

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | WEDNESDAY 16 | DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 27°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: 2 mm

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Margazhi 1
Tithi: Thuvithiyai
Star: Puradam
Rahukalam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm
Yamagandam:
7.30 am to 9 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.07 am
Zohar: 12.09 pm
Asar: 3.19 pm
Maghrib: 5.45 pm
Isha: 7.01 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.46 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.24 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 7.54 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.32 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+25,740)	(+363)
99,32,397	1,44,110

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+1,132)
TN: 8,01,161 11,919

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

7,3535,996

DEATHS
16,35,351

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218

worldometers.info

APP alleges Tangedco demanding heavy discounts from IPPs, seeks min's intervention

New Delhi: The Association of Power Producers (APP) has written to Union Power Minister R K Singh, alleging that Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Ltd (Tangedco) was demanding heavy discounts on pending dues from independent power producers (IPPs). The APP in its letter to the minister also said that the state-run non-banking firms PFC and REC, which are implementing the centre's liquidity infusion scheme, should be directed to release funds for payment of bills of IPPs, central generating stations and renewable energy projects together.

Earlier in May, the government had announced ₹90,000 crore liquidity infusion scheme for discounts to pay off power generating firms (gencos) which was later increased to ₹1.2 lakh crore. In a letter shot off to the minister on Monday, the APP said, "Looking at the urgency, we request for early action...." and help in resolving this impasse.

Raja Chari picked for SpaceX mission to ISS

Washington: NASA and European Space Agency (ESA) have selected three astronauts, including Indian-American Raja Chari, to serve as crew members for SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the International Space Station (ISS), which is expected to launch in the autumn of 2021. Raja Chari will serve as commander while NASA's Tom Marshburn will be pilot and ESA's Matthias Maurer will serve as a mission specialist, NASA said on Monday.

COUNTER POINT



We are lucky to be blessed with unadulterated grass!

STATE | 3

MNM ready to work with Rajini, says Kamal

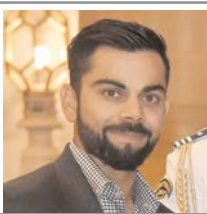


NATION | 4

British PM to be R-Day chief guest

SPORT | 8

Virat second best in Test rankings



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MORE TIME OFF FOR PARLIAMENT DUE TO CORONAVIRUS

No Parliament in winter, Budget session proposed to begin in Jan.

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

The Winter Session of Parliament that usually begins in the last week of November won't take place this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the government will convene the Budget Session in January 2021, parliamentary affairs minister Prahlad Joshi said in a letter to Congress' Lok Sabha leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. "The winter months are very crucial for managing the pandemic because of a recent spurt in cases during this period, particularly in Delhi. We are in the middle of December and a Covid vaccine is expected very soon," Mr

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— PRAHLAD JOSHI, Parliamentary affairs minister

Joshi said.

Attacking the government over the issue, the Congress said Tuesday the "decimation of parliamentary democracy is complete" and asked why, if election campaigning can be done amid the pandemic, the session could not be

held. Senior party leader and Rajya Sabha chief whip Jairam Ramesh also said Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad wasn't consulted.

The minister said the government had spoken to floor leaders of political

parties informally and they had expressed concerns about the pandemic.

"The government is willing to have the next session of Parliament at the earliest; it would be appropriate to have the Budget Session in January, keeping in mind the unprecedented circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic," Mr Joshi said in the letter.

The Constitution broadly stipulates one major rule -- that there should not be a gap of over six months between two sessions of Parliament. It has been a convention to hold three sessions of Parliament -- budget, monsoon and winter -- in a year.

I-T dept claims ₹700 cr tax evasion by group

New Delhi, Dec. 15: The Income Tax Department has detected tax evasion of more than ₹700 crore after it recently raided multiple locations of Chennai-based Chettinad Group, the CBDT and official sources said on Tuesday. "The highlight of the search includes seizure of unaccounted cash of ₹23 crore from various locations," the CBDT said in a statement. "As of now, the department has succeeded in detecting evasion of income of over ₹700 crore," it said. The taxman had raided 60 premises of the Tamil Nadu-based group in Chennai, Trichy various locations in AP, Karnataka and Mumbai on December 9.

— PTI

More IIT-Madras students down with coronavirus

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami had ordered Covid-19 tests to be conducted on all those who were inside the IIT premises in view of a spurt in cases inside the campus, Health Secretary J Radhakrishnan said.

Speaking to the media after inspecting a facility at Tondiarpet along with Corporation Commissioner G Prakash, the health secretary said that 987 RT-PCR tests were conducted inside IIT and 183 persons were found to be positive. He said the positivity rate was 19 per cent as against the two per cent in the State. Also the Chief Minister had ordered tests to be conducted in all educational institutions, including Anna University, he said.. ■ P2

Conspiracy afoot to confuse farmers: PM

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

With no end in sight to the deadlock between the agitating farmers and the Centre even after multiple rounds of talks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that a "big conspiracy" was going on around Delhi to confuse the protesters and that his government was always committed to farmers' welfare and will keep addressing their concerns.

Attacking the Opposition and other activists protesting against the new agriculture-related laws, Mr Modi said: "They also wanted these reforms but they couldn't (pass them) when they were in power. But now that we have managed to do it, they are misleading the farmers."

Speaking at the inauguration of mega energy projects in Kutch, Mr Modi said: "A conspiracy is going on around Delhi to confuse the farmers. They are being scared that after the new agricultural reforms, the land of the farmers will be occupied by others. Tell me, if a dairy has a contract of collecting milk from you, do they take away your cattle too?"

At the Singhu border between Delhi and Haryana, the farmers' leaders said that the fight over the new farm laws had reached a stage where they are "determined to win it, no matter what". They have also threatened to completely block the Delhi-Noida border crossings on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, continuing his tirade against the Centre for not repealing the new farm laws, Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal said his former ally BJP was the

● **Attacking the Opposition and other activists protesting against the new agriculture-related laws, Mr Modi said: "They also wanted these reforms but they couldn't (pass them) when they were in power. But now that we have managed to do it, they are misleading the farmers."**



real "tukde tukde gang" which was trying to push patriotic Punjab into communal flames. He said: "The BJP is the real 'tukde tukde gang' in the country. It has smashed national unity to pieces, shamelessly inciting Hindus against Muslims and now desperately setting peace-loving Punjabi Hindus against their Sikh brethren, especially farmers. They are pushing patriotic Punjab into communal flames."

While the farmers -- who have been protesting for 20 days now -- want the three new laws to be scrapped, the government has said it is willing to continue talks but won't take back the laws. Union minister Kailash Choudhary said the Centre will soon call the farmers' leaders for the next round of talks to end the deadlock over the farm laws.

The protests against the new laws is likely to intensify further as more farmers are expected to join the ongoing agitation at Delhi's borders.

Over 2,000 women from the families of those protesting at the Singhu border are likely to join the demonstration in the coming days.

The farmers' leaders said they were making arrangements for the women coming from different parts of Punjab.

A number of "khaps" in Uttar Pradesh's

Muzaffarnagar have also pledged support to the farmers' agitation against the new laws and will join the ongoing protests at the Delhi borders on Thursday. The decision was taken at a meeting of the khap chiefs held on Monday at Shoram village in the Shahpur police station area, Subhash Balyan, secretary of All Khap Council, said. Balyan Khap head and Bharatiya Kisan Union president Naresh Tikait, Latyan Khap head Bijender Singh, Desh Khap head Sharanvir Singh, Ahlavat Khap head Gajendra Singh, Nirval Khap head Rajvir Mundet, Kundu Khap head Choudhry Upendra Kundu and Benival Khap head Amit Benival were among those who attended the meeting.

With the number of protesters at Delhi's borders growing by the day, senior officers in the Haryana police said the borders cannot take more people as "the situation is increasingly turning unsustainable". The Haryana police said more than 60,000 protesters are camping at the borders while the farmers' leaders said the figure is higher. Apart from far-flung areas of Punjab, farmers have been arriving from Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, UP and other parts of the country to join the protests.

It's official: Biden is US prez-elect, Kamala his deputy

Washington, Dec.15: The Electoral College has voted Joe Biden as the President and Indian-origin Senator Kamala Harris as the Vice President of the United States, bringing to an end the legal battle unleashed by incumbent Donald Trump who has been alleging widespread voter fraud in the presidential elections.

In accordance with the Constitution and federal law, the Electoral College cast its votes on Monday for the President, the elections for which were held on November 3. The Electors met in their respective states following certification of the results.

The development brings to an end the legal battle unleashed by President Donald Trump against the elections, which he lost both in terms of the popular vote as well as the majority in the 538-member electoral college. Typically, the meeting of the Electoral College is merely a formality. However, it received international attention because of unsubstantiated allegations of massive voter fraud by Trump.

— Agencies

The 'auto rickshaw' for Rajinikanth's Makkal Sevai Katchi is seen as a clear case of blatant favoritism by many as Rajini had become popular donning the role of an auto rickshaw driver in the 1995 blockbuster 'Baasha' which is seen as a turning point in his film career.



Sources said Rajinikanth and his fans were elated over the allocation of 'auto rickshaw.' Probably that was their second choice.

Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiyam was given its earlier symbol 'Battery Torch' on which it went to the Lok Sabha polls, has now been allotted only for the 30 constituencies in Puducherry Union Territory, where too elections would be held along with Tamil Nadu.

Kamal Haasan, in the meantime, is said to have remarked that if 'Battery Torch' was denied they would go for 'Light House.'



name of a 'president' of the party having an Ernavoor address. Sudhakar's statement too did not deny the reports.

Another interesting thing that emerged from the ECI letter was the symbol 'Pressure Cooker' being allotted to Amma Munnetra Kazhagam, led by TTV Dinakaran. It may be recalled that the same symbol was denied to the party when it contested the Lok Sabha elections.

Earlier, when Dinakaran contested the by-election to the RK Nagar Assembly constituency that fell vacant following the demise of J Jayalalithaa, too the ECI denied allocation of the symbol 'hat' that the candidate had

popularized during the hustings for the first round of the by-election, which was initially cancelled following allegations of irregularities.

Then the 'Pressure Cooker' was allotted to him, on which he won the by-election. Subsequently when the AMMK wanted a common symbol for the 2019 Lok Sabha election and moved heaven and earth to get the 'Pressure Cooker', it was denied and 'Gift Pack' was allotted.

Since then, the popular perception in Tamil Nadu is that the ECI, reportedly at the behest of the government at the Centre, tends to show favouritism in allotting symbols. ■ P3

Ugly scenes mar K'taka council meet

VINAY MADHAV | DC
BENGALURU, DEC 15

The Upper House of Karnataka Legislature -- Legislative Council witnessed unprecedented, ugly scenario, with opposition Congress and ruling BJP members coming near to exchange blows during the special sitting of the session to debate over no-confidence against the Chairman Pratap Chandra Shetty.

Deputy Chairman S L Dharme Gowda was dragged out of the chair and the glass shield on Chairman's table was broken, when he tried occupying the seat by Congress members.

Harish, a Congress member punched the face of BJP member Narayanaswamy, while he tried closing the Council doors. Even the Marshals were not spared, who tried to clear the melee. Two Congress members -- Narayanaswamy and Chandrashekhara Patil occupied the Chairman's seat after Dharme Gowda was dragged away. At the end, Chairman Pratap Chandra Shetty adjourned the house sine die, without conducting any business.

Even before the house assembled, as the bell was ringing, Deputy Chairman Dharme Gowda came and occupied the Chair. BJP member Narayanaswamy

went and closed the door, through which the Chairman was supposed to enter. Congress member Harish tried banging the door and fell down, when pushed by Narayanaswamy. Irked Harish punched Narayanaswamy's face.

Meanwhile, the Congress members rushed to the chair, held Dharme Gowda by his collar and dragged him down the Chairman's podium. They also broke the transparent shield on the podium. Then they made Congress MLC Narayanaswamy to occupy the chair. Later, another Congress MLC Chandrashekhara Patil occupied that chair. Congress and BJP members pushed each other in front of the podium in the well of the house. At that time, Chairman Pratap Chandra Shetty came to the house and adjourned the house.

The issue has been brewing since the recently concluded Legislature session. The BJP members had submitted a no-confidence motion against the Chairman, as BJP is the single largest party in the Council also.

However, Pratap Chandra Shetty rejected the no-confidence notice, stating that the BJP had not given 14 days advance notice.



Karnataka Legislative Council chairman K. Pratapachandra Shetty adjourns the council after ruckus between BJP and Congress leaders during the special sitting session on Tuesday. Congress MLCs heckled and pushed Deputy Chairman of the Legislative Council, S.L. Dharme Gowda, from his seat.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Only dance, music can spread harmony, non-violence: VP

New Delhi: Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday urged artists to utilise the potential of India's soft power to expand its global outreach, saying through dance and music, the country can spread ideals such as non-violence, peace and harmony around the world. He also urged artistes to fully explore and exploit the opportunities in the virtual medium to reach out to audiences.

Inaugurating the 'Yours Truly Margazhi' festival online from Hyderabad, he highlighted the glorious tradition of music and dance in India, and emphasised the importance of reviving them in the current stressful times.

Two RTOs suspended, over ₹25L, gold seized

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIRUDHUNAGAR, DEC 15

Two motor vehicle inspectors were caught red-handed with unaccounted money to the tune of ₹ 25.66 lakh in surprise raids at the RTO office in Virudhunagar district on December 12, and both were suspended.

Sleuths of the anti-corruption wing last Saturday held raids in 17 regional transport offices and 18 check-posts across the state, and is reported to have recovered a total cash of ₹34.17 lakh from the 18 check-posts.

In a raid in Virudhunagar RTO office alone, the team seized unaccounted cash of ₹ 25,66,870 from two motor vehicle inspectors, Kalaiselvi and Shanmuga Anand. It is said that they were attempting to flee with the money to escape the vigilance team headed by DSP Karuppalah, but the anti-corruption sleuths intercepted their vehicles at Chathirareddiyapatti near Virudhunagar, and nabbed them.

The team also seized 117 sovereigns of gold from Kalaiselvi's car. In a raid at the residence of Shanmuga Anand at his native village, Nallipalayam near Namakkal, the team recovered unaccounted money of ₹ 6,46,000 and 30 sovereigns of golden ornaments.

Preliminary investigations with the two officials attached to the Virudhunagar RTO office, is said to have revealed prima facie evidence for their involvement in corrupt practice, and hence, the anti-corruption sleuths registered cases against them, following which the two were suspended from service.

Sub-registrar's office, residence raided

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-corruption (DVAC) sleuths seized unaccounted cash and jewels to the tune of ₹63.31 lakh following a raid at the Guduvanchery sub-registrar office and house. The search, which commenced at the sub-registrar office in Guduvanchery on Monday evening extended till Tuesday, sources said.

