



DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
ANANTAPUR | MONDAY | 14 DECEMBER 2020

**WEATHER**

Max: 30.0°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 52%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 30/18 °C

COVID-19
**COUNT**

CASES
(+28,144)
98,54,175

DEATHS
(+376)
1,42,994


covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+635)
TS: 2,77,151
(+510)
AP: 8,75,025

(+4)
1,489
(+3)
7,052

CASES AROUND THE WORLD


7,17,80,957

DEATHS
16,07,304

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Bahula Amavasya till 9.48 pm
Star: Jyeshtha till 11.27 pm
Variyam: 6.45 am to 8.12 am
Durmuhurtam: 12.32 pm to 1.16 pm; 2.44 pm to 3.27 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

HUJRI CALENDAR

Rabbi-ul Akhir 28, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM
MOONSET 5.12 AM
MOONRISE 5.11 PM

COUNTER POINT



It's a multi-purpose outfit... protects me from cold and Covid!

IN BRIEF

RTGS fund transfer is 24x7 service

Mumbai: The Real Time Gross Settlement System (RTGS) for high-value transactions will become available round-the-clock from 00:30 hours on Monday onwards, making India one of the few countries in the world to operate the system 24x7. In October, the RBI had announced RTGS will be available round-the-clock on all days of the year.

Traffic jam due to rush in Srisaillam

Kurnool: The penultimate day of Kartika Somavaram in Srisaillam witnessed heavy rush of pilgrims on Sunday. As a result, vehicles were stranded for hours on the roads leading to the temple, giving a nightmarish time to police personnel posted along the stretch. Atmakur DSP Y. Sruthi said police cleared the traffic soon after coming to know of a jam near Sakshi Ganapati temple. She said besides pilgrims, VIPs also came for darshan, including a minister and a Deputy Speaker. Energy minister Balineni Srinivas Reddy is visiting Srisaillam on Monday, the DSP added. A temple official said at least 70,000 people came for darshan. Covid-19 protocol was given a go-by as the temple staff was insufficient and unable to control the surging crowds.



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Covid positive minister Vij shifted to hospital



WORLD | 5
UK, EU agree 'extra mile' Brexit deadline

SPORTS | 7
Ankita wins ITF doubles title in Dubai



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Group-1 Mains to start today

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

As many as 9,679 candidates will be taking the the APPSC Group-1 Mains examinations that will commence from Monday and gon on up to December 20.

The examinations will be held at 41 exam centres both in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states in seven sessions. The Group-1 Mains' test will be held from 10 am to 1 pm. APPSC officials informed that candidates will be allowed into the examination centres between 8.45 am and 9.30 am. The candidates must bring their hall tickets and identity card.

A help desk has been set

up at the commission office in Vijayawada for complaints or information regarding the examination. Officials said that all arrangements have been made for the conduct of the examinations.

About 1,712 people have been given the option to write exams in Hyderabad. For the first time, questionnaires will be given to candidates in English and Telugu via Tabs. All candidates are required to comply with the Covid-19 regulations. Candidates must reach the exam centres before 9.45 am including those with special exemption. Isolation? rooms have also been set up for Covid-19 patients at all exam centres.

Farmers to fast nationwide today

Shah meets ministers to break deadlock, may send new proposals

SANJAY KAW and RAJNISH SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Scaling up their agitation against the Centre's three agriculture-related laws, the farmers will observe a day-long fast and organise dharnas at district headquarters all across the country on Monday. Not satisfied with the government's offer to amend the new farm laws, thousands of farmers from different states have started marching towards the Delhi borders, where protests have been going on for the past 18 days.

The Delhi-Jaipur highway was partially shut for about three hours on Sunday afternoon as farmers started a tractor march from Shahjahanpur on the Rajasthan-Haryana border as part of their escalating protest against the contentious farm laws.

In a bid to break the ongoing deadlock with the farmers' unions, Union home minister Amit Shah held a series of meetings on Sunday with agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar and senior BJP leaders from Punjab. Even though the farmers are insistent that the Centre should withdraw the three farm laws, the Centre is keen to once



Barricades placed to stop farmers during their protest against the new farm laws, at Singhu border in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

again resume its dialogue with the farmers' unions.

Sources said there was a strong possibility that the Centre could send a fresh proposal to the farmers in the next two days and invite them for a renewed dialogue. It is learnt Mr Shah discussed in detail with Mr Tomar what additional concessions could be given to the farmers.

While information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said the government's door was

always open for farmers and it was ready to discuss all issues, farmers' leader Gurnam Singh Chaduni said at the Singhu border they were going ahead with the nationwide agitation. "The heads of all farmer unions will observe a hungerstrike from 8 am to 5 pm on Monday," he said.

The I&B minister was speaking to the media at his residence ahead of the farmers' hungerstrike announcement at the

Singhu border -- one of the key agitation spots on the Delhi-Chandigarh route where thousands of farmers are sitting under the open skies, braving chilly winter nights.

He said: "The government's door is always open to have a conversation with farmers on their issues. The procedure is continuously moving forward. The government is keeping proper monitoring of the current situation and ongoing develop-

ments." In Nagpur, Union minister Ramdas Athawale said the Centre was ready to make amendments in the farm laws. He said: "The farmers should not be adamant on the repeal of laws, but should pursue a dialogue on this issue," he said. "Both (farmers and government) should take two steps back and (then) try to move ahead on the issue."

The Centre has already conveyed to the agitating farmers its willingness to make all possible amendments in the three laws so their demands can be met. In a written proposal a few days ago, the Centre agreed to make nine important changes in the three laws and even give a written assurance on MSP.

Mr Tomar and top BJP leaders from Punjab briefed the home minister on the "valid" problems faced by farmers from the region so that these can be addressed. Mr Shah is said to have advised Mr Tomar that all efforts should be made to continue the dialogue process with farmers. Support for the farmers has been growing in different quarters. Voicing solidarity with the protesting farmers, a serving Punjab police officer had resigned from his post on Saturday.

MINING SURVEY AT BORDER HALTED

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, DEC. 13

The Andhra Pradesh-Karnataka state border dispute has not come to an end after the team of Survey of India team reportedly stopped the survey process and finalising borders between Anantapur-Bellary dis-

tricts.

High-level authorities from the Centre and teams from both states reacted after the entire episode was published in *Deccan Chronicle*, and the survey process has reportedly been put on hold, sources said.

■ Full report on Page 2

JP NADDA COVID POSITIVE, IN HOME ISOLATION

New Delhi, Dec. 13: BJP president J.P. Nadda has tested positive for Coronavirus and has gone into home isolation on the advice of doctors.

In a tweet, he said he had undergone a test after showing symptoms of Covid-19, and was found to be positive. "My condition is alright and I am following all instructions after going for home isolation on the advice of doctors. I request everyone who got in touch with me in the last few days to isolate themselves and undergo test," he said.

— PTI

BJP SHINES IN BODOLAND LOCAL ELECTIONS

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, DEC. 13

The BJP, in collaboration with its new ally, the United People's Party Liberation (UPPL) and the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP), has decided to form government of the Bodoland Territorial Council bringing an end to 17-years rule of Bodoland Peoples Front.

5 techies in car jump signal, die

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 13

Jumping a red traffic light proved fatal for five IT employees as a speeding tipper lorry crashed into their car at Wipro circle, killing all of them at around 2.45 am on Sunday.

Gachibowli police officials said that the victims, hailing from Andhra Pradesh, were residing in a hostel at Madhapur. They were suspected to be driving under the influence of alcohol and travelling from IIIT-H road to Gowildoddi.

According to police, the deceased included K Santhosh, 25, software engineer from Tech Mahindra, K. Pavan Kumar, 24, employed at an IT firm, Chinta Manohar, 23, working in an animation studio, P. Bharadwaj, 20, and N. Roshan, 23.

Gachibowli police released CCTV footage of the accident, which showed that they were travelling in a white Maruti Swift (AP 39 ED 5229), near the Wipro circle when their vehi-

● THE CAR in which they were driving was sandwiched between the lorry and a construction site barricade. It could not be found if they had seat belt

cle jumped the signal and travelled to the other side where they were hit by a tipper lorry.

Gachibowli traffic and law and order police officials rushed to the spot. However, four of them died on the spot and the fifth succumbed while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Gachibowli.

"The impact of the accident was such that we are unable to tell if they had their seat belts on during the mishap. The car was sandwiched between the lorry and a construction site barricade," said police inspector of Gachibowli, Srinivas.

The bodies were shifted to Osmania General Hospital mortuary for post-mortem and their blood samples were collected to ascertain their BAC level.

Military honour



Army Chief General M.M. Naravane with Saudi Arabia's Chief of General Staff General Staff Fayyad bin Hamid Ruwaili during his two-day visit to the Gulf country to lay ground for deeper military ties.

— PTI

PARENTS DEMAND ACTION ON PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN AP OVER HIGH FEES

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13

Andhra Pradesh Parents Association (APPA) has demanded that the state government take action against private schools and colleges collecting higher fees in advance even before opening of these institutions.

APPA has alleged that some private schools are insisting on payment of fee in advance to process applications under the government's Amma Vodi scheme, causing much heartburn among parents.

At a general body meeting of the association here on Sunday, its president Sikaram Narahari appealed to DEOs and RIOs that they take steps to implement fee structure as per guidelines of the Fee Regulation Commission.

He underlined the need to ensure 30 percent waiver in fee from all students studying in private schools.

Group wars in YSRC surface

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13

Group wars within YSR Congressmen owing allegiance to MLA Maddisetty Venugopal and party leader Buchepalli Sivaprasad led to tension in Darsi on Sunday.

The two groups being at loggerheads with each other in Darsi Assembly segment is nothing new.

The latest trouble started when supporters of the MLA objected to followers of Sivaprasad ignoring the photo of Darsi legislator on flexi banners displayed in the town to greet the Chief Minister

● THE LATEST trouble started when supporters of the MLA objected to followers of Sivaprasad ignoring the photo of Darsi legislator on flexi banners displayed in the town to greet the Chief Minister

display the photo of Maddisetty Venugopal as per protocol.

When the situation started turning volatile at the Clock Tower Centre in Darsi on Sunday with both groups jostling with each other, police intervened and pacified both the groups. They assured the issue will be discussed with leaders to find a lasting solution to differences between cadres of the two groups. Locals are, however, worried over frequent tussles between these groups and fear violence may break out between them.

NO BHARATNET LINK TO MOST PANCHAYATS

ANIMESH SINGH | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Despite the fact that the BJP is directly in power in 12 states and is the junior alliance partner in six other states, the NDA government's ambitious BharatNet project -- envisaged to provide Wi-Fi broadband connectivity to 2.5 lakh gram panchayats of the country by March 2019 -- has till date managed to give the facility only to 15,500 gram panchayats, with the Centre now blaming the states for their non-involvement in the project.

Highly placed sources said, so far only 1,26,000 gram panchayats have been made service ready, which means, they have the wherewithal to start the Wi-Fi services, but Wi-Fi hotspots have not been provided there.

On the other hand, Wi-Fi hotspots have been made functional in only 15,500 gram panchayats till date, according to information available with this newspaper. Therefore, in other words, a programme, which was originally envisioned by the erstwhile UPA regime nine years back in 2011, has not been able to achieve the objective in even one-fourth of the gram panchayats till date. Known as the National Optic Fibre Network or NOFN Project during the UPA regime, it was renamed BharatNet by the BJP-NDA government, which had come to power in May 2014. While NOFN was envisaged to provide infrastructure for middle mile connectivity and the service provider was to utilise the network, the NDA government decided to include last mile connectivity also in the scope of BharatNet.

The NDA government set new deadlines to provide broadband link to all the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats and this was to be done in two phases by March 2019. However, as can be seen by the figures provided above, the project has anything but progressed, even in the last six years.

SHORT TAKES

JAGAN TO VISIT
POLAVARAM
PROJECT TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC 13

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will visit Polavaram Project in West Godavari district on Monday. He will arrive from Tadepalli and land at a helipad site near the project. He will inspect project works and its progress and review with the officials and the contractors. Later, he will leave for Tadepalli by 1.30 pm.

FARMER ATTACKS
ASI WITH KNIFE IN
WEST GODAVARIDC CORRESPONDENT
VEERAVASARAM, DEC. 13

A farmer, A.R. Kumar, on Sunday attacked an assistant sub-inspector of Veeravasaram police station P. Pardha Saradhi in at Veeravasaram of West Godavari district with a knife.

Veeravasaram police plice said that farmer Ch. Gopi had lodged a complaint with the police station against Kumar over a crop issue. The ASI along with a constable P.S. Murthy went to the field and were making enquiries when Kumar took out a knife and allegedly stabbed the ASI injuring him severely, and fled the scene.

