win over 10-man Torino.

Torino had a mountain to climb after Wilfried Singo was sent off after 14 minutes in Rome following two yellow cards in seven minutes.

Roma followed on from their 5-1 win over Bologna last weekend and are level on 24 points with Juventus.

After Singo's dismissal the hosts piled on the pressure and it paid off with Mkhitaryan opening the scoring after 27 minutes in the Stadio Olimpico.

Torino goalkeeper Vanja Milinkovic-Savic had

pushed out a Gianluca Mancini long-range effort, but Leonardo Spinazzola sent the ball back with Mkhitaryan's follow-up hitting the post and bouncing into the net.

Jordan Veretout converted a penalty before the break after a foul on Edin Dzeko.

Simone Edera rattled the woodwork for Torino after an hour but the visitors hopes diminished when Lorenzo Pellegrini added a third after 68 minutes.

Torino captain Andrea Belotti pulled a goal back after 73 minutes with substitute Federico Bonazzoli sending the ball wide minutes later.

— AFP

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2018-20
Printed and Published by **K. Sudhakar** on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: **Kaushik Mitter**

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