According to DVAC sources, on Monday, based on credible information that the officials of Sub Registrar Office, Guduvanchery, are indulging in corrupt activities, the officials of Kanchipuram Vigilance and Anti Corruption, Special Investigation Cell along with Inspection Cell Officers conducted a surprise check at the office of the sub registrar office, Guduvanchery, Chengalpet. The office was kept locked during the search operation to prevent the exit of staff or the entry of strangers.

Musical treat

Vocalist Sikkil C. Gurucharan performs at R.R. Sabha at Mylapore as part of Margazhi music festival.

— DC

Ayurveda doctors can't perform surgery: Assn

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

The Doctors Association for Social Equality has opposed the Central government's move to allow students in PG Ayush course to perform surgeries after completing the course.

According to an estimate there are a total of 12,01,354 allopathic and around 7.88 lakh Ayurveda, Unani and Homeopathy doctors in the country.

Association's general secretary G.R. Ravindranath said there is no need for a PG course in Ayurvedic surgery as it would cause unwanted confusion in the minds of people. It would create a wrong belief by rejecting scientific temperament in the profession. It would pose a serious threat to the development of science and technology in medicine.

Hence, the Central government must set MBBS as a basic course in medicine including Ayush. A candidate may be allowed to do a PG course and research in Ayush only after completion of MBBS. The government must allot more funds to develop and modernise Ayush medicine in the country, he said.

Newly married woman ends life

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

A 23-year-old newly married woman allegedly died by suicide at her house near Tambaram on Monday night.

According to police, the deceased has been identified as Karpagam (23) an engineering graduate and a native of Sivagangai. Police said she married Alex (24) of Ooty in Nilgiris district, against her parents' wish. The newly married couple moved to a rented house in Manimangalam near Tambaram, last month. Alex worked in a private company in the city, while Karpagam was searching for a job.

The incident happened on Monday night when no one was present in the house. On Monday night, when Alex returned home from work, he found the main door locked from inside. He knocked on the door and tried to reach Karpagam through the phone. As she did not respond, he peeped through the win-

■ On Monday night, when Alex returned home from work, he found the main door locked from inside. He knocked on the door and tried to reach Karpagam through the phone. As she did not respond, he peeped through the window and found her hanging from the ceiling

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Based on the information, the Manimangalam police rushed to the scene. They recovered the body and sent it to the Chrompet government hospital for post-mortem.

The police registered a case and began investigations. Karpagam's parents accused him for allegedly abetting her suicide. The police are investigating the woman's husband Alex. The case was also forwarded for an inquiry by a revenue divisional officer to verify if the woman ended her life due to dowry harassment.

79 more test positive, IIT-M tally now 183

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

Seventynine more people have tested positive for coronavirus on the IIT-M campus taking the tally in the institution to 183, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan said on Tuesday. Of the 978 samples lifted from the IIT-M since December 1, a total of 183 people have tested positive till date and results for 25 specimens alone were yet to be received, he said.

J. Radhakrishnan said that IIT-M local cluster is a lesson for the public as well. He said so far 978 samples were collected from IIT-M, out of which, results of 25 are awaited. Of the 953 results received, 183 tested positive since December 1.

He said that instruction has been given to the GCC authorities to conduct RT-PCR test for all people on the campus. He urged people to make masks mandatory when they step out of home. "We have given instructions to all universities and colleges to follow Covid-19 protocols properly. If there is only one mess on the campus, the students should be provided food at the hostel rooms. If anybody fails to follow the rule, we would fine them," he said.

The overall positivity rate vis-a-vis the institution has however gone down to 15 per cent from about 20 per cent seen earlier.

A majority of those affected were students and the rest being people like workers in canteens. All of them are being treated at the government-run King's Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research here. Following the outbreak, the institute shut all its departments and classes were being held online. Testing would be done for those associated with facilities like canteens in educational institutions and mansions for early identification of positive cases and treatment, he said.



A health worker collects samples from hostel students in Anna university on Tuesday.

— DC

Social distancing goes for a toss in city

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

The super spreader incident reported at the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) after a brief lull shows that social distancing is still a casualty in various parts of the city.

Social distancing, one of the key weapons in the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic, was thrown to the winds in the city after the government relaxed restrictions in public spots including markets, shopping malls and places of worship.

The downward trend of Covid-19 spread for the last few months has made people take the virus for granted. People irrespective of age are roaming around Thiruvalluvar Salai road, one of the congested highways in Ramapuram, these days.

On Monday evening, a

group including at least 50 devotees offering prayers at an Arasamaram temple near Ramapuram. Apart from this, every morning, loads of guest workers without wearing masks were being transported in trucks via Arasamaram temple road. The street vendors can also be seen selling their goods either without wearing masks or wearing it improperly.

Selvi, a roadside fruit vendor, said that people lost seriousness about corona as it has become a no news and people started talking about vaccines. Everybody is now busy getting back to their business that collapsed due to the lockdown, she said.

P.N. Viswan, a resident of Ramapuram, said that people have started thinking that social distancing is a thing of the past. "Recently I went to a famous temple at Vadapalani where I saw hundreds of devotees

without maintaining any kind of standard operating procedures. It's time for the authorities to make sure of maintaining SOPs at public places to avoid a fresh round of corona wave in the city," he said.

"Crowds violating social distancing norms are not uncommon in the city especially post Deepavali. The authorities are not strict in implementing the norms these days. Since the election is around the corner, politicians don't want to make rules strict. The news reports on vaccine have also made a psychological impact on people to flout norms. But it will still take many months for the vaccine to become full-fledged and get distributed. So violating social distancing now will be counterproductive," said Dr. Rex Sargunam, president, Tamil Nadu Health Development Association.

Environment department's official not lone culprit, arrest co-conspirators too: Greens

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

Hailing the arrest of S. Pandian, Superintendent, Department of Environment, state government, by the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, environmental activists and others have demanded the DVAC to arrest others who were involved in the multi-crore real estate scam in Kattupalli and Ennore in northern Chennai.

The activists alleged that Pandian was a key player in the Tamil Nadu Coastal Zone Management Authority and an architect of the fake map that was responsible for disappearance of the Kosasthali river and its backwaters, which led to the conversion of more than 1,500 acres of wetlands into real estate.

In a letter sent to DVAC, the fishermen representatives, Save Ennore Creek Campaign and activists from Chennai sought further investigation into the Ennore Map scam. The letter was signed by former judge of the Madras high court Justice D. Hariparanthaman,



DVAC officials raid the office and residence of the superintendent in the state department of environment at Saligramam.

— DC

Nityanand Jayaraman, Chennai Solidarity Campaign, Pooja Kumar, Save Ennore Creek Campaign, K. Saravanan, Save Ennore Creek Campaign, Chennai, G. Sundararajan, Poovulagin Nanbargal, T.M. Krishna, famous Carnatic singer and writer, Dr. S. Janakarajan, former professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies,

Karen Coelho, Associate Professor, MIDS, R. L. Srinivasan, Fisherman, Kattukuppam, Ennore, Karthik G. and Siddharth Shivakumar, Chennai Climate Action Group. They stated that Pandian was not alone in the racket and there were other co-conspirators in the scam. Pandian was a crucial player in the presentation and use of a

fraudulent/fake Coastal Zone Management Plan Map covering the Ennore Wetlands in north Chennai and Thiruvallur districts. This fraud effectively "legalised" the illegal conversion of over 2,000 acres of wetlands and lands on Kattupalli island into real estate.

In 1996 the Central Government had approved the Coastal Zone

Management Plan for Tamil Nadu under the CRZ Notification 2011 and the Ennore wetlands and the Kattupalli island were given protection and declared a "No Development Zone" (NDZ).

In June 2017, Pandian and then his superior declared that the approved CZMP of 1996 for the Ennore region was modified and replaced by another fake map which they claimed was approved by the Central Government after 1997. The original and the only Government of India-approved CZMP of 1996 was given a quiet burial by the officials at the Department of Environment which also serves as the secretariat for the Tamil Nadu Coastal Zone Management Authority.

In the fake map produced by Pandian in June 2017, approximately 15,000 acres of Ennore wetlands, including the Kosasthali river and its backwaters, disappeared. Kosasthali and its backwaters have been shown as land. Contrary to claims, this map has no approval of the central government.

A series of applications under the Right to

Information Act 2005 to both the Department of Environment, state Government and the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, had revealed that no formal approval for any modifications of the Coastal Zone Management Plan of the Ennore wetlands was obtained from the Centre. In a case filed on this matter at the National Green Tribunal by P. Mahendran, a fisherman from Ennore, the MoEFCC had also submitted a written affidavit that with regard to this sheet, no approvals for newly modified maps were made after the initial approval in 1996.

Considering the magnitude of investments and the extent of water and land converted into "real estate," the use of illegal and unapproved maps to grant clearances must be investigated especially since it involves Pandian as a key player.

They hoped that "it is our firm belief that Pandian was not alone in this racket, and that other officials, including particularly certain seniors present in the lead-up to June 2017 were co-conspirators".

RBI, DBS clarify on amalgamation scheme of Lakshmi Vilas Bank

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

The Reserve Bank of India and DBS Bank Limited have informed the Madras high court that the amalgamation scheme of Lakshmi Vilas Bank and DBS limited is under challenge before four high courts and they have moved for transfer of all such cases pending in different high courts to the Supreme Court itself.

A division bench comprising Justices Vineet Kothari

and M.S.Ramesh before whom such submission was made, while posting the matter to December 22, said if any orders are passed by the Supreme Court, that may be placed before this court.

Originally, while hearing a petition, challenging amalgamation scheme, the bench had on November 27 declined to stay the operation of the Amalgamation scheme but in order to give proper legal protection to the shareholders which



may yield to their benefit, even in future also, it passed an interim order qua (in respect of) DBS Bank India Limited.

In its interim order, the bench had said no further prejudicial action by the DBS Bank Limited shall be taken against the shareholders of the Transferor company Lakshmi Vilas Bank, without leave of this court. The DBS Bank India Limited should furnish an undertaking in this court to the effect that in case this court comes to a conclusion and directs the DBS Bank company to provide a cash compensation to the shareholders of the Transferor

company MsLakshmi Vilas Bank, they will compensate such shareholders of Lakshmi Vilas Bank. "To provide a security for the aforesaid purpose, we direct the fourth respondent company to create a separate Reserve Fund in their own Books of Accounts to the extent of Face Value of the shares of the Transferor company Lakshmi Vilas Bank and maintain the same subject to further orders and directions of this court in the present

petition. Except the aforesaid directions against the fourth respondent, we make it clear that we are not interfering with the operation of the said scheme in any other manner," the bench had added.

Subsequently, the present petition relating to Amalgamation came up for hearing before the Bench on December 14.

During hearing, senior counsel Vijay Narayan, appearing for RBI and Senior counsel AR.L.Sunda-

resan and another Senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for DBS Bank limited submitted that the Amalgamation Scheme of Lakshmi Vilas Bank and DBS Limited was under challenge before four high courts, viz., Bombay high court, Karnataka high court, Madras high court and Delhi high court and the RBI and DBS Bank limited have moved for transfer of all such cases pending in different High Courts to the Supreme Court itself.

Mukul Rohatgi submitted that the matter will be mentioned before the Supreme Court during this week itself and it was likely to be taken up before the Supreme court closes for Winter Holidays on Friday, December 18, 2020.

The bench said, "In view of the said submission, list the matter again before this court on December 22, 2020. If any orders are passed by the Supreme Court, that may be placed before this court".

SHORT TAKES

I-T conducts raids on Erode firm

Chennai, Dec 15: Income tax raids have been conducted on various premises of Sri Pathy Associates Private Limited in Erode for the last two days.

One of the directors in the raided firm, Srinivasamoorthy, is also a director in an Erode-based firm called Supreme Sago Industries Erode Private Limited, in which CM Palaniswami son's relative N. Ramalingam is another director. The CM's son Mithun Kumar is married to Divya, whose sister is married to Chandrakanth Ramalingam, son of N. Ramalingam.

The firm, incorporated in June 2019, is into real estate, transport, construction, running marriage halls and stone quarries and other businesses. It has won several tenders for construction of government buildings, including bridges and medical colleges. The two-day searches are said to have led to the seizure of ₹12 crore in cash and other documents for properties worth several crores, informed sources said.

Sastra to hold final year exams online

Thanjavur, Dec.15: The academic council of Sastra deemed to be university here has approved the remote proctored hybrid end-semester exams for students for the semester just ended for the academic year 2020-21.

After detailed deliberations on the pros and cons of online exams, the academic council found the hybrid model doesn't compromise the integrity of the exams and at the same time students need not travel to the campus from distant locations. Sastra is partnering with TCS-ION centers located in over 130 districts across the country to offer over 50,000 assessments to over 10,000 students. Students shall be given the choice to choose their closest exam centre and appear for the exams based on their schedule.

"This Sastra-TCS partnership is the first of its kind during this pandemic and is a win-win for all stakeholders," said Dr. S. Vaidhyasubramaniam, vice-chancellor.

MNM ready to work with Rajini, says Kamal

ARULOLI M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, DEC. 15

Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder president Kamal Haasan, said that he is ready to work in coordination with Rajinikanth, in the interest of the people.

Kamal, interacting with media persons in the midst of his 'Seeramaippom Tamilagathai' campaign in the district on Tuesday, complained that the state administration tried all means to prevent his campaign which commenced on December 13 in Madurai.

"We are not sure about the reasons as to why police denied permission for us to stage public meetings as we started our campaign," said Kamal, adding that he would continue his campaigning without any fear.

On media query about a possible alliance with the yet to be formed party of his cine field colleague, Rajinikanth, Kamal said,



MNM founder and president Kamal Haasan campaigns in rain in the fishermen area at Theresapuram in Thoothukudi on Tuesday evening.

"The MNM is ready to work in coordination with Rajinikanth, giving up our ego, if it is in the interest of the people."

Kamal also added that Rajinikanth's policy of

'bringing in a change', matched with the core policy of the MNM, though the new party is yet to be launched and its policies newly formulated.

MGR IS 'MAKKAL THILAGAM', NOT 'AIADMK THILAGAM':

Meanwhile, responding to AIADMK leaders' strong criticism about the 'Seeramaippom Tamilagathai' campaign at Sivakasi in Virudhunagar district on Tuesday, Kamal Haasan, slammed back at the AIADMK saying former chief minister MGR is still people's asset and not exclusive for the AIADMK alone.

"Several ministers in the present cabinet may not have even seen MGR, whereas I had chances to sit on his lap," said Kamal, who also recalled MGR appreciating him with pride about his victories. Moreover, establishing his

right to use MGR's name in his campaign, Kamal Haasan said anyone could use MGR's name with pride, as 'MGR is Makkal Thilagam (people's asset) and not AIADMK Thilagam'.

Kamal also accused the AIADMK of being drenched in corruption. In a veiled attack on the BJP, Kamal said the party (without naming it), was attempting to destroy the multiplicity of Indian culture in the name of caste and religion.

