

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | MONDAY | 28 DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 31.0°C
Min: 16.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy.
Max/Min temp.
31/16 °C

2-DAY VACCINE DRY RUN STARTS FROM TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

With the Covid-19 dry run programme scheduled for Monday, Krishna district collector A. Md Imtiaz inspected the arrangements at the government general hospital (GGH) on Sunday. Imtiaz said the two-day vaccination dry run will take-off in five centres in the district, including the GGH, and each centre has five vaccination officers.

■ Full report on Page 3

25 ILL AFTER DRINKING ILLICIT BREW IN PALASA

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, DEC. 27

At least 20 persons fell ill, and two of them were in a serious condition, after consuming illicit country liquor in Sirimamidi village under Sompeta mandal in Srikakulam late Saturday. The police said they had consumed country-made liquor after attending a villager's cremation and they start vomiting immediately.

■ Full report on Page 3

NATION | 4

Rahul away for few weeks abroad: Cong

deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle

Merit twist: AP students enter Gandhi

Local students deprived chance to join top-ranked institutes

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Several students from Andhra Pradesh have secured admission in government medical colleges in Telangana state, including the prestigious Gandhi and Osmania, allegedly in violation of rules, thereby depriving local students of an opportunity to join these top-ranked institutions.

The allotment process adopted by the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences (KNRUHS) in Phase 2 counselling resulted in at least 40 students from AP, a majority of whom are oth-

● THE ALLOTMENT process adopted by the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences (KNRUHS) in Phase 2 counselling resulted in at least 40 students from AP, making it to govt colleges in TS

erwise ineligible, making it to the government colleges in Telangana state and locals losing an equal number of seats.

The process also virtually converted the "unreserved category", in which meritorious students compete for the seat irrespective of their local status, caste or religion, into a

"reserved" category for non-local students.

All the students in Gandhi and Osmania medical colleges who got admission in the unreserved category in the Phase 2 counselling belong to either Andhra University or Sri Venkateswara University regions and same is the case with many other government colleges in TS.

Significantly, the NTR University of Health Sciences (NTRUHS), AP, which initially followed the same procedure as KNRUHS, cancelled allotments of Phase-2 counselling stating that it was faulty. It claimed to have rectified the error and

made fresh allotments in a different procedure.

What is intriguing is that the Kaloji University also cancelled Phase 2 counselling citing technical reasons. Except for including two students in Phase 2 counselling following High Court orders, it stuck to the old procedure.

"Both universities cannot be right because the procedures they followed are completely opposite," said Dr Ala Venkateswarlu of Guntur, who complained against the faulty procedure in AP and got it rectified.

■ Page 2: Kaloji varsity failed to follow sliding rule

ELECTION | MODE

Home ministry fears largescale poll violence

Centre may start WB poll work in Jan

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC 27

The Union home ministry could approach the Election Commission as early as January for a discussion regarding the security arrangements and deployment of Central para-military forces for West Bengal Assembly election. The election in the state is likely to be held in April next year.

Sources claim the home ministry feels that there could be large-scale violence during the Bengal polls this time for which "unprecedented security arrangements are required." With the BJP making aggressive inroads into Bengal before the crucial elections, it is largely believed that there could be intense violence in the run-up to the Assembly polls for which adequate

security deployment would have to be done.

Already Bengal has witnessed clashes between the BJP and the Trinamul Congress workers, with the latest incident of violence being the attack on the convoy of BJP president J.P. Nadda on the outskirts of Kolkata a few days ago. Even though formal discussions are yet to begin between the Home Ministry and the EC for

the security deployment, Centre has already started making advance preparation for the same.

Sources claim that according to the initial assessment, anything between 800 to 1000 companies of central para-military forces could be deployed during the Bengal elections.

Each company of central forces comprises 100 to 135 personnel.

STUDENTS CAN PICK OPTIONS IN AP EAMCET FROM TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

The long-awaited option entry for admissions into engineering courses through AP Eamcet 2020 will be conducted from Monday, December 28, to Wednesday, December 30. Aspirants can change their option on January 1 and allotments of colleges will be announced on January 3.

As many as 25 helpline centres have been started to help Eamcet qualifiers resolve the difficulties they may face during option registration.

Eamcet convener has said that eligible candidates, who have participated in web counselling process of Eamcet, comprising payment of processing fee and certificate verification from October 23 to November 3 for admission into BE / B Tech / Pharmacy courses will be able to exercise their options.

Further, the verification of certificates belonging to candidates, who got eligibility status in the web portal as "not eligible", will also be conducted along with option entry.

■ Page 2: Allotment results on January 3

SPORTS | 8

India ride on captain Ajinkya's century



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CM to give house site pattas today

Jagan to address public meet

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 27

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will distribute house site pattas for eligible beneficiaries under the 'Pedalandariki Illu' scheme at Urundur village in Srikalahasti constituency on Monday.

According to officials, after distributing house site pattas to a few women beneficiaries, the Chief Minister will address a public meeting. Prior to that, he will interact with beneficiaries and inaugurate a pylon and a model house built under the scheme.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayan Swamy, along with Panchayat Raj Minister Peddreddy Ramachandra Reddy, advisor of CM visit Thalaseela Raghuram, Chittoor MP Reddeppa and MLAs B. Madhusudhan Reddy and Nawaz Basha and Collector Narayan Bharat Gupta visited the public meeting venue

to oversee the arrangements on Sunday.

The ministers also held a review meeting with officials from police, health, electricity, rural water supply, roads and buildings, MEPMA, transport, panchayat and other line departments on the arrangements for the CM's visit. They directed officials to make foolproof arrangements for the people and ensuring drinking water supply and good sanitation facilities.

District Collector Narayan Bharata Gupta informed that around 3,760.37 acres of land, including 1,903.90 acres of government land and 1,856.47 acres of DKT/patta land, was procured across to form 1,267 housing layouts under YSR free house sites distribution scheme. A total of 2.46 lakh people will benefit from the scheme. Elaborate security arrangements were in place at the venue by the urban police wing led by SP Avula Ramesh Reddy.

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SHORT TAKES

LAND GRABBING ROW BETWEEN TD, YSRC HEATS UP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 27

High drama prevailed at the well-known Saibaba Temple on Beach Road in Visakhapatnam on Sunday morning when Anakapalle MLA Gudivada Amaranth and a large number of YSRC workers waited for TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu to swear on Baba and announce that he never grabbed an inch of government land.

After waiting for an hour, Amarnath and his followers left the temple premises declaring that by not presenting himself, the TD MLA has accepted his guilt of grabbing government land.

Allegations and counter allegations have been exchanged after revenue and GVMC personnel got vacated the 290 square yard government land at a prime locality near Rushikonda and 40 acres of land in Mudasarlova, opposite to Central Jail and abutting BRTS road.

The day Rushikonda land was freed, Rajya Sabha member V. Vijay Sai Reddy released a list of government lands grabbed by TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna and named his benamis. Reacting to this list, Velagapudi said he was ready to swear on God that he did not grab any government land and challenged Vijay Sai Reddy to do same.

"Vijay Sai Reddy is too big a man for Velagapudi. Hence, we have come to Saibaba Temple and waited for him for hours with all evidence of his land grabbing," Mr Amarnath told reporters. He maintained that government has enough evidence to nail the TD Urban MLA. The SIT report would further strengthen the case against Velagapudi, sufficient enough for sending him to jail.

"Velagapudi will go to jail. It is a certainty," Anakapalle MLA declared before reporters.

Earlier, a huge rally was taken out from YSR statue at Park Hotel junction to Saibaba Temple in East Point Colony led by Amarnath. Ruling party workers raised slogans against Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu.

Police personnel were deployed to prevent any untoward incident.

PATRUDU: JAGAN IS BETRAYING PENSIONERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

Senior Telugu Desam leader Ch. Ayyana Patrudu on Sunday wondered how the YSR Congress government could claim credit over people's welfare when it could not fulfil its avowed ₹3,000 pension promise.

He accused Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy of betraying even grannies and granddads by not increasing their pensions, which was an electoral promise he had made last year. He pointed out that the Chief Minister made the people believe in his promises by saying that they were as sacred as the Bible, Quran, and Bhagavad Gita.

YSRC CHEATING FARMERS, SAYS BJP AP CHIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

BJP AP president Somu Veeraj, who has been addressing meetings in support of the three farm laws passed by the Centre, said many people are turning to agriculture and are taking up organic farming.

Addressing a Farmers' Empowerment Meet organised by the BJP at Pedavallapudi in Guntur district on Sunday in support of the new agricultural laws, Mr Veeraj maintained that both YSRC and TD had supported these legislations but have now joined hands with Congress and Communists against the laws.

The BJP state chief pointed out that the central ACT clearly mentions that there will be agreements with farmers on crops to be grown and harvested. While the farmer's land will remain safe, payments will be made as per the agreement, which will be helpful for the farming community. He said the debate over these laws had been going on for two decades. Only after many discussions and exchange of ideas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought in these laws. He suggested that farmers should make themselves aware about organic farming practices.

God promise



Anapalle MLA Gudivada Amarnath along with YSRC leaders and party activists offer prayers at East Point Shirdi Sai Baba Temple while they protest against Vizag-east MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu at East Point Colony in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

Revamped AP state schools pose a threat to pvt schools

Jagan saw first-hand the sorry plight of students studying in govt schools

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

The year 2020 was boon for government schools across all in 13 districts in the State as they were able to get a vibrant new look.

There was a near-complete revamp of schools with all necessary infrastructure and ambience put in place and making them on par or even better than private institutions.

In the first phase, 15,715 government schools were refurbished with all basic amenities like fans, blackboards, water purifiers, cupboards and other infrastructure under Mana Badi Nadu-Nedu. Further, converting anganwadis into English medium pre-primary 1 and 2 will strengthen government education segment.

Rolling out welfare schemes has been part of the quest for a better tomorrow to the people and their children. Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, during his walkathon, saw first-hand the sorry plight of students studying in government schools and the inability of parents to send their wards to private institutions resulting in a yawning gap in standards and outlook of students vis-a-vis schools they go to.

Bringing in a new order, the Chief Minister has initiated a slew of measures and 'Mana Badi-Nadu Nedu' is aimed at revamping and rebuilding government education institutions and anganwadi centres.

The conventional assumption that government schools lack of basic amenities underwent a sea-change in 2020, thanks

to Mana Badi Nadu-Nedu programme. The determined approach saw schools boasting of toilets with running water facility, electricity with fans and lights, drinking water, furniture for teachers and students, painting of buildings, major/minor repairs, green boards, English labs, compound walls and kitchen sheds.

For instance, the 82-year-old primary government school at Kolavennu in Kankipadu mandal was totally neglected for decades. Now it has been transformed into an iconic school under Mana Badi Nadu Nedu programme and is drawing the attention of parents, who are keen on enrolling their children.

In the first phase, 15,715 government schools were renovated and they bear the appearance of corporate schools. The remaining 31,073 will be taken up for revamp in the second and third phases and schools will be decked up by March 2022. Anganwadi centres doubling up as pre-primary 1 and 2 will also get a facelift.

Two parents D. Syam and T. Sudarshan said that corona had thrown life asunder by creating a huge financial crisis. They said that they were worried about the expenditure they had to incur on their children due to corona impact but modernisation of government schools has come as a ray of hope and now they were enthusiastic about sending their wards to a government school as they were assured of quality education free of cost.

Minister for education, Audimulapu Suresh said

2020, a shot in the arm for education, welfare

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

The academic year in 2020 was impacted adversely by corona, but that did not stop rolling out education-related welfare schemes as originally scheduled.

Introducing English medium right from the primary level has been overwhelmingly welcomed by parents' committees putting to shade the disgruntled elements. This step will provide a level-playing field for students across the spectrum. Under 'Jagananna Vidya Kanuka', school kits were provided to children up to Class X. The kits containing uniforms, books, shoes, socks, belt and a school bag were given to 42.3 lakh students at a cost of ₹650 crore.

As education is the only asset that can be offered to lakhs of students from downtrodden families, Jagananna Vidya Deevena was launched so that the total fees reimbursement move would benefit 14 lakh college-going students and overall ₹4,000 crore was credited into the bank accounts of the students' mothers besides ₹1,880 crore towards pending dues.

"Jagananna Vasathi

• The one-year reading fluency campaign takes place in four phases, preparatory, foundation, advanced and valedictory, to develop the reading habits of children from Standard three to nine.

Deevena" takes care of hostel and mess charges payable up to ₹20,000 per student annually. The scheme costs ₹2,300 crore and benefits 11 lakh students, approximately. Under Jagananna Gorumudda, nutritious food will be given to 40 lakh students in 45,484 government and aided schools. Wages for those cooking and providing midday meals were increased from ₹1,000 to ₹3,000 to garnish the meal for a spiced up taste.

The State is to start 30 skill development centres along with a high-end IT Skill University in Visakhapatnam. Each parliamentary constituency will have one such centre and four units will be set up in collaboration with the four IIITs while one will be attached to Pulivendula JNTU.

