

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

HYDERABAD | TUESDAY | 22 DECEMBER 2020

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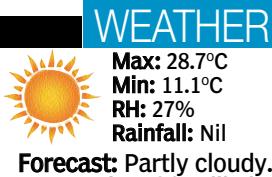
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BOOK TODAY

TS RERA: P02200001827

Forecast: Partly cloudy.
Mist of fog likely.
Max/Min temp. 25/11 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES (21,247)

DEATHS (+330)

1,00,75,079 1,46,134

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(316) (+2)

TS: 2,81,730 1,515

(214) (+2)

AP: 8,78,937 7,078

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

7,74,38,173

DEATHS 17,03,852

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH 218 CASES

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana

Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Ashtami till 6.17 pm

Star: Uttarabhadra till 1.38 am (Wednesday)

Varjyam: 9.42 am to 11.28 am

Durmuhratam: 8.57 am to 9.41 am; 10.56 pm to 11.48 pm

Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

HJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 6, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajr: 5.36 am

Zohar: 12.25 pm

Asar: 4.12 pm

Magrib: 5.54 pm

Isha: 7.07 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.42 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.47 PM

MOONSET TODAY 12.06 AM

MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.39 PM

COUNTER POINT



Everything is ready for our minister's surprise and unexpected visit!

SHORT TAKES

Cong leader Vora dies due to Covid

New Delhi: Veteran Congress leader Motilal Vora, a staunch Gandhi family loyalist who had a political career spanning almost five decades, died at a hospital here on Monday following post-COVID-19 complications, his family said. He was 93. Vora was admitted to the Escorts Hospital in Okhla here a few days ago with a urinary infection. He developed a severe lung infection and was put on ventilator support, his family said. He completed 93 years on Sunday. He will be cremated in Chhattisgarh where he stayed most of his life. Vora, a two-time former chief minister of undivided Madhya Pradesh and also a former governor of Uttar Pradesh, had served as a Rajya Sabha member four times and as a Lok Sabha member once. He started his political innings as an MLA in 1972.

Gadkari launches works for 14 highways via state

S.A. ISHAQUI | DC HYDERABAD, DEC. 21



Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari on Monday set the foundation stones for 14 National Highway projects worth over ₹13,169 crore in the state through a virtual mode.

These projects are for a total length of 765.66 km of highways in which eight projects account for a budget of ₹3,452 crore and six projects covering 370 km length cost ₹3,717 crore, the minister explained.

Gadkari dedicated six projects to the nation.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union minister said that a total of 59 road works with an approved length of 1,918 km and a cost of ₹17,617 crore have been sanctioned for Telangana in the last six years.

Of this, 1,782 km length has already been sanctioned with a cost of ₹15,689 crore.

He said, almost all of the 33 districts in the state have connectivity with national highways. The remaining district Peddapally will also be connected to the network soon, he added.

The minister said that

there has been a phenomenal growth of 55.71 per cent national highway length in the last six years in the state and nearly 1,400 km have been added during this period.

He said that while construction of 841 km roads worth ₹4,793 crore has been completed since 2014-15 and works were going on for another 809 km at a cost of ₹13,012 crore.

He announced that 14 projects with a length 1,730 km have been identified in Telangana for development under Bharatmala Project. Of them, nine projects with a length of 423 km have been awarded at a cost of ₹7,400 crore.

He said the country is already over-producing sugar and rice, and sufficient stock is available with the government.

■ Development of green-field and access-controlled

corridors have also been planned in Telangana to ease-out traffic on existing corridors, reduce travel time and costs and also provide a boost to the economy," he said.

These include Surat, Ahmadnagar, Solapur, Kurnool, Chennai (75 km length in Telangana), Suryapet-Khammam-Devarapalli (164 km length in Telangana) and Indore-Hyderabad (136 km length in Telangana).

The Union minister explained that three major projects for 192 km worth ₹2,339 crore are in the bidding process and another 21 NH works with a total length of 1,422 km and a total cost of ₹27,116 crore are under various stages of DPR (detailed project report) preparation. He said that these works are likely to be completed by the financial year 2024-25.

He appealed to the state government to take up diversification of agriculture into economic productivity.

He said the country is already over-producing sugar and rice, and sufficient stock is available with the government.

■ Page 2: Surplus crop can be converted to ethanol

Phase-II MBBS counselling in TS, AP cancelled

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

a direction to the university to consider her name for phase-2 counselling.

A division bench comprising Justices M.S. Ramachandra Rao and T. Amarnath Goud granted "interim order as prayed for". Student's counsel Vedula Srinivas argued that the decision of the university declaring that the student did not join the college and debarring her from counselling as illegal as she already took admission in a city medical college.

He also brought to the notice of the court that Siddhartha Medical College, Vijaywada, from taking part in the phase-2 counselling in Telangana. The NTR University also sent messages to students that phase-2 allotments that were released are cancelled.

Deccan Chronicle had published a report titled *State students given a raw deal in MBBS admissions* in these columns on Sunday highlighting the Kaloji University debarring students who joined Siddhartha Medical College, Vijaywada, from taking part in the phase-2 counselling in Telangana.

A student approached the TS High Court seeking a direction to the university to consider her name for phase-2 counselling.

Sources told this correspondent that the NTR University cancelled the phase-2 after it was noticed that the Supreme Court directions were flouted in implementing the rule of reservation at the time of sliding of candidates in the phase-2.

■ Page 2: Leaders object to rule violation by Kaloji

WEATHER | WARNING

Met issues cold wave warning for next 24 hrs, Kumaram Bheem coolest at 4.3°C

TS in grip of winter chill, Hyd records 11.1°C

T.S. SIDDHARTH | DC HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

warning for the next 24 hours.

"Cold wave conditions are likely to prevail at isolated places in northern and western districts of Telangana," the IMD stated.

The coldest districts were Kumaram Bheem and Adilabad, which recorded 4.3 and 4.6 degrees Celsius respectively.

"There are cold winds blowing from the northern direction over the state.

■ MET OFFICIALS said the cold wave conditions will not persist for more than 48 hours.

■ THE SHIFT in wind pattern is making the climate cold

Earlier, these winds used to get intercepted by strong winds from the eastern direction, which are relatively hot and humid. Now, that the eastern winds are out of play, cold winds

between nine to 12 degrees Celsius. In the city, however, the temperature recorded will be anywhere between 11 and 14 degrees Celsius," Naga Ratna said.

Monday night will be quite chilly and the same weather conditions will persist till Tuesday, she said.

"The cold northerly winds will first lower temperatures in the northwestern part of Telangana. Our prediction is that the temperature in these parts will go down to anywhere

specifically position them close to the border and the LoC.

While the Indian security agencies took immediate corrective steps, having rushed in additional reinforcements, what has baffled New Delhi's security establishment is the timing for this sudden buildup by Pakistan.

■ Full report on Page 7

Army alert as Pak beefs up LoC

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

The security forces along the India-Pakistan border and the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir have been put on high alert after a "massive buildup" by the Pakistan Army in the region. New Delhi's security establishment is

baffled over this sudden mobilisation while additional Indian reinforcements were rushed to the border.

Top security sources said the major movement of Pakistani troops was seen close to the border over the past two weeks. Specific intelligence gathered by the security forces

deployed along the LoC revealed that the Pakistan Army had substantially increased its presence, having deployed more men and heavy artillery close to the Indian border.

It was clear, the senior security officials claimed, that the Pakistanis had pulled out their troops from some other sectors to

Farmers to decide on further talks today



Farmers raise slogans during their protest against the farm laws at Singhu Border, in New Delhi on Monday. They are expected to decide on their future course of action on Tuesday over the Centre's latest letter to them seeking a date for the next round of talks to end their 26-day-long agitation.

— PTI

MAMATA SNAPS AT SHAH FOR SPREADING 'LIES'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 21

Calling the BJP a "party of cheats", West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday squarely accused Union home minister Amit Shah of spreading "lies" about her government's performance during his two-day visit to the state.

Asking Mr Shah to "cross check" his statements, the Trinamul Congress supremo also cautioned him against lying as a home minister for his political mileage and urged him to tell the "truth" about the state.

■ Full report on Page 7

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meteorologist from Skymet, a private weather forecasting agency.

On Monday, certain pockets of the twin cities reached chilling temperatures of 10 degrees Celsius. Going by readings of the Telangana State Development Planning Society (TSDPS), the coldest parts of the city were Ramachandrapuram and Patancheruvu, which recorded 10 degrees Celsius.

SHORT TAKES

TS RECORDS 316 NEW COVID-19 CASES, 2 DEATHSDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Telangana has recorded 316 new cases of Coronavirus, apart from two deaths.

Inclusive of new cases, there are now 6,590 active cases in the state, 4,467 of whom are in home and institutional isolation.

With the weekend witnessing low collection of samples for testing, authorities tested 32,714 samples on Sunday.

There have been 86 new cases recorded within the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits.

Government has reiterated that people must compulsorily follow protocols of safety including wearing of masks.

HAWALA RACKET BUSTED, 2 FROM HYD ARRESTEDDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 21

In a joint operation with city taskforce personnel, the Special Enforcement Bureau officials raided a lodge near Vizag Railway Station and busted a hawala racket and seized ₹1 crore from two persons hailing from Hyderabad on Monday. They were identified as Raj Purohit Bharat Kumar, 30, a resident of Abids in Hyderabad and Chota Ram of the same area in Hyderabad.

Giving details of the case, ACP Prem Kajal said Bharat Kumar and Chota Ram were doing electrical works for a builder Pralabhi Bhai, a construction contractor in Hyderabad. On instructions from Pralabhi, both came to Visakhapatnam to collect money and accordingly they came to Visakhapatnam and met one Raju in Duvvada. They collected the amount of ₹1 crore.

After collecting the money Bharat Kumar and Chota Ram came to a lodge near the railway station and waiting to board a train to Hyderabad. On tip-off the city taskforce personnel and the Two Town police raided the lodge and after they failed to provide sufficient proof for the source of the money they were taken into custody for further investigation. Two mobile phones were also seized from them.

In another incident in the same area, both the police and SEB staff raided a lodge and caught two persons who had the silver ornaments weighing about 29.5 kg. They were taken into custody and produced before mandal executive magistrate for further investigation. They were identified as Suhan Singh and Himmat Singh of Rajasthan and working as delivery boys for one CS Rathod, a jeweller in Vijayawada.

The SEB and CTF combine also arrested one J. Gaurav and seized 100 kg of ganja under Duvvada police station. The car in which the contraband was hidden was also seized.

Spirit of Christmas

Christians shop for decorations ahead of Christmas at General Bazaar in Secunderabad on Monday. — P. SURENDRA

HC grills TS over Aadhaar rule for farm registrationVUJINI
VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

THE COURT then asked Vivek Reddy what is the problem when the petitioner is voluntarily giving the Aadhaar number at the time of registrations. Further, it is not that Aadhaar details have been sought only after Dharani portal came in existence.

properties. The High Court observed that it is not necessary at present to pass any directions regarding non-agricultural properties as the government has reverted to the old process of registrations.

Kondam Vivek Reddy, counsel for a petitioner, submitted that even after the interim direction of the High Court dated November 3 not to insist on caste and Aadhaar details vis-a-vis agricultural lands. The court directed petitioners to file counters for vacate stay petitions and asked the government to explain their stand on interim applications filed by petitioners, including insisting on Aadhaar numbers for agricultural properties.

The cases were then adjourned to December 31 for further hearing.

Meanwhile, the High Court directed the government to file a sworn affidavit on application of Dharani portal for registration of agricultural lands in scheduled agency areas. Some of the residents belonging to scheduled areas questioned implementation of Dharani portal in their areas, where land registrations are denied to non-scheduled persons. The petitioners feared that Dharani portal could lead to misuse of this law.

or act enacted with regard to it. Further, he submitted that under the guise of Rythu Bandhu input subsidy, the government is insisting on Aadhaar number.

But how it can defend itself on demanding Aadhaar number of family members, as they did not get Rythu Bandhu or any other subsidy, Vivek Reddy asked.

Advocate General B. S. Prasad informed the court that the government has filed a vacate stay petition against interim directions issued by the bench on November 3, in which it asked not to insist on details from people with respect to non-agricultural lands and not to insist on caste and Aadhaar details vis-a-vis agricultural lands.

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2,536 LAND DEALS REGISTERED IN A DAY ACROSS TSDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar has said that registrations of non-agricultural property commenced on Monday in 141 sub-registrar offices across the state without advance slot booking and by using the CARD System.

In a press communiqué he informed that 2,536 transactions were taken up and an amount of ₹71.73 crore was remitted towards stamp duty and registration fees for 4,706 transactions.

He said that the sub-registrar offices in Qutubullapur, Maheswaram, Uppal and Sangareddy witnessed high turnout and were anticipating high turnout. All necessary steps were taken to augment the staff and systems, he added.

He said that registrations in all the Offices throughout the state were being conducted smoothly and owners had no problems with the same.

Property in GHMC to be reassessed

Civic body takes decision after gross fraud were found in tax assessment by bill collectors

MADDY DEEKSHITH | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

The ground-level staff working in the revenue wing has been indulging in high-level corruption. A bill collector at Sarooranagar collected ₹101 from four flat owners and ₹1,575 from the other six flat owners in the same apartment.

Taken aback by the incident, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is now planning to reassess all properties in the city limits.

The corporation's lower-level officials have been cheating not only citizens but also denting its revenue. Property taxpayers allege that bill collectors, who are supposed to collect three years' penalty on unauthorised properties, have been demanding only a year's penalty from residents in order to waive off three years' penalty and depositing 50 percent of tax collected into GHMC's account.

A classic instance of open corruption is an apartment in TP Colony in Sarooranagar circle with 10 flats measuring 450 square yards. Bill collectors in the area, who are hand-in-

glove with the four flat owners, have been collecting a mere ₹101 from them since 2016. The other six pay ₹1,575 as annual property tax since they have not bribed the bill collector.

During a meeting of the flat owners, this difference in property tax came to the fore. The aggrieved parties brought it to the notice of higher authorities of GHMC, who, in turn, called for an internal inquiry.

Against this backdrop, the corporation has decided to reassess all properties in 13 potential circles.

