

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SUNDAY 20 | DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 30°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Margazhi 5
Tithi: Shashti
Star: Sathayam
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.07 am
Zohar: 12.09 pm
Asar: 3.19 pm
Maghrib: 5.45 pm
Isha: 7.01 pm

ED attaches Farooq assets worth ₹12 cr

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate Saturday attached residential and commercial properties worth nearly ₹12 crore of former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah in an ongoing case of alleged money laundering, drawing strong reaction from his party National Conference (NC) which said these properties were "largely ancestral" and he would challenge the action in a court of law.

COUNTER POINT



As a matter of principle, I never use my company's products!

STATE | 3

Rajini Mandram leaders asked to hurry up



NATION | 4

Police to probe Akhtar's complaint against Kangana

SPORT | 8

Gavaskar hails Aussie bowlers



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Mamata will be left alone: Shah

Midnapore (WB), Dec. 19: By the time assembly elections are held in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will be left alone in her TMC, a cocky Union Home Minister Amit Shah asserted on Saturday as a battery of TMC leaders including the redoubtable Suvendu Adhikari joined the BJP.

● Suvendu Adhikari joins BJP: P4

including five of the ruling party, and a Trinamool Congress Lok Sabha member in Mr Shah's presence. The TMCs slogan of 'Maa, Mati, Manush' (mother, motherland and people) has been reduced to 'extortion, corruption and nepotism', Mr Shah said, and exuded confidence that the BJP will form the next government in the state. — PTI

Chief Minister position is 'God given', says EPS CM kicks off poll campaign

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs SALEM, DEC. 19

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Palaniswami launched his poll campaign for the Tamil Nadu polls of 2021 from a small village near Salem on Saturday on a pious note. Describing his stint on the chief minister's chair in the State in the time from February 2017 to now, he said he never believed that one day he would be given the CM's post. "It is God-given," he said.

It was on a worshipful note that he kickstarted his campaign after offering



prayers at the small village temple in his Edappadi constituency and having a puja done in front of his campaign van that was bedecked with garlands. With trademark humility in front of his supporters and voters, Mr

Palaniswami recalled his humble background and how glad he was that he could utilised the post to serve the people, however challenging the post was. "I never thought of becoming chief minister. This is God-given...I utilised it to serve the people," Palaniswami said. He pointed out that his rural background and education in a state-run school helped him understand the difficulties of the people and in resolving their problems. He reminded the people, supporters and AIADMK cadre at a large gathering that when he took up the reins, the state was facing a

severe drought while cyclones ravaged the coast and currently coronavirus pandemic was posing a massive threat. He overcame all obstacles and ensured continuity of the 'Ammu' government, thus disproving the opposition parties' calculations on his government not lasting its term till the 2021 Assembly elections he said. "Some questioned whether my rule will continue after Jayalithaa's demise. Now my government has successfully completed four years in office and is all set to step into an election year (in 2021)," he added. ■ P2

TN to offer ₹2,500 as Pongal gift to rice card holders

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, DEC. 19:

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami's announcement of Pongal gift of ₹2,500 cash to all 'rice' ration card holders, besides a package of condiments to make the festival sweeter, has evoked critics of two types – one saying don't pay and the other telling him to pay more. Soon after Mr Palaniswami let his plans for the Pongal bonanza be known at the campaign meeting Saturday, his arch political rival and DMK president M.K. Stalin said that ₹2,500 was too little an amount for the people and urged him to pay ₹ 5,000 cash. ■ P2

Team India's summer of 36 Down Under

R. MOHAN | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 19

This will go down as the "Summer of 36". Team India achieved history of the notorious sort in going down for a bus route kind of number in their total of 36 (innings closed as last man Mohammad Shami retired hurt). The ignominy of being shot out for their lowest total since India played their first Test at Lord's in 1932 is that of Virat Kohli's team. Is this an aberration or is it a "representation of

new India?" Only time will tell.

The previous low for India was on the 1974 tour of England when they were a miserable set of tourists, huddled at Lord's against the blustery cold of Old Blighty as the ball swung and seamed. But this was a bright Australian summer day on which the ball hardly swung and moved off the seam only a smidgen.

This Team India of the new millennium sank without a trace, done in by precise bowling, the ball

pitched up to a full length and aimed at the corridor of uncertainty by Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc and the stump-to-stump line as in Josh Hazlewood's pinpoint accuracy. ■ P2

India skipper Virat Kohli congratulates his Aussie counterpart Tim Paine after the first Test in Adelaide on Saturday. Australia thrashed India by eight wickets after bowling out the visitors for their lowest total in Test history. — AFP



Sonia holds rapprochement meeting with 'letter writers'

New Delhi, Dec. 19: Seeking to quell recent dissension in the party, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday met a section of leaders including some who wrote to her this August demanding a complete organisational overhaul. The highlight of the five-hour meeting, which ended with a plan to hold a 'chintan shivir' at the earliest opportunity to

chalk the Congress' future strategy, was a demand by Sonia Gandhi's loyalists that Rahul Gandhi should assume the party leadership again. Mr Gandhi said that he was "ready to take any responsibility given by the party", but at the same time mentioned that the decision on leadership should be left to the electoral process. — PTI ■ P4

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SHORT TAKES

DMK terms transfer of Bengal IPS officers 'autocratic'

Chennai, Dec. 19: The DMK in Tamil Nadu on Saturday dubbed as "autocratic and anti-federal" the union government transferring three West Bengal IPS officers to central deputation and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to 'rescind' the order.