The IT Skill University will cater to Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics

and other modern courses with a thrust on job-orientation. With regard to developing and designing the curriculum, the State government has partnered four international institutes-Singapore Polytechnic, Van Hall Larenstein (University of Applied Studies), GIZ and Department for International Development for setting up lab infrastructure in skill development in all centres.

Towards this end, 23 reputed organisations, including Dell, Tata, HP, IBM and Biocon, have come forward for signing MoUs with the government and discussions are on with 35 other companies.

On multiple occasions, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has emphasised on stress-free education and focus on building a healthy learning environment. He also laid focus on inculcating the habit of reading towards which a 'We Love Reading' campaign was launched.

The one-year reading fluency campaign takes place in four phases, preparatory, foundation, advanced and valedictory, to develop the reading habits of children from Standard three to nine.

ern centres of excellence once they are through with the three phases of Nadu-Nedu.

that the government is providing amenities and modern equipment in the State schools that are on

par with private schools. He said that all government schools would be converted into ultra-modern

TRUST | DEFICIT 99% of the plants do not have any certification from authorities

Untested water being sold in Kadapa

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, DEC. 27

Water is an important part of our life. But with water pollution rising, it is difficult to trust the water available for drinking today.

With rising health awareness among people, most choose only filtered water, which is supplied by water plants. But they don't know how safe it is. There are more than 1,600 water purifying plants in Kadapa district. In Kadapa town itself, there are 150 to 200 plants supplying drinking water to its 4.10 lakh population.

Interestingly there is no supervision of these plants and 99 per cent of these plants do not have

any certification from authorised agencies.

As per BIS standards, packaged drinking water means packaged water derived from any source of potable water, which may be subjected to treatments, such as, decantation, filtration, combination of filtrations, aeration, filtration with membrane filter, depth filter, cartridge filter, activated carbon filtration, water demineralisation, re-mineralisation, reverse osmosis or any other method that meets the prescribed standards. However, most of the water plants in Kadapa district do not have required machinery for filtration.

Nearly 99 per cent of water plant operators do

not follow any regulations. Water taken from boreholes is being supplied to the people without filtering it. Owners of water plants in Kadapa charge ₹10 for a 25-litre can.

During the Telugu Desam regime, it had been decided to provide free filtered water to people under the NTR Sujala Sravanti scheme. For the purpose, permission was given to start plants everywhere. Several water plants got started under the name of various foundations. Most of these plants operated without any filtering equipment. Interestingly, even the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) officials do not bother about quality maintenance

Kaloji university failed to follow sliding rule

FROM PAGE 1

"The only difference between the two procedures is that local students of Telangana state were deprived of seats because of the Kaloji University procedure," he added.

Earlier, he filed a public interest litigation (PIL) and succeeded in getting in the AP government to implement the rule of reservation in sliding as per Supreme Court judgments.

As per the admission rules, 15 per cent seats in each college are declared "unreserved" and the remaining 85 per cent are reserved exclusively for local students. The Phase 1 counselling was held strictly by this procedure in both states. But, when a vacancy arises in the "unreserved" quota during Phase 2 counselling, a student who has already got a seat in Telangana state under the "local quota" should be pushed up into the "unreserved" quota if she is more meritorious than the student from AU or SVU regions. In such case, there will be a vacancy in the "local quota" which can be filled with another Telangana state student. But, the KNRUHS authorities retained the

• As per the admission rules, 15 per cent seats in each college are declared "unreserved" and the remaining 85 per cent are reserved exclusively for local students. The Phase 1 counselling was held strictly by this procedure in both states.

TS local student in the local category and filled the vacancy in the "unreserved" category with non-local students. As a result, not only could ineligible non-local students secure admission in the "unreserved" quota but also local students were deprived of the seats.

When contacted, KNRUHS registrar Dr Praveen initially tried to justify the decision saying that students from other states did not join and hence those vacancies would be filled by local students in the Phase 3 counselling. Asked what if they did join the college, he said that the admission committee members would be able to better explain the procedure followed by the university. He assured this reporter that a member of the admission committee would call and clarify but none approached till the report was filed.

Eamcet allotment results on January 3

FROM PAGE 1

In addition, candidates, who have not attended counselling earlier under special category, can attend certificates' verification programme being organised on December 29 only at Government Polytechnic, Vijayawada. Eamcet rank holders from 1 to 60,000 can avail option entry on December 28 and 29. Rank holders from 60,001 to last rank can register their options on December 30 and 31. Exercising of fresh options / change of options from rank 1 to last rank will be allowed on January 1. Allotment of seats will be displayed on the website after 6 pm on January 3.

Certificate verification of candidates, who have paid processing fee, but were not eligible / obtained ranks recently but not verified online, candidates whose data is incomplete, will be held on December 29 for special category (PH, NCC, CAP, Sports and Games) from rank 1 to the last rank only at Government Polytechnic, Vijayawada.

Verification of certificates belonging to candidates of general category from rank 1 to last rank will be held at all helpline centres from December 28 to 31, except Government Polytechnic, Vijayawada. For any help, such as change in mobile number, non-receipt of login ID, registration number or any other corrections, candidates are requested to approach the nearest helpline centre with valid proof.

Candidates can change their option already exercised on January 1, with options being frozen at 6 p.m. on the same day. Allotments will be placed on the website on January 3 after 6 p.m. In case of One-Time Password (OTP) problems, candidates can change their mobile numbers by visiting the nearest helpline centre by producing proof of their identity. After changing the mobile number, candidates can exercise options as per schedule. Detailed instructions for options entry – Instructions to Candidates – are available on <https://apeamcet.nic.in>.

List of Helpline Centres include:

1. Government Polytechnic, Srikakulam
2. MRAGR Government Polytechnic, Vizianagaram
3. Government Polytechnic, Parvathipuram, Vizianagaram district
4. Government Polytechnic, Kancharapalem, Visakhapatnam
5. Government Institute of Chemical Engineering, Visakhapatnam
6. Government Model Residential Polytechnic, Paderu, Visakhapatnam
7. Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Kakinada

Helpline numbers: 8106876345, 8106575234, 7995865456, 7995681678.

COVID-19
COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+18,712)	(+248)
1,02,07,065	1,47,907
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+472)	(+2)
TS: 2,84,863	1,531
(+349)	(+2)
AP: 8,81,061	7,094

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

8,09,26,235
DEATHS
17,68,844
COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
218
worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Chaturdasi full day
Star: Rohini till 3.35 pm
Varjyam: 6.49 am to 8.34 am; 9.38 pm to 11.21 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.39 pm to 1.23 pm; 2.51 pm to 3.34 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
HILARI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 12, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 6.00 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.45 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.43 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 4.16 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 5.41 AM

COUNTER POINT



Shh! They are political infiltrators!

OTHER STORIES

NEW CHARIOT GETS READY FOR ANTARVEDI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC. 27

The new chariot for Lord Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple at Antarvedi of East Godavari district got ready. The old chariot was gutted in September. The government had taken steps for making new chariot for the temple.

BC welfare minister Chelluboyina Venugopalakrishna, Razola MLA Rapaka Vara Prasada Rao and collector D. Muralidhar Reddy visited the temple on Sunday. Mr Venugopalakrishna said that the old chariot was gutted on September 5. The government sanctioned ₹90 lakh for making a new chariot. He said that the Endowment Department has announced that the new chariot will be ready by Dec. 30.

No new strain found in UK returnees so far

Sample of Covid positive returnee sent for further tests

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, DEC. 27

A returnee from UK to Nellore tested positive only in RT-PCR test and more tests are under way, district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu has clarified. The same sample has been sent for further investigation to ascertain whether any new strain is involved as was reported in the UK and some other countries.

“The symptoms of the patient are no different from those of general Covid patients, the collector said, quoting the senior medical officers treating him at the GGH in Nellore.

Only the mother of the 35-year-old infected man was tested positive while the other family members tested negative.

“The woman is also asymptomatic and there is no cause for worry,” the collector said.

He said 55 persons returned to Nellore district from UK in the last 14 days and RT-PCR tests were conducted on all these. Tests are in progress for the 244 primary and secondary contacts of these returnees. Among them, only a 35-year-old man was tested positive so far and he was kept under observation at GGH in Nellore though he was asymptomatic.

Meanwhile, Nellore district administration has arranged a 24-hour help desk to screen and guide the passengers bound for Andhra Pradesh from the UK, at the International Airport in Chennai from

349 new Corona cases, new strain reports not yet received

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

As many as 349 new Covid-19 positive cases in the past 24 hours registered on Sunday in AP state. Only two deaths, one each Guntur and Krishna districts registered and the total deaths increased to 7,095 in AP.

Total Corona cases increased to 8,81,061 and 422 patients were recovered from the disease on Sunday which increased the total number of recoveries to 8,70,342.

As many as 46,386 samples were tested in the past 24 hours and total samples reached 1,16,20,503 in the State.

The Chittoor district reported the highest single-day tally of infections

- AS MANY as 1,162 UK returnees are in quarantine.
- THE TEST results from NIV Pune and CCMB not yet received to verify if new strain or not.

among districts with 105 new infections. It was followed by 67 new Corona positive cases in Krishna district, 34 in Guntur, 31 in Anantapur, 28 in Visakhapatnam, 27 in East Godavari, 17 in Kadapa, 11 in Nellore, 8 each in Prakasam and Srikakulam, 3 in West Godavari and no new positive cases were registered on Sunday in Vizianagaram district.

The Covid-19 positivity rate is 7.58 per cent in AP and 2,17,612 Corona tests were conducted in the State per million.

Meanwhile, regarding the UK returnees, the officials informed that total returnees are 1,216 till date in which traced returnees were 1,187 and 29 yet to be traced.

As many as six UK returnees were positive in which one each belongs to East Godavari, Krishna, Anantapur and Nellore districts and two belong to Guntur district.

As many as 1,162 UK returnees are in quarantine.

The test results from NIV Pune and CCMB not yet received to verify if new strain or not.

Chennai,” he said.

Returnees from the UK are being told to remain in home quarantine for two weeks even if they are tested negative and their address details are forwarded to the respective districts for field surveillance.

All flights from UK to India were cancelled two days back. Yet the help desk is operational since some passengers from the UK had landed in other airports and coming to Chennai through domestic flights to reach their hometowns in AP.

- Sample of Covid Positive UK returnee sent for tests

- 55 UK returnees and their 244 primary and secondary contacts are being screened

- A 35-year-old man is asymptomatic and only his mother is tested positive

December 24.

“We have posted six medical officers to work in three shifts at the desk to counsel and screen the

passengers coming from the UK apart from arranging tests if necessary, through a tie up with the local labs in

Crimes reduced by 12% in Vijayawada in 2020

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

In a significant development the crime rate in Vijayawada decreased by 12 per cent in 2020. Crime cases decreased to 15 per cent compared with 2018 and by 12 per cent against 2019 while crime against women decreased by 11.9 per cent.

Vijayawada Police Commissioner B. Srinivasulu presented the annual crime report of Vijayawada city on Sunday.

Later, addressing media persons, the commissioner said that 2020 passed without any major law and order incidents and also on the property front. He said that the major issue that the public encountered in the year was Covid-19 and Vijayawada City Police have done a commendable job in coordination with the front-line warriors.

Mr Srinivasulu said that regarding reported cases, when compared with 2019, at 766 it is 12.05 per cent lower. He

said that during 2020, the percentage of detection of property crime is 69.7 per cent under which the total property lost is valued at ₹12,16,93,226 while the recovery was ₹9,58,62,724, which is 78.77 per cent.

In cybercrime, cash worth ₹3,48,04,295 was lost and ₹1,26,85,901 was recovered which is 36.45 per cent.

In crime against women, the percentage of reduction of cases when compared to 2019 was 11.97 per cent.

Mr Srinivasulu said that the first-of-its-kind Court Monitoring System (CMS) was established in Vijayawada City Police Commissionerate in 2004. After the introduction of the system, there was a quantum jump in the quality of police performance, which resulted in the overall improvement in conviction percentage. In 2019, the conviction percentage was 50 per cent while it was 55 per cent this year.

Meanwhile, the gang wars culture that van-

ished decades back, made a comeback in 2020. As many as 10 rowdy-sheets were excommunicated from the city during 2020. Further 79 new rowdy sheets, six DC sheets, 26 KD sheets and 233 suspect sheets were opened in the year, he said.

On the ganja cases front, 75 cases were booked, 4,135 kgs of ganja and 44 vehicles were seized and 166 persons were arrested and NDPS Act cases were filed against the accused. The total worth of the banned substance that was seized was ₹1.60 crore. A total of 160 gutka cases were booked, 226 persons arrested, cash to the tune of ₹6.30 lakh was seized apart from 19 vehicles. The overall worth of the seized material was put at ₹2.08 crore. 1,231 cases were booked for liquor smuggling, 2,435 accused were arrested and 1,02,957 liquor bottles worth ₹4.35 crore the first-of-its-kind.

Road accidents killed 264 in 2020.