According to official data, the 13 circles have the potential to net about ₹1,600 crore annually but in the financial year 2019-20 they could only collect ₹1,472 crore or 66.14 percent of the property tax owed while the remaining circles only contribute ₹200 crore.

Officials claim that taken together the ground-level staff has been siphoning off at least ₹200 crore a year from these potential circles.

They claimed that if additional staff was deployed to enhance the property tax collection in the potential circles, the existing bill collectors take them to

task and prevent them from collecting property tax. Interestingly, GHMC officials said they found more irregularities in the assessment of properties, the property tax, which was reduced from ₹1,200 to ₹101 prior to GHMC elections. They are confident of mobilising at least ₹500 crore through rationalisation.

He said that the civic body has so far identified 1.5 lakh such properties. He also said that the corporation would impose a 100 percent penalty on unauthorised constructions and was planning to collect 0.5 percent tax on all vacant lands in their limits.

A senior GHMC official said that the corporation has been operating with very few staff. The official said that corporations have no choice but to rely on bill collectors pertaining to the property.

The official also said that the corporation has been operating a revenue wing with unqualified staff.

"The last recruitment was almost a decade back. Outsourcing staff like sweepers are deployed to collect property tax", the official added.

Accused out on bail ends lifeDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

A 29-year-old retired civil engineer, who was released on bail 12 days ago after being arrested in a criminal case, killed himself by hanging at his residence at Chandanagar on Monday.

R. Jitender Reddy was involved in a criminal

case at the Panjagutta police following a complaint of him allegedly cheating his owner to the tune of ₹6 lakh.

"Reddy earlier worked as a civil engineer and was involved in a criminal case after he allegedly cheated his owner by taking ₹6 lakh from him. Following a complaint, the Panjagutta police arrested

him on November 23," said the police.

After his bail about 12 days ago, he was reportedly depressed and killed himself by hanging at his residence on Monday. The Chandanagar police booked a case under section 174 (suspicious death) of the CrPC and the body was shifted to OGH for postmortem examination.

2 security staffers held for stealingDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Two security staffers were arrested in connection with a theft case reported from a cloth store earlier this month and the stolen amount of ₹2.60 lakh was recovered from them on Monday by the Panjagutta police.

The accused were identi-

THEY DUPLICATED the keys to open the shutter and decamped with the cash on December 5.

fied as Biradar Baliram, 32, and Mohd Imran, 54.

"The offenders had opened

the shutter of the store using

a duplicate key and took away the cash kept in the store in the night. The management noticed the cash missing on Sunday morning when they opened the store for the day as usual," said Panjagutta police sub-inspector B. Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy.

Based on a complaint, the police registered a case and

started a probe and the two were arrested on Monday. "They duplicated the keys to open the shutter and decamped with the cash on December 5. We had a suspicion that someone who knew the place well was involved in the theft. During the investigation, the two confessed to the crime," added the official.

Officials put pending works in Hyderabad in full gearDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

A convergence meeting of top officials belonging to various departments of the state capital on Monday decided to complete all pending works related to twin cities on a priority basis.

"Make it a point to intimate police, TSSPDCL (Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited) and HMWSSB (Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board) about tasks like white topping and Strategic Road Development Project (SRDP), so that underground cables, pipelines, electricity

wires and CCTV cameras could be appropriately shifted by departments concerned," suggested Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) commissioner D. S. Lokesh Kumar speaking at the convergence meeting.

Officials related to the twin cities are meeting after a gap of over eight months following lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent polls held for electing a new council for GHMC. Lokesh Kumar recommended that a meeting of all departmental related to the state capital be held every week on Wednesday to coordinate the various left-over works.

On representations by beneficiaries of two-bedroom houses not to collect fee for new electric connections and treat them as existing ones, the corporation chief executive referred the issue to TSSPDCL.

With regard to progress made on installation of CC cameras throughout the twin cities at a cost of ₹800 crore for better surveillance, joint commissioner (Traffic) D. S. Chauhan sought permission from authorities concerned for minor trenching works at 534 locations. "Once the project is completed, city traffic can be viewed live. It will also improve surveillance," Chauhan

Hyderabad

IMAGES AND MEMORIES

We wrapped up our celebrations to mark the 75th anniversary of Deccan Chronicle on May 15, by bringing a special compilation of seventy-five stories filled with intrigue and delight from the final days of the Nizamshahi, titled Hyderabad: Images & Memories

From the palace mysteries and murder plots to the Nizam's 3,000 wives and how the ruler faced allegations of kidnapping his bride, all under the watchful eyes of the British, it is all there.

We scoured the archives and collected anecdotal evidence from several actors of that era to discover delightful asides like how the motichur laddus got their name, how an aide saved the Nizam's legendary treasures for the royal family and how Indira Gandhi floored the Nizam.

There are more than 75 pictures, a few of them rare and perhaps being published for the first time.

HYDERABAD: IMAGES AND MEMORIES

The hard-bound : ₹2,000, Soft cover : ₹1,500.

at all Deccan Chronicle & The Asian Age offices across the cities

NOW
AVAILABLE

SHORT TAKES



Jupiter and Saturn (to the left) were seen in 'great conjunction', as a plane flies in the evening sky (right) in Hyderabad on Monday.

GANDHI

KTR CONDEMNS AKBAR FOR INSULTING PV, NTR

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao condemned the controversial remarks of AIMIM Assembly floor leader Akbaruddin Owaisi against former prime minister late P.V. Narasimha Rao and former chief minister of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh late N.T. Rama Rao.

He said that the derogatory statements against such stalwarts were deplorable and have no place in a democracy.

Akbaruddin Owaisi, during his election campaign, termed the memorials of P.V. Narasimha Rao (Gnana Bhoomi) and N.T. Rama Rao (NTR Ghat) constructed along the Necklace Road abutting the Hussain Sagar lake as "illegal structures" and demanded their removal. Owaisi alleged that the Hussain Sagar lake had shrunk from the original 4,700 acres to a mere 700 acres due to "such encroachments".

He made the remarks in the wake of the TRS government's decision to demolish illegal constructions and removal of encroachment on tanks and nalas across Hyderabad, including the Old City.

Akbaruddin Owaisi is known for making such communally provoking and vicious remarks, including against Hindu gods and famously asking the police to withdraw for 15 minutes. He is currently out on bail and the cases are going on.

PROBE ORDERED AGAINST URDU ACADEMY OFFICIAL

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Secretary of Minorities Welfare has directed Telangana State Urdu Academy to conduct a detailed inquiry against its Superintendent in charges of corruption.

Secretary Christian Minority Welfare Association M. John and Secretary of State Minority Welfare Association complained to the Governor and Anti-Corruption Bureau leveling grave allegations against G. Srinivas Section Officer, Minorities Welfare Department, and G. Krishnaiah Superintendent Urdu Academy.

They alleged that Srinivas is involved in corrupt practices and collected a huge amount from those who approached him, including Khazis.

Likewise, Krishna regularized the services of six temporary employees of Urdu Academy. When another employee requested him for regularization, he was advised to approach courts.

Ahmed Nadeem, Secretary Minorities Welfare ordered a detailed inquiry against Krishnaiah into the allegation levelled against him and sought a compliance report with recommendations.

KTR showers sops on GWMC

Says areas under the corporation to get water on a daily basis

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Residents of Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) will start getting drinking water on a daily basis, proclaimed municipal administration minister K. T. Rama Rao. He went on to assure that ₹300 crore annual budget will be earmarked for GWMC and a pilot project pertaining to daily drinking water supply will be taken up by Ugadi.

The minister made these announcements while holding a review meeting of GWMC with ministers and public representatives of Warangal in Hyderabad. He maintained that the daily sup-

ply of drinking water will be on an experimental basis.

Rama Rao advised officials to fix targets for providing drinking water to people of Warangal on a daily basis. "Be prepared to complete the entire infrastructure needed for providing drinking water on a daily basis from Ugadi. The government has already taken many steps to improve water supply in Warangal city through Mission Bhagiratha-Urban. From the earlier 30 MLD of water supply a day, we are now supplying 168 MLD of water," he underlined. The minister said while pipelines were to a length of about 1,400 km earlier, their

length now is 1400 km. Another 500-km pipeline is being laid.

He pointed out that under Mission Bhagiratha, ₹1,000 crore are being provided for taking up various programmes, which are likely to get completed by next Ugadi.

Rama Rao said, with this, the infrastructure built for Warangal will be sufficient for supplying drinking water to the city till 2048. 200 additional personnel are being deployed to strengthen the supply of drinking water in the city, he stated. There are 1.7 lakh house connections in Warangal. Connections to remaining houses will be given as soon as possible.

He asked officials and public representatives to make people aware about water connection charges being Re. 1. The minister inquired about the 3,700 double-bedroom houses being constructed within the corporation limits.

Officials informed him that already about 800 houses have been completed and the remaining are in the final stages of construction. Very soon, the completed houses will be allotted to beneficiaries, KTR stated.

He asked officials to continue programmes taken up under Pattana Pragathi, like Vaikunta Dhamam, urban parks and sports complex in the GWMC limits. He also reviewed the smart

city programme, apart from measures for conserving historical sites, upgrading sanitation, and strengthening road networks.

During the meeting, minister Satyavathi Rathod said that the newly formed

Mahabubabad district has more tribal population, many of whom have been without livelihood. She requested the municipal minister to set up industrial and textile parks, apart from food processing units for providing employment to the tribal people of Mahabubabad district.

Rathod said about 800 acres of land in the district has been identified for setting up industrial units.

RECORD BLOOD DONATED ON JAGAN'S B'DAY

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. As a result, the blood donation found a place in the Wonder Book of Records International. Due to shortage of blood prevailing in the state because of Covid-19, blood banks in AP had been running short of blood for road accident victims and patients in need of blood.

6th DEATH ANNIVERSARY

LATE GADDAM VENKAT SWAMY (Kaka)

(Ex.CWC Member, Ex. Union Minister, Ex. A.P. State Minister & Ex. APC President)

The values you inculcated in us continue to guide us to this day.

Son-In-Law & Daughter:

Dr. P. Shankar Rao

& Smt. P. Vishwa Shanti

Grand Children: P. Shashank,

P. Sushmitha, P. Sudeep

Great Grand Son:

P. Vishwanth Avyayaan

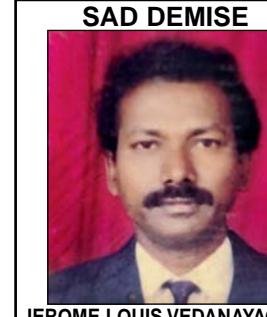


IN LOVING MEMORY



Prof. T. Rajagopal

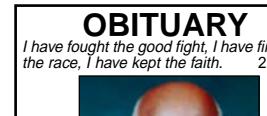
(Professor, Botany Dept., Osmania University)
Left for heavenly abode on Sun, 13th Dec, 2020.
VAIKUNTA SAMARADHANA is on Friday, 25th Dec, 2020 at our Residence Plot No.44, O.U. Teachers Colony, Sanikpuri, Secunderabad.
T. Ravi Kumar (Eldest Son)
Mobile: 94400 88015



JEROME LOUIS VEDANAYAGAM
DOB: 20-07-1950 DOD: 21-12-2020
Funeral Service @ Our Lady of Health Church @ 3 pm today.

Inserted by:
AUTUGINE VEDANAYAGAM &
FAMILY MEMBERS
Contact No: 9849397750 9880586792

(CA-3485)



OBITUARY
I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. - II Timothy 4:7b

Dr. KODALI KOTESHWAR RAO
Rtd. Zonal Medical Officer Warangal
DOB: 25-4-1942 DOD: 21-12-2020
Funeral will be held on 22 Dec. 2020
at 11 am at JANGAON, Warangal

For details contact:
9440807582, 76759 91243
Inserted by near & dear family members

(CA-3485)



Dr. KODALI KOTESHWAR RAO
Rtd. Zonal Medical Officer, Warangal
Called to Glory on 21-12-2020

"We will miss your graceful smile always."

Funeral on 22-12-2020 @ Jangaon Cemetery on

Proceedings will be telecasted in Zoom

Meeting Id: 7427539067 Pwd: 4072019

For details contact:
9440808582, 7675991243, 9908199721

Inserted by: FAMILY MEMBERS



SRI KALAKONDA RAMARAO
DOB: 18-12-2020
Left for his Heavenly Abode.
May his divine soul attain Utama Sadgati.

Inserted by:
CHINTALA SURESH KUMAR & FAMILY



Mrs. MRUDULA
DOB: 09-11-1983 DOD: 22-12-2014

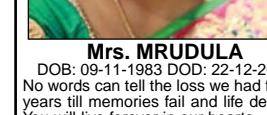
No words can tell the loss we had for six years till memories fail and life departs.

You will live forever in our hearts.

We miss you a lot MRUDULA

Dr. SWAMY MIRYALA & FAMILY

(S/2021/D00971)



100th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF
JAMES PATRICK ROBERTS (Sonbun)

DOB: 22-12-1922 DOD: 17-03-1989

In hearts and minds

Your memory we treasure.

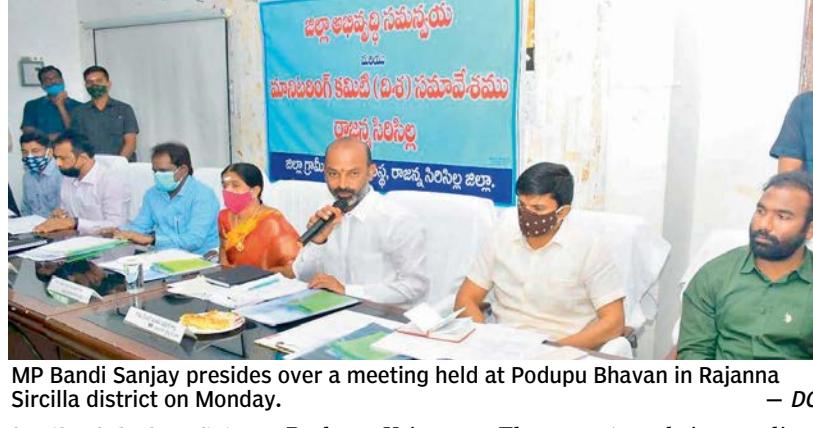
But missed beyond words.