"Such forces might could have gained voters' support in other parts of the country, but Tamil Nadu will teach them a fitting lesson," said Kamal, adding, "This is not my single voice, but of the people."

Kamal also met industrialists and entrepreneurs in Sivakasi and Kovilpatti and promised them that his party would be committed for decentralised industrial growth, if it comes to power in the state.



POLLS APPROACHING

Tirupur District Collector K. Vijayakarthy along with representatives of various political parties inspects EVM machines kept at Palladam thasildhar office in Tirupur.

—DC

Some old wives' tale on man-jumbo conflict

B RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, DEC. 15

While a search is on to trace the wild jumbo which killed three persons including a father and his son, in three days in Kollapalli limits in Pandalur on the Nilgiris border, there is an interesting tale doing the rounds in the vicinity.

Locals believe that the killer jumbo is the mentor of another killer jumbo named 'Chinnakomban' which was captured in Pandalur in 2016. Another myth is that this adult killer jumbo has returned to Pandalur to avenge the capture of his friend Chinnakomban in 2016. It may be recalled that Chinnakomban, aged about 15 years in 2016, killed two persons in a short time in Mangoranga area in Pandalur in April 2016. Immediately, it was captured and relocated to the elephant camp in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, where it is being trained to become a kumki.

Sullikomban, the suspected killer jumbo at Pandalur limits in Nilgiris.

—DC



However, when Chinnakomban was captured, it was in the company of two more wild jumbos including Sullikomban, an aged wild tusker with damaged tusk, which vanished into the jungles once the forest teams began to target Chinnakomban.

Forest sources said that evidence collected from Kollapalli limits where the wild jumbo killed a father and son, matched with the concept that the killer jumbo with a broken tusk is Sullikomban. Sullikomban was spotted deep inside the woods by

search teams, on Tuesday evening.

In the recent past, its movement was recorded in neighbouring Kerala jungles. But this time, it tried to venture into human settlements in Kollapalli hamlet that led to man-elephant conflict leading to loss of three human lives in three days. Now, three kumkis from MTR and 25 anti-poaching watchers are engaged in tracking Sullikomban, which vanished into the jungles in Kollapalli. Four drones are also being used for aerial survey to track the jumbo, forest sources said.

COFFEE-BREAK

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



Aries: You will spend quality time with your family. Domestic problems will need patient handling. Senior colleagues are likely to be of help at work.



Taurus: It's best to cooperate despite obstacles at work. Reacting unwisely at home may precipitate matters. You may fail to make a commitment to your partner.



Gemini: You're full of ideas and the stamina to see them through. The urge to do good on a large scale will feature prominently. Unbusinessmen are likely to forge new partnerships.



Cancer: Do something out of the ordinary. You are able to get a clear perspective of what you desire. You may have to defend your position and fight for what is yours.



Leo: If you stay focused you'll be able to create the foundations for the work ahead. A short-lived brawl will be settled by a completely unexpected event.



Virgo: Financially you will be on a better footing than your competitors. Investment in stocks may not bring desired results, but real estate looks promising. Friends may share a secret with you. Spend quality time with your beloved.

You share your b'day with

Bhaichung Bhutia, former Indian professional footballer who played as a striker. He has also won many awards, such as the Arjuna Award and the Padma Shri.



Libra: Don't let underlying discord ruin your peace. Travel will strengthen ties. Investment in arts and antiques will be profitable. You will be appreciated for good deeds.



Scorpio: Gossip and fast driving could get you into trouble. Travel will be beneficial and educative. Sudden speculative gains cannot be ruled out. Expenditure may increase.



Sagittarius: Professionally, your hard work will pay off, and you will be appreciated. Land and property matters and fresh business deals bring gains. A hectic day ahead.



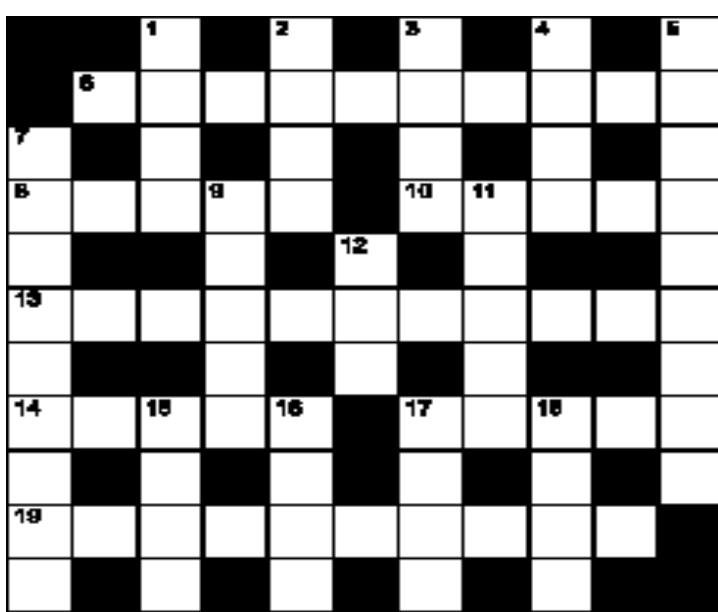
Capricorn: Someone close will disappoint you. Follow your conscience. Your friends and co-workers will be grateful for your help. You will enjoy giving. An emotionally disturbing day.



Aquarius: Your financial status is set to improve. Sportsmen and athletes can look forward to benefits and fame. Take time off to have fun with family. You will make new friends if you socialise.

Pisces: Opportunities to make positive changes are indicated. Your ideas will be appreciated. Negotiations will work to your benefit. You will buy expensive items for your beloved. Investments will fetch returns. Spend time with children and enjoy.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across
6. Pallid (10)
8. Composition (5)
10. Palm fruit (5)
13. Disrespect (11)
14. Gather (5)
17. Idolise (5)
19. Of language (10)

Down
1. Intimidates (4)
2. Nosegay (4)
3. Framework of bars (4)
4. Wording (type)
5. Triangle type (9)
7. Attractive (9)
9. Beast (anag) (5)
11. Change (5)
12. Sewn edge (3)
15. Spots (4)
16. Stimulus (4)
17. Church recess (4)
18. Exclude (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Delude, 3. Ugly, 7. Arch, 8. Fibula, 10. Airless, 13. Saunter, 16. Filter, 17. Beat, 18. Tump, 19. Titter.

Down: 1. Drag, 2. Lactic, 4. Glim, 5. Yearly, 6. Dissent, 9. Cleared, 11. Profit, 12. Deceit, 14. Clam, 15. Str.

Word Mine

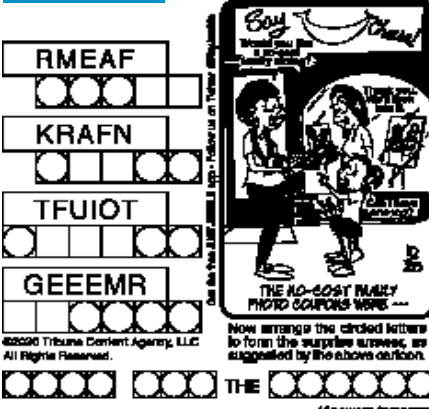
R
P
U
E
N
N
O
O
C

TODAY'S RATINGS: 16 AVERAGE: 18
GOOD: 20 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

North	South
W	E
R	P
U	E
N	N
O	O
C	C
W	E
R	P
U	E
N	N
O	O
C	C
W	E
R	P
U	E
N	N
O	O
C	C
W	E
R	P
U	E
N	N
O	O
C	C

jumble



Yesterday's Jumble: THREW
Answer: To see who was the best when throwing, they held an event.

the heart suit correctly)

When the dummy appeared, South thought they had missed a slam. He could see one spade, five diamonds and six clubs. But given West's overall, there was a risk of a bad diamond break. Declarer won with dummy's spade ace, cashed the club king and played a club to his jack. Now he carefully played the diamond ace and king. If everyone had followed,

South would have drawn East's last trump and claimed an overtrick. But when West discarded on the second round, declarer played a diamond to the queen, ruffed a diamond, crossed to dummy with a trump and discarded his second spade on the diamond nine. He lost only two hearts.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge
PHILLIP
ALDER

TEXTBOOK DEALS DO OCCUR AT THE TABLE

John Hope Franklin, who was a historian, said, "We must get beyond textbooks, go out into the world of the glories of our journey."

Some bridge players believe that textbook deals never arise at the table, so why bother reading the game's literature? We know that that attitude is ill-advised. In today's deal, how should South plan the play in five clubs

after West leads a spade? West's two-club overcall was a Michaels Cue-Bid, promising at least 5-5 in the majors. North doubled to show values. East passed because he had equal length in the majors, and eventually South pushed into five clubs. East was tempted to sacrifice in five spades because of the double fit, but the vulnerability was unfavorable. (Five spades doubled costs only 200, though, if West guesses

North	South
W	E
R	P
U	E
N	N
O	O
C	C
W	E
R	P
U	E
N	N
O	O
C	C
W	E
R	P
U	E
N	N
O	O
C	C

Opening lead: ♠ 4

SHORT TAKES

CENTRE SEEKS
DRAFT OF C'GARH
AGRI SCHEMERABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, DEC. 15

Amid intensifying protests by farmers on the three central farm laws, the Union government has sought a draft of Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana, the flagship programme of Bhupesh Baghel government aimed at ensuring minimum income availability to the farmers in Chhattisgarh through direct bank transfer.

This was revealed by Chhattisgarh agriculture minister Ravindra Choubey in Raipur on Tuesday.

The minister was highlighting the schemes launched and work done in the past two years in the state at a press conference ahead of completion of two years of the Congress-led government in Chhattisgarh on December 17.

"Amid protests by farmers over Centre's three new farm laws, the Union government has sought a draft of the Nyay scheme from Chhattisgarh government. It is up to the Centre to decide if it would like to implement the scheme", Choubey said.

The Nyay scheme, launched in Chhattisgarh in May this year, has benefitted farmers during Covid-19 crisis, he said.

Under the scheme, the state government has disbursed ₹4,500 crore to farmers in three installments as input support in the previous Kharif season and the last installment of ₹1,250 crore would be released to them in March, 2021, the minister said.

The scheme has benefitted nearly 20 lakh farmers in Chhattisgarh.

He said another welfare scheme for the farmers launched by the Bhupesh Baghel government has also not only benefitted the farmers but has also given a boost to the rural economy in Chhattisgarh.

SAD SLAMS GOVT
ON NOT HOLDING
PARLIAMENT

Chandigarh: SAD lawmaker Harsimrat Kaur Badal and AAP MP Bhagwant Mann slammed the BJP-led central government for not convening Parliament's winter session, saying the Centre was "running away" from its responsibility to resolve grievances of farmers.

Mann said the Centre was trying to "run away" from discussing "anti-farmer" agri laws which have led to the farmers' protest, while Badal described the government's move as "murder of democracy".

Badal, who had resigned as union minister over the farm laws issue, demanded that a special one-day session be held at the earliest to repeal the three laws as per the wishes of the farming community.

She said the government was "running away" from its responsibility to resolve the grievances of farmers by repealing the three agricultural marketing laws.

"The Centre knows that it is in the wrong. It knows it has legislated on agriculture which is a state subject and that farmers of all states have rejected the three Acts it bulldozed through in the last season. It knows it cannot face the people on this issue and that is why it has invented the excuse of COVID-19 to cancel the winter session of Parliament," the Bathinda MP said in a statement.

She said parliamentarians had been denied an opportunity to raise the voice of the farmers.

"The farmers are suffering untold hardship in biting cold wave conditions and parliamentarians wanted to highlight this." — *PTI*

Fun amidst chaos



Farmers play volleyball at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Tuesday during their protest against Centres agri-laws. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday launched a campaign to make farmers aware that the laws passed by Centre would pave way for their prosperity.

— *PTI*India still susceptible
to Coronavirus: Govt

Situation can escalate unexpectedly, Minister cautions public

New Delhi, Dec. 15: Covid-19 cases and deaths are declining in India which is very reassuring, the Centre said on Tuesday but cautioned against any laxity saying an overwhelming proportion of the country's population is still "very vulnerable" to the virus and the situation may escalate unexpectedly.

While there is a continuous increasing trend in Covid-19 cases and deaths globally, particularly in America and Europe and the situation in the world is becoming worrisome, in contrast the scene in India is satisfying as the cases and deaths are declining, Dr V.K. Paul, member (health) at NITI Aayog, told a press conference here.

"Mortality is declining and it is well below 400 per day. Cases have come down to almost 22,000. This is the kind of number we all experienced in July. So that is very reassuring. As a nation, we seem to be now doing very well. We are saving lives. But remember, this cannot be taken for granted. An overwhelming proportion of our population is still very vulnerable to the virus. And the situation can escalate unexpectedly," Paul said while cautioning against any laxity.

He further said the reassuring thing is that people are saying the R0 has come below one which means the pandemic is shrinking.

India's recovery rate
crosses 95 per centDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

Country's recovery rate crosses 95 per cent, which is among the highest in the world for countries with high caseloads. The daily new cases recorded on Tuesday — 22,065 — were also the lowest in over five months. Active Covid-19 caseload has fallen below 3.4 lakh, a mere 3.43 per cent of the total infections.

Union health ministry pointed out that the number of recoveries have crossed 94 lakhs (94,22,636), pushing the national recovery rate to over 95 per cent, which is one of the highest in the world for countries with the high caseload.

"So we should be happy about that but cautiously happy," he said.

Noting Delhi has made progress, he said, "We congratulate the government of Delhi as also all the other governments who have done so well in contributing towards such a significant control (in cases) in recent times."

Paul, however, expressed concern over the Covid-19 situation in

"With a high number of patients recovering every day and the sustained fall in the mortality rate, the country's steady trend of decline in active cases continues," said the Union health ministry.

There are 3,39,820 active cases of Covid-19 as on Tuesday. The slide in the active cases is supplemented by an exponential rise in the recoveries.

"The gap between active cases and recovered cases is continuously increasing and stands at 90,82,816. The national recovery rate has further escalated to 95.12 per cent," the ministry added.

A total 34,477 patients have recovered in a span of 24 hours, of whom

74.24 per cent are concentrated in 10 states and UTs. Maharashtra has reported the maximum number of single-day recoveries at 4,610, followed by 4,481 in Kerala and 2,980 in West Bengal. The ministry said that 73.52 per cent of the new infections are from 10 states and UTs. Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 2,949, followed by Kerala with 2,707 new cases. A total 354 case fatalities have been reported in a span of 24 hours. Ten states and UTs account for 79.66 per cent of these. Maharashtra and Delhi reported maximum casualties with 60 new deaths each, followed by West Bengal at 43.

rate has come down to 6.37 while the average daily positivity rate during last week was 3.00 per cent.

Speaking about the preparation for the Covid-19 vaccination drive, Bhushan said guidelines for estimation of electrical and non-electrical cold chain equipment and their strengthening have been issued to states.