TTD additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy offers laminated portrait of Sri Venkateshwara and prasadam to SC Judge, Justice V. Ramasubramanian inside Tirumala temple on Sunday. — DC

SC judge and CJ of AP HC offer prayers at Tirumala

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 27

Supreme Court Judge, Justice V. Ramasubramanian and Chief Justice of AP High Court, Justice Jitendra Kumar Maheswari along with their family members had darshan of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala temple on Sunday.

The Supreme court Judge and AP High Court CJ arrived at the temple sepa-

rately. On their arrival at the temple at two different timings, TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy and additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy received both the dignitaries and took them for Srivari darshan.

After the darshan, the Supreme Court Judge and Chief Justice of AP HC were rendered with Vedasirvachanam by a team of TTD Vedic pundits inside Ranganayakula

mandapam. The Additional EO offered theertha prasadam and portrait of Sri Venkateshwara to both the dignitaries.

Meanwhile, Chief Justice of Telangana HC Justice Raghavendra Chauhan on Sunday called on TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy at Tirumala. The TTD chairman, who extended a warm welcome to the Chief Justice, felicitated him with shawl.

20 ILL AFTER DRINKING ILLICIT BREW IN PALASA

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, DEC. 27

At least 20 persons fell ill, and two of them were in a serious condition, after consuming illicit country liquor in Sirimamidi village under Sompeta mandal in Srikakulam district late on Saturday evening.

The local police said one Gorakala Rama Rao, 68, died of kidney ailment on Saturday. The villagers accompanied the body to the cremation ground and 20 of them consumed country-made liquor after the body was cremated. They immediately started vomiting and complained of dizziness, stomach and headache and taken to a community hospital. The doctors discharged 18 persons after first aid but two of them, Karagi Papa Rao, 51, and Karagi Rudrayya, 56, to RIMS government hospital in Srikakulam after their condition became serious. On the orders of collector J. Niwas they were admitted into KIMS Hospital for better treatment.

Itchapuram MLA Dr Bendalam Ashok Babu and senior police and excise officials visited the village and asked the people to control the flow of illicit brew in the villages.

- The local police said one Gorakala Rama Rao, 68, died of kidney ailment on Saturday. The villagers accompanied the body to the cremation ground

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL DEC. 27

Srisailem temple issue continued to simmer with Goshamahal MLA, Raja Singh, stepping up allegations against Silpa Chakrapani Reddy by charging that around 300 cows from the goshala were killed.

Razaq, the contractor, in the eye of the storm, says they are human beings and have the right to stay in Srisailem. BJP Atmakur leader Buddha Rajasekhara Reddy said Chakrapani Reddy has been controlling shops and other commercial

places in Srisailem with his henchmen.

Srisailem Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swami temple executive officer K.S. Rama Rao said 11 temple employees have been shifted to other departments to assuage the feelings of Hindus.

Sai Kumari, in-charge of the goshala, has been transferred to the donations procurement wing.

Raja Singh alleged that her husband Razaq has cornered major revenue-generating activities in the temple town and she was helping her husband in his nefarious activities.

2-DAY VACCINE DRY RUN STARTS FROM TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

With the Covid-19 dry run programme scheduled for Monday, Krishna district collector A. Md Intiaz inspected the arrangements at the government general hospital (GGH) on Sunday. Intiaz said that the two-day corona vaccination dry run will take off in five centres in the district, including the GGH, Prakashnagar urban primary healthcare centre, Poorna Heart Institute (private hospital) at Vijayawada, government school at Tadigadapa and Uppulur PHC.

He said that Krishna district was selected as a pilot project for the dry run because of the official machinery's proven efficiency. He said that three rooms were set up for the purpose at each centre. The registration process will be in the first room, vaccination in the second and observation in the third room. He mentioned that a 10-bed separate room is kept handy for emergencies.

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NATURE'S HAVOC

People living close to water bodies routinely face the wrath of nature's fury

Effective laws must to check flood havoc: US expert

PATHRI
RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, DEC. 27

Introduction of effective laws to check flooding of cities by storm-water, similar to the laws in Chicago, is necessary for India, proposed US-based expert in water conservation and management, Dr Prakasam Tata.

Expressing concern over the plight of residents during the recent floods in Hyderabad as also cities in Andhra Pradesh, Dr Prakasam told *Deccan Chronicle* that similar situations existed in Chicago and other US cities in the past, but these have been overcome with new laws and effective steps.

Dr Prakasam said, “Acute flooding and water-logging during monsoon are annual occurrences in metros and other cities across India. Governmental intervention can help change the grim scenario. Years of careful planning



Dr Prakasam Tata

- People living close to water bodies and low-lying areas routinely face the wrath of nature's fury during monsoons in metropolitan cities, corporations, municipalities and even villages in India.

- In 1885, the city of Chicago in the US saw 90,000 deaths involving one out of eight residents,

and creation of a flood management infrastructure also effective execution of projects helped Chicago being less prone to flooding and a safe

following the outbreak of cholera. This was due to the consumption of contaminated water drawn from Lake Michigan, the primary drinking water source to Chicago.

- Chicago subsequently reversed the flow of Chicago river that drained sewage into Lake Michigan. Seven sewage treatment plants were set up and a massive storm-water control programme undertaken. This included the implementation of the 'tunnel and reservoir plan' costing billions of dollars. It helped reduce the storm-water discharges and the sewer overflows to Lake Michigan.

place to live now.”

Referring to his 30-year-long service with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRDGC), Dr

Steps to reduce greenhouse gases key to checking floods

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, DEC. 27

Among the important steps to reduce flood havoc is a reduction in greenhouse gases that would limit the adverse effects of climate change, a main contributor to floods.

This was stated here by Dr Catherine O'Connor, director of engineering at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of

Prakasam said a proper storm water drainage system and relevant infrastructure to keep ground water free from pollution by floodwaters are a must.

“The scenario in Chicago improved over time since the 1950s. The passing of a storm-water con-

Greater Chicago and her colleague Khaza Moinuddin.

This, they said, should be in addition to implementation of a well-designed infrastructure consisting of a sewerage network connected to the plants for treatment of sewage, stormwater and combined sewage overflows, apart from implementation of the best storm-water management practices.

trol law 2004 helped improve things more. Several of its elements can be emulated and implemented by cities like Hyderabad,” he said, and offered to undertake free consultancy in this respect for any such project in India. Dr Prakasam's former

According to them, it may not be possible to accurately predict the time when heavy storms would occur resulting in heavy flooding of an area.

Effective steps for people's safety should be formulated by governments and regulatory agencies and these be made available for implementation when flooding occurs after heavy rains, they proposed.

colleagues in the Greater Chicago agency Dr Catherine O'Connor and director of engineering there Khaza Moinuddin, who has his roots in Hyderabad, also shared their views with the daily on facing the flood threat to urban areas.

SHORT TAKES

SHOPIAN FAKE ENCOUNTER: CASE ON ARMY OFFICER

Srinagar, Dec 27: Police have filed a chargesheet against three men, including an Army officer, in the Shopian “fake” encounter case of three civilians in July, officials said on Sunday.

The 1,400-page chargesheet was filed in the court of principal district and sessions judge, Shopian on Saturday by the head of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), the officials said. Captain Bhupinder of the Army’s 62 Rashtriya Rifles, Bilal Ahmed Lone and Tabish Nazir were named as accused in the chargesheet for their role in the alleged fake encounter killing of the three men hailing from Rajouri District, they added.

A police spokesperson said the court has issued an order, giving an option to the Army under the relevant sections of law for a trial of Captain Bhupinder alias Major Basheer Khan in a criminal court of ordinary jurisdiction or court martial. The spokesperson said during investigation, it came to light that a conspiracy was hatched by the accused captain and civilians Nazir and Lone to abduct the three civilians and stage the encounter.

“They deliberately and purposefully chose not to follow SOPs, planted illegally-acquired weapons and material on their bodies after stripping them of their identities and tagged them as hardcore terrorists in possession of war-like stores, deliberately providing false information to colleagues and seniors,” he said.

The information obtained from the accused led the SIT to recreate the scenes of the crime, including the routes used after meeting the victims and the place where they were killed, the spokesperson said.

FALL IN LINE OR LEAVE, AIADMK TELLS BJP, ALLIES

A. ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 27

The leaders and cadre of ruling party AIADMK rallied behind Chief Minister Edappadi K Palanisamy as the CM candidate for the forthcoming Assembly election of 2021.

In a veiled attack on the BJP at its maiden election rally in the city on Sunday, the party’s deputy coordinator K. P. Munusamy said - “The government will be led by the AIADMK. There is no necessity for a coalition government. If any political party comes forward for an alliance arrangement with an idea of a coalition government, let them please think about it again.” This was tantamount to telling the BJP to fall in line or rework its poll options for Tamil Nadu.

The demise of AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa and DMK’s M Karunanidhi, who opposed her, may have emboldened “many national parties” to try and make a political entry into Tamil Nadu. Boldly terming them as “opportunists and betrayers” who were blaming the Dravidian outfits in alleging that they had ruined Tamil Nadu in their five-decade rule, Munusamy wondered how accusations of inefficiency could be hurled against the AIADMK government when the Centre had given so many awards to Tamil Nadu for its meritorious performance in many sectors. The State had superior infrastructure and facilities, be it education or health care amenities, he pointed out.



Women and children shout slogans as they take part farmers ongoing agitation over new farm laws, at Tikri border in New Delhi on Sunday

— PTI

Pick ‘Made in India’ goods, urges PM

Farmers beat thalis, raise slogans against farm laws during Modi’s Mann Ki Baat radio address

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

In his last Mann Ki Baat radio broadcast of the year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday urged people to substitute foreign-made products they use with items produced in India, and said they should make this resolution for the country in the new year.

During his address, the Prime Minister touched on various issues, including wildlife conservation, ridding the country of single-use plastic, and paid tributes to several revered Sikh personalities, including sons of Guru Gobind Singh. He, however, did not mention farmers’ protest.

But at the three major spots of protests — Singhu border, Faridkot in Punjab and Rohtak in BJP-ruled Haryana — farmers clanged thalis and raised slogans against the Centre’s new farm laws during the Prime Minister’s monthly radio address on Sunday morning.

The “thali bajaao (clang plates)” protest was decided upon by the farmers last week.

Making the announcement, Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav had said that “on December 27 when the Prime Minister gives his Mann Ki Baat radio address, farmers will say, ‘We are tired of listening to your Mann Ki Baat, when will you listen to our Mann Ki Baat?’ So we will bang utensils so that the noise of his Mann Ki Baat doesn’t reach us”.

The idea of clanging plates and clapping was floated by the Prime Minister earlier this year to felicitate frontline workers battling coronavirus as the lockdown started. In Sunday’s Mann Ki Baat, PM Modi referred to it.

Citing letters written to him by people as the year moves to a close, Mr Modi said, “In most of the letters people have commended the country’s capabilities and the collective strength of the countrymen. When a novel experiment such as Janata cur-

Nadda shares Rahul video to slam Cong on farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

Sharing an old video of Rahul Gandhi’s speech in Lok Sabha in which he seems to be advocating the need for farmers to get rid of middlemen and sell their produce directly to industry, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday accused the Congress leader of playing politics over the ongoing farmers’ protest.

“What is this magic happening, Rahulji? You are opposing now what you had advocated earlier. You have nothing to do with the country’s or farmers’ interests. You have to play politics only. But this is your bad luck that your hypocrisy will not work. People of the country and farmers have recognised your double standards,” the BJP president tweeted in Hindi along with the video clip.

● **FARMER UNIONS** are alleging that these laws will weaken the existing government’s support for the farm sector which has been vehemently denied by the Centre.

● **MR GANDHI** charged that farmers and labourers of Amethi and 10-12 districts of Uttar Pradesh have been fighting for a food park, which the government had denied saying the park never had land.

The Congress and some other Opposition parties are backing the protest against the three agriculture-marketing laws which give cultivators an option to sell their produce directly to private players.

Farmer unions are alleging that these laws will weaken the existing government’s support for the

farm sector which has been vehemently denied by the Centre.

In the video, Mr Gandhi, then an MP representing Amethi parliamentary seat in Uttar Pradesh, can be heard saying that a farmer in UP had asked him to explain the “magic” behind a packet of potato chips costing ₹10 while farmers sell potato for ₹2 per kg. When he asked what they thought was the reason for this, the farmer said factories are located very far from them and if they could sell their produce directly there, they will get all the money without middlemen earning any cut.

Mr Gandhi charged that farmers and labourers of Amethi and 10-12 districts of Uttar Pradesh have been fighting for a food park, which the government had denied saying the park never had land.

Attempt to mislead farmers will not succeed: Rajnath

SHIMLA, Dec. 27: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Sunday said that attempts to “mislead” farmers on the recent agriculture laws will not succeed.

Addressing a state-level function to mark the third anniversary of the Jai Ram Thakur-led BJP government in Himachal Pradesh, he said the new laws will raise the income of farmers, but the Congress was misleading them.

Whenever a reform is effected it takes a few years before it starts showing positive results, Singh said in his virtual address.

Be it the 1991 economic reforms brought in by the then finance minister Manmohan Singh or other ones enacted during the

Vajpayee government, it took four-five years to see their positive results, he added.

