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However, he said, the quality will dip again, starting Monday due to predicted high humidity, low wind speed and temperatures.

Womenia

BY WOMEN, FOR THE WOMEN



TEJAL SINHA

THUVAM is run by run by three women including its founder Ponmani, was backed by a strong resolve to prevent women from migrating from the region.

In March 2017, SP Ponmani, a fashion design graduate from Madurai, then 24 years old, visited Cuckoo Forest School near Puliyannur village in Krishnagiri district to attend an event hosted by Nurpu, a handloom weaving society founded by C Sivagurunathan.

Ponmani shares, "Being at the cuckoo forest school for some time and I get to know the lives of the rural women in the nearby village puliyannur. Due to their financial needs, a lot of women are migrating to metro cities in search of jobs, leaving their kids behind. I wanted to do something which would help the children to grow up with their mothers. That was the moment idea of starting the tailoring classes evolved. In 2017, tailoring classes were started by renting a small room in the puliyannur village. Initially the turnout was very poor and irregular. Gradually 2-3 women were coming for the tailoring classes regularly."

After a year or so of the tailoring classes, around 4 women were able to learn learned stitch cloth for their own family needs.

She adds, "If they get a decent income regularly by doing tailoring in their free time at home they won't be going for jobs to the cities. That is when the idea about designing a product came to my mind. "We shall be able to fulfill our basic needs from the skills we have learnt" So we de-

Thuvam is an initiative to eradicate the rural migration by tailor clothes right in the middle of the village. They focus on sustainable clothing possibilities in lingerie's and much more sustainable products which we feel is the need of the hour



cided to launch a brand named "Thuvam", a Tamil word which means "the path". This is our first humble initiative in creating a 'new path' in cloth products."

According to Ponmani, people in the village didn't believe that she was giving them free tailoring course. Later few of the women came forward to join the classes that were conducted. After the basic classes like machine handling, basic sewing and small pattern goods, the ladies believe and continue the classes. After that they started to make lingerie's and sell them via online sites and their website www.thuvam.in to provide rural empowerment.

Sharing about how 'Thuvam' is different from the other brands in the market, she shares, "After making them, we gave it to our friends used these products and from their suggestions and corrections, we shaped it into the perfect form for customer use. The product is made by woven fabric. Basically, a cot-

ton garment is bleached, dyed and then printed. Even if you don't include these three steps, growing cotton, making the cloth and stitching it into a garment uses anywhere between 100 to 150 litres of water. Thuvam simply eliminates these steps, conserves water and makes them safe for your skin. One of our designs uses elastic simply because women are more used to it than the string that Thuvam prefers. Knitted fabric requires heavy machinery. That's not the case with hand-woven fabric. Moreover, most of the stitching for woven fabric can be done on simple sewing machines."

Along with Ponmani, there are two other women Mumtaz and Pradeepa working along with her, who earn nearly Rs 250 per day for piece count.

Toys refashioned from scrap

According to her, whenever she saw an object, there was always a question raised in her mind, what if it is made by cloth

or how to sew a safe cover for that object.

Ponmani adds, "I learned toy-making as part of my curriculum. I gradually taught women from my unit too and soon. Initially, I stuffed the dolls with strips of cloth from old T-shirts and kurtas. I also tried stuffing the dolls with ilavan panju (silk cotton), but they did not retain the shape a few days on, so now we use polyester stuffing. I feel cloth toys are better than their plastic counterparts. They do not harm the environment and can be washed, and re-purposed after their lifetime. There is no risk of choking and mothers can safely offer such toys to their children. Right now in the Thuvam cloth dolls range, we designed elephants and fishes both palm-sized. I think these dolls have added more color to our lives, literally. The underwear we make is off-white in color, since they are unbleached and for a change, our women are working with colored fabric."

TWEET PATROL



PALAK MUCHHAL
@PALAKMUCHHAL3

May you all be blessed with joy and love not just on Christmas, but throughout the year! Have a blissful and a Merry Christmas! ♥



Re-wear and Reuse, style mantras of 2021

SUJATA ASSOMULL

BUYING sustainable fashion was predicted to be the trend of 2020 last December. At this time most of us had not even heard of the Coronavirus and those who had, certainly thought it was something that would not affect the whole world.

The pandemic, just like any other major global crisis has redefined everything. It is no longer about shopping sustainably but wearing the clothes we have sustainably.

As we sat at home, we no longer needed to consume fashion like we once did. And when the lockdown went from weeks into months we craved the joy of dressing up. We looked at our closets in both disgust and desire. We realised how we owned too many clothes--- and how the very act of dressing on a daily basis brought routine into our lives.

While you dress for an occasion, you actually dress for yourself—for the pleasure it brings you. And when you buy new clothes they come with the hope of new adventures. This pandemic drove home the point we need to buy less. In the United Kingdom alone it is estimated that 350,000 of clothes end up in a landfill. Sustainable fashion activist Livia Firth, the founder of Eco Age (a company which certifies brands for their sustainability) began the #30Wears campaign to encourage us to only buy a garment if we wear it multiple times. After all the most sustainable clothes are the ones we own already. Which is why the mantra for 2021 has to be re-wear and reuse. And actually you can have such fun learning how to rewear your clothes.

Be Your Own Upcycling Stylist

During lockdown, where we had time on our hands, I spent time really looking at my closet. Understanding the clothes I wear, the ones I do not. Some of the clothes you do not wear, simply need a bit of "do-over". Living in India is really a boon, as there are so many good tailors who can help you spruce up pieces. Sometimes a pair of trousers simply need to be shortened or a dress just needs its shoulders corrected. Other times you can be your own designer. For instance, take old textiles like discarded dupattas or unwanted saris and turn them into resort friendly kaftans, or

even jackets for a dinner party. And some pieces simply just need to pass on to a sister or a friend. Your junk might be someone else's treasure.

Vintage

Shopping for Vintage is almost like fashion portfolio management—you need to know when it's a good time to buy a vintage piece and when is the time to cash in. When it comes to accessories some fashion pieces really are object d'art. Right now for instance the Bottega Veneta pouch is an "it bag" but how much cooler would it be if it came out in the 1970s be. This pouch clutch was made popular by Lauren Hutton in the 1980 film American Gigolo and there was a reissue of a few years ago. The new 2020 version references the "Lauren 1980 Clutch". Auction house Christie's

While you dress for an occasion, you actually dress for yourself—for the pleasure it brings you. And when you buy new clothes they come with the hope of new adventures

and Sotheby's now regularly hold auctions of handbags, and there websites such as The RealReal and The Luxury Closet specialises in pre-loved luxury pieces, you can often find vintage gems if you have a keen eye. Buying vintage is as circular fashion friendly as it gets.

The Fashion Swap

It was while I was in my 20s that the "it bag" syndrome started, and of course we all had tight budgets--- (And could never understand how Carrie Bradshaw could afford all those bags!) So we each bought one "it bag" every year and then did swap every month or so. And it's a system I have restarted with friends—for instance I have had my eye on the Sabyasachi Royal Bengal Tiger Belt for a while now--- my friend has it and said was bored of it. So I now have it, and in exchange she borrowed one of the statement necklaces, that I have just worn so much that I am tired of it.



Keep your skin glowing



Moisturising is one of the most important steps that one must do to have a glowing skin in winters

WINTER is the coldest and yet the most beautiful season of the year in some places. Winter is the time when the days are short and nights become very long and it is also the time when most of us enjoy a holiday traveling with family and friends or just curling up in bed with a favourite book and a piping hot cuppa! Perhaps some people won't agree with this, because winter is also the time that aggravates medical conditions like arthritis and the freezing winter wind can turn our skin and hair dry, and render the scalp itchy.

Layer-up your skincare

Just as you would pop your favourite winter coat over a cashmere jumper, and that over a thermal vest, apply moisture-attracting serums to clean skin, such as ones containing hyaluronic acid. Then smooth a facial oil all over, and add a

nourishing cream on top to seal the deal.

Protect your skin from water contact

Try layering a cleansing oil over the skin before stepping into the bath or shower. Leave on while you soak or wash, and remove just before you get out. Immediately layer your skincare or body care on to just damp skin. This will help retain moisture and leave skin supple.

Take extra care with your eye area and lips

The skin here is thinner and has little-to-no oil glands to protect itself. Use serums and oils around the eyes that soothe and protect the skin. On the lips, use occlusive balms to provide a barrier against the elements.

Invest in a humidifier

Harsh winter weather creates a challenge for the skin as humidity is low both indoors and out. Using a humidifier helps replenish the top layer of the epidermis by preventing the air from becoming too dry.

Wear breathable fabrics

Opt for light, soft layers next to your skin, rather than synthetic fabrics that may cause itching.

Look to natural ingredients

Fragranced body creams and soaps will dry the skin further try switching to unscented, natural formulas.

Avoid harsh, alcohol-heavy cleansers

Opt for cream or balm products instead. You

can double cleanse if your skin is really parched — use water with the first cleanse but make the second one a dry cleanse.

