

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | FRIDAY 25 | DECEMBER 2020

## WEATHER



**Max:** 29°C  
**Min:** 21°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Margazhi 10  
**Tithi:** Ekadashi  
**Star:** Ashwini/ Bharani  
**Rahukalam:**  
10.30 am to 12 noon  
**Yamagandam:**  
3 pm to 4.30 pm

### PRAYERS

**Fajar:** 5.11 am  
**Jumma:** 12.13 pm  
**Asar:** 3.23 pm  
**Maghrib:** 5.48 pm  
**Isha:** 7.04 pm

**SUNSET TODAY** 5.50 PM

**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 6.29 AM

**MOONRISE TODAY** 2.19 PM

**MOONSET TOMORROW** 3.04 AM

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+22,318)	(+315)
1,01,46,342	1,47,106

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+1,035 )  
**TN:** 8,11,115      12,036

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

7,94,34,342

### DEATHS

17,44,373

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

218

worldometers.info

## Karnataka withdraws night curfew order

**Bengaluru:** In a U-turn, the Karnataka government on Thursday withdrew its night curfew order, hours before it was to comment into effect. The decision to impose night curfew for nine days from 11 pm to 5 am starting from Thursday was taken on Wednesday in line with the Centre's advice, amid concerns over a new COVID-19 variant spreading in the UK.

## Priority list for vaccine ready, 21,000 personnel getting trained to deliver shots: TN

**Chennai:** A list of people who should be inoculated on priority in Tamil Nadu is ready and 21,000 personnel are being trained and 46,000 centres identified in the state for the rollout of the immunisation exercise after the vaccine is made available, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan said on Thursday.

## COUNTER

## POINT



**Psst! Corona vaccine...**

# BCCI approves 10-team IPL from 2022 edition

**Ahmedabad, Dec. 24:** The governing body of the Board for Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) on Thursday ratified the entry of two new franchises in the Indian Premier League (IPL) to make it a 10-team affair from 2022. It has also decided to back the international Cricket Council's push for cricket's inclusion in the 2028 Olympics. It was decid-

ed during its annual general meeting (AGM) here. Ahmedabad, which boasts a refurbished Motera stadium with a seating capacity of 1.10 lakh, Lucknow, and Kochi or Thiruvananthapuram are likely to be in the fray. It's learnt that the BCCI has decided to set a cap of one franchise per state which means the new IPL franchis-

es would be located in a state where no existing team has a home base.

It is learnt that time at hand is too short for even a nine-team IPL next year as an elaborate tender-floating process, increase of matches and ensuring that all foreign player' international calendars are adjusted, would be prove to be a Herculean task.—Agencies ■ **P4**

## Centre invites farmers but MSP not on agenda

**SANJAY KAW | DC**

NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

The Union government on Thursday extended a fresh invite to protesting farmer unions for talks, but made it clear that it would not be logical to include new demands related to minimum support price (MSP) in the agenda, adding that it was out of the purview of the three new agriculture laws. The government said 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 Sankhyut 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. ■ **P4**

## Cong leaders meet Prez, demand repeal of farm laws

**DC CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

Congress leaders led by former AICC president Rahul Gandhi met President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday to demand the repeal of the three new farm laws. Mr Gandhi said that his delegation met the President with two crore 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," Mr Gandhi said.

The march led by Mr Gandhi to the Rashtrapati Bhavan was stopped by the police and AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra along with several other party leaders were taken into custody and driven away in buses to the Mandir Marg police station. A few Congress leaders then proceeded to the Rashtrapati Bhawan. ■ **P4**

## Merry Christmas 2020



Christmas prayers underway at Santhome church in Chennai on Thursday. *Deccan Chronicle* wishes all its readers a happy Christmas.

— DC

## India challenges tribunal verdict in Vodafone case in Singapore court

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** India has challenged in a Singapore court a verdict of an international arbitration tribunal that overturned its demand for ₹22,100 crore in back taxes from Vodafone Group Plc, sources said Thursday. An international arbitration court had on September 25 rejected tax authorities' demand for ₹22,100 crore in back taxes and penalties relating to the British telecom giant's 2007 acquisition of an Indian operator.

Two sources privy to the development said India had 90 days to file an appeal against the tribunal award, and the same was done in a Singapore court earlier this week. This appeal also sets the stage for the government to challenge the order of a three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague that asked India to return USD 1.4 billion to British oil and gas company Cairn Energy plc. —PTI

# UK, EU clinch post-Brexit free trade pact

**London, Dec. 24:** Britain clinched a historic deal with the European Union 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. "The deal is done," was the message posted on social

● **"We have concluded the biggest trade deal yet and delivered on what the British people voted for," said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson**

media alongside an image of a jubilant Prime Minister Boris Johnson with his arms in the air moments after news of a post-Brexit free trade agreement (FTA) hit the headlines.

He soon took to the podium at 10 Downing Street to declare that he had kept his promise to the British electorate, who had voted for Brexit in a referendum in

June 2016 and then handed him a thumping majority in December 2019 on a manifesto that centred around getting Brexit done.

"We have concluded the biggest trade deal yet and delivered on what the British people voted for," said Johnson, visibly in much higher spirits than he has seemed at these briefings usually dominated by

Covid-19 infection rates and tougher lockdown measures.

Declaring that the UK had taken back control of its "destiny, money, borders, laws and waters", Johnson hailed the new "comprehensive, Canada style, free trade deal" that will allow goods to be sold "without tariffs and without controls in the EU markets". "We will be able to decide how and where we are going to stimulate new jobs and new homes in freeports and new green industrial zones. —PTI

## Covid positive UK returnee traced in AP

**New Delhi/Amaravati, Dec. 24:** As states put in place fresh protocols in view of a new Covid-19 strain spreading in the UK, a coronavirus positive woman allegedly managed to give the slip to authorities in New Delhi after her arrival from London and reached Andhra Pradesh by train only to be picked up by authorities and admitted to a hospital.

Her son, who travelled to Delhi to receive her, has also been admitted to the hospital though he has tested negative, officials said on Thursday, adding their swab samples have been sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune to determine whether the woman contracted the new strain of Covid-19. —PTI

## Indian economy is coming out of deep abyss: RBI

**Mumbai, Dec. 24:** The economy is coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic's deep abyss faster than most of the predictions, and the growth will enter positive zone in the third quarter of the current fiscal, said an article on the 'state of economy' in the RBI Bulletin. "More evidence has been turned in to show that the Indian economy is pulling out of Covid-19's deep abyss and is breaking out amidst winter's lengthening shadows towards a place in the sunlight... it is refracting at a pace that beats most prediction," said the article written by the officials of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). ■ **P7**



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**Pondy CM: None has power to ban NY bash**



**WORLD | 5**  
**Don vetoes def bill; cites certain provisions as risk**



**SPORT | 8**  
**Chetan appointed new chairman of selectors**

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# Tagore's vision is essence of Atmanirbhar Bharat, says PM

**ANIMESH SINGH & RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC**

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, DEC. 24

With the upcoming West Bengal Assembly Election on his mind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday attributed the essence of the BJP-led NDA government's Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) initiative to Bengal icon Rabindranath Tagore at the centenary celebrations of Visva-Bharati University, founded by the Nobel laureate in Santiniketan.

The speech was made in the absence of West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee who later claimed that she was not invited to the event though Visva-Bharati vice-chancellor Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty's letter on December 4 inviting her as a "special guest" went viral.

Presiding as the Chancellor of the Central university, Mr Modi, in his virtual address, said, "Guided by Gurudev, Visva-Bharati presented a strong image of Indian nationalist sentiment during the Independence. Gurudev wanted the entire humanity to benefit from India's spiritual awakening. Atmanirbhar Bharat vision is also a derivative of this sentiment."

Invoking Tagore's famous poem, Chitto jetha bhoj shunyo, uchcho jetha shir (Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high) in Bengali accent, he



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses at the centenary celebration of Visva-Bharati University, Shantiniketan, through video conference, in New Delhi, Thursday.

— PTI

also pitched for the National Education Policy, adding, "Today the entire country is trying to fulfil this purpose through the national education policy. Visva-Bharati has a great role to play to put it in place."

To placate the anger among the Bengalis over the Visva-Bharati authorities' decision not to give permission for the traditional Pous Mela this year, Mr Modi observed, "This was the third time in Visva-Bharati's history when Pous Mela was not held. This pandemic has taught us to be vocal and local. This mantra has always been associated with Pous Mela. The artists and artisans of handicrafts, who used to come to the fair, could not do so this time due to the pandemic. Visva-Bharati students can contact the artists and artisans and collect information about them and their products. ■ **P4**

# Mandatory FASTag has city commuters worried

**T. SUDHEESH | DC**

CHENNAI, DEC. 24

City commuters have raised concerns over the lack of infrastructure and transparency in the operation of FASTag, which is being made mandatory for all vehicles in the country from January 1.

Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari had said on Thursday that the FASTag would help commuters save time as they need not stop at toll plazas for cash payments. But, city commuters

point out anomalies in the functioning of FASTag facilities at the five toll plazas on Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR)—Thoraiakkam, Perungudi, Medavakkam, Navalur and ECR link Road (near Kalaighar Karunanidhi Salai).

Earlier this month, commuters questioned the deed of Tamil Nadu Road Development Corporation (TNRDC), the nodal agency that maintains the toll plazas on East Coast Road (ECR) and OMR, as they intimidated the information

about the glitches in the FASTag network, leading to chaos.

V. Subramani of Traffic and Transportation Forum, Chennai, said the travelling expense would rise once the local resident pass (LRP) is merged with FASTags.

"The government should fully exempt the local residents from paying toll," he said. "Currently, there is no transparency in collecting toll in the city. The local residents have already faced many incidents of double charging at toll plazas."



## SHORT TAKES

## Gold worth ₹50L seized at airport

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, DEC. 24

The customs officials at the Chennai airport seized 980 grams of gold worth Rs. 50.54 lakhs and arrested a flyer in connection with the case.

According to airport sources, based on intelligence Syed Imran Ahamed (28) of Cuddalore who arrived from Dubai by Indigo Flight 6E-66 was intercepted at exit. On personal search four bundles of gold paste weighing 1068 grams were recovered which were concealed in rectum. On extraction yielded 980 grams of gold valued Rs. 50.54 lakh was recovered and seized under Customs Act. He was arrested by the officials. Further investigation is under progress.