— *PTI*SC suggests break
for health workers

New Delhi, Dec. 15: The Supreme Court asked the Centre on Tuesday to consider granting a break to doctors engaged in Covid-19 duty for the last seven-eight months.

The top court said that continuous work might be affecting mental health of doctors.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah, which is hearing a suo motu case on proper treatment of Covid-19 patients and dignified handling of dead bodies in hospitals, asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to consider the suggestions of giving the doctors some break.

"For the last seven-eight months doctors have not been given any break and are continuously working. You take instruction and think over giving them some break. It must be very painful and might be affecting their mental health," the bench told Mehta.

The solicitor general assured the bench that the government would consider the suggestion of the bench to grant some break to health workers engaged in Covid-19 duty.

The top court also expressed shock that the Gujarat government has levied around ₹90 crore fine for not wearing face masks, but has not been able to enforce the guidelines on Covid-19 appropriate behaviour.

At the outset, the bench while referring to the affidavit filed by the Centre said that it does not state which hospitals have fire No Objection Certificate(s) (NOCs) and it is citing 2016 information.

Mehta said that the picture is not as rosy as it seems from data (referred in the affidavit) but the Gujarat government has taken all necessary steps on fire safety measures.

Justice Shah said No, they have not and added that the affidavit does not show which Covid hospitals have the necessary safeguards.

The bench pointed out that 16 notices were sent to a hospital at Rajkot itself but nothing was done about it and many hospitals have no fire NOCs in Gujarat.

It said that out of 260 private hospitals in Gujarat, 61 hospitals do not have fire NOCs. Mehta further said that now in all these private hospitals, responsible persons have been appointed as nodal officers.

Dealing with the ₹90 crore fine collected by the Gujarat government from persons for not wearing masks, the bench said despite the fine, the state has not been able to enforce Covid appropriate behaviour guidelines. Mehta said that ₹500 is not a deterrent fine to which the bench said that what about implementation of mask wearing protocol & social distancing measures. — *PTI*

Gulmarg coldest
at minus 10.2C

Sri Nagar, Dec 15: Night temperatures in the Kashmir Valley dipped below the freezing point owing to a clear sky, with the famous ski-resort of Gulmarg shivering at minus 10.2 degrees Celsius, Meteorological department officials said here on Tuesday.

All weather stations in the Valley recorded sub-zero night temperatures several degrees below the normal for this part of the season, the officials said.

They said the temperature in Gulmarg, the famous ski-resort in north Kashmir, settled at a low of minus 10.2 degrees Celsius, which is six degrees below the normal for this time of the season. The resort was the coldest recorded place in the UT, the Met officials said.

Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 5.3 degrees Celsius, and Srinagar the summer capital of the union territory recorded a low of minus 3.2 degrees Celsius, they said. Qazigund the gateway town to the valley recorded a low of minus 2.6 degrees. — *PTI*

EoM: British PM to be
R-Day chief guest

New Delhi, Dec 15: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will visit India in January to be the chief guest at the Republic Day Parade, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced on Tuesday after holding talks with his Indian counterpart External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

Addressing a joint press conference after the talks, Jaishankar said the two sides held four hours of discussion on a wide range of issues and focus has been on how to take the bilateral ties to a higher level. "In recent years as you know, there have been very big changes in global politics and we both believe that our interests are better served by working together more effectively," he said and added that important issues, including the situation in Afghanistan as also developments in Gulf and evolution of the Indo-Pacific region were discussed.

Jaishankar said challenges posed by terrorism and radicalism which are shared concerns were also discussed during the talks. "Prime Minister Boris

COURT GRANTS
BAIL TO ACTOR'S
RELATIVESHAHAAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 15

A special Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance (NDPS) Act court on Tuesday granted bail to Agisilaos Demetriades, brother of Bollywood actor Arjun Rampal's live-in partner Gabriella, in a drugs related case.

The Narcotics Control Bureau had arrested Demetriades in October when the agency in a raid had found 0.8 grams of a sticky brown substance from a resort in Lonavala where he was celebrating his birthday.

Even though the court had granted him bail in this case but he remained behind bars because the probe agency had arrested him in another drugs related case. Demetriades later moved the bail application through advocate Kushal Mor.

Mor argued before the court that no person could be vexed twice for the same cause and that there was no new evidence to support the allegations against him.

He had further argued that the only new piece of evidence were statements of co-accused, which, in view of a recent SC ruling related to statements made before NCB officers, were not admissible, Mor said.



Boris Johnson

Johnson has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to join the UK-hosted G7 summit next year. The UK Prime Minister has also accepted the very generous invitation to attend India's Republic Day celebrations (as chief guest) in January which is a great honour," Raab said. On his part, Jaishankar said Johnson accepting the invitation for the Republic Day was, in a way, symbolic of a new era in Indo-UK ties. Raab's three-day visit to India from December 14-17 comes at a time the UK is holding complex negotiations with the European Union on reaching a post Brexit trade deal. — *PTI*

Bihar cabinet
approves free
Covid vaccine shot

Patna, Dec. 15: The Nitish Kumar cabinet has approved free Covid vaccine shot to every resident of Bihar. Earlier, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Ashwini Kumar Choubey had said that seven lakh COVID-19 vaccine shots will be provided to Bihar in the first phase.

While reviewing the supply of vaccination in the state, the Bihar minister made the announcement adding that another one crore doses will be provided to the state in the second phase. The Minister also revealed that the preparation of supply and storage of vaccination was being carried out satisfactorily in the state, adding that the first line of vaccination will be provided to the health officials followed by frontline workers and common people.

Notably when it comes to the Centre's vaccination plan, the BJP in its poll manifesto ahead of the Bihar Assembly Elections had promised that after ICMR's nod, every Bihari will get a free COVID-19 vaccination. Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the newly-elected NDA government will provide the vaccine made available by the Centre to the people free of cost.

Court acquits all 36 TJ foreigners

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

A Delhi court, on Tuesday, acquitted 36 foreigners, who were charge-sheeted for attending the Tablighi Jamaat congregation here by allegedly being negligent and disobeying the government guidelines issued in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

Chief metropolitan magistrate Arun Kumar Garg acquitted the foreigners from 14 countries of all charges.

The court had, on August 24, framed charges against the foreigners under Sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous

to life) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 3 (disobeying regulation) of the Epidemic Act, 1897.

The charges were also framed under Section 51 (obstruction) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

However, they were discharged for the offences under Section 14 (1)(b) (violation of visa norms) of Foreigners Act and

Sections 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 271 (disobedience to quarantine rule) of the IPC.

The court had also discharged eight foreign nationals from six countries of all charges under which they were charge-sheeted in the absence of any record or any credible material against them.

FINAL WISH

Rajaram Singh once told a journalist that he wished to see accused hanged

Main witness of Behmai massacre dies

Kanpur (UP), Dec. 15: Rajaram Singh, the main witness of the 1981 Behmai massacre by Phoolan Devi's gang, has died at his native village, his last wish to see the accused hanged unfulfilled.

The 85-year-old, who was suffering from a prolonged illness, died at his native village in Kanpur Dehat district on Sunday.

Twenty men were gunned down on February 14, 1981 allegedly by dacoit Phoolan Devi and her gang seeking revenge for her rape by upper caste men in Behmai

village, less than 100 km from Kanpur.

Seventeen of the dead were Thakurs, the dominant caste in the village. Rajaram Singh's younger brothers Banwari Singh and Himmat Singh, cousin Naresh Singh and nephews Dev Singh, Hukum Singh and Dashrath Singh were among those allegedly killed by the Phoolan Devi gang.

Singh once told a journalist that he wished to see the accused hanged for their crime. "But God only knows whether I will be able to

● **TWENTY MEN** were gunned down on February 14, 1981 allegedly by dacoit Phoolan Devi and her gang seeking revenge for her rape by upper caste men in Behmai village, less than 100 km from Kanpur.

witness it as I am suffering from chronic liver ailment. I will get peace only when the killers are punished in my lifetime," he was quoted as saying.

A Kanpur court framed charges in the case in

August 2012, three decades after the massacre.

Out of the 23 accused, 16, including Phoolan Devi, are already dead. Charges were then framed against the four surviving accused, and the court issued non-bailable warrants against the three absconders among them — Maan Singh, Ramkesh and Vishwanath alias Ashok.

A special court (dacoity) had initially fixed a date in January 2020 for pronouncing the verdict. But it was adjourned several times as the original case diary was

reported missing from court records, and a probe was ordered.

The court has to give its verdict on the role of the four surviving accused — Poshra (75), Shyambabu (70), Bhikha (65), and Vishwanath (54).

While Poshra is still in jail, the rest are out on bail. In the years following the massacre, Phoolan Devi went on to surrender and later become an MP. She was gunned down outside her official residence in New Delhi on July 25, 2001.

— *PTI*

SHORT TAKES

FIRE AT RUSSIAN RETIREMENT HOME KILLS 11

Moscow, Dec. 15: A fire in a retirement home in Russia's southern Urals killed 11 people while three more were hospitalised with injuries, local officials said on Tuesday.

The fire broke out in the early hours in a wooden, one-story building of a private retirement home in a village in the Bashkiria region.

A total of 16 people were in the building. It wasn't immediately clear what caused the fire. Emergency officials said seven men and four women were killed in the incident. According to Russian media reports, they were bed-ridden residents of the retirement home. A criminal probe into the incident has been launched and the head of the facility has been detained.

'TWITTER KILLER' SENTENCED TO DEATH IN JAPAN

Tokyo, Dec. 15: A Japanese court on Tuesday sentenced a man to death for killing and dismembering nine people, most of whom had posted suicidal thoughts on social media, in a case that shocked the country.

The Tachikawa branch of the Tokyo District Court found Takahiro Shiraishi, known as the "Twitter killer," guilty of killing, dismembering and storing the bodies of the victims in his apartment in Zama, near Tokyo.

Shiraishi, 30, pleaded guilty and said he would not appeal his death sentence. Police arrested Shiraishi in 2017 after finding the bodies of eight females and one male in cold-storage cases in his apartment. Investigators said Shiraishi approached the victims via Twitter, offering to assist them with their suicidal wishes. He killed the women, including teenagers, after raping them, and also killed a boyfriend of one of the women to silence him, investigators said.

OFFICIALS: BOMBS, SHOOTING ATTACK KILLS 4 IN KABUL

Kabul, Dec. 15: A bombing and a shooting attack in Kabul killed at least three people, including a deputy provincial governor, while a deputy provincial council chief was killed in western Afghanistan on Tuesday, officials said.

The attacks are the latest in relentless violence in Afghanistan even as the Taliban and Afghan government negotiators hold talks in Qatar, trying to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war. According to Tariq Arian, an Afghan interior ministry spokesman, a sticky bomb attached to the armored vehicle belonging to Kabul's deputy provincial governor killed two people, and wounded two others.

The deputy provincial governor and the apparent target of the attack, Mahbobullah Mohibi, was killed alongside his secretary while two of his bodyguards were wounded, Arian said.

NIGERIA: BOKO HARAM CLAIMS MASS ABDUCTION

Lagos (Nigeria), Dec. 15: Nigeria's Boko Haram jihadist rebels have claimed responsibility for the abduction of hundreds of students in an attack on a boys school in northern Katsina State, a Nigerian online newspaper says.

More than 330 students are missing from the Government Science Secondary School in Kankara after gunmen with assault rifles attacked their school on Friday night. The Daily Nigerian said it received an audio message from Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau saying that his group abducted the schoolboys because Western education is against the tenets of Islam.

"What happened in Katsina was done to promote Islam and discourage un-Islamic practices as Western education is not the type of education permitted by Allah and his Holy Prophet," the paper quoted Shekau as saying.

There has been no independent verification of the audio message but Shekau has in the past released video and audio messages on Boko Haram's behalf. Nigerian presidential spokesman Garba Shehu said in a statement on Monday that "the kidnappers had made contact and discussions were already on, pertaining to the safety and return" of the children to their homes.

'Time to turn the page', says Biden after EC confirms win

Joe lashes out at Trump saying he refused to respect the will of people

Washington, Dec. 15: US President-elect Joe Biden has told election-weary Americans that it is time to "turn the page", after the Electoral College affirmed his triumph over President Donald Trump, who has refused to concede and filed a litany of legal challenges to overturn the poll results.

The 538-member Electoral College on Monday pushed Biden past the 270-vote threshold to win the bitterly-contested race for the White House. It was one of the crucial steps required for the 78-year-old Democrat to take office on January 20 as the 46th US President.

Under the US system, voters actually cast their ballots for electors, who in turn, formally vote for candidates weeks after the presidential election. Biden won the November 3 election with 306 electoral college votes to incumbent Republican President Trump's 232.

The Electoral College votes will now be sent to Congress to be counted formally next month. Though some House Republicans have indicated they will object to the results in key states, they can do little more than delay the process during a joint session of Congress on January 6.

In a speech from his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware after the announcement of his victory in the election, Biden said the US democracy had been "pushed, tested and threatened" and "proved to be resilient, true and strong".

He criticised President Trump's attempts to overturn the result and said the "will of the people prevailed". "The rule of law, our Constitution and the will of the people prevailed" over Trump's efforts to undo the results of the election, the former US vice president said.

"The flame of democracy was lit in this nation a long time ago. And we now know nothing, not even a pandemic or an abuse of power, can extinguish that flame," Biden said.

"In this battle for the soul of America, democracy prevailed. We the people voted. Faith in our institutions held. The integrity of our elections remains intact. And so, now it is time to turn the page. To unite. To heal," he said.

Biden said the election outcome should be celebrated, not attacked, that more than 81 million votes were cast for him and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. This too is a record



Former President Bill Clinton and other members of New York state's Electoral College help Electoral member George K. Gresham who fell while voting for President and Vice President in the Assembly Chamber at the state Capitol in Albany, New York.

— AFP

GOP leader McConnell wishes Biden

Washington, Dec. 15: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell congratulated Democrat Joe Biden as president-elect on Tuesday, saying the Electoral College "has spoken."

The Republican leader's statement, delivered in a speech on the Senate floor, ends weeks of silence over President Donald Trump's defeat. It came a day after electors met and officially affirmed Biden's election win. "I want to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden," McConnell said.

"Many of us had hoped the presidential election would yield a different

result," he said. "But our system of government has the processes to determine who will be sworn in on January 20. The Electoral College has spoken."

McConnell called Biden someone "who has devoted himself to public service for many years." He also congratulated Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, saying "all Americans can take pride that our nation has a female vice president-elect for the very first time."

McConnell prefaced his remarks with sweeping praise for what he characterised as Trump's "end-

less" accomplishments during four years in office. He said Trump and Vice President Mike Pence "deserve our thanks."

For the first time, a groundswell of leading Republicans have said that Democrat Joe Biden is the winner of the presidential election, essentially abandoning President Donald Trump's assault on the outcome as the Electoral College certified the vote.

