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VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | 25 DECEMBER 2020



Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy. Max/Min temp.

COVID-19 **C***UNT

CASES **DEATHS** (+324)(+23,942)

1,00,99,021 1,46,458 covid19india.org STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+617)(+3)TS: 2,82,347 1,518 (+4)(+402)

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

AP: 8,79,339



218

worldometers.info/ coronavirus

7,082

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana **Tithi:** Margasira Shuddha Ekadasi till 1.53 am (Saturday) Star: Ashwini till 7.35 am Varjyam: 6.22 pm to 8.10 pm Durmuhurtam: 8.59 am to 9.42 am; 12.38 pm to 1.22 pm Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12

HIJRI CALENDAR Jamadi-ul-Awwal 9, 1442 AH **PRAYERS**

> Fajar: 6.00 am **Zohar:** 1.30 pm **Asar:** 4.30 pm Maghrib: 5.45 pm Isha: 8.15 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM SUNSET TODAY 5.42 PM **MOONRISE** TODAY 2.13 AM **MOONSET** TOMORROW 3.06 PM



Psst! Corona vaccine...

HC strikes down

judge's order

SHORT TAKES

Vijayawada: The AP High Court on Thursday struck down a single judge order that directed the Registrar (judicial) to resolve problems being faced by advocates in listing cases. Earlier, reacting to complaints of advocates, Justice M. Venkata Ramana directed Alapati Giridhar, the

Registrar, to list cases on dates as dictated by judges and take steps to avoid trouble to advocates in getting their cases listed

Full report inside



NATION 5

Modi to credit funds to farmers

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WORLD 5

UK, EU clinch post-Brexit deal

SPORTS 6

Australia all charged up



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Merry Christmas



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

PM praises Tagore's vision

ANIMESH SINGH & RAJIB CHOWDHURI NEW DELHI/KOLKATA,

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

Santiniketan.

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

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

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

of this sentiment." He invoked the famous poem, Chitto jetha bhoy shunyo, uchcho jetha shir (Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high), he also pitched for the National Education Policy.

GETS 41.1% OF KAKINADA DEEP WATER PORT N. VAMSI SRINIVAS I

AUROBINDO

HYDERABAD, DEC 24.

Aurobindo Realty and Infrastructure Holdings Pvt Ltd on Thursday became the major share-holder in the Kakinada deep water port by acquiring 41.12 per cent stake in the company which is currently oper-

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

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

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

Page 2: Aurobindo takeover may kill probe

No stay on Jagan's housing scheme: HC

Post-Delhi return, CM gears up party for polls

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

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

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

er M. Nagasankar of Vijayawada, argued that the government's decision to allot house sites in far off places would affect the livelihood of these people and also change the demographics. This would have a direct bearing on the reser-vation of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, he said. "No one is forcing them (beneficiaries) to take

possession of the sites. It's

Jagan to give away house sites today

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

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

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

The Chief Minister will initiate the programme at Komaragiri layout of U Kothapalli mandal in East Godavari district. The day will also mark the commencement of construction of 15.60 lakh houses in the first phase. In addition to these, the government will also distribute sale agreements for 2.60 lakh TIDCO

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

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

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

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

PLATINUM BLESSINGS

DENIED LOANS, STAFF DUMP GARBAGE IN FRONT OF BANKS

DC CORRESPONDENT

Sanitary staff angry over garbage in front of banks at Vuyyuru in Krishna district. The applicants lamented that the banks were reluctant to give small loans. According to reports, several nationalised

banks refused to give

several

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

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

Association condemned

Row over curbs at Tirumala turns political

DC CORRESPONDENT

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

The Opposition is charging the govern-ment and the TTD with failure to ensure free darshan to devotees from far-off places. Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu Chandrababu slammed the YSRC for "not taking steps" to ensure darshan for nonlocal devotees and alleged that the police at the behest of the ruling party resorted to a lathicharge on the devotees. In a statement, Naidu said, "Everyone has a right to have darshan at the Tirumala temple. The government and the TTD are responsible for ensuring hassle-free darshan to all. The YRSC has been tarnishing the image of Tirumala ever

since it came to power.'

BJP leaders also joined

Naidu to target the TTD

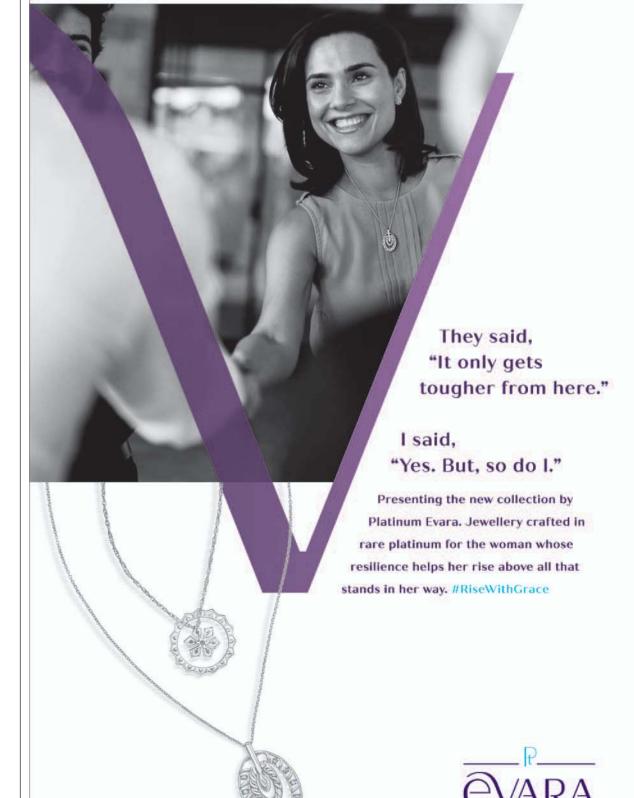
Party spokesperson G. criticised the TTD's decision to allow former Rajampeta MLA Akepati Amarnath Reddy to reach Tirumala via 'Annamayya Bata' on Tuesday along with over 3,000 devotees without security checks.