Fondly remembered by:

SONS, DAUGHTERS AND
THEIR FAMILIES

(S/2021/D00975)

MP Bandi Sanjay presides over a meeting held at Podupu Bhavan in Rajanna Sircilla district on Monday.



NIRANJAN WANTS CHANGE IN POLICY ON PROCUREMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Agriculture minister S. Niranjana Reddy demanded that the Union government must change its policy on procurement of farm produce.

The minister held a review with senior officers of agriculture and marketing departments on rabi crops and stock situation of fertilisers and pesticides on Monday.

Stating that measures taken by the state government have boosted agriculture production considerably in the past few years, he said that it was unfortunate that the Centre had issued orders fixing MSP by taking the average production in the past five years.

The minister said that with Centre's decision will make farmers get only 25 per cent of the MSP for their total production.

During the meeting it was decided to write a letter to the Centre demanding that it increase the MSP on red gram.

UOH PHD BAGS FULBRIGHT-NEHRU DOCTORAL RESEARCH AWARD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

University of Hyderabad PhD has been awarded the prestigious Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Research Fellowship, 2020-2021.

Parul Srivastava, who will be as a Fulbright-Nehru visiting researcher at the Department of History, College of Humanities and Fine Arts, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, from February 2021 to October 2021, will be working on microhistories of the Partition of India and will try to probe into the oral history and memory aspect of it.

INTUC and led by Adil Shariff, demanded that employees denied promotions so far be promoted, wages of drivers working in transport wing be enhanced, retirement age be increased from 58 years to 60 year and AMOHS and sanitation workers, who have been holding office for more than four years, be replaced. Adil Shariff said a representation has been given to GHMC commissioner D. S. Lokesh Kumar, who assured that the issue will be resolved after discussions with the state government.

representation has been given to GHMC commissioner D. S. Lokesh Kumar, who assured that the issue will be resolved after discussions with the state government.

be organised on January 8, wherein the Vijayawada National Highway will be blocked at L. B. Nagar in Hyderabad. They said: "All Hindus must unite and demand that the state government respect our demand on protection of cows."

N. Rajini Rao, in-charge of Telangana Brahmin Joint Action Committee political wing, said Brahmins are participating in the ongoing hunger strike to ensure that cow is declared the National Animal.

Organisers of the programme announced that a "Gow Sadak Bandh" will

Scrap new pension plan: Civic staff

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

The workers' union of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) on Monday staged a protest at the civic body headquarters near Tank Bund demanding PRC and DA on par with government employees.

Demands of the union include scrapping of the new pension scheme, restoration of old pension scheme for employees appointed on or after April 2004, issuing of health cards to GHMC employees, regularising of services and removing of anomalies in the health insurance scheme.

The Municipal Sahakar Mazdoor Union, GHMC, affiliated to



Workers' union of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) on Monday staged a protest at the civic body headquarters near Tank Bund.

Members of Yuga Tulasi Foundation stage a demonstration in Hyderabad demanding that cow be declared as a National Animal at Dharna Chowk in Indira Park, Hyderabad, on Monday.

perform poojas to them on auspicious occasions? Cows can be saved only if we all take their protection

on a mission mode and demand that they be declared as National Animal," Shiva Kumar

declared the National Animal.

Cine artist Satya Choudary said, "I am very much interested in the cow protection cause. I will continue my support to the movement in the future too," she maintained. Jyothi Vamshi, who represents International Navya Mahila Sangh, pointed out their demand is very old. "We hope that the Union government will accept our proposal of granting cow the status of a National Animal," she said.

Suhasini Saeethi, one of the participants from the public, declared that she postponed inauguration of her house to participate in the dharna. "Cow is sacred for all Hindus. Inauguration of my house can wait. But this cause is more important," Suhasini remarked.

Sardar Lachman Singh Rait, in-charge of the Telangana Brahmin Joint Action Committee political wing, said Brahmins are participating in the ongoing hunger strike to ensure that cow is declared the National Animal.

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be organised on January 8, wherein the Vijayawada National Highway will be blocked at L. B. Nagar in Hyderabad. They said: "All Hindus must unite and demand that the state government respect our demand on protection of cows."

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MAGNETIC MAHARASHTRA 2.0

MOBILIZING INVESTMENTS FOR 2020 AND BEYOND

54 MoUs for INR 2,06,155 Crores

worth of investments intentions signed by Govt. of Maharashtra during lockdown

25 MoUs for INR 61,043 Crores

worth of investment intentions being signed today 22nd Dec, 2020



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- **Shri Uddhav Thackeray**
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Maharashtra

TURBOCHARGING INVESTMENT

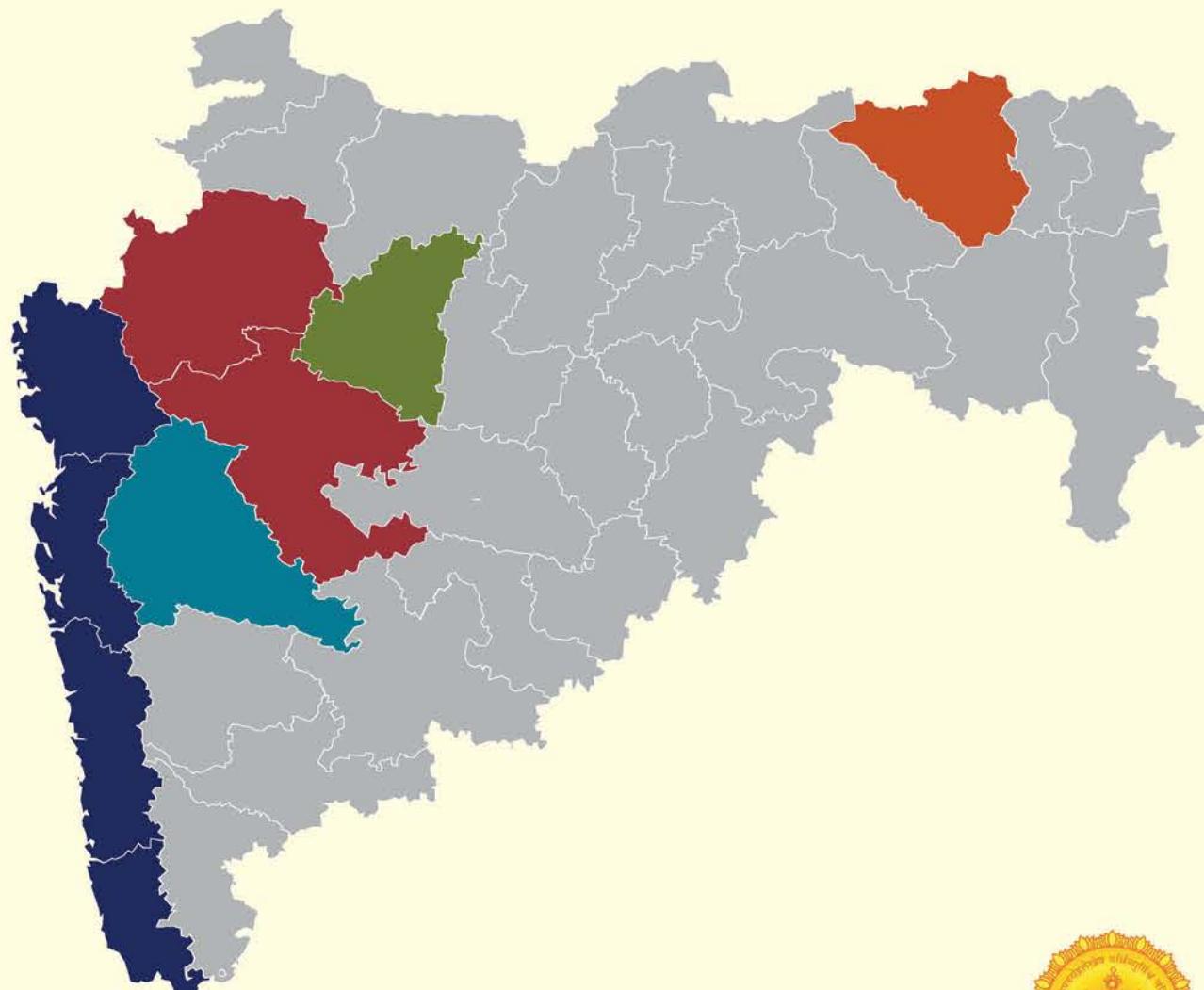


54 MoU's signed during the lockdown and a robust pipeline of investors in advanced stages from US, UK, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Spain, Russia, Indonesia and India, across diverse sectors, highlight the executional prowess of Maharashtra and the impact of the state's revitalized investment strategy – Magnetic Maharashtra 2.0

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Aurangabad (AURIC, DMIC) - Jalna - 8,000 Acres

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| Medical Device Park

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Government of
Maharashtra



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DECCAN Chronicle

22 DECEMBER 2020

Battleground Bengal: Didi faces a huge test

Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress are facing an epic battle for political survival as Union home minister Amit Shah virtually launched the BJP's campaign for the April-May elections during his two-day visit that ended Sunday. While it can't be denied that the departure of Suvenu Adhikari, a key aide and onetime Nandigram pointperson, who joined the saffron party along with several MLAs on Saturday, is a major blow to the TMC supremo, if she takes it as a wake-up call and tries rectification measures, changing the way her government and party function, all may still not be lost.

The BJP as a challenger has many advantages — the virtually limitless funds it has access to, which neither the TMC nor any other party in India can match.

The BJP's posters in Bolpur and Santiniketan, home to Rabindranath Tagore's Visvabharati, in which the home minister's photo was placed above Gurudev's, which set off widespread protests, was yet another ill-advised move by a party whose local leadership seems singularly clueless about how it would hurt Bengali sentiments. Likewise, to speak of the homogenisation and standardisation of Indian culture, there couldn't be a more inappropriate spot than Gurudev's campus celebrating diversity, where "narrow domestic walls" have no place.

The "outsider" tag Ms Banerjee sought to paint Mr Shah with seems to have rankled, with the minister declaring no one could be an "outsider" as everyone was an Indian, with references to Indira Gandhi and others, but contradicted himself by virtually anointing Mr Adhikari as a "bhoomi putra" and possible CM face. It remains to be seen, though, if Bengalis are ready to accept the somewhat rustic and rough-spoken Mr Adhikari in that role, once filled by the likes of Bidhan Chandra Roy, Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Even Ms Banerjee, before becoming CM, had served multiple terms as a Union minister. It is undeniable that there is widespread disenchantment with Mamata Banerjee and her government on several counts. Her mismanagement on several fronts, the rising corruption and extortion that her partymen are accused of and the minority appeasement that has cost her significant support. Bringing in Prashant Kishor to firefight isn't enough — in fact he is blamed for some of the recent exodus from the party. But what does the BJP promise? How will it end corruption by inducting TMC leaders accused of multiple offences into its fold? Given the Centre's mismanagement of the nation's economy, how will it end Bengal's mess? And with what magic wand will Mr Shah create the "Sonar Bangla" that he has promised?

Is China behind Oli's move?

Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari's consent to Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's recommendation, after a Cabinet meeting, to dissolve Parliament on Sunday and call elections in April, two years ahead of time, came after 91 ruling party MPs in a House of 275 moved a no-confidence motion against the PM. This has raised a Constitutional question in Kathmandu, and the matter is before the Supreme Court.

Whatever the court's verdict, it is evident the Himalayan nation is in the throes of a political crisis. The dissonance within the ruling establishment had been brewing for eight months. Mr Oli was PM and co-chairman of the Nepal Communist Party along with Pushpa Kumar Dahal Prachanda, a former PM.

He was not willing to let go of either post. The tussle at the top has given the ruling NCP down the middle. Seven Cabinet ministers resigned when the PM recommended dissolution prior to fresh polls. It's not clear if the turbulence will spill over to the streets. There can be no guarantee of orderly elections in April-May next.

This is a situation that is tailor-made for sub-rosa intervention by Beijing, which had invested considerable political capital in Mr Oli, shoring up his government with financial support and political guidance at a time when India-China relations have plummeted with the Chinese Army pushing inside India's frontier region in Ladakh. New Delhi needs to be watchful.

Nepal is of strategic value to India. From New Delhi's perspective, it is important that Kathmandu at least remain neutral even as Beijing has been on a heavy wooing spree, with Chinese President Xi Jinping paying a high-profile visit to Kathmandu not long ago. The Oli government had even begun the "study" of Xi Jinping's "thought" in Nepal. The best that India can do is to attempt to play a stabilising role. This had been started with the recent visit to Kathmandu of the foreign secretary and the Army Chief. The process can be sought to be bolstered.

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Aakar Patel

There are some time bombs ticking in our Constitution that worry me. These are in Part 4 of the document, about which we are assured by the Constitution's writers that "the provisions contained in this Part shall not be enforceable by any court, but the principles therein laid down are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws".

So, these are only principles then. But our experience has been that these are akin to gospel. How many literate Indians will assume that the government is obliged to constitutionally bring about the prohibition of cow slaughter (Part 4's Article 48)? I would say the vast majority would think that.

The insistence with which the ban is pushed might lead one to forget that there is a distinction between a principle not meant to be enforceable and an obligation which must be legislated forthwith ("it's in the Constitution").

Fewer Indians are likely to know about Article 47, which nudges the

State towards making its citizens teetotallers ("the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health").

The insistence, seen most recently in Bihar, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, on creating better, more moral Indians through sobriety is also underpinned by what is seen as the same constitutional obligation on legislators.

The time bombs that worry me are a little further down, in Article 51A, which specifies fundamental duties. It is instructive to read them in full because, and I fear this is already happening, we are moving in the direction of turning these things into laws. The list reads:

"Fundamental duties. It shall be the duty of every citizen of India:
(a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;
(b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
(c) to uphold and protect the sover-

ignty, unity and integrity of India;
(d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;

(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;

(g) to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures;

(h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

(i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;

(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement."

Almost everything here fills me with a sense of dread. Example: the bit in (c) saying it is our duty to uphold and protect India's sovereign-

ty, unity and integrity. Are those who raise their voice against, say, the use of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Kashmir and the Northeast violating this duty? If so, should they be punished? One might say, no, it is only a general principle offset by other rights. But then, so is a ban on cow slaughter and a ban on alcohol.

