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HYDERABAD | MONDAY | 21 DECEMBER 2020

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## HC slams TS for claiming lands in Hafeezpet area

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

The Telangana High Court has pulled up the state government for its "vexatious conduct" of repeatedly attempting to claim ownership of land parcels in Survey No. 80 of Hafeezpet in the city, and categorically declared that it has no right, title or interest on them.

In a case involving Greater Golkonda Estates Pvt Ltd, the High Court referred to a delay of 38 years by the government in challenging the preliminary decree passed in CS No 14 of 1958 and the courts including the SC, dismissing its claims.

"Thus, the state's claim to the lands covered by the preliminary decree in CS 14 of 1958 including Hafeezpet village has failed and at this point of time it is not open to the state of Telangana to set up any claim to the land in Hafeezpet village," said the High Court.

**Page 5: Settle border row with Kondapur: HC tells TS**

ing areas who accused the authorities of making a killing by permitting a few constructions and denying permission to many others. "When we sought justice in the High Court, the government did not even bother to file counter affidavits for years, causing obstruction of justice," alleged a resident.

In series of judgments on these lands in the recent past, the division bench comprising Justices M.S. Ramachandra Rao and T. Amarnath Goud directed the authorities concerned to mutate lands in favour of individuals or companies, grant building permission, allow registration or conduct surveys in Survey No. 80. All these were being rejected by the authorities who claimed that it was government land.

The landmark judgments will provide relief to thousands of property owners in residential colonies of Hafeezpet and surround-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib on the occasion of the 400th Parkash Parv of Guru Tegh Bahadur, in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

## Farmers' unions to stage 24-hr relay hunger strike

SANJAY KAW | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

Amid the ongoing impasse between the farmers and the Centre, the farmers' unions have announced a 24-hour relay hungerstrike Monday across all protest sites. The unions also decided to block toll collections at highways in Haryana for three days from December 25. They

have issued a call to oppose Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Mann ki Baat" programme to be relayed next Sunday, November 27.

At the Delhi-Haryana border, the farmers' leaders refused to budge and said they would intensify their stir if their demands are not immediately met. Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav said a team of 11 members at the

protest sites will observe a hungerstrike on Monday. He urged all those demonstrating against the laws across India to observe a day-long fast at their protest sites. Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait urged people to skip a meal on "Kisan Diwas" on December 23.

**Page 5: Unions to urge NDA allies to oppose laws**

vargiya was sitting next to him. Asked about the National Register of Citizens, the home minister added: "Let first in the chronology end."

Rejecting TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's slogan of "outsider" against the BJP, he pointed out: "When she was in the Congress and Indira Gandhi or Pranab Mukherjee or Narasimha Rao used to come here, what did she say? Was it then interference in the internal politics of Bengal? Didi, we do not need to defeat you by bringing someone from Delhi. A bhoomiputra will rise and will fight you. We are going to give Bengal a son of the soil as its next CM."

### SHAH TO EXTEND STAY IN BENGAL FROM JANUARY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

Overwhelmed by the large-scale defections from the ruling Trinamul Congress and other parties to the BJP in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah will extend the duration of his two-day monthly visits to the state from January.

**Full report on Page 7**

underway soon, from either January or February, to placate the resentment among the Matuas, a community of Hindu migrants who voted for the BJP in the last Lok Sabha polls, over the delay in implementing the CAA. Incidentally, when Mr Shah was speaking about the CAA's fate, Mr Vijay-

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## WEATHER

Max: 28.4°C  
Min: 15°C  
RH: 36%  
Rainfall: Nil  
Forecast: Partly cloudy.  
Moderate rains likely.  
Max/Min temp. 29/15 °C

## COVID-19 COUNT

| CASES                      | DEATHS   |
|----------------------------|----------|
| (+22,214)                  | (+295)   |
| 1,00,53,832                | 1,45,804 |
| covid19india.org           |          |
| STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS |          |
| (+592)                     | (+3)     |
| TS: 2,81,414               | 1,513    |
| (+438)                     | (+2)     |
| AP: 8,78,723               | 7,076    |

## CASES AROUND THE WORLD

|                                   |             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
|                                   | 7,69,02,835 |
|                                   | DEATHS      |
|                                   | 16,96,433   |
| COUNTRIES,<br>AREAS WITH<br>CASES | 218         |
| worldometers.info/<br>coronavirus |             |

## ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Daksinayana  
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Saptami till 4.18 pm  
Star: Purvabhadra till 11.05 pm  
Varijam: Nil  
Durmuhurtam: 12.35 pm to 1.19 pm; 2.47 pm to 3.31 pm  
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am  
**HIJRI CALENDAR**  
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 5, 1442 AH  
**PRAYERS**  
Fajr: 5.36 am  
Zohar: 12.24 pm  
Asar: 4.11 pm  
Maghrib: 5.53 pm  
Isha: 7.06 pm  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 6.41 AM  
**SUNSET TODAY** 5.47 PM  
**MOONSET TODAY** 12.04 AM  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW** 1.23 PM

## COUNTER POINT



Para riders pose for a picture ahead of the final leg of the Infinity Ride 2020, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, in the city on Friday. The final leg was flagged off by Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan on Sunday. Actor Regina Cassandra (centre), seen next to Aditya Mehta, whose foundation organises the ride, cycled for 104 km.

## Para cyclists set off on a long ride

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Having covered more than 2,500 km so far on their bicycles with a mission to raise awareness about para sports, India's first international medal winning para cyclist Aditya Mehta alongside members of country's para cycling team and other amateur cyclists began the final leg of Infinity Ride 2020 here on Sunday.

The Infinity Ride, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, a brainchild of Aditya Mehta Foundation, aims to create awareness about para sports and scout talent across the country to nurture them. The ride is in its sixth year. Infinity Ride is supported and sponsored by Border Security Force (BSF). Governor Tamilisai

Soundararajan flagged off the final leg of the ride to Kanyakumari, totalling 1,279 km. The 36-city 45-day journey, which began on November 19 in Kashmir, will end on December 31.

Telugu film stars like Regina Cassandra, Lakshmi Manchu, Shilpa Reddy and Shobu Yarlagadda — producer of the popular movie *Bahubali* — also participated.

Aditya Mehta Foundation for their work. This is the first function I'm attending amid this pandemic and I wanted to attend it to support specially-abled people and today I'm here as their strong supporter," the Governor said.

She praised the arrangements at the Infinity Para Sports Academy and Rehabilitation Centre.

"People with super ability only want our support, they are more confident than us," Dr Soundararajan said.

On Saturday, the riders visited the Academy, the

first such facility in Asia, for a quick rehabilitation and prosthetic check. The Academy, spread over 5,000 square yards and developed by AMF, is equipped with modern world class facilities.

"The para sporting talent which we are scouting during the ongoing Infinity Ride will be trained professionally at the Academy," said AMF founder Aditya Mehta.

Regina Cassandra, who has been associated with the foundation and Infinity Ride since its inception, said: "I am really impressed and motivated with the level of dedication each one of them has shown in these difficult circumstances while riding such distances."

The AMF have not only been raising awareness but also collected funds through this signature ride.

"I must appreciate the

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## Young politicos vie for seats in next polls, scramble to join BJP

PILLALAMARRI SRINIVAS DC  
ADILABAD, DEC. 20

Junior political leaders keen on contesting the next Assembly elections and who are hoping to have a head-start over the seniors with a similar plan of action are in a hurry to join BJP in erstwhile Adilabad district.

Sammaiah kept her body at the bus stand till 5 pm on Sunday. Her son and relatives later shifted her body to Kothagudem.

The act by these persons caused the bank loss to the tune of ₹74.83 crore, the CBI said.

The CBI found that the company, represented by its managing director Hitesh R. Jain and director Ramesh Otarval Jain, was involved in a criminal conspiracy with unidentified public servants to cheat the bank by abusing the official position of the latter," said the official.

The accused allegedly borrowed the amount dishonestly and also fraudulently manipulated the books of accounts by overstating their sales, purchases, and profits by misrepresentation and falsification of records and through forged and fabricated documents, the CBI said.

"They then used the same to avail credit facilities. The bank also alleged that the accused misappropriated the funds of the SBI to the accounts of various other parties without doing genuine business," the CBI said.

Hitesh and Ramesh fraudulently also opened Letter of Credit (LCs) in the name of other beneficiaries for their own gain and it has caused wrongful loss to the bank.

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## SHORT TAKES

## CONG LEADERS THANK SONIA FOR CLARITY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Congress senior leaders including former MPs and former ministers on Friday thanked party president Sonia Gandhi for conducting a meeting with senior leaders about electing the new head of the All India Congress Committee. Former minister Shabbir Ali, former Union minister Balram Naik, former MPs Mallu Ravi, Suresh Shetkar, Ponnam Prabhakar and Sircilla Rajaiah signed the letter.

The leaders were thankful to Rahul Gandhi for agreeing to lead the party and thanked Sonia Gandhi for clearing all doubts about the future.

The senior leaders praised the decision to hold a 'chintan baithak' and said the people were looking to the Congress for fight on behalf of farmers and against unemployment and also take a stand on other key issues. The leaders said India is facing a political crisis. Whenever India faces a crisis, the Congress save the nation, they said.

## PD ACT INVOKED AGAINST TWO RAPE SUSPECTS

**Hyderabad, Dec. 20:** The Rachakonda police invoked the Preventive Detention Act (PD Act) against two men charged with gang rape and detained them at Cherlapally Central Prison.

The order was given by Rachakonda police commissioner Mahesh M. Bhagwat as part of an ongoing drive against people who commit crimes against women and to build a sense of safety and protection among women.

The accused were identified as Ambothu Ramesh and Pawan, drivers from LB Nagar. Along with one Ramavath Santosh, they are accused of raping a 17-year-old on August 25. Santosh was detained under the PD Act last month.

The girl had lost her way while going to her grandmother's house when Ramesh and Pawan kidnapped her. — INN

## Solidarity with farmers



Sikh community people took out a car rally against the Farm bills from Manovikasnagar Gurudwara to Hitec City in Hyderabad on Sunday.

— R. PAVAN

## Congress may replace Bhatti

## AICC is hoping to appoint young leaders

IREDDY SRINIVAS  
REDDY I DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Speculation doing the rounds in the state Congress is that the party high command is likely to change the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader in the coming days. This will be part of the proposed revamp, including appointment of a new state Congress Chairman.

AICC is working on finalising names for chairman of the state Congress coordination committee and campaign committee. The front runners are reportedly legislator D. Sridhar Babu and Komatireddy Rajagopal Reddy.

It will be a tough call for the campaign committee chairman's post. If working president A. Revanth Reddy is made TPCC Chief, the chairman's post may go to Komatireddy Venkat Reddy. Or there could be a reversal if Venkat Reddy is named successor to N. Uttam Kumar Reddy.

Senior leaders opine that Congress president Sonia Gandhi is dissatisfied with the existing set-up after the party nominee lost his deposit in the Dubbaka by-election and the party lost a substantial vote share in the (GHMC) Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation elections.

Party leaders are speculating that if the

high command wishes to replace CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, his brother Mallu Ravi could be a possible choice as the next AICC National SC Cell Chairman.

AICC leaders are taking cognisance of the report of in-charge of state affairs Manickam Tagore. BJP picked up aggressive young leaders like Bandi Sanjay as president and D. Arvind as MP. In the recent GHMC elections, the BJP leaders' generated political heat while hitting out at Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao and highlighting his performance.

Now the Congress is keen on fresh blood and hope that the new-look TPCC can salvage lost prestige. Sources said that AICC will ring in the changes after Christmas.

## RGIA WINS AWARD FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY INITIATIVES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

The Rajiv Gandhi International Airport has won a gold award from the TS Renewable Energy Development Corporation Ltd. The corporation recognises companies engaged in energy efficiency initiatives that adopt best practices and technological advancement in their daily operations.

The jury evaluated the participants on many parameters and innovative thought process adopted.

Pradeep Panicker, CEO, GMR Hyderabad International Airport Limited (GHIAL), said the award was a testimony to GHIAL's commitment towards energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. He said GHIAL's energy and water saving initiatives have been recognised by many industry platforms.

## Bandi questions KCR on opposition to farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar took on Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao for his opposition to the new agriculture laws and demanded an explanation as to why the CM felt farmers should not sell their produce anywhere in India.

Sanjay alleged that the Chief Minister had profited by growing doddoo biyyam (regular rice variety) at his farmhouse, while the farmers who cultivated fine rice (sanna biyyam) on his advice had suffered losses.

He said that the CM would give an appointment to meet AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi even at midnight time but would not meet even his Cabinet colleagues who need to discuss serious issues in their districts.

Speaking at the event, Aruna called KCR the 'Number 1 cheat' for allegedly making false promises to the public. She alleged that the Chief Minister did not fulfil his promises about farmers' loan waiver which he had announced during the campaign for the previous Assembly elections.

Aruna asked why the Chief Minister did not announce minimum support price (MSP) for fine quality paddy. She apprehended that farmers would come on the roads demanding MSP.

She alleged that Chandrashekhar Rao had failed to fight for farmers' causes even when he was Mahbubnagar MP.

On Sunday, Sanjay was speaking at an awareness programme for farmers on the new agricultural reform laws at Narayapatna district along with party vice president D.K. Aruna.

He said that the BJP will work for Hindus who constitute 80 per cent of the country's population.

"Why does KCR not fight for Hindus?" he asked.

Sanjay said that there

was no opportunity during the GHMC elections to carry out the 'surgical strike' on the Old City, but it will be carried out in the state in the coming days.

"We don't need KCR who does not care about the people. All the ministers are dummies in the KCR Cabinet," Sanjay said.

He alleged that

Chandrashekhar Rao would give an appointment to meet AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi even at midnight time but would not meet even his Cabinet colleagues who need to discuss serious issues in their districts.

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On Sunday, Sanjay while on his way to Narayapatna

district went to the residence of former MP A.P. Jitender Reddy in Mahbubnagar along with senior leaders for breakfast.

Sources said that Shekhar was insulted at Jitender Reddy's residence over seating arrangements for the senior leaders. He was apparently seated in the second row, which upset him. Shekhar's followers pointed out that as a former legislator who wielded clout in the area and as district president, Shekhar's opinions

should have been taken into consideration before conducting meetings and press conferences but they were not.

Shekhar successfully contested the Mahbubnagar Assembly seat on a TD ticket in the 2014 elections and subsequently joined the BJP.

Meanwhile, Sanjay's press meet was cancelled at the eleventh hour because of pressure from senior party leaders. There is talk of a rift between the party's senior leaders and newcomers in the district.

Incidentally, his resignation was timed with the party's state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar's visit to Mahbubnagar.

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## SHORT TAKES

TIRUMALA  
DEVOTEES HOLD  
PROTESTDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, DEC. 20

Tirumala-bound devotees staged a protest for a brief while at the ticket issuing counters in Vishnu Nivasam complex here on Sunday, denouncing issuance of darshan tokens by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in advance for darshan on December 22, 23 and 24.

A group of devotees, who had queued up at the ticket issuing counter, expressed unhappiness when they received darshan tickets for 24th of this month. They questioned TTD staff why they have not been given darshan tickets for at least Monday or Tuesday. Counter staff informed devotees that sarva darshan tickets quota for the next three days has already been exhausted. Because of this, they could issue free darshan tickets only for December 24. Unhappy with TTD staff's reply, devotees entered into heated arguments with devasthanams' staff and later staged a protest, raising slogans against TTD.

Following this, TTD vigilance and security wing personnel, apart from police, rushed to the spot and pacified devotees. Later, authorities also increased the sarva darshan quota by 3,000 tickets to facilitate darshan for some protesting devotees within the Monday slot. However, those who got the darshan slot for December 24 were not given any advancement.

Following this, these devotees, who had come from far off places with families, were left fuming. "TTD has issued us darshan tickets for December 24. How can we afford to stay in Tirupati for three days? It is the responsibility of devasthanams to provide us a trouble-free darshan. The problem is TTD neglects common devotees", they retorted.