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

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

Subba Reddy rejected Naidu's allegation of the police resorting to a

Page 3: TTD chief hits back at Naidu



UNSOCIAL I MEDIA Pedda Reddy suspects JC's men of nasty posts

ALA's men ransack JC house

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, DEC. 24

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

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

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

both groups began pelting stones at each other.

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

suffered injuries. Sources said a post against Pedda Reddy's wife

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

Pedda Reddy stopped his convoy in front of Diwakar Reddy's house and rushed into it, accompanied by more than 30 close aides along with armed gunmen and the local sub inspector. None of the family members was around. Aides of

the MLA attacked Dasari

Kiran and beat him severe

ly for the social media post

came out after issuing a stringent warning to Kiran to quit Tadipatri.

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

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

to Tadipathri and moni-

tored the situation.

■ Page 2: Prabhakar Reddy not to file complaint

🛐 🥝 /PiatinumEvara Look for PT950 - The assurance of 95% pure platinum, a mark of authenticity and purity. Explore https://ptevara.in/ For authentic platinum jewellery and assured buyback, ask for your platinum purity assurance card. Some PGI Authorised Retailers: M G Road: Bhima Jewellers 2481531 | Jos Alukkas Jewellery 2464916 | Joyalukkas 2491916 | Kalyan Jewellers 2578233 | Kirtilals 2472511 | Malabar Gold & Diamonds 2497916 | NAC Jewellers 04443996666 | Tanishq 6665002

SHORT TAKES

TAKEOVER MAY KILL PROBE

FROM PAGE 1

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

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

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

PRABHAKAR REDDY NOT TO FILE COMPLAINT

FROM PAGE 1

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

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

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

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

TD alleges graft in house sites

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

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

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

BENEFICIARIES TO BE GIVEN 1.5 There has been a war of **CENTS EACH IN RURAL AREAS**

FROM PAGE 1

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

The state government had

palaces in different metro cities but his regime was giving just one and halfcent in rural areas and one cent in urban areas. He stated that if the State was spared from the ₹6,500 crore looting of public funds, then over 13 lakh families could have got one additional cent. He alleged that the ruling party legislators and leaders had committed corruption in 40 Assembly segments and looted ₹4.000 crore in land acquisitions, ₹2,000 crore in levelling of lands

acres for those living in occupied lands have also been acquired. another ₹750 crore in the

form of collections from

acquired 68,361 acres of

land worth ₹23,535 crore. Of

this 25,120.33 acres belongs

to the government, which is

valued at about ₹8,000 crore and 25,359.31 acres were pur-

chased at a cost of Rs 10,150

crore. Also, 4,457.05 acres

was acquired under land

pooling scheme in Visakhapatnam, 1,074.18 acres owned by AMRDA in Amaravati, 2,550.96 acres scheme

was acquired for TIDCO

housing, and another 9,800

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

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

15.60L houses in first phase

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

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

The first phase works will commence on Friday,

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

ty of houses inspected by experts from IITs and NIT. Each house will consist of one bedroom, living

plinth area of 340 sq.ft.

The government has decided to have the qualiroom, kitchen, toilet and verandah, with a total

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

of 300, 365, 430 sq. ft. In an innovative act, the State government is only charging ₹1 for a 300 sq ft house. The sale agreement would be issued on the occasion.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy prays at samadhi of Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy at

CM extends Christmas greetings

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

fellow human beings, compassion for the helpless, limitless patience, boundsacrifice, peaceful

Chief message said that-love for coexistence, forgiveness even for the enemies were the extraordinary messages that Christ had given

No Coronavirus strain cases in AP, says health minister

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

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

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

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

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

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

ing on Nadu-Nedu works Victoria Hospital at Visakhap-atnam, and the government hospitals at Guntur, Kadapa and Kurnool.

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

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

VIZAG: VIJAY SAI EXPOSES TD MLA'S ENCROACHMENTS

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 24

Rajya Sabha member V. Vijay Sai Reddy listed out the land encroachments made by TD Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi MLA Ramakrishna Babu and reiterated that the government would be the custodian of stateowned lands. He said the TD leaders,

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

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

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

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



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STATE

TTD CHIEF HITS BACK AT NAIDU

FROM PAGE 1

TTD chairman Subba Reddy said there was no lathi-charge and said Vaikunta Ekadasi will fall only on Friday and the dwara darshan will commence from that day.