Wear a serum high in vitamin C

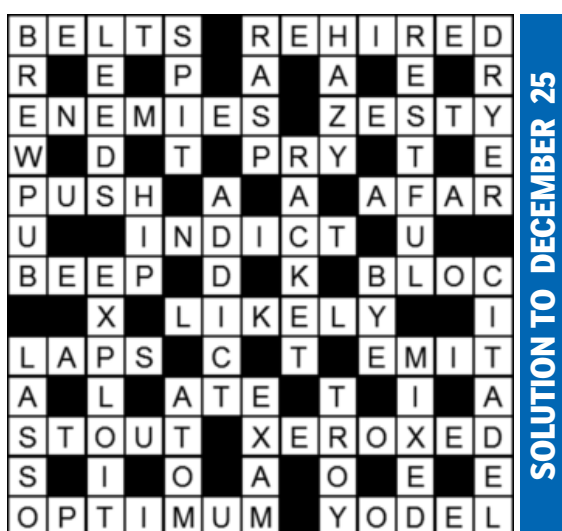
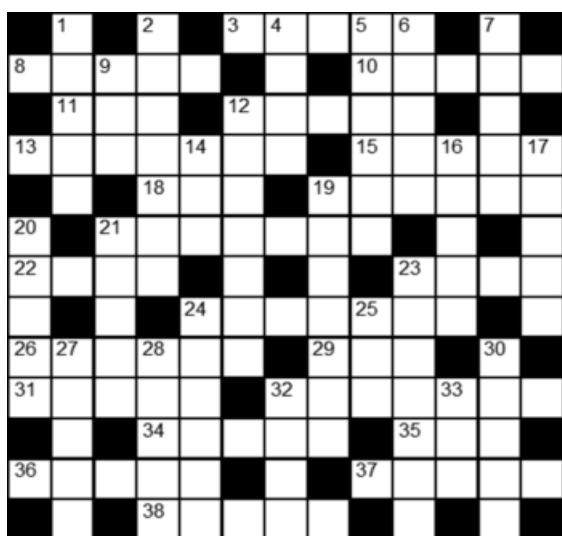
This encourages the production of collagen and cell turnover.

Apply a honey mask three times a week

Do this in the evenings after removing your makeup. Honey is a natural humectant, meaning it seals in moisture. This will instantly give your skin a lovely glow, too. Leave on for 10 to 15 minutes and don't forget your neck.

Use face oil overnight

Look for ingredients such as rosehip, soybean and jojoba, which all possess highly hydrating properties.



SOLUTION TO DECEMBER 25

CROSSWORD

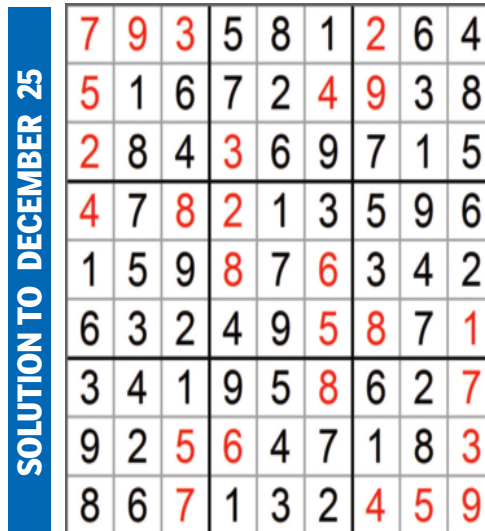
Across

- 3 Improve a performance or a speech, etc. (2-3)
- 8 Form of speech (5)
- 10 Approaches (5)
- 11 Leap on one foot (3)
- 12 A bacterial disease of the skin (5)
- 13 He fails to exercise a right (3-4)
- 15 Tragic Montague (5)
- 18 Facial feature (3)
- 19 Eye part (6)
- 21 Conveyed or bore (7)
- 22 Cat's noise (4)
- 23 Move slowly (4)
- 24 Relieve (7)
- 26 Frivolousness (6)
- 29 Family (3)
- 31 Blood-sucker (5)
- 32 Took away (7)
- 34 Cut, chopped (5)
- 35 Outer edge (3)
- 36 Former US president (5)
- 37 Smiles broadly or sunnily (5)
- 38 Rapid surprise attacks (5)

Down

- 1 For a special purpose (2,3)
- 2 Widely liked (7)
- 4 Austere (4)
- 5 Hardened (6)
- 6 Stupefy with drink (5)
- 7 Primp (5)
- 9 Charged atom (3)
- 12 Hansen's disease (7)
- 14 Knight's title (3)
- 16 Winnie the Pooh creator (5)
- 17 Vows (5)
- 19 Scolded, admonished or berated (7)
- 20 Tumble or splash (5)
- 21 Long for (5)
- 23 Disregards (7)
- 24 Greek counterpart of Minerva (6)
- 25 My ___ in life : my purpose or intention in life... ? (3)
- 27 Very strange (5)
- 28 Watery humour (5)
- 30 Burglar's tool (5)
- 32 Pore over (4)
- 33 By way of (3)

SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO DECEMBER 25

NEWS ROUNDUP

Preity Zinta on year 2020: Hope the worst is behind us

Bollywood actress Preity Zinta on Christmas shared a video on social media where she advised her fans to stay home, stay safe and be silly! "Merry Christmas everyone. Cannot believe this year is finally coming to an end. Hope the worst is behind us and next year will be a happy and a positive one. So stay home, stay safe and be silly. Love you all. #MerryChristmas #HappyHolidays #StayHome #StaySafe," tweeted Preity from her verified account.

The actress also shared a video where she reminded everyone to take the necessary precautions for the pandemic.

Preity said, "2020 has been a difficult year for everybody. The good news is that it's finally coming to an end. I wish you all lots of love, lots of happiness and good health. Please don't go out and if you do, wear masks."

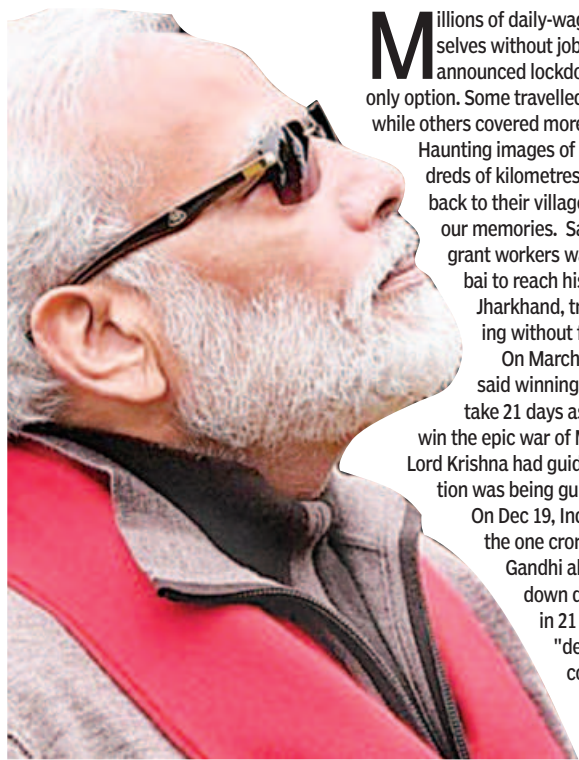




MILLIONS WALKED AS INDIA WATCHED



Mar 25: Mahabharata was won in 18 days, COVID-19 battle will last 21 days: PM Modi
May 15: Impossible to monitor who is walking and not walking: SC on migrants crisis



Millions of daily-wage migrants suddenly found themselves without jobs and on streets when the Centre announced lockdown. For many, walking was the only option. Some travelled for a few hundred kilometres, while others covered more than a thousand to go home. Haunting images of hungry migrants trudging hundreds of kilometres on foot, cycles, trucks and trains back to their villages would be difficult to erase from our memories. Salaria Hembram and six other migrant workers walked almost 1,800 km from Mumbai to reach his home in Chaibasa district in Jharkhand, trekking up to 45 km a day and going without food, sometimes.

On March 25, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said winning the war against Coronavirus will take 21 days as opposed to the 18 days taken to win the epic war of Mahabharata. He added that while Lord Krishna had guided the Pandavas to victory, the nation was being guided by its 1.3 billion citizens.

On Dec 19, India's Covid-19 caseload surpassed the one crore mark, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged that the unplanned lockdown did not manage to "win the battle in 21 days as the PM claimed", but it "destroyed" millions of lives in the country. More than 96 lakh patients have recovered and 1.46 lakh people have died so far. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) said 515 doctors (Covid warriors) died due to COVID-19. Dr VK Paul, a NITI Aayog member, had claimed zero new cases from May 16, 2020. Six sitting MLAs and three sitting MPs have succumbed to the virus till date. The biggest name in Covid casualty has been former President Pranab Mukherjee.

The Supreme Court too effectively washed its hands from this humanitarian catastrophe.