## Malayalam director passes away

**Kochi, Dec. 24:** Malayalam film director Shanavas Naranippuzha, who suffered a heart attack a few days ago, died at a private hospital here, film industry sources said here on Thursday. Shanavas (37), hailing from Naranippuzha near Ponmani in Malappuram district, was admitted to a hospital in Coimbatore in a serious condition after he suffered a heart attack. But he suffered another attack while being shifted to the private hospital here last night for better medical care, hospital sources said. He was brought to the hospital at 9 pm in a serious condition. His end came after 10 pm. He had suffered brain damage too. Efforts to revive him did not yield result, they said.

Shanavas's movie 'Sufiyum Sujatayum' was the first Malayalam film released on OTT platform during coronavirus lockdown. Aditi Rao Hydari, who was the lead actress in the movie, recalled that he was 'as kind and sensitive as his stories'.

"Rest in Peace Shanavas sir. I Hope your Sufi soul finds a place as beautiful as the one you created for us in Sufiyum Sujatayum."

## Genomic analysis result of Britain returnee's sample expected next week

DC CORRESPONDENT  
with agency inputs  
CHENNAI, DEC. 24

The result of genomic analysis of a sample from a United Kingdom returnee, who tested Covid positive here, could be expected next week, according to the National Institute of Virology and Tamil Nadu has requested the research facility to expedite it, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan said on Thursday.

The returnee from the UK, who days ago tested positive, continues to be treated at the King's Institute for Preventive Medicine and Research and he is stable and doing well, Radhakrishnan said here.

Asked on genomic analysis result of the sample sent to the Pune based NIV, he said institute authorities have indicated that it may be expected on December 28 and Tamil Nadu has requested it to expedite availability of result.

"We are talking with them (NIV) continuously. This is genomic analysis. There are several mutations which has to be studied," he said.

The process involved in such an analysis is complex, something not seen in a routine test to detect

coronavirus and hence it may consume more time, he noted. The idea behind the test is to find out if the strain matched with the ones currently in circulation or whether it belonged to a different variant, like the one seen in the United Kingdom recently which is said to be more virulent.

As many as 2,724 passengers, who either arrived from the UK or transited via that country between November 25 and December 23 have been identified and were being monitored, he said, adding health, civic and police authorities were working in tandem in the tracing and monitoring exercise.

Barring the young man, who tested positive on his arrival from the UK and being treated with drugs including anti-virals and antibiotics at state-run King's Institute, no other foreign returnee has tested positive, the official said citing test results of international returnees received.

Samples from 15 people who travelled along with the man in the Delhi-Chennai connecting flight on Monday have been taken and results are awaited. Seventy others on the domestic flight have also been asked to go for Covid testing, he said.

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Health secretary J. Radhakrishnan along with officials inspecting the international airport in Chennai on Thursday.



The CSI church in Vellore illuminated for Christmas on Thursday night.

— DC

— DC

## 38,000 passengers monitored 9 crew members of BA cargo flight tested

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, DEC. 24

Amid reports of spread of mutant variant of corona virus in the United Kingdom, nine crew members of British Airways cargo flight from London were subjected to corona virus tests and were sent to quarantine on arriving at the Chennai international airport on Thursday.

Airport sources said that following the spread of the mutant variant of corona virus in the UK, the Central Government has banned all flights to and from London till December 31, while allowing cargo flights with special permission.

On Thursday, a British Airlines cargo flight landed at the Chennai Airport and all the nine cabin crew members were subjected to tests and they were sent to quarantine facilities.

Meanwhile, a British airlines flight scheduled to arrive here on Thursday morning from London and one scheduled to leave London on Thursday were cancelled.

An Indigo Airlines special flight to and from Dubai was also cancelled at the Chennai Airport owing to poor patronage due to fear of the spread of the mutant variant of the virus.

**Chennai:** About 38,000 passengers who arrived from countries other than the UK recently were also being monitored in Tamil Nadu. Instructions have been given to them to approach authorities if they have any symptoms and as regards returnees from the UK, their primary contacts were also being monitored.

Three people who

arrived from Delhi allegedly did not cooperate with public health authorities and they proceeded to their destinations in the state and nearby Puducherry claiming that they tested negative for the virus in the national capital.

They were, however, subsequently traced and placed under isolation, the health secretary said

and appealed to passengers and the public to cooperate with officials to effectively tackle the pandemic.

If passengers prevent authorities from carrying out their duty like testing for the contagion, a complaint would be lodged against them with the police and action initiated, Radhakrishnan warned.

While inspection of airports was on across Tamil Nadu, foreign returnees are allowed only if they have RT-PCR negative certificate and were being placed in home quarantine like those who arrive from other states. All the returnees were being monitored, the health official said.

Following inspection of the airport here, cargo handlers have been instructed to use personal protective equipment and officials have been asked to focus more and increase visibility of advertisements on awareness about coronavirus on the premises, Radhakrishnan said. Though flights from

Britain have halted, officials have been instructed to intensify domestic surveillance as some could have travelled elsewhere from the UK and may arrive later in Tamil Nadu, he said.

They were in touch with airline operators as well to ensure foolproof monitoring.

## Horrrifying crime incidents that dominated headlines

SINDHIYA SAMUEL | DC  
CHENNAI, DEC. 24

The year 2020 witnessed some horrrifying crime incidents that traumatized the conscience of the people in the state. From child trafficking to murdering the entire family with a gun, several cases created an uproar in the people.

## Crime tales from Chennai:

**TNPSC scam:** A massive fraud was unravelled in Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) Group IV services examination.

TNPSC has debarred 99 candidates for life for indulging in malpractices in the examination held in September 2019. As per the reports from the Crime Branch CID 99 candidates used evaporating ink to mark the answers to objective type questions. After the ink evaporated, two officers responsible for transporting the transcripts to safe custody marked the right answers in the sheet. Reportedly, 39 such candidates passed the exam and made it to top 100. It should be noted that 16,29,865 candidates appeared for filling 9,398 posts in the Group-IV exams conducted by TNPSC, for which the results were declared on 12 November 2019.

The fraud came to light when the certificate verification of the successful candidates was underway and some candidates discovered that most of the toppers belonged to Rameswaram and Keelakarai centres which raised suspicion and an issue was raised to the authority.

The case was cracked by a special team under the direct supervision of Director-General of Police M. S. Jaffar Sait, who also unravelled the modus operandi of the suspects. Over 50 persons including government officials were arrested in the state in connection with the scam.

The two suspect tahsildars were taken into custody in Ramanathapuram and brought to Chennai for interrogation after which Kingpin Jayakumar of

## 2020 WRAP-UP

Chennai and his associates were arrested. According to officials, the candidates were asked to opt for Rameswaram or Keelakarai examination centre. The suspect officials charged ₹10-12 lakh from each of the candidates.

The candidates were given two pens on the examination day, one normal pen to write their registration number and other important details, while the other pen had disappearing ink which was to be used for marking answers in the transcript.

Amidst the TNPSC group IV scam, the Tamil Nadu Crime Branch-CID (CB-CID) has found malpractices in the 2017 Group II A Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) recruitment exams. The Tamil Nadu crime branch registered a case and are probing the matter.

## CHILD FORCED INTO PROSTITUTION:

The Incident of a minor girl forced into flesh trade in Chennai sent shock waves across the state. In this shocking case, police inspector C. Pugazhendi was arrested for raping the 13-year-old victim several times. He allegedly knew the child had been pushed into prostitution but chose to sexually assault her as a 'customer' in exchange for not reporting the crime.

The case, which has helped the police bust several prostitution rackets in the city, came to light after the child's mother raised the alarm.

The child had dropped out of school after Class 5 and was helping her single mother. After the child attained puberty, the mother, believing their neighbourhood unsafe for the girl, sent her to the home of her niece in North Chennai.

The niece, her boyfriend, and several others are alleged to have pushed the

child into prostitution, letting eight to 10 men rape her daily. After the niece, for months, refused to let the child go home to her mother, the mother grew suspicious.

Following a complaint from the mother, on November 11 the Chennai police arrested eight people, including six women, for forcing the child into prostitution for several months. In subsequent investigations, police arrested seven more persons, including the police Inspector and BJP functionary Rajendran who were pimps and involved in forcing the girl into prostitution.

## SOWCARPET TRIPLE MURDER:

On November 11, Dileep Thalil Chand, 74, who ran a finance firm and his wife Pushpa Bhai, 68, and their son, Shithal Kumar, 42, natives of Rajasthan were found dead at their house on Vinayaga Maestri Street in Sowcarpet in the city. They were shot at point-blank range by the gang of suspects, including a woman, who was their daughter-in-law.

Just over a week after three members of a family were found shot, the Chennai police have nabbed all six accused in the triple murder case. While three were arrested from Maharashtra on November 13, the Chennai police detained remaining suspects, including the Jayamala, Sithithal Kumar's wife from a hideout in Delhi.

Police investigation revealed that the suspects reportedly entered the house in PPE suits and fled in a car. Shithal had married Jayamala, a native of Pune, Maharashtra, 16 years ago, and they had two children. After being estranged from her husband, she has been living with her children in Pune, with a divorce case pending at the family court in Chennai.

Both sides filed police complaints against each other in Chennai and Pune, following frequent quarrels between the families. Shithal Jain allegedly

## Govt medical college a milestone this year

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC  
OOTY, DEC. 24

In this year of pandemic, education activities have been a low-key affair all over the country, but the period saw the foundation laid for the construction of a government medical college, the first ever medical institution to come up here, usher in a new dimension in the education sector in the region, while Gurukulam school in Ooty, won two global awards for its unique tree planting scheme.

The hi-tech modern day hospital facilities had been a pending petition here for a long time, and this year, to the delight of all, Chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, through video-conferencing, laid the foundation for a government medical college to be constructed here.

The medical college establishment also saw some organizations approach the

## 2020 NILGIRIS

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company which also approached the court for transferring the land under its possession for the medical college. However, all these hurdles have been overcome.

The Gurukulam school at Agalar rural limits near here brought laurels to the Nilgiris this year as it bagged two international awards for its unique tree planting project entitled 'Each One, Plant One, Yearly On', as the UK-based green organization 'Green Earth Appeal' conferred International CSR (corporate social responsibility) Excellence Award-2020 to the school for Gurukulam's contribution to the environment around the local communities with its greening project.

