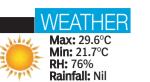
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THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

NELLORE | SUNDAY | 27 DECEMBER 2020



Forecast: clear. temp. 29/21 ºC

DEATHS



(+18,549)

(+280)1,01,88,353 1,47,659 covid19india.org

(+317)(+2)TS: 2,84,391 1,529

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+282)(+1)AP: 8.80,712 7.092

CASES AROUND THE WORLD



218

worldometers.info/ coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana **Tithi:** Margasira Shuddha Trayodasi till 6.19 am (Monday) Star: Krittika till 1.16 pm Varjyam: Nil Durmuhurtam: 4.18 pm to 5.02 pm Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 11, 1442 AH PRAYERS (SHAHI MASJID) Fajar: 5.16 am **Zohar:** 12.11 pm **Asar:** 4.13 pm Maghrib: 5.49 pm Isha: 7.05 pm SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM **SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.33 AM MOONRISE** TODAY 3.38 PM **MOONSET** TOMORROW 4.47 AM



No need to panic, It's safe!

SHORT TAKES

BJP to push for 1 nation, 1 poll

New Delhi: The BJP will organise nearly 25 webinars over the next few days on the issue of "one nation, one

election", as it seeks to build

academia and legal fraterni-'webinars', seminars that are held online. "We plan to hold 25 webinars by the end of this month," a party leader

'love jihad' Bill

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh Cabinet on Saturday cleared the Dharma Swatantra (Religious Freedom) bill 2020, known in political par lance as 'Love Jihad' bill through in the assembly dursion of a girl for marriage

Report on Page 4



NATION 4

Ajit sees return of NCP leaders to BJP



WORLD 5

China hails 'success' in curbing Covid SPORTS 8

Bumrah, Ashwin bowl Australia out for 195

Vol. 18 No. 171 Established 1938 | 8 pages | ₹6.00

PM: Cong. need not lecture BJP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Saturday that free and transparent DDC polls in Jammu and Kashmir coupled with voters' keen participation are a "moment of pride" for India, while hitting back at his rivals for giving him "lessons in democracy'

In a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, who alleged recently that there is no democracy in India, Modi said while his government has completed three-tier panchayat polls in Jammu and Kashmir in over a year of the region becoming a Union Territory, the Congress dispensation in Puducherry has not carried out local body elections despite a Supreme Court order.

Launching the Ayushman Bharat scheme via a video-conference to extend health insurance

₹4.39 CRORE

COLLECTED IN

TIRUMALA HUNDI

DC CORRESPONDENT

On the day of Vaikuntha

Ekadasi, the Srivari Hundi at the Lord

Venkateswara temple at

Tirumala received ₹4.39

crore in offerings. This is

the highest-ever since

Srivari Darshan was resumed by the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanams

on June 8, after the lock-

down called for the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the TTD, a total of 42,825 pilgrims had Vaikuntha Dwara

Darshnam in the Tirumala temple on

Friday. Supreme Court

Justice Indira Banerjee

had Vaikuntha Dwara

Vaikuntha Dwadasi on Saturday. TTD Executive Officer

Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy

received the judge at the

main entrance of the

temple before she had

Later the Supreme Court judge was ren-dered Vedasirvachanam

by a team of Vedic schol-

Ranganayakula

Mandapam.
The TTD EO offered

prasadams, a laminated

picture of the lord to the

THE SRIVARI Hundi

teswara temple at Tir-

umala received ₹4.39

at the Lord Venka-

crore in offerings.

SC Justice Indira

Vaikuntha Dwadasi on

Vaikuntha Dwara

Banerjee had

Darshanam on

Darshanam

Venkateswara.

NELLORE, DEC. 26



deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle

benefits to all residents of Jammu and Kashmir, he said the three-tier panchayat system has fully taken shape here, describing it as a realisation of Mahatma Gandhi's dream of 'gram swaraj' (village self-rule).

"Some people in Delhi curse Modi day in and day out and hurl abuses. They regularly offer me lessons in democracy. I want to show them the mirror today," he said, blasting the Congress for not undertaking local polls in Puducherry. "The party of those teaching me democracy is in power in Puducherry," the prime minister said. — PTI

Faith matters

FARMERS SEND DRAFT FOR TALKS ON DECEMBER 29

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 26

As the protests demanding the repeal of the three farm laws entered the 31st day, the protesting farmer unions on Saturday decided to resume talks with the government.

They have proposed December 29 as the date for the next round of negotiations and sent the draft of the issues to be discussed. These include repeal of farm laws, making the MSP a legal guarantee and changes in the draft Electricity Amendment Bill to safeguard the interests of farmers. There is also a demand to exclude farmer from the amendments in Commission for the Air Quality Management in Delhi Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020.

Report on Page 4

Will stop infiltrators: Shah

Home minister sounds Assam poll bugle, blasts Cong. inertia

MANOJ ANAND | DC

home minister Union Amit Shah sounded the poll bugle in Assam on Saturday by saying that the state's two biggest problems — infiltration and floods — could be resolved only by the BJP govern-ment.

Asserting that only the BJP government can stop infiltration, which affects our culture and snatches away opportunities from youth, Shah, who is on a three-day visit to Assam and Manipur to oversee poll strategies of BJP in the 2021 elections, accused the Congress of doing nothing to protect the rich culture of the state.

'Congress didn't do anything for the birthplace of Acharva Sankardev whose contributions gave recognition to Assam's history, drama writing, arts and



Union home minister Amit Shah being felicitated by Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarmah on Saturday.

poetry. But BJP believes in strengthening of language, culture, arts of the states." he said.

Shah further said, "BJP believes that India cannot achieve greatness until the culture and language of states are strengthened. India's culture and arts are incomplete without Assamese culture and

arts." In an obvious reference to the Congress government, Shah said that there was a period of movements in Assam when many agitations were launched over different issues in which hunof youths were killed.

The peace of Assam was

Asserting that the state's two biggest problems are infiltration and floods, Mr Shah said that neither Congress nor any other party cannot stop infiltration. "Infiltration affects our culture, arts and snatches away opportuni-ties from our youth," he said while addressing a

public rally at Amingaon. He said, "All separatists groups have slowly left violence and joined the mainstream. Bodo youth who used to carry guns are now joining the mainstream. Recently conducted polls saw 80 per cent voting without violence. This pair of BJP leaders -Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and minister Himanta Biswa Sharma has crossed several hurdles in the story of Assam's progress. People of Assam will give the

Centre accepts ₹55,548 cr as revised Polavaram cost

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

The efforts of the YSR Congress government led by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to get adequate funds for the construction of the Polavaram irrigation pro-ject expeditiously seemed to have yielded the desired result as the Centre accepted the revised cost estimate of the project at ₹55.548 crore at the 2017-18

ministry, in its annual release through Press Information Bureau (PIB), announced the new project cost

price level. The Union Jal Shakti ministry in its release through the Press Information Bureau here on Saturday announced the new project cost.

It may mentioned that CM had met the Union

and Union Jal Shakti minister Gajendra Shekhawat and requested them to accept the revised cost estimate to enable completion of the project so as to extend its benefits to all the targeted people and the farmers. He appealed for acceptance of revised cost estimate-2 at ₹55,656 crore at 2017-18 price level

■ Page 2: YSRC managed to persuade Centre on cost

DRUG REGULATOR

Theatre owners want 50% bar on seating to be lifted

Ekantam to Sri Sudarshana Chakrattalwar in the sacred waters of Swamy Pushkarini in

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

Tirumala on Saturday.

A section of Tollywood has appealed to the Centre to permit theatres to run to capacity while complying with standard operating procedures (SOPs) against Covid-19. Theatres can currently run at 50 per cent of the capacity in Andhra Pradesh.

The huge turnout of viewers to watch Solo Brathuke So Better starring actor Sai Dharam Tej — the first film to be released after the theatres reopened — on Friday left Tollywood jubilant that it could revive the forgotten practice of going to the

movies with family and friends.

Between 50 and 60 per cent of the 1,250 theatres in the state reached permitted capacity.

Film-makers and exhibitors want the same practice to be continued to encourage more people to visit the theatres so that it will help them overcome the loss of revenue during the nine months of closure of theatres. They assured that they would comply with Covid-19 protocols and the SOPs drafted by the Centre and the AP government.

Their main contention is that when aircraft and buses are permitted to carry passengers to capacity, and permission is accorded to political parties to organise public meetings and take out huge rallies, film theatres should be permitted to run to their full capacity.

They are also appealing to the Andhra Pradesh government to issue the GO to waive power bills of film theatres for three months from April to June and permit deferred payment of power bills for six months from July to December. The Cabinet has already taken the deci-

> Page 2: Section of **Tollywood cautious**

GREEN | DANGER | Flora, fauna of the region under massive threat

UK returnees pose challenge in Kurnool

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL DEC. 26

Even as the spread of Covid-19 was controlled in Kurnool district, with just two positive cases being reported in the past 24 hours, the issue of UK returnees is posing a challenge in view of the discovery of a more infective mutation of the SARS-CoV-2 in the island nation.

So far 39 persons are identified as having returned from the UK in recent days, of whom 33 were from Kurnool, said District Medical and Health Officer Dr Rama Giddayya.

He said the returnees include children, adults

and elderly persons.

A few had returned to Adoni and Nandyal divi-

The DMHO said all the UK returnees were isolated and their samples were and Health Officer Dr Rama Giddayya. sent for tests and found to be negative. They were advised to self-quarantine

SO FAR 39 persons

are identified as having

returned from the UK in

recent days, of whom

33 were from Kurnool,

said District Medical

said. Asked whether there was any instances of the new variant found in UK returnees, he said nothing had been reported. He said the administration

in their own houses, he

was on high alert and was monitoring the situation minutely.
"The Covid infections have come down, We hope to see that there won't be

any spike as testing and tracing has been continuously taken up in the dis-

to create awareness among

people and traders on com-

plications arising out of

plastic use. Subsequently,

officials will take stringent

action if any trader sells

plastic covers or plastic

bags or even packs any-

Praveen Adithya said all

thing in them.

TO CLEAR OXFORD COVIDSHIELD FIRST New Delhi, Dec. 26:

With preparations underway for a possible vaccine-rollout January, the Indian drug regulator is looking at the UK, which sources believe may give its nod to the Oxford Covid-19 vaccine next week, before deciding on giving emergency use authorisation to the Serum Institute that is manufac-

turing the shots here. Once the UK drug regu lator gives its approval to the Oxford vaccine, the expert committee on Covid-19 at the CDSCO will hold its meeting and thoroughly review the safety and immunogenicity data from the clinical evaluations conducted abroad and in India before granting any emergency authorisation for the vaccine here, official sources said.

The process of granting emergency use approval for Bharat Biotech's Covid-19 vaccine 'Covaxin' may take time as its phase 3 trials are still underway, while Pfizer is yet to make a presentation.
"Going by this, Oxford vaccine 'Covishield' is

likely to be the first to be rolled out in India," a source said. Serum Institute of India last week also had submitted some additional data required by the DCGI the sources said. Amid fears about the mutated variant of SARS-CoV-2 detected in the UK, government officials recently said that it will have no impact on the potential of emerging vaccines that are being developed in India and other countries. Bharat Biotech, SII and Pfizer had applied to the DCGI seeking emergency use authorisation for their Covid vaccines early in December.

Villager fires at wild boar, hits young boy

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 26

Tension prevailed at village Santhipuram mandal of Chittoor district when a young boy sustained a bullet injury on the chest after a hunter Siva of Solisettypalli opened fire from a country gun to capture a pig at Jogindlu vil-

lage on Saturday. Siva failed to notice to notice the boy, identified as 14-year-old Subhash, who was playing in bushes, when the hunter opened fire at the pig.

According to police, the pig belonged to Anji of Jogindlu village. He had ACCORDING TO police, the pig belonged to Anji of Jogindlu village. He hired Siva to capture the animal which had escaped two days ago.

hired Siva to capture the animal which had escaped two days ago.

Police rushed Subhash to CMC hospital in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, for treatment, where the boy's condition is critical. Police have registered a case against Siva and a few others based on a complaint lodged Sarasamma, mother of

Subhash.

Agency areas to ban plastics DC CORRESPONDENT

KAKINADA, DEC. 26

Menace of plastic pollution in agency areas of East Godavari district has reached such enormous proportions that authorities have decided to ban use of plastics from the New Year day onwards.

awareness gramme is scheduled to be conducted in 120 villages of seven mandals under Rampachodavaram ITDA limits in this regard.

Problem of plastic pollution is not confined to only urban and plain areas. Of late, due to growth of tourism, the menace has spread into interior areas

AN AWARENESS programme is scheduled to be conducted in 120 villages of seven mandals under Rampachodavaram ITDA limits

 PLASTIC POLLUTION problem is not confined to urban and plain areas only.

in this regard.

as well. Many visitors are bringing water packets as well as food in plastic bags, indiscriminately discarding them after use on roads, forests as well as near waterfalls and caves. This is threatening the

flora and fauna of the

region on a large scale, in cloth bags. He has worrying environmental- instructed agency officials ITDA project officer

Praveen Adithya has already announced that usage of plastic will be banned in 120 villages of mandals Rampachodavaram division as part of protecting the environment. He said check posts will be set up at Fokspeta, Seethapalli, Gudise and other gateways the agency area. Thorough checking will be done and plastic materials seized from tourists.

To avoid inconvenience, the ITDA head has appealed to tourists that they carry all their items

village secretaries, Velugu personnel, ward, and village volunteers, apart from others, will carry out large-scale campaigns about the impending ban on plastics up to the end of December 2020. All plastic packaging will be seized

from January 1, 2021 onwards.



popular support for what has been a strong plank of Prime Minister Narendra Modi Party sources said its senior leaders, besides members of ty, will be attending these

MP clears new

The draft bill, which may see ing its 3-day winter session commencing on December 28, provides a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and ₹1 lakh fine to the perpetrators of forced religious conver-The new bill has provision of declaring such a marriage null and void. The Bill puts onus on the accused and those associated with accused including organisations and institutions, to prove their innocence

SHORT TAKES

APFDC WISHES EARLY RECOVERY OF RAJINIKANTH

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

Development Film Corporation chairman T. Vijay Chandar wished early recovactor-politician Rajinikanth who is undergoing treatment at Apollo hospital for severe fluctuations in blood pressure.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, the APFDC chairman said that he was praying to the God to help the actor get speedy recovery from his health problem and added that the actor's services were indispensable to the society by entering into the politics.