What about (a), which requires us to respect the national flag and anthem? Violation of this has already been criminalised, and it happened long before Narendra Modi. We are, however, living in times when the flag and nationalism have been conflated. Are you worried something coercive is around the corner that might equate even inaction with insult? I am. There is talk of a ₹100 crore fine for mistakes in maps.

The inability of our courts to often weed out majoritarian sentiment (as witnessed in the matter of cow slaughter) leads me to think that there is no proper safeguard available there either. The Constitution is a terrific document, but it is also one that has suppressed the Hindu majoritarian sentiment. We are living through times when this suppres-

sion is being popularly rejected. The path to getting everyone to fall in line is open and it lies through such provisions as we have seen. It is no good to say these are only directive principles or whatever else because our experience shows that this is no defence. If something is "in the Constitution", that is the end of it.

Going through the list, some of the clauses are quite chilling, such as 38(1): "The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life."

Chilling, I accept, given the current mood more than anything else, but chilling nonetheless.

There are several (equal pay for women — Article 39D) that I suspect will not be taken up with any degree of seriousness. It is the ones that touch our current high-intensity nationalism that worry me, and these are the ones I call time bombs.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

Subhani



Congress drifts as real issues are left ignored

Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The faction-ridden, intrigues-in-festéed Congress Party, even in its decrepit state, remains more interesting for political observer than the regimented Bharatiya Janata Party, with the monotonous hectoring of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the few chosen leaders who are licensed to speak. There are more voices inside the Congress despite the dominance of the Nehru-Gandhis, with its camp followers in tow. The meeting convened by party president Sonia Gandhi, which included Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and the 23 "dissenters" who dared to raise doubts about the party's leadership held on Saturday seems to have been a cloak and dagger affair.

The Gandhis seem to have said that the party was "like a family" and that they should all work together, and the family loyalists intoned that Rahul Gandhi was the right man to become party president once again because he enjoys enormous support in the organisation.

The dissidents wanted a decision on the issue of who will lead the party and how, and Rahul Gandhi deflected the question, saying that the meeting was not convened to discuss who will be president but to strengthen the party. He had also clarified that he had nothing against the seniors in the party as it was made out. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said there was a real need to take to the streets and that just submitting memorandums would not suffice. There was an assurance from the Gandhis that the Congress is busy making itself irrelevant.

Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy. Rahul Gandhi has instinctively

meeting soon like the one on Saturday — for brainstorming on the lines of the meetings at Pachmarhi (held in 1998) and Shimla (2003) in the first decade of Sonia Gandhi as president. But there was no official announcement that there would be such a meeting. At the end of the day, there was no clarity on whether peace was made with the dissidents who wrote the letter or whether they have been left high and dry with vague assurances that the Gandhis recognise their importance.

This has always been the way of the Congress, in the party as well as in the days when it was in power, not to face up to problems or to solve them. The issues are left unaddressed. At the most, consultations without outcomes are held. It looks like procrastination is the chosen path of the Congress even now. It might have been the secret of the party's success in the past, but it does not look like it is effective any longer. An aggressive BJP is not marginalising the Congress as much as the Congress is busy making itself irrelevant.

The challenge before the Congress is to sense the political winds as well, which is what it tries to do half-heartedly, and becomes an easy target of both the majority communalists as well as the minority communalists. There is no one in the Congress and in the liberal intelligentsia outside to forge a plank which will win over ordinary Hindus who are religious, and tell them that Hindutva is anti-Hindu, which it is.

The new rationale of secularism should be formulated as defending the rights of religious minorities along with the majority's religious rights.

The party is indeed moving in this direction, but there is no one really of any standing to articulate this calibrated stance.

The real crisis in the

Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy.

Congress is that of the party's second- and third-rung leaders depending on the Gandhis to win elections for them in the way they used to, and to sing praises of the Gandhis as their saviours.

The Gandhis are now unable to deliver electoral victories, and this is no fault of Rahul Gandhi. The country has changed, and people are not looking up to charismatic leaders.

Of course, the BJP leaders are acting like the Congress when they praise Narendra Modi as the talisman of their party, and that Mr Modi is winning the elections for them. It is of course an illusion, not much different from the Congress' that the Gandhis are the mascots.

The dissidents are critical of the monopoly of the Gandhis' followers in the party, who are blocking everyone's way. But the dissidents also do not have any bright ideas to fashion a political vision for the party and the country. But there is something common that unites the Congress establishment (the Gandhis' camp holding party positions) and the dissidents. They are not perturbed by electoral defeats. They have played the game of power much longer than anyone else, and they believe that electoral setbacks are seasonal and that it is not necessary to lose sleep over it.

The many people who do not like Congress and its wily ways but who feel that it is a necessary evil to fight the BJP, which is more dangerous because of its authoritarian and totalitarian regime, are agonising over the present dilapidated state of the grand old party.

They are forever suggesting solutions to the Congress' problems, which are given short shrift by the party itself. The Congress isn't going to mend its ways anytime soon, and its leaders also feel that they do not have to do so.

The real crisis in the

Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

OUR DEMOCRACY

The Indian democracy has been adulterated by the BJP more than by any other party (*Shah to extend Bengal visit duration from Jan., DC, Dec. 21*). The BJP legalised defections in Karnataka, MP, Goa, Rajasthan and Northeastern states earlier now in West Bengal. This democracy in the hands of the BJP is in peril.

B. Ragunadha Rao
Hyderabad

When there can be rallies for votes without social distancing and no masks, no one can agree with the home minister's view on CAA. Vote politics cannot be the principal of governance. The Supreme Court has asked the government if three laws for farmers can be kept on hold. It looks something is seriously wrong in governance.

Dr Jaspal Singh Bhatia
Hyderabad

LS SPEAKER
Mohan Guruswamy's suggestion to have an eminent individual like a retired chief justice preside over Parliament is worth considering seriously (*Parl dysfunctional due to competitive politics, DC, Dec. 21*). Gone are the days when Speakers in Parliament and Assemblies were impartial and unbiased. In contemporary politics, democracy prevails till representatives are elected. Then oligarchy takes over with the PM or CM and his coterie wielding power.

S. Nageswara Rao
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle
Sex deviations in Britain
LONDON, Dec. 21.
Sex change operations at ₹300 sterling (Rs. 5,400) at a time, paid for by the tax-payer, are on the increase in Britain, according to an expert in the treatment of sexual deviants.

The expert's statement followed a disclosure in a Sunday newspaper here that already this year in Britain seven men had been changed into women.

The reason, according to a special list in the field of trans-sexualism was the mental distress caused by trans-sexual problems.

A senior official of the Alabama Trust — a charity organisation helping deviants said: "There are a growing number of people with trans-sexual problems, seeking medical advice." At least 45 men and a number of women had already had treatment in Britain.

The path to getting everyone to fall in line is open and it lies through such provisions as we have seen. It is no good to say these are only directive principles or whatever else because our experience shows that this is no defence. If something is "in the Constitution", that is the end of it.

Going through the list, some of the clauses are quite chilling, such as 38(1): "The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life."

Chilling, I accept, given the current mood more than anything else, but chilling nonetheless.

There are several (equal pay for women — Article 39D) that I suspect will not be taken up with any degree of seriousness. It is the ones that touch our current high-intensity nationalism that worry me, and these are the ones I call time bombs.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

'Time bombs' ticking in the Constitution are a worry



Aakar Patel

There are some time bombs ticking in our Constitution that worry me. These are in Part 4 of the document, about which we are assured by the Constitution's writers that "the provisions contained in this Part shall not be enforceable by any court, but the principles therein laid down

SHORT TAKES

ARJUN RAMPAL APPEARS BEFORE NCB FOR 2nd TIME

SAURABH JOSHI | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 21

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) questioned actor Arjun Rampal second time in connection with the ongoing drugs probe involving Bollywood, which began following the suicide of actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Rampal (47) was grilled earlier in November along with his girlfriend Gabriella, a South African national, whose brother Agisilaos has been arrested by NCB over his links with international drug cartels.

The officials said that Rampal arrived at the NCB office before noon after having sought time to appear till December 22. He was issued summons last week. The agency grilled Rampal in the backdrop of the data retrieved from the electronics that were seized from his residence following a raid in November.

The NCB officials had seized 11 gadgets, including laptop, mobile phones and pen drives from Rampals following which he was grilled by the officials days later.

"The questioning went all through the day and if needed he or his partner may be summoned for questioning again," said an officer.

CRPF CONSTABLE RENEGES ON RAPE CLAIM

New Delhi, Dec. 21: The 30-year-old CRPF constable, who had accused the paramilitary's Chief Sports Officer and Arjuna Awardee Khajan Singh and coach Surjit Singh of sexual harassment, rape and intimidation, has retracted her allegations, official sources said on Monday.

Police said Khajan Singh was questioned and his statement has also been recorded by the investigation team but refused to divulge further details, saying the investigation is still underway.

Earlier this week, the victim recorded her statement before the magistrate under CrPC section 164 where she retracted her allegations mentioned in her complaint filed before the Delhi Police earlier this month, they said.

"She retracted her allegations levelled against both the accused and is reluctant to pursue the case further," sources said. Khajan Singh has also recorded his statement before the investigation team and refuted all allegations levelled against him.

This came after the victim registered her statement before the magistrate, a police officer said.

A senior police officer said after the FIR was registered, the case was transferred from a sub-inspector level officer to an inspector attached with the Crime Against Women Cell of Dwarka district, which is investigating the case presently.

J&K'S DDC POLLS VOTE COUNTING BEGINS TODAY

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, DEC. 21

The counting of votes across all 280 District Development Council (DDC) constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir will begin at 9 am on Tuesday. The ballots will decide the fate of nearly 4,200 candidates who joined the fray in the first-ever such elections in the Union Territory.

State election commissioner (SEC), K.K. Sharma, said, "We've made elaborate arrangements for counting of ballots polled for DDC elections and Panchayat by-polls. Necessary Covid-19 protocols have been put in place and directions have already been issued to concerned deputy commissioners to adhere to coronavirus standard operating procedures (SOPs) during the counting process".

He said that the entire counting exercise will be monitored and recorded "to achieve full transparency." Elaborating on the counting guidelines, the SEC said that the counting of ballot papers will be taken on a round-wise basis after proper mixing of the ballot papers of different polling stations as per prescribed procedure and counting guidelines.

He said that his office has issued detailed guidelines under the Panchayat Raj Rules 1996 and prescribed elaborate procedure on the counting of ballot papers. "The handbook of returning officers also contains the relevant instructions on counting of votes," he added.

Didi asks Shah to check facts on Bengal growth

Shah lying to gain political mileage in WB, says Mamata

BJP MP gets ready to divorce his wife for joining the TMC

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 21

Calling the BJP a "party of cheats", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday squarely accused Union home minister Amit Shah of spreading "lies" about her government's performance during his two-day visit to the state.

Asking Shah to "cross check" his statements, the CM also cautioned him against lying as a home minister for his political mileage and urged him to tell the "truth" about the state.

Inaugurating the Kolkata Christmas Festival at Allen Park in Park Street, Banerjee, in an oblique reference to Shah, said, "Bengal is No. 1 in so many sectors. Some people, I am sorry to say, are coming here from Delhi. If I do anything wrong, I will apologise to them. But please tell me why you are telling a garble of lies to the people. Tell the truth."

Meanwhile, election strategist Prashant Kishor, who has been in the eye of the storm of the rebel brigade within the ruling TMC over his role in party affairs, leading many to defect to the BJP, on Monday made a startling prediction that the saffron party would "struggle to cross double digits" in the next year's Assembly elections. He also promised he would quit Twitter if proved wrong.

CONG LEADERS HAND OVER SONIA'S LETTER TO UDDHAV

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 21

Indicating that the Congress is not happy with the Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government, senior party leader Prithviraj Chavan on Monday said the state government must implement the common minimum programme.

He said the CMP is not a manifesto of any particular party.

A Maharashtra Congress delegation led by state party chief Balasaheb Thorat met CM Uddhab Thackeray and gave him a letter written by Congress president Sonia Gandhi seeking implementation of common minimum programme (CMP) and welfare measures for Dalits and tribals.

"The objective of the CMP was that there should not be anything done that is contrary to Congress's fundamental principles. Common minimum programme was not any party's manifesto. If any decision is taken is not in accordance with our fundamental principles, then we will have our objections to it," Chavan said.

However, the Congress leader also reiterated that there are no serious references among the MVA partners.

"Sonia Gandhi's letter is only a communication in the form of a letter. The MVA government is strong and working together," he said.

In the letter, dated December 14, Sonia Gandhi reminded Thackeray of the CMP of the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress government and sought implementation of certain measures for the welfare of Dalits and tribals.

She demanded reservation in government contracts for SC/ST professionals to promote entrepreneurship among them, among other things.

CONGRESS LEADERS reiterate that there are no serious references among the MVA partners and Sonia Gandhi's letter is only a communication in the form of a letter. The MVA government is strong and working together.

divorce notice. In the afternoon Sujata, who was found working actively for the BJP to ensure her husband's victory in the last Lok Sabha polls, walked into the TMC office.

Senior TMC MP Sougata Roy handed over the party flag to her. Hailing Banerjee and her MP, nephew Abhishek Banerjee, Khan said, "I want honour. I wish to work in my favourite party and its leader. I worked tirelessly for my husband's victory. But the BJP did not value my contribution. It gives place to some incompetent by poaching them from other parties. When good sense will prevail upon Khan, he will return to TMC also."

With tearful eyes Khan, also the state BJYM chief, said, "Our relations were of 10 years. But I did not know that politics could end it. I am not stopping her. Love is above politics. I quit the TMC for the development of Bengal. I knew the TMC steals cattle and coal. But I never thought the TMC would steal someone's wife."

Getting the legal notice from her husband, Sujata Khan broke down and said, "Ours was a love marriage. I loved my husband's victory. But the BJP did not value my contribution. It gives place to some incompetent by poaching them from other parties. When good sense will prevail upon Khan, he will return to TMC also."