The ASI was admitted to a hospital at Bhimavaram.

Veeravasaram police registered a case.

Meanwhile, West Godavari superintendent of police K. Narayana Naick visited the ASI at the hospital.

Director General of Police Gowtham Sawang reacting to the incident instructed the police officials to investigate the issue and take action.

POLICE SEIZE
₹1.9CR FROM A
BUS PASSENGERDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, DEC. 13

The police seized ₹1.9 crore unaccounted cash at Panchalingala check post near Kurnool city from a passenger who was travelling from Hyderabad to Kurnool in an APSRTC bus belonging to the Kuppam bus depot.

According to Kurnool DSP K.V. Mahesh, the police conducted raids on various vehicles including the suspected RTC bus part of routine checks near Panchalingala check-post on late hours of Saturday on NH 44.

Meanwhile, the police found ₹1.9 crore and no documents were justifying the said amount with the passenger. The passenger was identified as K. Rama Chowdary, resident of Maruthinagar in Anantapur district headquarter, a real estate agent.

'NAIDU HAS
ALWAYS BEEN
ANTI-TRIBALS'DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

Deputy Chief Minister Pamula Pushpa Srivani alleged that Leader of the Opposition N. Chandrababu Naidu has no right to talk about tribals in the state as he never worked for the development of tribal communities.

Addressing a press meet here on Sunday, she strongly condemned Mr Naidu's false propaganda alleging negligence by YSRC government in protecting rights of tribals.

Pushpa Srivani said that their government was tribal-friendly. She recalled that the government had filed a review petition on the instructions of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to reconsider the Supreme Court judgment on striking of GO No. 3 on behalf of the tribals. She alleged that tribals were all aware that Mr Naidu was instrumental in doing away with the GO as the TD government did not respond properly in that case.

She alleged that Mr Naidu did not even include a tribal in his Cabinet and treated them as untouchables. She stated that an ST Commission was set-up for tribals and under the ST sub-plan ₹5,177 crore was spent for the benefit of tribals in the state. She further said that Jagan Mohan Reddy had also given a record number of ROFR patta lands to tribals and permanent employment to them.

Palnadu battle memories
passed on to generations

The battle ended with a cockfight deciding the winner

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

A traditional celebration remembering the warriors of Palnadu by passing down on story of *Palnati Yuddham* (Battle of Palnadu) to newer generations is continuing for decades at the ancient and historical village of Karempudi in Guntur district. People of Palnadu have been protecting the centuries-old *Veerula Gudi* (temple) and the culture by conducting the Palnati *Veeraradha Utsavalu* (celebrations). The famous story of the Battle of Palnadu, registered in 1182 CE at Karempudi, is retold in the village every year for five days through plays. The story in short is the fight for power between brothers was the cause of the battle which ended with a cockfight deciding the winner.

The story has it that the battle took place between Nalagammaraju King who ruled the area of Palnadu and his step-brother Malidevaraju. Nalagammaraju was supported by Reddy woman Nagamma while Malidevaraju was supported by social reformer Recherla Brahmanaidu. Brahmanaidu was a staunch Vaishnavait and founded a new sect called Veera Vaishnavism as against Veera Saivism which was prevalent then and which allowed the Sudras into its fold but not the "untouchables".

Brahmanaidu accorded equal status to untouchables. The social reforms like *Chapa Koodu* (having food sitting side by side on a mat irrespective of caste) initiated by Brahmanaidu antagonised the conservatives of Palnadu society.

The story goes that the conservatives found an able leader in Nagamma, known as Nayakuralu, who joined the court of Nalagammaraju and gained his confidence. She made Nalagammaraju remove Brahmanaidu's men from key positions. The differences in the court and the royal family grew which led to the division of the kingdom.

Nalagammaraju's half brother Malidevaraju moved to Macherla with Brahmanaidu and set up a separate kingdom there. Mutual suspicion between the two kingdoms grew and Nagamma under the pretext of Malidevaraju's defeat in a cockfight exiled them for seven years from Palnadu. After the exile Brahmanaidu sent Alaraju, the brother in law of Malidevaraju, to claim Malidevaraju's share. The demand was turned down and Alaraju was poisoned in Cherlagudipadu on the orders of Nagamma. His wife Perindevi committed *sati* (jumping into the pyre of the husband) with Alaraju. This enraged Malidevaraju and Kommaraju who was the father of Alaraju. Brahmanaidu then declared war on Gurajala. The battle was fought at Karempudi on the banks



In this file photo the successors of Palnati Brahmanaidu carrying the weapons of Palnati Brahmanaidu decorated in a procession during Palnadu Veerula Utsavalu in Karempudi village of Guntur district. — DC

Coronavirus dampens
Palnadu battle festivityDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

The Covide-19 pandemic has impacted the traditional Palnati Veeraradhana Utsavalu as the five-day event will be held amidst strict protocol which allow only limited people. The Palnati Veeraradhana Utsavalu started as a low-key affair on Sunday at Karempudi.

Macharla MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy formally launched the celebrations. He said that due to Covid-19, the celebrations will be restricted and only selective groups mainly heirs and priests would be allowed.

Mr Reddy said that near-

ly one lakh and above people will join the celebrations from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana state, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. He said that all traditional programmes would be held for five days but in restrictive mode and *Chapakoodu* (sitting on the mat and eating) and *Kodiporu* (cockfight) would be conducted on the concluding day. He said that this is the only traditional celebration in the state which is protected and revealed to new generations every year and said that the Battle of Palnadu was being remembered mainly because of the yearly festivities down the ages.

Karempudi tahsildar J. Prasada Rao said that every year Thirunallu would be conducted and cultural programmes including plays will be demonstrated resembling the Battle of Palnadu but this time it was restricted due to Covid-19. He said that traditional warriors were arriving in Karempudi and they will conduct the devotional worship programme to the martyrs of the age old war.

Devotees K. Srinivas and others said that the Palnadu battle earned Palnadu a brave name still continues to hold it apart from making factions thrive in the Palnadu region.

Battle of Palnadu inspired many
movies, books, plays, TV serialsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

The Battle of Palnadu has been etched in memory in the form of films, books, plays and TV serials. The first movie on the battle was made in 1947 under the direction of legendary Gudavalli Ramabrahmam and L.V. Prasad.

In 1966, another movie *Palnati Yuddham* was produced in which another legend of the Indian cinema N.T. Rama Rao acted in the lead role. Interestingly, NTR's son Balakrishna acted as hero in the *Palnati*

of the river Naguleru in which Nalagammaraju's side emerged victorious with Malidevaraju dying in the mele.

Brahmanaidu was forced to reinstate Nalagammaraju. Balachandrudu, the valiant son of Brahmanaidu, dies in the battle along with his wife Manchala. With this a whole generation of Andhra warriors perish in the battle.

The annual five-day cele-

● The ancestors formed a society to remember the martyrs and also displays age old swords, knives and other weapons used in the battle apart from offering prayers to them during the five-day celebrations

Brahmanayudu movie in 2003.

Books on the battle also include Palnati Charitra, Nayakuralu Nagamma, Palnati Brahmanaidu, Palnati Veerula Burrakathas apart from

poems and plays.

The ancestors formed a society to remember the martyrs and also displays age old swords, knives and other weapons used in the battle apart from offering prayers to them during the five-day celebrations

Interestingly, according to the history, two soldiers who took part in the battle, Jaffar and Fareed, constructed the *Palnati Veerula Gudi* (temple of the brave warriors) on the battle ground at Karempudi. The two who died at Karempudi are also buried on the same ground and their graves also present there.

Rayabaram (talks) between the two warring groups episode.

On the third day, *Chapakoodu* (all sitting on mat and eating) would be conducted. On the fourth day, cockfight in which minister Brahmanaidu is defeated in the hands of Nayakuralu Nagamma would be played.

The concluding fifth day will see the Battle of Palnadu, with warriors enacting the battle.

Rumours about mysterious
illness in Dachepalli fakeDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

Rumours about people fainting due to convulsions at Dachepalli, similar to the mysterious illness at Eluru, went viral across social media on Sunday leaving the public a worried lot. Officials immediately plunged into action and found that they were fake news. The rumours gained ground after a young person fainted in Nadikudi colony of Dachepalli on Sunday.

According to reports, 25-year-old Pallapu Ramakrishna soon after he fainted suddenly was rushed by his relatives to a private hospital. The doctors, after primary treatment, suggested that he be shifted to Guntur for better treatment. Doctors at the private hospital where Ramakrishna was taken found that he was suffering from convulsions and

● Medical team tests water after youth faints. They were sent for tests to clear doubts about water contamination

had a past history of the ailment. He recovered after he was given treatment. District Medical and health officer Dr J. Yasmin said that five teams were sent to find out about the incident and conducted tests on locals. She said that the teams found that Ramakrishna was an epilepsy patient and had experienced convulsions attack last year. She said that similarly Ramakrishna fainted due to epileptic attack on Saturday night.

Dr Yasmin said that only Ramakrishna had fainted but the medical teams collected water samples from locals in Dachepalli as a precautionary measure. They were sent for tests to

clear doubts about water contamination.

Dachepalli tahsildar G. Levi said that medical and revenue teams had conducted household surveys in various colonies but did not find any cases of fainting. He said that the revenue officials started an investigation about water pollution because of chemical waste released into canals from three chemical factories and action would be taken on the basis of investigation. He urged the locals not to worry as there was no mysterious disease in Dachepalli.

Gurazala MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy appealed to people not to believe rumours about mysterious illness in Dachepalli.

Meanwhile the mysterious illness cases were brought to zero as nobody was admitted in hospitals in West Godavari on Sunday.



Housing complexes being constructed on either side of the National Highway from Yendada to Anandapuram in Visakhapatnam. — DC

Builders going outskirts
for affordable housingK.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 13

Hoping that the rapid transit system would reduce the travel time, builders are going for construction of affordable houses on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam to attract the middle-class segment in north Andhra for whom houses in the city limits are no more within reach.

However, the development is moving towards Bhimili, which would be

close to the Bhogapuram International airport and very few are having their ventures in the industrial suburbs on the south side of the city.

The prices per square foot of an apartment are at a minimum of ₹2,500 in Anandapuram, about 28 km from city and Tagarapavalasa (Bhimili), which is 30 km from the city on the highway. The proposed flyovers and metro rail are planned from Kommadi, not far from

Anandapuram. Whereas in the city the price had gone up to ₹5,500 per square foot.

"The builders have made a wise move presuming the flyovers and metro rail would reduce the travel time between Tagarapavalasa and the city and put the prices within in the reach of the middle-class segment," president of Vizag unit of CREDAI Mr B. Srinivasa Rao said. He said around 10,000 units are coming up in these areas.

Mercury dips in
AP, rains for SeemaDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 13

Temperature dipped in many parts of Andhra Pradesh and Anantapur was the coldest place with a drop of 3.4°C in the minimum temperature recorded on Sunday morning. The temperature was 14°C. Nandigama recorded 14.1°C. Tunli in coastal Andhra was hottest with 31.1°C and

Kurnool in Rayalaseema with 31.1°C. The dip was due to north easterly winds, said S. Stella, director of IMD, Andhra Pradesh.

She also said an Easterly trough in Bay of Bengal may bring in moderate rains to Nellore and Kadapa in another two days and the region including parts of Tamil Nadu will have moderate rains for three days.

AP NEEDS TWIN
POLL SURGICAL
STRIKES: GVLDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 13

Alleging that both the YSR Congress and the Telugu Desam parties are indulged in communalism and vote bank politics, BJP MP G.V.L. Narasimha Rao said that the people of Andhra Pradesh will soon make twin electoral surgical strikes – one on the ruling YSR Congress and the other on opposition Telugu Desam.

Addressing the media persons here on Sunday, the BJP MP hit hard at the YSRC and the TD, stating that both the parties are competing with each other in playing religious politics in the state.

"Have you ever seen a state government given licence to celebrate Christmas in police stations? How can the YSR Congress do this? Have we ever seen Dasara celebrations held at police stations?" he questioned, while saying that it is the responsibility of both parties to answer these questions before going to contest in the Tirupati byelections.

He found fault with both the political parties trying to do vote bank politics in the name of secularism in the episode of late Salaam family of Nandyal. He alleged that the government is conducting religious campaigns by allowing such celebrations at police stations.

DC | IMPACT

The survey process was reported in these columns

Mining survey halted at the
Anantapur-Bellary borderDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, DEC. 13

The Andhra Pradesh-Karnataka state border dispute has not come to an end after the team of Survey of India reportedly stopped the survey process and finalising borders between Anantapur-Bellary districts.

High-level authorities from the Centre and teams from both states reacted after the entire episode was published in *Deccan Chronicle*, and the survey process has reportedly been put on hold, sources said.