DEVOTEES WHO PAID ₹11,000 **GET RAW DEAL**

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 26

Devotees who bought tickets under Sri Vani Trust scheme by paying ₹11,000 for special darshan on the occasion of Vaikunta Ekadasi criticised TTD for sending them in the ₹300 queue and offering only Laghu darshan on Saturday at Tirumala

They alleged that TTD staff handled women and children roughly when they questioned the rationale behind providing darshan from Bangaruvakili instead of allowing them into the sanctum sanctorum.

Police officials spoke to the women devotees who complained against staff outside the temple while assuring to take action against the staff responsible for high-handed behaviour with them.

Meanwhile Rayalaseema Porata Samiti leader Naveen Kumar Reddy criticised the TTD for the ordeals of devotees holding Sri Vani Trust ticket after paying ₹11,000 per head for darshan on Vaikunta Ekadasi day.

He demanded to know the number of tickets issued for special darshan and also explanation for increasing the ₹300

darshan ticket to ₹1,000. Meanwhile, TTD authorities in a release said that they have printed about laghu dar-shanam for devotes who bought tickets under Sri Vani trust scheme. However, some devotes demanded regular darshan inside the temple after reaching Bangaru Vakili. They have blocked the way for devotees waiting for darshan.

SC NOTICE TO MISLEADING IT

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

Supreme Court has served show-cause notice to a convict for misleading it by submitting a wrong copy of the trial court's verdict to escape jail

S. Sankar was convicted on December 31, 2000, along with others, on charges of graft and other offences, including criminal breach of trust and conspiracy. Special judge for CBI cases, Hyderabad, awarded him a sentence of one-year jail term and imposed a fine of ₹1,000 for criminal breach of trust under provisions of IPC and Prevention of Corruption

However, Sankar, accused number 5 in the case, moved AP High Court challenging the sentence awarded by the trial court. However, the HC upheld the sentence awarded by the trail court.

Sankar then moved Supreme Court claiming that AP High Court had wrongly construed the operative portion of sentence passed by the trial court. He went on to claim that he was only sentenced to pay a fine of ₹500 each on each count, apart from undergoing one month simple imprisonment in case of failure to pay the fine.

Accordingly, the SC, in its verdict delivered on July 23, 2019, allowed Sankar to walk free in the graft case on payment of ₹1,000 as fine.

Subsequently, the Supreme Court secretary general held an inquiry and submitted a report that the convict had misled the court to avoid the jail term.

Following this, an SC division bench comprising justices Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose issued an order to serve a show-cause notice to appellant Sankar as to why the earlier order of the court not be recalled and modified to initiate a further suitable action against him.

Sankar's advocate on-record A. Venkateswara Rao accepted show-cause notice on behalf of Sankar, who has been granted four weeks' time to respond.



Beneficiaries of the housing scheme gathering at Gandhiji Mahila Kalasala for receiving house pattas at One Town in Vijayawada on Saturday.

Housing to create jobs, boost economy: Dokka

Distribution of 31 lakh of houses will lead to growth of state's GDP: MLC

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

YSR Congress MLC Dokka Manikya Varaprasad Rao has stated that distribution of house sites and construction of houses is not just a welfare scheme but would generate revenues for the state, apart from providing employ-

ment to people.

Specifically, he claimed, distribution of house sites to 30 lakh women will lead to employment of people with 30 types of skills, apart from unskilled persons, in all 13 districts of

Speaking to media here on Saturday, the MLC flayed opposition TD for creating hurdles in house sites distribution and construction scheme by moving courts. He asked opposition party leaders to withdraw cases they have filed if they have any concern for poor. He maintained that housing for poor is a brainchild of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan

UK RETURNEES

MUST UNDERGO

DC CORRESPONDENT

State health authorities

have advised returnees

Kingdom to Andhra

Pradesh that they under-

go RTPCR tests without fail, apart from staying

put in quarantine for 14

State health commis-

sioner K. Bhaskar said here on Saturday that

out of 1,214 persons who

have returned from the

UK to AP in the last one

month, 1,158 persons addresses have been identified. Of them,

1,101 have been kept in guarantine. The

addresses of the remain-

ing 56 returnees are yet

So far, six of those who

have returned from the

United Kingdom have

tested positive to Covid-

19.
With regard to the new variant of Coronavirus,

the commissioner said

Health Department is

maintaining a high

vigil. So far, presence of

the new strain has not

been confirmed. This is

because results of the

six samples they have

Institute of Virology,

East Godavari, Kris-

hna, Anantapur and

Nellore have registered

one case each of Covid-

19 with regard to returnees from the UK.

Pune, are awaited.

National

to be traced.

VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

RTPCR TEST

Lokesh: CM telling lies on demographic imbalance DC CORRESPONDENT Attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues and problems in Minister's words attention from the pressing issues attention from the pressing its present attention from the pressing its pression from the pression from the pression from the pression from the pressing its present attention from the pression from the pression from the pressin

VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

Telugu Desam national general secretary N. Lokesh has criticised Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for "deliberately misinterpreting" demographic imbalance as caste imbalance with the ulterior motive to derive undue political advantage. He said that the Chief Minister was telling all lies only to rake caste feelings and

thereby divert the people's Andhra Pradesh was now only one caste. Mohan Reddy, who took inspiration from his father and former CM late Rajasekhar Reddy who had earlier provided shel-

ter to lakhs of people. Varaprasad Rao asserted

DC CORRESPONDENT

Andhra Pradesh will con-

duct a trial run of Covid-

19 vaccination pro-

gramme to find out the

preparedness of the

health personnel roped in

for the programme in

State health and family

welfare commissioner K.

Bhaskar said here on

Saturday that as the

Centre had selected Andhra Pradesh along

with four other states for

district on

conducting a dry run of administered the vaccine

Krishna

Monday.

VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

ing issues and problems in the state. He claimed that Jagan Reddy fully aware that demographic imbalance had nothing to do with caste but yet he was resorting to cheap political gimmicks with utter disregard for decorum and decency.

Mr Lokesh said that it was because of his nonstop lying that Jagan Reddy was called a fake CM. He claimed that no section society

The Centre had select-

ed Andhra Pradesh along

with four other states for

gramme, they were mak-

ing all arrangements for

taking it up.
Accordingly, the state

health authorities will be

using a software applica-

tion called "Co-WIN" to

take up the trial run for all

identified beneficiaries to check on the prepared-

ness. No person will be

vaccination pro-

conducting a dry run of

the vaccination pro-

that distribution of 31 next to agriculture majorlakh of houses will lead to growth of state's GDP by three per cent, as it would create direct and indirect employment worth ₹20 crore. He claimed that

was

claimed that the real caste imbalance took place in the present regime as it discriminating political stunt. against the weaker sections in nominated posts and works.

Mr Lokesh said that over 850 posts at the government and corporations' top levels were given to

Minister's words and statements considering

his dubious track record

in just 19 months of his

ity of employment comes from the housing sector. He underlined that while wanted to provide houses for 54,000 poor families in

during the run as it was

Health authorities main-

tain that they are coming

up with an action plan to take up the vaccination

programme in compliance

with the guidelines issued

for it. The authorities will

arrange the requisite amenities for the pro-

gramme. The action plan

also includes arranging

amenities for storage of

the vaccine and mobilisa-

tion of personnel for tak-

ing up the programme,

and to come up with plans at the state, district and

meant to be a mock drill.

While the state government wanted to provide houses for 54,000 poor families in Amaravati region, TD leaders approached the High

Amaravati region, TD leaders approached the High Court on grounds that it would lead to demographic imbalance. He wondered whether such an objection is a democratic act or another cheap

The MLC said that TD is now blocking provision of housing for poor after abandoning them during its own regime. He pointed that all commercial sec tors have been facing a slump due to Covid crisis across the country. As such, it is a great thing that Jagan Mohan Reddy government is taking up a massive housing programme to generate economic activity on a large

In Krishna district, the

mock drill will be held at

five centres, including

government general hos-

pital, primary health centre at Uppuluri, Purna

Heart Institute, the pri-

mary health centre at

Penagalur and at the

urban primary health cen-

As part of preparatory

work, the state health

authorities will identify

health personnel for tak-

ing up the programme and

upload their names in the

Co-WIN app. A special team will handle any unto-

tre at Prakash Nagar.

Section of Tollywood cautious over Covid

FROM PAGE 1

K.L. Damodar Prasad, film-maker and Telugu Film Chamber secretary, said, "As people have started visiting the the-atres in large numbers to watch films, we appeal to the Centre to allow viewers to full capacity in theatres to help the industry to recover quickly from huge financial loss. We also appeal to the AP government to issue GO on waiver of power bills and deferred payment to give us some relief.'

Another section of Tollywood is cautious, given the threat of a second wave of Covid-19 and the discovery of a mutant about the health risk.

strain of the Coronavirus in the UK and elsewhere. They want to play safe with regard to allowing viewers into theatres. They maintain that they are expect a large turnout at the theatres as more are scheduled for release during the Sankranti fes-

tival in January.
Andhra Pradesh Film
Development Corporation (APFDC) former chairman Ambica Krishna said, "Though allowing theatres to run to full capacity helps quick revival of the industry, with shooting of films and other related activities gaining pace, we should be more careful

3 women killed in mishap on NH

DC CORRESPONDENT

NELLORE, DEC. 26

Two woman and a 14year-old girl were killed on the spot and four others injured critically when a minivan in which they were travelling was hit by a speeding truck on the Putalapattu-Naidupeta National high-

way early on Saturday.
According to the police,
one P. Vijay Kumar and
his brother P. Sekhar
belonging to Nangili in
Karnataka had planned a trip to Tirumala and other temples in Chittoor district on the occasion of Vaikuntha Ekadasi. houseowner Subhramanyam and his family members joined them. The three families hired two vehicles for the

pilgrimage.
The mishap took place near Gadanki in Pakala when the families were returning to Nangili after offering prayers in Tirumala on Friday.

Among the victims were Vijaya Kumar's wife Annapurna, 60, mother Rajamma, 80, and a rela-tive, Jyothi 14. The injured were shifted to the SVR Ruia Government General

Hospital in Tirupati.
Some passersby alerted the police and 108 staff. Pakala police rushed to the spot and shifted the injured to hospital. Police registered a case and are investigating.

Meanwhile a couple

were killed on the spot after an unidentified vehicle hit their bike near Jadadevi village in Varikuntapadu mandal of SPSR Nellore district on Saturday.

The couple identified as Gangi Srinivasulu Reddy mandal when a speeding and Rathnamma belong lorry going towards to Vadlamudi village in Tirupati hit the minivan Udayagiri mandal.

It's TD vs YSRC



TD activists stage protest against YSRC activists outside the Vizag-east MLA office at MVP Colony in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

YSRC GOVT MANAGED TO PERSUADE CENTRE ON REVISED PROJECT COST Covid-19 vaccination trial tomorrow FROM PAGE 1

The fixing of the project cost has been a bone of contention for long. Recently, the Centre had raised queries on the project cost and announced that it would extend financial help as per earlier agreement with the previous Telugu Desam regime at the price level of 2014-15. However, the YSR government Congress submitted relevant details and managed to persuade the Centre to consider the revised cost estimate of the project at the 2017-18 price level.

As per Central Water Commission's revised cost estimate-II, the total

cost of the project was ₹55,656.87 crore at 2017-18 price level while the revised cost committee recommended the price level at ₹47,725.74 crore at the 2017-18 price level.

With regard to reimbursement details, the total expenditure incurred up to December 11, 2020, was ₹17,733.75 crore and expenditure incurred after declaration as national project up to December 11, 2020, was ₹12,597.70 crore. The amount reimbursed to the AP government by the Polavaram Authority was ₹10,741.46 crore while the amount yet to be reimbursed was estimated at ₹1,856.24

FACING COVID | CHALLENGE | 1.15 crore tests were conducted, covering nearly 20% of population

State makes rapid strides in health infrastructure

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 26

The year 2020 threw a lot of challenges to the State government, more specifically the Covid-19 pandemic, which the administration not only contained well but also strengthened the medical and health sector. Further, the government increased the extent of YSR Aarogyasri scheme by incorporating many more diseases under its cover.

The State, led by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Minister Mohan Reddy, made rapid strides in developing infrastructure and facilities in controlling the pan-

demic by widening the network and pressing into service the village secretariat system and closely monitoring the situation almost on a daily basis. It stood first in the number of tests per million in the country and its recovery rate was higher and mortality rate lower than that of the national average. Labs were established in a record time. 'Trace, Test and Treat' was the policy followed and ANMs, village and ward volunteers along with sanitation workers and medical personnel did a commendable job in containing the pan-A household survey was

taken up by volunteers on each and every demanding situation and adequate ed for Covid centres.

AP stood first in the

number of tests per mil-

lion in the country and its

recovery rate was higher

and mortality rate lower

than that of the national

medical staff were recruit-

The data, as on Friday, shows that about 1.15 crore tests were conducted, covering nearly 20 per cent of the population standing first in the country. About 8.80 lakh were infected with an average positivity from teaching hospitals to rate of 7.64 per cent, the primary health centres

death rate logged was 0.81 and mobile units. per cent, which is considerably lower than the national average.

An effective control system was put in place by developing testing facili-ties, setting up of Covid care centres, and establishing a structured network right from 104 tollfree number to telemedicine. The number of virology labs went up to 150 when there was not even one before. The State has followed a decentralised model of sample collection centres and about 1,519 facilities acted as sample collection centres ranging

Doctors, para-medical

staff, employees of village and ward secretariats, volunteers, sanitation workers. ASHA workers and ANMs played a vital role during the pandemic.

Government hospitals were revamped under Nadu Nedu. Green signal was given for commence-ment of 16 additional teaching hospitals, covering tribal areas as well.

The year started with Jagan Mohan Reddy, fulfilling his election promise with the launch of a pilot project on January 3 in West Godavari district, which provides medical cover for treatment cost-

ing ₹1,000 or more and bringing 2,059 ailments under its purview from the earlier 1,059. The scheme was extendto Vizianagaram,

Visakhapatnam, Guntur,

Prakasam, YSR Kadapa and Kurnool districts from July 16 covering 2,200 ailments. Later, it was implemented in Srikakulam, East Godavari, Krishna, Nellore, Chittoor and Anantapur Procedures were increased by 234, taking the total to 2,436 on November 10. During the year, the State recruited 508 Aarogya Mithras and 670 new help desks were set up in the network hospitals.