The school also received the 'Green Apple Environment Award' by the UK-based 'The Environment Organization' for taking initiative for the project a decade ago.

The school also received the 'Green Apple Environment Award' by the UK-based 'The Environment Organization' for taking initiative for the project a decade ago.

On October 6, over 25 minors and women shared screenshots allegedly that two preachers of Scripture Union, an organisation that promotes the Bible had behaved unacceptably or texted them inappropriate content. Preachers, Samuel Jaisunder, and Reuben Clement were booked by the Chennai police on the charges of sexual harassment.

Chennai Police Commissioner Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal then immediately took cognisance of the case and ordered an inquiry to clarify

any further details. Both the preacher has been booked under 354(A) (Whoever assaults or uses criminal force to any woman, intending to outrage or knowing it to be likely that he will thereby outrage her modesty), 67 (A) (Punishment for publishing or transmitting of material containing the sexually explicit act, etc., in electronic form.) of the Information Technology Act 2008, read with Section 4 of Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Women Act.

On October 30, The Coimbatore police in Tamil Nadu have arrested Samuel Jaisunder, a preacher from Scripture Union, based on a complaint from a college student in the district. The complainant came forward with allegations of sexual harassment against the preacher after coming to know of a series of screenshots posted on social media by survivors who alleged

that they have faced similar experiences with him.

According to reports, Samuel Jaisunder sent the student sexually inappropriate messages between 2011 and 2015 when she was still in school. She reportedly met him between 2011 and 2016 as he visited her school in Coimbatore to propagate the teachings of the Bible. She alleges that he took the numbers of some of the girls, including hers and sent her obscene messages on Facebook.

## Major crime news from the rest of Tamil Nadu

**Custodial death of Jayaraj and Bennicks:** The blood-chilling case of custodial death of P Jayaraj and his son Bennicks shook the conscience of the people across the nation. On June 19, 2020, P. Jayaraj (59) and his son J. Bennicks (31) were picked up for inquiry by the Tamil Nadu Police in Sathankulam, Thoothukudi district for allegedly violating the Indian government's COVID-19 lockdown rules. According to the police, the duo was held for allegedly keeping their mobile accessories shop open beyond permissible hours on June 19. An FIR was filed against the two on 19 June and both were taken into custody. They were sexually assaulted and tortured by the police while in custody, leading to their deaths.

On June 22, 2020, Bennicks fell ill and was moved to the Kovilpatti General Hospital, where he died later that day. The following day his father also died. The custodial death of the two men in Tamil Nadu's Sathankulam town in Thoothukudi district has sparked massive outrage in the state over police brutality.

Celebrities, politicians, and several notable people used social media to reveal the details of the attack and condemn the police action. Hundreds of thousands of tweets were sent out using the hashtag #JusticeforJayarajandBennix, which was among the top Twitter topics trending in

India and globally.

The Central Bureau of Investigation had registered two cases related to the allegations of custodial death. On the request of Tamil Nadu Government & further notification from government of India, and taken over the investigation of both the cases.

A CBI team camped continuously at Madurai and worked in the case during Covid pandemic. During the investigation 10 police officers including inspector/SHO, 3 SIs, 2HC, 4 Constables, all of Sathankulam police station were arrested. The CBI had filed a chargesheet on September 26, 2020, against all arrested police officers. One more accused SI Palthurai died during the investigation due to Covid-19.

According to the CBI chargesheet, the post-mortem report established that the police officers brutally tortured Jayaraj and Bennicks, and "had inflicted several injuries knowing well that they would die of such injuries."

Coimbatore gang rape: On April 12, 2020, the all women police in Coimbatore on arrested seven people, including four school students, for raping and impregnating a 15-year-old Class IX girl student of a government-aided school.

Police said the girl was repeatedly raped by 10 people since 2016. She became friends with a student in 2016 and fell in love with him subsequently. However, the boy raped her repeatedly. Meanwhile, three other boys also became friends with her and raped her. Later, six youths from the neighbourhood also began sexually assaulting her repeatedly.

But, she did not reveal it to her parents, who got to know about her pregnancy and took her to the Coimbatore Medical College and Hospital (CMCH), where she was admitted.

Based on her statement, police registered a case under sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and arrested the seven people. The accused students were lodged at a juvenile home and three other youths at the sub-jail in Avinashi.



## IN BRIEF

## Perambalur annual credit plan is ₹4 cr

DC CORRESPONDENT  
PERAMBALUR, DEC. 24

The potential linked annual credit plan for Rs 4,424 crore has been prepared for the year 2021-2022 for Perambalur district, said Collector P Srivenkata Priya.

Releasing the plan in the presence of IOB regional manager Lakshmi Narasimhan, Assistant general manager, NABARD, LS Naveenkumar, District lead bank manager, Arul, and general manager, district industries centre, Senthilkumar, and others here on Wednesday, the collector said that out of this 4,424 crore target, a major portion of Rs 3,500 crore is meant for agri-culture sector and Rs 348 crore for the tiny and small scale industries sector, and the rest is meant for educational advances, housing and export oriented business, etc.

## Six feet cake in the form of SPB

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC  
SALEM, DEC. 24

In a novel manner of paying tributes to late playback singer SP Balasubrahmanyam, a baker here has made a six-feet-tall cake in the form of the late singer.

The cake was made in a bakery here at the eve of Christmas and is kept for public view. The cake looks as if Balasubrahmanyam is holding a microphone and performing a song. Several passersby were seen taking selfies with the cake. The store manager said, "We are preparing a six-feet-tall cake to honour late singer SP Balasubrahmanyam. We made the cake with 100 kgs of sugar, 80 eggs and sweets. He said the cake was made by a team of six persons, who worked on it day and night for three days."

## Pondy CM: None has power to ban NY bash

**Puducherry, Dec 24:** Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy on Thursday reiterated the decision of the territorial government to permit New Year celebrations with adherence to Covid-19 safety norms. Addressing the National Consumer Day celebration organised by the department of civil supplies and consumer affairs here, he said, "No one has power or authority to ban celebration of New Year revelry."

He said the government is meant to function without banning the practices of the people.

In a veiled reference to the ban on the celebration announced by the District Collector Purva Garg, the Chief Minister said if the pandemic situation was sought to be cited to prevent the celebrations a question arises as to whether industrial, business activities, agricultural practices or others were put on hold.

Are not officials attending offices during the situation, he asked.

Narayanasamy said religious conventions and practices cannot be restricted though one should follow safety norms during the celebrations.

In Puducherry, a former French colony, celebrating occasions like New Year have been taking place traditionally. "Our culture is intertwined with the French culture," he said. "Those showing red flags should change their attitude and abstain from embarrassing the people," he said.

Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi had objected to the Congress government allowing the New Year celebrations here in view of the pandemic and urged Narayanasamy to ban them. Bedi, in a letter to him, said as neighbouring Tamil Nadu has banned

new year celebrations in public places, the Union Territory would draw people from there and the good work done to contain the Covid-19 spread was likely to be at peril. In his reply, Narayanasamy said Puducherry was a tourism place where many people's livelihood depended on the industry and that curbing such festivities would affect the service sector and the economy. He accused Bedi of interfering in the day-to-day administration of the Union Territory and asked her to refrain from such interference. —PTI

## CCB arrests Nigerian national from Mumbai on charges of cheating

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, DEC. 24

Chennai Crime Branch police arrested a Nigerian scamster for cheating a city-based businessman of Rs 40, 50,000 after offering him a 'lucrative' business proposal to import Folic oil from London.

The victim, Joseph, a resident of Kilpauk met the scamster on social networking site Facebook and most of their interaction happened on this platform.

According to the victim, he got a friend request and message from the woman on Facebook in 2019. She identified herself as Elizabeth from London. The two started chatting on the social networking

site. Two few days into the friendship, the woman revealed to the victim that she was involved in pharmaceutical business. She offered him the opportunity to become her partner in the export and import business of Folic oil, that helps in the treatment of Blood cancer.

The woman asked the victim to deposit Rs 40, 50,000 in four different transactions for the folic oils. Accordingly, he contacted the said person in Mumbai and deposited the amount. The next day, the woman stopped chatting with him. Later, he approached the woman in Mumbai who was in contact with Elizabeth but in vain. On realizing he was

cheated, he approached the Chennai police commissioner office and lodged a complaint.

Chennai Central Crime Branch Police have collected call details between the victim and the 'woman'. The police also got the details of the account in which the victim had deposited the amount and begun an investigation.

Police traced the accused to Dwarka in Delhi. He was later identified as Fulgens Quadrio alias Krishnath Wilmer, 27, a Nigerian national. A team of CCB police brought the scamster to Chennai on Thursday. He was produced before a court in the city and sent to judicial custody.

## Farmers walk out of grievances day meet

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THANJAVUR, DEC. 24

Farmers who participated in the monthly farmer's grievances day meet in Kumbakonam on Thursday through video-conferencing, presided over by Collector Govinda Rao from Thanjavur, staged a walkout led by Sundara Vimalanthan, secretary, Thanjai district Cauvery farmers protection association, demanding repeal of the three farm laws enacted by the Centre. They wore black badges to register their opposition to the new farm laws.

In the meeting, a farmer demanded payment of Rs 4,000 per ton of sugarcane. V Jeevakumar, another farmer from Budalur, demanded filling up water in lakes and

ponds in the Agniyar division.

The collector said that samba and thaladi crops have been raised on 1,35,147 hectares. He also said that a total of 1,757 tons of seeds have been distributed for both kuruvai short-term and samba long-term crops. "Now, we have 670 tons of short-term variety of seeds as stock in agriculture extension centres," the collector added.

"With respect to fertilizers, there is a stock of 12,756 tons of urea, 3,133 tons of DAP, 8,214 tons of Potash, 7,297 tons of complex," he said. A total of 1,17,969 farmers have insured their crops for the rabi season for the year 2020. Crops on 3,26,819 acres have been insured, he added.

## Alagiri planning to launch a party?

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, DEC. 24

The ousted DMK leader M.K. Alagiri is planning to meet superstar Rajinikanth, who is planning to launch a party next month. Speaking to reporters, after meeting his mother Dayalu Ammal in Gopalapuram, Alagiri said, "I will be holding a meeting with my supporters in Madurai after January 3. I will discuss with them about floating a

party." Alagiri said he will also meet actor-turning-politician Rajinikanth, when he returns to Chennai.