DMK President M K Stalin described the transfers as "unilateral". The three IPS officers were responsible for the security of BJP National President J P Nadda whose convoy was attacked during his recent visit to West Bengal, where Assembly polls are due next year.

The Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government in that state is strongly opposing the Centre's move. In a Facebook post on Saturday, Stalin said, "the unilateral transfer of 3 West Bengal IPS officers by the Union BJP Govt is autocratic and anti-federal."

"The civil service of the country must not be dictated by the whims and fancies of the ruling party in Delhi," he said.

Stalin, Tamil Nadu Leader of Opposition, urged the Prime minister to "immediately rescind the transfer order."

— PTI

Gold worth ₹87.6 lakhs seized at city airportDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 19

The Chennai Air Customs on Saturday seized gold weighing 1.7 kg and worth ₹87.6 lakhs from five air passengers.

According to a press release from Air Customs, based on tip-off, five passengers, Nouffar (28), Ahamed Ershad Ali (31) both of Ramanathapuram, Nandha Kumar (23) of Kanchipuram, Muruganandam Mohan (38) of Chennai and Satham Usen (25) of Pudukkottai who arrived from Dubai by an Air India Express flight were intercepted at exit on suspicion of carrying gold.

On search, 16 gold cut bits, weighing 597 grams, and two packets of gold paste were recovered from them. One gold paste packet was found concealed in shoes and another packet was recovered from the jeans pocket.

In all, four gold paste packets were recovered from which 701 grams of gold were extracted. Further, three bundles of gold paste weighing 428 grams were recovered from one of them. In five cases, 1.7 kg of gold valued at Rs 87.62 lakhs were recovered and seized under the Customs Act. Further investigation is underway.

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Pongal bonanza: ₹2,500 cash, gift hamper

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 19

Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami's announcement of Pongal gift of ₹2,500 cash to all 'rice' ration card holders, besides a package of condiments to make the festival sweeter, has evoked critics of two types – one saying don't pay and the other telling him to pay more.

Soon after Palaniswami let his plans for the Pongal bonanza be known at the campaign meeting on Saturday, his arch political rival and DMK President M K Stalin said that ₹2,500 was too little an amount for the people and urged him to pay ₹5000 cash.

Stalin was addressing an election meeting organised for Thiruvallur district when he said that the government that had refused to pay people money during the Coronavirus lockdown could at least consider paying ₹5000 now after the people had been further battered by rains and floods.

On the other side, the announcement of ₹2,500 for ration card holders now drawing rice from the shops opened a Pandora's box with many people slamming him on Twitter for the largesse. Comments like 'election stunt,' 'gift is to cover up the mistakes made while serving as a servant to the BJP' were tweeted by some of his critics.



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami prays at a temple in Salem on Saturday.

— DC

But there were many others who supported the gift offer and thanked the Chief Minister for his gesture. 'Hits a Sixer Announcement in his Day 1 campaign,' said a supporter tweeting with the hashtag with Palaniswami's name that trended for some time

Others were more critical. 'This appears to be just be a bribe for votes. Let AIADMK by all means give it from their party funds. Public money should be spent in better ways. Hope Courts step in and stop this,' read another tweet.

But there were many others who supported the gift offer and thanked the Chief Minister for his gesture. 'Hits a Sixer Announcement in his Day 1 campaign,' said a supporter tweeting with the hashtag with Palaniswami's name that trended for some time.

Another one said that ₹2,500 was definitely going to help the poor people and that it should be continued every year.

The package of condiments that will come along with the ₹2,500 cash comprises one piece of sugarcane, one kilo sugar, raisins and cashew nuts.

We tackled cyclone, covid: CM

From P1

He claimed that his pro-people and development oriented initiatives rendered Tamil Nadu a power surplus state in India and also a pioneer in water management. "We tackled the drought, cyclones and now have brought the covid pandemic under control," the chief minister said, commencing his election campaign after offering worship at the Senraya Perumal temple



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami campaigns in Salem on Saturday.

— DC

AIADMK Co-Coordinator, also the party's chief ministerial candidate for the polls, successfully contested from Edappadi in 1989, 1991, 2011 and 2016

in Periya Sorgai village.

The AIADMK Co-Coordinator, also the party's chief ministerial candidate for the polls, successfully contested from Edappadi in 1989, 1991, 2011 and 2016. Party sources indicated

he may seek re-election from this segment for the fifth time and first time as chief ministerial candidate in 2021.

Pointing out that the people of Edappadi constituency did not allow the DMK to win for 43 years, Palaniswami hoped they would continue to express their loyalty by making the AIADMK win yet again in the elections, due in April-May 2021. His government fulfilled

the aspirations of the people, he said and urged them to ensure a resounding win for his party to facilitate continuity of the good service to them. His government had created a record in producing 32.24 lakh tons paddy, up from a mere 23 lakh tons in the past.

Tamil Nadu is a leader in diverse fields like education and the enrolment rate in higher education in India, he added.

Is AIADMK-BJP alliance on shaky ground?

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR / DC
CHENNAI, DEC 19:

Why is the BJP dithering in firming up its tie-up with the AIADMK for the coming 2021 Assembly elections in the State even after both the Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswamy and deputy Chief Minister O Pannerselvam have unilaterally announced the continuation of the existing alliance?