OTHER STORIES **CHAKRASNANAM HELD IN SWAMY**

PUSHKARINI DC CORRESPONDENT

NELLORE, DEC. 26

On the auspicious occasion of Vaikuntha Dwadasi, Chakrasnanam was performed in Ekantam to Sri Sudarshana Chakrattalwar in the sacred waters of Swamy Pushkarini in Tirumala on Saturday.

The Sudarshana Chakrattalwar was being rendered in the holy Chakrasnanam temple tank waters for the first time after nine months. TTD has closed the Pushkarini activities early in March this year, following Covid-19 pandemic along with the entry of pilgrims into Pushkarini. Even during the annual and Navarathri brahmotsavams also, TTD has observed Chakrasnanam in a makeshift temple tank inside the temple only.

227 RED SANDER LOGS WORTH ₹1CR SEIZED

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC, 26

In a prize catch, Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) team seized 227 red sander logs along with the lorry transporting them to Chennai illegally following a tip off in Pitchatoor mandal in Chittoor district during the early hours of Saturday.

The team also apprehended

the driver of the lorry apart from the B-grade logs weighing around 3 to 4 tonnes worth ₹1 crore in the open market.

AP CJ OFFERS PRAYERS AT TIRUCHANOOR

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 26

The Chief Justice of High Court of Andhra Pradesh Justice Jithendra Kumar Maheswari and his family was given a warm reception by the Additional Sri A.V. Dharma Reddy on their arrival at Sri Padmavathi Rest House in Tirumala on Saturday.

Earlier he offered prayers in the temple of Goddess Padmavathi Devi at Tiruchanoor on Saturday. After darshan, he was offered prasadams by TTD JEO P Basanth Kumar.

Silpa, Raja Singh spar over 'desecration' of Srisailam

Srisailam MLA offers to resign if allegations are proved

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, DEC. 26

Srisailam MLA Silpa Chakrapani Reddy offered to resign if allegations of harbouring Muslims in temple town of Srisailam are proved by Goshamahal legislator

Raja Singh.
The BJP MLA from
Hyderabad alleged that Srisailam temple was under the control of Muslims and all contracts and shops were monopolised by them. He alleged cows in Goshala are being killed to extract their meat.

Denying the charges,

Silpa said he was ready for

a debate after Sankranti. Srisailam, one of the Shaktipeeths, and an important Jyothirlintga in India has been in the eye of controversy as the major revenue sources of commerce and business are cornered by Muslims. Raja Singh had alleged that one Razaq, who is a

DC CORRESPONDENT

BJP AP president Somu

Veerraju on Saturday accused officials of sup-porting misdeeds of rul-

Addressing party work-

ing during a visit to Nellore on the day, he said

democracy is at stake in Andhra Pradesh because

officials are toeing the

line of ruling party big-

"These very officials once confined present Chief Minister Jagan

Mohan Reddy, then oppo-

sition leader, to the air-

port on instructions of

then CM N. Chandrababu

Naidu. Now, the same offi-

cials are restricting Naidu

at the airport on instance

NELLORE, DEC. 26

ing party leaders.

RUBBISHING THE allegations, Silpa Reddy said Muslims have been living in the temple town for ages and he became MLA only two years

back.

contractor with Srisailam temple and his wife, a Hindu, is employed as a supervisor in the temple.

He said Razaq is a close aide of Silpa Chakrapani Reddy while Razaq's brother is a TD leader. Irrespective of which party is in power, the Razaq brothers are controlling the temple with the help of political parties.

When contacted, Raja lingh told Deccan Singh Chronicle that several cases are pending against Razaq, which include transporting of mutton in flower baskets. These flowers are used for puja in the temple. He said the gosha-

Officials support state

misdeeds: BJP leader

hoist the national flag at

Srinagar notwithstanding

threats from terrorists of

Pakistan, he said their cadres would not show

their back even while

going through adverse cir-

cumstances because of

the atrocities of ruling

YSRC workers against them. He found fault with

YSRC leaders for foisting

false cases against BJP

cadres fighting against

The party state president alleged that YSR

Congress legislators in

Nellore are involved in

illegal transportation of

red sanders, sand and

even soil. He warned that

he himself will stage a sit

in at Nellore if the ruling

MLAs fail to mend their

their corrupt practices.

la is supervised by Razaq's wife, who is helping her husband. Cows are killed with the connivance of the supervisor and its meat was being consumed, which is prohibited in the temple town.

Rubbishing the allega-tions, Silpa Reddy said Muslims have been living in the temple town for ages and he became MLA only two years back.

He clarified that he had nothing to do with Razaq and Singh's allegations were "baseless, malicious, mischievous," and only intended to provoke a section of the community and spreading ill-will in the community.

He claimed that he was a staunch Hindu by practice and had built temples with his own money. He challenged Singh to prove his allegations in the presence of Peetadhipathis at Srisailam after Sankranti and he was ready for any

heavy borrowings, which,

he stated, will make the

state bankrupt in future.

He appreciated that the

centre for providing to Andhra Pradesh ₹5,000

crore for Sarva Sikshya

Abhiyaan, ₹700 crore for

rural water supply and

₹1,200 crore for water grid

Still, he alleged, there

was no trace of any devel-

opment works in the state.

said whatever develop-

ment that Nellore district

has seen is due to the

immense efforts made by

M. Venkaiah Naidu before

he went on to become the

Meanwhile BJP leaders

of Nellore took objection

to officials removing all

banners they had erected

over the visit of their

party president Somu

Vice President of India.

The state BJP president

schemes

The goshala run by the Srisailam Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy temple has about 1,542 cows including ox. Every month at least one or two cows reportedly die due to dise ases, said a temple official.

A dedicated veterinary doctor, along with 44 helpers, is working at the goshala. The official said that the goshala supervisor was shifted after allegations of killing of cows surfaced.

The official said Endowments Act clearly states that people of other religions are not allowed to live in temple towns. But the Muslims staying in Srisailam approached courts and the issue is now hefore pending Supreme Court.

Once a decision is out, we will proceed according-

Atmakur DSP, Y. Sruthi said no cases have been filed against Razaq at

YSRC GROUPS IN CHIRALA LOCK HORNS AGAIN

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 26

Differences between the groups of YSRC leaders of Chirala continue to create ruckus in the constituency. Even before the wars

fishermen between groups owing allegiance to former MLA Amanchi Krishna Mohan and Chirala legislator Karanam Balaram died down, MLC Pothula Suneetha created a scene during the distribution of house pattas at Akkayyapalem on Satur-

Ms Suneetha raised a hue and cry after former MLA Paleti Rama Rao said in speech that they wish to have Karanam Balaram as their repre-Assembly in the next term also

NETA'S NATTER

Deepwater port is ported out again

he Kakinada deepwater port has a unique tradition — it's always operated by people who are close to the party in power of the day. It all started with then chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's initiative to privatise the port and favour the son of then Malaysian ruler Mahatir Mohamad. As domestic problems cropped up for the Malaysian firm, Naidu awarded the port contract to L&T and later got the Malaysian firm to buy a stake along with a consortium of TD leaders and their relatives. After

the change of guard, K.V. Rao, a smalltime businessman from Vijavawada made it big and bought the port from L&T thanks to his proximity to K.V.P.

Ramachandra Rao, in a literal sense also for they are neighbours. K.V. Rao managed to get the government to agree to dilute the concession agreement and Chandrababu Naidu never uttered a word against the gross compromise of the state's financial interests. Finally, it's curtains down for K.V. Rao with the Aurobindo group, which enjoys the most favoured company status in the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy regime, buying a major stake in the port company.

In Congress, secret within a secret

othing in the Congress is what it seems. This is being seen again in the long-drawn process of selecting the new chief for the Telangana state Congress. AICC incharge Manickam Tagore met a number of leaders and prepared a report regarding the new chief. In most cases this would have been enough. But then, Tagore, in true Congress style, left it to the high command. He also told state leaders that there was no need for them to visit Delhi as the time for consultations was now over and that he, being the envoy of Congress president Sonia Gandhi and party leader Rahul Gandhi, had finished the exercise. But then, this is the Congress. Several leaders rushed to Delhi and tried to drum up support. Given the cloak-and-dagger nature of such things, no one knows if the Tagore report will prevail on the

AICC or the famous 'sealed cover' will come from the high command, carrying the name of the favoured one. However, one of the aspirants is learnt to have told scribes that he will take charge of the post and launch a padayatra to ensure that the

Easy jump from TS to AP Jagga joins the

Kendram oka mid-hya (Centre is a With all efforts myth)" was a famous slogan of Telugu Desam founder and former chief minister N.T. Rama Rao, who fought relentlessly against the big brother attitude of the Centre. The executive heads of two the Telugu states seem to have taken a leaf out of NTR's book when it came to accommodating the long-pending wish of senior bureaucrat Srilakshmi who is facing many cases. Ever since Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy took over the reins of Andhra Pradesh, the

Telangana state cadre

Herculean efforts to

go on deputation to

With all efforts failing, she got an order from the Central Administrative Tribunal changing her cadre to AP, six years after bifurca-What is more shock-

Secretary Somesh Kumar gave her relieving orders and his AP counterpart Nilam Sawhney not only admitted Srilakshmi in the AP cadre but also made her secretary municipal adminis-

ing is that TS Chief

India services officers, into cognisance.

divorcee

looks

(what's

(S/2021/C01749)

gorakshaks

ongress MLA T. Jayaprakash Reddy, better known as Jagga Reddy, is feeling the pain and agony for losing six cows which he said he had bred with utmost love and affection. Jagga Reddy made a request to the DGP through the media that the cows were stolen by some unidentified persons two months ago, in October. He said that thieves had taken away the cows, leaving the behind their

He told the DGP that he had lodged a complaint with the Sangareddy police, but they had failed to either recover his cows or trace the thieves. But then, this is no Uttar Pradesh and he is no Azam Khan for the police to go rushing off to find missing cattle.
And, in the style of BJP MLA T. Raja Singh, darkly hinted that cow slaughter gangs may have something to do with it. Is there a mes-

Reminding that BJP CLASSIFIEDS

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FILM

SHORT TAKES **CONGMEN HELD** FOR PROTECT COW,

FARMERS STIR

Lalitpur/Jhansi (UP), Dec. **26:** Üttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Kumar Lallu and over 50 party workers were arrested in Lalitpur on Saturday after they tried to take out the 'Gai Bachao, Kisan Bachao' march without permission, but were released hours later, police said.

However, district Congress president Balwant Singh Rajput, who was among those arrested, claimed around 200 party workers were held. He also alleged that about two dozen party workers were injured as the police used force against them.

"About 50 to 60 workers, including state Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu and district unit chief Balwant Singh Rajput, were arrested from Dailwara township while try ing to take out the march with-out permission. They have all been taken to police lines,' Additional Superintendent of Police Brijesh Kumar Singh said. Later in the evening, the Congress leaders, including Lallu, were released from police lines on furnishing personal bonds and the UPCC president was allowed to leave for Lucknow, the ASP said.

The Congress had announced that it will take out the 'Gai Bachao, Kisan Bachao' march in different districts of Bundelkhand to highlight the alleged mismanage-ment in cow shelters under the state government.

PM TO INAUGURATE INDIA'S FIRST-EVER DRIVERLESS TRAIN

New Delhi, Dec. 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate India's first-ever driverless train operations on Delhi Metro's Magenta Line along with the fully opera-tional National Common Mobility Card service on the Airport Express Line on December 28 via video confer-

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said on Saturday that these innovations will herald a new era of travelling comfort and enhanced mobility. The driverless trains will be fully automated, which will eliminate the possibility of human error, it said, adding that after the start of driverless services on the Magenta Line (Janakpuri West-Botanical Garden), the Pink Line (Majlis Park-Shiv Vihar) of Delhi Metro is expected to have dri-

verless operations by mid-2021. The National Common Mobility Card, which will be fully operationalised on the Airport Express Line, will enable anyone carrying a RuPay-Debit Card issued from any part of the country to travel on the route using it. This facility will become available on the entire Delhi Metro network by 2022, the PMO said.

I-T DEPT DETECTS BLACK INCOME OF ₹100 CR IN ASSAM

Delhi, Dec. Unaccounted income of ₹100 crore has been detected after the income tax department raided three "leading" con-tractors of Northeast India based in Assam early this week, the CBDT said on

Saturday. The search and survey action was initiated on December 22 at fourteen locations in Guwahati, Silapathar and Pathsala in Assam and in Delhi. "Cash of ₹2.95 crore has

been seized. Overall, undisclosed income to the tune of approximately ₹100 crore has been unearthed so far during the search and survey operation," the Board said in a statement without sharing the identities of those

It added that "jewellery of ₹9.79 lakh has been seized and the sources of acquisition of some other jewellery worth ₹2 crore is under verification." The Central Board of Direct Taxes frames policy for the I-T department.

The entities covered are "leading contractors of Northeast and one group is also involved in the hospitality business," it said.

The main allegation against the three groups is that they have taken accommodation (dubious) entries in the form of non-genuine unsecured loans and also securities premium from dubious Kolkatabased shell (dummy) companies." "The three groups have suppressed their net profits across the years and routed back into business the unaccounted income through entry operators based out of Guwahati and Kolkata," the CBDT said.

J&K residents get free treatment



Jammu and Kashmir Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha hands over the golden cards to beneficiaries of the Ayushman Bharat PM-Jay Sehat scheme, after it was rolled out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually, in Jammu, on Saturday.

India, Vietnam begin SCS drills

Sea exercises to be closely watched by an already furious China

PAWAN BALLIDO NEW DELHI, DEC. 26

Indian and Vietnamese navies on Saturday started an exercise in the South China Sea, something which will be closely watched by China. The exercise comes when China is becoming increasingly assertive in the South China Sea and has been conducting military aggressive manoeuvres in the region

CHOUDHURY I DC

The Madhya Pradesh Cabinet on Saturday cleared the Dharma

Swatantra (Religious Freedom) Bill, 2020, known in political parl-

ance as 'Love Jihad' bill.

The draft bill, which may sail through in the

Assembly during its

three-day winter session

December 28, provides a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and ₹one

lakh fine to the perpetra-

tors of forced religious

conversion of a girl for

The new bill has the pro-

The bill puts the onus on

the accused and those

associated with the accused, including organ-

isations and institutions.

to prove their innocence.