This paper reported on contradictions and alleged influence of leaders from

● The Union Government is conducting the survey to fix the borders following dispute for the past one and a half decade after borders were destroyed by the mining companies. Illegal mining of 29 lakh tonnes of rich quality of iron ore from reserved forests had caused damage to the border areas

sort of injustice.

This problem has not been raised for many years and the Supreme Court directed that the border dispute be resolved. However, there is no solution to this problem, a mining unit owner Tapala Ganesh, who was fighting against illegal mining, said.

However, the Survey of India has been conducting the survey for the two months. The Karnataka government has asked them to show the demarcation area. Survey work in the border area was halted for four days. With this, the Survey of India officials withdrew from Bellary and AP-Karnataka

border demarcation has been duly postponed.

There is a rich iron ore presence at the borders of the two states while speculation is rife that is immense pressures from BJP-led Karnataka over the survey process.

The Union Government is conducting the survey to fix the borders between Bellary and Anantapur district forest lands following dispute for the past one and a half decade after borders were destroyed by the mining companies. Illegal mining of 29 lakh tonnes of rich quality of iron ore from reserved forests had caused damage to the border areas.

OTHER STORIES

506 new Covid cases in state

Vijayawada: The decreasing trend in Corona positive cases continued in AP State with the 506 new Covid-19 positive cases in the past 24 hours on Sunday. Only five deaths, one each reported in Chittoor, Guntur, Krishna, Vizianagaram and West Godavari districts and the total deaths climbed to 7,057 while the death rate remains at 0.81 per cent. Total Covid cases increased to 8,75,531 and 613 patients recovered from the infection on Sunday which increased the recovery rate to 98.63 per cent and the total number of recoveries increased to 8,63,508. For the fifth consecutive day more than 60,000 samples were tested. The positivity rate of the 63,873 Covid tests conducted during the past 24 hours was 0.79 per cent and the overall positivity rate of the 1.08 crore samples tested was 8.08 per cent.

Cops counsel rowdysheeters

Visakhapatnam: Officers from various police stations and task force counselled the rowdy sheeters at the police barracks on Sunday. The officers warned them to mend their ways and lead a normal life to maintain law and order in the city. A senior officer told them to intimate their absence from the city to the police station in their area. He told them that if any violence takes place in the city, they would be summoned to the police station and would be told to explain their involvement. There are about 400 rowdysheeters in the city and of them 150 are very active. They are mostly involved in extortion and violence related to real estate.

2 held, 650 kgs of PDS rice seized

Kadapa: Rajampeta town Mannur rural police seized 13 bags of PDS rice on Sunday morning. According to the information from Rajampeta sub-divisional police officer Siva Bhaskar Reddy, based on a tipoff about the illegal rice transportation, he directed the Mannur rural police to inquire into the issue. Sub-Inspector Shaik Roshan along with his staff raided the spot, and found an auto rickshaw carrying 13 bags of PDS rice, weighing 650kg at Isukapalli cross road, on the outskirts of Rajampeta at 9.30 am on Sunday. They seized the rice along with autorickshaw and arrested two from Anantapuram district. Police filed a case and investigation is on.

SEARCH ON TO TRACE MINOR FALLEN IN RIVER

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13

The police, along with fire and revenue departments, launched a search on Sunday to trace a nine-year-old girl, who fell into the Swarnamukhi river following an accident involving two motorcycles late on Saturday night in Naidupeta. According to the Circle-Inspector of Naidupeta, G. Venugopal Reddy, Pravallika is the daughter of Mangalapuri Murali, 30, and Sujatha, 27. The mishap took place when the family was returning home after offering prayers at Sri Vinayaka temple in Thimmaraju Kandriga village. The child, along with her parents, fell into the river from their bike, when another speeding bike, hit their vehicle from the rear on the causeway to Venkatagiri from Naidupeta. Some bystanders saved Murali and Sujatha, but they could not find the girl, who got washed away in the river by then. Two riders of the other bike identified as Treenath, 20, of Ichhapuram and Sai, 22, of Visakapattam were killed on the spot when their heads hit the pillars of the causeway in the accident. However, the driver of the bike Naguru of Modugulapalem escaped with minor injuries. All three of them are employees in the Green Tech Company located at Menakuru village and were in an intoxicated condition. The CI said that their efforts to trace the girl did not yield any results till late on Sunday evening and they would continue the operation on Monday. Sullurpeta legislator Kiliveti Sanjeevaiah joined the search team for a while on Sunday and directed them to put all their efforts to locate her.

Pig menace plagues Kurnool

Rearers spreading pens in city with political leaders' support

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC KURNOOL, DEC. 13

In the wake of the Eluru health crisis, where a mysterious disease made hundreds of people sick with convulsions, and the residents of Kurnool city were shivering even at the sight of pigs. The pig rearers in connivance with ruling party leaders have been expanding the pig pens across the city. Kurnool Government General Hospital (KGGH) with special Covid-19 wards is populated with pigs. A senior doctor at the hospital said that pigs are thrown into the hospital campus during night times, and they are freely strolling around majestically carrying viruses risking patients' health. The swine rearers are densely populated in Budhavarepet, Sareen Nagar, Vaddegeri, Saibabasanje-evaiah Nagar, Mujafar-nagar, Geethamukarji Nagar, Aroranagar and other several colonies in the city. The pigs were regularly transported from Kurnool to Bengaluru where the pig is sold in the wholesale market at much better rate. There are 54 wards in the Kurnool Municipal Corporation limits and nearly 200 residential colonies in the city. Of them, Bhudavarpet, Swamireddy-nagar, Krishna Nagar, Devanagar, Vitalanagar, Aroranagar, Mahalakshmi Nagar, Kallur, Abbaas Nagar, Ayyappanagar, Mujaffar Nagar and other localities have faced troubles with pigs. Kurnool MLA Hafeez Khan said a drive was launched last month before the Tungabhadra Pushkarams and pigs were driven out. However, a KMC official said that only 680 pigs were caught last month. Prod C. Prabhakar Red-



Stray pigs spark health scare in Kurnool city as they could be carriers of diseases and infections.

dy, deputy superintendent of KGGH said that pigs are the source of several diseases like brain fever and swine flu. He said human infections with H1N1v, H3N2v and H1N2v viruses had been detected in several countries including India. Diseases spread between pigs, and people is thought to happen mainly when an infected pig (or human) coughs or sneezes and droplets with influenza virus in them spread through the air. If these droplets land in the nose or mouth, or are inhaled, that person (or pig) could be infected. He further said that there also is some evidence that the virus might spread by touching something that has a virus on it and then touching the

mouth or nose. A third way to possibly get infected is to inhale particles containing influenza virus. Influenza is not contagious to people when they eat well-handled food and prepared pork or other products derived from pigs. In a hospital environment, the presence of pigs throws several challenges in patient disease management, he said. The civic authorities appear to have turned a blind eye to the problem created by pigs. Except for some main roads, pigs are sighted on almost all the residential localities. Children are afraid to play in front of their houses in residential colonies. As per rough calculations at least fifty thousands pig populations is in the city.

More than 90 families depended on the rearing of pigs in the city. "During the night time, residents complain that dogs are barking and causing a lot of noise. They are taking away the peaceful sleep of residents," Ms M. Soundarya, a resident of Abbas Nagar, said. The Kurnool civic authorities should wake up to the problem and give relief to residents, she added. "Hotel waste has become a source of nuisance to the residents. Especially pigs, dogs and other animals carry the garbage and deposit nearby the houses. As the waste is from the hotels and residences are very high that it may cause the spread of diseases," P. Krupakar, a resident of Krishnanagar said.

Take special care of ailing migrant workers: Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13

Industries and IT minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy has directed the medical officers in the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Nellore to pay special attention to the ailing migrant workers from West Bengal undergoing treatment in the hospital. The minister elicited information on the health condition of ailing migrant workers from West Bengal during a visit to the GGH in Nellore on Sunday. The sick workers are part of the 49 workers who came to Verubotlapalli in Kaluvoya mandal for paddy transplantation work a few days back. Nine among them were shifted to the GGH after they fell seriously ill following suspected food poisoning late on Friday evening. Mr Reddy interacted with the workers undergoing treatment and enquired about their health condition. Speaking to media persons, the minister said that the 49 migrant workers from West Bengal have reached to Verubotlapalli under Kaluvoya mandal for agri-

CAMPS TO IDENTIFY KIDS SUFFERING FROM HEART AILMENTS IN PRAKASAM

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13

The Prakasam district administration is contemplating over providing orientation to the ANMs working in Village/Ward Secretariats in association with Sangamithra Hospital in Ongole to identify children suffering from heart diseases in the district. Collector Pola Bhaskar has disclosed this while appreciating the doctor's team in the hospital for carrying out heart surgeries to four children below 13 years under the Arogyasri scheme after interacting with the parents of the children during a visit to the hospital on Sunday.

culture labour works. "Suddenly, 17 among them took ill on Friday evening, and nine workers were shifted to Government General hospital in Nellore city in critical condition on Saturday. Now, the condition of the workers has improved. The balance workers were

Mr Bhaskar said, "We would conduct medical camps in association with Sangamithra hospital in the limits of every secretariat to identify and provide treatment to children suffering from cardiac problems before Sankranti festival." Reminding that hitherto patients have to rush to Hyderabad, Chennai or Vijayawada for heart operations, he said there is no more need to look outside for specialised treatment. Chief Operations Officer of Sangamithra, Harikumar Reddy and senior cardiologist Dr Senthil Kumar were present with the collector apart from Arogyasri coordinator Dr Sravan-kumar among others. also admitted in the hospital for observation for the next three days as a precautionary measure," said the minister. He said water samples of an abandoned borewell were sent to a laboratory for testing as the workers consumed water drawn from the borewell.

STATE URGED TO INSTALL ALLURI STATUES

DC CORRESPONDENT RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, DEC. 13

Alluri Sitaramaraju Yuvajana Sangham urged the government to install the statues of revolutionist and the freedom fighter Alluri Sitaramaraju in Taylor High School in Narasapuram of WG and National High School at Ramachandrapuram in EG where Sitaramaraju studied. The Sangham held a meeting here on Sunday. The Life Time Achievement award was presented to the Sangham founder president Padala Veerabhadra Rao.

DC CORRESPONDENT RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, DEC. 13

Rajamahendravaram Rural MLA Gorantla Buchaiah Chowdary criticised that the YSRC government failed to bring proper sand policy in the state and the construction activity has not been recouped yet due to lack of knowledge on it by rulers. Participating as a chief guest in TNTUC meeting

Renaming of Peruru project turns into political controversy

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, DEC. 13

Renaming of the Peruru Branch Canal after removing slain warlord and former minister Paritala Ravindra name turned controversy as the TD and YSRC parties had scathing attacks on each other in the state. Further re-engineering of the entire project by changing the main canal route has reportedly jolt for close aides of slain Paritala Ravindra family and close aides in the state. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had laid the foundation stone for the re-engineered project named as 'YSR Upper Pennar Project' three days ago. The project is proposed to fill decades-old Peruru Reservoir along with meeting irrigation and drinking water needs of seven mandals in Rapthadu Assembly segment and adjacent areas along with three new

reservoirs. Previously, the project was confined to build a reservoir at Puttakanuma during TD regime, and the project was named after former minister Paritala Ravindra of TD party. Rapthadu YSR Congress MLA Thopudurthi Prakash Reddy slammed TD leaders for politicising the Upper Penna project naming after former Chief Minister Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy, who originally initiated the project and started Handri Neeva project in 2005, which was after the death of Paritala Ravindra. In 2008, then CM Y.S.R. had brought a feasibility report for the project and announced it to be constructed during the 2009 election campaign. Rapthadu MLA stated that there was no contribution of Paritala Ravi in bringing the project. "Chandrababu Naidu has also announced the same project during the

2014 election campaign, but issued the GO in January 2018, barely completing minor works of 5-10 per cent in five years. The estimates of this project were proposed at an escalated cost of ₹1,140 crore leaving more space for corruption although the tenders were finalised at ₹803 crore," he said. After project re-engineered three reservoirs Muttala, Thopudurthi, and Devarakonda are to be constructed at the same cost of ₹803 crore along with enhancing to the capacity of 3.9 tmc, which would irrigate 56,000 acres. Rapthadu Telugu Desam party in-charge Paritala Sriram lashed out at the YSRC government for removing the name of Paritala Ravindra for the project. Former irrigation minister Devineni Umamaheswar Rao announced to changing the name.