With states affirming the results, the Republicans faced a pivotal choice—to declare Biden the president-elect, as the tally showed, or keep standing

silently by as Trump wages a potentially damaging campaign to overturn the election.

Number of senators said the time has come to move on. "At some point you have to face the music," said Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the second-ranking GOP leader. "Once the Electoral College settles the issue today, it's time for everybody to move on." Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri, the chairman of the inaugural committee, said the panel will now "deal with Vice President Biden as the president-elect."

— AP

US attorney general Barr resigns

Washington, Dec. 15: US Attorney General William Barr, who of late had publicly differed with President Donald Trump on allegations of voter fraud in the November 3 presidential elections, has resigned.

Trump has appointed his deputy Jeff Rosen as the Acting Attorney General. "Just had a very nice meeting with Attorney General Bill Barr at the White House. Our relationship has been a very good one, he has done an outstanding job! As per letter, Bill will be

leaving just before Christmas to spend the holidays with his family..." Trump announced on twitter Monday night.

"Deputy Attorney General Jeff Rosen, an outstanding person, will become Acting Attorney General. Highly respected Richard Donoghue will be taking over the duties of Deputy Attorney General. Thank you to all!" Trump said as he tweeted the two-page resignation letter of Barr. Barr, in his letter, said, "As discussed, I will spend the next week wrapping up a few remaining

matters important to the administration, and depart on December 23."

"I am greatly honored that you called on me to serve your administration and the American people once again as Attorney General. I am proud to have played a role in the many successes and unprecedented achievements you have delivered for the American people. Your record is all the more historic because you accomplished it in the face of relentless implacable resistance," he added.

— PTI

US federal agency homing in on social media firms' data collection

Washington, Dec. 15: Federal regulators are ordering Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, TikTok's parent and five other social media companies to provide detailed information on how they collect and use consumers' personal data and how their practices affect children and teens.

The Federal Trade Commission's action announced on Monday goes to the heart of the tech industry's lucrative business model: harvesting data from platform users and making it available to advertisers so they can pinpoint specific consumers to target. The agency plans to use the information, due in 45 days, for a comprehensive study.

The other five companies are Reddit, Snap, Discord, WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, and Google's YouTube. Regulators and lawmakers are increasingly weaving into their investigations of market dominance by Big Tech companies concerns over data power and privacy.

The FTC wants to know how social media and video streaming services collect, use and track consumers' personal and demographic information, how they decide which ads and other content are shown to consumers, whether they apply algorithms or data analytics to personal information, how

they measure and promote user engagement and how their practices affect children and teens. "Never before has there been an industry capable of surveillance and monetising so much of our personal lives," three of the five FTC commissioners said.

They said the planned study "will lift the hood on the social media and video streaming firms to carefully study their engines," teens.

— AP

Indian pleads guilty of 36.1M gas oil heist

Singapore, Dec. 15: A 40-year-old Indian man on Tuesday pleaded guilty to his involvement in misappropriation of SGD 49 million (\$36.1 million) worth of gas oil at a multinational refinery in Singapore. Sadagopan Premnath committed the crime in 2017-18 while working at the Royal-Dutch Shell Eastern Petroleum located on Pulau Bukom island. Premnath will return to court for mitigation and sentencing in February.

The case also involves several other employees at the refinery. He pleaded guilty to four charges of abetting criminal breach of trust as a servant, while another five charges will be considered in his sentence.

Vaccinate Joe, Harris, Trump, Pence: Fauci

Washington, Dec. 15: Top US infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci says President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris should be vaccinated for Covid-19 as soon as possible.

Speaking to ABC's "Good Morning America" on Tuesday, Fauci said, "For security reasons, I really feel strongly that we should get them vaccinated as soon as we possibly can." He adds he'd like to see Biden "fully protected as he enters into

the presidency in January." Fauci says that while President Donald Trump probably still has antibodies to the virus that will protect him for at least several months, he should get the vaccine as well to be "doubly sure."

Trump was hospitalised with Covid-19 in early October. Fauci says Vice President Mike Pence should get vaccinated, too. He says, "You still want to protect people who are very important to our country right now."

— AP

LONDON ON HIGHEST ALERT AFTER NEW COVID-19 VARIANT IDENTIFIED

Geneva, Dec. 15: The World Health Organisation is aware of reports that a new variant of Covid-19 has been identified in the United Kingdom, although there is no evidence to suggest that the mutation will impact the effectiveness of vaccines against the disease, WHO Health Emergencies Programme executive director Mike Ryan said on Monday.

UK health secretary Matt Hancock earlier in the day announced that a new variant of Covid-19 had been identified in the south of England, and

was responsible for roughly 1,000 cases.

"We are aware of this genetic variant I think reported in about 1,000 individuals in England, and the authorities in the UK under Matt Hancock's leadership are obviously looking at the significance of this," Ryan said at a WHO virtual press briefing.

According to the WHO official, there was no evidence to suggest that the new variant of the disease would transmit more easily or undermine vaccines against Covid-19 that are being rolled out.

— Agencies

PDM leaders booked as they ask PM Khan to quit

Lahore, Dec. 15: Pakistan Democratic Movement's top leaders, including PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz, were booked on Tuesday for causing irreparable damage to a national asset after its Minar-e-Pakistan rally here, as the 11-party opposition alliance set January 31 deadline for Prime Minister Imran Khan to step down or face long march on Islamabad.

The opposition alliance held its final anti-government rally in Lahore on Sunday despite a ban on the gathering of more than 300 people owing to an increase in Covid-19 cases across the country. The PDM has been

holding massive rallies since its inception in September to seek Khan's ouster and press the powerful military to stop interfering in politics. Lahore police booked Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) vice president Maryam Nawaz, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former National Assembly speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, former railways minister Saad Rafique and 125 others under different sections of the Pakistan Penal Code for breaking the locks of Minar-e-Pakistan gates, damaging the official property and violating the Covid-19 guidelines.

— PTI

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Short-Term e-TENDER-INVITATION FOR BIDS NO.45/2020-21 Dt:14.12.2020 1. For details, visit www.tntenders.gov.in & www.tnphc.com 2. e-Bids are invited by the Superintending Engineer/CC/TNPHC Ltd., for the Construction of New Building for newly formed District Police Office Building at Chengalpattu in Chengalpattu District. (SE/CC/DB/2419/2020). 3. Approximate value of work : Rs.1097.17 Lakhs (with GST) 4. Date and time for Downloading / Uploading of bid documents through online : 19.12.2020 at 12.00 Noon to 30.12.2020 upto 6.00 P.M. 5. Date & time of opening of the bid : 04.01.2021 at 11.15 a.m. 6. Other details can be seen in the bid documents. Superintending Engineer/CC TNPHC Ltd., Chennai.	
DIPR/4685 /TENDER/2020	

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001 GURU HARGOBIND THERMAL PLANT, LEHRA MOHABBAT DISTT. BATHINDA (PUNJAB) - 151 111 e-tendering website- http://eproc.punjab.gov.in .	
NOTICE INVITING TENDER (Through E-tendering) Tender Enquiry No.: 64/CHP/Op.-304/GHTP/2020-21 Dated 14/12/2020 SHORT DESCRIPTION: Manual picking of stones coming along with coal from running conveyors and their further disposal in scrap yard at 2 x 210 MW + 2 x 250 MW, CHP, GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat Distt. Bathinda. EMD: Minimum Rs. 190000/- (One Lac Ninety Thousand) Last Date & Time for bid submission : 19/01/2021 upto 11:30 hrs. Date & Time of opening of Fee stage bid : 22/01/2021 upto 12:00 hrs.	
Detailed NIT and tender specification can be downloaded from PSPCL website http://eproc.punjab.gov.in from dated 15-12-2020 onwards.	
Note: 1. The prospective bidders can obtain clarification regarding tender specifications from this office. For registration of digital signatures and uploading of tender information may be sought from http://eproc.punjab.gov.in . 2. It is informed that in case tender process is not completed due to any reason, no corrigendum will be published in newspapers. Detail regarding corrigendum may be seen on PSPCL official website i.e. https://pspcl.in .	
Superintending Engineer, Mechanical Mtc. Circle-II, O&M, GHTP, PSPCL, Lehra Mohabbat, Distt. Bathinda (Pb.)-151111.	
GHTP-59/2020 RO : I/117794	

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT / BUILDINGS ORGANIZATION BUILDINGS (C&M) CIRCLE, TRICHY-1 TENDER NOTICE NO. 25 / 2020-21 / SE / B / C&M / TRY / Dated: 15.12.2020 FORM OF CONTRACT: LUMPsum / ITEM WISE RATE TENDER For and on behalf of the Government of Tamilnadu, the Superintending Engineer, PWD, Buildings (C&M) Circle, Trichy invites sealed tender for the following works at his Office up to 3.00 PM on 05.01.2021. The tenders received will be opened at 3.30 PM on same day.	
Name of Work: (1) Construction of Own Building with Driving Testing Track for the Motor Vehicle Inspector Office (Unit Office) at MANARGUDDI in Thiruvannamalai District. (2) Construction of One Science Lab, One Art/Craft Room, One Library, One Computer Room and Drinking Water Supply arrangements in Government High School at ATHIPALLAM in Virudhachal District. (3) Construction of One Science Lab, One Art/Craft Room, One Library, One Computer Room and Drinking Water Supply arrangements in Government High School at PUNALKULAM in Gandhinagar District.	
Approx. value of work in Lakhs (including GST @ 12%) : (1)Rs.184.41 (2)Rs.66.20 (3)Rs.66.70 Amount of Earnest Money Deposit : (in Rupees) : (1)Rs.1,02,300/- (2)Rs.43,100/- (3)Rs.43,400/- Period of completion (for each work) : 05 Months Tender Schedule available date : From 17.12.2020 to 04.01.2021 up to 5.45 PM	
Note : Price Adjustment Clause is applicable for the work mentioned against Sl.No.1 only. Minimum Eligibility of the Contractors, Tender Documents Cost and other details can be seen & download free of cost from the website www.tntenders.gov.in & www.tenders.in.gov.in Superintending Engineer, PWD, Buildings (C&M) Circle, Trichy-1.	
DIPR4680/Tender/2020	

US Court terminates lawsuit against Modi and Amit Shah

Washington, Dec. 15: A US court has dismissed a \$100-million lawsuit filed against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah after the litigants - a separatist Kashmiri Khalistan outfit and two associates - failed to appear before it at two scheduled hearings.

The suit was filed on September 19, 2019, days before Modi's historic "Howdy Modi!" event in Houston, Texas. It challenged the Indian Parliament's decision on Jammu and Kashmir that abrogated the special privileges of the state and carved out two union territories and sought a compensation of \$100 million from Modi, Shah and Lt. Gen. Kanwal Jeet Singh Dhillon. Dhillon is currently serving as the Director-General Defence Intelligence Agency and Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff under the Chief of Defence Staff.

Other than that attempted service," Kashmiri Khalistan Referendum Front "have done nothing to prosecute this case", and have now failed to appear at two duly set Scheduling Conferences, US District Court Southern District of Texas Judge Frances H. Stacy said in his order dated October 6 and recommended that the case be dismissed.

The case was terminated by Judge Andrew S Hanen of the US District Court in Texas on October 22. Apart from the Kashmiri Khalistan Referendum

Front, the other two complainants have not been identified, other than the acronyms "TFK" and "SMS".

The suing party was represented by separatist lawyer Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The Indian Parliament passed legislation last year changing the status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, modifying provisions that have been an obstacle to economic development and promoted a sense of separatism.

— PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

16 DECEMBER 2020

Biden affirmation is a win for US democracy

The Electoral College's formal affirmation of Joe Biden's victory was only a ritual. If it assumes the contours of a milestone in US election history, the blame should go to the outgoing President Donald Trump's attempts to subvert the democratic process. "It is the rule of law, the Constitution and the will of the people" that prevails, as the victor, Mr Biden, put it in a gracious speech in which he said realistically, "Now it is time to turn the page."

The proof of the durability of the US political system, which is an important template for democracies, represents a significant moment for all of the free world. In the six weeks since November 3 in which Mr Trump and his supporters tried every bizarre trick in their subversive playbook to overturn a clear popular verdict in which Mr Biden not only got 306 of 538 Electoral College votes but also trounced Mr Trump — one of five Presidents to win the White House without a popular mandate — by over seven million votes.

The members of the Electoral College were only upholding the brief given to them in a democratic process but what the Supreme Court did in throwing out every challenge to the election is truly heroic. As many as 86 judges, many of them either nominees of Mr Trump or the Republican Party, displayed scorn or contempt for lawsuits that were part of legal manoeuvres backed by as many as 17 attorneys-general of states and 126 members of Congress.

The court made legal history in its unanimity after having seen through the subterfuge of trying to throw out 20 million legitimately cast ballots. This is a grand lesson in how the integrity of a justice system can be preserved only by the honesty of judges who resist the temptation to reflect any gratitude they may feel towards those who nominated them, or their own ideological leanings. Their firm rulings helped sustain the reputation of a great institution.

The catastrophic Trump presidency may not have fulfilled the worst scenarios of a crazed authoritarian let loose in the White House but the visible damage it has caused to a precious democratic process like free and fair elections will take a long time to mend. What Mr Trump did in repeatedly questioning the legitimacy of the presidential polls, considered the fairest in many quadrennials, is to corrode social trust in a vibrant democracy. In exploiting political divisions, Mr Trump had split a nation with his web of lies whose reach became phenomenal in the age of social media that can be so easily manipulated.

The strength of institutions was sorely tested in four years but so many of them came through with flying colours. Mr Trump's animus against migrants as reflected in his stopping the DACA programme was stayed by the courts, so too his manipulation of visas and green cards. The media exposed his cruel separation of children from their parents. His own administration pooh-poohed his disinformation campaign on the coronavirus which, ironically, did not spare him either. The top court ridiculed his skewed election petitions and, finally, the people rejected his presidency. His legacy, apart from damage to public trust in government, is bits and pieces of a Mexican Wall. A divided nation must pick up the pieces now.

'Reckless' Kamal Haasan

In the electoral marketplace, do good intentions alone sell? This is a mind boggling question that crops up when actor Kamal Haasan, launching his campaign for the Tamil Nadu state Assembly elections of 2021, reels out a list of public inconveniences that governments hardly bother to address. He also raises serious questions. Like, what's the need for a new Parliament building?

But he also seems to get carried away by the crowds that turn up for his meetings. 'Gangs come together for money but it's a revolution when people congregate for an ideal,' he exulted on Twitter presuming that the throngs at Madurai and Usilampatti were there to join him in his mission to eliminate corruption.

Of course, it is not just from Central rulers that he demands answers but also from those holding the reins in the state. Aptly underlining the hypocrisy of a ruling party top honcho's suggestion for alternating power between a man and a woman in a single term, he pointed out that the party does not have even a single woman as a district secretary. He even pledges to make ministers out of at least 20 women when the mantle falls on him. Things that sound really nice.