Singh Chouhan, who chaired the cabinet meet-

ing, justified the bill sav-

ing that instances of reli-

gious conversion of a girl

for political purpose has

come to the fore.

If someone is looking to

capture a panchavat. he

gets married to a girl and fields her in elections,

"We have rescued many

minor girls from various places recently. We will not allow this to happen

to innocent girls from Madhya Pradesh", he

reporters, Home minister

Narottam Mishra said

that the new bill provides

briefing

Chouhan explained.

Later,

Chief Minister Shivraj

vision of declaring such a

marriage null and void.

commencing

marriage.

"Indian Navy conducted Passage Exercise today with the Vietnam People's Navy in the South China

Sea," said a senior office.

The relations between has dete-India and China has deteriorated this year after the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) violated the Line of Actual Control in Eastern Ladakh and the military stand-off between two armies in the sector has continued for the last eight months.

which may sail through

in the Assembly during

its three-day winter session commencing

on December 28, pro-

vears imprisonment

and ₹one lakh fine to

the perpetrators of forced religious con-

version of a girl for

imprisonment of 1-5 years and a fine of ₹25,000

for forced conversion. If

the victim of forced reli-

gious conversion belongs

to Scheduled Caste or

Scheduled Tribe or is under-aged, the offence

would attract a jail term

of 2-10 years with a maxi-

mum penalty of Rs one

Under the new bill, it is mandatory for both the

bride and groom sides, to

notify local district mag

istrate on change of reli-

gion two months in advance, failing which the marriage would be

Religious leaders and

priests associated with

such marriages would

attract five-year jail

terms and organisations

and institutions involved

in such marriages would

The new bill has also

made provision of main-tenance for the victim

and her children. The

Uttar Pradesh govern-

ment passed a similar law

However, cases of abuse

of law in Uttar Pradesh

have come to the fore.

declared illegal.

be deregistered.

on November 28.

marriage.

lakh.

vides a maximum of 10

MP Cabinet clears

'Love Jihad' Bill

(Religious Bill, 2020,

pressure on China at many fronts.

China was already furious over India-Vietnam virtual summit this week, where India had stressed that negotiations for a Code of Conduct (CoC) in the disputed South China Sea (SCS) waters should not undermine the interests of other countries or third parties in the region. Reacting to the summit, China's state mouthpiece Global Times had said,

(nor will it be the last) that India has poked its nose in the South China Sea.'

Earlier this week defence minister Rajnath Singh and his Japanese counterpart Nobuo Kishi had also discussed regional situa-tion in the South China Sea. Both had asserted to oppose any activities that escalate tension.

The US Navy has started patrolling in the South China Sea to challenge China. In past few months

Ronald Reagan and USS Nimitz along with their escorting cruisers and destroyers have conducted exercises in South China

After clash between Indian Army and teh PLA in Galwan Valley in June, India had sent its frontline warship to the South China Sea much to the displeasure of the Chinese who raised objections over the move during diplomatic talks between the

NTF: No need to change protocol for new strain

SHASHI BHUSHAN I DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 26

The National Task Force (NTF) on Covid-19 has concluded that there is no need to change the existing treatment protocol in view of SARS-CoV-2 mutations emerging in the United Kingdom and spreading to some coun-tries. The NTF on Saturday discussed evidence-based modifica-tions in testing, treatment and surveillance strategies for Covid-19 in view of the new virus strain.

The NTF deliberated on aspects related to the treatment protocol, testing strategy and surveil-lance of SARS-CoV-2 visa-vis the UK variant. It emphasised that since the UK strain is implicated to cause increased transmis-sibility of the virus, it is critical to identify individuals infected with this strain and adequately contain them to prevent its transmission in India.

The NTF recommended that in addition to the surveillance existing strategies, it is critical to conduct enhanced genomic surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 specially in incoming passengers from the UK. Besides, it will also be critical to conduct genome sequencing in samples where there is dropout of the S gene in lab diagnosis, proven cases of re-infections etc. Routine genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 from representative samples all across the samples needs to be a continuous and well planned activity.

8 UK returnees to Kerala test +ve

Thiruvananthapuram, decided to subject the Dec. 26: Eight people who returnees to more tests, recently returned from she added. the UK to Kerala, have positive Coronavirus and their samples have been sent to the National Institute of Virology, Pune for genomic analysis.

Health Minister K. K. Shailaja said on Saturday that samples of eight returnees were found positive for Covid-19 and their samples have been sent to NIV for further tests. Following this development, it has been

tain the mutant variant.

"The NTF concluded that there is no need to change the existing treatment protocol in view of mutations emerging in the strain. Further, since ICMR has always advocated use of two or more gene assays for testing caseload.

Surveillance at the four international airports in the state have been further strengthened. After the recently held local body polls, it was feared that there would be a massive surge in cases. However, that did not occur.

The death rate did not go up in the state as the government had taken precautionary steps in this regard, she said.

According to the Union health ministry, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) informed that the Centre has taken cognizance of the reports mutant variants of SARS-CoV-2 reported from the UK and the response of other countries to these reports. The situation is being monitored proactively. A strategy has been put under place to detect and conSARS-CoV-2, it is unlikely to miss infected cases using the current testing

strategy," said the Union

health ministry.

A total of 251 new deaths and 22,273 infections of Covid-19 were, mean-while, reported in the country. The number of people who have recovered from the disease climbed to 97,40,108, pushing the national recovery rate to 95.78 per cent, while the fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent. The active caseload remained below three lakh for the fifth consecu tive day. There are 2,81,667 active cases of Covid-19 in the country, constituting 2.77 per cent of the total

Farmers ready for talks with Centre on Dec. 29

ASHHAR KHAN | DC

As the protests demanding the repeal of the three farm laws entered the 31st day, the protesting farmer unions on Saturday decided to resume talks with the government. They have proposed December 29 as the date for the next round of negotiations and sent the draft of the invested to be discussed. issues to be discussed.

These include repeal of the farm laws, making the minimum support price (MSP) a legal guarantee and changes in the draft Electricity Amendment Bill to safeguard the interests of the farmers. There is also a demand to exclude farmer from the amendments to be the Commission for the Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020.

The decision to resume talks was taken at a meeting of Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of 40 farmer unions protesting at various Delhi border points against three farm laws.

Rakesh Tikait, a senior leader of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, said the modalities for the repeal of farm laws and guarantee for MSP should be part of the agenda for talks with the govern-ment. "We have decided to hold talks with the government on December 29," he said.

The announcement for fresh discussions came a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi lashed out at the Opposition for the first time since the beginning of the protests. On Friday he stressed that farmers' lands won't be taken away, adding, "Some people are spread-

ing lies".

The Prime Minister also released a financial aid of ₹18,000 crore under the PM-Kisan cash transfer

Five rounds of talks between the government and farmers have failed in the last couple of

The government has been repeating its stand that the farm laws will benefit the farmers.

should have faith in the government and that if at ny stage the laws cause hindrance to the farmers the government will not hesitate to rethink these.

Union Dharmendra Pradhan said that during Dr Manmohan Singh's government in 2013-14, the farmers were paid ₹1,310 for a quintal of paddy but now they are being paid ₹1,815.

Carrying ration and other essential items with them, several batches of farmers from Punjab headed towards Delhi borders to join the peasants protesting against the Centre's new agriculture-related laws.

According to farmer union leaders, farmers from various places including Sangrur, Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Gurdaspur and Bathinda districts were headed towards Singhu and Tikri borders. They began their journey despite fog and biting cold wave condi-tions in many parts of Punjab.

Tractor trolleys, cars and other vehicles carrying farmers, including the elderly and women, were seen on the Amritsar-Delhi national highway. The road from Delhi to Ghaziabad near the Ghazipur border was also closed as the farmer protest spilt over to the other carriageway.

Kisan Union leader Dr Darshanpal said on Saturday that the farmers will celebrate the martyrdom of Guru Govind Singh's son on December 27 and December 28. The protesters will then meet the Centre for the next round of talks on December 29.

On December 30, farmers will march from Singhu to Tikri and Shahjahanpur alongside their tractors on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) highway. "We request people from Delhi and other parts of country to come and celebrate New Year with protesting farmers," he said.

Dr Darshanpal added. He went on to say that the farmers are inviting everyone to have langar with them on December Several senior ministers 31 and January 1 at have said that farmers Singhu border.

BJP leaders will join NCP: Pawar

SHRIVASTAVA | DC

Deputy chick Maharashtra and Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar on Saturday said that leaders who had joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will return to NCP in the next three-four months. Mr Pawar said that he will refrain from commenting on who will be joining the party as election code of conduct for the gram panchayat elections is in

Few days ago 18 Congress corporators shifted their loyalty to NCP. Mr Pawar indicated that BJP leaders are next

effect as of now.

Mr. Pawar said that those joining the NCP were earlier in the same party before defecting to the BJP. These leaders

are not being heard by the

The NCP leader's statement would assume a political significance as elections of the several local bodies and gram panchayats are round the

"The leaders who joined the BJP thought that they would be heard when the BJP would come to power. Now, they want to leave BJP because their works weren't done. Some leaders from Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad have wished to return. They will soon be welcomed, Mr Pawar said.

Reacting to Pawar's statement, the BJP state president Chandrakant Patil said, "When Ajit Pawar failed to keep his 28 MLAs, whom he thought were with him when tried to form the government with the BJP. how would he get any other MLA now?"

MEDICAL I RECORD Hemant had developed Lukoskin for leucoderma; several other herbal medicines

DRDO man bags Scientist of the Year Award

Senior scientist Hemant Kumar Pandey has been honoured with DRDO's 'Scientist of the Year Award' for his contribution in developing several herbal medicines, including the popular drug Lukoskin meant for treat-

ment of leucoderma. A recipient of several prestigious awards for his contribution in the field of herbal medicine, Pandey has been undertaking research at the Defence Development Organisation's (DRDO) lab Defence Institute of Bio-Energy Research (DIBER) at Pithoragarh Uttarakhand for the past 25 years.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had recent-ly facilitated the scientist at an event here with the prestigious award that comprises a certificate and cash prize of ₹2 lakh.

• **DEFENCE MINISTER** Rajnath Singh had recently facilitated the scientist at an event here with the prestigious award that comprises a certificate and cash prize of ₹2 lakh.

 APART FROM Lukoskin, Pandey has developed drugs for treatment of eczema and toothache as well as an anti-radiation cream.

Pandey, Scientist 'E', Defence Institute of Bio-Energy Research (DIBER), Haldwani has

"Dr Hemant Kumar in the development of five herbal products and filed

seven patents. ToT of three products has been done with Aimil significantly contributed Pharmaceuticals, New

launched anti-leucoderma product into the market by trade name Lukoskin. "In recognition of his

invaluable contribution, the Scientist of the Year Award-2018 is conferred on Dr Hemant Kumar Pandey," the citation accompanying the award stated.

Though the scientist has developed six herbal drugs so far, Lukoskin used for treating leucoder-

in which white patches get developed on the skin, has been most widely appreciated and found huge acceptance in the

A formulation of around eight herbs found in Himalayan region, Lukoskin helps in treat-ing white patches and is marketed by Delhi-based Aimil Pharmaceuticals. Leucoderma is an auto-

under its grip in India. It is neither contagious nor life-threatening.

The incidence of leucoderma is 1-2 per cent of the population worldwide. Apart from Lukoskin, Pandey has developed drugs for treatment of eczema and toothache as well as an anti-radiation cream, most of which are already being sold in the market following transfer of tech immune disorder and nology (ToT).

SHORT TAKES

JUDGE DELAYS EXECUTION OF U.S. WOMAN

Washington, Dec. 26: A fede ral judge said the Justice De partment unlawfully rescheduled the execution of the only woman on federal death row, potentially setting up the Trump administration to schedule the execution after president elect Joe Biden takes office.

US District Court Judge Randolph Moss also vacated an order from the director of the Bureau of Prisons that had set Lisa Montgomerys execution date for January 12.

Montgomery had previously been scheduled to be put to death at the Federal Correctional Complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, this month, but Moss delayed the execution after her attorneys contracted Coronavirus visiting their client.

TURKISH OPPN TV STATION SHUTS DOWN

Istanbul, Dec. 26: A private Turkish TV station that aired pro-Kurdish opposition views has shut down less than a month after launch, raising press freedom concerns in a country often chastised by

rights groups. Olay TV, owned by businessand former minister Cavit Caglar, began broadcast ing on November 30 and was pulled off the air on Friday. Its staff announced its clo

sure live on air. Caglar said he pulled out of the venture because the station's editorial line veered too close to the pro-Kurdish opposition, while the editor claimed he had bowed to gov-

ernment pressure. Executive editor Suleyman Sarilar said on air that the network had aimed to maintain equal distance from every seg ment in Turkey's polarised society. "But we have seen that we can no longer keep up with this kind of broadcasting ... Cavit (Caglar) said he was under intense pressure from the government and that he cannot move forward," he claimed.

BUTCHERING **LOVER: RUSSIAN GETS 12.5 YRS**

Saint Petersburg, Dec. 26: A Russian historian and Napole on enthusiast was sentenced to 12-and-a-half-vears in prison for murdering and dismembering his young lover last

The Saint Petersburg trial, which spurred activists to voice growing anger over domestic abuse in Russia, began in June after delays due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Oleg Sokolov, 64, had admit ted murdering 24-year-old Anastasia Yeshchenko but said he committed the crime against his former student and lover in the heat of the moment during an argument.

He was arrested in Novemb er last vear after he was found drunk and carrying a back pack containing a woman's arms. Judge Yulia Maximenko sentenced Sokolov on Friday to "12 years and six months in a strict regime penal colony on charges of murder and the

illegal possession of firearms. "He was aware of his actions at the time of the crime, Maximenko said as she read out the verdict.

BRITISH DOUBLE AGENT GEORGE BLAKE DIES

Moscow, Dec. 26: George Blake, a former British intelligence officer who worked as a double agent for the Soviet Union, has died in Russia. He

Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, known as SVR, announced his death Saturday in a statement, which didn't give any circumstances of his death. Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed condolence es, hailing Blake as a "brilliant professional" and a man of "remarkable courage." Blake has lived in Russia since his daring escape from a British prison in 1966 and was given the rank of Russian intelli-

gence colonel. Born in the Netherlands, Blake joined British intelligence during World War II. He was posted to Korea when the war there erupted in 1950 and was detained by the Communist north. He said he voluntee red to work for the Soviet Union after witnessing relent less US bombing of North Korea. In a statement issued in 2017 through SVR, Blake emphasised that he decided to switch sides after seeing civilians massacred by the "American military machine.'