Officials directed to make spl voter lists

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 13

District Electoral Roll Observer P.A. Shobha directed Revenue officials and BLOs to work responsibly in compiling the 2021 special voters list in the district without any mistakes. She was in the district on Sunday to review voter registration, changes, additions, settlement of claims, data entry and other issues related to the design of the 2021 Special Voter List. On Sunday afternoon, she toured the field with Revenue officials in C.K. Dinne, Khajipet and Kamalapuram mandals to see how these programmes were going on. She first inspected the Moolavanka 202 polling station in Kadapa suburb,

203, 204, 205 polling stations at C.K. Dinne Mandal ZP High School and the 27th polling station at Kamalapuram Mandal Appaipalli. She closely examined the data entry issues. On this occasion, booth level officials were asked for details on voter registration, amendments, resolution of objections etc. and appropriate instructions were issued. The concerned tahsildars have been directed to conduct a campaign to create awareness among the people through volunteers on the special voter amendment and registration programme. Booth level officials were advised to check back and correct eligible voters, mismatching, and address errors in the voters' list.

KARTHIKA MASA VISHNU PUJA DEEKSHA CONCLUDES WITH DHANWANTARI PUJA

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, DEC. 13

The month-long fete of vratas and pujas organised by TTD as part of Karthika Masa Vishnu Puja Deeksha has concluded with Dhanwantari puja on the occasion of Dhanwantari Jayanti at Vasantha Mandapam in Tirumala on Sunday. Before the commencement of puja, the Vaikhanasa Agama advisor of TTD Mohana Rangacharyulu narrated the significance of the Karthika Sri Dhanwantari puja and said that Dhanwantari is worshipped as God of Medicine, who emerged during Samudra Madhanam. Later, the utsava idols of Lord Malayappa and his two consorts were seated in Vasantha Mandapam, while the idol of Lord Dhanwantari was also seated facing the deities and special pujas performed. The programme included Vishnu puja Sankalpam.

more than Covid-19 deaths in the state. He alleged that the Building Welfare Funds have been diverted to other schemes and it has caused a great loss to the construction workers. Presiding over the meeting, the TNTUC district president Nakka Chittibabu said that the government would help the construction workers immediately by giving ₹10,000 each worker per annum as other profes-

sions like tailors, washermen, barbers and others. He said that the Building Welfare Board should be strengthened and all schemes which were implemented previously for the benefit of the workers should be introduced again. He said that due to hike in prices of petrol and oil, the transportation cost has increased heavily and the transportation field is facing hardships.

AP failed to bring proper sand policy: TD

here on Sunday, Mr Chowdary said that the construction workers lost their livelihood for the past 18 months due to non-availability of the sand and the construction cost has also increased drastically, which the property owners are unable to bear. He said that due to hike in of liquor prices, many people were attracted to illicit liquor and arrack and now the deaths due to illicit liquor has increased

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MORE BURDEN

Left parties to agitate on Dec. 28 and 29

Series of protests against tax hike

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

The Communists and allied organisations decided to conduct a series of statewide protests against the hike of taxes in AP under which agitations against the government would be conducted on December 28 and 29 opposing the increase of tax component on urban people in the state. Andhra Pradesh Urban Citizens Forum (APUCF) convenor and CPM state leader, Ch. Babu Rao, said that a protest against the government would be initiated on December 28 and 29 on the increase of tax component on urban citizens in the state. He said

● Babu Rao demanded the state government to roll back the decion of increasing taxes with immediate effect due to Covid

that on 28 and 29 they would protest at Secretariats in the urban areas. He further said that on 6 January 2021 they would conduct agitations at municipalities and corporations. Mr Babu Rao said the government heedlessly increased the taxes including property tax hence they would conduct a massive signature campaign

by collecting 10 lakh signatures all over the state. He deplored that while Telangana has cut down the taxes by 50 per cent for the convenience of the people, the AP state government was enhancing them. He appealed to all the civic society associations throughout the state to cooperate and make the agitations a grand success. He also appealed to the state BJP unit to be on the side of people in this critical hour. Mr Babu Rao expressed concern over the mysterious illness that attacked people in Eluru town where more than 600 turned patients leaving people in distress and fear. He said that people in

some other municipal areas all over the state are suffering from dengue, malaria and other ailments. He lamented that instead of taking remedies to the problems people are facing, the state government had prepared the GOs, ordinances, circulars and the municipal bills in a hurry and got them passed in the Assembly to enhance the taxes in the first week of January which is severely objectionable. He demanded the government to roll back the decision of increasing taxes with immediate effect considering the plight of people due to Covid-19 pandemic induced illnesses and lockdown.

60-YEAR-OLD MAN DIES IN ROAD ACCIDENT

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 13

Sixty-year-old Papaiah was killed a road accident near Kumarkalva of Chakravyet mandal on Sunday. According to reports, the mishap occurred when a tractor hit the bike on which Papaiah, of Muddappagariipalle village, was going to Chakravyetpalli from Vempalli. The old man was severely injured and was shifted to Vempalli hospital for medical treatment by the locals. He died in the hospital, while undergoing treatment. Vempalli police registered a case and investi-

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IN BRIEF

2 ULTRAS KILLED,
THIRD HELD IN
POONCH GUNFIGHTDC CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 13

Two militants were killed and their associate was arrested during a gunfight that took place in Dugran area along the Mughal Road in Jammu and Kashmir's frontier Poonch district on Sunday.

"Two (militants) killed. One associate arrested at Poshana area in Poonch in a joint operation by JKP and Army," the police said in a tweet.

Giving the details of the encounter, the officials said that the J&K police's counterinsurgency Special Operations Group (SOG) and the Army's 16 Rashtriya Rifles jointly launched a cordon-and-search-operation in the area in the Pir Panjal range early Sunday, soon after a resident of neighbouring Dogrian Buffliaz village Ghulam Hussein filed a report with the local police that his son Talib Hussain went missing on December 9.

The J&K police late on Sunday said that the militant duo killed in Poonch encounter has been identified as Pakistani nationals Sajid and Bilal — both affiliated with Lashkar-e-Tayyaba. IGP Jammu Mukesh Singh said that two AK 47 rifles, one UBGL and one Thuraya Satphone were found on the slain men.

DG police Dilbag Singh said that these militants are known to have sneaked into J&K from PoK recently.

BENGAL'S FAMED
'POUSH MELA'
CALLED OFF

Kolkata, Dec. 13: The annual 'Poush Mela', a heritage cultural event attracting lakhs of travellers to West Bengal's Santiniketan, will not be held this year due to Covid-19 restrictions, an official said.

The over-a-century-old handicraft, handloom, art and music festival, is usually held in December-end. "We are not sure about getting the nod from the local administration in view of the Covid-19 situation. Most students, an integral part of Poush Mela, are not coming to the campus. Keeping all these factors in mind, we had to take this unpleasant decision for public health safety," a member of Visva-Bharati's executive council said.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting of the executive council. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore had first organised the fair in 1894 and Visva-Bharati, the university founded by the bard, started organising it from 1951.

The 'Poush Utsav', including prayers and singing of devotional songs in the varsity campus, will, however, take place (on December 23 this year), he said. The fate of the Poush Mela has been a subject of conjecture in the last few months, with an official of the council claiming in July that Visva-Bharati authorities had decided to scrap the event.

NORMALCY BACK
AT REMOTE
ARUNACHAL TOWN

Itanagar, Dec. 13: Normalcy returned to the remote Arunachal Pradesh town of Vijonagar, which saw violent protests with several government offices burnt over the voting rights of former Assam Rifles personnel in the pan-chayat polls, a senior official said on Sunday.

Security has been tightened in the sensitive town, which is surrounded by Myanmar on three sides, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Kime Kaming said after returning from the area.

Paramilitary forces along with the police have been deployed in Vijonagar to ensure peace, he said, adding that vandalism will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Vijonagar, in the state's Changlang district, saw widespread arson on Friday as a mob of around 400 people led by the Yobin Students' Union set fire to the offices of the Extra Assistant Commissioner, Special Branch of the state police and the post office, besides ransacking the local police station.

The civil helipad was also partially damaged by the mob. Ex-employees of the Assam Rifles have been living in the town since the early 60s. They originally hailed from outside the state but form the majority of the local population now, official sources said.



BJP leaders being rescued after a shikara carrying them capsized in the Dal Lake in Srinagar on Sunday. — PTI

Shikara, part of BJP poll
rally, capsizes in Dal LakeDC CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 13

A group of BJP activists and a couple of TV reporters escaped narrowly when a shikara (water gondola) they were riding capsized in Srinagar's Dal Lake on Sunday.

The boat was part of a 'shikara rally' organised by the BJP ahead of the seventh phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections scheduled to take place early next week.

The rally was being led by Union minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur who is in-charge of the BJP's election campaign in J&K and it's national general secretary

● **BJP DENIES** any of its activists were riding the boat which met with the mishap and alleged that a section of media was 'spreading negative propaganda against the party'.

Tarun Chugh. The others who attended the rally included Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain, BJP's national spokesperson, and the party's local leaders including Sofi Yousuf and Altaf Thakur.

Witnessed said that one of the shikaras carrying a few BJP activists and a couple of TV reporters and camerapersons capsized near Ghat No.17 of the lake.

However, all of them

were rescued immediately by local boatmen. The videos of the incident went viral on social media platforms with some netizens mocking the BJP.

However, the BJP denied any of its activists were riding the boat which met with the mishap and alleged that a section of media was 'spreading negative propaganda against the party'.

"It was a boat carrying three TV journalists that capsized. None of the BJP leaders or workers was onboard," claimed party's media in-charge Manzoor Bhat.

The police said that those who fell in chilly waters of the lake were given medical attention "as a safety measure."

WOMAN JUDGE
DIES DURING
COVID TREATMENT

Indore, Dec. 13: Justice Vandana Kasarekar of the Indore bench of Madhya Pradesh High Court died on Sunday while undergoing treatment for Coronavirus at a private hospital here, a medical officer said.

Kasarekar, 60, had also been suffering from a kidney ailment since a long time, he said. "Justice Vandana Kasarekar of the high court's Indore bench died while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in the city. She had been in a critical condition at the hospital since the last few days," district nodal officer for Covid-19 prevention Amit Malakar said.

"Justice Kasarekar had tested positive for Covid-19 a few days back. Besides, she had been suffering from a kidney disease since a long time," he said.

State Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed grief over her death in a tweet. Before being appointed as a judge, Justice Kasarekar was the lawyer of civil and constitutional matters in the Indore bench of the high court.

She was the only woman judge of the Indore bench at present. She had been appointed the high court judge in October 2014 and her term was to end in July 2022. — PTI

● **JUSTICE VANDANA KASAREKAR, 60, who had been suffering from a kidney ailment was tested Covid-19 positive a few days back.**

HEALTH | REPORT

Survey finds drastic rise in obesity among kids

New Delhi, Dec. 13: The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has found a drastic rise in obesity among children under five years of age in 20 of the 22 states where the study was conducted, with experts attributing it to lack of physical activity and unhealthy food habits.

According to the NFHS-5, several Union Territories, and states, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Mizoram, Tripura, Lakshadweep, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, have registered several folds increase in the percentage of obesity among children below five years of age in comparison to NFHS-4 conducted

Experts say unhealthy food choices, lack of physical activities are major causes

between 2015 and 2016. Only Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu registered a drop in the number of overweight children under five years of age, the data showed.

About 13.4 per cent children under the age of five were found to be obese in Ladakh which was highest among the 22 states and Union Territories surveyed, followed by Lakshadweep at 10.5 per cent, Mizoram 10 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir, and Sikkim 9.6 per cent each. Not just children, rise in obesity has even been recorded in adults in the latest survey in comparison to NFHS-4.

According to the survey data, 16 states and Union Territories registered a rise in obesity among women while 19 states and UTs recorded an increase in obesity among men. Kerala and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at 38 per cent.

Also, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at over 40 per cent. Men and women were counted as obese whose body mass index was found to be over or equal to 25.0 kg/m² while children's obesity was counted in terms of

weight-for-height. Healthcare experts have attributed the rise in obesity to unhealthy food choices and lack of physical activities among children and even adults.

Sheila Vir, a public health nutrition expert and founder director of Public Health Nutrition and Development Centre, said there is also lack of awareness on what are good food habits. Also, high-fat and high-sugar foods are easily available and so there is higher consumption of it, she said.

"We have a double burden of undernutrition, malnutrition and overnutrition occurring together. So, I think what to feed a

child is what we are going wrong in," Vir said.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, she also raised concern over the rise in obesity. "There might be an increase in obesity among children in view of Covid-19 pandemic as after closure of schools, there was lack of physical activity among children and even in adults in some cases," she said.

Dr. Khan Amir Maroof, Professor at Department of Community Medicine, University College of Medical Sciences and GTB Hospital termed the rise in obesity a "very disturbing sign".

"Obesity is a manifestation of what is rapidly

changing in our environment. Of late, we see trends which increase the risk of developing obesity. Environmental factors, such as availability and consumption of junk foods, poor complementary feeding, lack of outdoor activity, and increased screen time on may be the reason for this trend," he said.