She alleged, "The BJP is a party of cheats. For politicians, they can do and say anything. Hope Shah knows what is gold or not. Speaking for a political party and furnishing false information does not suit a home minister. Amiti, yeh aapko shobha nehi deti hai. (It is not right for you to talk of false and wrong information which were prepared by your party workers.) You do not have an idea of it. Please cross check what you say. I have

also the state BJYM chief, said, "Our relations were of 10 years. But I did not know that politics could end it. I am not stopping her. Love is above politics. I quit the TMC for the development of Bengal. I knew the TMC steals cattle and coal. But I never thought the TMC would steal someone's wife."

Reaffirming her fierce opposition to the CAA, the NRC and the NPR, she added: "When the CAA was passed, I started opposing it. They (BJP) cannot decide the fate of citizens. Let them decide their own fate. We are against the CAA, NRC and NPR. Nothing has been withdrawn. They exist. We will fight a battle against them. We will not allow anyone to go out of the country."

the evidence against whatever you claimed."

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All for a glimpse



People gather to watch the shooting of upcoming film *Atrangi Re* starring actors Akshay Kumar and Sara Ali Khan, at the historic Taj Mahal in Agra on Monday. — PTI

SPECIAL SESSION

Cabinet to recommend Governor Khan convene session on December 23

Kerala to pass resolution against farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
DEC. 21

farm bills against which farmers across the country are currently agitating.

Barring BJP which has a lone member in the 140 member Assembly, the remaining parties are expected to register their strong opposition to the farm laws which the CPM and Congress led coalitions in the state have dubbed as "anti" farmers.

The Cabinet meeting here decided to recommend to Governor Arif Mohammad Khan to convene the special session of the Assembly on December 23 to discuss Centre's farm bills in detail.

The Assembly is likely to pass a resolution against the bills. Barring BJP, all principal opposition parties in the state have expressed solidarity with the agitating farmers in Delhi.



Farmers block a road at Ghazipur border during their ongoing agitation in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Earlier the Kerala government had shot off a letter to the Union agriculture minister Narendra

Singh Tomar pointing out that it would not implement the new farm laws in the state. The government told the Union minister that it was opposed to the Central government's position on the farm laws. The Centre was trying to coerce the states to be part of a system that would pave the way for exploitation of farmers by corporate and multinational corporations.

The government had described some of the provisions in the new law impractical hence there was no question of accepting such diktats.

The opposition UDF has also slammed the Centre for bringing the farm laws

Russia will not take sides in India, China tiff: Envoy

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Russia will "not take sides" in the Sino-Indian border dispute but wants an atmosphere of cooperation and enhanced dialogue between the two Asian giants, top Russian diplomats said on Monday, adding that "non-inclusive" Indo-Pacific concepts like the four-nation Quad can be "detrimental" to regional stability and inclusive cooperation in the region.

However, in what is being seen as a balancing act, Russia said it supports both the "growing Indian profile" globally as well as "Indian sentiments" and that it also "supports the Indian vision for the Indo-Pacific". Moscow also said the sale of the S-400 missile systems to India is "advancing well".

At an annual year-end media briefing in the national capital on Monday in the Virtual format, Russian Ambassador to India Nikolay R. Kudashev — while commenting on the recent Sino-Indian military tensions in the Ladakh sector, said, "It is vital to ensure an atmosphere of cooperation between the two Asian giants. As a friend to both India and China, we would encourage enhanced dialogue between both the governments. Between New Delhi and Beijing, we believe this is the key for the future progress in ties and to the regional security and stability."

Pointing out that the sale of the S-400 missile systems to India is "advancing well", the Russian Ambassador also said that if the K-226 helicopter and AK-47 203 rifle deal processes are expedited, "we will see good progress".

On the Sino-Indian border dispute, Russian deputy chief of mission (DCM) Roman N.

Boeing pitches its jet for Indian Navy

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

American aerospace giant Boeing said Monday its fighter aircraft F/A-18 Super Hornet has shown compatibility with India's aircraft carriers.

IT RECENTLY concluded "ski jump" trials for F/A-18 Super Hornets.

29Ks, is seeking jets for its aircraft carrier Vikramaditya and for the coming Vikrant. France's Rafale, that was purchased by the Indian Air Force, will offer tough competition for any order given by Indian Navy.

"The Super Hornet can act as a lynchpin of naval aviation collaboration between the US Navy and Indian Navy. This will improve inter-operability and commonality between the two navies and boost opportunities for collaboration in variety of areas related to naval aviation," said Mr Kanaglekar.

Boeing said the F/A-18 Super Hornet can interface with P-8I aircraft and other assets of US origin to act as a force multiplier for the Indian Navy.

It said the Super Hornet will offer the Indian Navy value in the form of advanced technologies at low acquisition cost.

Babushkin said, "Russia is not taking sides. It maintains close ties with both nations."

But it was on the Indo-Pacific issue, that Russia clearly expressed its discomfort once again.

NIGHT CURFEW IN MUMBAI TILL JANUARY 5

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 21

Amidst the reports of new Coronavirus variant spreading rapidly in Britain, the Maharashtra government, as a precautionary measure, announced a night curfew in metropolitan areas of the state from December 22 to January 5. We need to remain more alert during the fortnight, said Chief Minister Uddhab Thackeray.

According to the measures announced by the state government, a night curfew will be imposed in municipal corporation areas between 11 pm and 6 am from December 22 to January 5 as a precautionary measure. In addition to this, all passengers arriving at the state airports from European and Middle-East Asian countries will be put under institutional quarantine. Those coming from other countries will be home quarantines.

The decision to impose night curfew was taken in a meeting held by Thackeray on the backdrop of alarming situation in the UK. "The new Coronavirus variant is spreading rapidly in Britain and its lethality will be known in coming days. Hence, we need to exercise restraint," the Chief Minister said.

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Krantikari Kisan Union leader Gurmeet Singh said, "We have already sent them our proposals. They need to respond to what we have already told them. Tomorrow, there will be a Sanyukt Morcha meeting to decide how and when to respond to the government. We will evaluate the government's letter and then

meanwhile, a farmer from Tarn Taran district of Punjab allegedly tried to kill himself at the Singhu border on Monday.

The 65-year-old farmer was first admitted to Sonipat's civil hospital but was later referred to Rohtak's Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences. He also wrote a note in support of the protesting farmers.

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The government had described some of the provisions in the new law impractical hence there was no question of accepting such diktats.

The UDF leaders said that the Centre was unnecessarily provoking the farmers by resorting to provocative actions. Instead of adopting such a stand, the Centre should be ready for a climb down, they said.

SHORT TAKES
**ARMY TO RUN
MAYA TRAIN:
MEXICAN PREZ**

Mexico City, Dec. 21: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Sunday the army will run the Maya train project and several airports, and use any profits to finance military pensions.

The army is already overseeing construction on some parts of the controversial project, while private firms build the rest. Obrador said Sunday that "so there won't be the temptation to privatize" the \$6.8 billion project, the army will operate it once built.

The proceeds from that — and several airports, some of which the army is constructing — will be used to provide pensions for soldiers and sailors.

López Obrador has already given the army more tasks than any other recent Mexican president.

**RARE SALES OF
CHRISTMAS ITEMS
IN SAUDI ARABIA**

Riyadh, Dec. 20: Christmas trees and glittery ornaments are for sale at a Saudi gift shop, a once unthinkable sight in the cradle of Islam where all public non-Muslim worship is banned.

In recent years, festive sales have gradually crept into the capital Riyadh, a sign of loosening social restrictions after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledged to steer the conservative Gulf kingdom towards an "open, moderate Islam". "I didn't ever imagine I'd see this" in Saudi Arabia, a Riyadh resident said at the shop selling trees, Santa Claus outfits as well as tinsel, baubles and other ornaments.

"I am surprised," said the resident, declining to be identified. Until barely three years ago, it was almost impossible to sell such items openly in Saudi Arabia, but authorities have been clipping the powers of the clerical establishment long notorious for enforcing Islamic traditions.

**ISRAELI PARL TO
VOTE ON BILL TO
DELAY POLL CALL**

Jerusalem, Dec. 21: Israel's parliament was set to vote Monday on a proposal from its fraught coalition that would temporarily put off the call for a fourth election in less than two years in the country.

Israel's coalition government — a broken marriage between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his political rival, Defence Minister Benny Gantz — has been inching towards collapse for weeks.

Under the current arrangement between Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and Gantz's centre-left Blue and White, the coalition has until one minute past midnight on Wednesday to agree a budget for the current year.

If a 2020 budget is not passed, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, would dissolve, with new elections held as early as March.

The three-year coalition deal stipulates that Netanyahu serves as premier for 18 months, with Gantz, currently the alternate prime minister, taking over in November 2021.

**RWANDAN TROOPS
DEPLOYED IN
C. AFRICAN REP.**

Kigali, Dec. 21: Rwanda has deployed troops to the Central African Republic, where its soldiers serving in the UN peacekeeping force have been targeted by rebels, the defence ministry in Kigali said.

"The Government of Rwanda has deployed force protection troops to the Central African Republic, under an existing bilateral agreement on defence," said a statement issued late Sunday.

"The deployment is in response to the targeting of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) contingent under the UN Peacekeeping force by rebels supported by (former president) Francois Bozize." On Saturday, the Central African Republic's government accused Bozize of leading an attempted coup as tensions mount ahead of key presidential and legislative elections on Sunday.

A spokesman for the UN's MINUSCA peacekeeping force in CAR said Sunday that armed rebels that had been advancing on the capital Bangui had been pushed back. No details were given but the defence ministry said they would "also ensure a peaceful and secure general elections scheduled on Sunday".

European countries begin to seal off United Kingdom

'Out of control' new Coronavirus variant forces nations to suspend flights

London, Dec. 21: France became the latest European country to close all its borders with the UK after Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, the Irish Republic, Turkey and Canada suspended flights amid growing concerns of an "out of control" new variant of Coronavirus spreading at a much faster pace in parts of England. India, so far, remains in the travel bubble with the UK, with strict testing and self-isolation rules in place. But with most of Britain now in the strictest Tier 4 lockdown, all non-essential travel remains banned for the majority.

Other countries and territories to announce restrictions on UK travel include Hong Kong, Israel, Iran, Croatia, Argentina, Chile, Morocco and Kuwait.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will chair a meeting of the government's emergency committee on Monday to take stock of the situation as a huge backlog build up on the border with France after even trucks and ferries were blocked entry at the ports.

European Union (EU) member states are also due for a meeting in Brussels to discuss a more coordinated response as the number of Coronavirus infections in the UK jumped to 35,928 on Sunday, down to the much faster spreading new mutation of the novel Coronavirus, with the country's death toll rising by 326 to hit 67,401.

"Everybody, particularly people in Tier 4 areas, needs to behave as if they might well have the virus — that is the only way we are going to get it under control," UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock said, adding that the situation is "deadly serious" as the government tries to contain the rapid strain of an "out of control" virus.

The government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) estimates the variant could increase the R number — or rate of infection — by between 0.4 and 0.9. The R number is how many other people one person will infect on average and an epidemic is in effect if it rises above one. Fears of the new variant meant that over 21 million people in England and Wales who entered new restrictions at midnight are being told to stay at home, while non-essential shops and businesses have to close. Those living under the newly-created Tier 4 restrictions in England will now be unable to mix with other households indoors at Christmas, unless they are part of their existing support bubble.

Opposition Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer accused Prime Minister Johnson of "gross negligence" and "weak leadership" that was "costing lives and costing jobs".



A sign on the M56 motorway informs drivers that all routes into France are closed at the junction with the M6 at Lower Stretton near Warrington, northwest England, on Monday. Crucial transit country France moved to block people and goods crossing the Channel, while the Netherlands said passengers arriving by ferry would be denied entry.

— AFP

EU regulator approves vaccine

Amsterdam, Dec. 21: The European Medicines Agency recommended conditional approval for a Coronavirus vaccine developed by BioNTech and Pfizer to be used across the European Union, weeks after the shot was first granted permission under emergency provisions in Britain and the United States.

Following a closed-doors expert meeting Monday, the EU drug regulator said it was recommending the shot be licensed for use in people over 16 years of age, with some exceptions.

shot be licensed for use in people over 16 years of age, with some exceptions. The pharmaceutical companies will need to submit follow-up data on their

vaccine for the next year.

"This is really a historic scientific achievement," said Emer Cooke, the head of the agency. "It is a significant step forward in our fight against the pandemic."

The approval needs to be rubber-stamped by the EU's executive branch on Monday evening, a move its chief said is likely to happen Monday evening.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted that the EMA's approval was "a

decisive moment in our efforts to deliver safe & effective vaccines to Europeans!" Now we will act fast. I expect a @EU_Commission decision by this evening," she said.

The EU's executive arm had been expected to require two or three days to approve the EMA's decision. Authorities in Germany and several other European countries have said they hope to begin vaccinating people on Dec. 27.

— AP

TRUMP ADVISER TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

Gainesville, Dec. 21: The leader of a north Georgia megachurch who has been a spiritual adviser to President Donald Trump has tested positive for Covid-19.

Jentezen Franklin, the senior pastor of Free Chapel in Gainesville was absent from Sunday services, news outlets reported. Pastor Javon Ruff announced the diagnosis during Free Chapels Sunday service, held both in-person and streamed live. "We want to make you aware that Pastor Franklin has come in contact with Covid, but he is doing perfectly fine. He actually is doing great," Ruff said.

"He went and got tested and his test came back positive so he is doing the right thing to do and staying quarantined and continuing to be distanced." The diagnosis came within days of Franklin attending a Christmas party at the White House.

British people were paying the price for Johnson's "incompetence", "indecision" and "weak leadership" that was "costing lives and costing jobs".

— PTI

NEW STRAIN OF CORONAVIRUS DRIVING DISEASE RESURGENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Johannesburg, Dec. 21: South Africa has announced that a new variant of the Covid-19 virus is driving the country's current resurgence of the disease, which is seeing higher numbers of confirmed cases, hospitalisations and deaths.

The new variant, known as M1.V2, is dominant among new confirmed infections in South Africa, according to health officials and scientists leading the country's virus

strategy.