“Similarly, if we can’t wait for four-five years, we can wait for at least two years to witness positive results of the agriculture reforms carried out by the Narendra Modi government,” the defence minister added.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting at different borer points of Delhi against the three laws enacted in September.

They have been claiming that new legislations will destroy the mandi system and end the Minimum Support Price mechanism, apprehensions the government has insisted are misplaced.

— PTI

Lawyer from Punjab commits suicide

Jhajjar (Haryana), Dec. 27: A lawyer from Punjab allegedly committed suicide by consuming poison on Sunday a few kilometres from the site of a farmers’ protest at Tikri border.

Amarjit Singh from Jalalabad in Punjab’s Fazilka district was taken to the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (PGIMS) in Rohtak where doctors declared him dead on arrival, police said.

In a purported suicide note, Singh said he was sacrificing his life in support of the farmers’ agitation against the Centre’s new farm laws so that the

government is compelled to listen to the voice of the people.

Singh wrote that the common people like farmers and labourers are feeling “defrauded” due to the three “black” agriculture laws and “the worst life is inevitable”.

The police said they are verifying the authenticity of the suicide note, dated December 18.

“We have informed the relatives of the deceased and once they reach here their statements will be recorded and further proceedings will be conducted,” a police officer from Haryana’s Jhajjar district

said, adding that they were informed about the suicide by the hospital authorities.

Earlier, at least two suicides have been linked to the farmers’ stir, underway at various border points of Delhi for over a month now.

A Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, allegedly committing suicide near the Singhu border protest site earlier this month claiming that he was “unable to bear the pain of the farmers”.

A 22-year-old farmer had allegedly committed suicide in Punjab’s Bathinda after returning from a

protest site near the Delhi border.

A week ago, a 65-year-old farmer from Punjab had attempted suicide by consuming some poisonous substance near the Singhu border.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and some other states have been protesting at various border points of Delhi against the Farmers (Empow-

erment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, and

the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

Enacted in September, the three farm laws have been projected by the central government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of Minimum Support Price and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

— PTI

Yadav accuses govt of hurting democracy

Lucknow, Dec 27: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday accused the BJP-led state government of hurting the foundation of democracy by dissolving village panchayats without conducting elections for them.

Yadav’s allegation prompted a rebuttal from UP BJP vice-president and party’s in-charge of panchayat elections Vijay Bahadur Pathak who said Yadav had been the state’s chief minister and should know that the panchayat elections could not have been held amid the Covid-19. Pathak also expressed the UP government’s commitment to holding the panchayat elections within six months.

“The BJP government in UP has dissolved the village panchayats without conducting the fresh elections for them. Major elections are being conducted, but the government has been finding itself unable to hold elections of the smallest units of public representation. How will this government run Uttar Pradesh?” Yadav said in a tweet in Hindi on Sunday.

“The BJP must not hurt the foundation of democracy,” the former UP chief minister added in his tweet. Rebutting Yadav’s claims, Pathak told PTI, Akhilesh Yadav had been the chief minister of UP. He should know that elections should have been conducted at the stipulated time.

—PTI

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 27

A 21-year-old tribal girl Annie Atram, who wants to pursue higher education abroad through a government scholarship scheme, namely ‘National Overseas Scholarship for higher studies’, is running from pillar to post of Maharashtra’s secretariat (Mantralaya) to prove her eligibility for the scheme from last three months.

According to her father, who is a senior official in Mantralaya, the disparity between the income limits of open category and trib-

al category is the biggest hurdle for getting the benefit of the scheme for tribal community. State agriculture minister Dada Bhuse has recommended her name to the tribal minister for the scheme in October 2020, but even that has not helped her.

As per the government resolution (GR) issued by the tribal development department, the income of the candidate’s family should be less than ₹6,00,000 (Rupees six lakhs) for the overseas education. But as per the GR issued by the higher and technical education

department, the income limit for open category is ₹20 lakh (₹ 20 Lakh). The disparity between the income limits for open category and tribal community caused a hurdle for the tribal girl in pursuing of higher education in abroad. The girl’s family hails from Gadchiroli district and earns more than ₹6 lakh per year.

Ms Atram wrote a letter to K.C. Padavi, minister of tribal development department urging him to treat her case as a special case her family can’t afford the expense of her education abroad.

Deccan Chronicle is in possession of her letter in which she has stated, “I have fulfilled the main criteria of the said GR but the income criteria is the hurdle in my overseas education. My family is native from Gadchiroli district which is a remote and naxal affected area. I have completed my BTech (four years of Bachelor of Technology) in Textile. I have applied to North Carolina State University (NCTU) for Master of Science in Textile. This university is a public school, has QS world ranking of 295, and is well known for Master

of Science in Textile, and this field comes under Engineering (STEM-Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The University has approved my admission for fall 2021 (August 2021) in Master of Science in Textile.”

“Since I come under ST category, there is a National Overseas Scholarship, in which I am interested. For this, I have appeared for GRE and TOFEL. I have secured a preliminary offer of admission, and I have passed my BTech with first class distinction, which makes me an exemplary student. But

INDIA RECORDS LOWEST COVID CASES IN SIX MONTHS

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

India on Sunday recorded the lowest daily rise in the Covid-19 cases in the last six months as fresh detections dropped to 18,732. The last time fresh cases were around this figure was on July 1. The active cases too have slipped to 2.78 lakh after 170 days. The total active cases were 2.76 lakh on July 10. India’s present active caseload consists of 2.74 per cent of the country’s total positive cases.

Union health ministry said the country has reported a trend of sustained decrease in the number of active cases and there has been a sharp rise in recoveries, taking the Recovery rate to 95.82 per cent. Officials said 72.37 per cent of the new recovered cases are observed to be concentrated in 10 states and union territories. Kerala has reported the maximum number of single day recoveries with 3,782 newly recovered cases followed by West Bengal (1,861) and Chhattisgarh (1,764).

India’s Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11 and crossed 80 lakh on October 29 and 90 lakh on November 20.

Among the new cases 76.52 per cent are concentrated in 10 states and UTs. Kerala reported the highest daily new cases at 3,527, followed by Maharashtra (2,854), Delhi, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana that were reporting a very high number of daily cases are now witnessing a low tide with a sharp drop in Covid-19 daily cases.

RAHUL GOES ON FOREIGN TOUR FOR SHORT PERSONAL VISIT

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi left for abroad on Sunday for a short personal visit, the party said.

Though the Congress did not disclose Gandhi’s destination, the chief spokesperson of the party, Randeep Surjewala, confirmed that he will be away for a few days.

“Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has left for abroad for a short personal visit and will be away for a few days,” he told PTI.

Asked where was the former Congress chief headed, Surjewala did not disclose the details.

Sources said Gandhi left for Milan in Italy on a Qatar Airways flight in the morning.

His grandmother stays in Italy and he visited her earlier too.

Gandhi’s travel abroad comes a day ahead of the Congress’s 136th Foundation Day celebrations on Monday. The flag of the party will be hoisted at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters on the occasion.

— PTI

BIG HURDLES

Disparity in income limits for open category, tribal category biggest hurdle

Tribal girl struggles to get overseas scholarship



SHORT TAKES

TURKEY HIT BY 5.5 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE

Istanbul, Dec. 27: A 5.5 magnitude earthquake struck eastern Turkey on Sunday, the US Geological Survey said, with initial reports indicating no immediate casualties.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said there were no reports of material damage or casualties so far.

The USGS said the quake was registered in the Sivrice district in Elazig province at 0637 GMT and struck at a depth of 10 kilometres.

The Turkish government's disaster agency AFAD reported a lower magnitude of 5.3 for the quake.

Turkey is situated in one of the world's most active earthquake zones.

A magnitude 6.8 quake hit Elazig in January, killing more than 40 people.

EIGHT KILLED IN AVALANCHES NORTH OF TEHRAN

Tehran, Dec. 27: Eight climbers have died and at least seven others are missing after a blizzard and avalanches hit the mountains north of Tehran, Iranian media reported on Saturday.

"The bodies of eight missing climbers were recovered in the mountains above Tehran thanks to the efforts of Red Crescent rescue teams and operations," said Iranian Red Crescent deputy head, Mohammad Baqer Mohammadi, according to the official IRNA news agency.

A group of mountaineers had gone missing on Friday due to avalanches and a blizzard in the mountains north of Tehran, IRNA reported.

State TV reported seven climbers were missing.

It broadcast footage of a helicopter rescue operation on the Tochal and Kolakchal peaks of the Alborz mountain chain overlooking Tehran showing Red Crescent personnel carrying a body on a stretcher along a snowy mountainside.

THREE KILLED, 3 WOUNDED IN ILLINOIS SHOOTING

Washington, Dec. 27: Three people were killed and another three wounded on Saturday in the US state of Illinois when a shooter opened fire at a bowling alley, police said.

A suspect in his 30s was in police custody.

Rockford city police urged people on Twitter to stay away from the area near the Don Carter Lanes bowling alley, as it was an "active situation" and officers were clearing the site.

The force posted on Twitter shortly after midnight: "37-year-old white male suspect is in custody. There are no others being sought at this time.""It's still an ongoing investigation. We do have three individuals that are confirmed deceased," police chief Dan O'Shea earlier told a press conference near the scene of the shooting.

He said three other people have been wounded from the gunfire and were being treated at local hospitals.

He did not specify whether the shooter had a motive.

Don Carter Lanes posted a simple message on Facebook after the shooting asking people to "pray please."

2 WOMEN, 3 GIRLS FOUND DEAD IN ARKANSAS HOME

Atkins (US), Dec. 27: Two women and three girls have been found dead in a home in northwest Arkansas in what authorities said are being investigated as suspected homicides.

Deputies responded to a call around 5 pm on Friday and found the five people dead in a home in Atkins, a city about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northwest of Little Rock, Pope County Sheriff Shane Jones said in a statement.

The dead were between 8 and 50 years old and are all believed to have been related, he said. Jones said during a short news conference Saturday that authorities did not immediately have a suspect and that at least some of the people were shot. He did not provide further details. "At this time, we believe this to be an isolated incident, and do not feel that there is any continued danger to the local public," he said. "We do believe that this is domestic related, possibly." Deputies are investigating the deaths with the help of the Arkansas State Police. A spokesman for the sheriff's office did not immediately respond to questions.

EU nations roll out vaccine campaign

Europeans unwilling to take vaccine, could impede its effectiveness as it takes months to vaccinate all

Paris, Dec. 27: EU countries on Sunday embarked on a vaccination campaign to defeat the "nightmare" of Covid-19, as the growing spread of a new Coronavirus variant intensified fears the pandemic could wreak further devastation.

The jab is a glimmer of hope for a continent yearning for a return to normal from a pandemic that has killed 1.76 million people worldwide since emerging in China late last year and caused at least 80 million confirmed cases, according to an *AFP* tally.

But polls have shown many Europeans are unwilling to take the vaccine, which could impede its effectiveness in beating the virus, while it will take months for large chunks of the population to be immunised.

"It is with deep pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I got the vaccine today. A small gesture but a fundamental gesture for all of us," said Claudia Alivernini, 29, an Italian nurse who was the first in her country to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech jab Sunday morning.

EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen hailed the campaign start as a "touching moment of unity and a European success story", even if some European states started a day early on Saturday.

Countries are also showing different strategies in their vaccination targeting, with Italy focusing on health workers, France the elderly and in the Czech Republic the prime minister himself at the front of the queue.

In a sign of impatience, some EU countries began vaccinating on Saturday, a day before the official start, with a 101-year-old woman in a care home becoming the first person in Germany to be inoculated and Hungary and Slovakia also handing out their first shots.

Araceli Rosario Hidalgo Sanchez, a 96-year-old living in a care home in central Spain became the first person in the country to be vaccinated on Sunday, in an event broadcast by national television. She said smilingly she felt "nothing" from the shot.

France began its campaign in care homes for the elderly in the Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, a low-income area hard hit by Covid-19, with a 78-year-old woman named Mauricette the first to receive the jab to applause from staff. — *AFP*



84-year-old Karin Sievers becomes the first to be inoculated with a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19, virus vaccine by Doctor Dirk Heinrich at the 'Hospital zum Heiligen Geist' retirement home in the northern German city of Hamburg, on Sunday.

CANADA DETECTS FIRST COVID-19 VARIANT CASES

Montreal, Dec. 27: The first two cases of a particularly infectious Coronavirus variant that recently emerged in Britain have been confirmed in Canada, health authorities said on Saturday. "The cases are a couple from Durham with no known travel history, exposure or high-risk contacts," Barbara Yaffe, acting chief medical officer for Ontario, said in a statement.

The couple have been placed in isolation, according to the statement, the same day that Ontario reimposed a lockdown for several weeks due to a spike in Covid-19 cases in the province since early December: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Wednesday his country would prolong its suspension of passenger flights from the UK until January 6 in light of the Coronavirus strain sweeping Britain.