The top court declined to entertain a plea seeking direction to the Centre to identify migrants walking on the roads and provide them shelter and food. The court said that it is "impossible for this court to monitor who is walking and not walking".

"Let the state decide. Why should the court hear or decide?" the Supreme Court said as it dismissed the plea.

The decision not to interfere earlier and to have accepted the Solicitor General's statement that there were no migrants on the road is certainly open to criticism, says the former Law Minister and senior advocate.

Retired Justice A. P. Shah, said top court "failed to satisfactorily acknowledge that the fundamental rights of migrant labourers have been violated".

Finally, on June 9, the Supreme Court directed all State and Union Territory Governments to identify, register and transport all migrant workers who wish to return to their homes within 15 days.

More than one crore, or 10 million, migrant labourers returned to their home states on foot during March-June 2020, the government said. 81,385 accidents occurred on the roads

during the period March-June 2020 with 29,415 fatalities, the Parliament was informed. The Centre said it does not maintain separate data in respect of migrant workers who have died in road accidents during the lockdown. One hundred and ninety eight migrant workers lost their lives in road accidents during the lockdown period, according to data compiled by the SaveLIFE Foundation, a road safety NGO.

The Union Home Ministry had said the Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Delhi's Nizamuddin locality in March led to the spread of coronavirus infection. Its members were accused of being 'super spreaders', with terms like 'Corona Jihad' creating a lot of noise.

On December 15, Delhi court acquitted 36 foreigners who were facing trial for allegedly flouting COVID-19 and visa norms whilst attending the event, which had around 9,000 participants.

Some BJP leaders blamed the gathering for the country's worsening Covid situation — senior functionaries of the party and in the government likened the Tablighis to "terrorists", excoriated them "for moving around like a bomb" and described the meet as a "Talibani crime".

India also witnessed intense protests in the national capital against the newly formed citizenship law by the Modi government. This led to some of the most violent communal clashes Delhi had witnessed over the last few decades.

Violence erupted in northeast Delhi on 24 February after hostility between the supporters of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and protesters spiralled out of control. 53 people died and nearly 200 were left injured.



Nov 13 BJP's stellar show in Bihar

A stellar performance by the BJP enabled the ruling NDA to attain a simple majority in the Bihar assembly. The saffron party, which had contested 110 seats, won 74 while the JD(U) which fought 115, won only 43. With four seats each won by junior allies HAM and VIP, the NDA had won simple majority with 125 seats.

The opposition Grand Alliance fell way short of the magic mark. The total number of seats won by all its five constituents stood at 110. Nonetheless, the RJD emerged as the single largest party in the assembly bagging

75 seats. The Congress managed to win only 19 of the 70 it had contested. The Left parties, though, sprang a surprise winning 16 out of the 29 seats the CPI(ML), the CPI and the CPI(M) had contested.

BJP in MP won 19 out of the 28 assembly constituencies, giving it a comfortable majority in the House and providing stability to its eight-month-old government. The opposition Congress clinched nine seats. The comfortable victory of the BJP, which needed only eight seats to have a full majority on its own in the 229-member House, will not only provide stability to the party-led government, but also further cement the position of senior leader Jyotiraditya Scindia, who quit the Congress earlier this year and joined the BJP.



AAP reigns supreme

The AAP won 62 seats in the Delhi Election 2020 and claimed the CM throne again for the third time. BJP secured 8 seats, gaining 5 more seats since the 2015. Kejriwal made it clear that his party would focus on issues such as clean water, education, and health. He asserted that AAP would not indulge in negative campaigning. On the other hand, BJP refrained from naming any CM candidate. In the last few days prior to the voting, BJP raked up Citizenship Amendment Act and the protest at Shaheen Bagh against the legislation



As many as 20 people, including two pilots, were killed and many injured after an Air India Express flight from Dubai overshoot the runway of Kerala's Karipur airport, plunged down a slope and broke into two pieces

China kills 20 Indian soldiers



June 16

In a major escalation of tensions between India and China, as many as 20 Indian Army personnel were killed in a "violent face off" with Chinese troops in the Galwan area of Ladakh, the Indian Army said. "Seventeen Indian troops who were critically injured in the line of duty at the stand off location and exposed to sub-zero temperatures in the high altitude terrain succumbed to their injuries, taking the total that were killed in action to 20."

Chinese-Indian border incursions are nothing new: according to the Indian government, 334 "encroachments" have already happened in 2014 (with 411, 426 and 213 incidents in 2013, 2012 and 2011, respectively).

Disputed since China annexed all of Tibet in 1950, the border still eludes clarification. India claims about 15,000 square miles of Chinese-controlled territory in Aksai Chin, while China claims Indian Arunachal Pradesh (about 34,000 square miles) as "Southern Tibet".



FARMERS ON STREETS

September 15

The farmers' protest is against the three farm acts which were passed by the Parliament of India in September 2020. The acts have been described as "anti-farmer laws" by many farmer union. Farmers and politicians from the Opposition also say it would leave farmers at the "mercy of corporates". The government, however, maintained that they will make it effortless for farmers to sell their produce directly to big buyers, and stated protests are based on misinformation.

Soon after the acts were introduced, unions began holding local protests, mostly in Punjab. After two months of protests, farmers— notably from Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana— began a movement named 'Dilli Chalo', in which tens of thousands of farmers marched towards the nation's capital. Police and law enforcement used water cannons and tear gas

to prevent the farmers from entering Delhi. On 26 November, a nationwide general strike that, according to the trade unions, reportedly involved approximately 250 million people took place in support of the farmers according to the trade unions that organised the protests.

The Supreme Court said it recognises the farmers' fundamental right to protest, but at the same time, it cannot affect other fundamental rights or the right to life of others, reported Live Law. "A protest can be constitutional till it does not destroy property or endanger life," said the top court.

So far, 41 farmers have died in Punjab as well as Delhi since September 15 when protests against farm laws intensified in Punjab and Haryana. Of these, 30 were from Malwa belt alone, six from Doaba belt, two from Majha belt and three from Haryana.

A Sikh priest committed suicide and another farmer passing away due to the cold weather.



March 20: Justice for Nirbhaya

More than seven years after a 23-year-old medical student was gang-raped in a moving bus in Delhi, four men convicted for the brutal assault were hanged. The four men -- Akshay Kumar Singh, Pawan Gupta, Vinay Sharma and Mukesh Singh -- were hanged at 5:30 am at Delhi's Tihar Jail, hours after the Supreme Court, in a mid-night hearing, refused to grant them relief and stay their executions. The four were hanged simultaneously, a first in Tihar Jail's history. On board the bus, the woman and her friend were assaulted by a group of six people. The woman, who was gang-raped, died two weeks later. The

brutal nature of the attack led to country-wide protests and forced the government to set up a commission to review the country's laws on rape and crime against women. The commission's review ultimately led to laws prescribing stricter punishments for crimes against women.

Six people were accused of gang-raping and murdering the 23-year-old medical student, who came to be called Nirbhaya. Of the six, one was a juvenile and was convicted by the juvenile justice board. He served three years in a reformation home and was released.

Of the remaining five, one committed suicide in jail. The four others were convicted by a trial court and sentenced to die.

Pandemic has changed education forever

The COVID-19 has resulted in schools shut all across the country. Globally, over 1.2 billion children are out of the classroom.

As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. The classroom will be supplemented by online coursework. This way, students may be required to physically attend classes on fewer days and will be free to study at their own pace from home. This will also give them sufficient time to assimilate information. All the teachers will have to be trained for online teaching as well along with classroom teaching. This will go a long way to ensure that they are comfortable with technology and will be able to effortlessly switch between online and offline modes of teaching the curriculum. And above all, teachers will feel empowered to deliver a more impactful lecture than before. With information readily available just a

click away, the role of a teacher from that of a 'knowledge-giver' will gradually move to one of a facilitator. This will help the teachers focus more effectively on teaching and course improvement.

Physical classrooms offer a high degree of interactivity with the teacher and also among students. Educators will have to bring in a lot of innovations to bring in the element of interactivity and collaboration in their e-learning modules.

Soon, educators will have to discard the 'one-size-fits-all' approach that is mostly followed in traditional classrooms and use technology to offer a learning experience that is uniquely suited to a child's learning needs. The blended approach to learning, in turn, will help all types of students, since they will have the opportunity to engage with different types of content such as video, audio, presentations, thereby increasing the ability to personalize learning.



A contentious trade deal?

LONDON and Brussels have announced a Brexit trade deal. “The deal is done,” Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on the eve of Christmas, on Twitter. This is the first post-Brexit trade deal even as the United Kingdom is all set to leave the EU market on January 1. The deal covers not only trade in goods and services, but transport, energy, fisheries, data protection, social security, among others. “This will create barriers to trade in goods and services and to cross-border mobility and exchanges that do not exist today - in both directions,” said the European Union, in a statement. This deal is being termed as a fair and balanced one by all which protects EU interests.