While it is true that BJP top national leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah did not openly acknowledge the AIADMK's voluntary offer on continuing the alliance at the meeting in Chennai, he gave no indication of the BJP's disinclination to be in the same coalition, in which it fought the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

In this backdrop, the statement of BJP State President L Murugan at Ariyalur, where he is on a tour explaining the benefits of the three agricultural bills that had brought farmers from the north Indian states to Delhi with a demand for

While it is true that BJP top national leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah did not openly acknowledge the AIADMK's voluntary offer on continuing the alliance at the meeting in Chennai, he gave no indication of the BJP's disinclination to be in the same coalition, in which it fought the 2019 Lok Sabha elections

the repeal of the Acts, refused to acknowledge Palaniswamy as the Chief Ministerial candidate of the alliance.

To a query from media persons, Murugan said that the Chief Ministerial candidate would be finalized by the BJP's Central leadership though the present alliance with the AIADMK was intact.

Does that mean that the BJP is having second thoughts on fighting the next Assembly elections along with the AIADMK? Will the party have a tie-up with the new party to be launched by actor Rajinikanth? After all, the chief coordinator for the yet to be launched party, R Arjunamurthy, was the head of the State BJP's intellectual wing presi-

dent till the moment Rajinikanth made the announcement of his appointment.

Besides, Thuglak editor S Gurumurthy, with whom Rajinikanth had a long conversation with before announcing the launch of his party, also had a prolonged discussion with Amit Shah when he came to Chennai recently. So, is Gurumurthy planning to broker an electoral pact between the two parties?

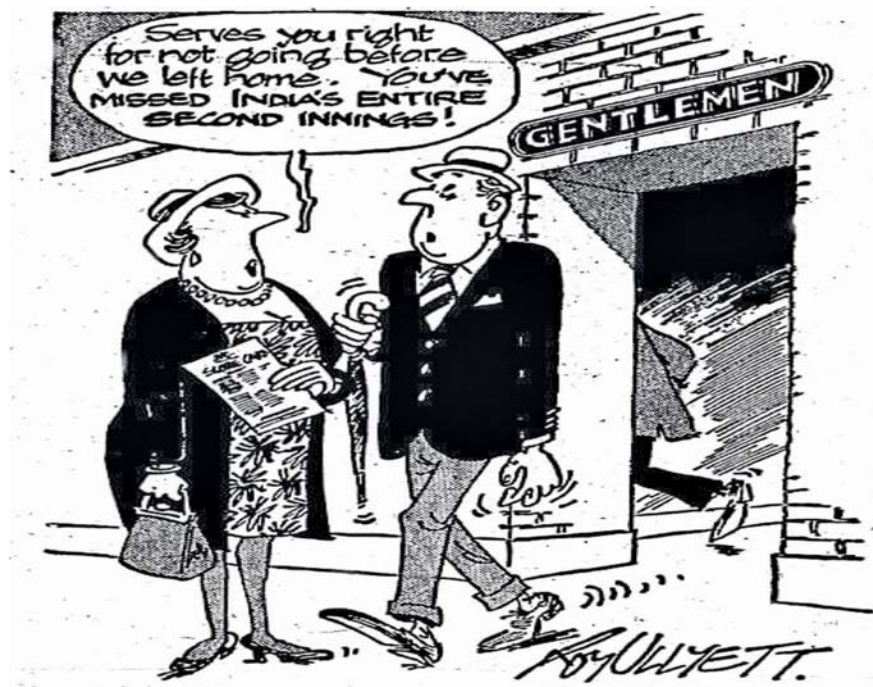
Within the AIADMK leaders were divided in their opinion while reacting to Murugan's statement. Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar told media persons in Chennai that Murugan's view need not be taken seriously after Shah himself had agreed for the alliance.

Another AIADMK leader Anwar Raajah made it clear that the BJP had to accept the chief ministerial candidate of the AIADMK. Every party in the coalition had to accept Palaniswami as the chief ministerial candidate, he said.

If the BJP cannot accept the AIADMK's candidate then it would have to face the elections on its own without the AIADMK support, Rajaah said.

BJP sources said that the party was waiting for the visit of its president J P Nadda next month to finalise the alliance. Only after Nadda makes an announcement on the tie-up would the party be able to launch its campaign itself, the sources said.

Otherwise, other parties have already moved into election mode by seeking voters support for them in the coming elections. While Palaniswami himself started his campaign on Saturday, others like the DMK had begun the vote hunting long back with a plethora of programmes, including meetings at various places by various leaders.



The historical cartoon by Roy Ulyett in a British newspaper in 1974 made a big splash with India furious and England most amused. The cartoon seems most appropriate after a worse collapse by India in Adelaide with not a single Indian batsman getting into double figures and extras were nil.

Cummins, Hazlewood excel in drawing batsmen to ball

R. MOHAN | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

Cummins was brilliant in using the in-tilt to draw the batsmen into playing at the ball and taking it away. Hazlewood carried out his plan of persistent accuracy around off stump. Up against such a planned assault, the worst of Indian batting erupted in indistinct footwork, hesitancy and bats presented to the ball held in hard hands and the outside edge drawn like moths to the flame.