"For children, we need to flag screen time as it has multi-dimensional effects on children, obesity, being one of them. The focus has been on breastfeeding, but now it's time that complementary feeding is also focused upon," Dr Maroof suggested.

— PTI

Covid positive min Vij
shifted to Rohtak hosp

67-yr-old BJP leader complained of discomfort at civil hosp

Ambala, Dec. 13: Haryana health minister Anil Vij, who had tested positive for Coronavirus recently, has been shifted to the PGIMS hospital at Rohtak from the civil hospital here after he complained of discomfort, doctors here said on Sunday.

Doctors said the minister was shifted on Saturday night. Ambala's Civil Surgeon Dr Kuldeep Singh said a team of doctors at the Rohtak hospital was monitoring his condition.

Vij, who had last month got one shot of the two-dose trial of the Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin after he offered to be a volunteer, had on December 5 tested positive for the Coronavirus. The 67-year-old BJP leader had offered to be the first volunteer in the phase three trials for Covaxin, an indigenous potential vaccine being developed by Bharat Biotech against Covid-19. He was administered the dose on November 20 at the Civil Hospital in Ambala Cantonment, about 50 km from Chandigarh.

Bharat Biotech had said that clinical trials of the vaccine are based on a two-dose schedule, given 28 days apart. The vaccine

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

India's Coronavirus tally is nearing the 9.9 million mark with 30,254 fresh cases and 391 more deaths reported in the last 24 hours.

Amid a downward trend in active cases and a surge in the number of people recovering from the disease, the country is reportedly planning to deploy its vast election machinery to deliver 600 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccines to the most vulnerable people in the next six to eight months through conventional cold chain systems.

The Centre has lined up cold storage facilities with temperatures ranging

efficacy will be determined two weeks after the second dose, it said.

Covaxin has been designed to be protective 2 weeks after volunteers receive the 2nd dose. The Union health ministry had also stepped in to say

between 2 to 8 degrees Celsius (36-48°F), said V.K. Paul, who heads the group of experts on vaccine administration which advises Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

With the first priority given to frontline health workers and those highly vulnerable to the infection, states and Union Territories are also ensuring that vaccines for all others are administered swiftly.

As many as eight Covid vaccine candidates, including three indigenous ones, that are under different stages of clinical trials, could be ready for authorisation in the near future.

India is actively considering Pfizer's Covid-19

vaccine after the American pharma giant sought emergency use authorisation in India.

The country is also considering two more vaccine candidates, one being developed by the Serum Institute of India in partnership with AstraZeneca and Oxford University and the other one by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech.

Both SII and Bharat Biotech are now conducting Phase 3 trials of their respective vaccine candidates in the country. The applications of Pfizer, SII, and Bharat Biotech are being reviewed by the subject expert committee (SEC) on Covid-19 at the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.

that Covaxin is a two-dose anti-Coronavirus vaccine and that Vij was given only the first dose a fortnight before he tested positive.

"The antibodies against the infection build up in a human being only after a

specific number of days pass after the second dose of the vaccine is taken. This is a two-dose vaccine. The minister in question has taken only one dose of the vaccine," the ministry had said in a statement.

— PTI

ASSAM OKAYS
SHUTDOWN OF
MADRASAS,
SANSKRIT TOLS

Guwahati, Dec. 13: The Assam cabinet on Sunday approved a proposal to close down all government-run madrasas and Sanskrit tols (schools), and a bill in this regard will be tabled during the upcoming winter session of the state Assembly, parliamentary affairs minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said.

"Existing laws related to madrasas and Sanskrit tols will be repealed. A bill will be introduced in the next session of the Assembly," Patowary, who is also the spokesperson of the Assam government, said.

The winter session of the Assam Legislative Assembly will begin from December 28. The decision to shut down all the state-run madrasas and Sanskrit tols was taken during the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, he said.

Education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had, in October, said there were 610 state-run madrasas across Assam and the government had been spending ₹260 crore annually for these institutes.

He had also said the State Madrasa Education Board, Assam would be dissolved. The minister had also mentioned that all the government-run madrasas would be converted to high schools and new admissions would be held for existing students as regular ones.

According to Sarma, the Sanskrit tols would be handed over to Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University.

The infrastructure of Sanskrit tols would be used to convert them to centres of learning and research where Indian culture, civilisation and nationalism would be studied, he had said.

Senior BJP leader and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly Aminul Haque Laskar had said madrasas run by private parties would not be shut down.

"These (private) madrasas will not be shut down as these have kept Muslims alive," Laskar had said while laying the foundation stone for a madrasa in Cachar district in November.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

**NIGERIA: GUNMEN
ATTACK SCHOOL,
400 KIDS MISSING**

Lagos (Nigeria), Dec. 13: Hundreds of Nigerian students are missing after gunmen attacked a secondary school in the country's north-western Katsina state, police have confirmed.

The Government Science Secondary School in Kankara was attacked Friday night by a large group of bandits who shot "with AK 47 rifles," Katsina State police spokesman Gambo Isah said in a statement. Police engaged the attackers "in a gun duel which gave (some of) the students the opportunity to scale the fence of the school and run for safety," Isah said. About 400 students are missing, while 200 are accounted for, Isah said. The school is believed to have more than 600 students.

**AZERBAIJAN
DECLARE BREACH
IN PEACE DEAL**

Baku, Dec. 13: Azerbaijan announced on Sunday that four of its troops had been killed in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region since a peace deal with Armenian separatists was agreed in early November.

The defence ministry said a group of Armenian fighters remained in the mountainous province — breaking the terms of the Russian-brokered truce — and had recently launched fatal attacks on Azerbaijan's forces.

The ministry said three servicemen were killed in a separatist ambush on November 26 and another sustained fatal injuries during an attack near the village of Hadrut on Tuesday last week.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of breaching the truce that ended six weeks of fighting between the longstanding foes for control of the breakaway region.

**IRAN SUMMONS
EU ENVOYS FOR
PROTESTING**

Tehran, Dec. 13: Iran on Sunday summoned the German envoy to Tehran after the European Union condemned the execution of an Iranian journalist whose work helped inspire nationwide economic protests in 2017, Iranian state media has reported.

IRNA said that an Iranian foreign ministry official summoned the German ambassador because of EU statements on the exiled reporter Ruhollah Zam, 47, who was hanged on Saturday. Zam was being held in jail in Iran after Iranian authorities seized him while he was traveling in neighbouring Iraq last year.

The German Foreign Ministry on Saturday expressed its shock about the circumstances of Zam's sentencing and what it described as his "abduction from abroad" and forced return to Iran. Iran will also summon today the French ambassador to Tehran over European reactions to the journalist's execution, IRNA added.

**MANY HELD AT
PARIS STIR OVER
SECURITY BILL**

Paris, Dec. 13: Paris police took nearly 150 people into custody at what quickly became a tense and sometimes ill-tempered protest Saturday against proposed security laws, with officers wading into the crowds of several thousand to haul away suspected trouble-makers.

Police targeted protesters they suspected might coalesce together into violent groups like those who vandalized stores and vehicles and attacked officers at previous demonstrations.

The interior minister said police detained 142 people. Long lines of riot officers and police vehicles with blue lights flashing escorted Saturday's march through rain-slickened streets. They hemmed in protesters, seeking to prevent the flare-up of violence that marked many previous demonstrations.

A police water cannon doused demonstrators at the end of the march, as night fell. Marchers were protesting against a proposed security law that has sparked successive week-ends of demonstrations and against a draft law aimed at combating Islamist radicalism. The security bill's most contested measure could make it more difficult to film police officers. It aims to outlaw the publication of images with intent to cause harm to police.

**Brexit deadline
goes 'extra mile'****Johnson feels Brexit failure still 'most likely'**

London, Dec. 13: UK businesses clamoured for compromise on Sunday as Prime Minister Boris Johnson said failure remains the "most likely" outcome to marathon post-Brexit trade talks with the European Union.

"I'm afraid we're still very far apart on some key things, but where there's life there's hope," Johnson told reporters, after agreeing with EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen to push on with negotiations.

The pair had said they would decide whether or not a deal was possible by the end of the weekend, but agreed in a phone call to "go the extra mile" before the UK leaves the EU's single market on December 31.

"The UK certainly won't be walking away from the talks. I still think there's a deal to be done if our partners want to do it," Johnson said at 10 Downing Street after briefing his cabinet about the call.

But Britain could not compromise on the "fundamental nature" of Brexit, controlling UK laws and fisheries, he said.

"The most likely thing now is of course we have to get ready for WTO terms," Johnson added, referring to tariffs and quotas on the basic rules of trade set by the World Trade Organisation.

"There is a clarity and a



Ursula von der Leyen

simplicity in that approach that has its own advantages. It's not where we wanted to get to... but the UK is prepared," he said.

"Either way, whatever happens, the UK will do very, very well." UK businesses welcomed the agreement to keep talking, but disagreed strongly with Johnson's cheerful forecasts for Britain's future if it severs all ties with its biggest overall trading partner from the New Year.

"We now need negotiators to finish the job and agree the deal we all so desperately need," Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders chief executive Mike Hawes tweeted.

Hawes added: "No deal" would be nothing less than catastrophic for the automotive sector, its workers and their families, and represent a stunning failure of statecraft. Quite simply, it has to be

ruled out." Nissan has warned that a no-deal Brexit would make its Sunderland car factory in northeast England, which employs more than 6,000 workers, unviable due to the restoration of tariffs on cross-Channel trade.

Last week, Japanese automaker Honda suspended production at its British plant for a day after suffering a shortfall in parts, owing to blockages at ports caused by the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit stockpiling.

Even with a trade deal, Britain will still be out of the EU's common market and businesses will face new customs regulations and paperwork. They warn the government has failed to get vital IT systems ready in time, leading to fears of transport gridlock on roads and at ports.

Confederation of British Industry director-general Tony Danker said the news of talks continuing "gives hope", but demanded the government fix the IT rollout and offer more support to businesses.

"A deal is both essential and possible. It is the only way to build upon the extensive support for the economy given by all governments during the pandemic. Without it, that progress is undermined," he said in a statement.

The British Chambers of Commerce appealed to London and Brussels not to give up. — AFP



Thousands of red-hatted protesters filled Washington streets to demand 'four more years' for Donald Trump's presidency and to denounce, without proof, the 'massive fraud' they insist gave the election to Joe Biden. — AFP

Clashes erupt after pro-Trump rallies

Washington, Dec. 13: Four people were stabbed and one shot as rallies backing President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud led to clashes in major US cities on Saturday.

Scuffles broke out in many places between rally-goers and counter-protesters who turned up to criticize the president, who lost the November 3 election to Democrat Joe Biden but is yet to concede.

Washington State Police said in a tweet late Saturday that a shooting had taken place after clashes near the capitol building in Olympia, and that a suspect had been detained.

In the US capital, DC Fire and EMS Department communications chief Doug Buchanan said that four people had been stabbed and were now hospitalised "with serious injuries." The New York Times reported that 23 had been arrested throughout the day.

There was no indication of whether any of the victims had been involved in the protests, on either side of the divide.

The day had begun with a festive atmosphere as thousands of red-hatted protesters filled Washington's streets to support the president,

undeterred by the US Supreme Court's rejection

on Friday of what may have been his last chance to overturn the results.

Similar events took place in Olympia, Atlanta and St. Paul, Minnesota, as well as in smaller towns in Nebraska, Alabama and elsewhere.

Demonstrators at the DC rally — noticeably smaller than a similar protest last month — said they were steadfast in their support for the embattled president. "We're not gonna give up," said Luke Wilson, a sixty-something protester who had come all the way from the western state of Idaho.

"I believe there is a big injustice being done to the American people," added

Dell Quick, a regular at Trump's political rallies, as he brandished a flag defending gun rights.

Protesters offered no shortage of explanations for the poll results, even though they have been affirmed by state election officials — several of them Republican — and by judges in several key states.

Every state has now certified the results, giving Biden 306 votes in the Electoral College to Trump's 232. Electors are to formally cast their votes on Monday. But protesters insisted, as Trump has repeatedly, that there was widespread fraud in the election. — AFP

US set for Covid vaccine rollout
Non-essential shops, schools to close in Germany, says Merkel

Washington, Dec. 13: The first trucks carrying a Covid-19 vaccine for widespread use in the US were set to pull out of a Michigan manufacturing plant Sunday, with the shots that are critical to stopping the nation's Coronavirus outbreak destined to reach states a day later.