Officials have maintained that TTD administration has repeatedly been announcing that they can only facilitate darshan of 30,000-35,000 devotees a day due to prevailing Covid-19 restrictions. They have also been requesting devotees to make advance reservations for darshan before reaching Tirumala due to restrictions because of Coronavirus.

Officials lamented that some pilgrims are continuing to arrive at Tirupati without any advance bookings.

POLAVARAM  
FIRST GATE TO  
BE FIXED TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, DEC. 20

The mega Polavaram Project on Godavari River has reached a crucial stage with all arrangements made for fixing the first gate at the spillway on Monday. A total of 48 gates will be installed at the project, which will be operated hydraulically on the spillway at a height of 55 metres.

Engineers of Polavaram Project say this is the first time in the country that hydraulic gates are being installed at a project. The 98 cylinders required for gates have been imported from Germany.

Polavaram Project Authority (PPA) chief executive officer (CEO) J. Chandrasekhar Iyer and his team members D. Ganesh Kumar, DD-PPA, and K. Lalitha, AE-PPA, visited the project on Sunday. They inspected spillway bridge gates, upper coffee dam and fish ladder works.

Project chief engineer B. Sudhakar Babu and superintendent engineer M. Nagireddy, apart from staff of Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited (MEIL) explained to PPA top officials various stages of the project's progress. PPA CEO Chandrasekhar expressed satisfaction at the progress of project works.

According to engineers, work on the first gate will start on Monday and completed by the same evening. Each gate will be 20.835 metres height and 15.96 metres in width. There will be eight arm-girders for each gate.

Total 384 arm-girders and 192 horizontal girders with a height of 16 metres each will be installed. Skin plates will be fixed after the work on girders is over.

Recently, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy visited the project area and announced that the project will be completed by 2021 December and water released for the Kharif 2022 crops. Officials asserted that the project will be completed as per schedule.

## Poor maintenance



Motorists face danger due to the damage on the Sikh Road leading to Trimulgherry, which the civic authorities have not repaired for a long time. — GANDHI

## After 100 years, AP set to resurvey all its land

## Landowners to get card with number, property details

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 20

The mega task of a comprehensive resurvey of lands after 100 years will be launched across all 13 districts and is aimed at resolving land-related disputes and objections.

The resurvey will be carried under YSR Jagannatha Saswath Bhau Raksha scheme and would spread over 1.26 lakh sq kms across the state. As many as 17,000 villages would be covered in three phases. People are hoping for an end to land disputes and upgraded land records.

As many as 5,000 villages will be covered in the first phase, 6,500 in the second phase, and 5,500 in the third phase. The survey will be conducted on

3345.93 sq km in towns and cities covering 10 lakh open plots and 40 lakh assessment lands and 2.26 crore acres of land belonging to 90 lakh patadar passbook holders.

Officials, who made arrangements for a smooth resurvey, stated that a land titling card, consisting of a unique identification number, measurements of the property, name of the owner along with the photo, and the total area would be given to the individuals after the survey. Digitized cadastral maps would be prepared on completion.

All details of the lands in the village would figure in the maps. Survey stones would be installed once the marking of land is completed. Digitized

property register and title register and a register for complaints would be made available at village secretariats.

According to reports, as a majority of disputes pertain to land boundaries and encroachments, the resurvey would be held according to government records. Considering that the absence of boundary stones with survey numbers are also creating differences among landowners, the government will now install boundary stones with details for every land.

As many as 52,866 land dispute cases are pending in revenue courts while there are 79,405 applications pending with regard to modifications of records in the 13 districts. The absence of an

upgraded survey records is also creating problems for landowners.

Landowners K. Amaranath and A.V. Ramana Rao said, "The surveying is a very lengthy process and we have to pay fee and further the surveyors would measure lands with long chains but it would be accurate." They said the new measurements process with drones and Continuous Operating Reference Stations (CORS) network should give accurate measures otherwise it would create new disputes. They said that the government should take all precautionary measures for a flawless resurvey and clear doubts of landowners about electronic surveying methods.

## MAGUNTA TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, DEC. 20

Ongole MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy has tested positive for the Coronavirus. Following this, he is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Chennai.

The parliamentarian has appealed to people, who came in contact with him during the last few days, to get themselves tested for Covid-19.

According to a press release issued on Saturday by the MP's office in Ongole, though Srinivasulu Reddy has tested positive, the percentage of his virus load is low.

He has, however, got admitted in a hospital on the advice of doctors, the press release added.

## 7th Century inscriptions found in Kadapa district

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, DEC. 20

Nagadasari Munikumar, a researcher from old Kadapa area, has found Seventh Century AD inscriptions at the Kapartheeswara Swamy Kona in Lankamala forests near the mandal headquarters of Siddavatam.

Kamakshi, Kapartheeswara Swamy Temple had been built by Chola kings in the Seventh Century.

Munikumar, an alumnus of Telugu Department in Yogi Venkata University, found the inscription engraved on a hill on way to the temple.

Realising that they could be valuable, he sent a photograph of the rare inscriptions to Acharya Muniratnam Reddy.

director, Archaeological Survey of India in Mysore, written in Devanagari script of the Seventh Century.

Muniratnam Reddy examined them and confirmed that they are Sanskrit inscriptions

written in Devanagari script of the Seventh Century.

Munikumar is presently working as a teacher at the Kadapa Public School.



Nagadasari Munikumar shows the inscriptions near Siddavatam in Kadapa district on Sunday.

## Unions to urge NDA allies to oppose laws

From Page 1

The unions have also decided to write to the NDA allies, urging them to oppose the Centre's stance and request a rollback of the three farm laws. "If the government's allies refuse to do so, protests would be held against them as well," Mr Tikait said.

As Delhi recorded its coldest morning this season on Sunday, with the mercury dipping to 3.4 degrees Celsius, thousands of farmers protesting at the national capital's borders continued with their agitation and were firm on their demand to get the three farm laws repealed. Some farmers also started returning home, to be replaced by their family members at the protest sites.

As the protests against the new laws entered the 25th day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday made a surprise

visit to Delhi's Gurudwara Rakabganj and paid tribute to Guru Teg Bahadur for his supreme sacrifice. Farmers in different parts of India also observed "Shradhanjali Diwas" with prayer meetings to pay homage to those who had lost their lives in the ongoing protests against the three farm laws.

"Those who have died during the protest against the farm laws are the martyrs of Punjab. After getting free from the protest, we will also fight for compensation and government jobs for the families of the martyrs," said Dharminder Pashore, Lehra block president of BKU (Ugraon). So far, 24 farmers have died in the last three weeks during the agitation at the capital's four key border points - Singhu, Tikri, UP Gate and Chilla. Seven farmers reportedly died due to the cold and heart attacks at the Tikri border, and six

others passed away at the Singhu border. Nine farmers died in road accidents on their way to the protest venues from their villages or while returning home from the protests.

One of the leading farmers' groups playing a major role in the protests has been accused of accepting foreign funds without proper clearances. The Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ugraon), the largest and most dominant in Punjab which has a huge base, has been issued a warning by a bank and been told to get the mandatory registration done.

Sukhdev Singh Kokri Kalan, its general secretary, said he was called by officials of Punjab and Sindh Bank in Punjab's Moga district and told about a mail from the forex department. The group had got Rs 8 lakhs in the past two months, which was cited by bank officials, Mr

Singh said. The money is usually sent from Punjabis living abroad who regularly donate for social causes. The group, Mr Singh added, will take a call on its response once they get something in writing from the bank.

Over the last years,

the NDA government has tightened implementation of the laws on foreign donations and cracked down on many NGOs for violation of rules.

Punjab CM Amarinder Singh has said, however, that the use of tax laws against farmers' groups was the Centre's ruse to break the farmers' protests.

At the Singhu border, nurses and medical staff from Punjab joined the protesters to support the agitation and to provide medical assistance. Ludhiana-based nurse Harshdeep Kaur: "We are here to support farmers but we also want to serve them if they are ill. Medical treatment is the

basic requirement for everyone because of the chilly weather."

In New Delhi, Prime Minister Modi prayed at the gurdwara, for which no special police arrangements were made or traffic barriers put up that would impede the movement of ordinary citizens.

Mr Modi's gurdwara visit assumes significance as it comes while farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, are protesting against the controversial laws.

After his surprise visit, Mr Modi tweeted he felt "blessed" and was "deeply inspired" by the kindness of Guru Teg Bahadur. "This morning, I prayed at the historic Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, where the pious body of Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Ji was cremated. I felt extremely blessed. I like millions around the world, am deeply inspired by the kindnesses of Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Ji," he tweeted.

## Jagan's b'day: Party eyes record blood donation

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNool, DEC. 20

YSRCP MLAs throughout the state are gearing up for a "never-before-ever-after" celebrations to mark the 49th birthday of their leader and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Monday.

The YSRC central office has directed all its MLAs to organise blood donation camps in their constituencies across the state. Attempts are also being made to gain entry into the *Guinness Book of Records* by organising record-breaking blood donation camps.

Party leaders feel this could well be possible with Covid-19 receding in the state and party cadre, apart from the Chief Minister's fans, being enthusiastic about donating blood at all mandal headquarters in the state.

Srisailam temple executive officer K.S. Rama Rao said Cherukulapati Sridevi said her constituency is full of the CM's fans and they are planning surprise celebrations on Monday. "I have heard they have ordered a cake weighing 49 kg to match the age of Jagan. We will be cutting the mega cake on the day and share it with public," she said.

Bakers are doing brisk business and many MLAs have announced plans of ordering 49-kg cakes to mark the 49th birthday of their leader.

Nandyal MLA Silpa Ravichandra Kishore Reddy announced that 300 party activists will be donating blood.

"Though more than 1,000 cadres have come forward, doctors have advised us to limit the donors to 300, as they only

have limited storage facilities," Ravichandra Kishore Reddy maintained.

Kurnool legislator Hafeez Khan said a large number of activists have voluntarily come forward to donate their blood to mark the birthday of CM Jagan. Pathikonda MLA K. Rama Reddy said his constituency is full of the CM's fans and they are planning surprise celebrations on Monday. "I have heard they have ordered a cake weighing 49 kg to match the age of Jagan. We will be cutting the mega cake on the day and share it with public," she said.

Nandyal MLA Silpa Ravichandra Kishore Reddy said apart from organising the blood donation camp, party activists will go around hospitals and distribute fruits and bread to convalescing patients. "I have ordered 500 bed sheets, which will

be given to the destitute and orphans," the Adoni legislator stated.

Panyam MLA Katasani Rambhupati Reddy said, "My constituency comprises of die-hard Jagan fans. We are planning blood donation and charitable activities." Banagampalapalle MLA Katasani Rami Reddy said at least 200 people will participate in the blood donation camp in his constituency.

Bakers in Kurnool are receiving massive orders from YSRC activists. Nagaraju of Peevi Bakers said that they can meet the orders as they have a big oven to bake large cakes.

Mongini Cake Shop's Afsar Pasha said since he sells premium cakes, only select people have placed orders. A representative of Rama Bakery said orders will be processed as they come.

## Farmers get just ₹1/kg for tomato

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNool, DEC. 20

The

revenue department took possession of a government land at Rushikonda here with the help of police on Sunday morning. The land, measuring 293 square yards, is located at survey number 21 and was under the possession of TD Vizag East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishnababu and is valued at ₹3 crore.

However, followers of the MLA said that Ramakrishnababu purchased this private land from a medical professional 15 years ago but some people raised a dispute claiming ownership. The revenue department was quite below 50 paisa per kg after deduction of transport expenses and market yard commission.

The Pathikonda marketing ADM said nearly 18 tonnes of tomatoes have arrived at the Pathikonda market yard on Sunday. Other markets like Alur, Aspari and Yemmaginur received only 2-3 tonnes of tomato, he stated.

The quality of tomatoes has been affected mainly due to untimely rains in the past month, said a market official.

## 45% of Nellore has Covid antibodies

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, DEC. 20

As many as 45.8 per cent of the people have developed antibodies against the Covid-19 causing SARS-CoV-2 in SPSR Nellore district, according to the second sero surveillance study carried out by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The survey covering 4,500 people from different walks of life was conducted in November. The third round will be launched on Monday.

The study is an important tool to estimate the antibody levels against infectious diseases in the population and is considered as the gold standard for measuring population immunity.

District collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said that the focus of the second round of the ICMR survey was on VIPs, medical professionals and people travelling daily to different places such as vendors moving from villages to towns and vice versa for livelihood.

Chakradhar Babu said the ICMR had changed the standards to confirm immunity against viruses among people based on the number of antibodies present in the blood sample to one, as against 20 in the past.

On behalf of President of India, sealed item rate tenders are invited for the work "Shifting, Installation of power panels of NCF including supply, laying & Termination of power cables". Estimated Cost: Rs 22,60,000/- Period of work: 12 months, dates of availability of tender document: 21.12.2020 to 04.01.2021, Last date and time of submission of bid: Up to 14.00 hrs on 09.01.2021. The detailed Tender Notice is available in the website [www.nfc.gov.in](http://www.nfc.gov.in). NFC/MZG/NCF-EPDB & MCC/2020/002 dt 18.12.2020 GM (MZG)

# DECCAN Chronicle

21 DECEMBER 2020

## Oz 'summer of 36' a blot that can never be erased

**T**eam India were bowled out for their lowest score (36) after 88 years in Test cricket. Compare that with a home record of eight victories in home Tests in the last three years, each win by huge margins and the genesis of the batsmen's problems becomes apparent. The fact that this stunning collapse of technique happened in the most modern professional era, in which players even have mental conditioning coaches aiding their preparation and fine-tuning, multiplies the shame heaped upon Virat Kohli's men at the Adelaide Oval. This is the first time in 143 years of Test cricket that 11 batsmen plus Mr Sundries have failed to get into double figures in an innings. Such a statistical adornment further erodes the reputation of Indian batting, built by such men as Col C.K. Nayudu, Nawab of Pataudi Jr, Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar and many others.

The Australian bowlers were brilliant in executing flawlessly their plan of attack on a fresh day of the Test. They preyed upon an atavistic weakness of Indian batsmen on foreign pitches and atmosphere against a ball that moves in the air and/or off the seam at great pace.

**Brian Lara named his first daughter Sydney after his favourite city with an attractive cricket ground but it is unlikely that Kohli would name his daughter after Adelaide, a British queen.**

And they did so with sustained precision with the trio of fast bowlers suppressing their egos and invariably pitching the ball right up to the batsmen and moving it just that fraction to entice the edge and bring into play the corridor of close-in catchers. Indian batting collapses may have been common enough in South Africa, England, Australia and New Zealand where Team India has won only one series in the last eight years, and that against an Australian team weakened by the absence of Smith and Warner. This one stung more.

The fear is not without basis that Indian cricketers have become too complacent in life and career as "white ball" millionaires. That none except the captain Kohli averages 40 in away Tests in the last three years is illustrative of the current team's failures. On the slow, turning pitches of home, the same men can appear invincible. The quality obviously lacking in our batsmen is mental toughness to perform their best in alien conditions, which is the eternal barometer of cricketing merit in which M.S. Dhoni's team excelled. The team led by the current captain boasts of neither winning World Cup performances nor great Test wins outside the subcontinent.

Kohli is coming back home on paternity leave, which is an empathetic concession to family in modern life. Kane Williamson of New Zealand is another who availed of it most recently. Brian Lara named his first daughter Sydney after his favourite city with an attractive cricket ground but it is unlikely that Kohli would name his daughter after Adelaide, a British queen. While the granting of such latitude for to-be fathers in pro sport is to be lauded, Kohli would have to mind what he says publicly as any contentious comments like his being a "representation of a New India" would be subject to severe scrutiny after the Adelaide "day & nightmare". At most times, Kohli's bat does the talking and it is better if it remains that way.