Even skipper Kohli, who compiled that flawless innings of 74 - the highest in the match on a pitch that was nowhere near Adelaide Oval standards and far from ideal for a Test match played with the pink ball that does a lot more when new than its red cousin - in the first innings managed just one boundary before being taken low in the slips cordon, as indistinct a stroke as that of any others in

the top order.

The last time a similar situation occurred may have been when Team India seemed to be on the cusp of making history but flopping was in Bridgetown, Barbados in 1997 when 120 was the fourth innings target. The West Indian attack was charged up that final morning, bowling the wicket-to-wicket line with an iron discipline and close catchers doing the rest. Young Tendulkar was the skipper then and a deeply disappointed man after India were bowled out for 81.

The best laid plans of men and mice can often go awry. But this seems to happen to Team India more often. A handy first innings lead and a bowling attack manned by such splendid men as Jasprit Bumrah and Ravi Ashwin had too small a bank of runs to defend even on such a pitch offering plenty of assistance. And Shami, the third

prong of the seam trio, had to retire hurt after ducking, swaying and swishing at the ball like a man in a trance.

The Indian approach to bowling on this pitch was in sharp contrast to what the Australians did in keeping the ball up to the bat. The number of times Burns pulled Bumrah amply illustrated how the Indians were pitching it that much shorter. Bumrah had bowled so much better in the first innings to exploit the variable bounce.

The shabby ways of Team India were exemplified in the finish too with a dropped catch going over the line for six. The embarrassment was complete.

This team didn't have the mental toughness needed to win a Test match in what is the hardest country in the world to beat the home team in. Kohli's men flattered to deceive and they will be without their leader in the rest of the series.

Man fears he contracted Covid-19, ends life

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 19

A 28-year-old man, who suspected he had contracted the Coronavirus infection, ended his life in Nedunkundram near Tambaram. The deceased has been identified as Shankar, a resident of Devanesan Nagar in Nedukundram.

According to police sources, a close friend of Shankar succumbed to Covid-19 in Tiruchy two days back. Shankar was upset about the incident and feared that he too would contract the infection.

The police said on Thursday he returned from Tiruchy after attending his friend's funeral. He reportedly self-quaran-

tined at his house, without speaking even to his family members, even though he had no specific symptoms of the virus infection.

But on Friday night, he was found hanging inside the room. Police were alerted and the body has been sent to the Chromepet government hospital for post-mortem.

Was MGR rule all that great?



G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

The latest bait that some politicians wanting to capture power are throwing at voters is 'MGR rule.' As most of you know, M G Ramachandran, more popularly known by his acronym MGR, was an actor-cum-politician who founded the AIADMK in 1972 and subsequently ruled the State as Chief Minister for 10 years from 1977. Now, 33 years after his passing away, two actors - Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan - are invoking MGR's memory. They seek to claim MGR's legacy even as the AIADMK is very much around, suggesting that they would give the people a regime that MGR once gave.

Was that much touted MGR rule a golden period of Tamil Nadu? Did milk and honey flow through the streets then? Of course, there can be no denying the fact that MGR, both as an actor and politician, had a huge following. When he broke away from the DMK in 1972, the State witnessed

three weeks of rioting. Vehicles were allowed to pass through roads only if they had a picture of MGR on the windscreen as his supporters took control.

Later on, in 1984 when he took ill and was taken to the Brooklyn Hospital in the US, his supporters set themselves ablaze and even cut their fingers hoping that such acts would appease their gods and help their leader come back to rule them again. And when he did return, in February 1985, a sea of humanity turned up to see him at the sprawling cantonment grounds below St Thomas Mount. Crowds had started arriving at the venue two nights ahead of MGR's arrival and the sight of the icon waving to them from a stage turned out to be an emotional moment for lakhs and lakhs of his supporters.

I was there at the meeting and witnessed grown up men shedding copious tears of joy over the leader's return. When he passed

away on the morning of December 24, 1987, I was on a long-distance bus that reached Tiruchy at daybreak to the news seeping in. Stranded mid-way as the conductor reimbursed the fare for the rest of the journey, I went to the railway station, from where a special train was operated to Chennai. All other modes of transport had been cancelled. So, I took the train, full of MGR supporters going for the funeral, and it took 24 hours to reach Chennai.

Perched on the luggage rack inside the crammed unreserved compartment, surrounded by men, women and children from rural areas, hailing from the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder, I gained a new political perspective. I learnt more on how the masses saw MGR from those mourners, chatting through the journey. Some of his initiatives as Chief Minister might have benefitted them immensely, say the mid-day meal scheme and the crowd spoke only about MGR, the person with a fair complexion, good looks and a large heart, averring that nobody can replace him. They were all unanimous on one thing: 'It's all over, there can't be another MGR.' All that they wanted was to have a look at him for one last time before

bidding goodbye.

Irrespective of the people's adulation that he enjoyed, MGR's rule was not something to write home about. A review of his policies would clearly reveal that his regime did not show any remarkable economic or industrial growth. Many leaders who were close to him managed to start private educational institutions – a trend set in motion during MGR rule – and grew exponentially by collecting huge amounts of capitation fees.

Otherwise, many human rights activists see his regime as one in which the draconian Goondas Act was brought in and used against many people. It was MGR who hunted down CPI(ML) activists, who were supporting the cause of farm labourers in the backward districts of Dharmapuri and North Arcot districts, in the 1980s by letting loose the police on them. When a court passed strictures against the police for the 'fake encounters' MGR decorated the police personnel involved in the human rights violations with medals for their valour and distinguished service. The way he dealt with a government employees strike is still spoken about, not in a kind way, of course.