The TTD chairman said "As Naidu is residing in another state, he has assumed that Vaikunta Dwara darshan had already started. He should note that the TTD has made arrangements to provide comfortable Vaikunta Dwara dar-

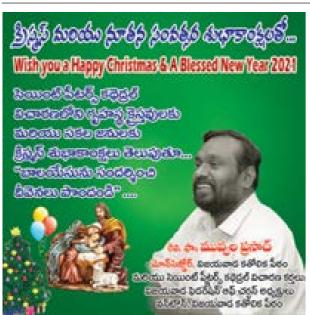
shan for 10 days starting from December 25 till January 3 to devotees this

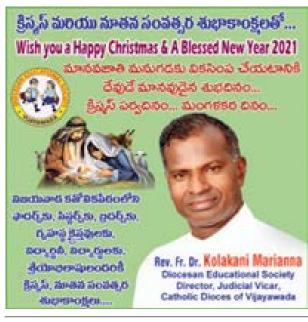
The temple administration also clarified that it had initiated action against those who flew drone cameras at Tirumala and that the vigilance officials have seized the drone.

seized the drone.

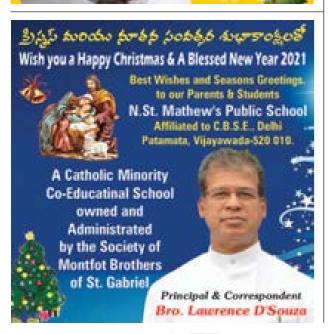
Meanwhile TTD chairman said that Vaikunta Dwara darshan for common devotees, who had booked their tickets online, will commence at the hill shrine of Lord.











Steps on to strengthen rural economy: Jagan

Stone set for the Institute of Rural Management Anand

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 24

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said the government was taking steps to further strengthen the rural economy. The Chief Minister on Thursday laid the foundation stone for setting up the prestigious Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) at APCARL.

Poonam Malakondayya, Special Chief Secretary on behalf of the state government, and N. Biswas, Director, Irma, signed the MoU on the formation of Irma in the presence of the Chief Minister at a function held at the APCARL Conference Hall near the town of Pulivendula.

Speaking on the occasion, the CM said, "We have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with GCMMF (AMUL) on 21-07-2020 with a view to further strengthening the rural economy."

He said the AP Amul scheme was formally launched on December 2 in 400 villages in three districts by the AP Dairy Development Cooperative Federation. Thus rural



Vijayawada Bishop T. Joseph Rajarao offers prayers at the replica of Bala Yesu at St. Paul's cathedral on the eve of Christmas celebrations in Vijayawada on Thursday. -DC

women milk producers' cooperatives were formed and laid the foundation for their economic progress. He said the project, which has now started in 400 villages in three districts, is running successfully and the state government is taking steps to expand it to other districts as well. A total of 4.69 lakh women beneficiaries in the state are interested in purchasing cattle through the 'Jagannanna and 'Asara' schemes

As part of the AP Amul project, the government has set up 9,899 dairy cooperative societies and is working to uplift the economic potential of rural women by using the infrastructure related to the dairy industry.

The AP Animal Husbandry Advanced Research Institute in Pulivendula set up in 2009 under the auspices of the then CM Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy at a cost of ₹250 crore on about 650 acres.

He said it was a great honour to have IRMA (Gujarat), one of the most prestigious educational institutions in India, set up at APCARL in Pulivendula as a continuation of the AP Amul project launched as part of its plans to make the rural economy self-sufficient. Mr Biswas, director, Irma, said, "We are able to set up the IRMA in AP at APCARL for the first time in South India in line with the CM's aspirations."

Isro releases 1st set of data related to Chandrayaan-2

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 24

The Indian Space Research Organisation released the first set of data pertaining to Chandrayaan-2 Moon mission for users on Thursday. Additional details are provided at the Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) portal https://www.issdc.gov.in and data may be downloaded Qusing https://pradan.issdc.gov.in.

The public release of the data archived at the ISSDC

The public release of the data archived at the ISSDC in Bylalu, near Bengaluru is prepared in the standard, globally followed Planetary Data System 4 (PDS4) format. According to Isro, its Science Data Archive (ISDA) holds data sets acquired by seven instruments on board Chandrayaan-2 payloads from September 2019 to February 2020. Data sets from IIRS payload will be added to this shortly.

shortly.
India's second mission to the Moon was launched on July 22 last year from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Shar, Sriharikota. An orbiter which was injected into the lunar orbit on September 2, 2019, carrying eight experiments to address many questions on lunar science.

• ISRO SAID that all experiments were going well, and the data received suggests excellent capability to deliver on the pre-launch promises.

• INDIA'S SECOND mission to the Moon was launched on July 22 last year from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Shar, Sriharikota.

Isro said that all experiments were going well, and the data received suggests excellent capability to deliver on the pre-launch promises. Chandrayaan-2 data are required to be in Planetary Data System-4 (PDS4) standard and required to be peer reviewed scientifically and technically before acceptance as PDS archives and declared ready for sharing with the global scientific community and general public.

This activity has been completed and hence the first set of data from the Chandrayaan-2 mission are now being released for wider public use through the Pradan portal hosted by the ISSDC.

HC strikes down single judge order

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA. DEC 24

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday struck down a single judge order that directed the Registrar (judicial) to resolve problems being faced by advocates in listing cases.