UK variant strikes Spain, France

New virus strain has prompted more than 50 countries to impose travel restrictions on the UK

Madrid, Dec. 26: Spain has registered its first cases of a Coronavirus variant believed to be particularly infectious that in Madrid's regional government said on Saturday.

The first case of a particularly infectious coronavirus variant that recently emerged in Britain has been confirmed in France, the health ministry said on Friday.

The person — a French citizen living in Britain is asymptomatic and selfisolating at home in Tours in central France, the ministry said.

The person arrived from London on December 19 and was tested in hospital on December 21 and found to be positive for the strain of the virus known as VOC

"The health authorities have carried out contacttracing for the health professionals taking care of the patient," the ministry said in a statement.

Any of their contacts that were seen as vulnerable would similarly be isolated, the statement said.

In addition to this first case, "to date, several positive samples that may suggest the VOC 202012/01 variant are being sequenced" by the specialist laboratories of the national Pasteur Institute, the statement added.

The region said four cases had been detected involving people who had recently arrived from the UK or had close contact with someone who had.

The father, mother and sister of a young man who arrived in Madrid by plane last week have tested positive for the coronavirus variant, it added.

The young man is suspected to have the new variant as well but Spanish authorities are waiting for the results of a polymerase chain reaction PCR test to confirm this.

The fourth confirmed case of the new variant involves a man who arrived in Madrid on December 20 on another

"The patients are not seriously ill, we know that this strain is more transmissible, but it does not cause more serious ill-Madrid regional health chief Antonio Zapatero told a

news conference.

"There is no need for alarm."There are another three suspected cases of the coronavirus variant but the results of tests will only be available on Tuesday or Wednesday,

Zapatero said. The new strain of the virus has prompted more than 50 countries including Spain to impose travel restrictions on the UK.

Madrid has banned all entries from the United Kingdom except for Spanish nationals and residents.

France and Italy have also already confirmed cases of the new variant, while the World Health Organisation reported that nine cases have been detected in Denmark and in each Netherlands

Australia. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said the new viral strain "may be up to 70 percent more transmissible than the original version of the disease". -AFP



down restrictions. Fears over new strains and surging Covid-19 infections in general across Europe have severely dampened the mood over the holiday season.

UK millions face tough post-Christmas curbs

London, Dec. 26: Millions more people across different parts of the UK entered tougher lockdown restrictions from Dece-mber 26, the day after Christmas marked annually as Boxing Day, as part of plans announced earlier this week to contain the rapid spread of a highly transmissible variant of Coronavirus.

Around six million people in east and south-east England have joined many others into Tier England's highest Covid level which includes a stay at home" order.

Lockdowns have also started in Scotland and

EGYPT HOSPITAL

FIRE KILLS SEVEN

COVID PATIENTS

A fire at a hospital north

of Cairo on Saturday

killed seven coronavirus

patients, security and

The blaze in the inten-

sive care unit of the hospi-

tal in Obour district, on

the outskirts of Cairo,

also injured five other peo-

It was not immediately

clear what caused the fire,

the sources said, adding prosecutors had launched

an investigation into the

Firefighters were dis-

patched to the facility and

stopped the blaze from

spreading, local media

Egypt has so far regis-

Health facilities in the

North African country,

like elsewhere, have been

strained by the mounting

In June, a fire at a hospi-

tal in Egypt's coastal city

of Alexandria killed seven

coronavirus patients and

number of infections.

injured seven others.

130,126 Covid-19

including 7,309

reported.

fatalities

tered

cases.

judicial sources said.

ple, the sources said.

CAIRO, Dec

(AFP) -

also started in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and measures have been reimposed in Wales after being eased for Christmas

LOCKDOWNS HAVE

70,000 virus deaths. Northern Ireland, and measures have been reimposed in Wales after being eased for Christmas Day,

Day, when the UK crossed

another grim milestone of

when the UK crossed another grim milestone of 70,000 Coronavirus deaths. Under the toughest Tier 4 restrictions, all non-

essential shops, bars and

capital has urged residents

not to leave the city during

the upcoming Lunar New

Year holidays, implement-

restaurants are closed and people are not allowed to meet other households, except in a support bubble or in an outdoor public space with one other person. Large parts of England were already in this tier pre-Christmas, including London, after the new mutation was found to be spreading fastest in those regions. With the devolved administrations setting

their own strategies, Northern Ireland goes into a six-week lockdown from Saturday with nonessential shops shut and hospitality open only for

were reported on Friday, a

convenience store worker

and a Hewlett Packard

Enterprise employee.

workplaces where the

AUTHORITIES HAVE

shut schools and all public

spaces in five divisions in

Dalian, and only essential

cases were found.

NO COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS IN LANKA AS OF NOW

Colombo, Dec. 26: Sri Lanka has postponed the reopening of its airspace for commercial flights, scheduled for Saturday, to prevent the spread of a new variant of the Coronavirus, officials said.

next date resumption of flights will be announced later. The Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka (CAASL) had announced last week that it will resume international flights operations from December 26, eight months after they were closed in view of the Covid-19 outbreak. The decision was taken in the wake of the new Corona-

Beijing residents

TOKYO CONFIRMS RECORD HIGH OF 949 NEW CASES

Tokyo, Dec. 26: Tokyo has confirmed 949 new cases of the deadly novel Coronavirus, a new high for the Japanese capital. as the country struggles with an upsurge that is spreading nationwide.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government said on Saturday that the additional cases bring the prefectural total to 55,851. Japan had 3,823 new cases on Friday for a national total of 213,547, with 3,155 deaths, the health min-

istry said. Japan has not been able to slow the infections despite government requests for the people to avoid going out for dinner and parties before and during the holiday sea-Tokvo Governor Yuriko Koike has ordered bars to close early and urged residents to avoid nonessential outings.

But many people have continued commuting on crowded trains and going out for dinner and drinks. And now with a new virus variant from the United Kingdom reaching, there's danger. -AP

EU starts vaccine rollout: Doses reach Italy, Spain, France

Paris, Dec. 26: The European Union teed up a vaccine rollout Saturday, even as countries in the bloc were forced back into lockdown by a new strain of the virus, believed to be more infectious, that has spread from Britain to France and Spain and even as far as Japan.

The pandemic claimed more than 1.7 million lives and is still run-ning rampant in much of the world, but the recent launching of inoculation campaigns has boosted hopes that 2021 could

bring a respite. First doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in hard-hit Italy, Spain and France on Saturday morning ready for distribution to elderly care facilities and hospital staff.

"We'll get our freedom back, we'll be able to embrace again," Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said as he urged Italians to get the shot. Vaccinations in all 27

European Union countries will begin on Sunday, after regulators approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on December 21.

Several countries including France, Spain, Japan, Denmark, Lebanon, Germany, Australia and the Netherlands have reported ca-

POC DOCTOR DIES OF COVID AFTER RACIST PLAINTS

Indianapolis, Dec. 26: A Black doctor who died battling Covid-19 complained of racist medical care in widely shared social media posts days before her death, prompting an Indiana hospital system to promise a "full external review" into her treatment.

Dr. Susan Moore, 52, tested positive for Covid-19 late last month and was admitted to IU Health North Hospital in Carmel, Indiana, according to a Facebook post. Acutely aware of her condition and medical procedures, the physician said had to repeatedly ask for medication, scans and routine checks while admitted at a hospital in Carmel. -AF

ses of the new strain, which has sent jitters through already overstretched hea lth services. More than 25 million total infections have been recorded in Europe on Friday, and Russia on Saturday said it had topped three million.

Ahead of WHO probe, China hails handling of virus

Beijing, Dec. 26: China's ruling Communist Party leaders have congratulat ed themselves on their "extremely extraordina-ry" success in handling the Covid-19 outbreak domestically, ahead of a World Health Organisation probe into the disease's origins.

China faced a barrage of criticism at home and abroad over its initial handling of the virus, which emerged in the central city of Wuhan last December.

China's Politburo, the top decision-making body of the Communist Party, said late Friday that the party leadership "played a decisive role in leading ... China in prevailing over the rare risks and challenges this year.""At the critical moment ... the Party Central Committee took a longterm view ...achieving an extremely extraordinary glory in this extremely unusual year," state news agency Xinhua reported, citing a statement issued

after the two-day meeting. China has largely curbed the spread of the virus, and was one of the only major economies to report growth this year. But it has been accused of covering up the initial outbreak. and so contributing to the virus' spread internationally. At home, Beijing has attempted to stifle criti-

TURKMENISTAN PREZ: LICORICE CAN CURE COVID

Ashgabat, Dec. 26: Wellknown for his baffling botanical pronouncemen ts. Turkmenistan's Presi dent Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov claimed Saturday that licorice could cure Coronavirus, the latest supposed miracle cure in a country still claiming zero cases.

"Scientists from every country are looking for effective cures, running various studies, and one of them could be licorice root," the leader of the authoritarian ex-Soviet country told ministers.

Without citing any scientific evidence, former den tist Berdymukhamedov claimed that "licorice stops the Coronavirus from developing" and "even a weak concentration of a waterbased extract has a neutralising effect." -AFP

cism by punishing at least eight whistleblowers. A Chinese citizen journalist who reported on Wuhan's outbreak, Zhang Zhan, has been detained since May and is expected to go on trial on Monday.

Instant immunity antibody drug trials start in UK

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

The University College London Hospitals NHS Trust (UCLH) said that the researchers in the Storm Chase study believe a Long Acting AntiBody (LAAB) known as AZD7442, developed by AstraZeneca, may offer immediate and long-term protection to people who have been recently exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 Cor-

them from developing

The study, led by UCLH virologist Dr Catherine Houlihan, recruited the first participant in the world to the study earlier this month and has recruited 10 participants since then.

"We know that this antibody combination can neutralise the virus, so we hope to find that giving this treatment via injection can lead to immediate protection against the development of Covid-19 in people who have been exposed - when it would be too late to offer a vaconavirus and prevent cine," said Houlihan.

ing fresh restrictions after Another two asymptomatic several Coronavirus infeccases were discovered in tions last week. Beijing earlier in the week. Two domestic cases were reported on Friday, a con- BEIJING IS conducting venience store worker and testing on a limited scale in the neighbourhoods and

face restrictions

Beijing, Dec. 26: China's • TWO DOMESTIC cases

a Hewlett Packard Enterprise employee. Another two asymptomatic cases were discovered in Beijing earlier in the week. Beijing is conducting testing on a limited scale in the neighbourhoods and workplaces where the cases were found. To contain any new outbreaks, the Beijing government cancelled big gatherings such as sports events and temple fairs. It says applications will be strictly reviewed for any major events. Venues such as cinemas, libraries and museums have to operate at 75% capacity. It also called on companies not to arrange business trips outside the city and abroad. Lunar New Year is on February 12. Separately,

workers can leave their compounds. ern port city of Dalian said Friday that they had tested over 4.75 million people for the Coronavirus

after 24 confirmed infec-

tions this month. Authorities have shut schools and all public spaces in five neighbourhood divisions in Dalian, and only essential workers can leave their com-

officials in the northeast-

LOW-KEY | EVENT | Families that reunite for Christmas celebrated apart this yr Services move online, people stay home

Rome, Dec. 26: Families that usually reunite on Christmas over a hearty, lingering meal celebrated apart Friday, services shifted online, and gift exchanges were low-key in one of the most unusual and

in decades. The Coronavirus left almost no one unaffected. Patricia Hager, 60, delivered homemade caramel rolls for breakfast to famiand friends in Bismarck, North Dakota, a state that didn't get hit until later in the pandem-

subdued holiday seasons

ic but was struck hard. It seemed every time she opened her door this holiday season, someone had left smoked salmon, baskets of nuts or cookies.

"This year Christmas love is expressed at the door," she said.

"I'm glad that people will probably be with us next year with the vaccines. I can give up anything for that." With a child due in February, Song Ju-hyeon of Paju, South Korea, near Seoul, said home is the only place she feels safe.

The government reported 1,241 new cases Friday, a new daily record for the country. "It doesn't feel like Christmas anyway, there's no carols being played on the streets," she said. "It's Christmask," the *Daily Nation* newspaper declared in Kenya, where a surge in cases led to doctors ending a brief strike Christmas Eve.

POPE FRANCIS delivered his Christmas blessing from inside the Vatican, breaking with his traditional speech from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to tens of thousands in St. Peter's Square.

Celebrations were muted in the East African hub as a curfew prevented overnight church vigils

Pope Francis delivered his Christmas blessing from inside the Vatican, breaking with his traditional speech from the bal-cony of St. Peter's Basilica to tens of thousands in St. Peter's Square. Tourism in Italy has virtually vanished and the government's

Coronavirus restrictions for the holidays foiled any plans by locals to flock to the square. Citing a cause for optimism, Francis said the development of Covid-19 vaccines shines "lights of hope" on the world. In a passionate appeal to

leaders, businesses and international organisations, he said they must ensure that the most vulnerable and needy in the pandemic be first in line to receive the vaccine. Bells rang out around Bethlehem as the traditional birthplace of Jesus celebrated.

But the closure of Israel's international airport to foreign tourists, along with Palestinian restrictions banning intercity travel in the areas they administer in the Israeli-occupied Bank, kept visitors away.

In Beijing, official churches abruptly cancelled Mass after China's capital was put on high alert following two confirmed Co-vid-19 cases last week. Two new asymptomatic cases were reported Friday. With economies reeling around the world, it wasn't

a year of lavish gifts. Robin Sypniewski of Middlesex County, New Jersey, was furloughed twice from her job serving school lunches and is now on reduced hours as her husband retires next week as a trash collector and her daughter wrestles with st-

+ **→** c m y k

DECCAN CHRONICLE | NELLORE | SUNDAY | 27 DECEMBER 2020

Chronicle 27 DECEMBER 2020



2020, the year I learn I am neurodivergent

The year-end roundup is a festal favourite; a December convention. What is there to celebrate this pandemic year you wonder. But if, instead of asking ourselves how the year shaped up, we asked how it shaped us, would it seem such a wasted year? This solitary annum, without even stepping outside, we've learnt more lessons than in a score of uneventful years

We've learnt that our sons-of-the-soil leaders care nothing for the true sons of the soil: the farmers, labourers, and key workers. We've unexpectedly found antivaxxers amongst friends and neighbours, who, in ignoring science and the common good, will ensure the world remains vulnerable not only to Covid, but a hundred vanquished diseases making a comeback. Most of all, we've discovered important facets of ourselves; a love for baking, an allergy to webinars, or quite

simply, who we really are. What I learned changed my life. I discovered I am, and have always been, autistic. One of the many definitions of autism offered up by the Internet calls it 'a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, and relationships. It is a "spectrum condition" that affects people differently and to varying degrees. I have what used to be called Asperger's Syndrome. Modern medicine however doesn't see it as a syndrome, but another way of being; atypical, but by no means "abnormal". No more "wrong" than being brown in a white country or a woman in a man's world, but subjected to the same marginalisation as any group outside the mainstream.