In 1981, MGR amended the

IPC and Code of Criminal Procedures (Tamil Nadu) Act to make 'scurrilous and indecent writing' a cognisable offence punishable with a prison term for 2 to 5 years with a view to harassing the media houses that were carrying unfavorable reports about his government. He even passed a bill to curb screening of films that were critical of legislators and ministers even if they had been cleared by the censor board.

The script of the play, Thaneer Thaneer (Water, water), by Komal Swaminathan, was censored because it was critical of the government in general and when it was made into a film with the same title by K Balchandar, MGR tried to put pressure on the Union Government to ban the film.

But then, the common people loved him for the way he treated them. He was never surrounded by menacing bouncers with intimidating looks and manners and people could get close to him and interact with him. There are people who still recall glowingly the taste of sambar and touch of humanism in the hospitality they enjoyed at MGR's house. Yes, the gates of his house were always open for those who wanted to meet him.

IN BRIEF

Child dies as house wall collapses

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, DEC 19

A two-year-old boy was crushed to death on the spot when a portion of a mud wall collapsed on him at K Sathanur in Tiruchy district here on Saturday.

Police said, Hari Krishnan, son of Sivakumar, a construction worker, was residing in a thatched roofed house.

The walls had become wet and damp due to the recent rains.

The victim was playing near the wall when a portion of it collapsed on him, killing him immediately on the spot.

KK Nagar police recovered the body and sent it to the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial government hospital for post-mortem, police added.

Rajini Mandram leaders asked to hurry up

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 19

District Presidents of Rajini Makkal Mandram, who are expected to become functionaries of the political party to be launched by actor Rajinikanth, have been asked to submit their reports with the details they had been asked to furnish by December 25.

Ever since Rajinikanth left for Hyderabad to attend the shooting of the film Annaatthe the two party leaders appointed by him—chief coordinator R Arjunamurthy and supervisor Tamilaruvim-anian - have been speaking to district presidents at the Raghavendra Kalyana Mandapam, which has been converted into the headquarters of the party.

It is said that the leaders were meeting five district secretaries at a time to

brief them about the tasks that they would have to finish and file the report on that. Among the tasks entrusted with the district functionaries are forming a booth committee and enrolling new members.

There are about 67,000 polling booths in the State and committees had been formed for about 75 per cent of the booths, a source said, adding that Rajinikanth had been peeved that the work had not been completed despite the district presidents getting sufficient time.

Since Rajinikanth is in touch with the leaders on a regular basis from Hyderabad, efforts have been made to speed up the process. Rajini Makkal Mandram functionary V M Sudhakar had sent out a circular to all the district presidents to complete the work and also submit the report on that by December

25. The district presidents had been urged to appoint only genuine and dedicated candidates for the committees. They had been cautioned against taking money for candidates for making the appointments and had also been warned against distributing money to voters, a source said. The persons appointed to the committees should be committed persons who would also get votes for the party, they had been told.

When Rajinikanth returns to Chennai, on completion of the shooting schedule, on December 30, the reports of all the district presidents should be on his table. He would announce the launch of his party on December 31 only after going through the reports and if he was satisfied over the developments made so far.

New farm bills, a game changer: CII

R VALAYAPATHY | DC
TIRUCHY, DEC. 19

The CII believes that the new farm bills will be a game changer for the southern states in agriculture and related sectors. The agricultural sector is poised to gain manifold from the path-breaking reforms announced by the Union government recently, together with the other policy support provided, to traverse decisively forward towards 'One Nation, One Market'. This is a significant step for the agricultural sector.

In a release here on Saturday, the CII stated that as per the First Advance Estimates for

2020-21 (Kharif), record food grain production of 144.52 million tons is estimated. The increase in production is driven by increase in acreage for the crop, an increase of 4.51 percent over the previous year and a good monsoon. Horticulture production at 320 million tons is estimated to be 3.13 percent higher than the previous year. Additionally, production in cash crops like sugarcane, cotton, spices and coffee, are also expected to be robust.

Chairman, CII, southern region, Satish Reddy, said that south India has a rich ecosystem supported by a vibrant private sector which would help the agri-

culture sector to grow manifold in the context of new reform measures announced by the Centre. The reforms would create the right environment for market and investment-led agricultural growth, and increased income generation for farmers.

Deputy chairman, CII, southern region, CK Ranganathan, said that the new laws will help transform the sector, and more importantly help augment farmers' incomes. Creation of an additional ecosystem where the farmers and traders enjoy the freedom of choice relating to sale and purchase of farmers' produce, will help facilitate remunerative prices

through competitive alternative trading channels.

CII is facilitating private sector engagement in agriculture under its business service unit for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) which aims at capability building of FPOs and forging market links. Nine value chains, namely rice, maize, soyabean, pulses, banana, potato, tomato, spices and red chilli, have been prioritized under the program, and 11 companies have already signed to engage with the FPOs. Under the program, over 50,000 farmer families are expected to be impacted by 2021, and nearly 200,000 farmer families by 2023, it added.

DMK preparing to face poll defeat: Murugan

DC CORRESPONDENT
PERAMBALUR, DEC. 19

The TN BJP president, L Murugan, on Monday said that the DMK was preparing to face yet another defeat in the forthcoming election to the state assembly.