## High-stakes game in J&K

**T**he Enforcement Directorate, a financial fraud investigation agency of the Centre, on Saturday attached residential and commercial properties of Farooq Abdullah, inarguably Kashmir's most eminent mainstream political leader. Dr Abdullah is the president of the storied political party of Kashmir, the National Conference, which had been founded by his late father, the legendary Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah. This is the party that ushered in the modern era in Kashmir with the closure of feudal rule and voluntarily opted to link its fate with "Gandhi's India", as Dr Abdullah recently had occasion to remind Delhi. Dr Abdullah is also a former chief minister and president of the Gupkar Alliance, a coalition of mainstream parties committed to restore J&K's autonomous state ended forcibly — constitutionally speaking — on August 5 last year.

The ED is evidently investigating a scam in the J&K Cricket Association of which Dr Abdullah was president for about 10 years. The investigating agency's action against Dr Abdullah rests on its belief — it is no more than that — that the former CM swindled about ₹12 crore of JKCA funds by laundering money. This is not a new allegation and there has been ample opportunity over the years for the Centre to investigate and bring charges. But instead of proving its case before a competent court, the investigating agency has taken *suo motu* action. On the face of it, this doesn't sit right at all.

Under the Narendra Modi government, prominent opponents of the BJP in several states have had serious allegations of corruption against them scuttled once they switched sides to join BJP. Dr Abdullah has done the opposite. He has mobilised mainstream political opinion in Kashmir along with PDP leader (and also a former CM) Mehbooba Mufti to challenge New Delhi's action of ending J&K's constitutional autonomy on which its joining the Union of India was conditional in 1947. It is easy to see that Dr Abdullah's political stance has irked the Centre. If it hopes to break him and by doing so break the mood of resistance in Kashmir to the ending of autonomy, New Delhi is playing a high stakes game.

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DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

**H**yderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax: 040-27805256  
**Vijayawada:** No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-255284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555285  
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Kishwar Desai  
London Diary

## End in sight to Brexit limbo; Xmas lockdown a big dampener

**I**t was the worst news that could have come for Londoners preparing for Christmas. Just as the high streets spilled over with people shopping for presents (with social distancing) the news came that a new strain of the Coronavirus is rampaging through the southeast of the country. Suddenly infections are going up more than 25 per cent. Instead of being freed up — Londoners are now looking at a very severe lockdown as this new strain has to be stopped in its tracks. The only good news is that the new strain will not "nullify" the impact of the vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine has already been administered to more than three lakhs in the UK... but, of course that is just the first shot! The second shot still awaited.

The reimposition of a severe lockdown has meant that instead of queuing up to buy presents — suddenly people are queuing up to abandon London. A Christmas spent in lockdown will be the worst blow to families who need to bond emotionally after a whole year spent, off and on,

in isolation. We have been lucky as where we live in London there are vast open green spaces — but other areas which are more crowded face the brunt of the problem.

Not more than a fortnight ago, we were told that for the five days around Christmas we will be free to celebrate Christmas almost as we used to. Three households could get together and celebrate and then part. It was great news.

No longer. Rules are changing so rapidly that it is hard to remember what you can and cannot do and there are severe and very public penalties for abandoning the rules.

**K**ay Burley heads the morning slot of Sky News. She can claim to be the woman with the longest time in front of camera on live TV as a journalist. We were even entertained with graphic details of her facelift a few years back, in the glossy magazines. So she is a celebrity with no hope of privacy! The morning slot is competitive and Kay has the biggest following. Recently, she

had a party for her sixtieth birthday with friends — 10 people in all. They booked two tables at a "Covid-compliant" restaurant, one with six and the other with four guests. But then she was seen briefly popping into another club. Someone took a photo on their phone and it was in the news on an online channel, Guido Fawkes.

Sky News management took this break (popping into another restaurant) very seriously. Kay Burley was reprimanded and put on suspension till sometime in the New Year. She had to apologise. Her invited guests included Beth Rigby who is the Sky political correspondent. She was also suspended. No one is quite sure which regulation was broken but it looked bad in the public eyes. Yes, ministers and advisers had broken the rules six months back without as much as an apology. No longer.

**O**f course, there is also the continuing good news of the vaccine being administered systematically, largely to the 80 years and above group. Beginning Tuesday

of last week, the first few to be vaccinated included an Indian couple, Hari Shukla and his wife Ranjan. The Queen will get it soon along with Prince Philip. This is the first bit the government has got right after a year of blundering around Covid. But who is complaining? Meghnad just got his shot NHS, that national treasure, follows up on each case, ensuring no one left out.

Sadly, theatres had just opened full of hope 10 days ago but they have had to shut again. The Christmas Pantomime shows, which are a favourite of children where stars and even famous politicians play bit parts, were also revived. William and Kate took their children to see one. They were lucky. Now the Pantos are shut.

**O**ur other anxiety is about Brexit. That is another contagion that gobbled up UK and spat out another Partition... when the UK leaves the European Union. It is a complicated process and negotiations have been going on forever.

It is a sort of push me plus pull you. We hear one day that the deal is done and the next that we will "Brexit" with no-deal. Either way the uncertainty will be over in the first week of January. But, meanwhile, we may run out of fresh fruit and medicines, which come daily from the continent! Our export lorries will also be held up in long queues.

The deadline is midnight on December 31. At least, they are promising that Big Ben (which is still under repair) will chime the arrival of the New Year.

But the rest, no one knows. Between A for anxiety, B for Brexit and C for Coronavirus, we may need a new alphabet and a new language very soon to express our feelings about 2020, as it leaves us with a parting shot. V is both for victory and for vaccine!

**Kishwar Desai** is an award-winning author. The Longest Kiss: The Life and Times of Devika Rani is her new book.

Subhani



AMIT SHAH EATS LUNCH AT FARMER'S HOUSE

## Parl dysfunctional due to competitive politics

Mohan Guruswamy

**N**othing much need be said as to how dysfunctional Parliament has now become. The blight has been a long time in the making and Parliament has now become a place more for political theatre than thoughtful consideration of the nation's many problems. The first Lok Sabha worked for almost 4,000 hours while the 16th Lok Sabha functioned for just 1,615 hours. Democracy is not just about an elected Parliament and periodic elections. Democracy is pointless without debate and discussion. Democracy is a system of government by compromises and accommodation. That is why it's called a reconciliatory system, where the myriad aspirations of individuals, groups, regions and nations are sought to be reconciled towards the common good. It is hence a government by discussion and debate, for the method of making choices is by common consent and acceptance. A prime prerequisite for democratic functioning is institutional order and coherence.

Unfortunately, what we have been witnessing in the recent past is the collapse of institutional order and coherence. Parliament is where these aspirations are intended to be reconciled, and Parliament has become increasingly dysfunctional.

Politics in India has been becoming increasingly adversarial and anything goes as long as it accrues to the gains of the adversaries. Imagine a game of chess where instead of two sides — black and white — we have one more side say in red playing on a three-sided board. The objective of each of the players would be to destroy the pawns and powers of the other sides and capture

their kings. Now complicate this a bit more. The rules of the game could allow any two sides to combine for a certain length of time against the third or any other combination. This game then gets very complex, with colours switching sides at will to make gains.

The Indian political system might very well have more than three colours. But we can see three major sides in the political spectrum for now. These are the BJP, the Congress and the loose alliance of the former Janata Dal factions and the regional parties, commonly called the Third Front. From 1969 to 1989 the BJP (formerly Jan Sangh) and the precursor factions of the Janata Dal used to combine against the Congress. The political and economic goals of the three major groupings in Indian politics do not differ very much. They are all committed to a raucous democracy and an increasingly populist economic system.

The evolution of our politics into a non-ideological political competition has seen the demise of discussion and debate within Parliament. The expansion of 24x7 television news channels and their vacuous talk shows aimed at garnering TRPs rather than spreading light has only accelerated this process. Parliament still meets and passes bills and enacts laws, but most of this is done without the debate and discussion that they require and which we expect. Even the Union Budget is barely discussed. The defence budget has not been discussed for years now. Parliament even functions without quorums for most of the time.

In this situation, the political adversaries pick issues to stall important political statements the ruling party is invested in. The GST Bill is a case in point. The BJP opposed

the BJP opposed a GST as long as it was in the Opposition... Now the sides have been reversed. The Congress is hoisting the BJP on its own petard.

party hack and works closely with the government that chose him or her to further the party's political agenda. It is little wonder then that the Lok Sabha Speaker, despite the show of deference and frequent reference by the MPs, actually commands little authority to control the House. On the other hand, Opposition members often feel stonewalled because of the Speaker's political affiliations. This is perhaps why the Lok Sabha ever so often witnesses so much disorder and wilful disobedience. This convention of having a Speaker from within must be re-examined and we might be better served by having Parliament presided over by an eminent and commonly trusted individual, perhaps like a retired Chief Justice, who might bring a more enlightened view of right and wrong to the office.

Then there is the Anti-Defection Act that seriously limits free discussion by muzzling inner-party discussion and expression of dissent. This law disrespects the essential reality that Members of Parliament or the state legislatures are representatives of the people. That they are members of a political party is only incidental. The elected members are intended to represent and protect the interests of the people who elect them, and not that of a handful of leaders. It makes them subservient to the whip on the pain of expulsion. This tyranny of the whip has turned MPs virtually into marionettes who are forced to act according to the wishes of the party leadership. Most party leaders are now vested within families and clans, and leadership is usually hereditary or extra-institutional.

So where do we go from here? And where will we discuss and debate just that?

**The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.**

## LETTERS

### FARMERS' STRIKE

Bhagyanagar Gas must be squarely blamed for the pipeline burst (*Pipeline bursts, creates havoc, DC, Dec. 20*). The HMWS&SB must also partially share the blame for not following 'Standard Excavation Procedures'. The excavation required the firm to seek permission from the HMWS&SB in writing with a proper 'work permit'. It would have ensured both parties understood the nature of work and what precautions were to be taken before the work.

**Sayed Nooruddin**  
Hyderabad

### PM vs FARMERS

Both the PM and the farmers seem to be in no mood to settle the issue for two weeks. They should call for a meeting to sort out the issue soon. I hope wisdom dawns on both the parties.

**Dr G.V. Kumar**  
Hyderabad

### CRICKET TEAM

Team India players must return at least 25 per cent of their match earnings for such a shameful performance. Though cricket is an unpredictable game, players should always collectively get a decent score. Scoring 36 runs is something not acceptable to a cricket loving nation like India.

**Surisetti Pankaj Kumar**  
Secunderabad

### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

#### Satellite to crash trunk rates

**H**YDERABAD, DEC. 20. Trunk call rates between main cities in the country will crash to 75 per cent and television service may almost become free, when the synchronous communication satellite is shot 40,000 km high into the space from the Sriharikota satellite launching station (SHAR) in Andhra Pradesh towards the end of the seventies.

The communication project, based on a concrete plan of the Indian Space Research Organisation and approved in principle by the Union Government, will facilitate the operation of 3,600 telephone channels for putting through the crashed trunk call rates alone within one year.

— UNI



## SHORT TAKES

## DMK LAUNCHES 'WEREJECTADMK' CAMPAIGN IN TN

Chennai, Dec. 20: Months ahead of Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, principal opposition DMK on Sunday launched a campaign against arch-rival AIADMK on what it called "lack of governance" by the Palaniswami government and touching sensitive issues such as the NEET-related suicides.

The party's campaign launched on Sunday is titled "werejectadmik" and the DMK released a video, flagging issues in sectors like agriculture and education as it urged people to defeat the AIADMK in the elections, likely in coming April-May. In the video, released during a meeting of DMK's key office-bearers, including district secretaries, party chief M.K. Stalin said senior party functionaries will visit over 16,000 villages and wards to conduct "gram sabhas" where resolutions will be adopted against the AIADMK government as part of the campaign.

At the meeting, Stalin set a target of winning 200 seats for his party office-bearers and claimed DMK was facing attacks from many fronts, including "some being forced" to start their own political ventures as part of a "conspiracy."

The DMK, out of power since 2011, is making a full-throttled bid to storm back and dethrone the AIADMK.

## AT 3.4°C, DELHI RECORDS COLDEST MORNING SO FAR

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

A cold wave swept Delhi on Sunday as it recorded the coldest morning of the season so far at 3.4 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. On Saturday, the minimum temperature at the Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, had settled at 3.9 degrees Celsius.

"The observatory recorded a minimum of 3.4 degrees Celsius, five notches below the normal, on Sunday morning. The maximum temperature is likely to settle around 22 degrees Celsius," an IMD official said.

The mercury dipped to 3.3 degrees Celsius at Lodhi Road, as icy winds from snow-laden Western Himalayas barrelled through the city, the IMD said.

On Friday, the minimum temperature had plunged to 2.7 degrees Celsius at Jafarpur. The city had recorded a "severe" cold day on Thursday as the maximum temperature dropped to 15.2 degrees Celsius, seven notches below normal and the lowest this season so far.

However, it rose to 19.8 degrees Celsius on Friday and 21.8 degrees Celsius on Saturday.

## PARL. ROW: RAUT URGES MODI NOT TO GO PUTIN WAY

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

Continuing its attack on the BJP-led Union government over the cancellation of the winter session of the Parliament, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut has claimed that the Centre wanted to avoid discussion on the ongoing farmers' agitation in Delhi. He has also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi going Russian President Vladimir Putin's way by not holding the parliament session.

"What is the need of spending ₹1,000 crore on Central Vista project of new Sansad Bhawan, when the government was not interested in holding debates and parliamentary work? The winter session of Parliament has been cancelled so that there can be no debate on the ongoing farmers' protest near Delhi," said Raut in his weekly column Rokhok (fortnight) in the Sena mouthpiece Saamana on Sunday.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting at Delhi borders since November 26 against the new agri laws. They have been demanding a repeal of the legislations.

Citing the visit of Britain Prime Minister Boris Johnson as a chief guest for the Republic Day ceremony on January 26, Raut argued, "Will we show him the closed parliament? We adopted the parliamentary democracy from Britain, but such things do not happen there. Had democracy been alive here, talks would have been held with the protesting farmers in Delhi. But attempts were made to ensure no debate over it in the parliament."



Union home minister Amit Shah during a roadshow at Bolpur in Birbhum district on Sunday, ahead of West Bengal Assembly elections 2021. — PTI

## Shah to extend Bengal visit duration from Jan.

Home minister overwhelmed by large-scale Oppn defections

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

Overwhelmed by the large-scale defections from the ruling Trinamul Congress and other parties to the BJP in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah has extended the duration of his two-day monthly visits to camp in the poll-bound state from January to three days, which will gradually go up to four days or even a week in the later stages, closer to the elections, apparently in a bid to attract more switchovers as part of his party's poll preparations.

State BJP chief Dilip Ghosh said on Sunday, "Shah will keep visiting here every month. The number of days will also increase gradually. So far,

AMIT SHAH chalks out the plan after being impressed by the huge number of defections, including Shubhendu Adhikari and nine other MLAs from the TMC, Congress and Left parties, and dozens of other TMC leaders to the saffron fold.

he has visited here for only two days a month. His visits will now be extended to three days and then up to a week."

Shah, on a two-day West Bengal tour, chalked out the plan, sources said, to camp monthly after being impressed by the huge number of defections, including Shubhendu Adhikari and nine other MLAs from the TMC, Congress and Left parties, and dozens of other TMC leaders to the saffron fold in his presence in Midnapore.

Another batch of defections by TMC MLAs, including a heavyweight,

He also attended a musical performance by students in a bid to connect with Bengali culture.

The TMC criticised the BJP for belittling Tagore over a controversial poster in which the iconic legend was depicted below Shah before his visit to Santiniketan.

"We condemn this disrespect to Tagore. We are protesting against it at Jorasanko, Tagore's residence in Kolkata, all through the day. Those who do not even know Tagore want to grab Bengal," said TMC minister Subrata Mukherjee.

In the afternoon, Shah visited Visvabharati, the Central university at Santiniketan, near Bolpur, and paid tribute to its founder Rabindranath Tagore.

Shah, later, had lunch at the home of a Baul artist, Basudeb Das, and led a mega BJP roadshow in Bolpur to make the saffron party's presence felt in a stronghold of the Trinamul Congress.