Earlier, reacting to complaints of advocates, Justice M. Venkata Ramana directed Alapati Giridhar, the Registrar, to

list cases on dates as dictated by judges and take steps to avoid trouble to advocates in getting their cases listed. He warned of severe legal action against the Registry if his orders were not implemented.

However, a division bench comprising Chief Justice J.K. Maheshwari and Justice J. Uma Devi took objection to the single judge order and struck down the same. In a rare

event, the CJ also threatened to slap a fine on advocate P.V. Ramana who tried to argue that the single judge order was to address the problems faced by the advocates.

The Bench felt that Justice Venkata Ramana should have called the Registrar and discussed the issue before passing orders. Giridhar filed a petition in his personal capacity

357 Covid cases registered in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

The spree of the decrease in Corona positive cases continued in AP by registering 357 new Covid-19 positive cases in the past 24 hours on Thursday. Only four deaths, one each reported in Anantapur, Kadapa, Krishna

and WG districts registered, and the total deaths increased to 7,089 in AP. Total Covid-19 cases increased to 8,80,075 and 355 patients were recovered from the disease on Thursday, which increased the total number of recoveries to 86,9124. As many as 59,551 samples were tested in past 24 hrs.

PSPGL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited

Rept. Office: PSE8. Head Office, The Mall, Patials 147001
CIN: U40109P82010SGC033813, Telefax: 0175-2201258
E-mail: cao-revenue@pspcLin Website: pspcLin
Office of The CAO Revenue
EOI Press Notice

Punjab State Power Corporation Limited intends to get a System Audit conducted regarding flawless functioning of its digital transactions system.

Service Providers having technical and financial exposure in this field may submit EOI, covering all activities to be performed under "Digital Transactions' System Audit" to the office of CAC/ Revenue, Room Number 507, 5th Floor, PSPCL Head Office, Patials or through email to caonsvenue@papci.in by 25th January, 2021.

Details of existing flow of activities and tentative scope of the proposed job is available on PSPCL website.

(www.pspcl.in, Information Centre, Office Orders & Circulars, CAO Revenue, Digital Transactions' System Audit)

Date: 23.12.2020

RO: 76155/12/6/2021/108

CAO/Revenue, PSPCL, Patiala

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COMMERCIAL

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DECCAN CHRONICLE | VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | 25 DECEMBER 2020

Chronicle

25 DECEMBER 2020

PM's platitudes at AMU play up contrast to reality

rime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University the other day offered Indians a reassurance that this nation belongs to all of its citizens, that India is on the path of progress and that no citizen would be left behind because of their religion. "Everyone would get equal opportunities so that everyone can fulfill their dream," the Prime Minster told the young people, and through them, to the nation, rekindling the spirit of the speech the first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru delivered on January 24, 1948, months after India's Independence and days before the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. "The basic objective," Pandit Nehru had said, "is to build up a free India of high ideals and noble endeavour where there is equality of opportunity for all and where many variegated streams of thought and culture meet together to form a mighty river of progress and advancement for her people." Mr Modi went on to say, quoting the university's founder Sir Syed, that "for the body to remain healthy, every body part should be healthy." Mr Modi also urged peo-

ple not to look at everything from a political lens.

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

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

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

Curtains for Netanhayu?

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

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

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

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

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KAUSHIK MITTER

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Christmas, like Diwali, is a special day in India



Karan Thapar

As I See It

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

The Gymkhana, Rotary and Lions Clubs across the country hold special Christmas tea parties for their members' children. There is always a Santa Claus, dressed in red, with a straggly white beard and a discordant ho-ho-ho! Most of us can sing Jingle bells and many can hum Silent Night. And no matter how many they make, our bakeries always run out of Christmas cake. The truth is that Christmas in India may be different but it's also special. Christmas is as much our festival as it is that majority Christian

world. Unfortunately, however, the Narendra Modi government neither understands this nor respects

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

farm laws. Frankly, this would be terrible. It would be reprehensible and deplorable. It amounts to a blatant and unforgiveable breach of India's valued tradition of respecting every religion. Worst of all, it ignores the fact that Christmas is as important a festival in India as it is for the countries of Europe and America.

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

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

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

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

gests, dedicate December the 25 to India's farmers? Nothing could hurt our Christian brothers and sisters more. Our Prime Minister should be protecting and defending their emotions and sen-timents, not wilfully and repeatedly disregarding them. In 2014 the Archbishop

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

The irony is that were he alive Atal Behari

Vajpayee would be as upset as I am. He would not applaud the govern-ment. Instead, he would lacerate it with his stinging criticism. He was, after all, a secular man with great respect for Christians. He would hate to be the excuse for this affront to them. And although I have not checked with her, I do not believe this would please Vajpayee's daughter Namita either. Let me make one further point. This year the

attempt to redesignate Christmas is likely to be more hurtful to India's Christians than the 2014 redesignation as Good Governance Day. This is because fear of the virus

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

has already changed the character of this special day. We may not be locked indoors as the British are, but we are equally fearful of con-

gregating in churches or celebrating in large family gatherings. For many Christmas is likely to be spent "home alone". Redesignating Christmas Day will only increase the sense of

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

WELFARE SCHEMES

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

D.S.P. Rao Kakinada

PV'S REFORMS

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



aerial survey for minerals Bv a staff reporter

HYDERABAD, DEC. 24.