The news is a welcome development for businesses in the U.K. and Europe, and puts an end to more than four years of what has, at times, seemed interminable economic uncertainty. EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier agreed that it was a day of relief but “tinged with some sadness.” This deal sets the terms for a post-Brexit future as close neighbours living apart. No one imagined that it would be such a smooth sail. There was no guarantee that the talks would succeed on this. Arguments in Brussels between Michel Barnier and David Frost, his British counterpart, went on through the week. Three familiar issues were at stake: a level playing field for regulation to

prevent unfair competition; some continuing EU countries’ access to British fishing waters; and a dispute-settlement mechanism. In the end Britain President, Johnson and President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen was brought in to make the necessary compromises. As has been the pattern since the 2016 referendum, Britain has generally had to make most of the concessions, abandoning its initial position of keeping most of the benefits of the EU’s single market without the obligations. This reflects the power balance between the two, as well as the fact that no-deal would have been more damaging to Britain than to the EU. The prime minister acknowledged he had been forced to give ground on his demands on fishing. Fishing makes up just 0.12 per cent of the UK’s economy but the negotiations went down to the wire over what EU boats are al-

lowed to catch in UK waters. In future 25 per cent of EU boats’ fishing rights in UK waters will be transferred to the UK fishing fleet, over a period of five-and-a-half years. Barrie Deas, the head of the National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations, said the UK had made “significant concessions on fish”, and “there will be a lot of disappointed and frustrated fishermen tonight”. That a deal has been struck itself is big good news. The fine print has a lot to say and several contentious issues could crop up. This is bound to happen. Discussions are said to have been elaborate and down to the wire on all the issues. It is said that for most British, the more immediate impact will be losing the right to free movement in the EU. Northern Ireland will remain in the single market while Britain students will have no entry into EU’s Erasmus scheme.

Indian team needs urgent injection to revitalise itself

YAJURVINDRA SINGH

THE uncertainties of cricket played a cruel joke on the Indian team in the first Test match against Australia in Adelaide. Indian supporters and fans were aghast when India posted their lowest ever total of 36 runs in their second innings. The super stars of modern India, considered to be the best cricket team that India has ever produced, looked amateurish. They now need to resurrect and forget the appalling performance. Cricket, as one says, is a great leveller. The highs and lows are unpredictable; therefore, the game is a way of life. It teaches one to be humble in victory and resilient after one faces defeat. The Indian team will need to bring about that quality when they get into the second Test match starting on Boxing Day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Melbourne.

What happened to the Indian batting will remain a topic of discussion. There were shades of such performance even when India toured South Africa, England, and New Zealand earlier. This was not a unique incident in the way that the Indian side succumbed to good, consistent swing bowling. However, the paltry total is the bone of contention.

One was amused to hear one of the elite commentators mentioning as to whether India will surpass their lowest total of 42 runs which was another shocking performance at Lord’s in 1974. This was the least of one’s worries when the Indian batters were falling like ninepins. The Australian bowlers did bowl wonderfully well and, with their tails-up, looked unplayable at times. The performance of the Indian team had experts and critics analysing their faulty batting technique and lack of footwork. Many had never played the game at that level and some of the senior cricketers were the ones who had also succumbed to such a disaster in their playing days.

For me, however, rather than India’s batting ability, which was quite acceptable in the first innings, it was the mental weakness that was highlighted when the chips were down. India has had such batting debacles in the past and the reason given was always that Indians lacked the mental toughness to perform under pressure. India of the 21st century boast how Indians have got over their inferiority complex and have the strength and belief now to shine in every possible way against the best in the world.

These were also the sort of statements made and impressions created which were conveyed to the cricketing world. This, therefore, naturally created a huge expectation from the Indian cricket fans and followers. The last two years have shown that when the team is faced with an adverse situation, as it happened in the World Cup and on their overseas tours, the players seem to collapse mentally.

The social media is an area of pressure that was never experienced before in a cricketer’s life. It is a wonderful tool that is a boon when one does well as most of the Indian cricket stars having millions of followers, but it becomes the medium that mocks and criticises one when one fails. The young Prithvi Shaw, a very talented Indian batting prodigy, who was hailed as one who could follow in the footsteps of the great Sachin Tendulkar, with a Test century on debut and a healthy average of 48 in Test cricket, became a prime example of it.

His failure in both the innings in the first Test match has been analysed and assessed to death. He definitely will not be playing in any of the matches to follow but will be a complete mental mess on his return. His technique will be tampered with and one wonders in time, whether he will become a victim to being one who finally lost his natural flare and stroke-play for which he was renowned.

Shaw’s replacement in the Indian team will be K.L. Rahul, who went through exactly the same predicament and lost his place in the Indian Test side. A good run in the limited-overs format has Rahul back in contention, with a belief that form and confidence will get him past his earlier faults. One hopes he does well or else he would be the next in-line to come home defeated.

The present Australian side is not a great batting unit if Steve Smith fails. India were in the driving seat

with a lead of 53 runs in the first innings of the Test match even after dropping five catches. The Australian batting also failed pathetically, having scored less than 200 runs. The Indian bowling did really well. However, it was the Australian bowling in that one session that broke the back of the Indian batting in the second innings of the match. It takes 10 good deliveries to get a team out in cricket. Normally, lady luck shines on a team as well as on the players who encounter it. Unfortunately for India, December 19, 2020, was not one of those days.

The Indian team must be mentally defeated. They have a coach in Ravi Shastri who has experienced failures such as this in his career and has been mentally tough to get over it. He has a major task in getting his boys back in the fray, mentally, physically and technically. In this pandemic bio-secure bubble that the players are subjected to, a mental coach would have been an essential person to assist him.

The Boxing Day Test match in Melbourne at the scenic MCG is considered to be an event which brings the curtains down on the years sporting activities. India will need to showcase sheer determination and resilience in order to achieve success. Let’s hope they are as strong as their coach to mentally do so.

(Yajurvindra Singh is a former Test cricketer. Views expressed are personal)



The battle for Bengal enters a critical phase



A tough battle is ahead in West Bengal Assembly elections. The Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee who was once beneficiary of the politics of defection is now facing threat of losing power. What started as a trickle is turning into a flood. It appears that the popularity graph of ‘Didi’ is on a downward slide. If TMC wins the Assembly elections in 2021, it would be with a razor-thin majority.

When Mamata toppled the 34-year rule of Left Front and won 227 out of 294 seats in alliance with Congress party and Socialist Unity Centre of India (TMC alone won 184 seats), several Congress MLAs and left leaders joined TMC. A decade after virtually holding sway over West Bengal politics, Mamata for the first time is facing the electoral heat and the forthcoming election has become a matter of do or die for TMC.

This will be the first election for Bengal tigress without her master strategist and second-in-command Mukul Roy. While Mukul had joined BJP in 2017 and had been made national vice president, another important TMC leader Suvendu Adhikari also joined BJP. The outflow from TMC did not end here.

Six sitting TMC MLAs and an MP joined the saffron party. Whether the BJP will be able to dethrone Mamata or not, a political scare for TMC has been created and it appears that she has an uphill task this time. It is not just the aggressive attitude of BJP but Mamata’s unquestioned popularity has gone down in the State and she is showing signs of weakness.

BJP had won only three out of 294 seats in 2016 assembly election. Three years later, in 2019, BJP won 18 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats which means that they got a lead in 125 Assembly segments which translates into 40 percent of the vote share. On the other hand Mamata had won 22 Lok Sabha seats and got 44 percent vote share. Hence pollsters feel that a 4-5 percent increase in the vote share for BJP could topple the Mamata government.

However, Mamata who has

been a fighter all through is continuing to put up a tough fight. She always has been a mass leader and is leaving no stone unturned to see that she comes back to power again and has been posing a challenge to the saffron party.

The Left and the Congress which have for all practical purposes lost their importance have formed into an alliance. Though this would lead to a triangular contest, they would get squeezed out and it will be a direct fight between the TMC and BJP.

The BJP government at the Centre is trying to win in the state by capitalising on the Matua vote bank in addition to other equations. Matuas are Namasudras, a Scheduled Caste group with a presence in at least 70 Assembly seats. While no official count is available, community leaders put their population at 3 crore. Matuas trace their ancestry to East Bengal, and many of them entered West Bengal after Partition and after the formation of Bangladesh.

The community is important for a number of reasons. Since 2009, the Matuas were mostly known to be Trinamool Congress supporters. The TMC had been mobilising the support of Matua’s even before the 2011 Assembly election.

When the BJP presented the Citizenship Amendment Bill in Parliament, which was subsequently passed, the TMC-led State government strongly opposed it. The BJP may not get the support of Matuas now. The incidents regarding the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam has been an important factor for this. There has been a direct impact on the Namasudras of Bengal as a lot of Hindu refugees were left out of the Register.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked about the issues related to citizenship of Namasudras during his visit to 24 Parganas in early 2019 which is said to be the stronghold of Matuas. In the election of 2019, Shantanu was given the BJP ticket from the Lok Sabha seat of Bangaon (SC) and he became an MP, defeating his aunt Mamata Bala. But still, the BJP does not seem to be enjoying their support.