Haasan even boasts of growing up on the lap of M.G. Ramachandran, the former chief minister popularly known as MGR who remained invincible in politics during his time. But does that privilege make him the inheritor of MGR's political legacy or do people see in him a modern MGR?

Whatever people see in him, when Mr Haasan cocks a snook at popular sentiments, he diminishes his prospects.

By promising to hand over TASMAG shops to private retailers or plumping for the commonly contentious NEET or openly supporting the vice-chancellor of Anna University, who is seen as most parties in the state as an intruder imposed on them, one cannot garner votes in Tamil Nadu, even if as MGR himself.

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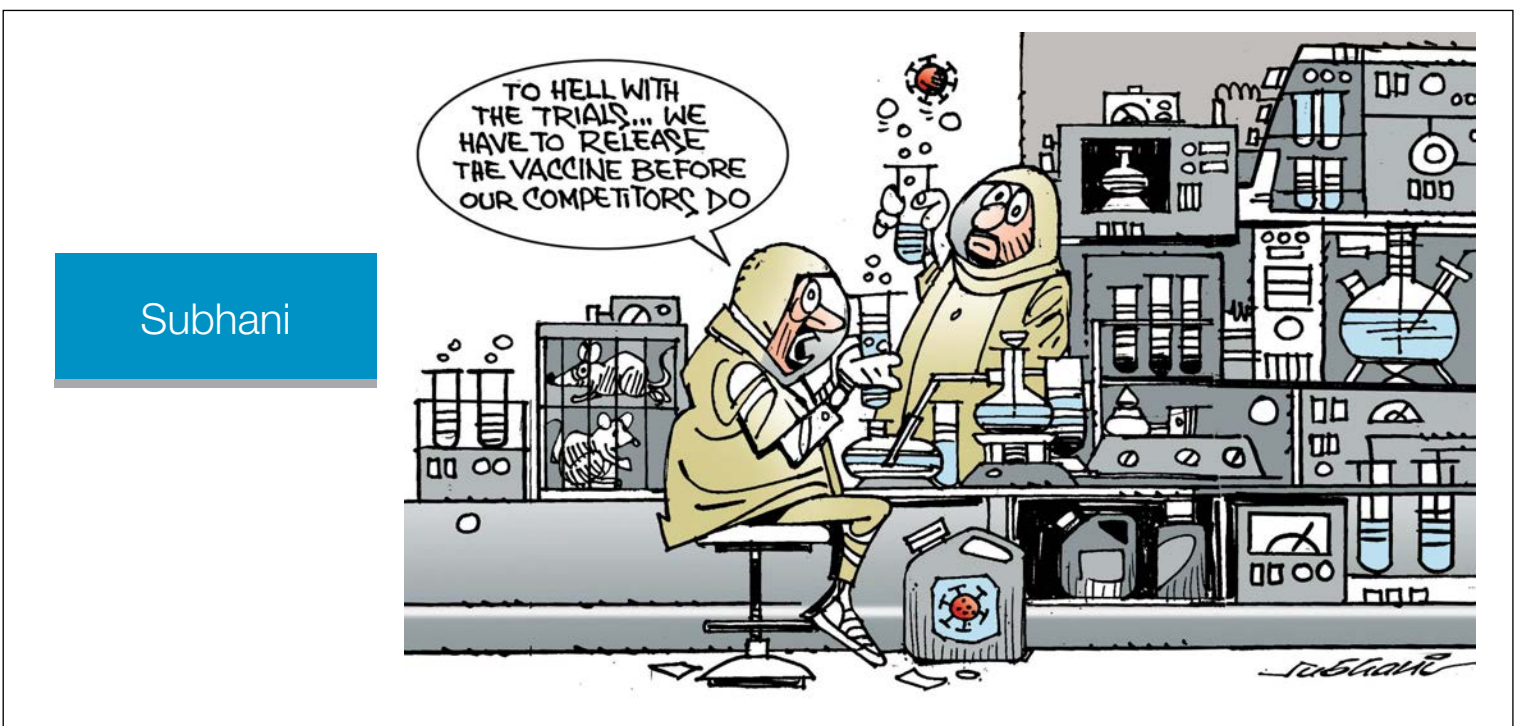
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Subhani

Language row led to a new nation 49 yrs ago



Abhijit Bhattacharya

The world knows that Bangladesh is South Asia's youngest nation state, but few people — and particularly those born well after the cataclysmic events surrounding its birth, who are now in their 20s, 30s and 40s — are fully aware of the torturous processes over a long period of time that led to the creation of arguably one of the few linguistic nation states through blood, sweat, toil and tears? The experience of living through the tumultuous 24 years (1947-1971), between when India attained freedom from British rule and the December day 49 years ago when Dhaka (then Dacca) became "the free capital of a free country" — in Indira Gandhi's ringing phrase in the Lok Sabha — are hard to fathom for those who didn't personally experience those momentous times. East Bengal, of course, had known the agony and humiliation of separation even before 1947 when undivided Bengal was partitioned into two halves, but nothing quite prepared it for the experience of those 24 years as the eastern enclave of the nation called Pakistan — and being treated as a vassal province.

The beauty and reality of history is that it is usually written, rewritten or unwritten by the victors, or deliberately distorted for the sake of the polity. When British India was split into two with the independence of two nations in 1947, it also created a geopolitical impossibility: two wings of the new nation of Pakistan separated by the mother state with a 1,000-mile crater. It was an unbridgeable disconnect making a mockery of a unified Pakistan, ostensibly founded on a common religious identity. Its two wings were a political reality, but remained a geographical and cultural disconnect

since birth.

Just ask any 74-year-old (or older) Bangladeshi (born in 1946 or earlier) about his or her life journey. One is likely to hear the agonising experience he/she underwent, changing his/her nationality. Ceasing to be Indian in August 1947. Being a Pakistani for 24 years, being treated as an inferior and a second-class citizen, discriminated against, till December 1971, and then attaining his/her present identity as a free, independent Bengali-speaking Bangladeshi.

The worst humiliation for the Bengali-speaking citizens of what became East Pakistan was the insensitive linguistic policy forcibly imposed by an insolent, dictatorial governor-general, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the country's founding father, who contemptuously treated them as inferior creatures in contrast to the full-fledged citizens of West Pakistan.

Jinnah's toxic temper, mixed with arrogance, sowed the seeds of irreversible Bengali nationalism in the world's most fertile soil, and ploughing their mind with confrontational ideas. Bengalis sullenly, but silently, bore this up to a point. Till Jinnah left Dhaka, on his sole (and last) visit to East Pakistan, which helped to create a "distinct Bengali nation within an indistinct and intolerant Pakistani state".

On March 21, 1948, Jinnah met a delegation of the Scheduled Castes; and on March 22 received another delegation of upper-caste Hindu members of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly. However, what happened on March 21 at a public gathering, addressed by Jinnah, was a bombshell. "Let me make it clear to you that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language," he declared. "Anyone who tries to mis-

lead you is really the enemy of Pakistan... Every Mussalman should come under the banner of the Muslim League, which is the true custodian of Pakistan". It was a warning-cum-threat to the Bengali language of "unit-ed" Pakistan. Jinnah misread the mood on the ground — and the fact that Bengali-speaking people across the world usually define themselves by their language, despite the significant role that religion may play in their lives.

Thus, while already nurturing a genuine feeling of deprivation, discrimination and humiliation, it didn't take long for East Bengalis to fall back upon their linguistic pride. Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam were always dearer to the Bengali head and heart than the divisive, hate-filled politics of violence and murder of the rest of South Asia. Little wonder Rabindranath Tagore's eternal rhythmic words and sonorous lyrics were wholeheartedly embraced and adopted as Bangladesh's national anthem in 1971. It spontaneously took to the 1905 composed lines of arguably the greatest philosopher poet to have blossomed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries east of Suez.

"Amar shonar Bangla, ami tomay bhalobashi; Chirodin tomar akash, tomar batash, amar prane bajay bashi" (My golden Bengal, I love you. Forever thy skies, thy air set my heart in tune as if it were a flute).

Jinnah was to face some of his worst moments in Dhaka before he returned to Karachi, which was then Pakistan's capital. His

What, however, remains an abiding mystery is how Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in Washington and Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in Beijing so misread the signs on the ground and tried their best — unsuccessfully — to abort the birth of an independent Bangladesh

speech at Dacca University's convocation March 24, 1948 had a kinetic effect. "There can be only one state language... and that language in my opinion can only be Urdu". Dhaka was instantly rocked by student agitations: the pent-up feelings and suppressed grievances of Bengalis didn't take long to crystallise and burst. People fell back on the facts to disprove Jinnah's views as absurd and unacceptable to Bengali-speaking East Pakistanis, who were a majority of the population.

Jinnah had ignored the fact that Urdu was the mother tongue of only four per cent of Pakistanis, while 55 per cent considered Bengali their mother tongue. Only the Muslims of northern and northwestern India, from where most of the Muslim League's leadership came from, would benefit from Urdu as the state language, along with some Punjabis and Pashtuns working for the state. The choice of Urdu as state language also meant a total absence of Bengali-speaking Pakistanis from state affairs.

What happened later, in 1971, is of course part of the folklore of the proud new nation. History will surely judge Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as an outstanding leader of geopolitical vision who, ably supported by the Indian armed forces under General (later Field-Marshal) Sam Manekshaw, managed the shatter the myth of invincibility around Jinnah's creation — and ensured the surrender of Pakistan's entire military in the eastern sector to the Indian Army at Dhaka's Ramna Maidan on December 16, 1971. What, however, remains an abiding mystery is how Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in Washington and Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in Beijing so misread the signs on the ground and tried their best — unsuccessfully — to abort the birth of an independent Bangladesh.

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College. The views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

MINI CLINICS

This refers to the report 2,000 mini clinics launched (Dec 15). Tamil Nadu has to be congratulated for having launched 2,000 mini clinics across the state in a bid to bolster the public health care infrastructure in the state, in places with no public health centres (PHCs). The clinics would be of great help to the poor, particularly to villagers who seek medical assistance for ordinary illnesses like fever, BP, sugar levels testing etc.

R. Balasubramanian, Sakkangudi

TESTING TIME

AS INDIA gets ready to vaccinate nearly 30 crore people against Covid-19, it faces diverse challenges such as vaccine shortages, multiple vaccines, shortlisting priority sections of the population, creating a pool of vaccinators and providing proper logistics and infrastructure support. Transparency and clear communication will, however, be the key to prepare Indians for a vaccine that is being developed in record time. India has vast experience in large scale immunisation. But that is for children less than a year old and here we are targeting adults. This might just prove to be a logistical nightmare. Mechanisms to ensure independent monitoring by the drug regulator do exist. But who pays the compensation in case of a proven adverse event remains an issue that needs to be addressed in the legal framework of clinical trials. Anyway, it is a testing time for the regulating body in general and the state governments in particular.

C.K. Subramnaiaam, Chennai

FARMERS' PROTEST

BY MAKING sweeping denunciations against the farmers who are protesting against three contentious farm laws in the outskirts of the national capital, union ministers had cast a big shadow over their publicly articulated commitment to the negotiations with agitating farmers and redress their legitimate grievances. Their allegation that protests are now being infiltrated by Maoist and Leftist elements is preposterous. The very strategy of name calling and blaming the protests as an example of "too much of democracy" could hardly help break the stalemate. What is at stake here is not just the ability of the government to push through a policy. It is time the government finds the message and medium to engage the anxieties and concerns of farmers. Any attempt to tar and taint dignified and peaceful protests of farmers does not augur well for our democracy.

S.M. Jeyaram, Sholavandan

Douglas Murray



The world has to make China pay for what it did in 2020

It's time we started to talk about reparations. The Chinese need to pay the world's citizens for what it did to us all this year.

In Britain, the economy is due to contract by more than 11 per cent this year. In the best-case scenario, the UK will not go back to pre-Covid economic output until the fourth quarter of next year. Anyone tempted to say that this is only because of the actions of the British government should look almost anywhere else. In America, the country's GDP has suffered its worst ever fall-off while government debt has soared to over \$27 trillion. In Australia, the state of Queensland alone is expected to rack up debt of more than \$130 billion in the next couple of years. Everywhere, the world's economies are experiencing an unprecedented slump in GDP and a rocketing of government borrowing.

Happily, there is one major economy where this is not the case. Guess which one it is? China is expected to see growth of 1.8 per cent this year. The only country where that is the case. As as one

financial journal put it earlier this week: "China driving global recovery".

I suppose you could put it that way. Personally, I feel (and perhaps this is just the spirit of Christmas arriving early) a certain amount of vengeance when I read such stories. A vengeance which is always in too short a supply at this time of the year. But speaking personally, I resent the prospect of China walking away from 2020 spinning headlines about the positive economic message its economic boom sends to the rest of the world.

First, it is worth getting the historical record right. We still do not know whether the Wuhan lab was the source of the virus or whether the bat-eating story is true. Both are plausible. And both leave the question of whether the Communist Party of China allowed the virus to come out deliberately or accidentally.

If this sounds vague, then it is by CPC design. Because the CPC spent much of 2019-20 ensuring that we do not, and cannot, know. When Australia called for an independent international inquiry into the

sources of the virus earlier this year, the CPC responded by threatening sanctions against Australia. This week Chinese government accounts posted doctored photos of an Australian soldier "murdering" an Afghan child. Funny enough, the Communists don't seem to play by the same rules as everyone else.

What is clear is that the CPC will do anything in order to ensure we do not linger on the WMD it released this year. It wants the rest of the world not to know and has done everything it can to keep us ignorant or distracted. It has disappeared the experts and scientists who might have informed us of what happened, and the chances of getting to the bottom of these facts while the CPC remains in power are remote. What we do know is that the Chinese knew about the virus and the dangers of it while keeping the rest of the world in the dark. They allowed people to continue to leave China and fly abroad long after the authorities locked down flights within their own country. Perhaps the CPC did just let off a global pandemic for the third time in a decade. Or perhaps

the CPC knew how lethal and infectious the virus was but allowed it to go out and spread across the globe anyway.

Is it a conspiracy theory to believe this could have been deliberate? I wouldn't have said so, and nor do many people in the intelligence world. In 2020 China achieved one of the greatest coups in financial history. The effects of the Trump administration's trade wars against China were beginning to be felt, and by accident or design the CPC found itself in the lucky position of their main competitor's economy (like the rest of the world) having to shut down completely. As a bonus, President Donald Trump, who appeared to be the only person in the world willing to take on the CPC, was taken out in the election which followed. Now, as the American public survey a political and financial mess of gigantic proportions, China is happily sailing into 2021 with increased growth.