## MEDICAL DRUG TABLETS WORTH ₹33L SEIZED

SAURABH JOSHI | DC  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

The Anti-Narcotics Cell (ANC) of Mumbai police seized medical drug tablets worth ₹33 lakh that were being peddled as narcotics substance and arrested two persons from Shivaji Nagar on Sunday. The seized tablets were identified as hypnotic drug Nitrazepam and officials said the source of the huge quantity of the seized items are accomplices of the arrested accused.

The officials arrested Shahrukh Shaikh (27) and Abdulla (29) who were in possession of 66,000 Nitrazepam tablets. A team of the Ghatkopar unit of the ANC raided the place where the said tablets were being stored illegally. "The contraband is worth ₹33 lakh and can be consumed only when prescribed by a doctor and are used to treat sleep disorders and anxiety," said an officer.

## Maha makes masks must for the next six months

SANJAY KAW | DC  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

India recorded 26,624 new cases of the Coronavirus disease, 341 related deaths and 29,690 recoveries in the last 24 hours.

Delhi recorded 1,091 fresh cases the lowest in around four months, as the total number of such cases climbed to 6,17,005 in the national capital, authorities said. 26 more fatalities pushed the death count due to the disease to 10,277 in the city. The positivity rate stood at 1.31 per cent.

This is the sixth consecutive day when the positivity rate has remained below two per cent. It stood at 1.3 per cent on Saturday, 1.6 per cent on Friday and 1.51 per cent on Thursday.

In India, the number of fresh infections was 5.8 per cent higher than Saturday, when the country registered 25,152 cases to take the total infections to over one crore mark.

MAHA CM says experts are in favour of imposing night curfew or another lockdown, but he was not in favour of these steps.

masks mandatory for the next six months.

While addressing people of the state on social media, Maharashtra Chief Minister Udday Thackeray said experts were in favour of imposing night curfew or another lockdown, but he was not in favour of these steps.

He said, "The Coronavirus situation in the state is under control, though not completely... Prevention is better than cure. Wearing of mask at public places should be made a habit for another six months at least."

In India, the number of fresh infections was 5.8 per cent higher than Saturday, when the country registered 25,152 cases to take the total infections to over one crore mark.

The country, however, remained in the number one position in terms of the number of recovered cases, followed by Brazil.

Thirty-three states and union territories in India have less than 20,000 active cases.

The US study, published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, noted that the hospitalised Covid-19 patients have a greater risk of dying if they are men or if they are obese or have complications from diabetes or hypertension.

In the research, the scientists from the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) in the US assessed nearly 67,000 hospitalised Covid-19 patients in 613 hospitals across the country. They said the patients who were obese, had hypertension or poorly managed diabetes had a higher risk of dying compared to those who did not have these conditions.

## METRO | PROJECT

**Bombay HC has stayed metro car shed work at salt pan land in Kanjurmarg**

## Uddhav seeks Centre's help to settle car shed row

DC CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday urged the Opposition BJP to help resolve the deadlock over the salt pan land, which the state government wants to use for Metro car shed.

Thackeray denied the opposition's charge that he has made the Metro car shed an ego issue. Thackeray had scrapped his predecessor Devendra Fadnavis' decision to construct the car shed at Aarey Colony and moved

the project to salt pan land at Kanjurmarg area.

However, the Bombay high court has stayed the work at Kanjurmarg. Responding to Thackeray, Fadnavis alleged that the Chief Minister is still misleading the people and he doesn't seem to have read the incriminating report submitted by the committee set up by his own government.

Addressing the people state via social media for 34 minutes, Thackeray said that he was called "arrogant", but if wanting the best for Mumbai and Maharashtra was "arrogant" then he acceded to his fault.

"I am being called 'arrogant' on the subject of the Metro car shed. Yes, I am arrogant for Mumbai. We sent the car shed to Kanjurmarg because building it in Aarey was destroying the forest there. First, trees would have been chopped off for a car shed... then for something else... and slowly the

whole forest would have been eliminated," the Chief Minister added.

Justifying the choice of land at Kanjurmarg for the Metro car shed, Thackeray said the state government gave "costliest" land in the Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) for the central government's bullet train project, despite opposition.

"We did not create

obstruction. If you create problems in Kanjurmarg and we do in the BKC, creating problems in each others projects will serve no purpose," he said.

However, Fadnavis dismissed Maharashtra CM's contention that relocating the metro car shed project to Kanjurmarg would serve future needs, including availability of land that might be needed for expansion of the infrastructure for metro lines. He asked the Chief Minister to make report of the high-powered committee public, "as it mentions financial losses the state

will incur if the project is shifted to Kanjurmarg, besides delaying the project by four years".

"Why are you hiding the fact that the construction work at Aarey cannot be stopped even if the car shed is shifted to Kanjurmarg?" The construction of underground tunnels is being carried out keeping in mind the Aarey land... The work is 80 per cent complete," Fadnavis said.

The BJP leader reiterated that relocating the car shed project from Aarey will "result into waste of time and money".

## India wary of new PLA's Western Command head

PAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

India is keenly watching the developments after China appointed a new military commander for its Western Theatre Command and how it will reflect on the ground as the two nations' armies continue to remain in a standoff in eastern Ladakh.

The People's Liberation Army's Western Theatre Command is responsible for whole of China's border with India from Ladakh to the Northeast. China's President Xi Jinping, head of the Central Military Commission, the PLA's overall high command, has appointed Gen. Zhang Xudong as the new head of the Western Theatre Command, replacing veteran Gen. Zhao Zonggu.

The Western Theatre Command is one of the PLA's most crucial units. It is also its biggest command. The outgoing Gen. Zhao was its commander since 2016 and had headed it during the Doklam crisis in 2017 with the Indian Army.

It was under his watch this year that China had launched its most aggressive military buildup against India since the 1962 war.

Gen. Zhao had earlier this year reached the upper limit of 65 years to hold such commands in China.

The new commander, Gen. Zhang, is reported to have no experience of the Western Theatre Command and was earlier posted in the Central Theatre Command, in charge of the capital

## Modi, Vietnam PM to hold talks today

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

chair the virtual summit with Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc during which "the two leaders will exchange views on wide-ranging bilateral, regional and global issues and provide guidance for the future development of India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)". They are also likely to issue a joint vision for this.

Both India and Vietnam are understood to have been in constant touch with each other regarding their concerns over the aggressive Chinese military behaviour on various fronts. While India is facing Chinese military intransigence in the Ladakh sector, Vietnam has been facing tensions with China in the South China Sea where it has a maritime territorial dispute with Beijing. Both countries have fought border wars with China in the past and they continue to have military tensions with Beijing.

It was reliably learnt on Sunday that India's Defence Line of Credit for high speed guard boats for the Vietnamese armed forces will "be further progressed". The two countries continue to have a shared interest in a "free, open, peaceful, prosperous and a rules-based regional order" which is expected to be reiterated at the Summit.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will co-

military talks at an early date. However, sources said that right now no date has yet been set for a corps' commanders meeting between the two sides.

The military standoff between India and China in eastern Ladakh has entered in its eighth month, with no agreement on disengagement in sight.

## MP university's new course for 'quacks' stirs row

RABINDRA NATH CHOURHURY | DC  
Bhopal, DEC. 20

A university in Madhya Pradesh has announced to introduce an online certificate course for 'Jholachap doctors' (quacks) to legalise their profession, inviting criticism from health experts.

Atal Behari Vajpayee Hindi University run by the state government here has issued an advertisement seeking application from quacks for admission into one-year-online certificate course, christened as 'first aid treatment specialist diploma course', costing ₹24,000.

The advertisement which has pictures of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former PM late Atal Behari Vajpayee and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, has said the quacks can practice legally by opening their first aid treatment clinics to treat the patients after completing the course.

The ad has invited criticism from health experts and Opposition Congress here. "It (the course) is a move to give legal cover to quacks to save them from law. This will have a serious repercussion on the health sector in the state.

The Medical Council of India (MCI) should take note of it urgently", leading anti-burn specialist of

the US study, published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, noted that the hospitalised Covid-19 patients have a greater risk of dying if they are men or if they are obese or have complications from diabetes or hypertension.

In the research, the scientists from the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) in the US assessed nearly 67,000 hospitalised Covid-19 patients in 613 hospitals across the country. They said the patients who were obese, had hypertension or poorly managed diabetes had a higher risk of dying compared to those who did not have these conditions.

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The US study, published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, noted that the hospitalised Covid-19 patients have a greater risk of dying if they are men or if they are obese or have complications from diabetes or hypertension.

Khandwa, Dec. 20: A 26-year-old software engineer allegedly married two women in five days in Madhya Pradesh and then fled, police said on Sunday.

Based on a cheating complaint filed by a woman's family here on Saturday, the police are conducting a probe into the matter, police said. The accused, resident of Musakheti area

**SHORT TAKES**  
**NOV. 2 VIENNA ATTACK: TWO MORE NABBED**

**Vienna, Dec. 20:** Austrian prosecutors said Sunday that another two suspects have been arrested for alleged involvement in the November 2 terrorist attack in Vienna.

The two men — one of whom is a 26-year-old Austrian of Afghan origin — were arrested on Friday, a spokeswoman said.

She declined to reveal the nationality of the other suspect.

A request would be made later on Sunday for them to be held until trial, the spokeswoman added.

Last month, an Islamic State supporter who had been convicted and imprisoned for trying to join the IS group in Syria went on a shooting rampage in central Vienna, killing four people, aged between 21 and 44.

**JIHADISTS KILL 5 SOLDIERS, KIDNAP 35 IN NIGERIA**

**Kano, Nigeria, Dec. 20:** Five Nigerian soldiers were killed when Islamic State-aligned jihadists ambushed a military convoy and more than 30 civilians were also kidnapped in another attack, military sources said on Sunday.

The military convoy was hit in northeast Borno state on Saturday, and militants also attacked a transport convoy in the same region a day before, abducting 35 people and killing one woman.

Nigeria's Boko Haram and a splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province, have killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million as part of a decade-long conflict. Saturday's attack on the military convoy took place outside of Mafa, 44 kilometres north of the regional capital Maiduguri. "The terrorists fired an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) on the convoy which hit one of the vehicles with five soldiers in it," one security source said.

**BIDEN, MEXICO PREZ DISCUSS MIGRATION**

**Washington, Dec. 20:** US President-elect Joe Biden told Mexico's president Saturday he was committed to addressing the root causes of poor Latino migrants crossing the border into America.

Outgoing President Donald Trump made tightening the southern frontier against what he called the free and dangerous flow of people entering the US from Mexico and Central America a key pillar of his US-centric policy on immigration, including his final plan to build a border wall.

Biden spoke Saturday with President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and emphasized "the need to reinvigorate US-Mexico cooperation to ensure safe and orderly migration," the Biden transition team said in a statement.

"The two leaders noted a shared desire to address the root causes of migration in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and southern Mexico and to build a future of greater opportunity and security for the region," the team said.

**'ICE MAN' SETS NEW RECORD IN FREEZING CABIN**

**Wattrelos, France, Dec. 20:** Frenchman Romain Vandendorpe on Saturday set a world record for sitting immersed in ice cubes for the longest time, enduring the extreme challenge to raise money for childhood cancers.

The 34-year-old health worker remained buried up to his neck in ice in a plexiglass cabin for two hours, 35 minutes and 43 seconds, breaking the previous record by 40 minutes in the northern French town of Wattrelos.

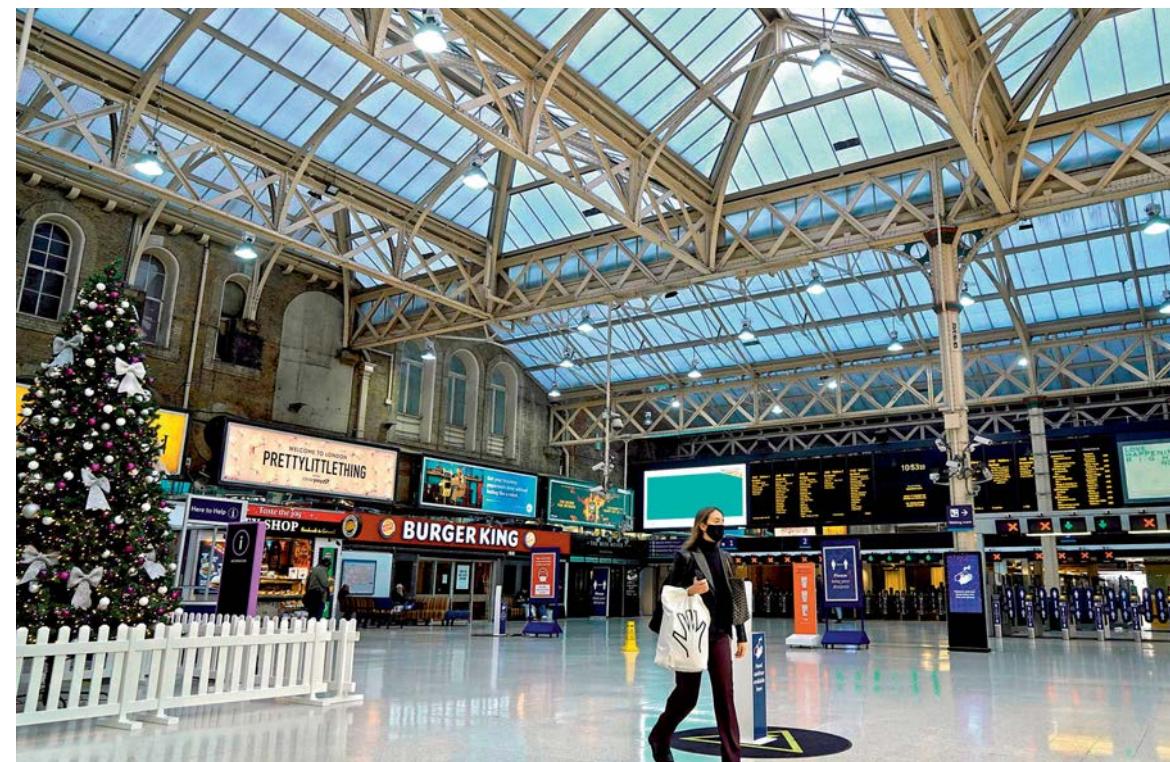
He said he trained to "overcome human limits" by neurocognitive techniques based on "imagination and concentration" to put himself in "a state of daydreaming." The feat was performed before some 50 people and Vandendorpe's mantra for success was simple.

"If we train, if we give our all, we can advance (and) obtain results that can improve things." His training techniques including sitting in an ice-cold jacuzzi, training in a 500-litre freezer and then remaining buried in snow in the French ski resort of Chamonix.

He aims to donate the money raised through hisfeat to the Wonder Augustine association founded in Wattrelos.

# England, Italy get ready for curbs

As Christmas approaches, Europe battles a winter surge including a more infectious new strain



A pedestrian, wearing a face mask or covering due to the Covid-19 pandemic, walks through an almost deserted concourse at Charing Cross train station in London on Sunday. — AFP

## Bibi gets Covid vaccine jab, Israel rollout starts

**Ramat Gan, Israel, Dec. 20:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a Covid-19 vaccine jab on Saturday, kicking off a national rollout over the coming days.

Netanyahu, 71, and Israel's health minister were injected with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine live on TV at Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv. "I asked to be vaccinated first, together with Health Minister Yuli Edelstein, to serve as personal examples and encourage you to be vaccinated," he said.

The ban is in effect from 0500 GMT Sunday until January 1. The Netherlands is under a five-week lockdown until mid-January with schools and all non-essential shops closed to slow a surge in the virus.

Residents in the affected areas will have to go into lockdown at least until December 30, Johnson said, tearing up earlier plans that would have allowed up to three households to mix. Hours later the Netherlands banned all passenger flights from Britain after finding the first case of the new, more infectious virus strain that is circulating in the UK.

The ban is in effect from 0500 GMT Sunday until January 1.

The Netherlands is under a five-week lockdown until mid-January with schools and all non-essential shops closed to slow a surge in the virus.