Did I know I was different? Yes; having been insistently told all my life. Whilst watching the Rain Mans and The Big Bangs had I suspected I might be one of "them"? No, they never felt true to life. Did it knock me for a six? OMG yes. Was I distraught and crestfallen? Confused at first but then, it brought me peace. My life seen in this new light suddenly made sense.

They say you can't change your past, but this mindboggling new knowledge did just that. It transformed *my view* of the life I've led, which is the next best thing. Mistakes, misunderstandings, the mistreatment I've borne much of which I've never forgiven myself for, I now could. We all blame ourselves for so much, but the failure of the neurodivergent to conform and resultant societal exclusion, leads to anxiety, stress, heart disease, and often early death. A recent study of people who had discovered their autism in middle-age revealed how life-changing this is. All of them attested to how they had internalised a lifetime of being told they were "wrong" and "bad". Routine censure and rejection for their unconventional responses had taken a terrible toll on their physical and mental health.



Young neurodivergents (like you) are the real X-Men. Mutants with a mission to change the world for the better, you are superheroes.

Over the last nine months of reading, analysing and embracing it, I knew I wanted to help prevent this eviscerating future generations of the neurodivergent. Related to the unearthing of my own "condition" was the stressful process of autistic assessment someone I loved dearly had embarked upon. My discovery had been a blessing for me, but what would it mean for this young person?

Mercilessly bullied at school, they were already aware of the dangers of atypicality, so I endeavored to present them with the positives. To tell them all I knew, which was the merest splotch on a spectrum of neural states so vast that one in 66 people in the world inhabit it. But when I told him it was as much a gift as a curse I was not dissembling ("Auties/Aspies" can't). Gifts this young man was already displaying in abundance; topping nationwide exams and mathematical challenges. Atypicality not only gave them an approach to life that was original and creative, it equipped them with application not always found in the mainstream.

Putting my arms around him ("Aspies" develop a defensive bubble they allow few into), I reassured that being different wasn't bad. But for the men and women who lived, loved, ideated and worked differently, for reasons of sexuality, belief, neurodiversity, and more, there would have been no advances in science, art, or ways of living. Without the likes of Einstein, Newton, Emily Dickinson, and Bach, this planet would have been a much poorer place (long before 2020). They are the you, I encouraged, are the real X-Men. Mutants with a mission to change the world for the better, you are superheroes, not villains. You forge ahead to accomplish so much, surmounting the peer understanding and support you lack.

Besides which, minds can be changed, I emphasised, even if it's one person at a time, and feels like it's taking forever. Providing information is the first step towards dispelling the misconceptions that drive the prejudice you face. There are so many things people don't know. For example, the autistic are often very bright, sometimes exceptionally so, but with some there is a few-seconds lapse before verbal information registers. This doesn't make them stupid, or deaf, or even vague (I always thought I was that). Their brains just work differently. The penny drops infinitesimally slower. But drops with the power of a bomb. Because what they then do with that information has often changed the world.

Ironically, in a year in which I completed writing my third book *The Accidental* Tourist. I found out just how much of an accidental tourist I was on this earth. In beginning to understand myself, I learned to forgive too, not just myself but those I'd felt had let me down and/or misbehaved. We're all bad at "getting" those we perceive as different, and the only thing that makes the neurotypical more culpable is that they are the norm: the muscular majority, with the power to change how society works. How it perceives difference and treats it. Differences frighten people, and scared folk will lash out. For my young superhero, and millions of young 'uns like him, a standing back to consider, a little thinking over, and even a tentative welcoming in, is a large part of what they need from society.

My resolution for 2021 is to convince, if not the typical into seeing the worth of the A, then the atypical themselves of their own value. To exhort them to continue charting their individual course, because neurodivergence, instead of a stigma, is a strength and should be a joy. But it isn't yet. Let this column in which I "out" myself be my first salvo towards this end.

Shreya Sen-Handley is the author of the recently published Strange: Stories, the award-winning Memoirs of My Body, and a forthcoming book of travel misadven-

tures. Her Twitter and Insta handle is @shreyasenhan.

Subhani FOR A YEAR OR TWO.

Politics didn't limit the enigma that was Atalji



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

here is a new nostalgia for Behari Vajpayee, whose birthday fell two days ago, coincid-ing with Christmas. Shakti Sinha's book on Atalji is out. Vinay Sitapati has written another one on the "jugalbandi" between Atalji and Shri L.K. Advani. Sagarika Ghosh is finishing a book on him. What explains this renewed spurt of interest in the former Prime Minister?

Not everybody has to agree with everything he believed in, or support him politically, but there will be very few who will disagree with the assessment that Atal Behari Vajpayee was a very likeable human being.
Although a product of the
RSS, and, therefore, supportive of its wider worldview, he somehow managed to retain an individuality ed in mindless ideological terms. That is why, his relationship with the

RSS was often strained.

The thing about Atalji was that he was in politics but not — as with the current crop of BJP leaders — entirely limited by it. In that sense, he was both a participant in the paraphernalia of power, and transcendent of it There was not a whiff of bigotry in his thinking. His spirit was eclectic, his patriotism transparent, and his worldview suffused with a rare idealism. But, in all of this. there was always that irrepressible humour. Once his foster daughter, Namita, told me that Baapji — as Atalji was fondly called — told her that it would be nice if I could write some of his written speeches. "But, perhaps, Pavanji is annoyed with my party,"

Atalji said. "Please tell him," he quickly he quickly "I am not quipped, happy with my party either!"

This disarming humour was reflective of a person who carried the burdens and pageantry of office lightly. The poet in him told him that all this was passing, a shadow play, a fleeting moment in the grand canvas of time. Behind it, ultimately, there was a loneliness that prompted a sponta-neous sense of detach-ment, a *virakti*, a deliberate denial of ownership. was this interplay between the participant, forever in battle for what he believed was right, and the observer, perpet-ually aware that for all the sound and fury, this was part of the overpowering transience of all human endeavour, that made Atalji the man he was. Only he, therefore, at the pinnacle of power could confess: come by the urge to leave it all behind and lose

myself in books, writing and thought. But I have been unable to do that. I have lived over seven decades in this dilemma, and what is left of my life will probably be spent no differently.

I still remember that memorable evening, when I met Atalji at the PM's residence and he

There was not a whiff of bigotry in his thinking. His spirit was eclectic, his patriotism transparent, and his worldview suffused with a rare idealism. But, in all of this, there was always that irrepressible humour.

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asked me if I would translate his poems into English. However, I put a condition, which was an audacious thing for a junior joint secretary in the MEA to do, for the request was from no one less than the PM. But, the greatness of Atalji was that he was talking to me then not as the PM of India, but as a poet, and I was responding not as a bureaucrat, but as a writer. I said that I would like to translate his personal poetry, those that he had written not from the pedestal of a politician but from his heart, as one aware of the mortality of life, and not his political poetry. It was his humility, as always accompanied by that remarkable twinkle in his eyes, that he readily

Atalji was not an insecure person. He was willing to respond to criticism, but was not afraid of it, or did not wish to suppress it. A leading TV anchor once told me that, after Atalji had recorded a show with him, he said — as he was leaving: "I am not happy with you. Come and see me at the PM's residence." The anchor was apprehensive, afraid that, perhaps, he had been too aggressive, and had asked the wrong question. When he went to see the PM, this is what Atalji said: "I said I am unhappy with you because you gave me much too easy a time. You did not ask the tough questions.' Contrast this with how sensitive the BJP has become today to all

questions that are

bing all those who ask them as "anti-national". Our PM today does not even meet the press in a direct interaction, leave alone feeling unhappy that he was not asked an uncomfortable question.
The absence of insecurity facilitates honesty.

Nothing brings this out more vividly then Atalji's poetry. For instance, a man who led the BJP campaign in 2004 on the slogan of "India Shining", was the same man who had the honesty to write: *Dharmaraj has not*

overcome His addiction to dice. In every panchayat Draupadi is robbed of

her honour. Without Krishna Today The Mahabharata will

be fought, No matter who claims the throne,

The poor will continue to suffer.

Those in power would do well to remember afresh what makes leaders like Atalji so resiliently popular. When leaders become humourless, unsmiling, insular and inaccessi ble, and governments become hyper sensitive to criticism, arrogant, and obsessed solely with power, they would do well to remember what Atalji wrote:

Never place me so high That I cannot embrace Those who are not my

My Lord!

The writer, an author and former diplomat, is in politics

Atalji was not an insecure person. He was willing to respond to criticism, but was not afraid of it. or did not wish to suppress it... The absence of insecurity facilitates honesty. **His poetry brings** this out vividly.

LETTERS

COVID VACCINE

To conduct dry run, a pilot mock drill for Covid vaccination in two districts each of four states is a good idea. The real vaccination programme is going to be humungous and a Herculean task with multiple challenges at multiple points. It needs meticulous planning, good number of trained personnel, logistics and fail-proof mechanisms. Given the large-scale requirements, greater demand and patently inadequate supply of vaccine, India, being second worst victim, cannot afford any failure.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao Vizianagaram

TUG OF WARSince pre-Independence days in India, every province had its own culture and traditions. Even during the Congress regime it never interfered with those as they felt the pride of their traditions. However, after the NDA (BJP) came to power, it is sad to watch the BJP interfering with every sphere of life and forcing the natives to forget them and follow the dictates of the BJP (Farmers intensify stir, insist on repeal of laws for parleys, DC, Dec. 26). For the success of any government at the Centre, it is always necessary to open-heartedly listen to demands of the main Opposition and come to an amicable solution.

N.S. Sharma

Visakhapatnam

ARROGANT CM

It is arrogance par excellence (Shivraj threatens mafia to bury alive, DC, Dec. 26). Can he walk the talk? No? Then why does he roar? Politicians at the helm should learn to behave rationally while speaking in public.

K. Nehru Patnaik Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN hronicle **Exploration of**

worthwhile HYDERABAD, DEC. 26. Preliminary investigation car-

diamonds in state

ried out by experts of Geological Survey of India beats out that further detailed exploration of diamonds is worth-while both in Banganapalli conglomerates and gravel area in Andhra Pradesh.

"As the study of the incidence of diamonds is the only method of exploration for locating promis-ing areas for mining." The fol-lowing programme of work is recommended by the investigator:— Drawing of bulk samples of conglomerates at favourable spots in Banganapalli, Munimadugu and Ramallaketa, followed by crushing screening and treatment to recover diamonds. If the tests yield encouraging results, further work can be commenced to block out areas, showing the incidence of diamonds, and to recommend the most prospective blocks for exploitation. "In view of the fact that the Srisailam Hydro Electric Project on the Krishna river would submerge the areas upstream quicker action is called for to prospect the gravel patches between Kurnool and Bolarum," the report adds. The report points out: "...the gravel patches are somewhat inaccessible there being no road worth the name to reach the deposits."

Anita Katyal **Political Gup-Shup**

Wait for RSS' pungent take on a Turkish drama series

he Turkish television drama series *Dirili?*: Ertu?rul has been a run away hit not just in Turkey but across the world with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan suggesting that everyone in the country should watch it as it promotes an understanding of Islam. The show, which chronicles the life of Ertugrul, the father of Osman I, founder of the Ottoman empire, has also proved to be extremely popular in Kashmir. But guess who else is watching the series being aired on Netflix? None other than some members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Not just that but they are also recommending the drama series to others. The Sangh members apparently evinced interest in the show after they learned about its popularity in Kashmir. They felt it will help the RSS to understand the psyche of the Kashmiri Muslim and also provide vital inputs in furthering its agenda of Hindu nationalism by fuelling Islamophobia. The RSS is helped by the fact that the Turkish series por-

trays Islam as a militant religion,

which has been decried by moder-

hen Congress president Sonia Gandhi called a meeting of senior party leaders, including the core group of dissenters last week, it was expected that Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal would be among them as he has been a leading member of the G-23 as this group is called. But surprisingly, he was not present at the long-awaited interaction. Different reasons have been cited for his absence. It is said that Sibal was not in Delhi on the day of the meeting as he had made prior plans to go on holiday to Dubai for the festive season. Though he was urged to change his flight plans by other members of the G-23 but he declined to delay his departure. However, the other side of the story is that perhaps Sibal was kept out of the list of invitees by Sonia Gandhi's office. The names of the G-23 representatives were sent in advance and were apparently vetted by Priyanka Gandhi who was in constant touch with former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath who was mediating between the dissenters and Sonia Gandhi's office. As the most visible and vocal member of the G-23, Sibal would have done some plainspeaking at the meeting unlike his colleagues who were at their diplomatic best.

hile on the subject of Sonia Gandhi's about meet much-talkedabout meeting, the development has catapulted former Maharashtra chief minister to the political centrestage once again. Chavan has been sidelined ever since he demitted office as chief minister. As an MLA from Karad, he has been confined to Maharashtra for the past six years now. There was some talk that he would be included in the Congress Working Committee, the party's highest decision-making body, or given some other responsibility at the Congress headquarters in Delhi since he has the seniority and the experience for such a slot — he was a minister in the Manmohan Singh government and also served as party general secretary. But unfor-

tunately for him, he was not considered by the Congress leadership for any important slot in Delhi. After his inclusion in the group of dissenters invited by Sonia Gandhi, Chavan is back in the limelight. Later, he was also asked to brief the media about the deliberations.

f reports from Jaipur are any thing to go by then the Ashok ▲Gehlot government in Rajasthan is set to face serious trouble in the coming months. Apparently, the BJP has renewed its efforts to topple the Congress government. It is obviously undeterred by its earlier efforts when it was let down by Congress rebel leader and former deputy chief minister of Rajasthan Sachin Pilot who could not muster the requisite numbers to oust his bete noire Gehlot.The BJP has since sidelined former chief minister Vasundhara Raje who had played spoiler last time and ensured that her party's plans did not fructify. The saffron party is reasonably confident that it will succeed this time as home minister Amit Shah has placed his loyalists

in key positions in the desert state.

t a meeting convened recently, BJP MPs from Uttar Aly, BJP Wifs from Com-Pradesh were specifically told that they should only display photographs of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the banners and hoardings they put up for programmes in their constituencies. This has obviously not gone down well with the lawmakers but they have little option but to abide by this direction. Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh are due only in 2022 but these instructions are obviously aimed at sending out a clear message that the electorate is voting for Modi who is synonymous with the BJP. Interestingly, even photographs of Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath are not to be displayed. Maybe, this has something to do with the fact that Yogi has acquired a larger-than-life image and is even being talked about as the BJP's future prime ministerial candidate.