The discovery of two cases in Ontario "further reinforces the need for Ontarians to stay home as much as possible and continue to follow all public health advice, including the provincewide shutdown measures beginning today," said Yaffe. — *AFP*

96-year-old is first Spaniard vaccinated for Coronavirus

Madrid, Dec. 27: A 96-year-old living in a care home in central Spain became the first person in the country to be vaccinated against Covid-19 on Sunday, in an event broadcast by national television.

She felt "nothing" from the shot, Araceli Rosario Hidalgo Sanchez said with a smile after being injected. With her short white hair, the pensioner living in the Los Olmos retirement home in Guadalajara got up slowly after pulling on her black jacket and walked off using a frame for support.

Carer Monica Tapias followed as the second Spaniard to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. The Los Olmos home was picked to kick off the country's inoculation campaign because it sits near a Pfizer storage depot, where vaccines were delivered from Belgium Saturday ahead of nationwide distribution.

No cases of Covid-19 have so far been detected among the staff or residents.

"It's a great source of pride and a great satisfaction for us, we're representing all the retirement homes in Spain," director Marina Vadillo said on Thursday. After the European Medicines Agency (EMA) approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine last Monday, the way is open for injections across the 27-member bloc. — *AFP*

Covid-19 pandemic will not be the last, says WHO chief

Geneva, Dec. 27: The Coronavirus crisis will not be the last pandemic, and attempts to improve human health are "doomed" without tackling climate change and animal welfare, the World Health Organisation's chief said.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also condemned the "dangerously short-sighted" cycle of throwing cash at outbreaks but doing nothing to prepare for the next one, in a video message marking Sunday's first International Day of Epidemic Preparedness.

The WHO director-general said it was time to learn the lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic. "For too long, the world has operated on a cycle of panic and neglect," he said.

"We throw money at an outbreak, and when it's over, we forget about it and do nothing to prevent the next one. This is dangerously short-sighted, and frankly difficult to understand," The Global Preparedness Monitoring Board's September 2019 first annual report on world readiness for health emergencies — published a few months before the Coronavirus broke out — said the planet was woefully unprepared for potentially devastating pandemics. — *AFP*

Investigators search home in Nashville bomb probe

Washington, Dec. 27: Authorities searched a house in the Nashville area on Saturday as they probed the large blast that ripped through the downtown of the southern US city on Christmas morning, injuring several people and damaging dozens of buildings.

The operation in Antioch came as US media reports said a 63-year-old "person of interest" had been identified in connection with the explosion, which came from a parked motorhome that blared a warning minutes before it blew up.

Some US media outlets reported Saturday evening that the bomber may have been killed in the blast, but authorities have not officially confirmed anything.

Friday's explosion in historic downtown Nashville, the United States' country music capital, damaged about 40 buildings and injured at least three people, with the streets largely abandoned at that hour.

Authorities were examining tissue found at the blast site that they believe could be human remains.

Police say the blast was an "intentional act" but the motive remained unclear, and FBI behavioral analysts were involved in the investigation.

"The damage is shocking and it is a miracle that no residents were killed," Tennessee Governor Bill Lee said on Twitter on Saturday.

Media reports said neighbors had previously spotted a motorhome outside the residence that was being searched Saturday by authorities, and that it appeared to be similar to the one that exploded in Nashville. — *AFP*

ANCIENT | TASTES

Discovery in Pompeii buried under lava when volcano erupted in 79 AD 2,000-year-old fast food shop unearthed

Rome, Dec. 27: A 2,000-year-old fast food stall unearthed from the ash of Pompeii has given researchers new clues about the snacking habits of the ancient Romans.

The ornate snack bar counter, decorated with polychrome patterns and frozen by volcanic ash, was partially exhumed last year but archaeologists extended work on the site to reveal it in its full glory.

Pompeii was buried in a sea of boiling lava when the volcano on nearby Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, killing between 2,000 and 15,000 people.

Archaeologists continue to make discoveries there. The thermopolium —

from the Greek "thermos" for hot and "poleo" to sell — at what was a busy intersection of Silver Wedding Street and Alley of Balconies, was the Roman era equivalent of a fast-food snack stall.

The team found duck bone fragments as well as the remains of pigs, goats, fish and snails in earthenware pots. Some of the ingredients had been cooked together like a Roman era paella.

Crushed fava beans, used to modify the taste of wine, were found at the bottom of one jar.

The counter appears to have been closed in a hurry and abandoned by its owners — perhaps as the first rumblings of the eruption were felt — Massimo Osanna, director general at the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, told *Ansa* news agency.

Amphorae, a water tower and a fountain were found alongside human remains, including those of a man believed to have been aged around 50 and discovered near a child's bed.

"It is possible that someone, perhaps the oldest man, stayed behind and perished during the first phase of the eruption," Osanna told *Ansa* news agency.

In the latest stage of their work, archaeologists uncovered a number of still life scenes. — *AFP*



Archaeologists uncovered a number of still life scenes, including depictions of animals believed to have been on the menu, notably mallard ducks and also a rooster, for serving with wine or hot beverages.

Biden warns over ‘devastating’ delay in aid package

Washington, Dec. 27: US President-elect Joe Biden warned on Saturday of "devastating consequences" if President Donald Trump continues to delay signing a Covid-19 economic relief bill passed by Congress.

Biden spoke out as millions of Americans saw their jobless benefits expire after Trump threw a long-awaited pandemic aid package into doubt -- demanding lawmakers more than triple the \$600 direct payments to US taxpayers.

"This abdication of responsibility has devastating consequences. Today, about 10 million Americans will lose unemployment insurance benefits," Biden said in a statement.

The stimulus measure is wrapped up with a \$1.4 trillion funding bill, without which the government will be forced to shut down at midnight Monday.

"In just a few days, government funding will expire, putting vital services and paychecks for military personnel at risk," Biden added.

"In less than a week, a moratorium on evictions expires, putting millions at risk of being forced from their homes over the holidays."

In a video late Tuesday, Trump, who is due to leave office in less than a month, called the \$900 million bill "a disgrace" — despite it being passed Monday with a large bipartisan majority after months of negotiation.

The legislation was designed to throw a lifeline to businesses and people struggling to keep their heads above water. — *AFP*

Israel braces for 3rd virus lockdown

Jerusalem, Dec 27: Israel was set on Sunday to begin its third Coronavirus lockdown, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voiced optimism that a "world record" vaccination drive will restore a degree of normality within weeks.

After a sharp rebound in detected infections, Netanyahu's government announced three days ago that it would re-impose the strict measures that had previously helped limit transmission.

From 5:00pm (1500 GMT) on Sunday, most people will be forced to stay within 1,000 metres of their home. There are a range of exceptions, including seeking medical care, attending legal proceedings or exercising.

A key difference in Israel's third lockdown compared to previous versions relates to schools, with more students able to attend classes.

Instead of near total closures, Israel is keeping schools open for children under six, as well as grades one to four and teenagers finishing secondary school in grades 11 and 12.

Israel's National Council for the Child criticised the decision to close grades five through 10.

"The decision to ignore this age bracket means the abandonment of hundreds of thousands of children, only because in theory they can be left at home alone while (their parents) go to work," NCC head Vered Windman was quoted as saying by the Ma'ariv newspaper. — *AFP*

Troubled Central African Republic goes to elections

Bangui, Central African Republic, Dec. 27: Voting began in presidential and legislative elections in the Central African Republic on Sunday, in a key test for one of the world's most troubled nations.

The polls take place after a week of turbulence, marked by accusations of an attempted coup, the brief seizure of the CAR's fourth-largest town and the dispatch of military personnel by Russia and Rwanda to help its beleaguered government.

UN peacekeepers and local and Rwandan soldiers were patrolling the streets throughout the capital, with armoured vehicles posted outside voting places armed with machine guns, *AFP* journalists saw.

There was a delay of around 50 minutes before some polling stations in Bangui opened as voting materials had not been delivered on time.

"It's very important for me to be here, as a citizen. I think this vote will change our country, whoever the president will be," teacher Hortense Reine said outside a voting place in Boganda secondary school in the city's east, where around 30 people were queuing.

Senior officials at the election organising authority said that where polling stations had opened late, voting would continue for an additional 50 minutes.

The frontrunner for the presidency is incumbent Faustin Archange Touadera, who was elected in 2016. The mineral-rich but poverty-stricken country has been chronically unstable since independence 60 years ago. — *AFP*

DECCAN Chronicle

28 DECEMBER 2020

Challenge to Vodafone ill-advised, withdraw it

Just a day after India lost its case against the UK-based oil major Cairn Energy Plc at an arbitration court at The Hague over nearly ₹9,000 crore in past taxes, the Indian government announced its decision to challenge the tribunal's verdict in nearly ₹22,000-crore worth retrospective tax case against Vodafone Plc.

In both cases, the central government's tax demands emerge from an amendment introduced by then finance minister Pranab Mukherjee to the Income Tax Act. The legislation was aimed at plugging a loophole in the Income Tax Act, which allowed Hutchison Whampoa to avoid paying ₹ 7,990 crore in capital gains tax while transferring its Indian telecom business to Vodafone in May 2007.

Months later, the government held Vodafone liable for its failure to deduct tax at source from the payment that it had made to Hutchison. The Bombay high court favoured the government, while the Supreme Court upheld Vodafone's

interpretation. However, the United Progressive Alliance government amended the law, empowering officials to levy tax with retrospective effect on any foreign transaction that resulted in direct or indirect transfer of an asset located in India.

The result of the amendment was that Vodafone had overnight become one of the biggest tax defaulters in the country. The legislation attracted harsh criticism inside and outside the country. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the prime Opposition of the day, was the harshest critic of the retrospective taxation, though it did not vote against the amendment in Parliament.

In 2018, Arun Jaitley, the finance minister of the day, categorised the retrospective taxation as an erroneous decision.

Given Jaitley's official stand, it was expected that the BJP government would graciously accept the awards of the arbitration court and consider the matter to be closed. However, the government — despite its claims of being investor-friendly — continued to keep the issue alive by opting for an appeal, which does no good for the country's image.

A stable and predictable policy framework is the bedrock of a good investment climate. While it was obvious that Hutchison and Vodafone had attempted to avoid paying tax by effecting their deal in a foreign country, the government must recognise the difference between tax avoidance and tax evasion. Tax avoidance using loopholes in the law is legal, while tax evasion is not.

The Vodafone case is clearly an issue of tax avoidance that emerged from poor drafting of the income tax law 50 years ago. The country should, therefore, not seek to penalise investors for the follies of our past administrators. As a country that is governed by the law, India cannot be seen overriding the judgement of its own apex court, regardless of the reason and provocation. More importantly, India should stop living in the past and look ahead to the future, especially when the country is seeking to position itself as the world's factory.

A step forward, two back

Two young women, both second year degree students, represent two faces of Kerala today. Arya Rajendran, the 21-year-old daughter of an electrician and an LIC agent, will be anointed the mayor of the capital city today. Her election is a foregone conclusion as the CPI(M), her party which leads the Left Democratic Front, has a comfortable majority in the council. She is all set to become the youngest mayor in the country. It's not for want of others that the LDF chose a student; the LDF has 25 other women councillors there. In so doing, the party was acknowledging the role of the youth brigade that it fielded in the local bodies' election in weathering the anti-incumbency factor and the impact of the incessant, and often one-sided, media scrutiny. Ms Rajendran is a dyed-in-the-wool Communist, having joined Balasamgham, the children's organisation of the CPI(M), at five. At present, she heads it, and is sure to bring that experience to address the issues that plague the city.

Contrast her experience with that of Hariitha, wife of Aneesh. Aneesh was hacked to death by Hariitha's father and uncle on Friday. Unable to stand the "horror" of their daughter becoming the wife of a man whose caste and economic status came a notch below theirs, the patriarchs, in their early forties, did away with the young man even before his marriage had lasted 90 days. It is not the first time that honour killing had claimed the life of a young person in the state: it was in 2018 that a dalit boy, Kevin, was killed by his wife's relatives for similar reasons.

Kerala has a history of more than a century of fighting social and economic oppression. The young mayor represents its success and the young widow the work left unfinished. The state must take it forward aggressively now, lest it slips back into the madhouse that it once was.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Subhani



Kashmir looks ahead at a winter of discontent



A.S. Dulat

Dr Farooq Abdullah remains the key to peace in Kashmir. The Sphinx must solve his own riddle.

ister Lal Krishna Advani, in early 2004, it was virtually the beginning of the end of separatism. What Kashmir needs is peace, justice, honour and dignity.

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, whose birth anniversary was celebrated last Friday, believed that we needed to move forward in Kashmir and end the permanent confrontation with Pakistan.

Force has never worked in Kashmir, nor has our muscular policy since the abrogation of Article 370. Terrorism has increased; almost 200 local boys mainly from South Kashmir have joined militancy in the last one year, not for *azaadi* or Pakistan but in the name of Allah. These figures are higher than any time since 2007. Pakistan too is back fishing once again in the troubled waters of Kashmir.

The security forces have suffered substantial losses. Suicide and fratricide among the forces, particularly the CRPF, who are in the thick of the anti-terror war, has grown due to stress, duress and trauma due to long-term duties in unfamiliar surroundings.