Shipments of the Pfizer vaccine will set in motion the biggest vaccination effort in American history at a critical juncture of the pandemic that has killed 1.6 million and sickened 71 million worldwide. Initially, about 3 million doses were expected to be sent out, and the priority is health care workers and nursing home residents as infections, hospitalizations and deaths soar in the US. With numbers likely to get worse over the holidays, the vaccine is offering a bright spot in the fight against the pandemic that's killed nearly 3,00,000 Americans.

Federal officials say the first shipments of Pfizer's vaccine will be staggered, arriving in 145 distribution centers Monday, with an additional 425 sites getting shipments on Tuesday, and the remaining 66 on Wednesday.

The vaccine, co-developed by German partner BioNTech, is being doled out based on each state's adult population. Pennsylvania health care giant UPMC has chosen staff who are critical to operating its facilities as among those getting the first round of vaccinations, said Dr. Graham Snyder, who led the center's vaccine task force. "It's very exciting. I will be thrilled, that moment when we administer our first dose," Snyder said Saturday. — AP

Berlin, Dec. 13: Shops selling non-essential goods, hair-salons and schools in Germany will close from Wednesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel said, to halt an "exponential growth" new in Coronavirus infections in Europe's biggest economy.

The partial lockdown will apply until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or offer extended company holidays, under the new measures agreed by Merkel with regional leaders of Germany's 16 states on Sunday.

Alcohol sales would be banned in public places,

essentially outlawing the business of mulled wine stands, which have proved popular in the days running up to Christmas.

"The Corona situation is out of control," said Bavarian state premier Markus Soeder, welcoming the tougher restrictions which he pledged to implement in his state.

Germany in November closed leisure and cultural facilities and banned indoor dining in restaurants.

The measures had helped to halt rapid growth of infections after the autumn school holidays, but numbers had plateaued at a high rate.

Over the last week however, the country's disease control agency reported that the infections trend has taken a worrying turn.

"With increasing mobility and the therefore linked additional contacts in the pre-Christmas period, Germany is now in exponential growth of infections numbers," said the policy paper agreed by regional leaders and Merkel.

It was therefore "our task to prevent an overload of our health systems and that's why there is an urgent need to take action," said the chancellor. — AFP

**Country music star
Charley Pride dies**

Dallas, Dec. 13: Charley Pride, country music's first Black superstar, has died of complications from Coronavirus at age 86.

Pride, known for hits like "Kiss an Angel Good Mornin'" and "Is Anybody Goin' to San Antonio", died Saturday in Dallas, Texas, according to a statement shared on the singer's official website. Born a sharecropper's son in Sledge, Mississippi, on March 18, 1934, Pride emerged from Southern cotton fields to also become the first Black member of the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Veteran country singer

and Pride's friend, Dolly Parton was among the first to pay tributes on social media. "I'm so heartbroken that one of my dearest and oldest friends, Charley Pride, has passed away. It's even worse to know that he passed away from Covid-19. What a horrible, horrible virus," Parton tweeted.

"Charley, we will always love you. Rest In Peace. My love and thoughts go out to his family and all of his fans," she added. Singer-songwriter Billy Ray Cyrus remembered Pride as a "gentleman, legend and true trail blazer." — AP

**JAPAN, S. KOREA
SET NEW DAILY
COVID RECORDS**

Tokyo, Dec. 13: Japan's daily Coronavirus cases have exceeded 3,000 for the first time while the government delays stricter measures for fear of hurting the economy ahead of the holiday season.

The 3,030 new cases, including 621 in Tokyo, took Japan's national tally to 1,77,287 with 2,562 deaths, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region: — South Korea has set another record for its daily coronavirus tally with 1,030, as authorities struggle to suppress the viral spread. — AP

Lahore, Dec. 13: The Pakistan Democratic Movement, an 11-party Opposition alliance seeking the ouster of "puppet" Prime Minister Imran Khan, is set to hold its final rally here on Sunday, despite a ban on the gathering of more than 300 people owing to an increase in Covid-19 cases across the country.

A number of workers of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) have reached Minar-i-Pakistan. They broke the locks of its main gate, placed chairs and have installed lights for Sunday's much-hyped power show of the Opposition.

The rally will be addressed by former prime minister and PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif from London, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, Jamiat Ulema Islam chief and PDM head Maulana Fazlur Rehman and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

"The government has not given permission to the PDM to hold a rally at Minar-e-Pakistan Lahore because of the rise in Covid-19 cases. Action will be taken against those who will take the law into their hands," Punjab Law Minister Basharat Raja said.

So far, police in Lahore have booked more than 3,000 workers of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for violating Covid-19 SOPs during this week's meetings held here by its vice-president Maryam, he said. PDM's Minar-i-Pakistan public meeting will be the last one in its first phase of rallies that had begun

**Pakistan Oppn set to stage
final showdown in Lahore**
**Slain Taliban chief
took life insurance**

Islamabad, Dec. 13: Slain Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour purchased a life insurance policy using a fake identity in Pakistan and paid ₹3 lakh in premium before being killed in a US drone attack, according to a media report on Sunday.

Mansour, who was killed in a US drone strike along the Pakistan-Iran border on May 21, 2016, assumed the leadership of the Taliban in July 2015, replacing its founder and the one-eyed reclusive long-time spiritual head Mullah Mohammad Omar who died in 2013.

The details about the insurance policy were revealed during the hearing of a terror funding case against him and his absconding accomplices on Saturday.

The insurance company provided this information to an Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Karachi

during the hearing of the case registered against Mansour and his accomplices by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) last year, Dawn news reported.

It emerged during the investigation that the Taliban leader and his accomplices were involved in generating funds for terrorist activities through the purchase of properties on the basis of "forged identities".

He had purchased five properties including plots and houses, estimated to be valued at ₹32 million (\$1,99,812) in Karachi.

The report said that it surfaced during the investigation that Mullah Akhtar Mansour had purchased the "life insurance" policy by using a fake identity and had paid up to ₹3,00,000 to the company before his death in the drone attack on May 21, 2016. — PTI

over two months ago. The PDM will announce the 'decisive phase' of its struggle against Prime Minister Khan's government in this public meeting.

The alliance has already announced that all Opposition parties will resign from the national and provincial assemblies to pressure the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government for fresh elections.

The long march towards Islamabad is also on the cards for the PDM. Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar has asked the PDM to delay its Minar-e-Pakistan rally in light of 'terror threat alerts' and the Coronavirus situation. "I ask the Opposition to resolve issues through talks. Discuss their issues through dialogue and not by playing with people's lives," Buzdar said. — PTI

FARMERS | SUPPORT**Car rally to Indian embassy hijacked by separatist Sikhs who were carrying Khalistani flags****Khalistan supporters vandalise Gandhi's statue in US**

Washington, Dec. 13: A violent group of Khalistani separatists has desecrated Mahatma Gandhi's statue outside the Indian embassy here in the US during a demonstration by Sikh-American youths in support of farmers protesting against the recently enacted agriculture laws in India.

Hundreds of Sikhs from in and around Greater Washington DC area, Maryland and Virginia, along with many from

other states like New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio and North Carolina, on Saturday undertook a car rally to the Indian embassy in downtown Washington DC, where they gathered to express solidarity with the protesting Indian farmers.

However, the peaceful protest was soon hijacked by the separatist Sikhs who were carrying Khalistani flags with anti-India posters and banners. During the protest, many

of the pro-Khalistan Sikh youths flashing kirpans jumped on the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and pasted a poster over it.

The group raised anti-India and pro-Khalistan slogans. The Indian embassy condemned the "mischievous act" by hooligans masquerading as protesters. "The statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Plaza in front of the embassy was defaced by Khalistani elements on 12 December 2020. The

Embassy strongly condemns this mischievous act by hooligans masquerading as protesters against the universally respected icon of peace and justice," it said in a statement.

The embassy said it has lodged a strong protest with the US law enforcement agencies and also taken up the matter with the Department of State for an early investigation and action against the culprits under the applicable law. — PTI

**Congressman Ro Khanna seeks
fair, peaceful solution to farmers**

Washington, Dec. 13: Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna has hoped for a peaceful and fair solution to the farmers' issues in India, saying he is encouraged by the ongoing dialogue between the protesting farmers and the government.

Khanna, 44, was recently elected for a third consecu-

tive term from the congressional district representing Silicon Valley. "India and the US share a rich tradition of democracy and peaceful protests.

Farmworkers are the backbone of both our nations and must have their voices heard. "I hope there's a peaceful and fair solution so they can pro-

vide for their families," Khanna said in a tweet on Saturday. "I am encouraged by the ongoing dialogue," he said, joining other American lawmakers who have expressed their views on the ongoing farmers' protest in India, several of whom have expressed their concerns. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

14 DECEMBER 2020

Russian ‘concerns’ drew a fitting Indian response

In a speech last week at the Russian International Affairs Council, a government think tank, the country’s veteran foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, noted that “currently” India was “an object of the Western countries’ persistent, aggressive and devious policy as they are trying to engage it in anti-China games”. New Delhi has done well to respond with alacrity — and clarity.

The external affairs ministry noted at a briefing, responding to questions, “Our relations with Russia stand on their own merits including in the sphere of Military and Technical Cooperation (MTC).” Mr Lavrov had made a special mention of MTC, saying it was the “goal of the US (to bring to bear) very tough pressure on New Delhi” in the MTC area.

The Indian reaction seeks to reassure Moscow on continuing close bilateral relations, including in the defence domain. At the same time, by making no reference to China, New Delhi has conveyed to Moscow that it is free to make decisions as regards the world stage in light of its own perception of self-interest.

Recently India signed on to the last of the four “foundational” agreements of the US. Without these, America does not extend special partnership deals with any country. These agreements include exchanging logistics and bases, joint training of forces, and military cooperation in the limitless geo-spatial field. In addition, India has signed the Defence Technologies and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with the US. These have understandably made Russia somewhat nervous.

On the other hand, India signed up two years ago to purchase the Russian S-400 Triumf air defence system that can neutralize incoming aircraft, missiles and even drones 400 km away. The system is scheduled to be delivered by end-2021. Meanwhile, in July this year, Russia confirmed supplies of anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems months after the face-off with China had begun in eastern Ladakh. This point is of special relevance since Russia has special ties with China. It is not inconceivable that Mr Lavrov’s formally expressed anxiety about India being roped into an anti-China configuration is to deflect possible head-shaking from Beijing.

Meanwhile, Washington is upset with India’s planned sourcing of advanced anti-missile systems from Moscow and the Trump administration even contemplated penalising India under CAATSA (Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), but held back. In light of India’s expanding warmth with it in a multi-faceted way, Washington has had to be indulgent about India’s ties with Iran and Russia.

Moscow has proved India’s all-weather friend. This has been India’s most abiding strategic relationship, regardless of personalities, systems and parties in power. With no country have such ties subsisted. This is on account of geo-strategic realities and geography. It would be unwise of either side to lose sight of this. Moscow has to understand that while it may have close ties with Beijing — and also a few worries in the Central Asia theatre — India has its reasons to bolster itself in the diplomatic and strategic domains all round in light of the difficulties posed by China’s rise.

India has spoken, while responding to Mr Lavrov’s talk centred on multipolarity and US moves to go back to a unipolar world, of its “independent” foreign policy. Even if some questions have risen about it, as a middle-level power India would do well to remind itself of the need for such independence, which permits it the latitude to negotiate with contending parties.

Lessons from Delhi border

It’s all in the ‘mindset’. The farmers’ barricade at the capital’s borders that has entered its 16th day and is stubbornly refusing to go away, to the chagrin of the Narendra Modi government, is now beginning to expose the hypocrisies of the ruling party and its constituents. And in so doing, embarrass them. On December 10, Human Rights Day, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan’s colleagues had held posters of jailed human rights activists arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case. It drew a reaction from the usual suspects — this time in the shape of Union minister Piyush Goyal — who tossed out at them his party’s overused salvo — that of being “hard Left” and “antinationa!”. However, the former soldier was nonchalant.

Mr Ugrahan, whose organisation recently moved Supreme Court to have the three contentious farm laws repealed, has a question for the government. Is the government afraid to engage with him on the points that he is making regarding the laws? For whatever they are worth, Mr Ugrahan can’t very well be expected to be punished for his beliefs, or the positions he has taken on these other matters, empowered as he is to have done so by dint of Articles 19, freedom of expression, and 25, freedom of conscience and religion, of our esteemed Constitution. On the flipside, Mr Goyal can’t properly be said to have indulged in whataboutery either, because it is socialists who have historically upheld the humanitarian cause. Be on the Left to fight for the right.

As evidenced by the tweets sneering at fox nuts and foot massages at the protest venue, the government’s propaganda machine, however, is jealous of the confident, new farmer. For them, the kisan bhai, and he needs must be a bhai, even as 60 per cent of India’s subsistence farmers today are female, so farmer’s rights are equally women’s rights, is cast in the image of the emaciated ploughman. The government is stereotype-bound and lack ideas — for actual agro-reform — and imagination. There is hope yet. A way to avoid more embarrassment is to learn from one’s mistakes.