The kick is that China now finds itself in a buyer's market. The rest of the globe is going to have to find a way out of this financial slump and possible depression. From

Africa, to central Europe, to Brexit Britain there is one obvious way out: Chinese investment. So long as China is the country "driving global recovery", the temptation will be there. Long ago the CPC bought up our universities very cheaply indeed. Not to mention a nuclear power station and more. Currently they are able to act like a property developer who has destroyed the area all around your house and now offers to buy your undesirable property at a dirt-cheap price. With certain strings attached. Even if one country resists the temptation to use Chinese investment to get out of this problem, it is unlikely that everyone will show the same restraint.

So I have a different suggestion. Countries of the world, unite. The CPC destroyed the world's economies in 2020. And we would like reparations. I am open to suggestions on how we do this — sanctions, gunboats — nothing should be off the table. China gave us 2020. We need to make them pay for it.

By arrangement with the Spectator

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,263.17	0.02
Nifty 50	13,567.85	0.07
S&P 500*	3,673.03	0.70
Dollar (₹)	73.64	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.08	0.57
Euro (₹)	89.53	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,847*514	1.05
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.69	0.40
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.941	-0.005
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.906	0.015

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Exports dip 8.7%, imports 13% in November

Exports contracted for the second consecutive month in November after recording positive growth for a month in September, as the second wave of the pandemic hit consumer demand in some of the largest markets. Exports fell 8.7 per cent while imports contracted 13.3 per cent, resulting in a trade deficit of \$9.9 billion. Exports of petroleum products were down 59.7 per cent while pharma were up 11.1 per cent.

DakPay app for India Post, payments bank



Customers of the Department of Post (India Post) and the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) can now operate their banking service through an app DakPay, which was unveiled by communications and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad. DakPay will facilitate services such as sending money, scanning QR code and making payment for services and merchants digitally. It will also provide interoperable banking services.

MSN gets USFDA nod for asenapine sublingual tablets

MSN Group said its marketing partner, Breckenridge Pharmaceutical, has received final approval for its ANDA for asenapine sublingual tablets, in 2.5 mg and 10 mg strengths, a generic for Saphris, with the US FDA. Additionally, the 5mg strength received tentative approval. This product, for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, was developed with Breckenridge Pharmaceutical for the US market.

EeVe India rolls out Atreo, Ahava e-scooters

EeVe India, the Odisha-based electric two-wheeler startup, introduced two new electric scooters called Ahava and Atreo priced at Rs 55,900 and Rs 64,900 at Delhi showroom, respectively. With this, the brand now sells six models in India. The Ahava electric scooter is claimed to have a range of 60-70km while the Atreo claims 90-100km. The two electric scooters have a running cost of 15 paise per km.



Delinquencies spike post-moratorium Loan disbursements by MFIs up in Q2

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 15

Though micro-loan disbursements have witnessed a five-fold growth in the September quarter over the previous quarter, delinquencies have spiked after the moratorium on loan repayments ended on August 31.

Micro-loan disbursements have, after a steep fall in the June quarter, made considerable recovery in the September quarter. In the September quarter loan disbursements by micro-lenders went up to Rs 31,261 crore against Rs 6,186 crore in the June quarter—a steep five-times increase in a quarter.

However, on the flip side, the disbursements have not even recovered to half of the March quarter levels. In the March quarter, the lenders had disbursed Rs 71,090 crore. In fact, in the lockdown-hit June quarter, disbursements had fallen 91 per cent.

The number of loans disbursed had fallen from 192 lakh in the March quarter to 21 lakh in the June quarter but has recovered to 88 lakh in the September quarter. A four-fold quarterly growth in the number of loan accounts in the September quarter has only helped a 45 per cent recovery to the March quarter levels.

However, the average loan size has made a smarter recovery. It has returned to Rs 35,652 in the September quarter from Rs 29,480 and Rs



36,940 in the previous two quarters.

However, delinquencies have soared post-moratorium. Portfolio at Risk (PAR) for 30 days or the outstanding balance of loans in arrears—has shown a sharp increase once the moratorium ended. PAR-30 stood around 1.5 per cent till the June quarter but has sharply moved up to 4.39 per cent in the September quarter, as per the data from MFIN India, a micro-financiers association.

Banks have seen the highest increase in delinquencies; from a sub-1 per cent level in the June quarter, PAR-30 went up to 5.97 per cent. NBFC-MFIs saw it moving up from 1 per cent to 4.17 per cent and small finance banks witnessed a rise from near 1 per cent levels to 2.75 per cent. However, NBFCs saw the PAR-30 days' delin-

quency coming down.

According to Manoj Nambiar, chairperson of MFIN India, the livelihood of all the borrowers has not come back to normal. Some are making part payments and some full payments. "Collection efficiencies are improving month-on-month. Earlier, we had thought that efficiencies would return to pre-Covid levels by December. But, it would probably take one or two months more," he said.

The total loan outstanding of all the micro lenders recovered to Rs 2,31,778 crore—closer to the March quarter gross loan portfolio (GLP) of Rs 2,31,788 crore—after coming down to Rs 2,27,727 crore in the June quarter. However, the September quarter saw 14.89 per cent growth in GLP against the same quarter in the previous year.

Personal loan-book growth flat this year

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 15

The pandemic has halted the growth of the personal loan-book and the delinquencies are growing. After growing 26 per cent in FY20 and 40 per cent in the previous two years, personal loan-book remained flat between April and August this year. However, delinquencies have risen in the five-month period.

As of August 2020, the personal loan-book stood at Rs 5,07,684 crore, having grown by only 0.57 per cent over Rs 5,04,792 crore in March 2020 due to Covid-19 disruptions. In the year-ended March 2020, the loan-book had grown by 26.4 per cent, but was lower than the 40 per cent rate of growth in the previous two years, as per data from CRIF High Mark, a Mumbai-based credit bureau.

As of March 2020 active loans had grown by



around 60 per cent, much faster compared to previous years. However, Covid-19 has impacted the originations in the five months of this fiscal year, with a minor de-growth of 1.5 per cent in the active loans.

The personal loan-book in metro cities felt a greater impact of the pandemic, owing to stricter lockdown rules

and near nil economic activity through most of the five-month period in FY21. Originations in metros have witnessed a 42 per cent de-growth compared to the same period in the previous year, as against 27 per cent in tier III and beyond cities.

The average ticket size has been reducing continuously over the last two years. In March 2020, it had shrunk by 18 per cent to 2,22,000. However, the average ticket size increased by 5 per cent to Rs 230,000 by August over March.

The amount of delinquencies for 31-180 days past due and 91-180 days past due have increased by 44 basis points and 26 bps, respectively. Loan delinquencies for 91-180 dpd have increased by 2X in the last two years from 0.91 per cent in March 2018 to 2.59 per cent March 2020. It further moved up to 2.64 per cent in August.

NPS, Atal Pension assets grow 35%

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 15

Asset under management (AUM) of the National Pension System and Atal Pension Yojana grew over 35 per cent year-on-year at the end of November to more than Rs 5.32 lakh crore.

The total number of subscribers grew 21.35 per cent year-on-year to over 3.88 lakh crore, said a release issued by

Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority.

As on November 30, 2020, total pension assets under management stood at Rs 5,32,378 crore showing a year-on-year growth of 35.76 per cent from Rs 3,92,467 crore in November 2019.

The number of subscribers in various schemes under the National Pension System (NPS) rose to over 3.88

crore by end-November 2020 from over 3.20 crore in November 2019, showing a year-on-year increase of 21.35 per cent.

Growing awareness about the tax saving benefits of the NPS led to maximum subscriber growth in all citizen sector by 33.38 per cent and assets under management for this category of subscribers also grew by maximum 51.11 per cent.

High inflows threaten RBI's tight grip on rupee

SUBHADIP SIRCAR & ANIRBAN NAG DEC. 15

A relentless torrent of funds rushing into India's markets may tip the central bank's delicate balancing act in 2021.

For most of this year, the Reserve Bank of India has capped currency gains as global investors poured around \$50 billion into stocks and stakes in companies. This has boosted rupee liquidity in a banking system that's already flush with cash from the RBI's stimulus measures.

There's growing consensus among traders and fund managers that the mounting pressures—particularly the liquidity glut distorting money markets—may spur the central bank to consider a range of changes, from relaxing its grip on Asia's worst-performing currency to curtailing bond purchases.

A modest gain in the rupee over the past month could mean that policy makers are already dialling intervention down a touch, or that inflows are starting to get the better of them.

"We believe that the RBI is facing a tough task of

liquidity management while juggling FX inflows, secondary bond market purchases to keep long-term borrowing costs low and ensuring money-market rates are aligned to the policy rate," said Kanika Pasricha, an economist at Standard Chartered Plc in Mumbai. Steps must be taken to realign money-market rates with policy rates, she said.

While most currencies in Asia have benefited from a weaker dollar, the rupee is down 3 per cent this year.

Traders point to how the RBI has bought \$58 billion of dollars in the first nine months of the year as signs of its intervention.

Governor Shaktikanta Das has only commented very broadly on the matter, writing in the most recent policy statement that the central bank acts to damp forex volatility and keep the rupee in sync with underlying domestic fundamentals.

Inflows into India's equity markets have grown to more than \$19 billion this

year, on course for the most on an annual basis since 2013. Foreign investors have also completed about \$30 billion of acquisitions in cash, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Declines in the dollar, which is forecast to keep falling in 2021, are fuelling fund flows into emerging markets globally.

In India, capital inflows may reach \$82 billion by the end of the fiscal year, then continue at much the same pace for the follow-

ing 12 months, according to estimates from Deutsche Bank AG.

"Given the multiple challenges from excess liquidity due to capital flows and inflation, the RBI may be forced to reduce the intervention and allow appreciation," said Arvind Chari, head of fixed income and alternatives at Quantum Advisors.

The median of estimates compiled by Bloomberg is for the rupee to appreciate to 72 per dollar by the end of 2021. Analysts at Goldman Sachs forecast the currency as strong as 70 by March 2022. It ended trading at 73.63 on Tuesday.

To be sure, some including B. Prasanna, IICICI Bank's head of global markets, sales, trading and research, argue that when you look at the rupee relative to a basket of its trading partners, the currency is overvalued and the RBI will have little tolerance for it to strengthen sharply.

With excess cash in the banking system estimated at Rs 7 lakh crore (\$95 bn), key overnight rates have plunged below the reverse repo rate that marks the lower bound of the central bank's policy corridor.

—Bloomberg

FPIs invest nearly ₹42K crore this month

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 15

It's another fortnight of foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pumping money in the Indian equity market, encouraged by favourable macro economic data, sharp fall in fresh daily Covid cases and weaker dollar. Till December 15, in the first half of the month, Rs 41,898 crore have been invested in equities by the FPIs after over Rs 60,000 crore net

inflows in November, according to national depository NSDL's data.

So far in the calendar year 2020 FPIs investment in equities stands at Rs 1,50,144 crore, of which close to Rs 1 lakh crore has come after the US Presidential elections.

On Tuesday, too, FPIs were net investors in Indian equities by Rs 2,484.09 crore, as per the provisional exchange data.

"Value erosion in dollar

and excessive liquidity is driving foreign portfolio investors to load up on emerging markets equities, specially Indian equities in a big way, pushing them to a record high. We are also witnessing a strong recovery in demand in the economy, which is leading to strength in the rupee as the year draws to a close," Sugandha Sachdeva, VP-metals, energy & currency research at Religare Broking, said.

Flexible wedding jewellery purchase plan from Tanishq

Mumbai, Dec. 15: In a move to assist consumers in buying jewellery for weddings and related occasions, Titan's jewellery arm Tanishq has introduced a new purchase plan—Rivaah Aashirwaad. Through this plan, consumers can plan their wedding jewellery purchase in a structured and systematic manner and yield great discounts on the making charges towards the end of the plan.

As the name signifies, Aashirwaad is the blessing in gold that is gifted to the bride on her wedding. Towards this, customers can enrol for a monthly purchase plan.

Apart from offering better value for money com-

pared to spot purchase, Rivaah Aashirwaad gives customers the flexibility to plan their purchase in terms of the quantum, duration and benefits.

Tanishq introduced Rivaah—its dedicated wedding jewellery sub-brand—in 2017, catering to the diverse and varied jewellery needs across communities and regions.

Ajoy Chawla, chief executive officer, jewellery division, Titan Company Ltd, said: "With Rivaah Aashirwaad, we aim to offer the best opportunity to brides and their families to build their wedding trousseau with the finest Tanishq designs, assurance of purity and at competitive prices."

Business NOTE

SAVING | MOTHER EARTH

Rice cultivation uses 30-40% of the world's freshwater

Drip irrigation to make rice eco-friendly

ARI RABINOVITCH JERUSALEM, DEC. 15

An Israeli company has developed a drip irrigation system for growing rice to replace the flooded paddies that have supplied the world with rice for generations but cause a surprising level of damage to the environment.

Rice is the staple food for more than half the global population, but its cultivation uses 30-40 per cent of the world's freshwater and is responsible for 10 per cent of man-made emissions of greenhouse gas methane, according to the UN-backed Sustainable Rice Platform.

Netafim, a company that pioneered drip irri-



gation decades ago to grow produce like potatoes and melons across Israel's challenging arid landscape, has just finished a pilot scheme using its technology on 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres) of rice fields in locations from Europe to southern Asia.

At one such location, at La Fagiana farm in north-east Italy, two fields, side-

by-side, grow a high quality rice for risotto. One is flooded, covered entirely by up to 15 cm of water to maintain temperatures and keep away weeds.

The other is criss-crossed with perforated pipes delivering to the roots precise amounts of water amounting to less than half the quantity used on the flooded field.

"We want to increase

the production without increasing water use or lowering quality," said Michele Conte, whose family has managed La Fagiana for decades and who has adopted the Netafim system on some of his land.

For three years the drip irrigation has yielded rice on par and at times even better quality than the flooded paddies, he said. It also allows them to rotate crops throughout the year.

Netafim said it had to learn from scratch how to achieve the same yield as flooding and it took a decade to create a new protocol for watering, fertilizing and planting rice with drip irrigation.

The growing conditions

switch to aerobic from anaerobic, which means methane emission "goes to zero," said CEO Gaby Miodownik.

Conte said the schedule for treating the rice still needs some fine tuning but that it has become a selling point for environmentally concerned customers.

The initial investment in pipes, pumps and filters could be expensive for farmers whose profit margins are, for the most part, already thin.

But the shift away from flooding is expected to gain traction and companies like India's Jain Irrigation are developing drip irrigation packages for rice as well.

—Reuters

BPCL MAY BUY OMAN OIL STAKE IN BINA REFINERY

New Delhi, Dec. 15: Privatisation-bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) has said its board will on Thursday consider buying out Oman Oil Company in the Bina refinery project in Madhya Pradesh.

The BPCL board will also consider merging Bharat Gas Resources Ltd(BGRL) with itself, the company said in a filing to the stock exchanges on Tuesday.