Another important factor that could tilt the balance in West Bengal elections is the large concentration of Muslims who constitute about 30 percent of the population. Though Left and Congress will claim that the Muslims will vote for them, the ground reality seems to be different. Muslims too so



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far were trusted vote bank for TMC and even now there does not appear to be much change in their preferences.

Though the Hyderabad based AIMIM led by Asaduddin Owaisi has thrown its hat into the ring, Mamata Didi’s party still appears to be the favourite party for the muslim community. AIMIM is seen as an outside party and majority of them do not even know who Asad is. They say whatever Didi has done is good. Normally, if the voter is angry with the ruling party, he does not open up and maintains silence, but the Muslim community by and large

seem to be supporting Mamata. This indicates that there would be clear polarisation of votes.

Sensing that TMC may have to face an uphill task, Mamata had struck a chord with the citizens by renewing ‘Swastha Sathi’ health insurance scheme up to Rs 5 lakh which attracted lakhs of people who vied with each other to enrol for the programme.

She also launched the “Duare Sarkar” (government at doorstep) outreach programme, which will ensure people receive the benefits of 11 state-run welfare schemes. TMC leaders and workers are reaching out to

around 10 million households in the next few days. The TMC is also pinning its hopes on the women voters who constitute about 50 percent of the population.

However, this time the TMC is rocked by internal rebellions and dissident voices from within the party.

On the other hand, Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to visit the State every month and stay there for a week during each visit till polls. Shah’s next visit to West Bengal is likely on January 12. He is likely to stay in West Bengal for a week during his visit and will be attending public gatherings and public meetings.

The TMC has pitched it as an ‘insider versus outsider’ fight. Another interesting aspect in the high voltage political battle is the political strategist Prashant Kishore putting his neck on the block. He recently tweeted saying that BJP will struggle to cross double digit in West Bengal and it does any better he said he would quit this space. So far Prashant always had been a backroom boy working quietly to deliver the intended result whether it was for BJP in 2014 or YSRCP in 2019 or even the UP elections. This election could be a maker or breaker for him.

For the present, the game is wide open in West Bengal. Winning West Bengal may be important for BJP because of another reason as it wants to get the better of the fiery fighter Mamata Banerjee who had taken on the BJP at the street level, more than any other opposition leader and continues to give a tough fight.

LETTERS

Today is the Boxing Day ‘test’

THE current year hasn’t been a good year for the Indian cricket team. Setbacks are not new for the Indian cricket team. In what can only be described as a horrible collapse, India was shot out for just 36 runs in the second innings of the first Adelaide Test. This was India’s lowest score in 88 years of playing Test cricket.

Going into the second Test starting Saturday after dismal performance in first Test, the Indian team will have to muster up all their mental strength to pose a worthy challenge to the marauding hosts. It is not that easy to come back from a humiliation and disastrous collapse of first Test. The mental scars keep pulling one back but there is no escape for India from reality. Without Virat Kohli, who has proceeded on paternity leave, the job will not be that easy for team India.

Captain Ajinkya Rahane and his boys need to look back at their earlier sojourns when they came back from ignominy to turn the tables on the Australians. The famous Test series victory in early last year is a shining example for Team India to emulate to perfection. Apart from being a best batsman, Ajinkya Rahane has added responsibility

thehansreader@gmail.com

of captaincy and he will have to build up a strong strategy to take on Australia in the Test series. We do trust captain Ajinkya Rahane to the best of his strength will definitely succeed in the remaining three Test matches.

Kodihalli S. Rao, Thane

Deplorable behaviour

IT is shocking to note that a municipal commissioner of Vuyyuru town in Andhra has instigated his employees to dump all garbage near the entrance of some public sector banks under the reason of non-sanctioning of loans to its employees under various schemes being announced by the C M Jagan Mohan Reddy such as Jagananna cheyuta etc each and every day. This shows that the Commissioner has acted more politically and mischievously to bring pressure on the banking system in getting loans sanctioned instead of taking the issue at the official level.

Further, the bankers will be meeting periodically at the state level bankers conference or the Mandal level bankers meetings conveyed by the leading banker and the Project director DRDA wherein all the projections/ targets and achievements/ reasons of loan sanctions/ non-sanctions/ viability of proposals/ status of bad loans in some portfolios etc under different schemes will all be discussed and decided for necessary action by all. The commissioner must have taken up the issue

with the banks regional level or at the bankers’ conference before resorting to such a nasty step of dumping garbage in front of banks. This is a very serious issue of mis-behaviour by a government official and the District Collector should immediately warn such officers to behave like an officer and not like a street fighter with bank officials.

Even though the Commissioner had ordered for removal of the garbage from the bank premises the next day the collectors should ensure that such things should not be repeated in future lest the bank officials will be more demotivated in grounding government schemes. After all, banking is not a charity but it is a business to financially lend to genuine borrowers from people’s money which should be repaid.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

Increasing parking woes

AS the number of vehicles is increasing day by day, car parking is becoming a nuisance in the residential colonies in cities across the country. Most of the car owners are freely parking their vehicles on roads causing severe inconvenience to the moving vehicles and especially to those who are sincerely parking their vehicles inside their home spaces. As there are no specified rules regarding the parking vehicles on roads, many car owners are taking advantage and parking their vehicles in front of their homes and neighbours

houses permanently. People are purchasing one or more cars even though they don’t have parking space in their residences and habituated to park their vehicles on roads occupying 20-30 per cent of roads. Government should consider restricting registration of vehicles if the owner did not possess enough parking space. “No Parking Space-No Registration” policy should be introduced by the government and new strict rules should be implemented for parking vehicles on roads and before the neighbour’s house in the residential colonies. Also, govt should introduce “scrap and crush” method where the very old vehicles should be treated as scrap and should be crushed.

Tumuluri Sri Kumar, Hyderabad

Modi government’s eyewash

THIS refers to “Let’s talk, but not MSP: Govt” (The 25 December). It is a well known fact that before every budget, the Finance Minister makes it a point to meet captains of industry to share and take inputs from them before presenting it in Parliament. However, when it comes to sensitive new laws, the BJP government led by PM Modi often gets the law passed by whatever means, creates controversy over it and then uses various forums to attack those who are opposed to such law. This happened with CAA/NRC, Triple Talaq and now Interfaith marriage law which being hurriedly passed by the state government ruled by

BJP. As for new farm law, instead of “reaching out” to the farmers before enacting the law, now after creating huge controversy and political divide, the party is now organizing an “Outreach” campaign. It is believed, as a part of this program some 100 press conferences and 700 meetings are being conducted, culminating with the proposed virtual meeting with nine crore farmers to be addressed by the PM.

All this is nothing but a drama to get political mileage at the cost of taxpayers’ money. After passing the law, if the BJP government can “Outreach” nine crore farmers now, why they could not have “reached out” to farmers explained to them the benefits of the new farm, instead of forcing them to come on the road and stay put for so long.

N Nagarajan, Hyderabad

UK PM not welcome

IN view of the new Covid strain found in the UK spreading panic of transmission across the globe, India should request British PM Boris Johnson either to go ahead with or drop his India visit only in line with the virus-effect to be felt in 2021 January. The Centre had better keep silent till then and decide on, only in January, welcoming the dignitary into the country. Otherwise, it would send a wrong message that the government is not concerned about our health.

E Sethuramalingam, Kollam

4 out of over 1,000 returned from UK test Covid positive

AMARAVATI

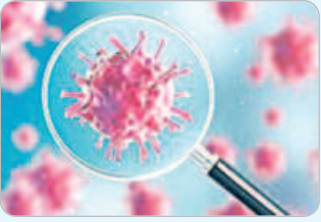
FOUR out of 1,148 people who returned from the UK to the state in the past one month have tested positive for Covid-19 and their samples were sent to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, and Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, to determine if they carried the new coronavirus strain.

State health commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar said on Friday that 1,148 people arrived to the state from the UK in the last one month and 1,040 of them have been traced so far.

He said in a release that 18 of them were from other states and 16 had invalid addresses, while efforts were on to trace the remaining 88.

Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar says of the 1,148 who returned to State from UK, 1,040 have been traced and tested

- ❖ The samples have been sent to NIV and CCMB to determine whether it is a different strain
- ❖ State witnesses 355 fresh cases of coronavirus and 2 deaths in 24 hours



Bhaskar said 982 of the UK returnees have been placed under quarantine.

"It will take at least three days to get the result of the four positive samples sent to NIV and CCMB for analysis. But there is no need to panic," Bhaskar added.

The commissioner said a

trial run of Covid-19 vaccination would be conducted at five locations in Krishna district on December 28 in accordance with the Centre's directive.

The trial run primarily was for testing whether the web-based software was working properly or not, he said.