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

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

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

Matt Ridley



Why the mRNA vaccines could revolutionise medicine soon

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

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

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

But by subtly modifying one of the four letters in the message (replacing uridine with pseudouridine, a chemical found in some RNAs in the body anyway), they made a version that escaped the attention of the cell's MI5 agents. Further refinements five years ago produced a recipe that worked reliably when delivered to cells inside a tiny oily bubble. The pandemic is the first time the technique has been tried in anger, and it worked: the first two Covid vaccines, BioNTech's and Moderna's, rely on these messengers.

The message tells the cell to make

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By arrangement with the **Spectator**

IN BRIEFS

ED attaches ₹1.8 cr FDs in Kerala case

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth ₹1.85 crore, including those of former Kerala principal secre-tary M. Sivasankar, in connection with its money laundering probe in the alleged Kerala gold smuggling case, the agency said on Thursday. "Fixed deposits along with seized cash recovered from the bank lockers totalling to ₹1.85 crore have been attached. Among the attached assets, ₹1 crore belongs to M. Sivasankar, IAS and former principal

'TOY TRAIN' RESUMES IN DARJEELING

secretary to the Chief

Minister of Kerala," the

agency said in a statement.

RAJIB CHOWDHURI I DC KOLKATA, DEC. 24

Nearly nine months after its shutdown due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, Toy Tr-ain, an integral part of Darje-eling and also a world heritage known for its "Joy Ride", will be back on its track in the hills from Christmas on Friday

with three daily services. North East Frontier Railway chief public relations officer Shubhanan Chanda said, "Consequent upon the permission received from the West Bengal govt to resume the "Joy Ride" train services; NFR authori-ties decided to re-start some of the services which had to be suspended due to outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic since

last week of March."
He added, "Three daily services of the "Joy Ride" train will presently run w.e.f. 25th December between Darjeeling to Ghum & back to Darjeeling with stoppage for passengers at Batasia loop for 10 minutes to visit Batasia Eco Garden & Gorkha War Memorial and 20 minutes stoppage at Ghum.

Chilly morning



People sit around a bonfire to warm themselves during a cold and foggy morning in Gurugram on Thursday. Bitter cold conditions persisted in most parts of north India as the minimum temperatures hovered well below the normal limits at several places in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

India, UK discuss vaccine

Oxford, AstraZeneca seek permission to roll out shots

VINEETA PANDEY I DC with agency inputs NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

Union health and family welfare minister Dr Harsh Vardhan held dis-cussions with his British counterpart Matt Hancock on the issue of new mutated SARS-CoV-2 virus in the United Kingdom. The issue of vaccines was also discussed in the meeting held on Wednesday

"Held an insightful virtual interaction with Secretary of State for Health and Social Care of UK, Rt Matt Hancock, yesterday. We discussed strengthing India-UK ties

in health sector, India's preparedness for rolling out Covid-19 vaccine and new variant of SARS-CoV-2 in UK. I said that while Covid-19 vaccine development has been expedited, protocols ensuring its safety & efficacy have not been compromised, India has vast experience in producing vaccines, we are committed to making the Covid vaccine affordable & accessible to people across the world," Dr Harsh Vardhan said in a

series of tweets. University The Oxford and AstraZeneca, that is making the Covidted a full data package to the UK health regulator and sought permission to roll out their vaccines. 'I'm delighted that the @UniofOxford/@AstraZe neca vaccine, developed in the UK, has submitted its full data package to the @MHRAgovuk for approval. This is the next step towards a decision on the deployment of the #coronavirus vac-cine," UK Health

The Covid-19 vaccine by Pfizer-BioNTech was the first to be authorised for use by the UK and has already been given to over five lakh people since last month.

Minister Matt Hancock

said in a tweet.

Even as India is ready

to procure international vaccines, it is keen to join the global teams that have their vaccines and is looking at the international market to push its indigenous vaccines that are still under development.

The New Delhi based AIIMS on Thursday invited volunteers for the Phase III clinical trial of the indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine candidate 'Covaxin' for one of the sites.

"This is a whole-virion inactivated vaccine cosponsored by Indian Council of Medical (ICMR) and Research Bharat Biotech," AIIMS said in an advertisement.

NO DEMOCRACY IN INDIA, SAYS **RAHUL GANDHI**

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

Congress leaders led by Rahul Gandhi met President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday to demand the repeal of the three new farm laws. Gandhi said that his delegation met the President with two signatures demanding that he intervene and the new farm laws be taken back. "We told the President that the laws are anti-farmer and that farmers and labourers will suffer due to them. The government said these laws are in favour of the farmers, but the country is seeing that farmers are against these laws, Gandhi said.

The march led by Gandhi to the Rashtrapati Bhavan was stopped by the police and Gandhi Vadra along with several other party leaders were taken into custody and driven away in buses to the Mandir Marg police station.

Only Gandhi, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary were admitted to meet the President.

After meeting the President, Gandhi launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that there was no democracy in India. "There is no democracy in India. If some of you think there is, then it's in your imagination... PM Modi is making money for crony capitalists. Whoever will try to stand against him will be called a terrorist — be it farmers, labourers and even Mohan Bhagwat," he said.