Alagiri was expelled in 2014 for anti-party activities. According to sources Alagiri has been in Chennai for over a week visiting his son and was waiting for a response from the DMK regarding his re-induction into the party. As there was no invitation, he has decided to enter politics.



Former Union minister and late chief minister M. Karunanidhi's elder son M.K. Alagiri addresses the media after meeting his mother at Gopalapuram residence. —DC

## Chennai's case count dips below 300 mark after months

**Chennai, Dec 24:** Tamil Nadu on Thursday logged 1,035 new COVID-19 cases taking the tally to 8,11,115 and the toll mounted to 12,036 with 12 more deaths. The state capital city's daily case count dipped

below the 300 mark for the first time after May. It reported 296 fresh cases.

All the 12 dead were aged between 60 and 84 and had co-morbidities, a health department bulletin said. The toll included

Chennai's 3,979, the highest in the state. Barring the state capital, all other districts showed either a single or double digit count of fresh infections, evidencing the trend of a continuing decline in new

cases and more recoveries in the past several weeks. The tally of 8.11 lakh plus cases included Chennai's 2,23,509.

With 1,120 patients getting discharged, cumulatively, 7,89,862 people have

got cured till date and active cases declined to 9,217.

As many as 70,993 samples were tested and in total 1,37,30,293 specimens have been examined so far, the bulletin said. —PTI

## Man held for GST fraud

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, DEC. 24

The personnel of GST and

Central Excise Department, Chennai-North arrested a 58-year old director of a metal scrap trading firm from the

city for committing GST Credit Fraud to the tune of ₹ 26 crore on Thursday. Additional

Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore remanded him to judicial custody till January 4. The accused is a

director of the business establishment and the main beneficiary of the ₹26 crore GST Credit Fraud. Colluding with

some fictitious firms he received bogus tax invoices without receiving any goods or services.

## COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



**Aries:** A good time for investments. Students fare well in examinations. Take time before you decide anything important. You deserve all the happiness.



**Taurus:** A sibling may be of great help. Let your winning strategy be your calm, cool way of being. Don't let negative people influence your way of thinking.



**Gemini:** Some of you need to guard your frank speech and brash ways. A few may get you into trouble today with people you care for. Take it easy.



**Cancer:** For your own progress, your hidden envy proves detrimental for yourself. Follow your instincts and acknowledge help from people around you happily.



**Leo:** A recent heartbreak could have changed the way you look at life. It's still very beautiful. A social gathering this evening means new friendships and great fun, enjoy!



**Virgo:** Efforts to bridge the gap with romantic partner are likely to succeed. Follow a strict diet and exercise routine to be fit and healthy. At work ability to do things quickly inspires slow performers.

## You share your b'day with

Justin Trudeau Prime Minister of Canada. Trudeau is the second-youngest prime minister in Canadian history; he is also the first to be related to a previous holder of the post, as the eldest son of Pierre Trudeau.



**Libra:** Make sure you continue work without any ifs and buts. Avoid rash decisions especially while negotiating financial deals. Feeling of boredom may make you lazy.



**Scorpio:** Some of you are likely to experience a different kind of romance. At work you may feel that you are capable of much more than what asked to do.



**Sagittarius:** Avoid over indulgence in work to maintain sound health. Testing times bring forth hidden talent. With your timely effort underlying tensions at home would vanish.



**Capricorn:** Avoid being too vocal about an important project at work. At home you could face some problems with a family member. Domestic expenses might take an upward swing on entertaining guests.



**Aquarius:** Opponents at work might cause some problems. At home lack of communication with family could disappoint. In financial matters unexpected expenses could come your way.



**Pisces:** Spending time with family brings happiness. At work use your verbal and written communication skills to your benefit. This will not be a boring time if you can help it! But it is apt to be a tense time if you are in a close, bonded relationship.



## bridge

PHILLIP  
ALDER

I hope all of my readers have a really fun time over the holidays despite the pandemic.

Now for the regular annual competition plus a ghost of Christmas Past, 20 years ago. 1. How should South play in four spades after West leads a trump, and East follows suit? Do not be influenced by the given East-West hands. They will change when I give the answer on Friday, Jan. 29. The other answers will be on Jan. 30.

2. Propose an auction for the deal, West being the dealer. 3. Look only at the East hand. North opens one spade. What should East do? 4. Look only at the South hand. North opens one diamond, and East passes. What should South respond? 5. Look only at the West hand. East opens one spade, and South doubles. What should West do? 6. Look only at the North hand. West opens seven

West		North		East	
♠ 5	♠ 4 3 2	♠ 4 3 2	♠ 4 3 2	♠ 4 3 2	♠ 4 3 2
♥ 6	♥ 5 4 3	♥ 5 4 3	♥ 5 4 3	♥ 5 4 3	♥ 5 4 3
♦ 10 9 8	♦ 10 9 8	♦ 10 9 8	♦ 10 9 8	♦ 10 9 8	♦ 10 9 8
♣ 9 8	♣ 9 8	♣ 9 8	♣ 9 8	♣ 9 8	♣ 9 8
Dealer: West		Vulnerable: Neither		Opening lead: ♠ 5	

spades, all pass. What should North lead? Two of Japan's poetic forms are haiku and senryu. Each contains three lines, no two of which rhyme, the first containing five syllables; the second, seven; and the last, five. Haiku is usually about nature. Senryu is the same, except not about nature. So, please compose one or more senryu with a bridge theme. Here is a possibility to give you the idea: "If you wish to ask / For the aces partner

holds / Trot out the old Black." But I'm sure that you can think of something much more imaginative. Mail your entry to Phillip Alder, c/o Andrews McMeel Syndication, 1130 Walnut Street, Kansas City, MO 64106 to arrive by Jan. 23, 2021. Or email it to phillip@bridgeforeveryone.com.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli &amp; craig boldman



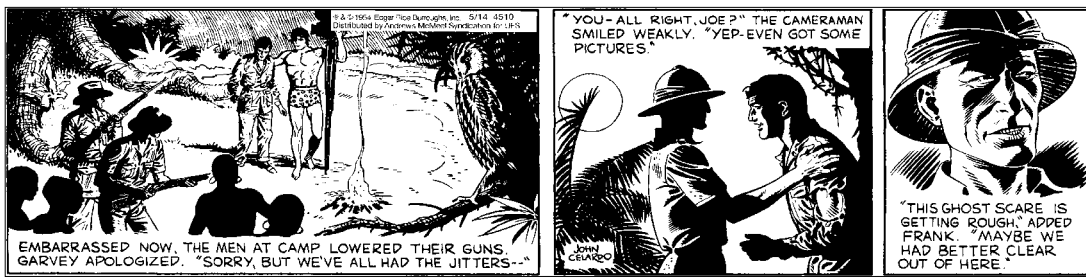
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs





## 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 secretary 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 secretary to the Chief Minister of Kerala," the agency said in a statement.

**India's first elderly Covid survivor dies**

**Pathanamthitta (Kerala):** The country's first oldest Covid-19 survivor Thomas Abraham died of age-related ailments on Thursday, his family said here. The 93-year-old died in Ranni village in the district and the funeral would be held at a church at Aithala on Friday.

He is survived by his wife and three children. The recovery of the 93-year-old Abraham and his 88-year-old wife after a battle against Coronavirus in March this year was dubbed by the medical community as a miracle cure.

**'TOY TRAIN' RESUMES IN DARJEELING**

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 24**

Nearly nine months after its shutdown due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, Toy Train, an integral part of Darjeeling 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 Government of West Bengal to resume the "Joy Ride" train services; NFR authorities 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 2020 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 to visit Ghum Museum."

The first service of the day, from 9.25 am to 11.20 am, will be run by a steam engine while the second, from 12 pm to 13.40 pm, will be on a diesel one followed by the last, from 1.50 pm to 3.45 pm, a steam engine again.

**SIT SAYS BONES OF RAPE VICTIM NOT MISSING**

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 24**

Even as people question the veracity of the SIT version in the 'rape and murder' of the five-year-old girl of Jadupur in Odisha's Nayagarh district, senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Arun Bothra, the head of the Special Investigation Team investigating the case, on Thursday clarified on the missing-bones claims and the doubts raised over the minor's body decomposing in just a few days.

Apparently trying to clear the air, Bothra told reporters, "No bones of the deceased girl are missing. The post mortem report has no mention of any missing bone, and the doctors too have corroborated the same." After the skeletal remains were traced on July 23, Bothra said, bones were sent to the lab for DNA testing to identify the body of the deceased. On being asked why the police sniffer dogs failed to trace the decomposed body by following the trail of the stench, the senior official said, "The SIT hasn't used a dog squad. So I cannot comment on the dog squad."

The SIT on Thursday took prime accused Saroj Sethi to Jadupur village for reconstruction of the crime scene, ascertainment of the modus operandi and subsequent destruction of evidence by the accused.

**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 | DC with agency inputs NEW DELHI, DEC. 24**

Union health and family welfare minister Dr Harsh Vardhan held discussions 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 evening.

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

The University of Oxford and AstraZeneca, that is making the Covid-19 vaccine, have submitted a full data package to

the UK health regulator and sought permission to roll out their vaccines. "I'm delighted that the @UniofOxford/@AstraZeneca 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 vaccine," UK Health Minister Matt Hancock said in a tweet.

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.

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 AIMS 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 co-sponsored by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Bharat Biotech," AIMS said in an advertisement.

**51 LAKH TO GET VACCINE IN 1ST PHASE: KEJRIWAL**

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24**

The Delhi government is fully prepared to receive, store and administer Covid-19 vaccine to 51 lakh priority category persons in the city in the first phase of vaccination, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Thursday.

He said his government is all set to start the vaccination drive as soon as it gets the vaccine from the Centre, and registration is underway for people in three priority categories who will receive it first.

Asked about the charges for the vaccine, and if it will be free of cost, a senior official in the Chief Minister's Office said the government has not taken any decision in this regard so far.

"There are a total of 51 lakh priority category persons in Delhi — three lakh health workers, six lakh frontline workers, and 42 lakh of those aged above 50 and those below 50 but having co-morbidities," the Chief Minister said at a virtual press briefing.

Each person will be given two doses, and a total of 1.02 crore doses will be required in the first phase of vaccination in Delhi, he said.