At a press conference here on Saturday, Murugan took strong exception to DMK president MK Stalin's remarks that until the Centre with-

draws its farm bills, the agitation of the DMK and its allies would continue. Farmers have already given a fit reply to Stalin, and all agitations staged by Stalin have ended in failure, he added.

Murugan also dismissed the remarks of CPI state secretary, R Mutharasan, that there is no democracy with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Asked to comment

on actor-turned-politician Kamal Haasan's announcement that he would release details of corruption related to AIADMK ministers' corrupt deeds, Murugan said, "Let Kamal Haasan first release the details."

To a query, Murugan said both the Centre and the state governments would shortly sit together and start construction activities for the proposed AIMS hospital at Madurai.

Protest seeking water

DC CORRESPONDENT
PERAMBALUR, DEC 19

Tension prevailed for a while when a section of villagers of Annamangalam staged a dharna in front of Collector P Sri Venkatapriya, ruling party MLAs

RT R a m a c h a n d r a n (Kunnam) and Tamil Selvan (Perambalur), when they went to open the shutters of Visvakudi reservoir for irrigation in Visvakudi dam near here, on Saturday.

They were protesting against the non receipt of Visvakudi water for their village and its surrounding villages.

According to the protesters, although the government announced that the Visvakudi reservoir water would irrigate 1,450 acres in Visvakudi, Annamangalam, Mohamadpattinam and Pillaiyarpalayam villages, the information was totally wrong.

They said that water released from the Visvakudi reservoir directly went to the big lake at Vengalam village, but they did not receive a drop of water from Visvakudi reservoir.

The collector persuaded the agitated villagers to disperse with an assurance that suitable action would be taken after a detailed inspection, upon which the protesters dispersed.

Test positivity and active cases decline

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 19

While test positivity and active cases shows a downward trend in the city for months now, the recovery rate continues to decline in the city for the last 60 days.

According to data provided by the State health department, a total of 7,715 patients were recovered for the last 20 days against 11,017 in the previous 20 days. The number of recovered cases between October 2 and 22 was 15,949. This comes at a time when the city has reported a new cluster of Covid 19 at Indian Institute of Madras Campus last week.

The trend of daily recovery shows – 1,803 (between June 24 and July 14), 313 (July 14 and August 3), 038 (August 3 and 23), 1,220 (August 23 and Sept. 12), 1,039 (Sept. 12 and Oct. 2), 1,192 (Oct. 2 and 22) to 797 (Oct. 2 and Nov. 9) to 550 (Nov. 9 and 28) to 385 (Nov. 28 and Dec. 18).

While the recovery rate improved between Aug. 23 and Sept. 12, the decline was seen between Aug. 3 and 23 as well. The number of recovered cases had declined from 26,274 (between July 14 and Aug. 3) to 20,759 (between Aug. 3 and 23). The trend shows the number had quadrupled from May 3 to May 13, doubled between May 13 and May 23, rose between May 23 and June 3 and improved between June 13 and June 24 to 18,673 cases, but climbed to 36,079 between June 24 and July 1.

When it comes to the test positivity, at least 7,010 cases reported in the last 20 days compared to 9,158 in the previous 20 days. The trend in daily positivity rate shows – 1,692 (June 24 to July 14), 1,166 (July 15 to Aug. 3), 1,120 (Aug. 3 to 23), 1,110 (Aug. 23 to Sept. 12), 1,121 (Sept. 12 to Oct. 2), 1,163 (Oct. 2 to 22), 564 (Oct. 22 to Nov. 9), 458 (Nov. 9 to 28) and 350 (Nov. 28 to Dec. 18).

The number shows 23,274

positive cases reported between Oct. 2 and 22 while 22,434 cases recorded between Sept. 12 and Oct. 2 and 22,202 in between Aug. 23 and Sept. 12.

The growth of the positive cases shows 1,273 on May 3 to 4,882 on May 13 to 9,364 on May 23 to 16,585 on June 3 to 45,814 on June 24 to 79,662 on July 14 to 1,02,985 on Aug. 3 to 1,25,389 on Aug. 23 to 1,47,591 on Sept. 12 to 1,70,025 on Oct. 2 to 1,93,299 on Oct. 22 to 2,05,419 on Nov. 9 to 2,14,577 on Nov. 28 to 2,21,587.

Active cases in the same period were 3,037. They had declined from 3,837 in the previous 20 days. As per the data, the trend shows that active cases had peaked from 1,007 on May 3 to 4,012 on May 13 to 5,461 on May 23 to 7,805 on June 3 to 18,673 on June 24 and then down to 15,814 on July 14 to 11,983 on Aug. 3 then up to 13,223 on Aug. 23 down to 10,645 on Sept. 12 and up to 12,013 on Oct. 2.

The death rate also recorded a downward trend in the last 20 days. A total of 95 Covid-related deaths registered in the past 20 days against 117 in the previous 20 days.

The data show that the daily death rate increased from 26 (between June 3 and June 24) to 31 (June 24 to July 14) to 44 (July 14 to Aug. 3). But the daily death rate had started declining between Aug. 3 and 23 as 20 and 19 in between Aug. 23 to Sept. 12. The rate touched 14 in Sept. However, it went up to 16 between Oct. 2 and 22. But it came down to just 4 between Nov. 28 and Dec. 18.