Centre extends fresh invite to farmer unions

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

The Centre on Thursday extended a fresh invite to protesting farmer unions for talks, but made it clear that it would not be logical to include any new demand related to minimum support price (MSP) in the agenda, adding that it was out of the purview of three new agriculture laws. The Centre said that the new laws have no connection with the price regime nor would they have any impact on the procurement of farm produce at fixed rates.

In a three-page letter addressed to the Sankyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of 40 farm unions, agriculture ministry's joint secretary and CEO PM-Kisan Vivek Aggarwal said, "This has been told to the

unions in every discussion and it has also been made clear that the government is ready to give written assurance on MSP. Any new demand related to MSP, which is out of the ambit of farm laws, is not logical to include in the talks. As informed earlier, the government is ready to discuss all the issues raised by farmer unions.

The letter from the Centre comes just a day after the farmer asked the government to stop repeating meaningless amendments and offer a concrete proposal in writing for another round of talks. The government had earlier written to the farmers' unions on Sunday, inviting them for the sixth round of talks as per their convenience.

Aggarwal's letter said, "I again request you that the government has been discussing all issues with an open heart and good intention to end the protest, and will continue to do so. Kindly suggest a date and time (for the next round of

PM TO CREDIT **FUNDS TO 9-CR FARMERS TODAY**

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

As the protests against recently-passed three farm laws grow louder, the BJP will dedicate the birth anniversary of its patriarch and former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Friday to the farmers with Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing them and transferring ₹18,000 crores to the accounts of 9 crore farmers under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana.

To make the event grand, the BJP leadership has instructed its leaders, MPs, MLAs and office-bearers in its state units to invite farmers to all the districts and state offices to listen to the Prime Minister's address and it should be widely publicised.

The party has also asked its leaders to make arrangements at all Agricultural Committee (APMC) and cooperative centres to ensure mass participation.

The party has asked its leaders to put up big screens for listening to the Prime Minister's address at every block development centre, ensuring participation of the maximum number of farm-

The party leadership has asked its leaders that the program at district level should start an hour before the address of PM Modi.

Previous five rounds of talks between the government and the unions failed to break the deadlock with the farmers insisting on the repeal of the three laws.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

15-YRS' JAIL TO **HAFIZ SAEED IN ONE MORE CASE**

Lahore, Dec. 24: Mumbai ter ror attack mastermind and Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed was on Thursday sentenced to 15 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan in one more terror financing case. The court also imposed 200,000 Pakistani rupees fine on him.

Saeed, 70, has already been convicted for 21 years imprisonment in four terror financing cases of late. Now, Saeed will have to undergo collective imprisonment of over 36 years in the Kot Lakhpat Jail Lahore. His punishment will run concurrently in these cases

BODIES OF 20 MIGRANTS RETRIEVED

Tunis, Dec. 24: Tunisia's coastguard on Thursday retrieved the bodies of 20 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa after their boat capsized at sea, a spokes man for the defence ministry said. Five other migrants who were on board were rescued, ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri said, adding that a se arch operation was underway.

Zekri did not give further details, but said the rescue operation took place off the port of Sfax in central Tunisia. Khaled Hayouni, a spokesman for the interior ministry said the boat was heading to Italy from the Sidi Mansour district of Sfax when it sank.

More than 40 people were on board the makeshift boat, Mourad Turki, a spokesman for the Sfax court, said.

ETHIOPIA GUNMEN KILL MORE THAN 100

Addis Ababa, Dec. 24: Gunmen killed more than 100 peo-ple in an attack on Wednesday in western Ethiopia, the national human rights body said.

The Ethiopian Human Righ ts Commission (EHRC) said survivors had "disturbing photo evidence of the attack which started in the pre-dawn hours "on sleeping residents' in the region's Metekel zone.

UK, EU clinch post-Brexit free trade agreement

Details to emerge in next few days with final ratification by both Parliaments

European Union (EU) officials in Brussels confirmed on Thursday as both sides managed to thrash out a post-Brexit free trade agreement (FTA) just days before the December 31 deadline. Thousands of pages of legal text accompanies the deal, with details of the agreement set to emerge in the course of the next few days, including the final ratification of the FTA by

Parliaments on both sides.
"We have got Brexit done and we can now take full advantage of the fantastic opportunities available to us as an independent trading nation, striking trade deals with other partners around the world," Downing Street said in a statement. "We have signed the first free trade agreement based on zero tariffs and zero quotas that has ever been achieved with the EU The deal is the biggest bilateral trade deal signed

London, Dec. 24: The deal is done, Downing Street in London and Enveronment Union (FII) office that the JW has taken hard. that the UK has taken back control of its "money, borders, laws, trade and our fishing waters".

"The deal also guarantees that we are no longer in the lunar pull of the EU, we are not bound by EU rules, there is no role for the European Court of Justice and all of our key red lines about returning sovereignty have been achieved. It means that we will have full political and economic independence on 1st January 2021,"

Downing Street declared. On the other side, the EU said it has a good deal to show for the "long and winding road". "We have finally got a deal, a fair and responsible deal," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said at a press conference

from Brussels.
"The EU rules and standards will be respected... the United Kingdom is a long-standing partner,"

path to such an agreement, with the UK concerned about the EU's insistence to close alignment to its rules even after Brexit and the EU accusing the UK of expecting unfair advantages.

she said, adding that while "parting was such sweet sorrow" it was time to look to the future as the UK is now classified as a "third country" in relation to the economic bloc.