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OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ Great ★★★★ Good ★★★ Okay ★★ Poor ★ Truly Terrible TT

The burden of proof is hers alone

Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors

CAST: Kirti Kulhari, Pankaj Tripathi, Jisshu Sengupta, Adrija Sinha, Anupriya Goenka, Mita Vashisht, Ashish Vidyarthi, Deepti Naval, Khushboo Atre, Kalyanee CTOR: Rohan Sippy and Arjun AMING ON: Disney+ Hotstar ATING: ★★★★

SUPARNA SHARMA

urder is a crime against the Union of India and it is designed to rise to defend

Marital sexual abuse is not a crime. Not in the eyes of the Union of India. It is trained not to react

Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors is an eight-part series that conducts the forensic examination of our *purush-pradhan samaaj* and some of its institutions while it investigates a murder.

As the series goes about interrogating the accused, digs into the actions and personality of the victim, it lays bare the most horrific abuse that goes on in the privacy of homes, behind bedroom doors, where nightly assaults leave no scars.

Chandra Sengupta) is a well-regarded, well-heeled lawyer who fights the cases of the dispossessed. He is also a devoted husband to Anu Chandra (Kirti Kulhari) who is a quiet, even strange sort. She's forgetful, nervous, in constant need of

reminders and calming pills.
Outwardly it seems like a straight-

forward crime involving a husband, a wife and an eyewitness.

But the series, sharply tuned to catch overt misogyny and micro sexism of the police force, the legal system and the family, takes us into confidence right at the beginning. It shows us the obsessive, controlling actions of one and the fear-stricken jitters of another, thus casting us in the role of an anxious juror who is the keeper of a secret. But things are kept suitably ambiguous, everything is not made clear — his actions and hers, their motivations. This adds an element of desperate urgency for us to get to the

Like us, Bikram and Anu's 13-year-old daughter Rhea (Adrija Sinha), an eyewitness to what happened that night and on several other nights, knows some things for sure but is con-

riminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors is in slow-burn mode. While it keeps its main focus on unravelling what happened, it spends a considerable amount of time on the tangents that spring from this one crime, and the tributaries that ioin it.

After the murder is reported and the wheels of the criminal justice system start to move, an ecosystem begins to take shape for several to feed off and benefit from.

Lawyers are either out to earn some money or to bolster their reputation while restoring the balance of patriarchy and earn kudos from brother lawyers.

Cops want to earn brownie points or make money.

Jail inmates need a friend or a foe. Family members and friends pick if they prove that they are not, then they are either wrong, misguided or





designed to give the man the benefit of the doubt and make the woman carry the burden of proof, even when she is

Thankfully, Criminal Justice is not simple minded. Everything is layered here, everyone carries patches of grey. There is no innocent, blemish-

free victim here. There's the accused who doesn't speak, not even in her own defence, and like her lawyers — Madhav Mishra (Pankaj Tripathi), Nikhat Hussain (Anupriya Goenka) — her silence hassles us, especially because we know what happened. And then we are told that she is flawed.

Criminal Justice challenges us, makes us struggle to decide which side we are on even as we watch active misogyny at play that taints everything, from evidence collection and interrogation to what gets asked and how it gets presented in the media. We see whose character the system is interested in "exposing" and whose character it would rather not discuss.

The show ventures behind several closed doors, including those of several bedrooms, the jail and the chambers of powerful lawyers. Through three couples — cops Gauri (Kalyanee Mulay) and Pradhan (Ajeet Singh Palawat), and advocate Madhav and his adorable wife Ratna (Khushboo Atre), Nikhat's ammi and abbu — we

see varying degrees of sexism.
But it's the marriage of the Chandras that shows us, in disturbing detail, how marital abuse works. How the perfect son, brother, lawyer, husband exorcises all his demons and complexes when bedroom doors are shut. How fine that crack between words and actions is.

"I love you, I will take care of you." Criminal Justice show how these sweet, simple words get weaponised, disappointment, disapproval and

anger is used to cover abuse, and a woman's belief in herself, her abilities is shaken to the core, so much so that till the very end she thinks she

The second season of *Criminal Justice*, which is based almost verbatim on the 2009 BBC series, carries along a few worthies from the first season — advocates Modbay Michael Nikhat Hussein cates Madhav Mishra, Nikhat Hussain (Anupriya Goenka), and Mandira Mathur (Mita Vashisht), the high-powered corporate lawyer.

That is partly because that's how it was in the BBC series but also because Pankaj Tripathi now has the power to make us smile everytime he is on screen. Here, however, he takes a courteous step back, letting the women around him shine.

Anupriya Goenka is efficient but Khushboo Atre, who plays his adorable wife, insistent on initiat-ing conjugal ties, is very good. Kirti Kulhari's silent, stoic but also quaking and crying performance is the series centrepiece. She deserves awards just for the litres of tears she has shed

Mita Vashisht has always had a pow-erful presence on screen. Though here she sometimes projects more than is required, as if she can't do light touch, she makes her presence felt as the mover-shaker. Matching her heavy footprint is the male lawyer she recruits, played by Ashish Vidvarthi.

Ajeet Singh Palawat, who plays the cop Pradhan, is excellent. Deepti Naval brings a lot of class and manages to anchor this gritty crime-court room-jail drama.

Jisshu Sengupta has very few scenes and yet his presence lingers throughout. Much like the insidiousness of sexual abuse, long after a controlling partner is gone, his noose-like, suffocating grip remains.

An entertaining meta experience

AK vs AK

CAST: Anil Kapoor, Anurag Kashyap, Yogita Bihani, Sonam Kapoor, Harshvardhan Kapoor OR: Vikramaditya NG ON: Netflix RATING: ***

SUPARNA SHARMA

have always worried, rather needlessly up until now, at having to use the word "meta". I have always sensed a distinctive pretentiousness to it and despite looking up its meaning a hundred times, it has never sat well with me.

Meta means being self-referential, having and showing explicit awareness of oneself. And there really is no other way to describe AK vs AK except as a major meta experience and exper-

Thankfully, unlike the word, the film is not just hugely entertaining but is also a sharp commentary on our current voyeuristic state of being.

n *AK vs AK*, actor Anil Kapoor and director Anurag Kashyap are playing themselves, their "characters" generously and

wickedly embellished by their real-life professional glories and glitches, as well as their personal ity traits and reputations

Kashyap is a director who is riding a high after some critically films and moves around with a camera constantly

filming him.
One Yogita is shooting a film school documentary on the best of Indian cinema and the first episode is on him. "Mere baad sab gobbar hai," he tells Anil Kapoor who is telling him that he is keen to work with him.

But Kashyap still cradles a 17year-old grouse and reminds Kapoor how her turned down his dream project. And now, he tells Kapoor, "I have now moved on. And in any case, you are no longer hero material. You are playing grandfather in Dil Dhadakne Do." He says all this while texting. He's probably in the

midst of another Twitter spat. This being the mood before the two appear before an audience for a panel discussion, it takes just a few more insults and a glass of water to bring the two to a head-on

A full-blown fight ensues and the industry takes sides. Anil Kapoor the star emerges as the winner and Kashyap sinks. And then he

Kashyap barges into Anil Kapoor's set one day and then into his vanity van with the camera



lady in tow saying he is shooting a hostage thriller and Kapoor now daughter, Sonam, who has been

has Sonam Kapoor bound, gagged

see his daughter alive, and that he has to find her by sunrise.

have to be on speaker mode and it's 14 hours to sunrise. What follows are sequences that

kidnapped. He Facetimes a hooded man who

and weeping.

Kashyap insists that Kapoor adhere to his rules if he wants to No cops, no outsiders, camera won't be switched off, all calls

showcase how powerful and insidious reel life is — even when

an actor wants to shed it, it won't

leave them.

Some of these scenes, like the one in a police station, are funny, while others, where Kapoor is asked to dance for a bit of information, are scathing.

he idea for AK vs AK and to pull off its script required both — megalomania and humility. So, perhaps, it is appropriate that it's written by Anurag Kashyap. The writing is sharp, political, funny, and the jokes are often on Kashyap himself.

While the dizzy, hand-held camera gives a reality waali feeling to AK vs AK, two interesting things happen simultaneously in the film — one is entertainment that draws all its power, jokes and insults from the real lives of these two Bollywood personalities, and the other is us, the viewer, cringing at the gleeful voyeurism of people who don't see the reality and trauma of Kapoor, but treat it as an act, a performance. The film recruits most of Anil

Kapoor's family members and some of Kashyap's, but sometimes it is too made-up. This is because while the characters are real, KApoor and Kashyap's silly fight, rivalry is not. It is not like, say, watching Rekha and Jaya fight Amitabh in Silsila.

There is a fakeness to it. And that is why, for a while in the mid-dle, the film, which is mostly faltu fun, becomes a bit tedious and dull. But then a chase is thrown in, followed by a twist.

AK vs AK is a clever plot executed very well by director Vikramaditya Motwane and can be put down as a fun milestone of lockdown creativity.

Both Anurag and Anil Kapoor very good and While convincing. While Kashyap exudes a certain creepy vibe laced with arrogance, Kapoor is. While he is obviously acting, he has to swing between "acting" and "reality", or be meta within meta. That requires swag. And he still

In 'Copperfield,' Iannucci brings Dickens to life

JAKE COYLE

Armando Iannucci. In each there's a passion for human frailty and absurdity, and, above all, a richness of people. Nobody filled pages with a vivid cast of characters like Dickens, so who better to take a shot at "David Copperfield" than the man behind the teeming ensembles of "Veep," "In the Loop" and "The Death of Stalin"?

In his third film as director, following his farce of bumbling and bloody Kremlin power struggles, Iannucci has turned to Dickens' most quintessential and autobiographical novel with the same zeal he previously reserved for political parody. "The Personal History of David Copperfield" is one of the more lively, colorful and whimsical Victorian costume dramas you're likely to see. It's a movie flowing with fresh air, which isn't something normally said of adaptations of 700-something-page

books. Iannucci, famed for his improvisational style and expletive-laden barrages, clearly finds in Dickens a writer simpatico in fondness for language and taste for multitudes. In many ways, they make a match, Iannucci's more anarchic, free-wheeling style animating the wit and idiosyncrasies of Dickens

And just as in the absurdly deep bench of "Veep," casting has made a difference. Dev Patel Copperfield, once out of childhood (as a boy, he's played by compelling youngsters Jairaj Varsani and Ranveer Jaiswal), with wide-eyed wonder, always alive to the world around him, if generally

The performers, a distinctly multicultural cast, add considerably to the vibrancy of the film, collectively making a fairly irrefutable argument for colorblind casting, for anyone who needs one. But while "The Personal

History of David Copperfield" keeps a restless, brisk pace as it rushes through Copperfield's life, Iannucci and his cowriter Simon Blackwell arrange the film in such distinct chapters that the movie feels more like a litany of scenes than the dramatic evolution of a young man. Some sections are better than others. The episode with Laurie and Swinton at their country home, fly-ing kites and chasing away donkeys, is so good that you want a whole

Wonder Woman combats a huckster's rise in 1984

f you're going to make a movie about wish fulfillment, 1980s America is about as good as you can do for a setting outside the Arabian Desert.

'Wonder Woman 1984,'' Patty Jenkins' time-traveling sequel to 2017's record-setting Wonder Woman," shuttles Gal Gadot's warrior to the era of Regan economics, parachute pants and "Rio." All have their cameos in "Wonder Woman 1984," a superhero parable of greed and fanny packs with pointed references to today. Two movies in, it's clear that

Jenkins and DC Comics have a thankfully different concept for Wonder Woman as a film fran-chise. Like its predecessor, 'Wonder Woman 1984" is spiritpurposeful and blessedly lacking in grandiosity. And both films place Wonder Woman not under the burdensome heft of world building or even universe saving — or at least Gadot comes across as too resplendently regal to ever seem

weighed down. She's more a moral and muscular counterweight to ego-driven male misdirections, steering history through the repeating pitfalls of megalomaniacs

intoxicated by power. Last time, it was German and British military leaders under e sway of Ares, the god of war.

Wonder Woman 1984

CAST: Gal Gadot, Chris Pine, Kristen Wiig, Pedro Pascal, Robin Wright, Connie Nielsen OR: Patty Jenkins RATING: ★★★★

preneur/TV personality who, in stealing an ancient gem — the "dream stone" — from the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. (where Gadot's Diana now works), gains the power to grant wishes. Max Lord (Pedro Pascal) goes from deadbeat dad to despot, turning into a conman of mythical dimensions. He's a diabolical genie without a bottle, or to paraphrase Robin William's Aladdin, he's got phenomenal cosmic powers sans the itty, bitty living space.

A snake oil salesman who placates cravings while stealing everything else is, you might say, a touch timely. "Wonder Woman 1984" plays up its Trump critique about as much as it does its '80s style. In one scene, Steve Trevor (Chris Pine), summoned from the grave by Diana's own wish while holding the gem, giddily tries on all the period-appropriate clothing like Ken's fashion show in "Toy Story 3." Best in the first "Wonder Woman" were the fish-out-of-water scenes of Diana experiencing

London with Trevor; this time the roles are reversed, and the charm a little less What does Max's rise have to do

with Wonder Woman? A huckster is a kind of perfect foil to Diana, conceived from the start as a force for truth. (Her lasso of truth was modeled after the polygraph, an invention of Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston.) Jenkins opens the film with an Amazonian flashback to an obstacle course race on the island of Themyscira where a young Diana learns the value of truth. "No true hero is born from lies," says Antiope (Robin Wright).