**Kerala Cabinet to request Guv again for spl session**

**Thiruvananthapuram, Dec. 24:** Days after Governor Arif Mohammed Khan declined nod for a special Assembly session, the Kerala cabinet on Thursday again decided to recommend to him to convene a one-day session to discuss and pass a resolution against the three central agricultural laws, against which farmers have been protesting near Delhi.

Instead of the special session earlier, the cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief

Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, decided to recommend to the Governor to convene the 21st session of the 14th Kerala Legislative Assembly on December 31 to discuss the farmers' issue.

The Governor had turned down an earlier plea of the Left government to convene a special session on December 23 citing that there was no urgency as a normal Assembly session was scheduled on January 8, 2021. Vijayan told reporters here the government decided to

recommend again as the concerns and problems faced by the agriculture sector and farming community continued to be serious.

Explaining the circumstances that forced the cabinet to come up with the recommendation again, he said at the national level, the agricultural sector and the farming community were facing serious issues. The situation was that the southern state was largely dependent on other states for foodgrains, he said. — PTI

**MUMBAI LOCAL TRAIN SERVICE LIKELY TO RESUME IN JANUARY**

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

The Maharashtra government is planning to resume the local train services for commuters in the first week of January. Almost nine months after the local trains would be resumed for Mumbaiers. However, the officers said that if a new variant of coronavirus is found in Mumbai, the resumption of suburban services would be further postponed.

The suburban services carry more than 70 lakh passengers on all four lines of the Central Railways (CR) and Western Railways (WR).

Maharashtra's relief and rehabilitation minister Vijay Wadettiwar said that the decision regarding resumption of local train services for all people would be taken. The government has already allowed water sports and boating (naukavihar).

"We will take the decision soon regarding the resumption of local services for commuters. I think by the first week of January, the local services would resume. The chief minister is also trying for it," Wadettiwar added.

In October 2020, the Maharashtra government had suggested to Central Railways (CRs) and Western Railways (WRs) to resume the suburban services for the common commuters, but both the railways had asked the state government to decide the technological solution to stagger the rush in the trains.

**Karnataka withdraws night curfew order within 24-hrs**

**Bengaluru, Dec. 24:** In a U-turn, the Karnataka government on Thursday withdrew its night curfew order, hours before it was to commence into effect. The decision to impose night curfew for nine days from 11 pm to 5 am starting from Thursday was taken on Wednesday in line with the Centre's advice, amid concerns over a new Covid-19 variant spreading in the UK.

In a statement, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said, "In view of the public opinion that there was no need for night curfew, the decision was reviewed and after consulting with cabinet colleagues and senior officials it has been decided to withdraw the night curfew."

Yediyurappa had initially announced yesterday that the night curfew will be imposed from December 23 till January 2 between 10 pm and 6 am.

Changes in night curfew dates and timing were announced later with Yediyurappa tweeting, it will be from December 24 till January 1, 2021, between 11 pm to 5 am (January 2, 5am).

The Chief Minister today appealed to the people to exercise self-restraint by wearing facemasks, hand hygiene and social distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The decision to impose night curfew had drawn flak from the ruling as well as the opposition parties. Terming the night curfew as a measure to 'cover up' wrongdoings of the BJP government by diverting public attention, Congress state chief D.K. Shivakumar said, "This is a government which is not accountable. It tries to divert public attention through various means. How does the night curfew help containing the Coronavirus?"

BJP MLC A.H. Vishwanath, who is aspiring to become a minister, criticised the government's decision to impose night curfew. "I request the government to reconsider its decision to impose night curfew. Some of the decisions should be taken after much deliberation because it's a government for the people," Vishwanath told media in Mysuru.

Another senior BJP leader and Vijayapura

MLA, Basanagouda Patil Yataln too urged the government to reconsider its decision on the restrictions. Earlier in the day, Karnataka health minister Dr K. Sudhakar defended the government's move to impose night curfew saying it was done on the advice of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for Covid-19.

Speaking to reporters in the city, he said, "TAC had recommended imposing night curfews from 8 pm onwards as a precautionary measure. However, after much deliberation we decided to restrict movement of individuals from 11 pm to 5 am." Reacting to criticism of the government's move, Sudhakar sought to know what important economic activities take place at night.

"When all the essential services, healthcare facilities and transport are well in place, I would like to know whom the night curfew is going to affect?" he asked.

As the festival season started from December 24, the minister opined that thousands of youth may step out in the night for celebrations. — PTI

**RANAUT TO MOVE HC AGAINST DEMOLITION ORDER**

**SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

Kangana Ranaut is likely to approach the Bombay High Court against the order of a Mumbai local court that dismissed her suit to protect her house from demolition.

Her lawyer Rizwan Siddiquee said, "Yes, it is true that the Dindoshi Court dismissed an application for interim protection which was filed by my client Ms Ranaut together with all other residents of DB Breeze building. The said matter will now be filed before the Bombay High Court."

The BMC had sent a notice to Kangana Ranaut in 2018 over alleged illegal construction undertaken at her fifth-floor residential apartment at Khar.

**Sena-led civic body rejects land for bullet train station**

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

A day after the Shiv Sena-led Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) rejected a proposal for handing over land for a bullet train station in the district, the BJP on Wednesday slammed the Shiv Sena calling it a narrow-minded and irresponsible party. TMC's decision comes amid a dispute between the Sena-led Maharashtra government and the Union government over allotment of salt pan land for Mumbai Metro car shed in Mumbai.

Maharashtra BJP's media department chief Vishwas Pathak told this newspaper that the Sena is acting just to satisfy Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's ego.

"Bullet train project should not be seen as project of Prime Minister Narendra

● **THE CIVIC** body's decision comes amid a dispute between the Sena-led Maharashtra government and the Union government over allotment of salt pan land for Metro car shed in Mumbai.

● **BJP SLAMS** the Shiv Sena and calls it a narrow-minded and irresponsible party.

Modi. It is a national project, which had been initiated by UPA-2 under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh. Because of delay in the bullet train as well as metro projects, the public of Mumbai are going to face great difficulty and hardship," Pathak said.

The TMC has rejected a proposal to accept compensation from the National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd, which is a

nodal agency of the bullet train project, for the transfer of nearly 2000 hectare land.

Nareish Mhaske, Mayor of TMC said that the proposal was brought in the general body meeting and it was unanimously rejected by all parties. She has also taken the rejection on record.

By bringing the proposal on record the TMC Mayor had ensured that the same cannot be brought up in the house for at least three months.

Even after three months, it can only be brought in by a member who was not present for Wednesday's meeting.

It is apparent that the Sena is trying to create hurdles for the Centre's bullet train project in Thane by not approving the land transfer.



## SHORT TAKES

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

**Lahore, Dec. 24:** Mumbai terror 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 five terror financing cases at 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 spokesman for the defence ministry said. Five other migrants who were on board were rescued, ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri said, adding that a search 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 people in an attack on Wednesday in western Ethiopia, the national human rights body said, the latest in a series of deadly assaults in the area.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a government-affiliated but independent body, said in a statement late on Wednesday that "more than 100 people have been killed in fires and shooting perpetrated by armed men" in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

The commission 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 and continued until Wednesday.

## KANSAS COP FATALLY SHOT SUSPECT

**Kansas, Dec. 24:** Wichita police say a police officer fatally shot a bank robbery suspect after the man rammed a stolen pickup truck into the officer's police cruiser.

Paul Peraza, 50, was fatally shot Monday afternoon after allegedly robbing a credit union and leading police on a chase that ended in a crash. Police said Tuesday that after striking an SUV, Peraza put the truck in reverse and struck a police cruiser. "The officer, concerned about his safety and the public's safety, fired shots and struck Peraza," Deputy Police Chief Jose Salcido said in a written statement. "The truck then struck a Honda Accord before coming to a stop. Peraza was pronounced dead at the scene."

## TURKEY HANDS EXILED JOURNO 27-YR JAIL TERM

**Istanbul, Dec. 24:** A Turkish court on Wednesday sentenced the exiled former editor-in-chief of the Cumhuriyet daily to more than 27 years in jail on espionage and terror charges for one of the reputable paper's stories.

The court found Can Dundar — who fled to Germany in 2016 — guilty in connection with an article about an alleged Turkish arms shipment to Islamist Syrian rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad.

He was sentenced to 18 years and nine months for "securing confidential information for espionage" and eight years and nine months for "aiding a terrorist group" led by US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen.

The Turkish government blames the cleric for orchestrating a 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

## Britain sails clear of its European moorings

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

**London, Dec. 24:** On one of the main sticking points in the trade negotiations, Johnson revealed that the fish transition period or status quo will last five and a half years, after which there is "no theoretical limit" to the amount of fish British fishermen can catch in the country's waters.

And, striking a conciliatory tone for the EU at the end of long-drawn and at times acrimonious talks, he added: "I think this deal means a new stability, and a new certainty in what has sometimes been a fractious and difficult relationship."

"We will be your friend, your ally, your support and — let it never be forgotten — your number one market. This country will remain culturally, historically, strategically, geologically attached to Europe."

Reflecting on the crucial turning point achieved with the new free trade agreement (FTA), Johnson

said it would finally resolve a question that has "bedevilled our politics for decades" and allow the UK to forge ahead as a non-member of the 27-member economic bloc from January 1, 2021.

He also indicated that British MPs will be recalled to Parliament to ratify the deal by December 30, just a day before the Brexit transition period is due to end. The UK had voted to leave the EU in a referendum in June 2016 and since then the contours of what that exit would exactly look like has dominated the politics of the country, bringing Johnson to power with a promise of leaving the bloc with an FTA that is beneficial to both sides.

The vote in favour of Brexit was a fairly close one and to those who voted against Brexit, Johnson sought to reassure them of a lucrative new trading relationship worth nearly 690 billion pounds a year.

● The vote in favour of Brexit was a fairly close one and to those who voted against Brexit, Johnson sought to reassure them of a lucrative new trading relationship worth nearly 690 billion pounds a year.

"My message to everybody on both sides of that argument in 2016 is that it is now a long time behind us... This is a great new deal with a great new trading relationship and partnership that I think will bring prosperity to both sides," he said.

The agreement, which Johnson said runs into 500 pages, will now be read through in minute detail by all 27 EU member-countries and cross-party MPs in the UK before ratification of the terms of what a

post-Brexit future will look like for both sides.