The death toll mounted from 17 cases on May 3 to 3,938 as of Dec. 18 (8 months). According to the data, the Health department conducted a total of 1.33 crore sample tests with 1,30,12,168 individuals tested across the state till Dec. 18. According to officials, most of the deaths came in patients with comorbid conditions.



Many school students along with NGO did a corona awareness campaign with placards and slogans at Camp road, East Tambaram. They insist mainly on the importance of wearing a face mask, and using hand sanitiser. —DC

Free Covid-19 vaccine trials

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, DEC. 19

The district administration here has arranged free vaccination trials of Covid-19 anti-vaccine, said Collector S Sivarasu on Saturday. In a release here, the collector said that free vaccination would be administered through government and private hospitals across the district. There are 1,389 private hospitals in the district under the 'clinical establishment act' of which only 370 hospitals shared their details on the total number of medical and paramedical staff

with them, and registered themselves in this connection.

The rest of the private hospitals should register themselves and provide the required details on or before December 22, through https://hmis.nhp.gov.in and apply in a prescribed form and submit their applications online to the joint director of medical and rural health services trichy-jdhs@gmail.com, and also to deputy director of health services dphtry@nic.in

Only free anti-Covid-19 vaccination would be supplied to them, the collector added.

TN fourth among most infected States

New Delhi, Dec. 19: India crossed the sombre milestone of one crore COVID-19 cases, adding 10 lakh infections in nearly a month, even as the virus spread slowed and recoveries surged to over 95.50 lakh, according to Union Health Ministry data.

The worst affected states and UTs with highest number of COVID-19 cases are Maharashtra (18,88,767), Karnataka (9,07,123), Andhra

Pradesh (8,77,806), Tamil Nadu (8,04,650), Kerala (6,93,865), Delhi (6,14,775) and Uttar Pradesh (5,72,196).

A total of 1,45,136 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 11,954 from Tamil Nadu as per the health ministry data.

There are 3,08,751 active cases in the country which constitute 3.08 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated. —PTI

CITY CLIPS Festive season for gourmets

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 19

The year 2020 may have been one of the hardest years on record. But Christmas, which comes only a year, brings good cheer and the festive spirit seems to be catching on in the city. Carols are going online this season while luxury hotels that used to offer themselves as great venues for Christmas season spreads are opting for delivery mode to keep their customers in good humour amid lockdown restrictions and the inhibitions people feel about going to public places to dine.

The luxury group ITC Hotels seems to have hit upon a good idea to spread the cheer with its culinary excellence reflected in its 'Biryani & Pulao Collection'. Thoughtfully curated, the collection brings ten gems from the heritage kitchens of India. The collection covers biryani and pulao from all four regions – north, south, east and west – of the country, sent with care and hygiene to ensure a safe dining experience. Anil Chadha, COO-ITC Hotels says, "The Biryani & Pulao Collection is a strong reminder of our culture and flows from significant investment in culi-



sine research. The dishes are reasonably priced with those from the vegetarian section for the likes of kale moti pulao and Hyderabad subz tahari and the chicken and mutton pulaos costing just a little more. With a raita and a popular dessert, it is an attractive enough package for biryani and pulao lovers. The collection can also be ordered on prominent food

aggregator platforms like Zomato, Swiggy & EazyDiner or through ITC F&B app and takeaway option.

The Trident hotel, like many other luxury hotels, is offering in-restaurant dining experience to lavish 4 course meals at lunch or dinner in their all day-dining Cinnamon, all served with the warmth of gratitude of the festive season. .

Actress launches venue with training facilities

Chennai, Dec. 19: Actress Namitha made a splash at the recent launch of Iris Studios which provides space for a range of activities for companies and individuals in a virtual 'hall n' all' equipped with facilities to conduct successful sessions in training. Namitha said the location of the facility near the old Sathya Studios would enable aspiring models, photographers, designers, choreographers and upcoming entertainment professionals to enhance their career prospects.



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SHORT TAKES

POLICE TO PROBE AKHTAR'S PLAINT AGAINST KANGANA

SAURABH JOSHI | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 19

The Mumbai police will now probe a defamation complaint filed by Bollywood lyricist Javed Akhtar against actor Kangana Ranaut following the orders of the Andheri court. The Juhu police has been asked to probe into the complaint pertaining to the remarks of coterie in the film industry naming Mr Akhtar.

The lyricist had sought action against Ranaut after she allegedly made statements on national television and in social media in connection with the coterie operating in the film industry. The complaint stated that Ms Ranaut had mentioned Mr Akhtar when speaking about coterie and that she had also claimed that the lyricist had threatened her to not speak about her alleged relationship with actor Hrithik Roshan.

The plea before Andheri metropolitan court sought for criminal case under relevant sections against Ms Ranaut. The magistrate court on Saturday ordered the Juhu police to investigate the matter and submit their report on January 16.

PRAGYA SKIPS MALEGAON BLAST CASE TRIAL AGAIN

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, DEC. 19

BJP's Bhopal MP Pragya Singh Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, has again given a skip to a hearing before a special NIA court. This is the second consecutive time this month she has missed the court hearing, which invoked a discontent from the court.

According to Ms Thakur's lawyer, she was admitted to a hospital in Delhi on Friday, due to which she could not attend the hearing. Of all the seven accused, five remained present in the court, whereas Ms Thakur and another accused Sudhakar Chaturvedi did not appear in court, the later citing personal reasons. Expressing displeasure on this, judge P. R. Sitre directed all the seven accused to appear before it on January 4.