BPCL holds 63.68 per cent stake in Bharat Oman Refineries Ltd (BORL), which operates a 7.8 million tonne oil refinery in Bina.

The company board will on December 17 "consider a proposal for according 'in-principle' approval" for "acquisition of 36.62 per cent of equity shares in BORL from OQ S.A.O.C. (formerly known as Oman Oil Company S.A.O.C.)," it said. This would amount to the acquisition of 88.8 crore equity shares from OQ.

The board would also consider a proposal to approach the Madhya Pradesh government for acquiring 2.69 crore warrants held by it in BORL.

The meeting would also consider "merger of Bharat Gas Resources Ltd (a wholly owned subsidiary) with BPCL," the filing said. BGRL won licence to retail CNG to automobiles and PNG to households and industries in 13 Geographical Areas.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

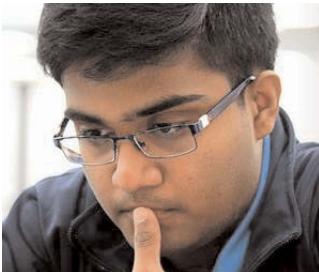
Hyderabad ride on Santana brace

Vasco: Aridane Santana struck twice in less than a minute to script Hyderabad FC's thrilling 3-2 win over SC East Bengal in an Indian Super League match here on Tuesday.

Santana's twin burst came in the 56th minute after SC East Bengal scored their first ever ISL goal through Jacques Maghoma in the 26th minute. There was no looking back for Hyderabad after that as they struck a third goal in the 68th minute with Liston Colaco making a terrific run to set it up for Halicharan Narzary to find the back of the net.

But there was more drama in store as Maghoma too completed a brace from Anthony Pilkington's freekick to reduce the margin in the 81st minute. East Bengal thus suffered their fourth defeat from five matches to remain at the bottom of the table with one point.

Hyderabad FC, on the other hand, remained unbeaten from five matches (nine points) to be placed at fifth place in the 11-team standings. — PTI



P. Iniyan

Iniyan wins Asian selection event

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 15

Grandmaster P. Iniyan emerged on top in the U-18 category of the Asian Continental Selection event after posting four wins and five draws. Thus, Iniyan made it to the knockout round of the Fide online World Rapid championship.

The three-day qualifier concluded on Sunday. Iniyan logged in 5.5/7 to snatch the Gold in the Open Under 18 section. With a similar score, IM Sankalp Gupta tied for the top spot, but settled for Silver under tie-break. Indian duo of IM Raja Rithvik R & Aakash G narrowly missed out on the medal finishing fourth in the Open Under 16 & Open Under 10 category respectively. In the Under 14 Girls section WFM Sahithi Varshini M finished fourth missing out on a medal.

Celta Vigo blow away Cadiz

Vigo: Celta Vigo earned their biggest win since June when they beat Cadiz 4-0 in the Spanish League.

Cadiz were coming off beating Barcelona 2-1 at home but started badly and by halftime were down 4-0.

Nolito's third goal in four games put Celta on the board after only six minutes.

BATTLE READY

Australia have plans in place for Kohli & Co.

Adelaide, Dec. 15: Australia coach Justin Langer on Tuesday asserted that his team will "have plans in place" for Indian talisman Virat Kohli as cricket's heavy-weights renew one of the sport's greatest rivalries with the opening day-night Test here from Thursday.

The four-match series opener at Adelaide Oval will be the only time India captain Kohli will play Test cricket Down Under this summer as he will return home after the game to attend the birth of his first child.

Langer, however, is determined to stop Kohli from setting the tone for the series.

"He is a great player and an equally great leader. I have got so much respect for him but we are going to be really well planned for him because we know how important he is for India as a leader and as a batsman. So, we will have our plans in place.

"The next trick is to execute them, hopefully, keep him out of the game with his runs. At the end of the day, that's where he is going to have the biggest impact. We've seen a lot of him now, and he has seen a lot of us too," Langer said during a virtual media interaction. Langer also made it clear that his team will focus more on the skill part and look for ways to get Kohli out instead of needlessly engaging with him.

"What we talk about is how to get Virat out. He is such a great player, we don't talk about whether we taunt him or not. That's rubbish... We play on the skill, not on emotions, at least we try to."

"There is obviously emotion in the game, no doubt about that, we are going to control our emotions."

Australia may have played more day-night Tests compared to India's one but according to Langer, his team would have no advantage heading into the opening pink ball match.

"I have always said that the best players and best teams adapt regardless of the big game or the colour of the ball, so whether it is the red ball or the white ball or the pink ball, the best players and teams adapt to it.

"So, what has happened in the past, it is nice to replay. India have just come off a day-night practice game, we have done a bit of practice under lights." — PTI



India captain Virat Kohli at a training session in Adelaide on Tuesday, ahead of the first Test against Australia.

— AFP

Gavaskar bats for Pant, Gill

New Delhi, Dec. 15: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar feels the Indian team management should prefer an aggressive Rishabh Pant over a technically sound Wriddhiman Saha for the wicket-keeper's role in the four-match Test series against Australia, starting Thursday.

Gavaskar, the fastest to reach 10,000 Test runs, said that with a blistering 73-ball 103-run knock in the second warm-up game under his belt, Pant will give India more flexibility in the first Test, the only day-night game, to be played in Adelaide.

"It is going to be a tough one for the four selection committee because Rishabh played in all the 4 Test matches four years ago. He also got a hundred and seemed he got under the skin of the Australian players with his chirping behind the stumps.

RAHANE SPELLS VERY LITTLE AHEAD OF TEST

Adelaide, Dec. 15: India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane on Tuesday conceded that pacer Ishant Sharma's absence is a "big miss" but side-stepped queries on his team's possible first XI combination for the opening Day/Night Test against Australia starting here on Thursday.

Rahane, who is expected to lead in the last three Tests after regular skipper Virat Kohli goes on paternity leave, also spoke about how pink ball's increased pace off the pitch during the 40-50

minutes of the twilight session, will be the biggest challenge for any batsman. "I think, we do really have a strong attack but yes we will definitely miss Ishant, being the senior fast bowler," Rahane said.

Ishant is recovering from a rib injury sustained during the IPL. Rahane, however, is confident that despite Ishant's absence, the pace attack comprising Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami will step it up for the Australians. — PTI

choice of the management I think," Gavaskar said.

Gavaskar said he pre-

ferred Pant over a more-accomplished keeper in Saha, as Australian pitches are not so demanding when it comes to keeping wickets.

Both Gavaskar and Border batted for Shubman Gill over Prithvi Shaw to open along side Mayank Agarwal in the series.

"...India is a little bit shaky at the top of the order. They don't know who they are going to go with. Mayank Agarwal is of course a certainty. But who's the other opener — Shubman Gill or Prithvi Shaw?" said Gavaskar.

"So with uncertainty at the top, they would like to strengthen their batting and so Pant will play. I am hoping he (Rishabh) plays at 6 because then that will allow you to pick 5 bowlers to try and get 20 Australian wickets." — PTI

BUMRAH WILL BE KEY TO WIN, SAYS BORDER

New Delhi, Dec. 15: Former Australia captain Allan Border believes a fully fit Jasprit Bumrah will be the key to India's prospects of retaining the four-match Test series Down Under.

Calling himself a big fan of the India pace spearhead, Border said Bumrah has the potential to make a difference between the two sides in the much-anticipated rubber, starting in Adelaide from Thursday.

"Well I am a huge fan of Bumrah. If he keeps himself fit. We are talking of a guy who can win games for you fellows. I worry about him because on our pitches you get a little bit of bounce and sideways movement," said Border.

"If he fires up like he did last time, get important wickets, ruffle a few feathers with the ball, I reckon he could be the real difference," he added. Bumrah accounted for 21 wickets in four matches in 2018-19, playing a key role in India's first-ever Test series win in Australia.

"You always think that your batting line-up will get enough runs, you need the 20 wickets to win the Test. If he stays fit, he is the one who is going to be a key," the former Australia skipper said. — PTI

Virat second best in Test rankings

Dubai, Dec. 15: India captain Virat Kohli on Tuesday jumped one place to second in the ICC Test ranking for batsmen, which also features Chesteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane at the seventh and 10th positions respectively.

Kohli is the leading Indian batsman in the chart with 886 rating points behind Australia's Steve Smith (911 points).

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson dropped a rung to the third spot. He is followed by young Australian batting sensation Marnus Labuschagne, Pakistan's Babar Azam and injured David Warner.

Pujara is seventh in the chart with 766 points, followed by Ben Stokes (760), Joe Root (738) and India Test vice-captain Rahane (726) to complete the top-10 list.

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah (779) and veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin (756) are the two Indians to find a place in the ICC Test rankings for bowlers at eighth and 10th spots respectively.

The list is being headed by Australia's Pat Cummins (904), followed by England's Stuart Broad and New Zealand's Neil Wagner.

Two other Indians — Ravindra Jadeja and Ashwin — also feature in the top-10 list for ICC Test rankings for all-rounders,

● **Chesteshwar Pujara is seventh in the chart with 766 points, followed by Ben Stokes (760), Joe Root (738) and India Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane (726) to complete the top-10 list.**

which is being topped by Stokes.

While Jadeja is placed third in the chart with 397 rating points behind West Indies' Jason Holder, Ashwin is at sixth with 281 points.

In the ICC Test rankings for teams, India are currently placed third after New Zealand jumped to the second spot following their recent 2-0 series win over the West Indies.

India have 114 rating points, two points behind New Zealand and table-toppers Australia, who both have 116 points but the Aussies are ahead on decimal points.

England are placed fourth ahead of Sri Lanka, South Africa, Pakistan, West Indies, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe.

But India have a chance to move up the ranking ladder as they take on Australia in the four-match Test series, starting Thursday in Adelaide.

— PTI

SYED MUSHTAQ | ALI T20



Yuvraj Singh

Yuvraj named in Punjab probables

New Delhi, Dec. 15: World-cup winning former India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh is set to come out of retirement and play domestic cricket again after being named in Punjab's 30-strong list of probables for next month's Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament.

Yuvraj, the star of India's 2011 World Cup-winning campaign, had announced his retirement last June but he decided to resume playing for his home state after being approached by Punjab Cricket Association secretary Puneet Bali.

The 39-year-old left-handed batsman, who has played 304 ODIs, 40 Tests and 58 T20s for India, has been training at the PCA stadium in Mohali and also posted a video of his preparations on social media.

The BCCI plans to conduct the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, the national T20 championship, from January 10, the venues for which will be declared later.

The tournament will be conducted in bio-secure and teams will have to assemble at their respective bases by January 2.

RAINA ALL SET TO PLAY FOR UTTAR PRADESH

Former India batsman Suresh Raina is all set to represent his home state of Uttar Pradesh.

Raina announced his retirement from international cricket in August this year, but the World Cup-winning cricketer will continue to play domestic cricket for his native state and in the Indian Premier League.

SREESANTH IN KERALA PROBABLES LIST

Former India fast bowler S. Sreesanth on Tuesday moved closer to a return to competitive cricket after being named in a 26-strong probables list by Kerala for the upcoming T20 tournament.

The 37-year-old Sreesanth, who was banned by the BCCI over his alleged involvement in spot-fixing in the IPL, features alongside Sanju Samson, Sachin Baby, Jalaj Saxena, Robin Uthappa and Basil Thampi among others. — Agencies

INDIA TO OPEN AGAINST A QUALIFIER IN WOMEN'S WC

Dubai, Dec. 15: India will open their campaign in the rescheduled Women's ODI World Cup against a qualifier on March 6, 2022 at Tauranga's Bay Oval in New Zealand, according to the 31-match schedule announced by the ICC on Tuesday. India have two more matches against qualifiers on March 12 and March 22 at Seddon park, Hamilton in the eight-team round-robin format event.

Among the marquee games, Tauranga will host the rematch of the 2017 World Cup final at Lord's with India taking on England on March 16. India will then face Australia at Eden Park, Auckland on March 19, before locking horns with South Africa on March 27 at Hagley Oval, Christchurch. The event, which was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic from its original window in February-March 2021 with the same six host cities and venues retained, will be held between March 4 and April 3, 2022. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Perth Scorchers vs Melbourne Stars from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

Lanka Premier League: Final from 7.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Mohun Bagan vs FC Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: Arsenal vs Southampton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; Leicester vs Everton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2; Leeds United vs Newcastle from 11.30 pm; Fulham vs Brighton from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Star Sports 3; Liverpool vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Star Sports Select 1; West Ham vs Crystal Palace from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Star Sports Select 2

Italian League: Juventus vs Atalanta from 11 pm on Sony Ten 2; Genoa vs AC Milan from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1; Inter Milan vs Napoli from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2

WWE

NXT: Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Editor: **KAUSHIK MITTER**

Melbourne, Dec. 15: Former Australia skipper Ricky Ponting wants the team management to show faith in under-fire Joe Burns and retain him in the Test series opener against India, starting here on Thursday.

The 31-year-old Burns has been going through a terrible phase, having scored just 62 runs at 6.89 with a highest score of 29 in his last nine first-class innings.

He scored 4, 0, 0, 1 in his last four innings during the two warm-up games ahead of the four-Test series against India.

"I'm sticking with Joe Burns. I've heard a lot of suggestions that he hasn't scored enough runs to stay in the side but I'm keeping him in there," Ponting said on Channel Seven.

"He made 40 in his last Test innings, he's made four Test hundreds, averages almost 40 I'm sticking with him and showing some faith. I think he's good enough to get through it."

There has been a lot of debate regarding the opening slot following Burns' worrying form and the injury to David Warner, who was ruled out of the first Test due to a groin problem.

Will Pucovski, who was primed to open in the first Test, too was ruled out after suffering a concussion in the first warm-



Joe Burns

up game, forcing selectors to add Marcus Harris to the squad.

"What Marcus Harris hasn't done is score (Test) hundreds — (his) highest score is 70-odd, (whereas) Joe Burns can score Test match hundreds. I'm

sticking with him," Ponting said.

Ponting also believes that wicketkeeper-batsman Matthew Wade should be elevated to the opener's role, which will pave the way for 21-year-old all-rounder Cameron

UNFIT SMITH MISSES NET SESSION

Adelaide, Dec. 15: Australia's premier batsman Steve Smith on Tuesday missed a crucial net session due to a sore back as the home team's tumultuous build-up to the four-match Test series against India experienced another major injury scare.

After having warmed up for 10 minutes with his teammates by doing a few stretching exercises and running drills at the Adelaide Oval, Smith skipped the routine football session and headed straight to the dressing room in some discomfort after tweaking his back while bending down to pick up a ball.

On his way to the dressing room, Smith was accompanied by team physiotherapist David Beakley. — PTI

Green's inclusion in the playing XI.

"What I am doing is moving Matthew Wade up to the top of the order to open with (Burns), (give) a left-hand, right-hand combination," Ponting said. — PTI