Significant changes are expected in various sectors of the economy but the fact that a deal has been agreed means these changes would be less damaging than a no-deal Brexit was likely to be.

Earlier, Downing Street announced the deal in a statement saying the UK can now take full advantage of the fantastic opportunities available to it as an independent trading nation, striking trade deals with other partners around the world.

"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 by either side, covering trade worth GBP 668 billion in 2019," it said.

"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," 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.

— PTI

## Don vetoes def bill; cites certain provisions as risk

## TRUMP PARDONS MORE, INCLUDING KUSHNER DAD: WH

**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 to provisions to rename military bases.

The bipartisan bill was passed by high enough margins in both chambers of Congress for lawmakers 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 protections for social media companies, known as Section 230 — an issue with no relationship to the US Defense Department.

He also objected to a provision in the NDAA to rename military bases bearing the names of generals from the secessionist, slavery-supporting South in the 19th century US civil war.

And he objected to a provision which could impede his decision to sharply cut US troop levels in Germany, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The NDAA "fails to

**Washington, Dec. 24:** US 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 commuted on Wednesday by Trump.

— AFP

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 and foreign policy actions," Trump said in a statement.

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

— AFP

## 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 travel.

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.

The others are stuck on the nearby roads in the southeastern county of Kent. "As testing in Kent continues... I've spoken to my French counterpart (Jean-Baptiste Djebbari) and we've agreed the UK/-



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.

— AFP

French border at Eurotunnel, Dover & Calais WILL remain open throughout Xmas in order to help hauliers & citizens return

home as soon as possible." UK transport minister Grant Shapps wrote on Twitter: The massive testing operation, which is

being bolstered by the military, began late Wednesday under an agreement between London and Paris.

— AFP

## JEWISH CENTRE BOMBING: MAN CLEARED

**Buenos Aires, Dec. 24:** A court has said it has cleared the only Argentine still facing charges in the 1994 bombing that killed 85 people at a Jewish cultural center in the nation's capital.

The federal court ruling came on Wednesday after former auto dealer Carlos Telleldin again denied knowing that the truck he sold would be used as a bomb in the attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, which caused the organization's main building to collapse. He proclaimed his "total and absolute innocence."

— AP

## Release men charged in Pearl murder: Pak court

**Karachi, Dec. 24:** In a surprise move, a Pakistani court on Thursday ordered the release of British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, who were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of US journalist Daniel Pearl.

A two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court, presided over by Justice K K Agha, directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under "any sort of detention" and declared all notifications of the Sindh government related to their

● THE COURT observed that the four men's detention was "illegal". In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment.

detention "null and void". The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal".

In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment.

The court also acquitted

his three aides who were serving life terms in the case — almost two decades after they were found guilty and jailed. However, the Sindh government refused to release them and kept them in detention under the Maintenance of Public Order. Their continuous detention was challenged in the Sindh High Court, which ordered their release.

However, it asked to place their names on the no-fly list so that they could not leave the country. It also directed them to appear before the court whenever summoned.

— PTI

## NEPAL: CHINESE ENVOY MEETS PRACHANDA

**Kathmandu, Dec. 24:** Chinese ambassador Hou Yanqi on Thursday met Nepal Communist Party's executive chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who claims control over the ruling party after removing Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli from the posts of the party's parliamentary leader and chair. The meeting at Prachanda's residence in Khumaltar — which lasted for about 30 minutes — dwelt on the contemporary political situation after the NCP split. "They discussed the issues of bilateral concern," according to sources close to Prachanda. Bishnu Rijal, a leader close to the Prachanda-faction, tweeted that "Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Hou Yanqi met Chairman of the Nepal Communist Party Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' this morning. They discussed the issues of bilateral concerns."

Hou's meeting with Prachanda comes two days after she called on President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Tuesday at the latter's office in Sheel Nivas.

Hou is said to have discussed the latest political development following the president's move to dissolve the House of Representatives and announce mid-term elections. My Republica reported. This is not the first time that the Chinese ambassador has intervened in Nepal's internal affairs at a time of crisis.

— PTI

## DRAGGED FROM CAR BY HAIR, WOMAN SUES

**Chicago, Dec. 24:** A woman who says she was yanked by her hair from a car by Chicago police during a shopping mall encounter has filed a federal lawsuit against the city. Mia Wright, 25, and four family members claim their civil rights were violated and asserts the May confrontation left her blind in one eye from flying glass caused by police breaking the windows of the car to get to its passengers. "During this attack, Mia Wright could not breathe and was in paralyzing fear as her face and neck were smashed against the concrete ground," says the lawsuit filed in US District Court in Chicago.

## CHRISTMAS | CHAOS

Since poll loss, Prez has almost vanished from public engagements

## No Christmas vacation for angry Trump

**Washington, Dec. 24:** An enraged Donald Trump helicoptered off the White House lawn for one of the last times in his presidency Wednesday, leaving Americans chaos as a Christmas present.

The Republican was bound with his wife Melania for a vacation at his lavish Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

From Marine One, the first couple must have got a magnificent view on a clear, wintry day of the White House, decorated in chocolate box fashion with Christmas wreaths and red ribbons at every window.

But with the clock ticking to Joe Biden's January 20 inauguration, there

won't be too many more occasions to enjoy the experience.

And Trump, consumed by election conspiracy theories, abandoned by allies and determined to take opponents down with him, is not exactly in a merry mood.

Crisis engulf the man supporters call "disrupter in chief" ("chaos president") to his critics.)

What's more, most of them are of his own making.

Trying to overturn the result of the election.

— Unexpectedly refusing to sign a massive economic relief bill for Americans struggling from coronavirus fallout, insisting at the last moment that it be

● YET FOR all his bluster, the larger than life showman who for four years held the media, his party and the entire country in thrall now cuts a diminished figure.

rewritten.

— Choosing to say nothing, other than to play it down, about what senior officials and members of Congress describe as a devastating Russian cyberattack.

— Vetoing just before he left for Florida the bill funding the US military.

— Declaring war on top members of his own party who dare concede that Biden won.

Yet for all his bluster, the larger than life showman who for four years held the media, his party and the entire country in thrall now cuts a diminished figure.

Normally, the departure on Marine One from the South Lawn of the White House has been a favorite stage for Trump to act out his flamboyant press conference/performance art routine.

Boasting, ad-libbing, entertaining and insulting, Trump used to love nothing more than "chop-pear talk" with journalists jostling to hear the world's biggest media star against the roar of an idling military helicopter.

But since losing the

November 3 election and embarking on a desperate mission to reverse the result, Trump has almost vanished from public engagements. His last extended Q&A with journalists was a bad tempered Thanksgiving encounter on November 26.

The once epic Marine One departures have been whittled down to the perfunctory exercise of a man catching a ride to the airport. With Covid-19 restrictions, only around a dozen journalists can attend the sessions anyway, meaning that even if Trump decides to stop and talk, the old, manic energy is gone.

Wednesday, he just walked past.

— AFP



# DECCAN Chronicle

25 DECEMBER 2020

## PM's platitudes at AMU play up contrast to reality

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

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

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

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

## Curtains for 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 Prime Minister.

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

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

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Subhani



# Christmas, like Diwali, is a special day in India



Karan Thapar

As I See It

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The writer is a television commentator and anchor*

### LETTERS

#### CORRUPTION-FREE POLL

Given the people's habit of expecting and taking bribes even for voting, the need for vigilance on the movement of vehicles carrying heavy cash without proper documents has become more than necessary because of the heavy stakes involved in the ensuing election to the TN Assembly. I anticipate it being an acid test for many parties and persons whose fortunes are sagging and future bleak. There is all possibility of money playing a far bigger role than policies or principles. A corruption-free poll is our goal. Whether this will remain a dream or becomes reality depends on the mindset of the voters.

**B.S. Jayaraman Iyer, Coimbatore**

#### INTRODUCE NIGHT CURFEW

COVID-19 INFECTIONS have come down due to lockdowns and other measures taken by state governments and the Centre. A first Variant Under Investigation, also known as lineage B.1.1.7, is posing a new threat and seems to be a new challenge for the medical fraternity and the people. But the news that a new strain of the virus is suspected as a passenger from South Africa to the United Kingdom was tested positive is shocking and calls for utmost caution in all countries. India should be on its guard with the health department working 24x7 to identify and control the spread. Night curfew from 10 pm to 5 am would not be a bad idea in all states as people have the tendency to celebrate festivals and New Year's Eve without following the pandemic protocols.

**M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai**

#### MAGICAL MESSI

RECORDS ARE meant to be broken but in a field game like football breaking records is not so easy to achieve. However, Lionel Messi became the all-time top scorer for a single club after scoring his 644th goal for Barcelona during their La Liga match. He touched peak form in 2011-12 and continues to garner goals in a steady way. Incidentally, Pele scored 643 goals in 665 competitive games for Santos while Messi needed 749 matches to break the record, although he did it 17 seasons compared to the 19 the Brazil great needed.

**Kooduthuraiyan, Coimbatore**

**Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com**

Matt Ridley



## Why the mRNA vaccines could revolutionise medicine soon

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

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

haps cancer, can now be rapidly and cheaply made.

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

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

The message tells the cell to make

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*By arrangement with the Spectator*



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,973.54	1.14
Nifty 50	13,749.25	1.09
S&P 500*	3,700.86	0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.54	0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.01	-1.04
Euro (₹)	89.66	0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,030▼119	0.24
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	51.10	-0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.929	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.936	-0.019

\* As of 9:30 PM IST

## ESIC adds 11.75L new members in October

Around 11.75 lakh new members joined the ESIC-run social security scheme in October against 11.49 lakh in the previous month, official data showed on Thursday, giving a perspective on formal sector employment in the country. Gross new enrolments with ESIC were 8.27 lakh in June, 4.87 lakh in May and 2.62 lakh in April, showing an increase in enrolments after easing of the lockdown, the data showed.

## India challenges Voda arbitration in Singapore



India has challenged in a Singapore court a verdict of an international arbitration tribunal that overturned its demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes from Vodafone Group PLC, sources said on Thursday. An arbitration court had on September 25 rejected tax authorities' demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes and penalties relating to the British telecom giant's 2007 acquisition of an Indian operator.