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Subhani



Justice hurried can be justice buried



V. Vijayasai Reddy

Benjamin Franklin’s maxim that “it is better 100 guilty persons should escape than that one innocent person should suffer” has been staple legal thinking for centuries.

Would a time bound and hurried disposal of cases be more of a quantitative exercise than a qualitative one? Would not this unwarranted haste totally invalidate the maxim given by Franklin?

Earlier this month, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, acting as an amicus curiae, informed the Supreme Court that as per the latest data available after collating inputs from various high courts, the number of cases against public representatives stood at 4,859. The report submitted by him also recommended that the high courts be directed to prepare a blueprint for expeditious disposal of cases with the conclusion of trials by no later than one year. The chief justices of each high court may be personally requested to look into the matter and submit an action plan. Now, a lot is being discussed as to this recommendation and whether it would create more logistical and legal problems than it would solve.

For such special treatment of expedited trial to be given to all serving and former public representatives, it must first pass the requirement of constitutionality. When the Constitution speaks of the fundamental right to equality why is it a public representative’s case merits priority over a longer pending case?

The question, therefore, is whether public representatives form a separate class of citizens

within the society to enable them preferential adjudication. If the answer is yes on the basis of their role, responsibilities and powers, then shouldn’t judges and heads of all statutory bodies, serving and retired, too, fall in the same category? The Supreme Court refrained from answering this question in 2013 and has, therefore, left it open to interpretation. Disproportionate focus on cases against public representatives, most of which are either political or cases with less than five years’ jail term if the accused is convicted, takes away from our focus cases against hardened criminals and repeat offenders.

The prospect of disposal of cases within one year against public representatives may make headlines but it also brings up a disturbing matter for discussion. Can a time frame be set to elicit information and verify the veracity in statements recorded by the prosecution from witnesses? Is not “justice hurried justice buried”? Normally, examination of witnesses in trials is filled with research and production of data beyond what was filed by the prosecution in Courts. Would not a trial court judge be pressured to deny time just

Disproportionate focus on cases against public representatives, most of which are political or with less than five years’ jail term if the accused is convicted, takes away from our focus cases against hardened criminals

The pressure on the trial courts to dispose a case within one year and limited resources may lead to disastrous results. One wrong conviction would lead to immediate disqualification of an incumbent MP...

because he has a deadline to catch? How can we ensure that all efforts have been made and sufficient time devoted to elicit the truth? What is the logic behind fixing a timeframe? Is it that the judiciary is again pushing against the boundaries of the doctrine of separation of powers and thereby sacrificing our constitutional right to equality?

This speedy disposal paradigm also conflicts with the present condition of fast track courts in the country. The fast track courts were meant to dispose of criminal cases. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data from January this year, the trials in fast track courts, set up in several states to allow quick trials in cases of serious crimes such as rape, take longer than those in regular courts. The data also showed that of the more than 28,000 trials completed in India’s fast track courts in 2018, only 22 per cent took less than a year to complete and about 42 per cent of the cases took more than three years to complete. While the Supreme Court has lamented about the pending cases against public representatives, it has overlooked the delay in the trial of much more heinous crimes such as crimes against women and children.

Further, the resources needed to be able to dispose of a case within one year are huge. As of 2018, India roughly has just 19 judges per million population with a shortage of over 5,700

judges in the trial courts, themselves. To squander the limited infrastructure of the judiciary, in terms of lack of judges, limited judicial time and physical resources in one type of mostly political cases would be unjust to victims of much more heinous crimes who would see further delay getting justice. The judiciary and the justice delivery system has limited infrastructure and it is important to efficiently use them for the greater good of the people. Rather than making an unimplementable law, the focus should be on distributing resources with focus on matters, which are of higher judicial importance, such as cases of rape, murder and even habeas corpus. The amicus curiae’s report if implemented would see the judiciary jump to the end result without providing for a path to enable the same.

Lastly, the pressure on the trial courts to dispose a case within one year and limited resources may lead to disastrous results. One wrong conviction with over two years’ jail term would lead to immediate disqualification of an incumbent MP or MLA and tarnish the reputation which he or she built over decades. Rather than actually cleaning politics, it shall clean up all the politicians, good and bad. Of late, we have been witnessing several bills being passed by the legislatures, which stipulate a timeframe within which the judiciary is expected to adjudicate. How feasible is it and are we jumping upon the result rather than creating an enabling environment for it? That is a question that only the passage of time will answer.

The writer is YSR Congress Parliamentary Party leader and general secretary. He can be reached at venumbaka.vr@sansad.nic.in.

LETTERS

US DEMOCRACY

The independence of judiciary from the lower courts in states to the Supreme Court in the US was demonstrated in dethroning an all-powerful President Trump. This is the way a democracy should function. The brick and mortar construction of Parliament buildings without the spirit of democracy does not serve any purpose.

P.A.S. Prasad
Visakhapatnam

MYSTERY ILLNESS

It is encouraging and appreciable to read that there are only two more patients afflicted by the mystery illness and that they are out of danger (*Mystery illness in control, DC, Dec. 13*). At the same time, authorities cannot be complacent and need to leave no stone unturned to contain it so that it does not recur in future.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

PAWAR’S GROUSE

If Sanjay Gandhi had not died prematurely, he would have succeeded his brother (*Praful: Pawar couldn’t be PM due to coterie, DC, Dec. 13*). PV becoming the PM at old age was an aberration from dynastic politics. Maharashtra government can fall if the Congress is incensed of Pawar being praised belittling Rahul Gandhi’s actions and his doubtful prospects for the future.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

6 Air Force pilots to man IA’s planes

BOMBAY, Dec. 13. Six Indian Air Force pilots arrived in Bombay today to man, in two teams, the Bombay-based AVRO HS-748 aircraft of the Indian Airlines from tomorrow as the threat of Corporation employees to go on a one-day token strike midnight tonight still loomed large.

Loaders, traffic assistants and cabin crew at Bombay stopped work hours before the scheduled start of the strike in pursuance of a directive from the Air Corporation Employees’ Union this morning. Traffic officers and outside loaders worked on the Boeing chartered from Air India and few Delhi-based Caravelles by which the Airlines again maintained a skeleton service. Meanwhile deputy minister of civil aviation, Dr Sarojini Mahishi was meeting unions.

A.G. Noorani



On farm bills, govt needs to consult Opp. & cultivators

Since Independence, India has seen many a protest, some massive. But never before has it seen such an organised, mammoth demonstration in which old as well as young participated. I am referring, of course, to the protests by the farmers of Punjab. Schoolboys left their homes and schools to be counted among the protesters. All were overshadowed by elderly women, whose presence made this unprecedented show of righteous wrath even more impressive.

It was a unique, unmatched feat of organisation. They travelled on their tractors, on and under which they slept, covered with blankets, under open skies in bitter cold. The traditional Sikh langar is another story. There were giant tawas to cook food for the huge crowds that had assembled — all united by clear, precise demands that the Modi government could have easily anticipated when it inflicted the three laws on a host of sites pertaining to the farmer, from farm to mandi.

The demonstrations, covered by

the Indian and international press, have evoked strong reactions among the Punjabi, particularly Sikh, diaspora. It has united a fragmented opposition. There have been some rounds of talks with government representatives, all to no avail.

The episode holds a lesson in democratic governance. A government ‘majority’ in parliament cannot, must not, govern without consulting not only the opposition but also the affected parties.

The government refused to even refer the three offending agriculture bills to a joint committee of parliament. It would have studied them far more closely than either house of parliament possibly could. It would have asked the farmers’ representatives to appear before it with facts and figures, expound their case and answer questions thoroughly, and satisfy themselves that they had been heard fully. Experts would have studied the committee’s report. An informed public opinion would have been evolved. In the time thus taken, the heat would have subsided.

This process is an integral part of participative government. In Deep Citizenship, P.B. Clarke wrote, “Democracy is unfinished business. It has yet to widen and institutionalise the crucial dimension of public participation.” To that I would add, old as it is, democracy has not passed the age of childbearing. The last half-century has sprouted the ombudsman; call him the mohtasib or lok pal.

Both in formulating policy and introducing it as a bill, the government may embark on a process of consultation with outside interests, and sometimes issue consultation documents to invite public comment.

This can help to improve and legitimise a bill, and win the support of those whose cooperation is needed if the legislation is to be effective.

The UK’s Hansard Society Commission on the Legislative Process made a number of recommendations for more timely, open, and sufficient consultation so that bills could be got into “a form fit for enactment, without major alter-

ation, before they are presented to parliament”. A few years later in 1997, the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons found there was little or no consultation within parliament or with other bodies before bills were introduced. Subsequently, the government issued a code of practice that urges departments to consult widely throughout the process of policy development and sets out criteria for effective consultation.

Pre-legislative scrutiny by parliament as well as outside bodies is facilitated if bills are published in draft well before their formal introduction.

It has been said authoritatively that proper consultation is a crucial part of the process of determining the most effective way of achieving a policy objective, and where legislation is deemed to be necessary. It is important therefore that, when a law comes before parliament, it should have been exposed to those who will be affected by its provisions and its suitability reviewed in the light of their reactions.

Some enabling acts oblige the minister concerned to consult organised interests or other bodies before making regulations. The particular organisations to be consulted may be specified by the act, or left to the judgement of the minister in accordance with some general formula.

In the UK, legislation is sometimes virtually the product of negotiation with affected groups. Some policies are not so much influenced by pressure as produced in a joint effort by a government department and one or more groups with which it shares a common interest. For example, a continuous dialogue takes place between the department for environment, food and rural affairs and the farmers’ union on questions of agricultural policy.

In his masterpiece, *Parliament*, Sir Ivor Jennings refers to the practice of consultation between the government and Opposition, if arrangements are arrived at “behind the speaker’s chair”. Narendra Modi has no use for that.

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

Manchester derby ends in stalemate

London: Manchester United and Manchester City did their Premier League title ambitions little favours in a drab 0-0 draw at Old Trafford as Chelsea's challenge also suffered a setback in a 1-0 defeat at Everton on Saturday. The pressure on United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was ramped up after his side crashed out of the Champions League with a mid-week defeat at RB Leipzig. He desperately needed an uplifting result in the derby to win back some support, but there was little for either side of the Manchester divide to get excited about as both teams failed to fire. A penalty was the difference between the sides at Goodison Park as Everton fed off the atmosphere created by 2,000 fans for the first time since March to arrest their slide. — *AFP*

Verstappen wins Abu Dhabi GP

Yas Marina, UAE: Max Verstappen claimed his second win of the season and the 10th of his career on Sunday when he drove to a clinical victory for Red Bull in a pedestrian season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. He dominated from start to finish as he turned his third pole position into a demonstration of speed, talent and flawless strategy to leave both Mercedes men well beaten behind him. Verstappen eased home 15.976 seconds clear of Valtteri Bottas, who at least recovered some pride by taking second after his forlorn showing at the Sakhir GP, and 18.415 ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton. On his return to action after recovering from a bout of Covid-19, Hamilton struggled to make any impact as he battled through ahead of Alex Albon, who finished fourth in the second Red Bull. — *AFP*

Honda Erula finish with 7 podiums

Chennai: The curtain went down on Sunday at the Madras Motor Race Track with final day of 2020 Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship & IDEMITSU Honda India Talent Cup Round 1. Marking their dominance, ENEOS Honda Erula Racing team now lead the ProStock 165cc class of the total 7 podiums including 2 wins. Sunday's races saw Mathana Kumar stamping his first victory and a total of 4 podium finish while Rajiv Sethu bagged another podium finish for Honda in PS165cc category. Alongside the national championship, the IDEMITSU Honda India Talent Cup saw the energetic young guns Sarthak Chavan, Kavin Quintal & Varoon S leading at top 3 in the NSF 250R open class whereas Shyam Babu leads the CBRI50R Novice class.

Datta signs off with a double

Coimbatore: Chennai's Ashwin Datta (Dark Don Racing) and Kottayams Amir Sayed (MSport) signed off with a double each in the first round of the 23rd JK Tyre FMSCI National Racing Championship here on Sunday. Datta cashed in on the chances that came his way to win both races in the national championship class for Formula LGB4 cars. However, it wasn't a great start to the day for the youngster from Chennai as the placings had changed, based on protests and official observation, for Saturdays final race, which Datta won. The revised result saw him placed 12th and Sarosh Hataria was declared the winner. That did not deter Datta who won an incident-free first race in the morning. He followed it up with yet another fighting win in the second race.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Sydney Thunder vs Brisbane Heat from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

Lanka Premier League: Semifinal-2 from 7.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

WWE

RAW: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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HANUMAN ON FIRE

Vihari confident of contributing to team's cause

Sydney, Dec. 13: The reticent Hanuma Vihari has slowly but surely cemented his place in the Indian Test team and is confident of contributing to the team's cause, saying he is well-equipped to execute plans in the traditional format. Vihari scored a hundred and also got a wicket with his part-time off-breaks against Australia A in the pink ball warm-up game. He looks set to bat at number six in the first Day/Night Test at Adelaide.