Meanwhile, state reported

355 fresh cases of coronavirus on Friday, while 354 patients also got cured and discharged from various hospitals.

Two fresh fatalities were also reported in the state, one each in Guntur and Krishna districts, a health department bulletin said. Chittoor reported the highest number of cases 81, followed by Guntur 53, East Godavari 49 and Krishna 43.

Eight districts added less than 25 new cases each, while Visakhapatnam added 28, the bulletin said. The total cases in Visakhapatnam crossed the 59,000 mark while in neighbouring Vizianagaram they shot past 41,000, the lowest in the state.

Vizianagaram also has the lowest number of 71 active cases now.

Amarnath accuses TDP MLA of criminal record, graft

VISAKHAPATNAM

YSRCP MLA from Anakapalle Gudivada Amarnath criticised TDP for politicising every initiative of the government and becoming hindrance for the development of the poor people in the state.

Speaking to media here on Friday, the MLA slammed TDP Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna for making false allegations against MP V Vijayasai Reddy and challenging him to taking oath at Saibaba temple in Visakhapatnam East. Amarnath challenged Ramakrishna to come to Sri Varahalakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple at Simhachalam and swear that he hadn't committed crimes, murders and had not earned illegal assets.

The MLA pointed out that Ramakrishna didn't reject Vijayasai Reddy's statements on illegal assets of his benamis, but just said those assets were not registered on his name. Ramakrishna came to Visakhapatnam after being accused in the murder of Vangaveeti Ranga, he said and added that he is indulged in other illegal activities like supply of drugs, horse riding competitions, cock fights, liquor syndicate during the previous government.

The YSRCP leader asked Ramakrishna to explain how he amassed wealth in last 30 years and said the report of SIT on land encroachments in Vizag would be released in 10 days and the state government would file charges against every one involved in the land scam.

10-day Vaikunta Dwara Darshan begins amid religious fervour

- Thousands of devotees and VVIPs beeline to the temple to have the rare opportunity of Vaikunta Dwara darshan considered most auspicious

- TTD chief Subba Reddy says darshan to the common devotees allowed 90 minutes ahead of schedule after the darshan of VVIP and VIPs



Devotees in queue line for darshan on Friday

**HANS NEWS SERVICE
TIRUPATI**

THE 10-day Vaikunta Dwara Darshan began amidst religious fervour in Tirumala temple on the occasion of Vaikunta Ekadasi on Friday. After the predawn rituals, much-awaited Vaikunta Dwara darshanam was commenced for the pilgrims, which will continue for 10 days till January 3.

Thousands of devotees and VVIPs beelined to the Lord's abode to have the rare opportunity of Vaikunta Dwara darshan, considered most auspicious by Hindus at large. The entire stretch of Vaikunta Dwarum is decorated with flowers and lightning leaving the devotees spell bound.

The hill top temple town and

the temple complex which were festive look with colourful decorations with flowers of various hues and bewitching electric illuminations at all places turned the holy hill into a spiritual paradise with pilgrims chanting 'Govinda, Govinda' coupled with a series of religious programmes from dawn to dusk, including the mass chanting of Bhagvat Gita and Golden Chariot procession held to mark Vaikunta Ekadasi.

Elaborate arrangements were in place in the shrine and also outside in the queue lines leading to the shrine while the TTD staff and Srivari Sevaku volunteers strived to ensure the pilgrims adhere to Covid guidelines.

This time, TTD provided 10,000 offline SSD tokens for locals for 10

days to enable them have Vaikunta Dwara darshan while daily 20,000 special entry tickets were also made available online.

A long list of VVIPs had offered prayers including ministers, MPs and MLAs while a total of about 40,000 had darshan on the first day of Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam.

Darshan to the common devotees commenced 90 minutes ahead of schedule after the darshan of VVIP and VIPs, said TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy adding that for the first time TTD allowed the donors of various schemes for darshan on Vaikunta Ekadasi, virtual seva pilgrims and also issued 1,000 SRIVANI tickets offline for Vaikuntha Dwara Darshan.

**HANS NEWS SERVICE
VISAKHAPATNAM**

THE Central government's aim is to direct farmers towards economic growth and enhance their income, BJP national general secretary Daggubati Purandeswari said here on Friday.

Inaugurating the farmers' awareness programme at Peddipalem village in Anandapuram mandal along with former MP K Haribabu, Purandeswari said the awareness drive was launched to mark the birth anniversary of for-

CM regrets over non-distribution of house sites in Pulivendula

- Takes part in Christmas prayers at CSI church in his hometown along with family
- Says as some persons have obtained court stay on distribution of APIIC lands, the programme is not being conducted in the constituency
- Assures beneficiaries that the govt will overcome legal hurdles and give them land



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy praying at CSI church in Pulivendula on Friday

great occasions as both Chirstmas, Vaikunta Ekadasi coincide on auspicious Friday.

The Chief Minister said he was fortunate to distribute 30 lakh house site deeds to the people. He expressed sadness for not able to launch the programme in his constituency of Pulivendula as some persons obtained stay orders by filing petitions in court alleging lands owned by Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) can't be diverted to the purpose of house sites as they were purely meant for establishment of industries.

The Chief Minister pointed that whether the land owned by APIIC or other organisations, it was the government property as government had every right to utilise it for public purpose. He said that there were some other instances in the state where house site pattas' distribution was stalled in the same manner. However, he expressed determination to overcome such problems and distribute the sites to the poor. "Beneficiaries need not worry as the government will move Supreme Court. I hope problem will be solved very soon," he said.

Bobde has darshan of Lord Venkateswara



Chief Justice of India S A Bobde prays at Dwajastambham in Tirumala shrine on Friday

TIRUMALA

CHIEF Justice of India (CJI) Sharad Arvind Bobde had Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam on the auspicious day of Vaikuntha Ekadasi on Friday after offering prayers to Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala.

Earlier, on his arrival at Mahadwaram, he was welcomed by TTD EO Dr K S Jawahar Reddy and additional EO A V Dharma Reddy. Later, inside the temple he was accompanied by TTD Trust Board Chairman YV Subba Reddy for darshan.

After offering prayers to the presiding deity of Sri

Venkateswara Swamy, the CJI had Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam which is considered to be auspicious.

Later, he was rendered Vedasirvachanam at Ranganayakula Mandapam and was presented with Thirtha Prasadam and diary, calendar and lamination photo of Lord Venkateswara.

District judge Ravindra Babu, CVSO Gopinath Jatti, temple DyEO Haridranath, urban SP Ramesh Reddy and others were present.

Later, he offered prayers in the temple of Goddess Padmavathi Devi at Tiruchanoor.

House sites distribution historic event: Dy CM

**HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIZIANAGARAM**

THE villages wore a festive look as the house sites distribution programme was taken up in every constituency in the district on Friday.

Deputy Chief Minister P Pushpasreevani has inaugurated the house sites distribution in Kurupam and another Minister Botcha Satyanarayana participated in the programme at Cheepurupalli. Local MLAs launched the scheme in their respective constituencies. The Deputy Chief Minister described the State government's initiative of distributing house sites to 30.7 lakh poor families as a historic event. The government will soon construct houses to them at the sites, she pointed out.

She said the selection of beneficiaries was made without any recommendations and any political interventions. Every eligible person got a house site, Pushpasreevani said. Collector M Hari Jawaharlal and others participated in the programme.

'THE LIARS'

Continued from P1

Only an 'Atmanirbhar' farmer can lay the foundation for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'," Modi

stressed. The Prime Minister has also slammed the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC) government for blocking Central benefits to reach the farmers "due to politi-

cal reasons". Noting that Mamata Banerjee's ideology has destroyed West Bengal and the farmers in the State, Modi asked why the rest of the Opposition is silent on this.

In AP on Monday

Continued from P1

The mock drill will include concurrent monitoring and review at the block and district levels, and preparation of feedback to be shared with the State and Union Health Ministry.

The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration of Covid-19 (NEGVAC) has recommended three prioritised population groups, including Health Care Workers (HCWs) (about 1 crore), Frontline Workers (FLWs) (about 2 crore), and Prioritized Age Group (about 27 crore). As vaccines are temperature sensitive and need to be stored in specific temperature, the present cold chain system consisting of 85,634 equipment for storage of vaccines at about 28,947 cold chain points across the country will be used for the cold chain administration. The current cold chain is capable of storing additional quantities of Covid-19 vaccine required for the first 3 crore prioritised population i.e Health Care Workers and Frontline Workers.

Each State will plan it in two districts and preferably in different (five) session type settings e.g. district hospital, CHC/PHC, urban site, private health facility

and rural outreach. This will exercise enable end-to-end mobilisation and testing of Covid-19 vaccination process (except the vaccine) and check the usage of Co-WIN in field environment, the linkages between planning, implementation and reporting mechanisms and identify challenges and guide way forward prior to actual implementation, including improvements that may be required in the envisaged process.