"It is still very early but at this stage, the preliminary data suggests the virus that is now dominating in the second wave is spreading faster than the first wave," Professor Salim Abdool Karim, chairman of the government's Ministerial Advisory Committee, said in a briefing to journalists. South Africa may see "many more cases" in the new wave than it experienced. — AP

TELANGANA STATE ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION e-TENDER NOTIFICATION

e-Tenders are invited for leasing of canteens/stalls/open spaces in the Bus stations of Hyderabad Region. For details Please visit website <https://tsrtc.telangana.gov.in> (Tender) or <https://tender.telangana.gov.in>. TSRTC reserves the right to cancel / Reject any or all the tenders with out assigning any reasons thereof.

No. M3/122/2/2020-HR-Dated:18-12-2020 Sd/- REGIONAL MANAGER

DIPR No.1288-PPCL-Agency/ADVT/11/2020-21, Dt:11-12-2020

DIPR RO No.833-DPICL-AGENCY/ADVT/11/2020-21

GOVT. OF TELANGANA O/o Superintending Engineer, Tribal Welfare, Warangal

e-Proc Tender Notice

NIT No. SE/TW/WGL/NIT/94 to 105/2020-21

No. of works (13) Name of the Works: C/o SC Hostel (boys) Building in Bhupalipally (V&M) Jayashankar Bhupalipally District and other all civil works in undersigned. Total ECV: 3.01 Crores. Bid document download Starting & Closing Date: 23/12/2020 after 5.00 PM upto 07.01.2021 upto 3 PM. Technical Bid Opening Dt: 07.01.2021 at 5.00 PM. Commercial Bid Opening Dt: 07.01.2021 at 5.30 PM. Please see in TWED Department e-procurement market places www.e-procurement.gov.in for further details

Sd/- Superintending Engineer, TW, Warangal

DIPR RO No.833-DPICL-AGENCY/ADVT/11/2020-21

QUTHBULLAPUR CIRCLE-25

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation

QUTHBULLAPUR CIRCLE-25

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Sd/- Superintending Engineer, TW, Warangal

DIPR RO No.833-DPICL-

SHORT TAKES

GRENADE KILLS
3 'CHILDREN'
IN ETHIOPIA

Addis Ababa, Dec. 21: A grenade explosion killed three children and injured five in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Sunday, the Fana BC broadcaster reported.

"A grenade abandoned in an open area by as of yet unidentified people" exploded after the children handled it, Alemayehu Ayalqe, director of the Addis police organised crime division, was quoted as saying. He described the victims as "street children".

KILAUEA VOLCANO IN HAWAII ERUPTS

Honolulu, Dec. 21: The Kilauea volcano on Hawaii's Big Island erupted late Sunday, authorities said, warning of a possible "significant emission" of volcanic ash into the atmosphere.

An eruption has commenced within Kilauea's summit caldera, shortly after 9:30 pm local time (0730 GMT), said the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

"The situation is rapidly evolving and HVO (Hawaiian Volcano Observatory) will issue another statement when more information is available." Images posted by the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park showed billows of red smoke rising into the night sky.

The USGS warned of a "significant emission of volcanic ash into the atmosphere" and upgraded its aviation color code to red, advising pilots to avoid the area around Kilauea.

The National Weather Service reported prevailing winds could push the ashfall towards communities on the southwest of Big Island and said people with respiratory problems should take "extra precaution".

THAI ACTRESS FACES INSULT TO MONARCHY

Bangkok, Dec. 21: A well-known actress who is one of the most high-profile supporters of Thailand's pro-democracy protest movement answered a police summons Monday charging her with violating the country's harsh law against defaming the monarchy, even though she is not known to have spoken publicly about the royal institution.

Inthira "Sai" Charoensupha, who is also a singer, has drawn both praise and criticism for giving material support and raising funds for the student-led movement.

Along with seven protest leaders, she presented herself at a police station in Bangkok to hear charges that they had violated the country's lese majeste law, which calls for a prison term of three to 15 years for defaming the king or members of his immediate family.

The law, known as Article 112, has long drawn criticism for its harshness and terms that let anyone file a complaint, allowing its use for partisan political purposes. Its use against

Inthira appeared to be unprecedented since she was not directly tied to any comments about the monarchy.

KURDISH EX-MP GETS 22 YEARS IN PRISON

Diyarbakir, Turkey, Dec. 21: A Turkish court on Monday sentenced a prominent Kurdish former lawmaker who went on a months-long hunger strike to more than 22 years in jail on terror-related charges.

Leyla Guven, an opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) deputy who was stripped of her parliamentary immunity in June, was convicted of membership of a terror group and disseminating terror propaganda for outlawed Kurdish militants.

The 56-year-old gained international attention by launching a 200-day hunger strike in 2018 in a bid to end jailed Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan's isolation by securing him access to his family and lawyers.

Ocalan's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is blacklisted by Ankara and its Western allies as a terror group, has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 that has killed tens of thousands.

The government has jailed dozens of mayors and other HDP officials in the past year over the party's suspected links to the PKK, which it strongly denies.

Tokyo dazzles under lights



People walk under winter-themed illumination, lit by approximately 1.2 million "champagne gold" LED lights as part of seasonal decorations, in the Marunouchi business district of Tokyo on Monday. — AFP

Rockets strike near US embassy in Baghdad

Attacks cause material damage, no casualty: Iraq's security

Baghdad, Dec. 21: A volley of rockets exploded near the US embassy in Baghdad Sunday, as tensions mount ahead of the anniversary of the US killing top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani on Iraqi soil.

AFP reporters in the capital's east heard at least five booms on Sunday night, followed by whistling sounds.

A few moments later, they heard thunderous rapid-fire sounds and saw streams of red flares in the dark sky, indicating the US embassy's C-RAM rocket defence system had been activated. Iraq's security forces issued a statement saying the attacks caused material damage, but no casualties.

A security source said

at least three rockets landed near the US embassy in the high-security Green Zone, while two others hit separate residential neighbourhoods.

An Iraqi man living across the street from the US diplomatic mission in a high-security residential compound said that his building was hit.

"Everyone is screaming and crying. My wife is losing it from all the terrifying sounds," he said, preferring to speak anonymously. A member of parliament said that his home had been hit by a rocket fragment, likely caused by the C-RAM's deflection or explosion of incoming rockets.

The US embassy and other foreign military and diplomatic sites have been targeted by dozens of rockets and roadside bomb attacks since the autumn of 2019.

Western and Iraqi officials have blamed hard-line groups, including the pro-Iran faction Kataeb Hezbollah. In October, these groups agreed to an indefinite truce, but Sunday's attack is the third apparent violation.

The first, on November 17, saw a volley of rockets slam into the US embassy and various parts of the Iraqi capital, killing one young woman.

On December 10, two convoys transporting logistical equipment for the US-led coalition helping Iraqi troops fight jihadists were targeted with roadside bombs.

The attacks have been claimed by groups that both US and Iraqi officials have described as smokescreens for well-known Iran-aligned armed factions in Iraq.

But in an unusual move, several factions condemned Sunday's attack as the third apparent violation.

Muqtada Sadr, a populist cleric and former militia leader, tweeted that "no one has the right to use weapons outside of the state." Even Kataeb Hezbollah, which has been blamed for other attacks, issued an online statement.

"Bombing the (US) embassy of evil at this time is considered out of order," it said, while also condemning the US embassy's use of the C-RAM system.

US will 'react' if Iran seeks to avenge Soleimani killing

Washington, Dec. 21: Washington is "prepared to react" if Tehran launches an attack to mark the first anniversary of the killing of powerful Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, the head of US forces in the Middle East warned Sunday.

"We are prepared to defend ourselves, our friends and partners in the region, and we're prepared to react if necessary," General Kenneth McKenzie, who heads the US Central Command (Centcom), told journalists.

He was touring the region weeks before the anniversary of the January 3, 2020 killing of Soleimani by a US drone strike near the Baghdad airport. "My assessment is we are in very good position and we'll be prepared for anything the Iranians or their proxies acting for them might choose to do," McKenzie, a four-star marine general,

told a small group of journalists in a telephone interview from an undisclosed location in the region.

The Centcom commander said he had recently visited Baghdad, where he met with the head of the anti-jihadist coalition, American General Paul Calvert, as well as the Iraqi army chief of staff, General Abdul Amir Yarallah.

McKenzie said he had also gone to Syria to meet with American forces deployed in the small southern base at Al-Tanf, near the border with Jordan and Iraq.

In an apparent sign of

US military leaders' concerns about Iranian intentions after Soleimani's killing, McKenzie's current tour was not announced in advance.

Similarly, last week's visits by General Mark Milley, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Israel and Afghanistan were kept secret until he had left the region.

"I talk to my commanders about it every day and I think we will be ready," McKenzie said.

Even as the US Army continues troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan ordered by President Donald Trump -- with a goal of drawing down to 2,500 in each country by January 15 -- the Pentagon has substantially reinforced its posture around Iraq to dissuade Iran from launching any attack.

— AFP

ANTI-SEMITIC RAMPAGE: LIFE TERM TO GERMAN

Magdeburg, Germany, Dec. 21: A German court on Monday handed down a life sentence to a neo-Nazi behind a deadly attack last year that nearly became the country's worst anti-Semitic atrocity since World War II. A bolted door at the synagogue in the eastern city of Halle with 52 worshippers inside marking Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, was the only thing that prevented the heavily armed attacker from carrying out a planned bloodbath.

After failing to storm the temple on October 9, 2019, Stephan Balliet, 28, shot dead a female passer-by and a man at a kebab shop. "Without that famous reinforced door, he would have committed a massacre," presiding judge Ursula Mertens said. — AFP

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— AFP

Tunisian environment minister was sacked

Waste from Italy stinks Tunisia

Sousse, Tunisia, Dec. 21: Hundreds of containers of household waste shipped from Italy to Tunisia have raised suspicions of dirty dealings in the North African country that already struggles to manage its own garbage disposal.

The scandal, which saw the Tunisian environment minister sacked at the weekend, started in the summer when Customs officials seized 282 containers in the port city of Sousse.

They were declared as carrying plastic scraps for industrial recycling — but were instead full of mixed, putrid household waste, which is barred from import under

Tunisian law. The case shines a spotlight on the global trade in waste, which has grown despite stricter regulations aimed at preventing rich countries from dumping their hazardous refuse on poorer countries.

The containers were imported by Tunisian firm Soreplast, which claimed to have government permission to import and recycle industrial plastic scraps. A copy of Soreplast's request to bring the containers into the country seen by AFP stated that the company would "temporarily" import the waste "in non-hazardous bales... for sorting, recycling and re-export oper-

ations to European territory". AFP has seen the contract which Soreplast signed with the Italian firm that sold the refuse, Sviluppo Risorse Ambiente Srl. It explicitly tasked Soreplast with "recovery of the waste and its subsequent disposal" in Tunisia.

Neither company was available for comment despite numerous efforts to contact them by AFP.

According to a customs official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, these documents show that Soreplast made a false declaration on the nature of the imported material.

As the scandal grew, PM Hichem Mechichi sacked the environ-

ment minister, Mustapha Aroui, late on Sunday without giving an official reason. But a government source said he was fired in connection with the waste issue. The global waste trade has been growing as more highly industrialised and urbanised countries get rid of their garbage in developing countries.

Interpol warned in August that criminal organisations have profited from an "overwhelming" surge in illegal waste shipments, particularly to Asia but also other parts of the world. The garbage often ends up in countries that are ill-equipped to cope with it.

— AFP

Oli defends move to dissolve Parl, blames own party

Kathmandu, Dec. 21: Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Monday defended his move to abruptly dissolve Parliament, saying he was forced to seek a fresh mandate through elections as the rift within the ruling Nepal Communist Party severely affected his government.

Oli on Sunday sprang a surprise on his rivals and got the President to dissolve Parliament, a controversial move amidst a prolonged tussle for power between him and former premier Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' within the ruling dispensation. In a special address to the nation, Prime Minister Oli said that he was forced to dissolve Parliament and announce mid-term elections after he learnt about a plan to move a vote of no-confidence against him.

"This move could be seen as an abrupt step for now, but some of my party leaders should be held responsible for creating this situation who did not cooperate with my government," Oli said. He also insisted that his government had done well in terms of safeguarding the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Earlier, Oli rejected his party's decision to take disciplinary action against him. The Nepal Communist Party's Standing Committee meeting termed Oli's move as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and based on his personal whim".

"I was forced to seek a fresh mandate through elections as attempts were made against my government, not to allow it to function properly," the prime minister said while defending his decision to dissolve Parliament and announce mid-term elections.

Oli said that the intra-party rift in the ruling Nepal Communist Party severely affected the government's functioning.

"The elected government was pushed to a corner and picketed against and was not allowed to work so

CYBERATTACK CLAIMS BY DON 'FARCE': CHINA

Beijing, Dec. 21: China on Monday said tweets by President Donald Trump suggesting Beijing was involved in a massive cyberattack on the US government were "a farce" concocted for political motives. A large-scale hack of US government agencies including the Treasury was "under control" as of Saturday, according to the outgoing US President.

But in a tweet thread he undercut his own administration's assessment that Russia was behind the cyberattack, instead saying China "may" also have been involved, without providing any evidence.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin stopped short of directly denying Beijing's involvement, but called US accusations of cyberattacks "not serious, and self-contradictory." "The accusations made by the US against China have always been a farce, out of political motives," Wang told a press briefing. "The US has politicised cybersecurity issues, continuously spread false information without conclusive evidence... in an attempt to destroy China's image and mislead the international community."

In July, the US indicted two Chinese nationals for seeking to steal virus vaccine research and hacking hundreds of companies.

— AFP

भारत अनुप-भारतीय तिलदान अनुसंधान संस्थान
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quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	45,553.96
Nifty 50	13,328.40
S&P 500*	3,669.42
Dollar (₹)	73.79
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.54
Euro (₹)	89.84
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,421▲117
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.957 -0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.930 -0.018

*As of 9:30 PM IST

FinMin releases ₹6K cr to states for GST shortfall

The finance ministry on Monday released the eighth weekly instalment of ₹6,000 crore to the states to meet the GST compensation shortfall, taking the total amount released so far under this window to ₹48,000 crore. The Centre had set up a special borrowing window in October, 2020 to meet the estimated shortfall of ₹1.10 lakh crore in revenue arising on account of implementation of GST.