Italy also announced a new regime of restrictions until January 6 that included limits on people leaving their homes more than once a day, closing non-essential shops, bars and restaurants and curbs on regional travel.

"It's right that they prohibit departures after 20 December if it means travelling in safety," Claudia Patrone, a 33-year-old lawyer, said as she got off a train in Milan. "I took the test before leaving, I stayed locked in my house, I didn't see anyone. The measure is right if everyone respects the rules and guarantees safety."

Europe — the epicentre of the pandemic earlier this year — is once again seeing growing cases with officials fearing an explosion in infections after the Christmas holidays as families gather.

A year after the pandemic first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, the rapid rollout of vaccinations is now seen as the only effective way to end the crisis and the economically devastating lockdowns used to halt its spread.

Europe is expected to start a massive vaccination campaign after Christmas following the United States and Britain, which have begun giving jabs.

— AP

## HIGHEST DAILY SPIKE OF 548 IN THAILAND

**Bangkok, Dec. 20:** Thailand reported more than 500 new Coronavirus cases on Saturday, the country's highest daily tally.

The 548 new cases, most of them connected with an outbreak at a wholesale seafood market on the outskirts of Bangkok, come after the country saw only a small number of infections over the past several months due to strict border and quarantine controls. Health officials said 516 of the new cases, most of them migrant workers from Myanmar, were found in connection with the outbreak at the Klong Toey shrimp market in Samut Sakhon province.

All of those infections were linked to a 67-year-old seafood vendor who tested positive for the virus earlier, the director-general of the Department of Medical Sciences, Opas Karnkawipong, said in a news conference broadcast on Saturday night. The first case at the market was confirmed on Thursday.

**HERCULEAN TASK**

## A fire broke out at an ex-lung clinic a few metres from the church in 2013, damaging its structure

## Atheists to save historic German church plank by plank

**Stiege, Germany, Dec. 20:** Ask Hans Powalla if he is a believer and the immediate response is a firm "no".

Yet he and other villagers in and around the German town of Stiege have embarked on the Herculean task of saving a picturesque church by moving it from the middle of a forest into the centre of town.

Former electrician Powalla, 74, said they were driven by the "unique architecture of the building" and the "meaning that it gives to the region" in the Harz mountains.

The object in question is a stave church, or wooden church, complete with dragon ornaments on the

roof, built in the Nordic style in 1905.

It is one of only three such churches from that era still standing in Germany, and is classed as a monument of national significance.

Unlike most churches which have prominent spots in town centres, this site of worship was built as a private sanctuary for patients recovering from lung diseases at sanatorium located in the woods.

But the sanatorium was shut, and by 2009, the church fell out of use. Its isolated location makes it a target for vandals.

A fire broke out at the former lung clinic just a few metres away from the church in 2013, damaging

its structure.

"From the village, we saw the black plumes of smoke and thought 'oh no, there goes the church,'" said Regina Nowolski, 69, a member of the Stiege Stave Church Association, co-founded by Powalla.

But as it turned out, the church was undamaged.

"And there came the idea that something must be done now or the church will one day collapse," said Regina Bierwisch, spokeswoman for the association.

"The only solution to save the church was to take it away." While the idea was clear-cut, it was far easier said than done.

The challenges were plentiful: getting permission to move the structure,

finding a new home, and working out how to get it there. At one point, lifting the whole building with a Bundeswehr military helicopter was mulled.

Linked to all those issues is the million-euro question of how to finance the project. Undeterred, members of the association took the matter to the mayor, wrote to federal authorities on conservation and made public appeals to fundraise.

"In the beginning I found it a funny idea. But I quickly noticed that they're not giving up, they are there to see it through," Ronald Fiebelkorn, mayor of the Oberharz am Brocken region, said.

Buoyed by the wave of

enthusiasm, Fiebelkorn took it to state and federal authorities whose initial reaction had been "you're crazy". But soon, the officials also relented.

With backing and funding secured, the 1.1 million euro project (\$1.3 million) to move the church is now in its last lap.

A plot of land has been secured in Stiege town, offered by the regional authorities to the association at a symbolic price of one euro.

The association also purchased the private church from current owners, a real estate company in Berlin, for a single euro.

Groundbreaking at the new site began in November. — AFP

## Belgians, Dutch halt UK flights over virus variant

**Berlin, Dec. 20:** The Netherlands and Belgium on Sunday banned flights from the UK and Germany considered limiting such flights in attempt to ensure that a new strain of Coronavirus sweeping across southern England does not establish a strong foothold on the continent.

Outside Britain, nine cases of the new strain have been reported in Denmark, as well as one case in the Netherlands and another in Australia, according to the WHO.

"Across Europe, where transmission is intense and widespread, countries need to redouble their control and prevention approaches," a WHO Europe spokeswoman said.

Spelled out a ban but is considering limiting or halting flights from the UK as well. A high-ranking German official said that restrictions on flights from Britain are a "serious option." Germany, which holds the rotating presidency of the 27-nation EU, was in contact with its neighbours and was following all developments about the new variant closely. Europe has been walloped this fall by soaring new infections and deaths due to a resurgence of the virus, and many nations have reimposed a series of restrictions to reign in their outbreaks.

Britain has seen over 67,000 deaths in the pandemic, the second-highest confirmed toll in Europe after Italy.

Johnson on Saturday closed all non-essential shops, hairdressers, gyms and pools and told Britons to reorganise their holiday plans. No mixing of households is now allowed indoors in Tier 4 areas, including London, and only essential travel is permitted into and out of such areas.

— AP

## This German factory races to churn out Covid-19 syringes

**Bad Arolsen, Germany, Dec. 20:** The battle against Covid-19 has delivered not just a vaccine at record speed but also a spike in demand for the billions of syringes needed to administer it.

One German factory is already busily churning out the little plastic tubes and is confident global needs can be met.

"There won't be a shortage of syringes, even if we are facing a big challenge," said Otto-Philipp Braun, co-director of Almo, Germany's leading syringe manufacturer.

At the company's production site in the central German town of Bad Arolsen, the loud hum of machinery fills the hall.

Employees man the assembly lines, wearing mas-

ks, hair nets and occasionally ear plugs. They churn out disposable syringes 24 hours a day, seven days a week, destined for use in Germany and more than 140 other countries around the world.

One machine moulds high-quality plastic granules into thin, one-millilitre syringes, while another spits out the pistons that fit snugly inside the cylinder and are needed to push out the vaccine.

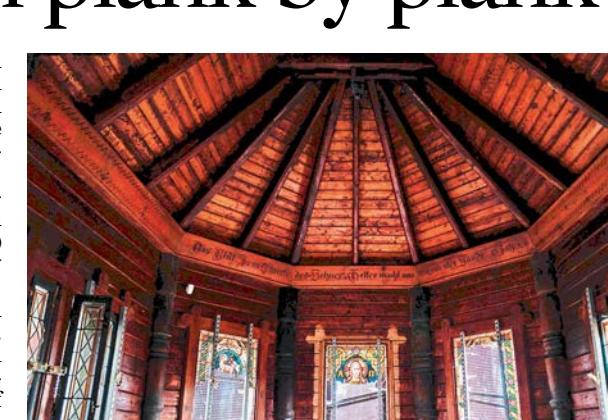
The plastic piston is green, matching the logo of German parent company B.Braun, a giant in the medical devices industry and still owned by the Braun family. A total of 64 syringes with pistons are assembled every 13 seconds. Every year, Almo churns out more than two billion

syringes of various kinds. The needles that can be added to the injection devices are produced by a B.Braun subsidiary in Malaysia. The company intends to spend 30 million euros on an additional assembly line, partly to cope with increased demand for the Covid-19 jabs.

The first orders have already rolled in from Germany's BioNTech, whose vaccine developed with US giant Pfizer is already being administered in some countries, and from CureVac, another German company whose vaccine candidate is in final stage trials.

"We can produce 270 million syringes of one millilitre next year and if needed an extra 200 million from 2022," Braun said.

— AFP



View of vandalised stained-glass windows inside the Stabkirche, a stave church built in 1905 as part of the "Albert House" sanatorium for patients with lung diseases, in a wooded area outside the town of Stiege, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. — AFP

## SHORT TAKES

**PHILIPPINES  
FLOODS: 8 DEAD,  
10K EVACUATED**

**Manila, Dec. 20:** Nearly 10,000 people were evacuated from their homes in the north-eastern Philippines as heavy rain across the country left at least eight people dead, said Sunday.

The storm — which has inundated villages and destroyed scores of houses in recent days — is the latest to batter the disaster-prone archipelago. Floodwaters reached waist-deep in 14 towns in the Cagayan Valley in the north-east of the main island of Luzon — which saw the worst flooding in decades last month — regional civil defence officer Francis Joseph Reyes said.

That forced nearly 10,000 people to seek shelter in emergency centres. The rain, which was intensified by the north-east monsoon, has filled Magat dam near to its critical level.

**FIJI CYCLONE  
SPARKS FEAR  
OF DISEASE**

**Suva, Dec. 20:** Disease threatens to worsen an already desperate situation in Fiji, an official warned Sunday, where thousands of lives have been devastated in the wake of the deadly super cyclone Yasa.

Agencies rushed food and clean water to areas where the storm smashed into the northern islands of the South Pacific nation on Thursday night, forcing more than 23,000 people to flee their homes.

Four people died and entire villages were wiped out, with crops and livestock destroyed.

Agriculture officials are being sent to hard-hit areas to help farmers dispose of dead livestock to reduce the risk of disease, National Disaster Management Office director Vasant Soko said. Fiji is prone to violent storms at this time of year, with Cyclone Winston killing 44 people when it slammed into the islands in 2016.

The Red Cross is now focused on providing relief to Bua and other areas in north Fiji.

**SUDAN, ETHIOPIA  
BORDER TALKS  
TOMORROW**

**Khartoum, Dec. 20:** Sudan and Ethiopia will hold negotiations next week to delineate their shared border, a statement from Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's office said Sunday.

The talks will be held on Tuesday, a week after Ethiopian forces reportedly ambushed and killed Sudanese troops along the border.

"Hamdok and his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed on Sunday discussed the meeting of the committee for delineating the borders which will be held on December 22," the statement said.

The two leaders met on the margins of a summit underway Sunday in Djibouti of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African regional bloc comprising eight countries.

The last border talks were held in May in Addis Ababa but another meeting scheduled for the following month was cancelled. Sudan and Ethiopia share a 1,600-kilometre-long border.

**PUTIN HAILS  
RUSSIA'S SPIES,  
VISITS INTEL HQ**

**Moscow, Dec. 20:** Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday hailed the country's "courageous" spies as he visited the headquarters of the Foreign Intelligence Service to mark its 100th birthday.

Putin, who has spent most of the Coronavirus epidemic at his residences outside the Russian capital and on the Black Sea, visited the SVR headquarters in southern Moscow amid the controversy surrounding the work of the country's security services.

SVR, Russia's external intelligence agency, which succeeded the First Chief Directorate of the KGB in 1991, marks its centenary on Sunday. But December 20 is also the day in Russia when the country fetes all members of the security services including those from the FSB domestic intelligence agency. Speaking outside the SVR headquarters, Putin, himself a former KGB officer, thanked all those who protect Russia from "external and internal threats" and called them "reliable and courageous people."

"Efficient work of security bodies, which is governed by law and national interests, always was and will be exceptionally important for Russia,"



Damaged cars are seen at the site of an attack in Kabul on Sunday.

**Oli gets Nepal Parliament dissolved amid infighting**

**Kathmandu, Dec. 20:** Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Sunday sprang a surprise on his rivals and got the President to dissolve Parliament, a controversial move amidst a prolonged tussle for power between him and former premier Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" within the ruling dispensation. President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament's House of Representatives at Oli's recommendation and announced mid-term general election in April-May, a decision termed "unconstitutional, impulsive and autocratic" by the Opposition and dissidents in the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Earlier in the day, an emergency meeting of the Cabinet chaired by Oli decided to recommend the President for the dissolution of Parliament, a senior Standing Committee member of the NCP told PTI. The first phase of the mid-term election will be held on April 30 and May 10 for the second phase, the Rashtrapati Bhawan said. The 275-member House of Representatives, which is the lower house of Parliament, was elected in 2017 for a five-year term. The upper house is the National Assembly.

The move comes as the intra-party feud reached

climax in the ruling NCP which has been witnessing months-long tussle between two factions, one led by 68-year-old Oli and Party's chairman and another led by 66-year-old "Prachanda", also the executive chair of the party and former premier.

between two factions, one led by 68-year-old Oli and Party's chairman and another led by 66-year-old "Prachanda", also the executive chair of the party and former premier.

Expressing dissatisfaction over Oli's move to dissolve the House, seven ministers from his Cabinet resigned in protest. Those who put in their papers are minister for science and education Giriraj Mani Pokharel, minister for energy and water resources Barshaman Pun, minister for agriculture Ghanashyam Bhusal, minister for labour and employment Rameshwor Raya Yadav, minister for tourism Yogesh Bhattacharjee, minister for forest and environment Shakti Basnet and minister for drinking water and sanitation Bina Magar.

The seven ministers, belonging to the Prachanda faction, announced their resignation in a joint statement issued during a press conference here.

The Nepali Congress (NC), the main Opposition in Parliament, said that Oli's recommendation to dissolve the House was against the provisions and spirit of the Constitution, and the party will strongly oppose the move. "We have taken this move as Oli's final attempt to fulfil his authoritarian desire," the NC said in a statement issued by party's spokesman Bishwa Prakash Sharma. "It is condemnable to push the country towards instability because of intra-party conflict amidst the Covid-19 pandemic." The party also called the decision "unconstitutional and impulsive", and appealed to President Bhandari to fulfil her role as a guardian of the Constitution by rejecting it.

Spokesperson of the NCP Naryankaji Shrestha termed Oli's move as "undemocratic, anti-constitutional and autocratic". Meanwhile, the NCP's Standing Committee meeting termed Oli's move as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and based on his personal whim", and recommended to take a disciplinary action against the prime minister, Standing Committee member Ganesh Shah told PTI. The recommendation for action will be forwarded to the Central Committee meeting which will be held on Wednesday, he said.

**\$2.6 mn diamond fraud:  
Nirav brother indicted**

**New York, Dec. 20:** Nehal Modi, the younger brother of fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi, has been indicted here for fraudulently obtaining diamonds worth over \$2.6 million from one of the world's biggest diamond companies in Manhattan.

Nehal, 41, is charged in a New York Supreme Court indictment with Grand Larceny in the First Degree, Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance, Jr. said. "While diamonds maybe forever, this flawed scheme was not, and now Modi will face the clarity

of a New York Supreme Court indictment. My Office will not allow individuals who have the privilege of soliciting business in Manhattan's iconic diamond industry to defraud our businesses or consumers," Vance said in a statement on Friday.

Between April and May 2015, Nehal returned to LLD three additional times and took more than \$1 million worth of diamonds for purported sales to Costco. He made a series of payments to LLD, but used majority of the proceeds for personal use and business expenses. — PTI

**Nine killed in car bomb targeting Afghan MP**

**'Terrorist attack' injures women, children: Interior ministry**

**Kabul, Dec. 20:** A car bomb targeting an Afghan lawmaker killed nine people and wounded more than a dozen in Kabul on Sunday, officials said, the latest attack to rock the capital. Kabul has been hit by a wave of deadly violence in recent months despite the Taliban and government engaging in peace talks to end the country's long conflict.

Sunday's bombing targeted parliamentarian Khan Mohammad Wardak who was injured in the attack, officials said.

"Nine people were killed and 20 others were wounded in the car bomb," Interior Minister Masoud Andarabi told reporters, adding that all the casualties were civilians.

The ministry said in a separate statement that women and children were among those wounded by the "terrorist attack".

A security source said the car bomb detonated in the west of the capital.

"It was a powerful explosion that has caused a lot of damage to houses in the vicinity," the source said.

**BIDEN TEAM TO  
FIGHT THREAT  
TO EXISTENCE**

**Washington, Dec. 20:** President-elect Joe Biden on Saturday introduced key members of his environmental team and said his administration would make the fight against global warming a pillar of his drive to rebuild the pandemic-hit US economy.