There is no other way but dialogue and a revival of the political process. Getting the mainstream political parties on board is the primary requirement for achieving peace in J&K today. The establishment of the PAGD makes political sense for Kashmir and also provides an opening for the Centre. How long the three main parties — National Conference, People's Democratic Party and People's Conference — stick together, only time will tell. Kashmiris normally do not, and a crack

or two are already visible. However, it is in New Delhi's interest that they do to further the political and democratic process.

Togetherness would have virtually been impossible without the initiative and resoluteness of the "Big Man". Sadly, New Delhi has never tried to understand Dr Farooq Abdullah, nor does he make it easy for anyone to do so. Earlier, it was his openness which puzzled Delhi, now it is his determination. As a senior colleague in the PAGD said: "Doctor Sahib in his new avatar is like a man possessed, in whose sincerity no one can doubt." Recently, when the Enforcement Directorate threatened to attach his properties, Dr Abdullah, echoing James Baldwin, said, "I will not bow; I will do what I have to." Yet, when he was released from detention on March 14, people who spoke to him would vouch that Farooq bore no ill will and was gracious enough to admit that his meeting with the Prime Minister a couple of days before August 5, 2019 went unbelievably well. Dr Farooq Abdullah has always stood by India, dedicating himself as a bridge between Srinagar and New Delhi but during his last visit to Delhi, somewhat disillusioned, Farooq said: "What is there to talk now, they call me a thief?"

Yet Dr Farooq Abdullah remains the key to peace in Kashmir. The Sphinx must solve his own riddle. There is no one half his stature in the political spectrum in J&K. Statehood assured to the people in Parliament needs to be restored, rather than a carrot kept dangling. And then, hopefully, as in 1996, Assembly elections in October-November next year may pave the way for peace.

Amarjit Singh Dulat is a former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing, India's external intelligence agency

LETTERS

JANA SENA'S FATE

The Jana Sena is likely to meet the fate of Praja Rajyam in the next elections with the BJP. The Praja Rajyam at least got some seats of some reckoning which may not be true with the Jana Sena. The enticement of Pawan Kalyan becoming the prospective CM is only a bait to grab his vote bank who will finally be left in the lurch.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

JUDGES AT TEMPLES

Nowadays, it has become a status symbol to have a darshan of Lord Venkateswara and get a group photo with the temple in the background. Even honorable judges are encouraging this. With due respect to judges, one expects that they keep away from personal publicity. It is hoped the judicial community will take this suggestion in the right spirit.

P. Ramakrishna
Rajahmundry

FARMERS' PROTEST

Finally, the farmers' body agreed to meet the Centre on December 29 after they receiving a conciliatory letter, ready to discuss threadbare all contentious issues. But the very first point for the agenda is: modalities to repeal the 3 Farm Laws and three more points. Let's hope this shall end the impasse and the people revert to their business at their home.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

LS dissolved, polls in Lower House

NEW DELHI, DEC. 27.

The fourth Lok Sabha has been dissolved. The nation will elect a new House early in March in all probability.

The President, Mr. V.V. Giri, signed the momentous order dissolving the House a year ahead of schedule.

He signed the order around 9 tonight accepting the advice tendered by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Faizan Mustafa



Historically speaking, the governor's office has been there in India since antiquity. Though loyalists were always appointed as governors, still most governors in ancient and medieval times, in fact, revolted against the Centre and declared themselves as independent. British governors were the most loyal servants of the imperial government and governors of free India preferred to follow the path of their immediate predecessors. Arif Mohammad Khan, just like other governors of the Indian republic, seems to care more for the interests of central government than the Constitution, though under Article 159 of the Constitution he has taken the oath to preserve, protect and defend it. Be refusing to convene the Kerala Assembly session, he has yet again crossed the *lakshman-rekha*. Subsequently, like a true statesman, in an extremely polite letter, he has clarified that since there is nothing like an emergency session, he had to decline the request. He has also emphasized the importance of 15 days' notice. Such technicalities do not deserve much importance as the governor's acting on the advice of government is a constitutional mandate. Last

month itself, he himself assented to a controversial ordinance without even exercising his right to seek reconsideration. Clearly, he was more concerned about the possibility of the Assembly passing a resolution against central farm laws rather than people's rights.

The Constitution gives no discretion to the governors in the matter of convening the session of the Assembly. Parliamentary democracy being the basic structure of our Constitution, this is the prerogative of the Cabinet though Article 174 does say that the governor from time to time summon the Assembly to meet at such time and place 'he thinks fit'. A few months back, Rajasthan governor Kalraj Mishra, too, behaved in a similar way and delayed the convening of the Assembly session as was recommended by the Ashok Gehlot government. Here, the governor doubted the 'purpose' of convening the session. The governor was strangely coming in the way of the chief minister proving his majority.

Even in the context of the state of Kerala's filing of petition challenging the constitutionality of Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, Khan had asserted that he is not a rubber stamp and was unhappy

that he was not kept in loop before filing the case. A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court in *Nabam Rebia* (2016) had explicitly observed that the governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Rajkhawa, who had advanced the session of Assembly without the advice of chief minister, had exceeded his jurisdiction as he had no discretion in convening the Assembly session.

Article 163(1) does permit governor to act 'in discretion' wherever constitution requires him to act in his discretion. According to Edward Cook, "discretion" is a science or understanding to discern between falsity and truth, between right and wrong, and not to do according to will and private affection. Justice Douglas in *United States v. Wenderlick* (1951) said that absolute discretion is a ruthless master. It is in fact constitutional blasphemy and is more destructive for freedom than any of man's inventions.

The Kerala governor is certainly aware that there are established rules for the exercise of discretion. First, discretion should always be exercised with caution and in a reasonable manner. Second, discretion cannot be exercised under dictation. Thus, in convening

Assembly sessions, the Kerala governor should have ignored it if at all any directive came from Delhi. The Kerala governor has not acted as an independent and impartial constitutional functionary. Third, discretion is to be exercised after proper application of mind. It cannot be exercised for an improper purpose or with bad faith or by taking into account irrelevant considerations. Fourth, discretion cannot be exercised in an arbitrary or whimsical manner. Any action of governor is arbitrary if he has acted on the basis of prejudice or preference rather than on reason or fact. As per the constitution bench judgment in *Nabam Rebia* (2016), the expression "as he thinks fit" in Article 174(1) gives no "discretion" to the governor in convening the Assembly session.

The moot question is why our governors behave like this. The worst thing which happened to this office is that the governor is the only constitutional authority who has no security of tenure like the President, judges, CAG, chairman, UPSC, Election Commissioner, CIC, etc. He is worse than an IAS officer who under Article 311 is entitled to a proper inquiry and cannot be terminated without a def-

inite finding of 'misconduct'. But the governor remains in office only so long he enjoys the "pleasure of the President" which, in reality, means the pleasure of the political dispensation in Delhi and he can be removed on the whims and fancies of Prime Minister.

This is in spite of the Supreme Court's decision in *Hargovind Pant v. Raghukul Tilak* (1979) where the court held that governor is not an "employee of the central government". He is neither under its control nor accountable to it and is "an independent constitutional office".

Mr Khan is clearly aware that the Kerala Assembly resolution against the controversial farm laws would be far more serious than the resolution against CAA as unlike citizenship on which the Parliament has exclusive jurisdiction, agricultural market is state subject in respect of which Parliament lacks legislative competence. One hopes better sense will prevail and the governor would accept a fresh request for the session.

The writer is a constitutional law expert and currently vice-chancellor of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad

By not letting Assembly meet, did Arif fulfil governor's role?

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,973.54	1.14
Nifty 50	13,749.25	1.09
S&P 500*	3,700.86	0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.54	0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.01	-1.04
Euro (₹)	89.66	0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,030	119 0.24
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	51.10	-0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.929	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.936	-0.019

* As of 9:30 PM IST, Friday

No going back on privatisation of BPCL, Air India

Covid-19 carnage may have slightly pushed back timelines but there is certainly no going back on privatisation of bluechip public sector undertakings like BPCL and Air India. Government officials expressed confidence of completing BPCL and Air India sale in the next few months. The government has put the onus on the top management of CPSEs to increase the market capitalisation of state-run companies.

India's crude steel output up 3.5% in Nov.



India registered a growth of 3.5 per cent in crude steel production at 9.245 million tonne (MT) in November, according to World Steel Association. The country had produced 8.933 MT crude steel during the same month last year, the global industry body said in its latest report. According to the world-steel data, China registered eight per cent year-on-year growth in steel output at 87.660 MT during November.

L&T plans to hire 1,100 engineers across verticals

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) CEO and MD S.N. Subrahmanyam said on Sunday that the company is looking to recruit close to 1,100 graduate and post graduate engineer trainees in 2021 and deploy them across various business verticals. This acquired pool of talent will be deployed in critical roles like business development, strategy, design, contract management, project management among others, he said.

Asus bets on offline, to add 1,000 retail points



Asus is bullish on expanding its presence in offline retail, adding about 1,000 retail points over the next year as it witnesses continuous strong demand in the consumer and gaming segments, said the company's India business head of consumer and gaming PC Arnold Su. The company, which had 7.5 per cent share in the Indian PC segment, has its products available at over 6,000 retail points.

Centre for biz-friendly laws

Directs ministries and states to reduce compliance burden on businesses

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Central government ministries, departments and states have been asked to relook at the laws and regulations with an objective to reduce the regulatory compliance burden for industry, an official said.

"Reducing the regulatory compliance burden is a priority area for the government. There are a lot of compliance burdens and we have to reduce that. Every ministry is doing this on a war footing," a senior official in the commerce and industry ministry said.

Citing an example, the official said the ministry handles several Acts such

LEGAL MAZE

- Chief Secretaries of all the states have been advised to identify burdensome regulations and ways to reduce that burden for businesses.
- Central ministries and states would have to examine central laws which can be repealed or subsumed or replaced.
- Issues which are being looked into include removing licence renewals, risk-based inspection system, simplification of number of filings, etc

as two laws for Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), intellectual property rights, and boilers.

"So we are looking at wherever there is any section where criminal prosecution is involved, can it be relooked. Whether it is necessary to have criminal punishments or civil punishment will also do like penalty or something else," the official added.

According to a recent

Ease of Doing Business rankings released by the World Bank, India stands at 63rd position, which is a great leap from 142nd rank in 2015.

In 2015, the government had aimed to break into the top 50 countries in the ease of doing business index by 2020. The country, however, failed to achieve its goal because of lacklustre performance in six of the 10 indicators.

According to a report, the government has decided to focus on six laggard segments such as enforcing contracts, registering property and starting a business.

Chief Secretaries of all

Panel cites PM to reject India's Cairn tax claim



New Delhi, Dec. 27: A three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague cited statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other ministers pledging not to use retrospective taxation to overturn a ₹10,247 crore tax demand on British oil and gas firm Cairn Energy Plc.

The tribunal, in a 582-page judgment on December 21, ordered return of the value of shares that the income-tax department sold as also the dividend it seized and tax refunds it withheld to recover tax demand that was levied following the 2012 amendment to the Income-Tax Act that gave authorities powers to seek taxes on past deals.

It ruled that the 2006 reorganisation of Cairn Energy's India business prior to listing on local bourses was not "unlawful tax avoidance" and ordered tax authorities to drop the tax demand.

In the order, the tribunal, which consisted of one member appointed by the Indian government, said the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) 2014 "election manifesto criticised the preceding government for having unleashed 'tax terrorism' and 'uncertainty', which 'negatively impact[ed] the investment climate'."

In his first Budget speech in July 2014, the new finance minister, Arun Jaitley, proposed that a CBDT-supervised 'High Level Committee' be implemented to scrutinise fresh cases that had arisen following the 2012 Amendments.

After stating that, "this government will not ordinarily bring about any change retrospectively which creates a fresh liability", he announced that "henceforth, all fresh cases arising out of the retrospective amend-

ments of 2012 in respect of indirect transfers and coming to the notice of the Assessing Officers will be scrutinised by a High Level Committee to be constituted by the CBDT before any action is initiated in such cases," the order said.

On November 7, 2014, Jaitley, according to the order, insisted that his government had taken a "policy decision that as far as this government is concerned, even though there is a sovereign power of retrospective taxation, we are not going to exercise that power".

On January 13, 2015, Jaitley was quoted as saying that the 2012 Amendment had "scared away investors from India" and that "the government had no intention of using the retrospective tax provision".

"This view was confirmed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, 2016. The Prime Minister was quoted in the *Financial Times* as saying that the government "will not resort to retrospective taxation; we are making our tax regime transparent, stable and predictable", the tribunal said.

The income-tax department in 2015 slapped a ₹10,247 crore tax demand on Cairn for alleged capital gains it made in the 2006 business reorganisation. Cairn denied the scheme, avoided any tax that was prevalent on that date and challenged the demand through an arbitration.

During the pendency of the arbitration, the government sold the UK energy major's near five per cent holding in Vedanta Ltd, seized dividends totalling ₹1,140 crore due to it from those shareholdings and set off a ₹1,590-crore tax refund against the demand.