"In 2018, it was my second overseas tour (after England) and it was a good challenge for me back then. Although I contributed a little (back then), I feel I am more well equipped with my game and pretty sure with my gameplan as well and looking forward to the Test series," Vihari said after the end of the warm-up tie.

While he will be batting at number six in the Test match, during the warm-up game, he did get a chance to bat at number 4 and 5 along with seasoned pros like Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane.

"At number four, I always feel you have more time than you think. In domestic cricket, I have always batted number three, so I am a bit familiar batting up the order," he said.

"Obviously, batting with Pooji (Pujara's nickname) is completely different. We always have a good communication and he tells me what the bowler is trying to do," he observed.

His assessment of Rahane is that the Mumbaikar is more flamboyant and has a good grip on game situations.

"Batting with Ajinkya, he is more flamboyant and he has also got a good sense of game situation "...but coming to bat at number six is a total different game situation. You have to bat with the keeper or an all-rounder or the bowlers. I enjoy batting at both position and it's about what the team needs," he said.

Having been in Australia for a month along with two first-class matches under their belt, Vihari said the players are now well-prepared to tackle the pace and bounce of Australian tracks. — *PTI*



Hanuma Vihari in action during the warm-up match against Australia 'A'. — *BCCI*

GILLY CALLS FOR CLARITY OVER SMITH'S ROLE

Sydney, Dec. 13: Former Australia cricketer Adam Gilchrist has urged the national selectors to end all speculations around Steve Smith's captaincy, saying that the ex-skipper should be named vice-captain if they want him back at the top job.

Smith and his deputy David Warner had stepped down from their posts after they were slapped with a one-year international bans for their role in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal. Since then Tim Paine has been leading the Test team while Aaron Finch is at the helm of the white-ball sides.

"I see no reason why someone shouldn't have a second chance and if part of that is the captaincy for Steve Smith, if he's the right guy and the most obvious candidate, I can't see a reason why he shouldn't be allowed to do it," Gilchrist told Fox Cricket.

"If Cricket Australia and the selectors feel that way, and Steve Smith is keen to do it, I think they should make him vice-captain immediately. Smith recently revealed that there have been discussions in the team about him returning to the top job again. — *PTI*

Ben & Jack shine in drawn game

Sydney, Dec. 13: The Indian cricket team will head into the first day-night Test against Australia with a lot of optimism and happy selection dilemmas, having managed to tick most of the boxes before drawing the three-day pink-ball dress rehearsal against Australia A here on Sunday.

Australia A gave a better account of themselves on an eased out third day track, despite being reduced to 25/3, ending

● **Australia 'A' gave a better account of themselves on an eased out third day track to end on 305/4 after picking themselves up from 25/3, thanks to Ben McDermott and Jack Wildermuth's tons.**

on 305/4 riding on Ben McDermott and Jack Wildermuth's centuries. Both the batsmen survived a barrage of bouncers under lights from Indian pacers.

The talented McDermott (107 off 167 balls), younger son of

Craig McDermott who was India's tormentor during the forgettable 91-92 series, along with his skipper Alex Carey (58, 111 balls) added 117 runs in a counter-attacking fourth wicket partnership to partially save the game.

The four-Test series gets underway from December 17 in Adelaide.

Rookie Wildermuth (111 off 119 balls) also got his ton and added 165 runs with McDermott but Virat Kohli and Ravi Shastri, watching the proceedings from the dug-out, will be happy with multiple options that emerged from the game. — *PTI*

Brief scores: Indians 194 & 386/4 drew with Australia 'A' 108 & 307/4 (Wildermuth 111, McDermott 107, Carey 57).

NEW ZEALAND CLOSE IN ON VICTORY IN SECOND TEST

Wellington, Dec. 13: New Zealand were in touching distance of an innings win and series sweep over the West Indies on Sunday when bad light stopped play on the third day of the second cricket Test.

The West Indies were 244/6 in their second innings at stumps drawn early because of the light still trailing New Zealand by 85 runs after being forced to follow on 329 behind.

West Indies captain Jason Holder was 60 not out and involved in an unbroken seventh-wicket stand with Joshua da Silva (25) which was worth 74 by stumps and frustrated

New Zealand's push to victory.

The umpires offered the batsmen the light around 5.30pm local time as dark clouds gathered over the Basin Reserve and with no improvement in conditions, players were unable to return.

Earlier, opener John Campbell reached his highest test score of 68, his second half century, in an 89-run third-wicket partnership which provided a further obstacle to New Zealand's push for victory. — *AP*

Brief scores: New Zealand 460 vs West Indies 131 & 244/6 (Campbell 68, Holder 60, Boul 3/75, Jamieson 2/43).

NorthEast remain unbeaten

Vasco, Dec. 13: NorthEast United extended their unbeaten run in the Indian Super League after a goal-less draw with Chennaiyin FC here on Sunday.

With one point from the match, the Highlanders are placed joint second with ATK Mohun Bagan on 10 points while Chennaiyin have now failed to pick up a win in their last four matches. NorthEast United made three changes to their side as Idrissa Sylla started upfront ahead of Kwesi Appiah.

BFC CLIP KERALA WINGS

Bengaluru FC walked away with three points after a 4-2 win over Kerala Blasters at the Fatorada Stadium.

The teams were tied 1-1 at the break with Rahul K.P. (17) giving Kerala a sur-



Bengaluru FC players celebrate their 4-2 win over Kerala Blasters in an ISL-7 match in Fatorada on Sunday. — *ISL*

prise lead which was canceled out by Cleiton Silva (29'). The second half saw four goals being scored in the span of 14 minutes. Erik Paartalu (51') and Dimas Delgado (53') scored in quick succession to give BFC breathing space but Jordan Murray (61') gave some hope to the away team. Sunil Chhetri (65') put the game to rest with a fine header. — *Agencies*

Raina bags doubles crown

Ankita ends year on high

Dubai, Dec. 13: Top Indian tennis player Ankita Raina won her third doubles title of the pandemic-hit 2020 season, clinching the Al Habtoor challenge with Ekaterine Gorgodze here.

The unseeded Indo-Georgian pair won 6-4 3-6 10-6 against Aliona Bolsova Zadoinov from Spain and Slovakian Kaja Juvan in the final of the \$100,000 hard court event on Saturday.

Ankita said success on the singles circuit is unparalleled but a deep run in doubles draw is not without significance.

"The doubles has always helped me in singles. Playing well in doubles has always been followed by good run in singles in my career. You get to practice with good players, get to play and can work out a few things in matches," Ankita said.

It was the fourth doubles final of the season for Ankita but the biggest trophy of the calendar since her earlier two titles were at the \$25,000 level.

In February this year, Ankita had made three finals, winning back-to-back titles in Nonthaburi

(Thailand) with Bibiane Schoofs and ending runners-up in Jodhpur with compatriot Snehal Mane.

The 27-year-old said returning to the circuit after a long break too was relieving. "It's really good that I am able to travel again. I was doing a bit of training, both physical and mental at home and it was different coming back to tour. Europe had already opened up and their players already had two months of match sharpness behind them.

"Most of the matches were on clay at that time and I had never played so many back-to-back court matches. It was a good learning curve."

During the last three months, Ankita also got exposure of playing on the US circuit.

"I have mostly played on hard courts and this time I got to play a lot in the US. Thankfully I had my coach Hemant Bendre's friend Shirish Deshpande to help me out. He has been there for long as a coach.

"It was good to have someone watching your matches and giving feedback." — *PTI*



Ankita Raina

Mushtaq Ali T20 from January 10

New Delhi, Dec. 13: The BCCI will start its much-delayed domestic season with the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy from January 10 to 31 in six different states where bio-secure hubs will be created. The participating teams will be expected to report to their respective hubs on January 2.

It is learnt that BCCI secretary Jay Shah has e-mailed all the state units that Mushtaq Ali will kick-start the domestic itinerary although there is no clarity as to when the Ranji Trophy will start. The schedule has been thrown haywire owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"After having gone through your responses and in accordance with the feedback received, I am pleased to inform you that BCCI is planning to start the domestic season 2020-21 with the scheduling of the T20 tournament for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy,"

Shah wrote to state units. "By Saturday, January 2, 2021, teams will have to assemble in their respective hub. From Sunday, January 10, 2021, tournament will start and the final will be played on January 31, 2021."

Shah, however, said that a decision on Ranji Trophy and the Vijay Hazare Trophy will be taken once the group stage of the Mushtaq Ali gets over. Feedback from members will be factored in.

"BCCI will subsequently seek feedback from the members on organising any other domestic tournament after the group stage of Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy," he stated.

It is understood that Mushtaq Ali is being held because the BCCI wants to have a mega players' auction in early February ahead of the next IPL which may have nine or 10 teams. — *PTI*

Vihari has made a strong case for his inclusion



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

Former Indian opener, Wasim Jaffer neatly summed up the situation that is currently being faced by the think tanks of both the Australian and the Indian teams as they prepare for the first, pink ball, day/night Test match at Adelaide. Jaffer gave a fitting reply to ex-Australian spinner Brad Hogg who had questioned the technique of the Indian top order batsmen while playing the Australia 'A' team in a practice match at the Sydney Cricket Ground. In a social media interac-

tion, Hogg had suggested that the "Indian top order need to know where their off stump is, learn to leave the ball off a good length, and not chase the ball moving away outside off stump." Jaffer, known for his mild manner during his playing days, took to humour telling Hogg: "Australia need to know who their top order is."

At this point in time, both teams are struggling to finalise their playing elevens for different reasons. The Aussies will miss their regular opener David Warner who is out

due to a groin injury he suffered during the second One Day International. Will Pucovski, the likely debutant, was declared out of contention due to the concussion he suffered after being hit on the head while batting in the first practice match against India 'A'.

Joe Burns, the third opener is in miserable form nothing just 5 runs in 4 innings against the visitors. Marcus Harris who was drafted into the Aussie Test squad as a replacement for Pucovski will probably open the innings with Burns, unless the hosts decide to take a punt with Marnus Labuschagne who has had a tremendous run in Test cricket over the last season. The ominous form showed by the Indian pacers, particularly

Mohammed Shami (who accounted for Burns and Harris in the last practice match) and Jasprit Bumrah has made the task of the Australian selectors a bit more difficult.

For India, the two practice matches in Sydney gave their batsmen an opportunity to test their form in the middle — which was grabbed by those who intend to make the cut for the Adelaide Test. Currently, three batsmen (in the top/middle order) are certainties to be on the list to be exchanged at the toss: Cheteshwar Pujara, skipper Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane. The dilemma that the Indian team management faces centres around the openers, the number six position, the wicket keeper and the bowling attack. For the opening slots, the

choice will be between the experienced Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw and the uncapped Shubham Gill. Of these three, Agarwal looks to be more certain to walk out to bat at Adelaide considering his past record playing Test cricket in Australia coupled with the 61 runs that he scored against Australia A in the second innings at the SCG. Gill, who had a fruitful outings in the two practice matches and has impressed many with his technique in trying conditions, will be a strong contender as the second opener.

The point is will the Indians open with Gill, a debutant, in a crucial game or go in with Shaw who has four Tests under his belt. Or will they take a chance with KL Rahul who has the maximum Test

match experience of the lot. For the sixth batting position, Hanuma Vihari has made a strong case for inclusion with an unbeaten century in his last innings at the SCG. The wicket keeper's position seemed to be fixed with Wriddhiman Saha sure to play until his deputy, Rishab Pant, threw a spanner in the works with a beligerent, unconquered 103 runs in the practice match. The biggest issue facing the Indians will be to go into the Test with the most balanced side. For starters, the game will be played with a pink ball and partly under lights — a tough scenario. The fluorescent ball tends to swing a lot more than its red and white cousins; a big factor when Kohli sits down to finalise his playing eleven. With all-rounder Ravindra

Jadeja out of the equation, the Indian team will have to go in with four (instead of five) regular bowlers to bolster their batting line up.

Team India will look at three parameters while picking the side: 1) form, 2) technique and 3) experience. If one was to don the selectors' cap, one would reverse the order considering the pink ball and the match being a day-nighter. Technique and experience would matter more than mere form, which has proven (comparatively) to be a fickle criterion. My openers will be Agarwal and Gill with Vihari at six followed by Saha, the best gloveman. The experienced Ravichandran Ashwin and Umesh Yadav would be my choices to support Shami and Bumrah.


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