Biden said these nominees will "lead my Administration's ambitious plan to address an existential threat of our time — climate change."

"Folks, we're in a crisis," Biden said at the event in Wilmington, Delaware. "Just like we need to be a unified nation to respond to Covid-19, we need a unified national response to climate change."

— AFP

**EU-UK trade talks flounder**

**Brussels, Dec. 20:** Deep into a crucial weekend of negotiations, a breakthrough on fishing rights remained elusive for the European Union and Britain, leaving both without a trade agreement that would dull the edge of a chaotic, costly economic break on New Years Day. With hundreds of thousands of jobs at stake throughout the economy, the tiny sector of fisheries continued to drive a wedge between the 27-nation bloc and the UK, highlighting the animosity that drove them to a Brexit divorce over the past four years.

Britain left the bloc in January, but a 11-month economic transition period ends on Dec. 31. "We continue to work hard," EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier said in a statement as light faded over EU headquarters on Sunday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office said Sunday that the EU is "continuing to make demands that are incompatible with our independence. We cannot accept a deal that doesn't leave us in control of our own laws or waters."

It left little hope a full deal could be found before midnight, which the European parliament had set as a deadline if it was to have enough time to vet and approve the deal before New Years. Officials on both sides said positions had hardly moved throughout the weekend of near-continuous talks.

The almost mythical sense of Britain's rights to rule its waves was an essential part of what drove Brexiteers to victory in the 2016 referendum. Johnson is seeking to make sure that as much as possible of the shared British waters are now returned to UK vessels only. The EU has always maintained that those waters have been shared for decades, if not centuries, and insists if too many fishing rights are taken away, it will punish

Britain by imposing hefty import fees to the mainland market, which is essential to the UK seafood industry. The stalemate has left the overall talks inconclusive with businesses on both sides clamoring for a deal that would save tens of millions in costs.

Johnson, though, could not be budged. "We need to get any deal right and based on terms which respect what the British people voted for," his office said. One official from an EU coastal nation said the EU was refusing to yield more than a quarter of the fishing quotas the bloc stands to lose now that Britain is regaining full control of its waters due to Brexit. Britain is also steadfast that a 3-year transition period would be long enough for EU fishermen to adapt to the new rules. — AP

**Tours ended in 2008 after a N. Korean soldier shot dead a tourist**

**N. Korea to redevelop tourist resort**

**Seoul, Dec. 20:** Pyongyang plans to redevelop its flagship Mount Kumgang tourist complex into an international resort, a year after leader Kim Jong Un ordered South Korean-built buildings there demolished, state media reported Sunday.

The resort — once a prominent symbol of inter-Korean economic cooperation — was built by South Korea's Hyundai Asan on one of the North's most scenic mountains, drawing hundreds of thousands of Southern visitors.

The reclusive North has long wanted to resume the lucrative visits, but they would now violate international sanctions imposed on Pyongyang over its nuclear and ballistic weapons programmes — although the South's President Moon Jae-in has long championed engagement with Pyongyang.

in a disaster-stricken area or isolation wards", ordering their removal.

On Sunday, the official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim Tok Hun, the North's premier, stressed "the need to build the tourist area our own way" to turn it into a "cultural resort envied by

the whole world", during his visit to the area.

He also called for pushing ahead to turn the area into a "modern and all-inclusive international tourist" resort, it added.

The Mount Kumgang complex was once one of

the two biggest inter-Korean projects, along with the now-shuttered Kaesong Industrial Complex, where Southern companies employed North Korean workers while paying Pyongyang for their services.

But its tours came to an abrupt end in 2008 after a North Korean soldier shot dead a tourist from the South who strayed off an approved path, and Seoul suspended travel.

The reclusive North has long wanted to resume the lucrative visits, but they would now violate international sanctions imposed on Pyongyang over its nuclear and ballistic weapons programmes — although the South's President Moon Jae-in has long championed engagement with the North.

with the now-shuttered

In June, the North blew up a liaison office with the South on its side of the border — paid for by Seoul — saying it had no interest in talks.

The Kim regime will struggle to find the resources to redevelop Mt. Kumgang and needs outside investment, but is signalling it will downgrade South Korean partners and stakeholders," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"By holding Seoul's hopes for engagement at risk, Kim is pressuring the Moon administration to find ways of resuming financial benefits for the North." — AFP

**Pearl murder key accused cries foul****PAK CANCELS 50 PILOTS' LICENCES**

**Islamabad, Dec. 20:** A lawyer representing the parents of slain US journalist Daniel Pearl has produced a handwritten letter in Pakistan's Supreme Court in which the key accused in the case claimed that he was a "scapegoat" arrested under "US pressure" and the real mastermind was a Karachi-based terrorist.

Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal*, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda. British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheik and his three aides were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of Pearl.

In April, they were exonerated by the Sindh High Court and an appeal against their acquittal is being heard in the Supreme Court. According to a *Express Tribune* report on Sunday, Faisal Siddiqui, counsel for Pearl's parents, has produced the handwritten letter in the Supreme Court in which Sheikh claimed that the real culprit was a militant, Attaur Rehman, from Karachi.

Siddiqui told the apex court that the letter was submitted to the Sindh High Court on July 19, 2019. In the letter, Sheikh claimed that he was a "scapegoat" arrested on the "US pressure" and that the real culprit was Rehman. The letter was produced during a hearing of the appeals against the acquittal of the four accused in the Pearl murder case. A three-judge special bench led by Justice Mushir Alam

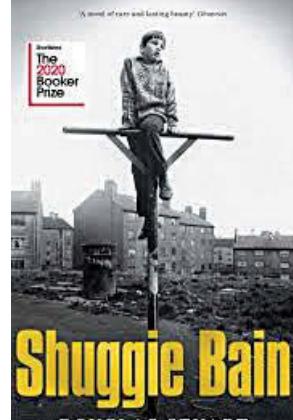
heard the appeals of the Sindh government and Pearl's parents, Ruth and Judie Pearl, against the high court ruling. Siddiqui contended that the bench must consider it. However, the apex court will decide on it on the next date of hearing on January 4, the report said. — PTI

INDIAN TOP 10  
BESTSELLERS

## NON-FICTION

1 A PROMISED LAND  
Barack Obama  
Penguin Viking, ₹1,9992 JUGALBANDI: THE BJP BEFORE MODI  
Vinay Sitapati  
Penguin Viking, ₹7993 JTHE BATTLE OF BELONGING  
Shashi Tharoor  
Aleph, ₹7994 REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION  
Aanchal Malhotra  
HarperCollins, ₹5995 THE COMMONWEALTH OF CRICKET  
Ramachandra Guha  
4th Estate, ₹6996 THE INDIA WAY  
S. Jaishankar  
HarperCollins  
₹6997 JINNAH: HIS SUCCESSES, FAILURES AND ROLE IN HISTORY  
Ishfaaq Ahmed  
Penguin  
₹9998 TILL WE WIN  
Dr Chandrakant Lahariya,  
Dr Gagandeep Kang,  
Dr Randeep Guleria  
Penguin Viking  
₹2999 MY OWN WORDS  
Ruth Bader Ginsburg  
Simon & Schuster, ₹59910 THE BOOK OF INDIAN ESSAYS: TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF ENGLISH PROSE  
Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (Editor)  
Black Kite Press, ₹699

## FICTION

1 SHUGGIE BAIN  
Douglas Stuart  
Picador, ₹4992 THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING  
Marieke Lucas Rijneveld,  
Faber & Faber, ₹4993 HAMNET  
Maggie O' Farrell,  
Tinder Press, ₹6994 HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT  
Jeffrey Archer  
Pan Macmillan, ₹4505 DAYLIGHT  
David Baldacci,  
Pan Macmillan, ₹6506 THE HEART ASKS PLEASURE FIRST  
Karma Ezara Parikh,  
Picador, ₹6997 WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS  
Shauna Singh Baldwin  
Tara- India Research Press, ₹5998 VANISHING HALF  
Brit Bennett  
Dialogue Books, ₹7999 THE ARCHER  
Paulo Coelho,  
Penguin Viking, ₹25010 A TIME FOR MERCY  
John Grisham,  
Hodder & Stoughton  
₹699

## A top cop's gripping diary



Anand K. Sahay

review

Retired senior officials in India have been, on the whole, shy to write about what they saw and did in their work lives. There is always the difficulty about how much to reveal. Social, political, national sensitivities live long and do not necessarily fade away when an officer retires. Then there is the Official Secrets Act. Writing must be careful in the extreme if it's not going to be all puff. So, most don't bother. It is too much trouble even if they could summon the energy once they've been there, done that.

Amod Kanth, among the most remarkable Indian Police Service (IPS) officers of his generation, appears to be a clear exception to the rule. In fact, he has written this book in part to inform the public. He believes, he says, that people ought to know.

This is healthy acknowledgment that in a democracy the apparatus of the state is run in

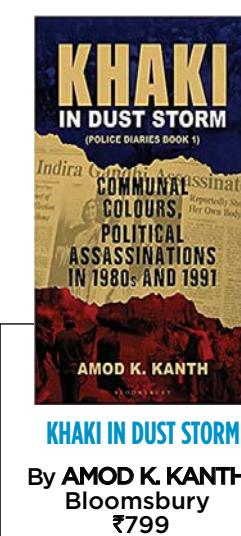
the name of the people, based on tax money they provide, and the burdens they must bear when governance goes haywire, as is frequently the case in this country. In fact, this volume is subtitled "Police Diaries Book 1". So, there is more to follow. In the main, the observations below derive from that expectation.

The heart of the book is gripping. This is not on account of any juicy, lazy gossip about key people but because the book reveals what dedicated police work can do — and no less what it takes to make police work dedicated. This is especially the case in the backdrop of shortage of resources and manpower, to say nothing of political interference. These are given in the Indian situation.

Kanth was the young officer who, first as Deputy Commissioner of Police of the Central District in the Union Territory of Delhi and subsequently as Deputy Commissioner, Crime and Railways, in the national capi-

tal, overcame these handicaps and led the police with courage and distinction. He had his share of luck. He had some great bosses, such as M.B. Kaushal, Vijay Karan and Ved Marwah, whose personality and guidance are unstintingly acknowledged in these pages along with the shining qualities of some individuals who reported to the protagonist in this chronicle.

"May you live in interesting times", is said to be a Chinese curse. The decade of the early 1980s to the early 1990s was just that sort of a time in India, especially in the national capi-

By AMOD K. KANTH  
Bloomsbury  
₹799

tal and the north of the country. The story began with the Khalistan movement in Punjab. This book deals with its blowback which burnt Delhi, leading to one crime wave after another at the vortex of which was the author of the present volume as a young police officer — armed with common sense, integrity and a sense of duty.

When Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her police bodyguards in 1984, medieval era-style mayhem broke out in the nation's capital as this reviewer was witness. Anti-Sikh riots broke out. Thousands were killed. In certain cases, young Sikhs sought to take revenge and this took the form of terrorist actions. Delhi Police was found unequal to the task. It was overwhelmed by the enormity of the tide. It lacked resources, didn't have specialised training, and there weren't enough police. And — it is important to say this — large sections of the police force had turned communal and callous. Thus, in many cases, the victims just burned.

But, in Kanth's neutral telling, in the Central district where he was in charge, the situation was somehow managed better — with boldness and dedication. The way it is told, it is an absorbing story. After the riots came the retribution in the form of terrorism, and

Kanth was the leader for all of Delhi in these investigations and operations, not just for a part of the great and growing city which is medieval and modern in parts all of the time, and for that reason poses special challenges to the administrator and the cop.

High profile assassinations were par for the course in that Delhi, and spraying of bullets by car-borne terrorists killing innocent civilians was something that was known to happen. In the centre of that story stood the author of this book. He has won a gallantry award on the recommendation of the Army (which motivated parties tried to traduce but the judiciary upheld it), and earned kudos. Later, while doing a stint in CBI, he was the head of the investigation in the Special Investigation Team created to crack the mysteries in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. The mission was accomplished in record time.

Some of these tales, based purely on what's presented here, can make a motion picture. But being a special kind of cop is part of Kanth. He has also done pioneering work in the field of child rights for as long as he has done policing. May be, that is another volume. Tidier editing and differently constructed editorial design and conception could have helped sharpen the focus.

## HOW CULTURE FILLIP CAN FAST-FORWARD PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Jaya Bhattacharji Rose  
essay

The creative economy refers to a range of economic activities where value is derived from the generation or exploitation of knowledge and is copyright relevant, such as music, writing, art, fashion, design, and media. Also, a wider range of production activities including goods and services that rely on innovation, research and development such as film, museums, galleries and photography, reside in its ambit.

Unesco survey "Cultural Times" (2015), the first global map of the cultural and creative industries, acknowledges the societal value of arts and culture. It assesses the contribution of cultural and creative industries to economic growth. It estimates that they generate US\$250 billion in revenue a year; creating 29.5 million jobs worldwide.

On March 11, 2020, the United Kingdom's Arts Council announced that the Culture Recovery Fund has marked its £1 billion milestone, with £654 million being invested in arts and cultural organisations, as part of its £1.57 billion support package.

On November 30, Germany approved a culture budget of Euro 2.1 billion (\$2.5 billion), nearly at par with the European Union's budget for culture at 2.8 billion euros, albeit to be distributed over the next seven years.

Over in the United States, of the US \$2 trillion coronavirus stimulus bill announced by its government, approximately \$75 million was for the National Endowment for the Arts.

In South Africa, where seven per cent of the workforce is employed in this sector, 45 per cent informally, the direct contribution to the country's GDP of which is 1.6 per cent, the National Arts Council committed its support to the artistes by continuing to pay them during the pandemic.

In June 2020, under a programme called New Start for Culture, Germany earmarked Euro 1bn for arts. Indeed, in November 2020, under Germany's infec-

tion protection law, culture got a new legal status. It is now no longer classified as entertainment. Hence, cancelling arts events in the pandemic might become difficult in this country.

On March 19, 2020, France, too, did something similar. It modified the rules of the country's specific unemployment scheme for artists and technicians. It announced that artists and authors could benefit with a lump sum from a solidarity fund.

Meanwhile, Italy set aside Euro 130 million for authors and audio-visual content creators.

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In May 2020, Jacinda Ardern, the newly returning Prime Minister of New Zealand, announced a \$175 million pack-

age for "decimated arts" — a "resilience grant". The creative sector contributes nearly \$11 billion a year to NZ's GDP and employs 90,000 people. The New Zealand Libraries Partnership Programme with a funding package of \$58.8 million will support librarians and library services and assist them to support community recovery. Ardern said, "A healthy cultural sector has many positive flow-on effects for other important parts of our economy, such as technical production, hospitality, venues and domestic tourism."

According to World Bank (August 2020 report), in 2013, creative industries around the world generated revenues of over \$2 billion and employed 29 million people. The market for creative goods is estimated to be \$508 billion as of 2015. In 2015, developing economies exported more than 250 billion creative products including design goods, fashion, and films. Top exporters included China, Turkey, India, Mexico, El Salvador and Pakistan. In the United States, the non-profit arts and culture industry generated \$166.3 billion of economic activity in 2015, supporting 4.6 million jobs, while receiving only \$5 billion in arts allocations by the public sector. A phenomenal return on investment at 3.326 per cent!

According to Megha Patnaik's report titled "Measuring India's Creative Economy", May 2020, however, approxi-

mately 1.1 million workers are employed in this sector, contributing 0.58 per cent of the GDP (2016-17). This is less than the international average as measured by WIPO where the mean contribution is 5.48 per cent. But again, in India, this can be partially attributed to the lack of comprehensive data. Patnaik states that with the right growth impetus through policy and markets, the creative economy can create a large share of jobs.

Sanjoy Roy, co-founder, Jaipur Literature Festival, confirms this by estimating that during the six days of the event there are more than 500,000 footfalls and 110,000 unique visitors.