## SpiceJet ties up with GMR cargo for Covid vax

Low cost carrier SpiceJet on Thursday announced that it has signed an MoU with GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo, a GMR group company, for providing a seamless service to all vaccine manufacturers in the region. As part of this association, SpiceXpress the cargo arm of SpiceJet envisions to provide efficient, speedy and reliable solutions for vaccine delivery, while also creating a sustainable cold chain network.

## Auro signs deal with Covaxx for Covid vaccine

Aurobindo Pharma Ltd and Covaxx, a United States-based company, have entered into an exclusive license agreement to develop, commercialise and manufacture UB-612, the first Multitope Peptide-based vaccine to fight COVID-19, for India and UNICEF. According to a release issued by the city-based drug maker, Covaxx is currently conducting a Phase 1 clinical trial for the vaccine candidate.

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## Smartphone sales to see 2-digit growth

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** When the pandemic forced people to stay indoors, smartphones became their window to the world, helping them stay connected with friends, work from home (WFH) and even learn new recipes.

And 2021 promises to bring back double-digit growth for the smartphone industry as people embrace hybrid work models, binge on web series and continue the pursuit for the perfect selfie on their six-inch screens.

This year has been challenging for the industry right from the beginning as supply chains for components were disrupted amid rising Covid-19 cases in China. Given the heavy reliance of Indian phone and electronics industry on imports from the neighbouring nation, there were apprehensions that stocks would run out, hitting local assembly.

By March, there were bigger worries. Rising number of coronavirus cases in India forced the government to impose a nationwide lockdown that barred movement of everything but essential items like food and medicine.

However, after the lockdown was eased, the industry saw a never-seen-before level of demand. Shipment in the September quarter is estimated to have touched an all-time high of over 50 million units. Pent up demand, coupled with people rushing in to buy devices to ensure continuity of work and studies, saw tech brands literally struggling to keep up.

Counterpoint Research senior analyst Prachir Singh said that despite losing almost one-and-a-half months to lockdown, there is just a six per cent year-on-year fall in shipment at 148 million units in 2020, reflecting the "resilient nature" of the



## Laptops, desktop sales continue to rise in 2021

**Oakland, California, Dec. 24:**

The world stocked up on laptop and desktop computers in 2020 at a level not seen since the iPhone debuted in 2007, and manufacturers still are months away from fulfilling outstanding orders, hardware industry executives and analysts said.

Remote learning and working has upturned the computer market during the coronavirus pandemic, zapping sales of smartphones while boosting interest in bigger devices, which had become afterthoughts to iPhones and Androids over the last decade.

Annual global shipments of personal com-

puters, the industry's collective term for laptops and desktops, topped out at about 300 million in 2008 and recently were sinking toward 250 million. Few expected a resurgence.

But some analysts now expect 2020 will close at about 300 million shipments, up roughly 15 per cent from a year ago. Tablets are experiencing even faster growth.

By the end of 2021, installed PCs and tablets will reach 1.77 billion, up from 1.64 billion in 2019, according to research company Canalys.

They added 2021 sales forecasts would be higher if not for the supply issues.

— Reuters

Indian smartphone market.

"In 2021, the Indian smartphone market is estimated to grow at 20 per cent year-on-year. Major reasons for such a high growth will be increased consumer spending as economic activities grow, and aggressive product

strategies from top brands," he said, adding that Jio's anticipated launch of low-cost 4G smartphone with Google could add further momentum.

Domestic players like Micromax could also make a strong comeback next year.

— PTI

## Taxmen train guns on GST input tax credit fraudsters

**SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 24**

Detection of input tax credit-related frauds has witnessed a rising trend of late. Of the total number of fraudsters arrested by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, almost half have been held in the past six weeks.

The CBIC has booked 12,000 cases of Input Tax Credit fraud and arrested 365 persons in such cases so far. In the past six weeks alone more than 165 persons were arrested. These are people who avail and pass on ineligible ITC credits through fake or fly-by-night firms.

According to industry experts, the government

has been focusing on identifying such fraudsters in the past two months. They have been analysing back-end data to find out fraudulent cases.

"Data driven targeting of the fraudsters is the need of the hour. The data is being collected from Income Tax and Customs departments and banks and necessary matching is being done to identify fraudsters... Precise targeting of fraudsters is being done only in specific cases after doing a comprehensive analysis using advanced data analytics tools," said CBIC.

CBIC also has issued a few notifications to deal with the menace. It has introduced mandatory

authentication of Aadhar number, wherever applicable or physical verification of business premises for the purposes of obtaining GST registration.

It has now restricted filing of outward supply details in GSTR 1 return for businesses who have not paid tax for the past periods by filing GSTR 3B. Till now, non-filing of GSTR 3B resulted in blockage e-waybill but will now result in GSTR 1 blockage as well.

"The government's idea here seems to be to curb input tax credit passing by businesses which have otherwise not paid their GST liability," said Abhishek Jain, Tax Partner, EY.



50 per cent.

How transactions got done also changed, as bidders flew drones to conduct due diligence and the head of a UK pharmaceutical giant inked his biggest-ever deal while quarantined in a hotel room in Australia. Globetrotting bankers transitioned to days of nonstop video calls, either from

home or nearly empty offices. "We saw a sharp decline in M&A activity after the outbreak of the pandemic but then a very strong recovery in the second half of the year," said Berthold Fuerst, co-head of investment banking coverage and advisory for Europe, the Middle East and Africa at Deutsche Bank AG.

## 2020 turns out best for IPOs, debutants trade at twice price

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

The year 2020 has been a good year for the primary market initial public offerings (IPOs) with several of the initial public offerings trading at double their public issue price or at a hefty premium.

In December, after Burger King's grand listing, another IPO by Mrs Bectors Food Specialities on Thursday provided investors more than 100 per cent return on debut.

Compared to the public issue price of ₹288 per share, Mrs Bectors Food listed at ₹500 on NSE and ₹501 on BSE and touched a high of Rs 601.20 on BSE and stock settled 106.79 per cent up at ₹595.55 on the BSE.

Mrs Bectors Food's market capitalisation at market close on BSE stood at ₹3,498.65 crore.

Happiest Mind, Route

## 2020 IPOs That Trades At Over 50% Premium To Public Issue Price

Company	Public Issue	Current Market
Mrs Bectors Food Specialities	288	592.50
Burger King India	60	180.95
Gland Pharma	1,500	2425
Computer Age Management Services	1,240	1,685.90
Route Mobile	350	1,119
Happiest Minds Technologies	166	346.90
Rossari Biotech	425	939

Figures price in Rs

Source: NSE



Mobile, Rossari Biotech, Gland Pharma, CAMS, Burger King, Mrs Bectors Food have given handsome returns to investors, to name a few.

All 14 IPOs listed in 2020 so far traded above their public issue price, the year saw few large IPOs. Gland Pharma raised ₹6,479.55 crore and shot up to be among the top ten

Indian pharma companies after successful listing.

SBI Card also raised ₹10,354.77 crore but the shares got hit after listing due to Covid led market meltdown and touched a low of ₹495.25 against public issue price of ₹755 per share before a sharp recovery as the broader market recovered.

Computer Age Manage-

● All 14 IPOs listed in 2020 so far traded above their public issue price, the year saw few large IPOs.

● Smaller size IPOs like Happiest Minds, Burger King, Route Mobile, Rossari Biotech, Mrs Bectors Food made higher listing gains and continue to trade at a hefty premium to the issue price.

## Top 3 cities recruit 53% of e-retail employees

**Mumbai, Dec. 24:** Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai have emerged as the demand hot spots for recruiting talent in the e-commerce segment, a report said.

The report is based on a survey of 5,000 employees from e-commerce and traditional industries working in over 100 roles. It also took input from over 25 e-commerce players.

Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai emerge as the demand hot spots, accounting for 53 per cent of the total demand on an average, when it comes to generating demand for top talent in e-Commerce, as per Catenon India's *Decoding Talent in E-commerce Report 2021*.

Indore, Kochi and Coimbatore are also coming up as the new recruitment frontiers.

The report revealed that the most in-demand jobs are product management roles, which are the highest paid ones and also see the steepest hike in annual compensation for higher years of experience.

— PTI

## Indian economy is coming out of deep abyss, says RBI

**Mumbai, Dec. 24:** The economy is coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic's deep abyss faster than most of the predictions, and the growth will enter positive zone in the third quarter of the current fiscal, said an article on the 'state of economy' in the RBI Bulletin.

"More evidence has been turned in to show that the Indian economy is pulling out of Covid-19's deep abyss and is breaking out amidst winter's lengthening shadows towards a place in the sunlight... it is refracting at a pace that beats most prediction," said the article written by the officials of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, the

Indian economy dipped by a historic 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of the current financial year. The contraction narrowed down to 7.5 per cent in the second quarter.

Quoting reports, the article said, "Real GDP growth is expected to break out into positive territory in Q3 — albeit, to a slender 0.1 per cent."

Two important forces are conspiring to bless this turning of the page on the virus, the article said. "First, India is bending the Covid infection curve: since mid-September, barring localised surges, infections are slanting fashion to support investment and consumption demand," it said, "The fiscal measures

have been sequenced in a designed shift in focus from consumption expenditure in Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package to investment expenditure in Aatma Nirbhar 2.0 and 3.0," the article added.

Abstracting from the inherent flux in high frequency indicators, the underlying trend would reveal that the pick-up in momentum of economic activity that commenced with the onset of the second half of 2020-21 is sustained, it noted. "The absence of the dreaded 'second wave' of pandemic in India so far has imparted elevation to this momentum in an environment of supportive macroeconomic policies," it added.

— PTI

## Tata Motors launches most advanced LCV

**MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 24**

Tata Motors, India's biggest commercial vehicle maker, has introduced the new Ultra T.7 light commercial vehicle or LCV that has been specially designed for urban transportation. The Mumbai-based automaker claims that it is the most advanced LCV that it has

ever developed. With the new Ultra T.7, Tata Motors is targeting applications such as transportation of e-commerce products, FMCG, industrial produce, consumer durables, electronics, essential goods and LPG cylinders.

The reefer variants of T.7 are best suited for transportation of vaccine, pharmaceuticals, perishable goods, food items

such as eggs and milk, along with farm produce.

The Ultra T.7 range comes with a modular platform with variants of various deck lengths and in 4-tyre and 6-tyre combinations to suit a wide range of applications.

The model's 1900mm-wide cabin has been engineered to offer the best-in-class comfort to reduce the turnaround time.