This will also provide a hands-on experience to programme managers at various levels. This two-day activity is planned on December 28 and 29, and will include activities from the necessary data entries in Co-WIN to vaccine receipt and allocation to deployment of team members, mock drill of session sites with test beneficiaries to reporting and evening meeting. This will also include testing for cold storage and transportation arrangements for Covid-19 vaccine, management of crowds at the session sites with proper physical distancing.

As the vaccine administrators will play an important role in the vaccination process, training of trainers and those who shall ad-

minister the vaccine has been taken up across various States.

To strengthen the capacity of human resource for Covid-19 vaccine introduction and rollout, detailed training modules have been developed for different categories of vaccine handlers and administrators, including medical officers, vaccinators, alternate vaccinators, cold chain handlers, supervisors, data managers, ASHA coordinators and all others involved in the implementation process at different levels.

The training includes all operational aspects of training like organization of vaccination sessions, use of Co-WIN IT platform for management of the entire vaccination process, deployment of HR Cold chain preparedness, management of adverse events, communications and inter-sectoral coordination, biomedical waste management and infection prevention protocols.

To facilitate redressal of queries on Covid-19 vaccination and Co-WIN portal related queries, national 1075 and state 104 Helpline capacity has also been strengthened to address queries beyond their routine support.

'Farm laws to enhance farmers' income'

**HANS NEWS SERVICE
VISAKHAPATNAM**



BJP national general secretary Daggubati Purandeswari addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam on Friday

mer Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. She explained that farmers can set their own prices

for their crops with the help of the three farm laws introduced recently by the Central govern-

ment. The Union government's goal is to double the income of all farmers by 2022, Purandeswari mentioned. She alleged that the Opposition is misleading farmers on the farm laws.

"Most of the families in the country are dependent on agriculture. In Punjab, the Congress government is implementing contract farming," she pointed out. She urged everyone to support agriculture laws that will benefit the farmers. BJP State secretary S Kasiraju, Jana Sena Bheemunipatnam constituency in-charge Panchakarla Sandeep and others participated in the programme.

Confluence of 3 festivals

Continued from P1

At many churches huge LED screens were installed so that those who were outside in the lawns could see the prayers taking place inside. All those who were outside the church were also seen ignoring wearing masks and taking selfies and greeting friends and social distancing had gone for a toss. Traffic police had a tough time regulating the traffic at many places. Traffic jams were witnessed at many places.

The famous temple of Lord Venkateswara at Liberty junction reverberated with Vedic hymns and slokas all through the day on the Ekadashi. The temple was thrown open in the early hours for devotees and special pujas were performed on the occasion of Vaikuntha Ekadasi.

Public address system was arranged to create awareness among the visiting devotees on the need for following safety norms. A large number of devo-

tees bearing the chill weather visited Venkateswara Perumal temple for Ut-tara Dwara Darshanam. "Hare Krishna Movement - Hyderabad" (HKM) also celebrated Ekadasi in a grand manner at Swayambhu Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Golden Temple in Banjara Hills to mark the auspicious occasion of Lord Sri Vishnu coming personally to the Vaikunta dwara to receive his devotee Sri Namma Alwar. The celebrations were concluded by a Grand Maha Arati and Pushpanjali Seva to the Lord in the evening.

Being Friday, Muslims performed special Friday prayers at the famous Mecca Masjid in the Old City. Special security measures were taken in the sensitive areas where the temples and masjids were located nearby during the prayers. Despite corona restrictions, many masjids in the city received huge gatherings to offer prayers and the police were on tenterhooks to maintain the law and order.

Dry run for Covid vax rollout in four States

Continued from P1

In addition, infection control practices will be followed at the site to prevent disease transmission. "It will provide insights on any gaps or bottlenecks so that those could be addressed before the commencement of the COVID-19 drive. The dry run is to be conducted in one or two districts under the overall leadership of the district collector/magistrate," Punjab Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu said on Thursday.

As part of vaccine roll-out plan, 2,360 training sessions have been held so far and 7,000 officials have been trained, including medical officers, vaccinators, alternate vaccinators, cold chain handlers, supervisors, data managers, and coordinators of accredited social health activists (ASHA). India may begin vaccinating "in any week" of January, Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan had recently said, adding that the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) is analysing emergency-use approval requests by Bharat Biotech, Serum Institute and Pfizer. The Delhi and Hyderabad airports have started prepping to safely store and transport the temperature-sensitive vaccines. The states have also collated a list of healthcare and frontline workers who would be the first to get the jab. After three crore healthcare and frontline workers, India expects to vaccinate 27 crore people in the high-risk and vulnerable categories for COVID-19 over next six to seven months, the minister had said.

TODAY'S QUOTE

Electronic mfg can contribute \$1 tn to GDP

“No corporate can snatch away farmers' land No corporate can snatch away any farmer's land as long as Narendra Modi is Prime Minister of the country and MSP will continue, mandis will not be shut down. If farmer organisations felt that any provision of the three new farm laws is against their interests, the Modi government is ready to discuss.


—Amit Shah, Union Home Minister



SALES

Rise in sales for Myntra in Dec

Myntra sold 1.1 crore items to more than 32 lakh customers during its 13th, five-day End of Reason Sale that ended on December 24. Also catering to more than 50 lakh orders, the fashion carnival witnessed 51% increase in traffic over the previous winter edition. The company processed record 19,000 items per minute at peak.

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	77.95	South	
Euro	94.08	African Rand	5.78
UAE Dirham	22.02	Hong Kong Dollar	10.91
Thai Baht	2.81	Japanese Yen	0.82
British Pound	103.75	New Zealand Dollar	54.96
Australian Dollar	58.72	Saudi Riyal	21.56
Canadian Dollar	60	Swedish Krona	10.24
Swiss Franc	86.79	Singapore Dollar	58.05

DELHI SATURDAY 26 DECEMBER 2020

BIZ BRIEFS

Dru Gold opens store

Dru Gold expanded its foothold with the launch of its 15th store in Hyderabad. It offers best market prices for gold and jewellery, helping the consumers unlock the optimum value from the yellow metal. It has announced a special offer under which it has reduced service charge from three per cent to one per cent till December 31. The company opened all 15 stores in 2020. Akhilesh Agarwal, Founder and CEO, Dru Gold said, “We understand how to unlock the value from jewellery and ornaments of gold and deploy cash to empower our customers to prosper in many ways. We aim to set up our operations globally and strengthen our foothold in the organised gold recycling industry.”

Crompton's new product

Crompton Greaves Consumer Electricals launched Rapid Jet Plus instant water heaters a range with superior heating performance that offer hassle-free installation, safety and aesthetic design. The device features high grade smart shield tank to protect from corrosion as well as a weldless tank for corrosion free long life. Sachin Phartiyal, Vice President, Appliance Business - Crompton Greaves Consumer Electricals Ltd. further adds, “Water heaters are an essential appliance in every home as it provides the quick hot water that everyone craves especially as we enter the chilly days. Crompton understands the convenience of water heaters Hence, combining innovation with consumer need, we hope our latest range makes their lives more comfortable and a little perfect.”

IKEA India FY20 loss widens to ₹720 crore

HOWEVER, NET SALES HAVE GONE UP 64.7% AT RS 566 CR LAST FISCAL

NEW DELHI

FURNITURE retailer IKEA India saw its net loss widen to Rs 720.1 crore in the financial year ended

Part of Ingka Group, IKEA India had opened its first retail store in Hyderabad in August 2018, followed by online stores in Mumbai, Hyderabad and Pune



March 2020, according to regulatory documents.

The company had registered a loss of Rs 685.4 crore in the financial year ended March 2019, according to Registrar of Companies filing shared by market intelligence firm Tofler. However, IKEA India saw its net sales grow 64.68 per cent to Rs 566 crore in FY 2019-20 from Rs 343.7 crore in the previous fiscal. Its total revenue during 2019-20 fiscal was at Rs 665.6 crore, up 63.18 per cent, as against Rs 407.9 crore in the previous financial year.

IKEA India, which has opened its second retail store this month

in Mumbai, saw its revenue from 'other income' in FY20 was at Rs 99.6 crore as against Rs 64.2 crore in FY19. When contacted, IKEA said India is an important market for the company and it is investing to offer customers an omnichannel experience. “India is an important market for IKEA. We are here in India for the long term. We are in the initial years of operations in the country where we are investing in our priority markets to offer customers an omnichannel experience,” said IKEA India CFO Preet Dhupar.

Part of Ingka Group, IKEA India had opened its first retail store in

Hyderabad in August 2018, followed by online stores in Mumbai, Hyderabad and Pune. Besides its new flagship store in Navi Mumbai, IKEA also has plans to set up two city centre stores in Mumbai to cater the demand from the city. “We are focussed on reaching the many people in our key markets with products and solutions that are affordable, sustainable, follow the best quality standards and relevant to their life at home,” she said. IKEA is also investing in the online system and has the ambition to reach 100 million Indian customers by 2022 through its omnichannel approach.