Earlier, it had emerged that crunch talks overnight meant UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson summoned his Cabinet for a late Wednesday night conference call to indicate that a post-Brexit trade agreement is ready to be signed off soon. Johnson and Von Der Leyen have been in close contact over the past few days as the December 31 transition period cut-off

loomed over the negotia- the member-countries britions, which have missed repeated deadlines as they failed to agree on key areas of fishing rights in each other's waters and competition rules that would apply to the UK as a non-member of the 27member economic bloc.

According to early reports, both sides have come to a base agreement which would ensure most of the current tariff-free, quotafree arrangement but unlikely to mean entirely frictionless trade as businesses had hoped. The UK Parliament needs to ratify the deal and as it has already risen for Christmas break, the likelihood is that MPs will be recalled to the House of Commons next week for urgent business. Johnson's comfortable majority in the Commons means the deal is likely to be signed off in time. On the EU side, the European Parliament would then ratify the agreement, which is expected in efed on it, they are unlikely to exercise their veto nas now been four and half years since Britain voted to exit the EU in a referendum in June 2016. It officially left at the end

of January this year and entered into an 11-month transition period, or a phase of status quo, to hammer out a new free trade agreement.

However, the last few months and weeks have proved particularly tense on the path to such an agreement, with the UK concerned about the EU's ment to its rules even after Brexit and the EU accusing the UK of expecting unfair advantages.

The main sticking points were fishing rights and the so-called "level playing field" — measures to prevent what is seen as unfair competition through the lowering of standards or the use of state subsidies.

Don vetoes def bill; cites certain provisions as risk

Washington, Dec. 24: US President Donald Trump vetoed a broad defense funding bill sent to him by Congress Wednesday, complaining that it helps Russia and China and objecting provisions to rename military bases

The bipartisan bill was passed by high enough margins in both chambers of Congress for law-makers to — in theory — override the president's rejection. The veto of the \$740 billion measure to fund the military for fiscal 2021 came a day after the US leader, with less than one month left in office, threw a separate \$900 billion Covid-19 relief bill and overall funding for the government into question.

Trump criticised the annual National Defense Authorization Act for not responding to his demand to end liability protec-tions for social media companies, known as Section 230 — an issue with no relationship to the US Defense Department. He also objected to a pro-

vision in the NDAA to rename military bases bearing the names of generals from the secessionist, slavery-supporting South in the 19th century And he objected to a pro-

vision which could impede his decision to sharply cut US troop levin Germany, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The NDAA "fails to

TRUMP PARDONS MORE, INCLUDING **KUSHNER DAD: WH**

Washington, Dec. 24: President Donald Trump issued a new raft of pardons on Wednesday for allies including the father of his son-in-law Jared Kushner, adding to a long list he has granted in his waning days in

office.

In addition to the pardon for Charles Kushner, Trump also pardoned his 2016 campaign chairman Paul Manafort and longtime ally Roger Stone, the White House said in a statement.

They were among 26 people pardoned and three who had all or part of their sentences com-muted on Wednesday by Trump.

include critical national security measures includes provisions that fail to respect our veterans and our military's history, and contradicts efforts by my administration to put America first in our national security foreign actions," Trump said in a statement.

Without the changes to Section 230, Trump said, the NDAA "is a 'gift' to China and Russia.

Rocket hit: Trump warning to Iran

Washington, Dec. 24: US President Donald Trump warned Wednesday he would hold "Iran responsible" in the event of a fatal attack on Americans in Iraq, as the first anniversary of the killing of a top Iranian general in a US air strike approaches. "Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by sev-

eral rockets," Trump said

on Twitter, referring to an

'Guess where they came from: IRAN," he added.
"Now we hear chatter of

additional attacks against Americans in Iraq," he added, before offering "some friendly health advice to Iran: if one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over," he said.

RECORD VIRUS CASES, DEATHS **IN RUSSIA**

Moscow, Dec. 24: Russia on Thursday registered record numbers for daily infections and deaths from the Coronavirus, as the country avoids reimposing a nationwide lockdown.

Health officials reported 29,935 new infections, bringing the country's caseload to 2,963,688 the fourth-highest in the world.

They also registered 635 deaths, increasing total fatalities to 53,096 since the beginning of the pandemic.

Russia's death rate is much lower than that of other badly hit countries, raising concerns that authorities could be downplaying the scale of

UK-France border to stay open Dover, Dec. 24: Rail and

sea links between the UK and France will remain open over Christmas to clear the backlog of thousands of trucks stranded by border closures due to the discovery of a new strain of Coronavirus, Britain said Thursday.

Thousands of European truckers on Wednesday spent a fourth night sleeping in the cabs of their vehicles, which are stuck close to the major cross-Channel port of Dover while the drivers wait to pass a Covid test, as required by France for

Around 6,000 trucks were waiting early Wednesday evening to cross the border according to Britain's Department of Transport, including 3,750 vehicles parked at the old Manston airport, which is also a Covid testing site.