In fact, culture can accelerate socio-economic recovery from the pandemic, as outlined by World Bank and Unesco in its report, "Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery" (2018). The framework, entitled "Cure", offers principles and strategies to apply in city reconstruction and rehabilitation in post-crisis situations.

There are four prominent ways in which culture positively impacts community resilience — by building social cohesion, fostering social and psychological well-being, offering critical tools for expression and community engagement, and finding authentic narratives, perspectives and experiences. These are critical insights that policymakers need to recognise for promoting sustainable and inclusive recovery from the pandemic's effects with full ownership from communities. Investing in creative industries and developing cultural capital is worth exploring for the Indian government.

Jaya Bhattacharji Rose is an international publishing consultant

## FAST FACT

He is one author who lived without the vaccine and died without it. In 1988, then 33-year-old Hervé Guibert was diagnosed with AIDS. From then on, he worked at recording what was left of his life. In 1990, he published *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*. Two more books followed. In 1992, he attempted to end his life just before his 36th birthday, dying weeks later.

## Barack Obama was decidedly a man of action as well as words

Sam Leith

review

Well, it's quite the title, isn't it? It tends to invite comparisons. The first one that occurred to me, though, was that the original Promised Land guy managed to get all the important stuff down on two stone tablets. His would-be successor doesn't have quite that gift for compression. As he semi-apologises in the opening pages, this memoir was originally envisioned as a 500-page A

Promised Land is just north of 700 pages, and there's another volume to come. Whether or not you rate his achievements as highly as he does, to keep company with his elegant prose, complex conscience and unmistakable intelligence is a cool drink of water after four years of the other guy. Did he bring about the other guy? That's something Obama frets about — and though in these pages Trump is a minor comic character, the book describes with dismay the truth-indifferent, competence-optimal rise of what was to metastasise into Trumpism.

A Promised Land is long, in part, because it wants to do two things: to serve the historical record (which means huge passages about the minutiae of passing legislation, complete with hat-tips to obscure staffers and bush-league congressmen); and to offer for the ordinary reader a sense of what it's like, in human terms, to be the 44th President of the United States of America. Plus, it needs to do a lot of the former to explain to his critics on the right why he's not a Marxist revolutionary, and to his disapproval stings him more, why he was not able to right the wrongs of the world in one go. Doing that — in an age of 280-character position statements — means a patient attention to detail.

But, as I say there's a lot of it:

he takes two and a half pages to describe his daily commute down the White House's West Colonnade; complete with picturesque old Black groundsmen (sign of the times: he capitalises Black, as he did not in his first book) who, it occurs to the President, are in a way just like him: "guardians... the quiet priests of a good and solemn order." There is a good bit of what in the past would have been called 'pi-jaw'; and a lot, too, of what these days gets called 'humblebrag'. He does like to namecheck the predecessors he admires, and com-

pare his travails with theirs — Lincoln, JFK, FDR, Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel and Gandhi are among those who get an outing.

Also, schmaltz. Obama salts his narrative with passages of novelistic colour and implausible verbatim dialogue. One of



BARACK OBAMA  
Penguin Random House, ₹1,999

his ticks is to describe himself, at one resonant moment or another, contemplating the scene and having a Deep Thought or a Meaningful Memory.

"As Michelle and I leaned out to wave, the night air brisk on our cheeks, the crowd cheering wildly, I couldn't help but think about the daily fighting that continued to consume Iraq and Afghanistan and all the cruelty and suffering and injustice that my administration had barely even begun to deal with."

Visiting the pyramids in Egypt really sets him off. He contemplates an old graffiti of a jug-eared figure who looks a bit like him: "All of it was forgotten now, none of it mattered, the pharaoh, the slave, and the vandal all long turned to dust." He also, in more prosaic moments, has the Alan Partridge quality ofliking to end sections by quoting his own witticisms and the approving reactions to same ("We both got a good laugh out of that").

But under all that hopey changey stuff, and where the long sections about wrangling policy through Congress really come into their own, is a superbly engaging study in realpolitik. He was famous for his windy rhetoric; but to get

anything done in office required a steely political operator. Obama, the centrist dad's centrist dad, is again and again confronted by the hard arithmetic of the caucus at home, and of tangled interests abroad.

He really shows you how the sausage is made — and his cool, conscientious, covering-all-the-angle pragmatism, more than his optimism, is the real fascination in this book.

He delivers crisp little put-downs, too. Nicolas Sarkozy is a "bantam cock" whose conversation "swooped from flattery to bluster to genuine insight, never straying far from his primary barely disguised interest, which was to be at the centre of the action and take credit for whatever it was that might be worth taking credit for." Putin leads a Russia that "resembled a criminal syndicate as much as a traditional government".

And the man himself? He likes vodka neat, has a weakness for nicotine, loves to play basketball, golf, and spades. He's uxorious, devoted to his kids, introspective and self-questioning. He doodles in meetings. He psyches himself up for rallies by listening to Jay-Z and Eminem. And as a young man he read Marx, Marcuse, Fanon and Foucault — but (he makes clear so as not

to give Jordan Peterson fans an embolism) mainly to impress girls.

And, wow, what a weird world the President lives in: empty motorways wherever you go, "armed Swat teams" filling every staircase, rooftops cluttered up with "Secret Service countersniper teams, clad in black". If you take off for the loo, hulking men in black suits will mutter "Renegade to Secondary Hold" into their cufflinks. Every day starts with a briefing dossier that Michelle calls the "Death, Destruction and Horrible Things Book".

It's plain that Michelle doesn't like any of it all that much. When Barack was originally thinking about running for president, he told her: "You get the final say." Michelle lifted her eyebrows as if to suggest she didn't believe me. "If that's really true, then the answer is no," she said. "I don't want you to run for president, at least not now." Three pages later, he's running for president anyway. "If one of the qualifications of running for the most powerful office in the world was megalomania," he writes, "it appeared I was passing the test."

By arrangement with the Spectator

## The importance of being earnest in a

## quick BITES

| INDICATORS             | %         |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Sensex                 | 46,960.69 |
| Nifty 50               | 13,760.55 |
| S&P 500*               | 3,709.41  |
| Dollar (₹)             | 73.56     |
| Pound Sterling (₹)     | 99.31     |
| Euro (₹)               | 90.10     |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹)       | 49,644.21 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)*  | 52.17     |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield    | 5.959     |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 0.926     |
| IN 10-Yr T-bill yield* | -0.004    |

\*As of 9:30 PM IST

## India, US mutual fund sectors get thumbs up

The mutual fund industry of India and the US received "top" grade for robust disclosure practices in areas such as fees and transparency of fund holdings, according to a global study by Morningstar. However, India could work to improve the level of details provided by fund firms in discussions of performance and risk within fund literature, the Morningstar report said in its sixth edition.

## Foreigners invest ₹54K cr in Indian equities in Dec.



Foreign portfolio investors pumped in ₹54,980 crore in Indian markets in December so far amidst availability of excess liquidity in global markets and expectation of fresh stimulus package by various central banks. As per data, FPIs invested a net ₹48,858 crore into equities and ₹6,122 crore into debt segment between December 1 and 18. This took the total net investment to ₹54,980 crore during this period.

## BoB completes integration of Dena, Vijaya

Bank of Baroda on Sunday said it has completed integration of 3,898 branches of erstwhile Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank with itself. In a first such amalgamation, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank were merged with BoB from April 1, 2019. It has completed the integration of 1,770 erstwhile Dena Bank branches in December 2020, and had completed the integration of 2,128 erstwhile Vijaya Bank branches in Sept. 2020.

## Power usage in India grows in first half of Dec

India's power consumption grew 4.8 per cent to 50.36 billion units (BU) in the first half of December this year, showing consistency in economic activities, as per government data. Power consumption was recorded at 48.04 billion units during December 1-15 last year, according to the power ministry data. For the full month of December 2019, power consumption was 101.08 billion units.

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## RIL, BP to get \$4.06 price cap for KG gas

New Delhi, Dec. 20: Reliance Industries and its partner BP will get only \$4.06 a unit for the new gas they have started to produce from the eastern offshore KG-D6 field even though they have discovered a higher rate in an open market auction, sources said.

Reliance-BP in November 2019 auctioned initial gas from the R-Series field at a biddable percentage of Brent crude oil price.

If Brent crude oil stays in the current range of \$50 to \$51 a barrel, the price comes to \$4.2 to 4.4 per million British thermal unit, two sources at the buyers of R-Series gas said.

Even though operators have pricing freedom, they can't sell gas at a rate higher than the cap the government notifies every six months. The cap for six months to March 31, 2021, is \$4.06 per mmBtu and so Reliance-BP would get only that amount for the remainder of the current fiscal, they said.

Emails sent to Reliance and BP for comments remained unanswered.

The rate discovered in the November 2019 auction at the lower end of the Brent price band is the same as the one that Reliance got in the first



Essar Steel, Adani Group and state-owned GAIL in November 2019 bought the majority of the initial 5 million standard cubic meters per day of gas planned to be produced from R-Series in the KG-D6 block by bidding between 8.5 and 8.6 per cent of dated Brent price.

Reliance got \$4.205 per mmBtu for gas from D1 and D3 and MA fields during April 2019 and March 2014. It would have got double of that rate if a new formula proposed by the Rangarajan committee was approved but the new BJP government scrapped it and brought a new formula on pricing gas at rates prevalent in export surplus nations

five years of production from Dhirubhai-I and 3 and MA fields in the KG-D6 block. These fields ceased to produce a few months back.

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The two firms are investing USD 5 billion in bringing to production three deepwater gas projects in block KG-D6 R-Cluster, Satellites Cluster, and MJ which together are expected to meet about 15 per cent of India's gas demand by 2023. —PTI

such as the US and Russia. The rates came to \$5.05 and are currently at \$1.79 per mmBtu.

Sources said the government in 2016 allowed a higher price for any new gas to be produced from a difficult project such as the deep sea field. R-Cluster field fell in that definition and gas from it was free to be sold but subject to the price cap. The price cap for October 2020 to March 2021 is \$4.06 per mmBtu, down from \$5.61 in the previous six month.

Reliance and BP had on November 18 stated that they have the commencement of natural gas production from Asia's deepest gas project, R-Cluster or R-Series.

The highest number of units identified for the scheme falls in Delhi. Though Delhi has 39 per cent share or 51,594 identified units, it has not signed the MoA for the scheme yet, as per the data available on the website of ministry of housing and urban affairs.

"Several units built under previous housing schemes of the Central government are lying vacant in different cities. The first model aims at utilizing them for the scheme," said Puri.

As per the ministry data, 3,363 identified units — 1,703 in Chandigarh, 830 each in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand — have been allocated. "We are not sure whether these units have been allocated to concessionaires who will

## Ethiopia sets up biz chamber in India

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 20

Ethiopia, a country with long standing trade and commerce relations with India, has become the first African nation to set up a chamber of commerce to strengthen the trade and commerce alliance between both the countries.

Ethiopia is one-third in size to India in area and is the second most populous country in Africa with population of 11.5 crore. India is the third important source of imports for Ethiopia, contributing 10.1 per cent of all of Ethiopia's imports.

Inauguration ceremony was held for the Indo-Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce & Industry in the presence of the ambassador of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in India, Tizita Mulugeta and Demekie Atenu Ambulo, consul general of Ethiopia in Mumbai. "India is one of the top trading partners of Ethiopia and going forward we want to strengthen our ties with leading Indian Business Groups," he said.

"For more understanding of market demand such types of associations will be very helpful for the business community to get familiar with each other's country," said Mukund Mehta, director, Indo-Ethiopian Chamber Of Commerce.



convert them for the scheme or migrants have started occupying the units," said Anuj Puri, chairman of Anarock Property Consultants.

As per the first model of ARHC, concessionaires selected through a bidding process, will repair or retrofit, develop, operate and transfer (RDOT) by converting existing government-funded vacant houses into Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) for a period of 25 years.

"Several units built under previous housing schemes of the Central government are lying vacant in different cities. The first model aims at utilizing them for the scheme," said Puri.

As per the second model, public or private entities can construct, operate and maintain ARHCs on their own vacant land. Under this model, the Ministry had issued an Expression of Interest on October 14. The last date of submission of EOI is January 11, 2021.

## Centre identifies 1.3 lakh housing units for poor

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 20

The government has identified 1.32 lakh government-funded vacant housing units for the Affordable Rental Housing Scheme meant for migrant workers in 21 states. However, all the states, which have such identified units, have not signed Memorandum of Agreement for the scheme.

As per the ministry of housing and urban affairs, 29 states and Union Territories have already signed the MoA (Memorandum of Agreement) for implementation of ARHC. The Centre has also identified 1,32,988 housing units for ARHC in 21 states.

The highest number of units identified for the scheme falls in Delhi. Though Delhi has 39 per cent share or 51,594 identified units, it has not signed the MoA for the scheme yet, as per the data available on the website of ministry of housing and urban affairs.

Though the government has identified units in Jammu and Kashmir, the Union Territory also has not signed the MoA. Among those already signed MoA, Maharashtra has the highest number of units 32,202.

As per the ministry data, 3,363 identified units — 1,703 in Chandigarh, 830 each in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand — have been allocated. "We are not sure whether these units have been allocated to concessionaires who will

## Network restructure increases cyber attacks

New Delhi, Dec 20: The sudden rush to provide remote access to employees by restructuring network and security systems during the lockdown made India vulnerable to ransomware attacks in the third quarter of 2020, according to cyber security firm Check Point Software Technologies.

According to the company's research, India was ranked second after the US among the top 5 countries most affected by ransomware attacks in the third quarter.

Sri Lanka, Russia and

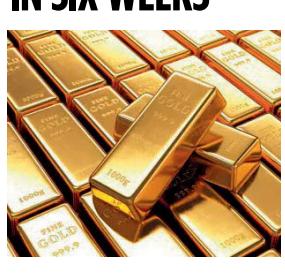
Turkey were at third, fourth and fifth position, respectively, in the list of most affected countries by ransomware attacks.

In a survey by Check Point, 71 per cent of respondents globally, including in India, reported an increase in cyberattacks during February-March 2020, and 95 per cent said they faced added IT security challenges with provision of large-scale remote access for

employees and managing shadow IT usage.

"The pandemic outbreak resulted in lockdown restrictions being imposed, and working from home became a way of life for most employees. Organisations in India found themselves having to restructure their network and security fabrics overnight, compressing several years' worth of IT changes into just a few weeks," he said.

## GOLD DEALERS OFFER DISCOUNTS FOR FIRST TIME IN SIX WEEKS



New Delhi, Dec. 20: Having endured and managed to recover from the disruptions induced by a once-in-a-century event, the Indian auto sector is cautiously looking forward to 2021 with hopes of putting up a better show in the post-Covid-19 world, although a lot will hinge on how the economy grows.

Already battered by an unprecedented slowdown before the coronavirus pandemic, the resilience of the Indian auto industry was tested severely when the nationwide lockdown was announced March-end.

Passenger vehicle sales in India, the barometer of the automobile industry's performance, plunged 78.43 per cent in the April-June period this year hit by the pandemic, declining for the ninth straight quarter and making it the longest slowdown in 20 years.