The dream stone transforms another, too: Barbara Minerva, a meek archeologist played by Kristen Wiig. Awkward in heels and most everything else, she mutters that she'd like to be more like Diana when holding the stone, setting off a metamorphosis that playfully remakes Wiig's typical screen presence, and creates another foe for Wonder

Just as in "Wonder Woman," I think Jenkins has left some opportunities on the table. The first film, despite being set in 1918 during WWI, omitted any real interaction with the era's thenflourishing women's rights movement — a vital source of inspiration to Marston. Likewise, 'Wonder Woman 1984" "Wonder Woman 1984" — more focused on "greed is good" decade and its contemporary resonances doesn't much pause to interro

gate the 1980s' gender imbalances. Like the last movie, "Wonder Woman 1984" becomes consumed by its (admittedly quite good) antagonist. It drags in the third act in a messy White House battle

and a prolonged finale. But I still like these movies more than most superhero films. They feel both campier and more real than Marvel movies — more like the page-turning thrill of a comic book. The ambitions of 'Wonder Woman 1984" may be just outside its grasp, but it seldom feels predestined or predictable - a preciously rare commodity in the genre.

As its characters awaken to their powers, turning from recognizable people to monsters, the film keeps changing shape, enlarging as it goes. Jenkins' pop cinema craft is limber and lucid. Pascal's performance, more sweet than sinister, is scintillat-

ingly over the top.

Premiering in theaters and on HBO Max in North America, Wonder Woman 1984" will close out a year largely absent of superheroes in a release plan that has upended the film industry. It's a very big film heading primarily to the small screen, at a time when the pandemic has made the escapist, popcorn-eating moviegoing that superhero movies are made for impossible, or nearly so. That makes "Wonder Woman 1984" a nostalgia act in more ways

The Personal T's not hard to draw a straight line from Charles Dickens to History of David Copperfield CAST: Dev Patel, Aneurin Barnard, Peter Capaldi, Morfydd Clark, Daisy Mary Cooper, Rosalind Eleazar, Hugh Laurie, Tilda Swinton **DIRECTOR:** Armando lannucci

> rather mystified by it. Still, the film belongs largely to the overall cast, including Tilda Swinton as David's aunt Betsey Trotwood; Hugh Laurie as the mentally ill, King Charles I-obsessed Mr. Dick; Peter Capaldi as the creditor-evading Wilkins Micawber; Rosalind Micawber; Rosalind Eleazar as the romantic interest Agnes Wickfield; Benedict Wong as the wine-swilling Wickfield; Ben Whishaw as the plotting Uriah

> > film of them.

Dean remembered

during MCG Test

Melbourne: More than three months after his death, Dean Jones was paid another tribute at his home ground here by Indian and Australian players, who were joined by his wife, daughters and the legendary Allan Border in remembering

the effervescent former player on Saturday. Jones' family and former Australia captain Border participated in the farewell during the tea break of the ongoing second Test here. Border, Jones' wife Jane, and daughters - Augusta and Phoebe - took a long walk from the boundary of the Melbourne Cricket Ground to the centre, carrying his baggy green, sunglasses and Kookaburra bat and laid the items to rest on the stumps at the Great Southern Stand end of the ground. Later, 12th men from both sides - K.L. Rahul (India) and James Pattinson (Australia) - collected the

Ex-Eng cricketer Jackman no more

items and rested them on a

seat by the boundary. -PT

London: Former England cricketer Robin Jackman, who played four Test matches and 15 one-day internationals, has died, the International Cricket Council said. He was 75. Jackman took 1,402 wickets in a 399-game first-class career between 1966 and 1982. Following his retirement he became a commentator in South Africa, where he lived with his wife Yvonne. A statement on Friday from the ICC read: "We are saddened to learn about the death of legendary commentator and former England bowler Robin Jackman, who has passed away

aged 75. Former New Zealand bowler and fellow commentator Danny Morrison tweeted: "Awoken to the sad news of dear buddy & comms colleague Robin Jackman passing... Blessed to have had wonderful times shared 'Jackers'. RIP Rob".

De Silva hurt after leading SL revival

Centurion, South Africa: Dhananjaya de Silva and Dinesh Chandimal put Sri Lanka in a strong position on the first day of the first Test against South Africa in Centurion on Saturday. De Silva made 79 before retiring hurt and former captain Chandimal hit 85 as Sri Lanka reached 340 for six at the close. De Silva suffered what appeared to be a left hip injury while running between wickets and was taken off the field on a motorised stretcher. It was not clear whether he would be able to take any further part in the

match. His injury ended a partnership of 131 with Chandimal. — AFP Brief scores: Sri Lanka 340/6 (D. Chandimal 85 batting, D. De Silva 79 retired hurt, W. Mulder 3-68) vs South Africa

BOWLERS' DAY OUT Tanmay to lead Hyd T20 team

Bumrah, Ashwin skittle Aussies out for 195 as India dominate

Jasprit Bumrah's menace matched Ravichandran Ashwin's guile as an inspired India led by Ajinkya Rahane shot out Australia for a sub-par 195 to dominate the opening day of the second Test here on Saturday. India then lost an out-of-

form Mayank Agarwal (0) to Mitchell Starc but debutant Shubman Gill (28 batting) survived a hostile spell to hit some delectable boundaries in the day end score of 36 for 1 in 11 overs

Giving him company was the seasoned Cheteshwar Pujara (7 batting). The line-up would look to exorcise the ghosts of the open-ing Adelaide game last week when India were shot out for their lowest

ever Test score of 36.
"Not being reckless but playing with confidence will be the motive going forward," said Bumrah at the end of day's play, spelling out the team's plan.

As much as the day belonged to the Indian bowling unit for another fired-up show, new captain Rahane deserved equal credit for marshalling his resources to perfection during the 72.3 overs that Australia batted.

Bumrah (4/56 in 16 overs) and Ashwin (3/35 in 24 overs) were the stars but debutant Mohammed Siraj (2/40 in 15 overs) also did his bit repaying the faith shown in him with wickets of Marnus Labuschagne (48) and Cameron Green (12) with the old ball. However, the Test series is increasingly looking like Ashwin's paradise as he once again made the opposition's best batsman Steve Smith (0) look ordinary, exploiting the turn and bounce that the first day of the MCG track offered. The Indian team looked way more galvanised despite being without regular skipper Virat Kohli, who is on paternity leave.

SIRAJ FULFILLED LATE FATHER'S DREAM

Mohammed Siraj could not perform the last rites of his late father last month as he was in Australia with the national team but he made him proud by making India Test debut in Melbourne.

His brother Ismail said it was his late father's dream to see Siraj play for the country in Tests and finally the dream was fulfilled on Saturday at the MCG. "It was my (late) father's dream that Siraj should represent India in Tests ... He always wanted to see him in blue and white jerto represent the nation, so our dream got fulfilled," Ismail said.



India's Ravichandran Ashwin (left) celebrates with captain Ajinkya Rahane after dismissing Australia's Tim Paine on Day One of the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Saturday.

SCORECARD

Australia 1st Innings: Joe Burns c Pant b Bumrah O, Matthew Wade c Jadeja b Ashwin 30, Marnus Labuschagne c Shubman Gill b Mohammed Siraj 48, Steven Smith c Pujara b Ashwin O, Travis Head c Rahane b Bumrah 38, Cameron Green Ibw b Mohammed Siraj 12, Tim Paine c Vihari b Ashwin 13, Pat Cummins c Mohammed Siraj b Jadeja 9, Mitchell Starc c Mohammed Siraj b Bumrah 7, Nathan Lyon Ibw b Bumrah 20, Josh Hazlewood not out 4. Extras (b-10, nb-3, w-1) 14. Total (in 72.3

155, 8-164, 9-191, 10-195. **Bowling:** Jasprit Bumrah 16-4-56-4, Umesh Yadav 12-2-39-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 24-7-35-3, Ravindra Jadeja 5.3-1-15-1, Mohammed Sirai 15-4-40-2.

India 1st Innings: Mayank Agarwal Ibw b Starc 0, Shubman Gill (batting) 28, Cheteshwar Pujara (batting) 7, Extras (nb-1) 1. **Total (For 1** wkt, in 11 overs) 36. FoW: 1-0.

Bowling: Mitchell Starc 4-2-14-1, Pat Cummins 4-1-14-0, Josh Hazlewood 2-0-2-0, Nathan FoW: 1-10, 2-35, 3-38, 4-124, 5-134, 6-155, 7- Lyon 1-0-6-0.

Gavaskar refrains from praising leader Rahane

impressed by Ajinkya ond Test here. Rahane's field place- Asked for ments but said he will refrain from praising his captaincy as it is still "early days" and he does not want to be accused of backing a Mumbaikar. fellow

Taking charge of the team in the absence of regular skipper Virat Kohli, Rahane marshalled his resources well as India dismissed

Former India skipper 195 in 72.3 overs on the is opening day of the sec-

> Asked for his com ments on Rahane's leadership, Gavaskar said: "... let's not jump into conclusions too quickly. If I say that his captaincy is outstanding, then again, I will be accused of backing a Mumbai boy and all kinds of

things will happen. "So I don't want to get into that because these are early days," the leg-

Melbourne, Dec. 26: Australia for a sub-par endary batsman said.

field placements as three Australian batsmen Marnus Labuschange Steve Smith, and Travis Head — were all caught by fielders deployed at different positions.

"From what I have seen in the last 2 Tests he captained and the one-day matches he captained, he has got a great sense of the fielders should

B. Sandeep has been named vice-captain of the 20-member squad picked by selectors J. Shivaji Senior Committee

Hyderabad is in Elite 'B' group along with Assam, Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Odisha in the tournament. They will open their campaign open their campaign against Assam on January 10 in Kolkata.

team: Agarwal Sandeep Abhirath Reddy, Himalay

HAIL RAHANE'S

Melbourne, Dec. 26:

India's stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane drew praise for his tactical acu-

men with former stars

hailing his effective bowl-

ing changes that put the

visitors in a dominating

position in the second Test against Australia

"Outstanding bowling

changes and really smart

fielding placements from Rahane. And the bowlers delivered. Ashwin,

Bumrah, Siraj were absolutely brilliant. Great

effort to get Australia all out for 195 on the first day. Now for the batters to get

a good first innings lead,'

Virender Sehwag tweet-

"(Rahane's captaincy)

has been brilliant so far

We were all a bit worried

about how they were

going to pick themselves up after Adelaide. I think

they looked potentially better today," Ponting

said. "The Indian bowlers

were outstanding too &

very well lead (sic) by

@ajinkyarahane88! Can

Ashwin,

here on Saturday.

LEADERSHIP

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 26

Tanmay Agarwal will lead the Hyderabad cricket team in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy — the BCCI's domestic Twenty20 tournament — to be held from January 10 to 31 next year.

Yadav, Ahmed Quadri and Abhinav Kumar in the Selection held Saturday.

Tanmay (captain), B. (vice-captain), Tilak Varma, Agarwal, Buddhi Rahul, Sai Pragnay Reddy, Kolla Sumanth, C. V. Milind, T. Ravi Teja, Ajay Dev Goud, Yudhveer Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Mickil Jaiswal, Hitesh Yadav, Rakesh Yadav, Prateek Reddy, Rakshann Readi, Kartikeya Kak, Charan.

Standbys: Ashish Srivastav, Akash Bhandari, Shreyas Vala, Samhith

staff: Zakir Support Hussain (coach), Shashank Nag (assistant coach), Bheesham Pratap Singh (physio), Rajamani (trainer), Sailesh Kumar (video analyst), Sajjed Hussain (massuer), Chitti Sridhar (manager).

The players should report to manager Chitti Sridhar at Hotel Green Park on Sunday, December 27, at 10 am, according to a press release from Hyderabad Cricket Association.



Leicester City's Jamie Vardy (left) celebrates with James Maddison after scoring against Manchester United in their EPL match in Leicester on Saturday.

Late Foxes strike frustrate United

Leicester, Dec. 26: Leicester and Manchester United missed the chance to put pressure on Liverpool at the top of the Premier League as the battle between second and third ended 2-2 at the King

Power on Saturday. Slow starts had been a feature for United on the road this season as they had won their previous six away league games despite

conceding first. However, this time it was the Red Devils who twice failed to hold onto the lead given to them by Marcus Rashford and Bruno

26: Fernandes. chester Harvey Barnes's thunchance derous strike levelled before half-time and Jamie Vardy's predatory instincts kept Leicester one point and one place above United in the table as his shot deflected in off Tuanzebe five minutes from time. Solskjaer has been keen

to put an end to his side's sluggish starts and should have been celebrating inside 90 seconds when Rashford headed over Fernandes's inch-perfect cross with only Kasper Schmeichel to beat.

Davis, James pair to dump Dallas

Los Angeles, Dec. 26: Anthony Davis scored 28 points while LeBron James added 22 as the defending NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers routed Dallas 138-115 in Friday's feature game of record-setting Christmas slate.

James had a game-high 10 assists and seven rebounds in 31 minutes. while Davis contributed eight rebounds, five assists and two steals and reserve Montrezl Harrell had 22 points for the Lakers, who played on the holiday for a 22nd consecutive year.

James, who turns 36 on Wednesday, rose to second on the NBA's all-time Christmas points list with 383, passing Oscar Robertson by six to pull within 12 of matching the late Kobe Bryant's career record.

It was the 10th Christmas victory in 15 holiday appearances by James, who equaled former Miami teammate Dwyane Wade for the

scored 22 as **Anthony Davis gar**nered 28 points to propel LA Lakers to a comfortable 138-115 victory over **Dallas Mavericks.**

LeBron James

most career Christmas NBA wins.

Slovakian star guard Luka Doncic scored 27 points for Dallas, but the Mavericks outscored in every quarter and outrebounded 53-

Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving and Miami's Duncan Robinson each matched an NBA Christmas record with seven 3pointers, the Heat stretching their holiday win streak to eight

Irving scored 37 points, hitting 7-of-10 3-point attempts in his return to Boston, as the Nets ripped his former Celtics

teammates 123-95. — AFP

Printed and Published from Nellore by K.Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronile Holdings Limited at PlotNo.527, Chemudugunta (Village) Venkatachalasatram (Mandal), Nellore. RNI Registration No.APENG/2003/11048 Phones: 2348581, 82 & 83, Fax: 2348580, Grams: CHRONICLE, Editor: Kaushik Mitter