Booking for new Audi A4 sedan begins in India



German luxury carmaker Audi on Monday announced opening of bookings for its upcoming new version of A4 sedan in India. The fifth-generation Audi A4 powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine can be booked with a booking amount of ₹2 lakh, either through online mode or at the company's dealerships. "This will be our first product launch for 2021," Audi India head Balbir Singh Dhillon said.

AstraZeneca gets nod to market asthma drug

Drug firm AstraZeneca Pharma on Monday said that it has received marketing authorisation from Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for Benralizumab solution, indicated as an add-on maintenance treatment for severe asthma. Benralizumab (Fasenra) is indicated as an add-on maintenance treatment for severe asthma with an eosinophilic phenotype in adult patients, the company said.

Vineet Agarwal takes over as Assocham chief

Logistics major Transport Corporation of India Limited managing director Vineet Agarwal has taken over as the new president of The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham). He replaces Niranjan Hiranandani, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Hiranandani Group of Companies. Sumant Sinha, CMD of ReNew Power, is the new senior vice-president of Assocham.

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Corporate profits hit an all-time high in Q2

Margins widen on lower input costs, better utilisation

Mumbai, Dec. 21: Corporate profits rose 15 per cent to touch an all-time high in the September quarter as margins widened on softer input costs and better utilisation levels, the research arm of leading rating agency Crisil said on Monday.

From an absolute perspective, the earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) touched an all-time high ₹1.60 lakh crore in the September quarter, as against ₹1.02 lakh crore in the preceding June quarter, it said.

It can be noted that the trend of companies' profits growing even as the economy contracts as a result of the pandemic has led some watchers to express concern claiming this is illustrative of widening inequalities.

Crisil, which analysed a sample of 800 listed entities comprising 85 per cent of NSE's market cap

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, DEC. 21

In a relief to Amazon Inc., the Delhi High Court on Monday declined to grant an interim injunction to Future Group which had sought an order to restrain the global e-commerce company from interfering in the \$3.4-billion deal between Future

FPI inflows touch 12-yr high in Nov.

Mumbai, Dec. 21: Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), which own more than 24 per cent of the domestic market, pumped in a record ₹8.1 billion last month, highest in 12 years, and at ₹5 billion to date, December also looks to get record inflows, says a foreign brokerage report.

At ₹8.1 billion, India has received the highest FPI inflows among the emerging markets in

in sectors excluding banking and finance and oil and gas, said improving utilisation levels, along with better management of power, fuel and raw material cost by large

companies contributed to the handsome profit growth.

Aggregate operating profit margins improved by over one per cent despite a rise in raw mate-

rial cost during the quarter, it said.

From an employee costs perspective, which is leading to the concerns, it said 370 manufacturing firms in its sample showed a contraction of four per cent while the same for the service sector reported a moderate growth.

The growth in profits came even as the revenues did not go up, the report said, pointing out that the topline was "stable" in Q2 as compared to the year-ago period after falling 29 per cent in the April-June quarter.

The small enterprises have taken a brunt of the hit in revenue impact as compared to the large ones, it said. "Large players saw muted revenue growth. However, small players, which are typically low on bargaining power and cash crunch remained in the red. The smaller the company, the more excruciating the pain," it said. — PTI

Delhi High Court refuses to restrain Amazon

GROUP AND RIL. However, the court found that the board resolution approving the Future-RIL deal was not prima facie void. "...the present application is disposed off, declining the grant of interim injunction as prayed for by Future Retail, however, the statutory authorities/regulators are directed to take the decision on

the applications/objections in accordance with the law," the court said.

After Future Group announced the sale of its retail and wholesale business to Reliance Retail in August, Amazon had filed an arbitration petition with Emergency Arbitrator at Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) in October, claim-

ing that Future breached the contract which was entered while taking an indirect stake in their retail business by buying shares in Future Coupons.

The High Court also observed that the parties have expressly chosen the SIAC rules as the curial law governing the conduct of arbitration proceedings.

SUCSEED VC FUND INKS DEALS WITH 3 STARTUP FIRMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Hyderabad-based SucSEED Indovation, a Sebi registered Alternative Investment Fund (AIF-1) venture capital fund, on Monday said that it has raised ₹40 crore for its maiden fund. Through this fund, the venture fund plans to support over 50 startups till they become large enterprises.

Making the announcement, Vikrant Varshney, co-founder and managing partner of the venture capital fund, said, "We are excited to state an overwhelming response and oversubscription to our first closing of the maiden ₹100 crore fund. Angel Investors, CXOs in large Domestic and global enterprises, family offices, and few family trusts have participated in the first successful closing of ₹40 crore."

Announcing the details of new early-stage investments, Vikrant said "Indovation Fund has identified three startups — Stargate, Auris, and Freestand — for investment and has signed term sheets." The restructuring is a

GMR gets nod for demerger plan

New Delhi, Dec. 21: GMR Infrastructure on Monday said that it has received consent from stock exchanges, with no adverse observations, on its proposed restructuring involving demerger of its non-airport vertical business.

The company said it will file the scheme with the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) within six months.

The company said it had filed an application to the BSE and National Stock Exchange of India towards the composite scheme of amalgamation and arrangement amongst GMR Power Infra (GPIL), GMR Infrastructure, GMR Power and Urban Infra and their respective shareholders (scheme)".

In August this year, GMR Infrastructure unveiled a strategic group restructuring plan involving demerger of non-airport vertical business as part of efforts to simplify the corporate holding structure. — PTI

Currently, GMR group operates the country's busiest aerodrome, Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, and Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. Also, it operates Cebu airport in the Philippines.

The vertical split demerger will go a long way in facilitating deeper understanding of the airport business independently as compared to other business verticals within the group, the statement added.

Separate listing of both the airport and non-airport businesses will also help in simplifying the corporate holding structure, the statement said.

The vertical split demerger will go a long way in facilitating deeper understanding of the airport business independently as compared to other business verticals within the group, the statement added.

Currently, GMR group operates the country's busiest aerodrome, Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, and Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. Also, it operates Cebu airport in the Philippines.

The restructuring is a

step in the right direction towards creating pure plays in different businesses of the group thereby attracting sector-specific global investors and unlocking value for the current shareholders of GMR Infrastructure, the company had then said in a statement.

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SHORT TAKES
Real president for changes in football

Madrid: Long linked to the creation of a more lucrative competition, Real Madrid president Florentino Prez wants financial disruption caused to football by the Coronavirus pandemic to spur deep changes to current playing formats. "Nothing will go back to being like before," Prez told an online assembly of Real Madrid's club members on Sunday.

"The pandemic must make us more competitive," he said. "We must innovate, discover formulas so that football remains attractive. Real Madrid was there at the beginning of FIFA and the European Cup. Our model now needs a new impulse, and the impact of Covid-19 has shown that."

Elite clubs, including Madrid, have been pushing for more guaranteed Champions League matches and revenue starting in the 2024-25 season, but UEFA-led talks failed to reach an agreement last year amid opposition from leagues and less wealthy clubs. Prez also in 2019 formed the World Football Club Association, which has been formulating plans for new competitions of its own. Those proposals only emerged in reports after Prez met with FIFA President Gianni Infantino. — AP

Groundsman dies at France stadium

Lorient, France: A groundskeeper at the stadium of French football team Lorient died on Sunday after lighting equipment fell on him following a game, the club said. The accident occurred shortly after Rennes beat Lorient 3-0 at Stade du Moustoir in north-west France. The club did not immediately identify the man. The light therapy equipment is used to heat the pitch and is wheeled on and off the field between games.

The city's mayor, Fabrice Loher, said police had begun an investigation into how the accident occurred, according to the daily Ouest France.

Several Lorient players were reportedly still on the sidelines when the accident took place in one of the penalty areas. Emergency personnel treated him on the field.

He died at an area hospital, media reports said. On Monday morning, Lorient players, staff and employees held a moment of silence for the victim at their training complex. — AP

Lalita, Babar are MAH members

Mumbai: Olympian long distance runners Lalita Babar and Kavita Raut have been made executive committee members of Maharashtra Athletics Association (MAH) after they were nominated as chairpersons of two committees. While Raut will be the chairperson of the Athletics

Commission, Babar will head the Organising Committee, Association's General Secretary Satish Uchil stated in a media release issued here.

Adille Sumariwalla, who was re-elected as MAH president in the polls held on Sunday, said it was a "historical moment" in Indian sport that five

Olympians and several international athletes were nominated to the post of chairperson of various committees or commissions of a state association.

Sumariwalla, also an Olympian and president of Athletics

Federation of India, said by virtue of being the chairpersons of the committees, Raut and Babar will be an integral part of the executive committee of the

Association.

Raut had won a silver and a bronze medal in the 10000m and 5000m respectively in the 2010 Asian Games. Babar had won a bronze in the 2014 Asian Games in 3000m steeplechase event. — PTI

Italian club Genoa fires coach Maran

Genoa, Italy: Italian club Genoa fired coach Rolando Maran on Monday as the team remained stuck in the relegation zone following a 2-0 loss to Benevento.

Genoa has just one victory in 13 games this season in Italian league and was in 19th place as it prepared to play at Spezia on Wednesday.

In a brief statement, the team said the 57-year-old Italian coach had been fired. The club thanks the coach and his staff for their commitment, it said.

In the 2013-14 season, Maran was fired twice by the same club Catania. — AP

Bruno blitzkrieg

Fernandes, Scott net brace as Man U fire Leeds



Bruno Fernandes (centre) of Manchester United jumps for a high ball with Luke Ayling (left) of Leeds United during their English Premier League football match at the Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, England, on Sunday. — AFP

Benzema packs off Eibar 3-1



Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema celebrates after scoring a goal against SD Eibar during their Spanish league football match at the Ipurua stadium in Eibar on Sunday. Real Madrid won 3-1. — AFP

Dimitrovic kept out Rodrygo's close-range effort, but Eibar got themselves back into the match in spectacular style before the half-hour mark.

Kike collected the ball outside the area before curling a fine finish past Thibaut Courtois.

Benzema thought he had restored the visitors' two-goal lead before half-time, but was flagged for a marginal offside, with VAR upholding the linesman's decision.

Eibar wasted an excellent chance to equalise 11 minutes after the break, as Takashi Inui shot wide following a rare mistake from Real captain Sergio Ramos.

The reigning champions struggled to put the game to bed in the second half, with Marco Asensio striking a free-kick narrowly off target shortly after coming on as a substitute.

The capital giants survived a late scare when VAR decided not to award Eibar a penalty after the ball struck Ramos's arm.

Vazquez wrapped up the points in injury time with a cool finish from a tight angle, having been played in by Benzema.

Earlier on Sunday, former Spain international Roberto Soldado scored twice as Granada moved into sixth with a 2-0 win over Real Betis, while Getafe beat Cadiz 2-0 and Celta Vigo made it four straight victories by seeing off Alaves by the same scoreline. — AFP

Lille hold PSG to top France table

Paris, Dec. 21: Lille moved back top of the French football league on Sunday after holding Paris Saint-Germain to an uninspiring goalless draw which failed to live up to its pre-match billing.

Lille take first place in the French top flight from Lyon on goal difference after a match which saw just a handful of shots on target and very little in the way of incident.

PSG are a point back in third after failing to create anything from their territorial dominance, shorn of attacking inspiration without Neymar and Mauro Icardi, among others, while Kylian Mbappe started on the bench as he reportedly struggles with a thigh knock.

Marseille meanwhile are five points behind the leaders after their 1-1 draw with Reims on Saturday, although Andre Villas-Boas' side do have two games in hand on their title rivals.

PSG were the stronger side in a dismal first half which didn't see a shot on target until Moise Kean's weak flicked header was easily collected by Mike Maignan in the 42nd minute.

Lille, who on Friday were sold to Callisto, a subsidiary of the Merlin Partners investment fund, struggled to get a foothold in the biggest match of their league campaign so far. PSG's dominance continued in the second period but they were lacking their usual creative spark, and the highlight of the latter stages was Presnel Kimpembe's superb tackle on Burak Yilmaz with Lille charging towards goal on the break.

Mbappe had been brought on a minute before Kimpembe's challenge but did very little in the time afforded him, and the curtain was soon brought down on a forgettable encounter between two tired-looking teams.

THE RESULTS

PSG	0
Lille	0
Rennes	3
(Da Silva 23, Bourigeaud 70, Terrier 76)	
Lorient	0
Monaco	1
(Volland 15)	
Dijon	0
Bordeaux	2
(Pablo 38, Otavio 66)	
Strasbourg	0

brought on a minute before Kimpembe's challenge but did very little in the time afforded him, and the curtain was soon brought down on a forgettable encounter between two tired-looking teams.

MONACO BOUNCE BACK

Germany striker Kevin Volland scored his sixth French league goal as Monaco battled to a 1-0 win at bottom club Dijon to snap a three-match losing streak.

Their win moved the seventh-placed principality club within seven points of Lille and Lyon.

Former Bayer Leverkusen forward Volland slotted in the only goal on 15 minutes, with both sides seeing later efforts ruled out by VAR.

"After four straight wins and then three defeats on the bounce, the most important thing was to win," said coach Niko Kovac.

Rennes are two points ahead of Monaco in fifth after strolling to a 3-0 win at Lorient, who sit second-from-bottom after their 11th defeat of the season.

— AFP



Kylian Mbappe (left) of PSG tries to get in a shot against Lille during their French League football match at the Stade Pierre Mauroy stadium in Villeneuve d'Ascq, northern France, on Sunday. — AFP

NBA gears up for new-season start

Los Angeles, Dec. 21: The NBA takes a leap into the unknown on Tuesday when the 2020-2021 season tips off after the shortest offseason in history against the backdrop of a raging Covid-19 crisis across the United States.

Little more than two months after LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers brought the curtain down on a grueling, pandemic-interrupted season with victory in the NBA Finals in the Orlando quarantine bubble, a shortened 72-game campaign gets underway with games in New York and Los Angeles.

The Golden State Warriors face a road trip to take on the Brooklyn Nets before the Lakers and the Los Angeles Clippers clash at Staples Center.

The new season marks the first time league action has taken place at home arenas since the 2019-2020 season was dramatically suspended in March as the coronavirus pandemic erupted across the United States.

The upcoming season will take place in 30 locations across the United States at a time when

country continues to set new records for Coronavirus cases and fatalities.