—PTI

GST cash rule won't hit small biz, says finmin

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Small businesses and dealers will not be impacted by the new government rule of paying at least one per cent of GST liability in cash as only entities with annual turnover of ₹6 crore and above are required to follow the new rule, sources in the finance ministry said.

After unearthing rampant use of fake invoices to evade goods and services tax (GST), the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) had last week amended rules to make it mandatory for businesses with monthly turnover of over ₹50 lakh to pay at least one per cent of their GST liability in cash.

Sources said the rule applies only to about 45,000 taxpayers out of the GST taxpayer base of 1.2 crore and genuine dealers and businesses would not be impacted.

The new rule, they said, has been brought to check use of fake invoices to claim credit for tax paid on non-existent or highly inflated input cost.

The new rule restricts the use of input tax credit (ITC) for discharging GST liability to 99 per cent, effective January 1, 2021.

The sources added that the rule would help to control use of fake invoices by fraudsters who avail and pass on ITC to dummy fake and dormant entities which show high turnovers, but have no financial credibility, and flee after issuing fake invoices and misusing ITC.

They said the rule would apply only to risky or suspicious dealers who use a lot of fake credit and make no cash tax payment. Dummy companies which generate fake ITC or are used to be a layer in multi-layer fake credit flow pay no tax in cash.

"This provision is a very smart rule against fraudsters and would not affect any genuine business entities or 'Ease of Doing Business' in any manner," the sources said, adding

- Sources in the finance ministry said the one per cent cash payment rule would apply only to risky or suspicious dealers who use a lot of fake credit and make no cash tax payment.
- Dummy companies which generate fake ITC or are used to be a layer in multi-layer fake credit flow pay no tax in cash.

that all small businesses, including MSMEs and composition dealers, have been excluded from the rule.

They emphasised that exceptions and exclusions have also been provided based on income tax track record and refund obtained in last year.

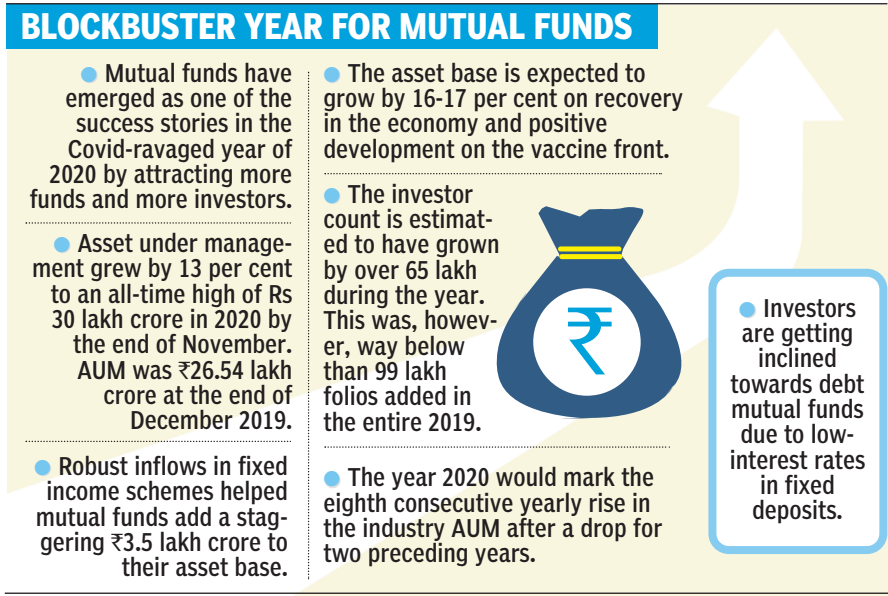
They said that with these exemptions, conditions and precise targeting, the requirement of mandatory payment of at least one per cent of the tax liability in cash would apply only to risky or suspicious dealers, and genuine dealers would remain excluded.

The rule is applicable to registered persons whose value of taxable supply, other than exempt supply and export, in a month exceeds ₹50 lakh, or ₹6 crore annually, they added.

The rule is not applicable in cases where the registered person deposited more than ₹1 lakh as income tax in each of the last two years and also wherein registered person has received a refund of more than ₹1 lakh in the preceding financial year on account of export or inverted tax structure.

The rule is not applicable to government departments, PSUs and local authorities. The CBIC has booked about 12,000 cases of ITC fraud and arrested 365 persons in such cases so far. More than 165 fraudsters have been arrested in the last six weeks alone.

—PTI



Investment in safe haven doubles in pandemic year

SANGEETHA G | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 27

While household demand for gold halved in 2020, the Covid-led uncertainty in the market saw investment demand more than doubling the investment demand.

Though the global demand and for gold was down to 2,074 tonnes in 2020 against 2,203 tonnes in 2019, the investment demand has more than doubled. In 2020, the demand for gold ETFs, coins and bars zoomed to 1,130 tonnes against 594 tonnes in the previous year, as per the data from Gold Hub.

"The Covid-led uncertainties saw investors flocking into exchange traded

funds, gold bonds and gold futures in 2020. Gold was also largely available through the digital channel due to the lock-downs in key markets. Further, surplus liquidity due to economic stimulus also found a way into gold like other asset classes," said Ajay Kedia, the managing director of Kedia Commodities.

Gold ETFs saw their holdings touching all-time highs in 2020. Till October, gold ETF flows had grown 24 per cent and holdings in both tonnage and value terms continued to reach new highs.

However, the household demand which is largely driven by jewellery halved in 2020 to 572 tonnes

against 1064 tonnes in 2019. This was the lowest jewellery demand in the past several years.

The trend was not different in the Indian market. While jewellery demand was down 48 per cent in the September quarter against the year-ago quarter, investment demand was 51 per cent up to 33.8 tonnes. In value terms, investment demand went up by 107 per cent to ₹15,410 crore.

Assets managed by Gold ETFs in the Indian market more than doubled in 2020. From ₹5,767 crore at the end of 2019, the AUMs went up to ₹13,239 crore at the end of November 2020, as per the latest data available with AMFI.

RBI paper roots for one inflation metric

Mumbai, Dec. 27: Rural-urban inflation divergence does not persist in the long run and converges over time, and both exhibit a long-term equilibrium relationship, said an RBI article.

This convergence of rural-urban inflation supports the relevance of one inflation target as nominal anchor at the national level, said the article prepared by Binod B. Bhoi, Himani Shekhar and

Ipsita Padhi, Department of Economic and Policy Research, RBI. "Rural urban inflation dynamics in India reveals close comovement, with episodic divergences driven by different components food, fuel or ex-food and fuel which do not persist long," it said.

Empirical estimates, it said, revealed that the differentials between rural and urban inflation are transient and both exhibit

a long-run equilibrium relationship, with a significant error correction in the short-run.

At the state level, urban and rural inflation rates converge over time, the IT said, adding, "these findings support the relevance of one inflation target as the nominal anchor at the national level for both rural and urban areas as well as all states".

The RBI said the views expressed in the article

are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the central bank.

The article noted that headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation witnessed significant and sustained moderation during 2012-13 to 2018-19, before rising thereafter. Both rural and urban inflation exhibited a similar trend with the only difference that urban inflation started rising from 2018-19.

Broadband firms want fair price for spectrum

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Broadband India Forum (BIF), the industry body for broadband service providers, on Sunday said that reasonable reserve prices for spectrum allocated via auctions, rapid proliferation of public Wi-Fi hotspots through WANI framework and forward movement on 5G without any delay are sector issues that need to be prioritised for 2021.

Further, rationalisation of high duties and levies will ensure viability of telecom operators and sustainability of services.

These key issues along with finalisation of Spacecom and Satcom policies, need to be placed high on policy agenda for the coming year, Broadband India Forum president T.V. Ramachandran said.

Earlier this month, the government approved a proposal for the auction of 2,251.25 mHz of spectrum worth ₹3.92 lakh crore at the base price. The ensuing spectrum auctions, slated to be held by March, will not include bands that support 5G services.

—PTI

FUTURE | FORWARD

Morgan Stanley says 2021 likely to favour small and midcap firms

Market outlook hinges on five factors in 2021

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 27

After a sharp recovery in the year 2020 from March lows, JP Morgan said five forces are likely to shape the contours of the recovery and asset returns in 2021 — the virus outlook, the policy outlook, the inflation outlook, the market outlook and the dollar outlook.

"The path of the virus is unknown, and the economic healing process is likely to be staggered. This kind of uncertainty can cause anxiety around investments. In our view, monetary policy, the fundamental driver of the business cycle, will remain supportive for the foreseeable future. Interest



est rates are likely to stay low until labor markets have fully healed and inflation has at least met, or exceeded, central bank targets," said JP Morgan in its outlook for 2021.

"The nascent recovery has already found some momentum, and fiscal stimulus should continue to provide further sup-

port. Failure to provide sufficient support is a key risk to economic healing," JP Morgan said.

Morgan Stanley, however, sees growth most likely improving in 2021, favouring smaller firms which have higher operating and financial leverage. Small and mid-cap valuations appear attrac-

tive and could outperform large caps in the next year.

"Though earnings growth should be consistently elevated, valuations appear uneven, Covid-19 cases and geopolitical uncertainty appear to be muting investor sentiment. This suggests that the strong growth outlook we are forecasting is not fully priced into the equity markets," Morgan Stanley analysts said.

"The bull market environment prevailing in calendar year 2021 could take Nifty-50 to 14,900 levels. However, if market bullishness reverts to average sentiment, the base case fundamental value is 13,500, which indicates flat returns for CY21. If a

risk-off environment materialises, we expect Nifty-50 to touch 11,600 on the downside," said ICICI Securities in its market outlook for 2021.

In its economic outlook, ICICI Securities said, "Near-term growth impulses are currently still weak with households preferring savings over consumption, government spending constrained by weak financial resources, and corporate sector deferring capex and cutting opex."

"Some of these challenges will reverse in CY21 due to aggregate demand normalising, pent-up demand, and improving resource mobilisation by the government," ICICI Securities said.

SHORT TAKES

GM Harikrishna holds Carlsen

Chennai: Indian Grandmaster P. Harikrishna held world number one and world champion Magnus Carlsen in the fourth round of the preliminary stage of the Champions Chess Tour Airtings Masters online chess championship. Both Harikrishna and Carlsen drew all their four games on the opening day of the tournament as matches ended late on Saturday. The game between Harikrishna and the Norwegian ended in 24 moves after the players repeated the moves.

India number two and former world champion Viswanathan Anand had earlier drawn his games with Maxim Vachier-Lagrave, Daniil Dubov and Spaniard David Anton Guijaro. He is in eighth place with two points. Harikrishna will take on Dutch GM Anish Giri in the fifth round followed by games against Alexander Grischuk, Hikaru Nakamura, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Lev Aronian, Wesley So and Teimour Radjabov subsequently. — *PTI*

SA batsmen fight back on Day Two

Centurion, South Africa: South Africa's batsmen scored freely against a depleted Sri Lankan bowling attack as the host nation fought back on the second day of the first Test on Sunday. South Africa were 317 for four at the close in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings total of 396.

Dean Elgar (95) and Aiden Markram (68) put on 141 for the first wicket, while former captain Faf du Plessis (55 not out) and Temba Bavuma (41 not out) added an unbeaten 97 for the fifth wicket as the hosts scored at better than four runs an over. Sri Lanka went into the match without leading fast bowler Suranga Lakmal because of a hamstring strain and suffered a major blow when opening bowler Kasun Rajitha limped off the field with what appeared to be a groin injury after bowling one ball in his third over. — *AFP*

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 396 (Chandimal 85, Shanaka 66*, Sipamla 4-76) **vs South Africa 317/4** (Elgar 95, Markram 68, du Plessis 55 batting).

Sydney Test is a 50-50 bet

Melbourne: The possibility of Sydney hosting the third Test against India has now come down to 50 per cent in the wake of fresh outbreak of Covid-19 cases there and a final decision will be arrived at in two days. Melbourne Cricket Club's chief executive officer Stuart Fox on Sunday said though he wants Sydney to retain the hosting rights of the third Test, the situation is "extremely complicated".

"He (Hockley) is working feverishly with the Department of Health in NSW and I believe it is extremely complicated. Everything he is telling me is it's really a 50-50 situation," Fox was quoted as saying by *Sydney Morning Herald*. — *PTI*

Kerala grab first win of season

Goa: Kerala Blasters dished out a complete performance as they edged Hyderabad 2-0 to secure their first win of the Indian Super League season here on Sunday. Abdul Hakku's header (29*) put Kerala ahead in the first half before Jordan Murray (88*) sealed three points for Kibru Vicuna's side. Vicuna rang in five changes to the side that drew against SC East Bengal while Hyderabad made two changes with Liston Colaco returning to the starting eleven. Both sides created chances in the first half but it was Kerala who headed into the break with a lead.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs Australia: Second Test — Day 3 from 5 am on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

Sri Lanka vs South Africa: First Test — Day 3 from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Crystal Palace vs Leicester City from 8.30 pm, Chelsea vs Aston Villa from 11 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Indian Super League: Bengaluru FC vs Jamshedpur FC from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

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JINKLE BELLS!