It is estimated that during the prolonged lockdown, the auto industry is now seeing signs of recovery in some of the industry segments. —PTI

## Auto firms drive ahead with hope

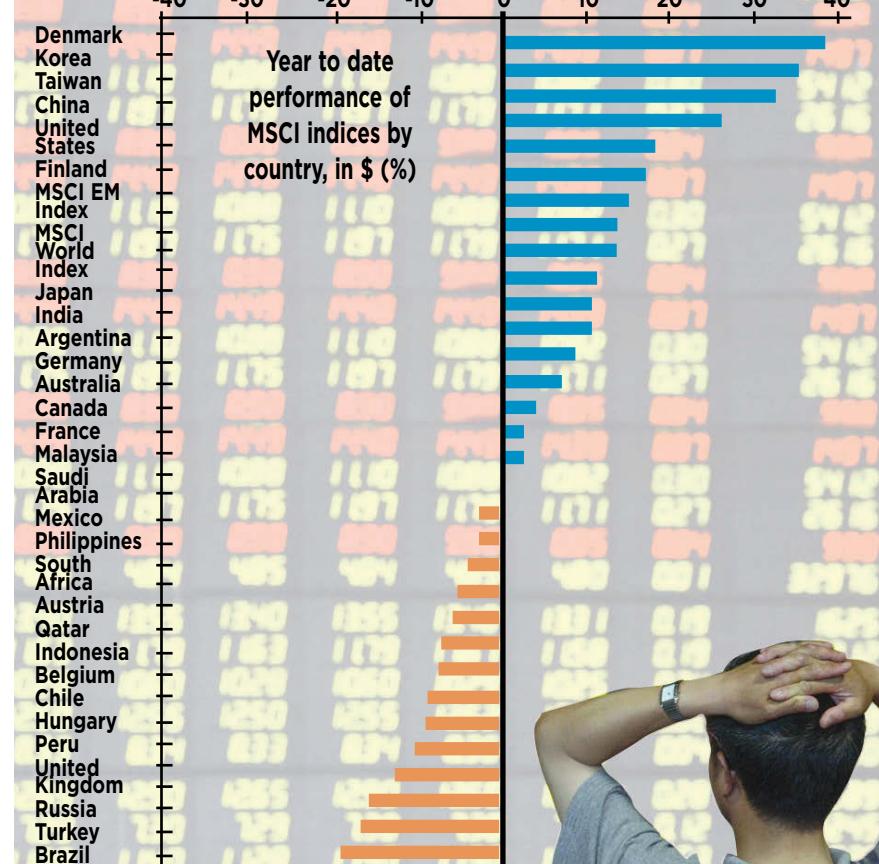
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## GLOBAL STOCK MARKET SCORECARD 2020



## HOME LOAN TICKET SIZE UP TO OVER ₹26 LAKH IN 2020 ON INCENTIVES



New Delhi, Dec. 20: The average home loan ticket size increased to over ₹26 lakh in 2020 despite the pandemic as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, fall in interest rates as well as lower registration costs in some circles evinced customers' interest in buying properties, according to a study by BankBazaar.com.

Due to the pandemic, people's priorities have changed and they are evaluating their spends and investments very closely, the fintech player said.

The online marketplace for financial products, which also provides free credit scores, said even as 2020 had very lean months during the lockdown, gradual economic revival and safe access to credit through digital KYC pushed credit uptake to about 80 per cent of pre-Covid levels.

Change in social and work structure due to the pandemic also convinced investors to look at bigger properties and loans.

"Consequently, the average home loans ticket size saw a strong increase from ₹23.82 lakh in 2019 to ₹26.41 lakh in 2020. The average ticket size for women went up from ₹25.66 lakh to ₹31.20 lakh compared with an increase from ₹23.64 lakh to ₹26.04 lakh for men," the report said. However, the traction was the lowest in high-value segment.

Share of home loans below ₹30 lakh decreased to 68 per cent from 72 per cent a year ago. Demand from non-metros is the biggest driver for recovery, it said. During the year, the biggest home loan of ₹1.46 crore was from Bengaluru, while among non-metros, the highest was ₹64.50 lakh from Lucknow.

## Stainless steel firms seek zero duty on input metals

New Delhi, Dec. 20: Ahead of the Budget, the Indian Stainless Steel Development Association (ISSDA) has urged the government to remove import duty on ferro-nickel and stainless steel scrap.

Currently, ferro-nickel and stainless steel scrap attract basic customs duty

(BCD) of 2.5 per cent.

In its recommendations to the finance ministry for the upcoming Budget for financial year 2021-22, ISSDA has also sought removal of import duty on graphite electrodes.

ISSDA said "it has appealed to exempt the 2.5 per cent BCD levied while

importing key raw materials, including ferro-n

**SHORT TAKES**  
**Gold for Simranjit,**  
**Manisha at WC**

New Delhi: Indian women boxers Simranjit Kaur (60kg) and Manisha Moun (57kg) notched up gold medals with contrasting final wins in the Cologne World Cup in Germany.

Manisha defeated compatriot Sashik Choudhary 3-2, while Simranjit got the better of German Maya Klienhaus 4-1 to finish on top in their respective categories.

India finished the competition at the second spot overall after claiming three gold, two silver and four bronze medals.

On Saturday, Asian Games champion Amit Panghal (52kg) had claimed the sole gold among men. Veteran Satish Kumar (+91kg) had to settle for a silver after an injury forced him to withdraw from the finals.

— Agencies

**BDL cruise to an easy victory**

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Riding on Yeshwanth Reddy's brilliant spell, BDL continued their dominance against R. Dayanand on the final day of their A-1 Division three-day league match. Team Dayanand

looked pale in the second innings before Yeshwanth's three wickets restricted them to a meagre 165 for 9, continuing their poor run in the first innings. Sandeep Goud's superb unbeaten 70 and Hima Teja's 56 ensured the win for BDL.

**A-1 DIVISION (THREE-DAY)**  
■ BDL 292/9 in 90 overs & 213/2 in 40 overs (Sandeep Goud 70 n.o, K. Hima Teja 56 n.o) bt R. Dayanand 160 in 46.5 overs & 165/9 in 40 overs (K. Bhagat Varma 47, R. Yeshwanth Reddy 3/18, P. Shiv Anurag 2/9). Points: BDL 6, R. Dayanand 0.

**Hyderabad suffer first loss of season**

**Vasco:** Vignesh Dakshinamurthy pulled off a stunning goal to set up Mumbai City FC's 2-0 win over Hyderabad FC in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

In a match where both sides struggled to create clear-cut chances, Vignesh's acrobatic 38th-minute strike stood out as a genuine quality moment.

Adam Le Fondre put Sergio Lobera's men further ahead in the 59th minute as Hyderabad tasted their first defeat of the season. The caginess that marked much of the game was evident from the fact that Vignesh's goal was the only shot on target in the first half.

With Hugo Boumous missing yet again, Mumbai City's creative struggles that plagued them in their last match against Jamshedpur, continued on Sunday as well. — PTI

**NZ hammer Pak in second T20**

**Hamilton:** Opener Tim Seifert carried his bat for 84 in an unbroken 129-run partnership with Kane Williamson to steer New Zealand to a nine-wicket win over Pakistan in the second Twenty-20 international Sunday and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Williamson finished 57 not out in his return to the short format as New Zealand overtook Pakistan's total of 163-6 with four balls to spare.

Seifert took his runs from only 63 balls with eight fours and three sixes, unleashing a wide variety of shots on a flat wicket against a Pakistan attack that struggled to find consistently challenging lengths. Williamson was scratchy at first, then became unstoppable, reaching his 12th T20 international half century from 37 balls. — AP

**Brief scores:** Pakistan 163/6 (Hafeez 99\*, Southee 4/21) lost to New Zealand 164/1 (Seifert 84\*, Williamson 57\*).

**Live on TV**

**FOOTBALL**  
English Premier League: Chelsea vs West Ham from 11.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

**WWE**  
Table, Ladders & Chairs: Bouts from 8 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

**UFC**  
UFC Fight Night: Edwards vs Chimaev from 7 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

**Regd. No. H/SD/509/2018-20**  
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# THE FALL GUYS

Saha, Shaw to be benched; Gill, Rahul, Pant in mix for Boxing Day

New Delhi, Dec. 20: Veteran wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha and young opener Prithvi Shaw are unlikely to be picked for the remaining Tests in Australia as India look to ring in wholesale changes after the batting debacle in Adelaide.

It is understood that young Shubman Gill, after a couple of impressive knocks in the warm-up games, is seen as a replacement of Shaw as senior star Rohit Sharma will not be available until the third Test match in Sydney.

With Saha's batting not giving any confidence to the dressing room, the team management will certainly look at Rishabh Pant, who had scored a hundred Down Under during his previous tour, as keeping might not be a factor on pitches with firm and even bounce.

K.L. Rahul and Mohammed Siraj are the two others in fray to enter the playing XI and those would be forced changes due to the absence of skipper Virat Kohli and senior pacer Mohammed Shami, who is out with a fractured wrist.

The 36-year-old Saha could well be running the last lap of his international career as young and feisty Pant is set to be preferred by the team management over the next three Test matches and if he does well, against England, too.

As far as Saha is concerned, his inept batting in SENA countries hasn't gone unnoticed (he doesn't have a half-century there), but former chairman of selectors M.S.K. Prasad said that during his regime, certain plans were chalked out on the Saha-Pant conundrum.

"Look, our committee was clear that Rishabh Pant will be our first choice keeper in places like England and Australia. Only when we are looking at matches in India where you don't need batting after number six most times, you can have a specialist keeper," Prasad said on Sunday.

"I believe Rishabh has worked on his fitness issues during the past month and looked in good touch during the pink ball practice game. So I would agree with the team management if they give Rishabh a go for the next three Tests," Prasad said.

— PTI

## Ponting backs Oz to go for clean sweep

### CA STICKS WITH SYDNEY TEST PLAN DESPITE COVID SURGE

Sydney, Dec. 20: Cricket Australia on Sunday said they were pressing ahead with plans to hold the third Test against India in Sydney despite a growing coronavirus outbreak in the city.

A Covid-19 cluster has risen to 68 cases since it emerged on Thursday.

The Test is due to be held from January 7 and CA

if we do, I think India's going to find it really hard to bounce back and win a game."

India will miss skipper

interim chief Nick Hockley said they were watching the situation closely, with contingency plans in place.

"We have made no changes to our schedule and our preference remains to play the match at the Sydney Cricket Ground," he said as speculation mounted that it would be moved.

Ponting is in favour of giving a chance to dashing wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant and young batter Shubman Gill in Melbourne.

Virat Kohli in the remaining three Tests as he returns home for the birth of his child and Ponting said it will be a

real test for the visitors as they look to pick up the pieces under the captaincy of Ajinkya Rahane.

"We'll learn a lot about them, won't we? With Kohli not being there as well there's almost one to pick them back up after a loss like that," Ponting said.

India will need to find their best playing XI for the Boxing Day Test, especially after the below-par performances of young opener Prithvi Shaw, who made 0 and 4, and wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha.

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— PTI

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— PTI

## Adelaide debacle brought back horrors of summer of '74

Hemant Kenkre  
**Silly Point**

**S**ome incidents trigger memories of past episodes like the first session of the third day of the Adelaide Test did. On a sunny morning, the Australians destroyed the morale of team India in 21.2 overs. Their capitulation for a mere 36 runs in the second innings of the first Test match brought back the horrors of the summer of 1974 when India was bowled out for their (then) lowest Test score of 42 at cricket's Mecca, Lord's.

The two sessions that

under Wadekar, it took a remarkable victory at Lord's (the same venue where India had touched its nadir) in 1983 when Kapil Dev lifted the World Cup. That win, followed by a 2-0 Test series win in and against England in 1986 gave us a sense of pride that India could no longer be considered as bad batsmen.

Before the start of the current Test series, skipper Kohli made a meaningful statement that described his approach as India's premier cricketer. Former Aussie great, Greg Chappell had likened Kohli as the "most Australian non-Australian cricketer of all time."

The Indian skipper, who is known for his plain-spoken acceptance of Chappell's assessment saying his personality and character is a

representation of the new India. One that is ready for and wants to take on challenges and move forward with optimism and positivity.

The one session at Adelaide took Indian cricket back many steps and made it clear that the current team has a long way to go when it came to performing consistently in Test cricket in SENA countries. Yes, the team deserves full credit for the historic series win the last time they visited the Australian shores, but they also need to accept that with three consecutive Test losses — two against New Zealand, earlier this year — there is a steep mountain to be climbed.

In a post-match media face-off, Kohli opined that the situation isn't alarm-

ing, saying, "We can very well sit here and make a mountain out of a molehill." By dismissing the Adelaide debacle as a molehill and asking his fellow batsmen to follow individual plans with stronger intent, Kohli may be addressing a short term issue but is missing the wood for the trees. One accepts that the 36-run surrender can be termed as a molehill considering the Australian bowlers bowled a fabulous line and length that could have caused the best batsmen, across eras, to struggle.

Having bad sessions, trying to survive in difficult conditions with zero support from lady luck is a part of the game called Test cricket. Not a single Indian batsman threw his wicket and each one was done in by deliveries that

were clinical with almost machine-like precision. The unpredictability of Test cricket is such that has confounded the best strategists whose best laid plans have gone awry. The Adelaide Test is a prime example of the uncertainty that makes the longest format even more interesting.

The important issue that team India face from a long term perspective is the lack of consistency of their players when it comes to Test match cricket.

At Adelaide, the Australians (who were facing a 53 run deficit) came back with the intent to win, a characteristic completely missing in the Indian camp, which was sitting pretty. In the past, we have seen India in similar situations when they

have had their opponents on the mat in Test cricket, only to offer their backs and lose matches after being in a commanding position.

Indian fans will be hoping for a better result in the Boxing Day Test match in Melbourne against a ruthless opponent. With three matches to go in the series, acting captain Ajinkya Rahane will have to put on his thinking cap while leading a team without Kohli and an injured Mohammed Shami in the eleven.

Meanwhile, Kohli could well use the time, during his long haul back to India, to look at the big picture and contemplate on what team India needs to do climb over the mountain (and not a molehill) to be known as a great touring team.

## Messi equals Pele's record

Madrid, Dec. 20: Lionel Messi scored his 643rd goal for Barcelona on Saturday to equal Pele's record of goals for a single club as the Spanish giants were held 2-2 by Valencia.

Messi, 33, headed in from Jordi Alba's cross after his first-half penalty was saved to equal the mark set by the Brazilian great for Santos.

"These figures are impressive, we will never have a player so effective at this club," admitted coach Ronald Koeman.

"That's why he is the No.1. What he's done for this club, it is impressive."

But Messi was eventually left frustrated on Saturday as a dogged Valencia forced a draw to leave Barcelona eight points behind leaders Atletico Madrid, who beat Elche 3-1 earlier in the day.

Barcelona started slowly and went a goal behind to Mouctar Diakhaby's unchallenged header from a corner after half an hour.

Antoine Griezmann earned the penalty that led to Messi's record-equaling goal when the France attacker was nudged over by Jose Gaya.

Messi's spot-kick was

saved by Jaume Domenech but the ball rebounded and from Alba's dinked cross, the Argentine forward headed the ball into the net to draw level with Pele.

Barcelona went ahead thanks to a superb scissor kick from Uruguay's Ronald Araujo.

But Valencia's pressure was rewarded when Maxi Gomez got in front of Oscar Minguez to turn in a cross and equalise.

Philippe Coutinho drove a shot just wide with 12 minutes remaining and Messi curled a free-kick wide but Barcelona were forced to share the points.

Luis Suarez scored twice from close range in a 3-1 victory for Atletico to move Diego Simeone's side three points clear at the top.

In a tight first half at the Wanda Metropolitano, Atletico wasted a clear chance to take the lead when France forward Thomas Lemar drove the ball straight at Elche keeper Edgar Badia as the defence opened up.

Also, Real Sociedad stay second but remain three points behind after giving up a one-goal lead to Levante. — AFP

## Physical education pioneers honoured

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

The International Federation of Physical Education, Fitness and Sports Science Association, Hyderabad, in collaboration with Indian Federation of Computer Science in sports conducted the IFPEFSSA International Virtual Award Ceremony at Nizam College on Sunday.

Various professors in Physical Education and Sports Science were honoured at the event.

The International webinar on Sprints and IPFESSA awards was inaugurated by athletics coach N. Ramesh, a Dronacharya awardee, and Prof. L. B. Laxmi Kanth Rathod, Principal, Nizam College.

Y. Emmanuel S. Kumar — former national level athlete, captain of the state handball team that won the national championship, selector, Amateur Athletics Federation of India official and an administrator was among the awardees.

He also has a collective



Y. Emmanuel S. Kumar (centre) receives the IFPEFSSA International Sports Leadership Award from Nizam College Principal Prof. L. B. Laxmi Kanth Rathod (second from left) in Hyderabad on Sunday.