The new-look schedule — reduced from the standard 82 games — will see teams play each other on consecutive nights more frequently to reduce the amount of time spent on the road.

The league has also only drawn up a schedule for the first half of the season — up to March 4 — in order to give itself flexibility over possible postponements.

Fans will also be largely absent from arenas.

Teams and players will be required to click back into gear after what has been the shortest offseason in history.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver had initially signalled that the league would restart in January, but the start was brought forward to December, a move which allows for a lucrative slate of televised games over the Christmas period.

The finals are due to conclude just one day before the Olympics get under way in Tokyo on July 23. — AFP



AC Milan's Portuguese forward Rafael Leao (centre) celebrates after opening the scoring during the Italian league match against Sassuolo at the Mapei Stadium in Sassuolo on Sunday. — AFP

Goal in just 6 seconds! AC Milan's Leao is quick gun

Milan, Dec. 21: AC Milan forward Rafael Leao scored the fastest-ever goal in Italian football history on Sunday, netting after just six seconds in a 2-1 win at Sassuolo which kept his side top of the table ahead of city rivals Inter Milan.

Milan, chasing a first Serie A title since 2011, launched straight onto the attack from kick-off, with Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu setting up Leao to slot home the rapid opener.

The previous fastest goal in the Italian top flight had been Paolo Poggi's for Piacenza against Fiorentina in December 2001 after eight seconds. Milan have a one-point

advantage on Antonio Conte's Inter who beat Spezia 2-1, with champions Juventus four points behind the leaders in third after a 4-0 win over Parma on Saturday.

"We have four or five kick-off patterns. (Leao) was prepared," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose side had been held 2-2 in both their last two league games against Parma and Genoa.

"Winning this match counts for a lot psychologically." Portuguese Leao, who usually plays on the left wing, started at centre-forward with star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic still out with a leg muscle problem and his replacement Ante Rebic also injured.

Calhanoglu thought he had scored second on nine minutes when he put home a Leao cross but the goal was disallowed for offside after a VAR review. However, Alexis Saelemaekers doubled Milan's lead in the 26th minute following good work from Theo Hernandez.

Domenico Berardi pulled a goal back late for Sassuolo, who sit sixth after the defeat. — AFP

SHORT TAKES
England hire Kallis as consultant

London: South African cricket icon Jacques Kallis will be a batting consultant for England's tour of Sri Lanka, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Monday.

The 45-year-old is third on the all-time list of Test run-scorers with 13,289 — he also took 292 wickets. Kallis coached Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League and worked with the South Africa team, but was not part of the set-up for England's recent coronavirus-disrupted tour.

"Former South Africa all-rounder Jacques Kallis joins the England setup for the first time as batting coaching consultant," the ECB said in a statement. England will leave for Sri Lanka on January 2 and play two Tests before going on to tour India. Both Tests will be played in Galle, starting on January 14 and 22. — AFP

Quinton happy to captain S. Africa

Johannesburg: South Africa captain Quinton de Kock on Monday revealed he agreed to lead the Test side as a short-term measure until the selectors find the right candidate. The development comes eight months after CSA's director of cricket Graeme Smith had ruled de Kock out of contention for Test captaincy. "When they (the selectors) told me the situation that we were in, I understood where they were coming from.

Obviously, I didn't accept it immediately," de Kock said. "I did think about it and I understood, it's just for now. For this season, it's not a long-term thing. It's just (till) when we get someone who really puts up their hand, they will take over. There does seem a lot on my plate but I am quite happy to do it for now," he added. — PTI

Hockey men to finish in 4th spot

Lausanne, Switzerland: The Indian men and women hockey teams will finish 2020 in fourth and ninth positions, respectively, after a major part of the year was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The international hockey federation (FIH) on Monday confirmed that the Belgium men's team and the Netherlands' women will finish the year at the top of the world rankings.

In January, the world body introduced its new match-based model for calculation of world rankings, with the FIH Hockey Pro League matches that were played in early part of the year seeing regular fluctuations in standings before the outbreak of the global health crisis brought all sporting activities to a grinding halt in March.

In the men's FIH world rankings, reigning world and European champions Belgium (2496.88 points) sit at the top ahead of 2019 FIH Hockey Pro League winners Australia (2nd place, 2385.70), Netherlands (3rd place, 2257.96) and India (4th place, 2063.78). — PTI

Mariners give BFC the blues

Goa: David Williams' 33rd-minute strike proved the difference as ATK Mohun Bagan got the better of Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League at the Fatorda Stadium on Monday.

The Australian scored his first goal of the campaign with a stunner which was enough to inflict on Bengaluru, their first defeat of the season.

The win took the Kolkata side level to 16 points from seven matches, the same as Mumbai City FC. Bengaluru stayed third with 12 points.

ATKMB looked threatening from the start and had good opportunities to convert their dominance into goals. But Manvir Singh saw both his efforts easily saved by the keeper during the first quarter.

ATKMB deservedly took the lead at the half-hour mark.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Sydney Thunder vs Perth Scorchers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Italian League: Crotone vs Parma from 11 pm, Juventus vs Fiorentina from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Indian Super League: Odisha vs North East United from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

WWE

WWE Raw: Bouts from 6.30 am on Sony Ten 1, HD

All eyes on Jadeja

Ravindra likely to replace Vihari in playing XI for second Test

Adelaide, Dec. 21: The Indian team management will be keenly monitoring Ravindra Jadeja's progress leading up to the Boxing Day Test against Australia this weekend as, if fit, the all-rounder could walk into the playing XI in place of Hanuma Vihari.

Jadeja, who suffered a concussion during the first T20 international, also sustained a hamstring injury which ruled him out of the first Test.

However, over the past few days when India were playing the Test match, Jadeja has slowly returned to the nets.

It has been learnt that the senior all-rounder is recovering well but it can't be said with certainty that he will be 100 per cent fit for the second

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Test in Melbourne starting on December 26.

But if fit, the axe will fall on Andhra Pradesh batsman Vihari, not because of his low scores in the Adelaide Test but purely based on the best combination that Ajinkya Rahane and Ravi Shastri can put on the field.

If Jadeja gets fit to bowl long spells, then there is no debate at all. Jadeja replaces Vihari on the basis of his all-round skills. Also it gives us an option to play five bowlers at the MCG," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

With Mohammed Shami already ruled out of the series because of a wrist fracture, India might just be tempted to go in with five specialist bowlers instead of the usual four, which has been their template for years.

INDIA'S PRACTICE CANCELLED

The Indian team had a scheduled practice session at the Adelaide Oval on Monday but due to steady rain in the



India's Ravindra Jadeja stretches during a practice session in Adelaide on December 16, ahead of the first Test against Australia. — AFP

South Australian city, it had to be cancelled.

With skipper Virat Kohli set to leave for India on Tuesday and the squad travelling to Melbourne, the skipper apparently had a chat with his team on the way forward after the 36 all-out debacle here.

ROHIT QUARANTINING IN SYDNEY

Senior batsman Rohit Sharma can start training from January 3 ahead of the Sydney Test. He is currently locked in a hard quarantine in a two-room apartment in Sydney.

The BCCI, at the moment, can't shift Rohit in the middle of quarantine. — PTI

BOXING DAY TEST IS CRUCIAL: BURNS

Adelaide, Dec. 21: If opener Joe Burns' views are any indication, another onerous task awaits an embattled Indian team, as Australia are entering the second Test believing that a favourable result for them in Melbourne could "decide the fate" of the four-match series.

"We have got some scars as well, we just have to prepare well, start well and carry on the momentum from the last game," Burns said during a virtual press conference on Monday.

We know that Indians are going to bounce back in the next Test, which is going to play a crucial role in (deciding) the fate of the series.

— JOE BURNS

Australia opener

"We know that Indians are going to bounce back in the next Test, which is going to play a crucial role in (deciding) the fate of the series."

The absence of Kohli and Mohammed Shami will be "big losses" but

Burns is expecting a strong comeback by the visitors. "I think Shami and Virat are obviously big losses for India. In saying that the Indian team does have very good depth as well. So, they are still going to be very challenging," Burns said, adding "It is always hard to replace world class players like that, but when we look (at the guys) that they got to come in, we are going to prepare well for the next game. We know that Indians are going to bounce back strongly."

— PTI

Haddin feels India can't recover

Melbourne, Dec. 21: Former Australia wicket-keeper Brad Haddin reckons the opening day/night Test was India's best shot at winning in the ongoing series as it will be very difficult for the visitors to script a turnaround after demoralizing eight-wicket loss in Adelaide.

India were bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the Border-Gavaskar trophy.

"I don't think they will (recover from the loss)," Haddin told SEN Radio.

The 43-year-old, who featured in 66 Tests for Australia, feels the conditions at the Adelaide Oval were conducive to the Indian bowling attack.

"I thought their only



Brad Haddin

opportunity to win a Test match was the first Test at Adelaide.

"I thought the conditions suited their bowling and I thought they'd get enough runs. But I don't think they'll be able to turn it around."

turn it around.

"You've got one Test up

at Brisbane where no one beats Australia. These next two wickets will be suited to Indian cricket, but I don't think they'll be able to turn it around,"

Haddin added. India created history by registering their maiden series win Down Under in 2018-19 on the back of a lethal pace-bowling attack.

However, the visitors are without the experienced Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami.

"They had a great bowling attack the last time they come out here, and now with Shami out with a broken arm they don't have enough depth to cover that," Haddin said.

Reflecting on the Indian batting collapse Haddin said "I think it's really concerning".

"Yes India were driving the game and we were talking at the start of day three about how Australia would get back into it, but the collapse they had has to leave some marks." — PTI

Chappell bats for on-field safety rules

Adelaide, Dec. 21: Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has advocated a review of on-field safety measures in cricket, saying it would be a good idea to "strengthen any law" that can protect tailenders when they face short-pitched bowling.

The run-up to the Test series between India and Australia was marked by a series of blows to head and concussion-related substitutes, reviving the debate around the use of bouncers by fast bowlers. Chappell rejected the idea of banning the delivery altogether.

"Any talk of completely banning the bouncer should be dismissed as quickly as bowlers removed New Zealand batsmen like-for-like replacement about a player not being a like-for-like replacement

Chappell wrote in *ESPNcricinfo*.

Instead, the batting great added, "The time is ripe for a worldwide review into on-field safety, including batsmen, bowlers and umpires, with batting technique a top priority."

The time is ripe for a worldwide review into on-field safety, including batsmen, bowlers and umpires, with batting technique a top priority.

— IAN CHAPPELL

Former Australia captain

"seems pointless".

A concussed Ravindra Jadeja being replaced by leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal in the T20 series is a case in point.

"The heat rose in this argument when Chahal claimed three wickets and the player-of-the-match award in India's narrow victory. Complaining about a player not being a like-for-like replacement

"seems pointless; it's always going to be difficult to please all parties."

Chappell also stressed on improving the batsmen's technique to face the bouncer.

"... Just addressing the concussion-sub issue doesn't get to the heart of the matter — it's the rising number of batsmen hit on the head that then leads to the need for a

replacement player.

"Following the tragic death of Phil Hughes, Cricket Australia conducted a safety review. Incredibly, this process didn't include a look at technique, which is the most important aspect in ensuring fewer batsmen receive blows to the head," Chappell said.

"Often batsmen duck into a short ball and get hit. Many times a ball only bounces between waist and chest height but still hits a batsman in the head because he has taken his eye off the ball and ducked. Will Pucovski's latest concussion is a case in point."

He said "replacing a concussed player is not such a perplexing problem" during the pandemic. — PTI

Sindhu, Saina ready for action

New Delhi, Dec. 21: India's top shuttlers PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal will be seen in action for the first time since the coronavirus-forced break when they compete in three upcoming tournaments in Bangkok, including the prestigious BWF World Tour Finals.

With Olympic qualifications in mind, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) on Monday announced a strong eight-member squad to participate in the three upcoming tournaments, scheduled in January.

back when he played the Denmark Open in October.

"We are very happy to see badminton finally getting back on the court. It gives us hope that tournaments can eventually make a steady comeback in near future. Most of our players haven't played tournaments in the last 7-8 months," BAI general secretary Ajay Singhania said.

"However, they have been training to the best of their abilities at the camp. The purpose of sending a full-strength team in these tournaments so that players can get the much-needed tournament practice ahead of the Olympic qualifiers," he added.

The team will be followed by Toyota Thailand Open (January 19-24) and the prestigious HSBC BWF World Tour Finals which is rescheduled for January 27-31.

After the coronavirus outbreak in March disrupted the sporting world resulting in cancellation or postponement of a number of tournaments, this will be the first time that top Indian players, apart from Srikanth, will feature in any international tournament.

The former World No. 1, Srikanth had made a come-

GOLFER KO CAPS YEAR WITH CME GROUP TITLE

Naples, Dec. 21: Jin Young Ko missed most of the LPGA Tour season and still won the yearlong money title.

That's what a \$1.1 million check does.

Ko, the No. 1 player in the world, put an emphatic capper on her truncated year on Sunday by shooting a final-round 6-under 66 and winning the CME Group Tour Championship by five strokes over Hannah Green and Sei Young Kim.

"I still can't believe it, that I'm here, that I won this tournament," Ko said.

With a birdie on the



Members of the G9 team receive their prize after winning the 3x3 basketball tournament in Hyderabad.

G9 win thriller, capture crown

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

G9 won the Under 22 category in the FIBA conducted 3x3 basketball tournament held at the Apollo Health City.

In a thrilling final, G9 defeated NPA Basketball Club 16 (Salman Khan 6, Rahul 5, Sudershan 4).

The Under 16 boys title was claimed by Grizzlies who defeated AVR 12-9.

The Future Kids School emerged winners in the Under 16 girls category by defeating St Joseph's Public School 13-10.

Peter Santosh Divakar, FIBA Referee and Chairman Technical Commission, Telangana

Basketball Association and S. Hanumanth Rao, Joint Secretary, Telangana Basketball Association distributed the prizes.

THE RESULTS (all finals)

Under 22 Men: G9 18 (Kothari 5, Dinesh Reddy 6, Goutham 6) bt NPA Basketball Club 16 (Salman Khan 6, Rahul 5, Sudershan 4)

Under 16 Boys: Grizzlies 12 (R