Ajinkya punches ton, India land second blow in Boxing Day Test

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Ajinkya Rahane played a captain's knock, a workmanlike century that steered India into a dominant position and took the sting out of Australia's potent bowling attack in the second Test here on Sunday.

Trailing 0-1 in the four-match series, India ended the second day at 277 for five for a handy 82-run lead after bowling out Australia for 195.

At stumps, which was brought early owing to rain, Rahane was going strong on 104 and giving him company was Ravindra Jadeja on 40, the two having added what might prove to be a game-changing 104-run partnership for the sixth wicket.

This was Rahane's 12th Test hundred and his second at the iconic venue, after a fine 147 during the 2014 tour.

A day after earning rich praise for his tactical acumen while marshalling the bowlers, Rahane shone bright with the bat and was spot on with his reading of match situations during his stay in the middle.

Rahane got a life when Steve Smith dropped him on 73 at second slip in Australia's first over with the second new ball, the unlucky bowler being Mitchell Starc, who was taken off the attack after just two overs with the shining red cherry.

That particular phase was crucial from both the team's point of view and by not losing a wicket to the second new ball, India ensured they finished the day ahead of Australia, in terms of runs as well as psychologically.

Rahane got another reprieve when substitute fielder Travis Head put one down after diving forward from gully, but that was after he had got to the three-figure mark.

To start with, Rahane was more watchful than he had ever been but as the day progressed, he went on to play some sumptuous shots and one of his day's best was the classic off-drive against Pat Cummins.

Earlier, Rishabh Pant (29) and Hanuma Vihari (21) frittered away promising starts after doing all the hard work, but Jadeja was determined not to do anything of that sort. — *PTI*

SCORECARD

Australia 1st Innings: 195
India 1st Innings (Overnight 36/1): Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc 0, Shubman Gill c Paine b Cummins 45, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 17, Ajinkya Rahane (batting) 104, Hanuma Vihari c Smith b Lyon 21, Rishabh Pant c Paine b Starc 29, Ravindra Jadeja (batting) 40. Extras (b-12, lb-6, nb-2, wd-1) 21. **Total (for 5 wickets in 91.3 overs) 277.**

Bowling: Mitchell Starc 18.3-3-61-2, Pat Cummins 22-7-71-2, Josh Hazlewood 21-6-44-0, Nathan Lyon 18-2-52-1, Cameron Green 12-1-31-0.



Indian captain Ajinkya Rahane celebrates after scoring a century as teammate Ravindra Jadeja applauds during the second day of the second Test against Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday.

— AP

GILL CREDITS RAHANE FOR HIS INNINGS

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Young India batsman Shubman Gill says watching Ajinkya Rahane's "magnificent" hundred from the sidelines was immensely educative for him and he learnt how not to get into a shell while facing a lethal bowling attack.

Stand-in skipper Rahane scored an unbeaten 104 in tough conditions to steer India to 277 for five against Australia on the second day of the second Test here.

"This knock was all about patience, more importantly when you are playing such a high quality pace attack, sometimes you get into shell and not able to score runs, and the way Ajinkya *bhai* played, it was such a magnificent knock to watch from outside," Gill said during a virtual press conference. "How to see off those tough periods, he made it sure that he put the loose balls away."

With Rahane going strong, India took a lead of 82 runs and Gill said the team will look to capitalise on it as batting will get more challenging from day three.

"On the first day, there was a bit turn for (Ravichandran Ashwin) Ash *bhai* and (Ravindra Jadeja) Jaddu *bhai* and even today we saw there was turn for Nathan (Lyon) and as the time goes on there will be more cracks and it will be more challenging for the batsmen."

Opening the innings, Gill scored a 65-ball 45 on debut before he nicked an outswinger from Pat Cummins. "When I came into bat, there was something in the pitch, it was lively but the only thing I told myself was that no matter what was in pitch, I should be able to play my game." — *PTI*

Starc rues missed chances for Oz

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Australian speedster Mitchell Starc rued the chances his team squandered on the second day of the Boxing Day Test but also praised rival skipper Ajinkya Rahane for his pressure-absorbing century.

A dogged unbeaten 104 by Rahane put India in the driver's seat after the second day as they were comfortably poised at 277 for five.

The fielders spilled a few chances offered by Rahane as India took a 82-run lead by the day end.

"It (the knock by Rahane) was pretty good. He absorbed some pressure there and sort of steadied the ship for them, at (a time) when they were still behind our score," Starc said at the virtual press conference. "He (Rahane) has batted

WARNER NOT SURE OF PLAYING THIRD TEST

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Star Australian opener David Warner is still struggling with his groin injury, coach Justin Langer said on Sunday, rendering him doubtful for the third Test against India starting January 7. He had missed the last ODI, three T20Is and the first two Tests against India due to the injury that he sustained during the second ODI.

Warner, whose absence was felt by Australia as they folded for 195 on the opening day of the ongoing Boxing Day Test, will hit the MCG nets on Sunday. "We saw him bat the day before the game, he's batting again this afternoon at the MCG, so in terms of his batting he's flying, it's just trying to ... he's still having some trouble with his groin and we know how dynamic he is," Langer told Ricky Ponting during an interview on *Seven*. — *PTI*

really well there, he took his chances and we probably could have got him out three or four or maybe five times before he got a

hundred, but he's run his luck there and scored a good hundred. Well done to him, added the left-arm pacer, who had figures of

2/61.

Starc admitted Australia endured a tough day.

"Pretty much that (frustrating day for the bowlers). The last ball pretty much summed up the day, so again not our best day, not our worst, we created a fair few chances and unfortunately could not hang onto to those half ones or those changes we created," he said.

"So Jinx (Rahane) batted pretty well throughout the day, (there were a) couple of really good partnerships. I thought there was really good stuff from us as well, we couldn't capitalise on some of the chances we created, to finish in a better position. So, just got to back up tomorrow and take five wickets as quick as we can," added Starc, summing up the day's play. — *PTI*

Furious Bedi attacks DDCA

■ Demands removal of his name from Kotla stand

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Spin legend Bishan Singh Bedi has threatened to take legal action against the DDCA if his name is not removed from a spectators' stand at the Feroz Shah Kotla ground with immediate effect.

On Wednesday, Bedi had shot a letter to the Delhi and District Cricket Association, lambasting it for installing a statue of its late former president Arun Jaitley at the Kotla.

In the absence of any response from DDCA, Bedi wrote another letter to the cricket body on Saturday.

"It's been a few days since I wrote to you ... While within minutes of my letter going public I had an overwhelming support of the cricket fraternity across the globe. But I'm sad there's been no reaction from you," Bedi wrote in his letter addressed to DDCA President Rohan Jaitley.

"... I hope in our country people still have a right to decide as individuals what they wish to be associated with & where their name plates can hang with dignity. Please don't push me to take a legal recourse."

Bedi had also decided to renounce his membership of the DDCA.

In his scathing letter, Bedi questioned the DDCA president's "ill advised" and "inexplicable" silence.

"Your seemingly ill advised silence to my letter that has triggered a public debate about perpetuating politicians at sporting venues exposes your naivety," he wrote.

● **On Wednesday, Bishan Singh Bedi had shot a letter to the Delhi and District Cricket Association, lambasting it for installing a statue of its late former president Arun Jaitley at the Kotla.**

"Your inexplicable silence also underlines guilt of occupying a position of power solely because of your family name, which, you obviously wish to promote, come what may."

"Finally, I hope you will have the basic courtesy to reply to a former cricketer who is not asking for a favour, but wants his cricketing integrity not to be bartered away."

The statue of Jaitley will be unveiled by BCCI president Sourav Ganguly at Kotla on Monday in the presence of union home minister Amit Shah and former BCCI chief Anurag Thakur, among others.

Bedi said he did not wish to be associated with the cricket stadium which has a statue of the late politician, who was a minister in the BJP-led NDA government and died last year owing to multiple health issues.

"I've been around long to know DDCA has a tradition of ignoring cricketers' voice, hence this reminder. There's a reason for my urgent request," the 74-year-old said. — *PTI*

MSD is ODI team of decade captain

Dubai, Dec. 27: The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Sunday named captain of ICC's ODI and T20 International teams of the decade while Virat Kohli stamped his pre-eminence in world cricket after being voted the skipper of the Test team.

Indians dominated the limited-over teams by having three and four players in the ODI and T20I respectively while England have maximum number of players — four — in the Test side.

The 39-year-old Dhoni, who retired from international cricket earlier this year, was one of the three Indians in the ODI team of the decade, the others being Rohit Sharma and skipper Virat Kohli.

Dhoni has three other compatriots in the T20I team — Rohit, Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah.

Besides being named captain of Test team, Kohli is the only player in the world to have been voted in the teams of the decade in all formats.

The teams of the decades were announced by the ICC ahead of the Awards of the Decade ceremony, to be held in virtual mode on Monday.

The top awards, includ-



Mahendra Singh Dhoni

ing ICC male cricketer as well as female cricketer of the decade, men's Test, ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, women's ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, will also be announced on Monday.

Kohli is also in the running for four awards — ICC male cricketer of the decade, men's Test cricketer, men's ODI cricketer and men's T20I cricketer of the decade.

In the Test team of the decade, senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is the other Indian while the four Englishmen are Alastair Cook, Ben Stokes, Stuart Broad and James Anderson. Australia are represented by Steve Smith and David Warner. — *PTI*

Rahane has regained his mojo after a century at MCG



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

When Ajinkya Rahane dabbled a ball from Mitchell Starc for a boundary through the slips, in the 66th over of their first innings, he made a statement. On a day that was peppered with dodgy weather, not too many Indian fans had expected their team to go past the Australian total. And they did thanks to a gritty performance by their batsmen who defied the relentless Australian bowling and the 'four seasons in a day' kind of climes that Melbourne is known for.

Notwithstanding the efforts by debutant Shubman Gill and Cheteshwar Pujara who weathered the Aussie attack in tough conditions with a 61 run partnership, the lead coming off skipper Rahane's blade was apt for the situation.

Coming in after a bad loss at Adelaide wasn't going to be easy. With two senior players out (including captain, and batting warlord, Virat Kohli) and two debutants (Mohammed Siraj being the second) not too many fans could put a punt on the Indians to stand up and

take the game to the hosts.

Rahane's effort of marshalling his resources to skittle out the Australians under the 200 run mark drew praises from senior cricketers who were impressed by his acumen. The smart usage leg-side attacking fielding positions — leg slip, gully and forward short leg — a rarity in modern day cricket saw the demise of the three main thorns in the Indian flesh. Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith and skipper Tim Paine perished to a strategy used predominantly in the pre-80s era of the game.

There have been many thoughts and opinions about Rahane's calmness as a cricketer. Comparisons with Kohli, in terms of their individual approaches towards the game, are trending on social media with fans of

both players putting forth their points of view with the kind of passion usually exhibited by armchair experts.

Legend Sunil Gavaskar, after day one, said Rahane has got a great sense of where the fielders should be kept and preferred to praise India's performance as a team effort rather than only Rahane's captaincy.

Effectively he took the focus back to the DNA of Mumbai, India's premier cricket city of the recent past, where coaches and seniors always gave importance to team efforts rather than individual performances.

Having watched Rahane break through to the top from his Under-19 days, one has always wondered why his classical approach hasn't given him the dividends he deserved. His average of 42.45 has belied

his ability for reasons that don't really have an explanation.

When he cut Pat Cummins past point to record his 12th Test century, the first of the series by either teams, Rahane took us back to 2014 when he had notched three tons at Wellington, Lord's and Melbourne. No matter what the expert's say, to me this ton was very special for it singled a certain intent that Rahane (and team India) have put the bad 36-run episode behind them as they slowly try and climb their way into the Border-Gavaskar series. More importantly, Rahane has regained his mojo, which augurs well for India as they go ahead in this series without Kohli.

Ending the second day with a lead of 82 runs with five wickets in hand, India

have given their fans two days of good cricket and plenty of hope of squaring the series. The team, with cameos coming from Hanuma Vihari and Rishabh Pant and a brave unbeaten knock by Ravindra Jadeja, are looking at putting a good distance between them and the hosts as they go into the third day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). Adding valuable runs is going to be India's main task as they will look at chasing as less runs as possible considering they will be batting last.

There will be many opinions and arguments about Rahane's captaincy (irrespective of the result of the ongoing Test) after this game and comparisons with the leadership style of Kohli will be expected. Debates about 'calmness

vs aggression' will continue to happen as fans play their fantasy games pitting one captain against the other. For now, team India has gained brownie points in two days of play at the MCG. The bowlers are bang on target, the team is combining very well, looks balanced irrespective of the absence of key players.

As far as the question of captaincy in the immediate future of Indian Test cricket is concerned, Indian fans could do well to refrain from daydreaming and accept the reality. No matter what India does in the series going forward, Rahane is a 'stand-in' captain who will happily hand over the baton to main leader, Kohli. The best thing fans could do would be to accept this fact and leave all theories in the realm of fantasy.