ICICI Bank to use tech to expand retail portfolio

NEW DELHI

TO buck the Covid-induced downturn, lending major ICICI Bank plans to pursue the technology route to expand its retail presence. Accordingly, the lender has introduced a slew of technology based products for customers, especially for millennial population.

Recently, the private lender launched 'iMobile Pay' app which offers payments and banking services to customers of any bank. ICICI Bank's Executive Director Anup Bagchi said: “Customers are

keen to know if an app can take care of all banking and payments requirements.”

“Keeping their demand in mind, we have extended the ambit of our mobile banking app. Now, customers of any bank can link all their bank accounts to this app. It means they can continue to bank with any bank and still use 'iMobile Pay' for all their digital transactions.” “Also, they can undertake all transactions, which they were so far doing through a gamut of payments apps, through this app.”

‘Interest cover for India Inc improving’

CORPORATES ARE NOW IN BETTER POSITION TO SERVICE DEBT: CARE REPORT

KUMUD DAS MUMBAI

Interest cover for companies	
Month	Interest cover
Dec,'19	4.7
Mar,'20	2.6
June,'20	2.7
Sep,'20	5.3

sectors witnessed an improvement in the ratio and included IT, FMCG, healthcare, construction material, trading, non-ferrous metals, logistics, power, agri, media and entertainment and realty. For realty, the ratio was less than 1, says the report. For five industries interest

cover was negative and included textiles, alcohol, diamonds and jewellery, telecom (for other reasons) and hospitality.

For the September ending quarter there was an improvement for all sectors barring non-ferrous metals. But here too the interest cover ratio was still high at 4.9 compared with 6.7 in June. Interest cover was negative

for hospitality at -0.4 which was however an improvement over June when it was -1.5. For retailing and infrastructure, the interest cover was less than 1 while for telecom and realty it was at 1.4, the report says.

The ratio was 3 and above for all other sectors. The general improvement in profits in Q2 of FY21 did provide a fillip to the interest cover numbers.

There has been a big push to bring down interest rates over this period which has helped to ease the interest cost of companies.

REAL CORNER

Private equity in real estate likely to touch \$6 billion

NEW DELHI

PRIVATE equity investment in the Indian real estate sector is likely to recover and hit the \$6 billion-mark next year, registering a year-on-year growth of 30 per cent, according to a report by Savills India.

The report noted that the growth may come on the back of an improving economic sentiment supported by policy reforms and growth in key emerging sectors.

It said that PE investment in real estate in 2020 contracted to \$4.6 billion due to decline in economic activity, adding that investors are likely to adapt themselves in the altered world order and steadily return to the market with evolved strategies.

“The next wave of investments will be driven by growth in warehousing, affordable housing and data centres apart from the commercial office segment which will continue to see steady improvement,” said the report titled Beyond The '20: Private Equity in Indian Real Estate’.

A likely repair of the bruised economy, improving trade relations, policy support and progress on the vaccination front, are the key factors that would drive the



“The investors will proceed with caution in early days, but 2021 is likely to experience a fair amount of PE investment owing to inherent strengths and potential of alternate asset classes in real estate”

sentiment henceforth, it added.

A Savills India statement said that its estimates for private equity investment in the sector are based on factors like overall economic and infrastructure growth, growth in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics and e-commerce. Geopolitical scenario and policy enabling environment are also considered to be key determinants.

As per the report, the warehousing and logistics segment has been among the most resilient asset classes in the ongoing pandemic. Warehouse leasing is expected to increase by 60 per cent in 2021 as compared to 2020, keeping investors riveted and on the lookout for investment opportunities.

Savills Research also expects private equity investors to assess an opportunity of around \$330 million in the industrial and warehousing segment in 2021. This is approximately 17 per cent higher compared to the average annual investments during the period of 2016-2020.

Anurag Mathur, CEO, Savills India said: “2020 has been a watershed year for businesses and industries across the globe. Indian economy has weathered this unprecedented crisis fairly well, which is indicative of its strong inherent fundamentals.”

“Going forward, policy steadfastness and implementation will hold the key to revival of investment. In our view, the investors will proceed with caution in early days, but 2021 is likely to experience a fair amount of PE investment owing to inherent strengths and potential of alternate asset classes in real estate,” he said. From 2000 to 2015, almost 60 per cent of PE investment was in residential segment until the focus of fund managers shifted to ready office assets supported by buoyant demand from 2014 onwards and the segment has attracted approximate 40 per cent of investment.

The report noted that the last 2 to 3 years have seen notable interest in newer asset classes such as student housing, data centres, warehousing and opportunistic assets.

“For the investor community and private equity players, the warehousing segment is becoming an asset class of choice in times ahead. While the leasing activity in the industrial and warehousing segment has declined year-on-year, we expect rentals to see a steady rise as quality supply gets added to the stock,” said Diwakar Rana, Managing Director, Capital Markets, Savills India.

The world of private equity would be aiming for some of their most lucrative opportunities in the time to

Builders look to 2021 as realty in deep crisis now

There are indicators that point towards recovery in the sector, but at a less than desired pace

MANVENDRA JHA NEW DELHI

India's real estate industry has been trying to get back on its feet ever since the 2016 note ban laid the sector low but 2020 was hardly the year to stand tall. With the pandemic devastating demand in the economy, the industry is now looking to the New Year with the hope of a sharp recovery in sales.

Stable property prices, low home loan interest rates, discounts and freebies offered by developers and lower stamp duty rates offered by some states are what the industry hopes will aid in the recovery after housing sales and office space leasing sunk by 40-50 per cent this year.

The economy, which witnessed one of the world's strictest lockdowns that lasted over two months, saw muted demand for housing and office space through September even as the developers quickly adopted digital tools to reach out to prospective buyers.

Only in October did the property market start seeing some traction, driven by pent up as well as fresh festive demand that got further consolidated towards trusted developers. Still, data compiled by property consultant Anarock showed that housing sales fell 47 per cent year-on-year to 1.38 lakh units in 2020 across top seven cities - Delhi-NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai and Kolkata.

Stamp duty cut by the Maharashtra government provided a big relief to builders and buyers alike, and was

instrumental in reviving demand in Mumbai and Pune. Many developers absorbed the balance stamp duty to boost their sales.

The pandemic reinforced the importance of home ownership in a world enamoured with the concept of shared economy. On the performance in 2020, realtors' apex body Credai's Chairman Jaxay Shah said the realty sector in the last few years has “borne the repercussions of fiscal and non-fiscal reforms”, be it demonetisation, introduction of GST or RERA. “While the sector was under pressure owing to all the reforms, the Covid-19 pandemic made things worse as the sector is reeling under the worst ever crisis,” Shah said.

“The real estate sector has been facing headwinds for the past few years. The situation became tougher owing to the Covid-19... uncertainty over jobs and livelihoods robbed the market of its potential buyer-base leading to near-zero demand,” Credai President Satish Magar said. Post-lockdown, he said sales have improved but are yet to touch pre-Covid levels in most cities.

“There are indicators that point towards recovery in the sector, but at a less than desired pace,” Magar told this reporter. The Credai President said the government and the RBI took steps to help the sector but those did not address the prolonged problems as he sought both demand and supply side interventions in the upcoming Budget.

To help developers tide over the crisis, the Centre invoked force majeure clause under the Real Estate

(Regulation and Development) Act (RERA) to extend the deadline for completion of projects by six to nine months. Interest subsidy for middle-income group was extended

till March 2021 while a scheme was launched to provide homes to migrants/ urban poor at an affordable rent. One-time loan restructuring was also allowed.

As many central ministers kept advising developers to offload their unsold inventories and not wait for price increases, industry demanded changes in tax rules.

Accordingly, Section 43 CA of the Income Tax Act was relaxed to allow primary sale of flats up to Rs 2 crore at a price that can be 20 per cent below the circle rate from the earlier 10 per cent differential.

The government-backed Rs 25,000-crore SWAMIH stress fund, launched last year to complete around 4.5 lakh units, has been operationalised and an investment of over Rs 10,000 crore has already been approved but many builders complained about tough eligibility criteria to secure funds.

These measures did offer some breathing space to developers but were not enough to trigger a V-shaped recovery in housing market. India's office market, which has



been performing well over the last few years despite overall slowdown in the property market, could not protect itself from the onslaught of Covid-19. Net leasing of offices is estimated to fall at 25-27 million sq ft in 2020 from record 46.5 million sq ft last year, according to JLL India. As companies deferred their decisions on expansion and adopted Work From Home (WFH) policy for employees, the fall in office demand was inevitable.

Nevertheless, the office market was full of action and attracted huge investments with developers monetising their commercial portfolio to trim debt. Amid the pandemic, India's second Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) - Mindspace Business Parks REIT - got listed after a successful public issue of Rs 4,500 crore, signalling that the long-term growth story of office market remains intact.

The year saw some big-ticket real estate deals, including RMZ group's divestment of a large commercial portfolio to Brookfield for around Rs 14,500 crore.