## L&amp;T 3D prints India's 1st building

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** Larsen & Toubro Construction on Thursday said it has successfully 3D printed a ground plus one building, claiming it to be the first in India.

The company has 3D printed the building of a 700 square feet built-up area at its Kanchipuram facility with an in-house developed concrete mix, using indigenously available regular construction

● Except for the horizontal slab members, the entire building structure was 3D printed 'Cast in Situ' at the job site in an 'open to sky' environment within 106 printing hours.

materials. "L&T Construction announced having successfully 3D printed a G+1 (ground plus one)

Building with reinforcement for the first time in India," the company said in a statement.

With the country aggressively pursuing the objective of creating 60 million houses under the Housing for All by 2022 programme, this achievement will certainly give a huge fillip for the mass housing segment, it added.

The building was printed with both vertical rein-

forcement bar and horizontal distributors, using a welded mesh that satisfies provisions in the Indian codes and optimises the cost of construction.

Except for the horizontal slab members, the entire building structure was 3D printed 'Cast in Situ' at the job site in an 'open to sky' environment within 106 printing hours, using a fully automated 3D printer.

## Key products to have separate warehouses

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** The government on Thursday said that it will set up product-specific warehouses at ports and national waterways.

The purpose of development of this infrastructure is to reduce the storage losses, minimise logistic costs and facilitate distribution of cargo in the hinterland, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) said in a statement.

"The (MoPSW) intends to create product-specific warehouses or silos at various ports (including both major and non-major ports), Multi Modal Logistics Parks located near port area and alongside the national waterways," the statement said. The ministry is target-

ing to develop the product-specific warehouses at ports for cement silos, liquid tanks, chemicals tanks, cold storage, electronics product storage, and pharmaceutical storage, among others.

"While the big players have their own warehouses and storage spaces, the smaller players find it difficult to get their product-specific storage silos at various locations," the ministry of port said in the statement.

The development of these world-class warehousing spaces will give a big push, especially to such small logistics players for their ease of doing business with better planning and inventory management, the ministry added.

— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Tatum leaves Bucks in tatters

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

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

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

## Oly-bound athletes get vaccine priority

**New Delhi:** A parliamentary panel on Thursday recommended putting athletes, coaches and support staff going for the 2021 Japan Olympics in the priority group for the Covid-19 vaccination process. The committee also voiced concern over large number of vacancies of coaches, saying they should be filled up in a time-bound manner so that Olympic preparations do not suffer. The Japan Olympics are slated to be held from July next year. The panel has also recommended identifying training facilities, stadia and sports centres for Olympic qualified athletes which have not opened yet. It said the closed centres should be reopened "at the earliest" or the athletes should be relocated to alternate centres which have opened. The department-related parliamentary standing committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports headed by Vinay P Sahasrabudhne submitted its report on "Preparation for Olympics 2021" to Rajya Sabha Chairperson M. Venkaiah Naidu through virtual mode. — *PTI*

## Odisha to have new hockey stadium

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced that a new world-class hockey stadium would be constructed at Rourkela in Sundargarh district as part of preparations for the 2023 Hockey World Cup which will be hosted by the state. The proposed stadium would be the largest hockey stadium in India with a sitting capacity of 20,000 people. This is going to redefine the sports landscape in the region, the chief minister said. The stadium along with the allied facilities will be developed as a benchmark for other hockey stadiums around the world, he said, adding that it would be constructed over 15 acres of land in the Biju Patnaik University of Technology campus in Rourkela. — *PTI*

## MCG on standby for Sydney Test

**Melbourne:** Cricket Australia on Thursday said Melbourne has been placed on standby to host the third Test between India and Australia if Sydney's Covid-19 situation renders it "untenable" despite efforts being made to continue with the original schedule. The fate of the third Test has been shrouded in uncertainty.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**India vs Australia:** Second Test — Day 1 from 5 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

## WWE

**SmackDown:** Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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## BCCI AGM approves 10 teams for 2022 IPL

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

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

## T20 CRICKET IN OLYMPICS

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

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

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

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

## BCCI LIKELY TO LOSE \$123 MILLION

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

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

## COMPENSATION FOR DOMESTIC PLAYERS

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



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

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

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

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

and accordingly compensate their male and female players."

## JUNIOR AND WOMEN'S CRICKET DURING IPL

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

## SHUKLA BECOMES NEW VP

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

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

## GANGULY-SHAH, INDIA'S FACE AT ICC

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

## CHETAN APPOINTED NEW CHAIRMAN OF SELECTORS

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

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

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

## WOMEN'S TEST MATCHES

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

## GM SACKED

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

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

## RETIREMENT AGE OF UMPIRES INCREASED

The BCCI's affiliated scorers and umpires will now retire at 60 instead of 55 years after the governing body ratified the move. "We believe that both umpires and scorers are physically fit enough like any other profession to continue till the age of 60 years," source said. — *PTI*

## Aussies charged up

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

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

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

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

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

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

That means the under-pressure Joe Burns retains his spot as opener after a handy 51 not out in Adelaide, with Matthew Wade again moving up the order to accompany him, while 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 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. It means they will be without two of their first-choice bowlers, with Ishant Sharma still injured. — *AFP*



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

## Australia will blow India away at MCG, says Warne

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

Australia had bundled out India for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in the opening Test which the hosts won by eight wickets. The next game is due to start on Saturday and India will be without talismanic skipper Virat Kohli, who has gone on paternity leave.

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

"Having said that, they have some class players to



Shane Warne

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

"(Mohammed) Shami is a huge loss as well. He's such a quality bowler. And if you look at bowlers for the Melbourne condi-

tions drop in pitches Shami hits the seam and stands it up and bowls a good length and straight."

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 credit to the Australians and how well they bowled. They were outstanding," the 51-year-old former leg-spinner said. — *PTI*

## INDIA SWEAT IT OUT AHEAD OF REVENGE BOUT ON BOXING DAY

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

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

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

It is understood that these sessions are basically conducted to give players a break from the monotony of regular training regime.

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, two days before the Boxing Day Test begins at the hallowed Melbourne Cricket Ground.

One of the tour's finds, T Natarajan bowled well at the nets and often managed to beat the outside edge of both Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara.

India trail the four-match rubber 0-1 after suffering an eight-wicket defeat to the hosts in the Day/Night first Test in Adelaide. — *PTI*

## Chennaiyin wary of misfiring EB

**NEHA SURANA | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 24**

Chennaiyin FC will take on a struggling East Bengal FC on Saturday, but head coach Csaba Laszlo does not want to take the misfiring team lightly.

"Pressure is always there. Just because they haven't won a single game, you can't consider us as favourites. I think they have very good players and it's a new team but they have adapted well to the ISL level. I don't think we will take the game as easy; I warned my players that we have to concentrate well and remain focussed. I see this game as a hard game," said Laszlo.

If CFC beat East Bengal, they will find themselves in the top half of the league's points table. "If you get two victories in a row you get very close to the top four. And if you lose two games in a row, you will go down immediately. Everyone is looking to win games and are not being very tactical," he said.

The coach heaped praise on Rahim Ali and Deepak Tangri. Laszlo had an eye on both young players and wanted them to be more

**Chennaiyin FC coach Csaba Laszlo doesn't believe that his side are the favourites going into the tie against East Bengal involved in the game.**

"Ali and Deepak are two talented players. Deepak was interesting as he is a central defensive player but I tried to bring him in the number six position because he has shown he has the quality to play in this position With Ali, in the beginning, he didn't really understand what I was asking from him. But after the injury, he is a changed player and understands what I am asking him to do. With the young players, we have to lead them in the right way and coach them every day in and out of the field," said Laszlo.

Laszlo hinted that he might rest attacker Esmel Goncalves, who had a hamstring injury. And, Reagan Singh has been suspended for the game due to the accumulation of four yellow cards.

Coach Laszlo said there wouldn't be any trouble in replacing the defender.



Chennaiyin FC players pose after their training session on Thursday. CFC will meet East Bengal on Saturday.

## Jagan, Ahmed eye success in ARRC

**NEHA SURANA | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 24**

Recently crowned national bike racing champions Jagan Kumar and KY Ahmed said they reaped rich rewards for their gruelling training sessions during the lockdown. Representing TVS Racing, Jagan clinched the Pro-Stock 165cc title, while Ahmed won the premier Pro-Stock 301-400cc category.

"I live near Jagan's house and we worked out together. In July, the first track day was opened and whenever practice time was allotted to us we would go and train without missing a single session. It held us in good stead," said Ahmed.

It was Jagan's ninth national title and the 31-year-old racer is now focused on winning the Asia Road Racing Championship (ARRC)



Jagan K and KY Ahmed

with Indian manufactured bikes. "My target is to finish on the podium with our own bike. I have already finished on the podium in ARRC. I want to finish on the podium with Indian manufactured bike and with all our mechanics. That is very important for us," said Jagan.

Jagan and Ahmed scored 10 and 12 positions respectively in the first round of the 2020 ARRC which was conducted in March before the pandemic forced the cancellation of the season. ARRC recently announced that the 2021 calendar would start in June. "There is a six-month gap for the event. We will train accordingly," said Jagan.

## Pat regrets making 'racist' one-liners

**Melbourne, Dec. 24:** Australia Test skipper Tim Paine said he was living with "his head in the sand" before the Black Lives Movement while his deputy Pat Cummins admitted to making hurtful "one liners" to players of colour that he now regrets.

Paine said he didn't think a lot about the issue of racism as it didn't affect him, adding that the BLM has shifted his perspective.

"Mine has only shifted in the last 12 months since the whole Black Lives Matter thing started to take off," Paine was quoted as saying by

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"I was probably someone who, if I am totally honest, had my head in the sand a little bit and because it probably wasn't a part of my world I didn't have it as a big issue.

"That's really opened my eyes to things and issues our Indigenous people, black people and people of all sort of different cultures around the world go through," he added.

When asked how he counselled youngsters to handle racism, Cummins said: "Just taking that extra second to think about what you say or do. You might try to throw in



Tim Paine (left) and Pat Cummins in this file photo.

a joke and I've definitely done this in the past.

"You say a little one liner or something off the top of your head and then just making sure you actually reflect on that and go

actually 'that's not me' or 'I've said the wrong thing there. I don't believe that, I don't know why I've said that, and I hate how I've made that person feel'," the pacer added. — *PTI*