Police speak with a driver as freight lorries remain queued up on the M20 motorway, leading to the Port of Dover in England on Thursday, as rail and sea links between the UK and France are to remain open over Christmas to clear the backlog of trucks stranded by a new strain of Coronavirus.

Tatum leaves

Bucks in tatters Los Angeles: Boston Forward

Jayson Tatum banked in a game-winning three pointer over Giannis Antetokounmpo with 1.5 seconds left to give the Celtics an 122-121 NBA seasonopening victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday. Antetokounmpo, the two-time defending NBA Most Valuable Player, had a chance to tie it

from the free-throw line with four-tenths of a second left, but the Greek superstar missed his second free throw after being fouled at the rim and the Celtics came away with the win on their home floor. "Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be in that position," Tatum

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

Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee with 35 points, 13 rebounds. two assists and two blocked

Oly-bound athletes det vaccine priority

New Delhi: A parliamentary panel on Thursday recommend-ed putting athletes, coaches and support staff going for the 2021 Japan Olympics in the priority group for the Covid-19 vaccination process. The committee also voiced concern over large number of vacancies of coaches, saying they should be filled up in a time-bound manner so that Olympic preparations do not suffer. The Japan Olympics are slated to be held from July next year. The panel has also recommended identifying training facilities, stadia and sports centres for Olympic qualified athletes which have not opened yet. It said the closed centres should be reopened "at the earliest" or theathletes should berelocated to alternate centres which have opened. - PTI

Odisha to have new

hockev stadium

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced that a new world-class hockey stadium would be constructed at Rourkela in Sundargarh district as part of preparations for the 2023 Hockey World Cup which will be hosted by the state. The proposed stadium would be the largest hockey stadium in India with a sitting capacity of 20,000 people. This is going to redefine the sports landscape in the region, the chief

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

BCCI AGM approves 10 teams for 2022 IPL

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

"Two new teams will be introduced in the 2022 IPL," a Board source said. It is learnt that time at hand is too short for even a nine-team IPL next year as an elaborate tender-float-

ing process, increase of matches and ensuring that all foreign player' internacalenders are adjusted, would be prove to be a herculean task.

T20 CRICKET IN OLYMPICS

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

"Look, the BCCI is an autonomous body and it would like to maintain its autonomy. Our legal team ifications. Obviously, cricket in Olympics is great for the game. Let's hope we can move in the right direction," the member, who attended the AGM, said.

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

BCCI LIKELY TO LOSE

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

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

COMPENSATION FOR

DOMESTIC PLAYERSAlso, it was decided that all first-class players, both

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

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

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

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

and accordingly compensate their male and female

JUNIOR AND WOMEN'S

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

SHUKLA BECOMES NEW VP

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

ue as the chairman of the IPL Governing Council.

GANGULY-SHAH. INDIA'S FACE AT ICC

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

Sharma was on Thursday appointed chairman of the senior national selection panel by the BCCI's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC), which also picked Abbey Kuruvilla and Debashis Mohanty in the five-member

CHETAN SHARMA IS NEW

CHAIRMAN OF SELECTORS

Ahmedabad, Dec. 24: Former India pacer Chetan

The selection panel also has former India players Sunil Joshi and Harvinder Singh. As per the BCCI constitution, the candidate with the most Test caps becomes the chief selector. -PTI

Sourav Ganguly continu-

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

WOMEN'S TEST MATCHES

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

GM SACKED

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

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

RETIREMENT AGE OF

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

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

Aussies charged up

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

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

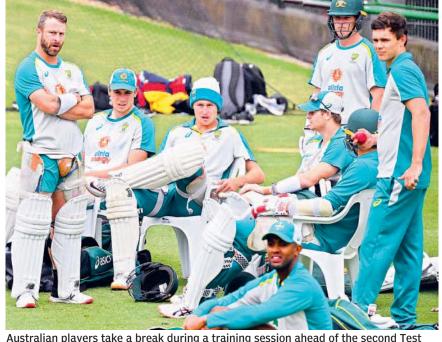
Australia head into the Boxing Day clash at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on a high after crushing the visitors by eight wickets inside three days in the opening Test at Adelaide.

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

Langer said it was an incredible effort, and he wants to see it repeated. "I've said that to become

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

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



against India, in Melbourne on Thursday.

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

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

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

INDIA SWEAT IT OUT AHEAD OF BOXING DAY TEST

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

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

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

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

Warne serves a warning to India

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

"I think Australia is probably going to blow them away," Warne, who claimed a record 708 Test wickets for Australia, told Fox "Having said that, they

have some class players to come in like KL Rahul. Young Gill will come in. (Ajinkya) Rahane is a class We know what (Cheteshwar) Pujara can do," he said. "(Mohammed) Shami is a huge loss as well. He's such

a quality bowler. And if you look at bowlers for the Melbourne conditions drop in pitches Shami hits the seam and stands it up and bowls a good length and straight," he added.

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

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

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



Shane Warne

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

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

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

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

--PTI

Man Utd, Spurs cruise into semis

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

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

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

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

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

They are third in the Premier League and have won their last three matches in all competitions.

United joined holders Manchester Tottenham and secondtier Brentford in the League Cup semi-finals.

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

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

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

ing him minutes later. Ben Davies Tottenham back in front with his first goal since 2017 before Harry Kane sealed Spurs' place in the semifinals. -AFP

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