"Ms Thakur has been undergoing treatment at AIIMS Delhi since April. She had gone there for a check-up and had to be admitted there on Friday on the advice of doctors following her medical reports," her lawyer J.P. Mishra said.

HONDA STOPS PRODUCTION AT GREATER NOIDA

New Delhi, Dec. 19: Honda Cars India Ltd (HCIL) has decided to pull the plug on production at its Greater Noida plant in Uttar Pradesh, sources said on Saturday.

The automaker, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Japanese Honda Motor Co, had set up the Greater Noida plant in 1997.

Industry sources said the plant would, however, continue to house the company's corporate head office, spare parts division and research and development (R&D) centre among other functions.

The company declined to comment on the matter. The automaker would now rely only on its Tapukara facility in Rajasthan to roll out its entire product range in the country, sources added.

HCIL had earlier this year initiated a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) for its manufacturing line associates at the plant to increase productivity and efficiency.

Sonia hears letter-writers out, clears chintan shivir

New Delhi, Dec. 19: Seeking to quell recent dissension in the party, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday met a section of leaders including some who wrote to her this August demanding a complete organisational overhaul.

The highlight of the five-hour meeting, which ended with a plan to hold a 'chintan shivir' at the earliest opportunity to chalk the Congress' future strategy, was a demand by Sonia Gandhi's loyalists that Rahul Gandhi should assume the party leadership again.

Mr Gandhi said he was "ready to take any responsibility given by the party" but at the same time mentioned that the decision on presidency should be left

to the electoral process. His response was applauded by the attendees, according to sources.

Overall, the meeting stood out as an ice-breaking session with the 'letter-writers' whom Sonia Gandhi assured a constancy of dialogue and meetings to address their issues, besides announcing that the internal election process was underway and a brainstorming conclave like the ones held in Shimla and Panchmarhi in the past would be held soon.

The meeting, which included Ms Gandhi's close associates, was significant as it was the first effort by the Congress leadership for a rapprochement with the 'letter-writers' who had raised questions over the leadership.

● **THE MEETING** stood out as an ice-breaking session with the 'letter-writers' whom Sonia Gandhi assured a constancy of dialogue and meetings to address their issues, besides announcing that a brainstorming conclave would be held soon.

Some leaders like A.K. Antony, Ashok Gehlot, Ajay Maken and Pawan Bansal wanted Mr Gandhi to assume the responsibility of Congress president.

The former Congress chief said he liked working with the senior leaders as they had also worked with his father late Rajiv Gandhi and he knew them since childhood.

● **THE 'LETTER-WRITERS'** stressed that their concern was to strengthen the party and asserted that they were not "rebels" or "dissidents", as construed by some. They said they had only raised issues in the party's interest to strengthen it.

Sonia Gandhi told those present that they were all a big family and will work together to strengthen the party.

The sources said she also gave a go-ahead to hold a 'chintan shivir' soon to resolve ideological issues within the Congress and the strategy of taking on the BJP as also to tell people about the ruling party's

'massive failure' in governance. The leaders said they had faith in the unifying face of party leadership and its ideological commitment, according to the sources.

The 'letter-writers' stressed that their concern was to strengthen the party and asserted that they were not "rebels" or "dissidents", as construed by some.

They said they had only raised issues in the party's interest to strengthen it, the sources said. They also pointed out the acrimony at the last CWC meet held virtually.

Those attending the meeting from among the 'letter-writers' were leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, deputy leader of the party in the Upper House Anand

Sharma, former chief ministers Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Prithviraj Chavan, and MPs Manish Tewari, Vivek Tankha and Shashi Tharoor.

The sources said after everyone raised their concerns, Mr Azad said they were grateful that the leadership heard them and hoped the issues raised by them would be resolved "with integrity and honesty".

Asserting that there was no dissidence in the Congress, party leader Pawan Bansal, a Sonia Gandhi loyalist, said the meeting was held on a positive note and in a congenial atmosphere with all the leaders expressing their views and suggesting ways to make the party stronger. Ms Gandhi also agreed

that more working committee meetings should be held, the sources said.

This was also the first time that ms Gandhi met Congress leaders in person since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The meeting was held at the lawns of her 10, Janpath residence, which was followed by lunch.

Besides former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were among those who attended the meeting. "Discussions were held on a positive note at the meeting where leaders talked about how to strengthen the party at all levels. Congress chief Sonia Gandhi said we all are one big family and we all should work to strengthen the party," he said. — *PTI*

Adhikari joins BJP, hails Amit Shah, reveals their past link

Lashes out at Mamata, her nephew for branding him a 'traitor'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 19

Joining the BJP on Saturday in his home turf, Shubhendu Adhikari described Union home minister Amit Shah as his "Dada" and "Aan Baan Shan" of the country before raising a slogan "Tolabaj Bhaipo Hatao (Remove Extortionist Nephew)" in an oblique reference to Diamond Harbour Trinamul Congress MP and chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee.

"The Union home minister, who has accepted me as a primary member of the world's biggest party: BJP that believes in pluralism, is my elder brother, my Dada and Aan Baan Shan of our nation. He fulfilled all the promises, he made earlier, within eight months of winning the Lok Sabha Election in 2019 under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership," Mr Adhikari told a grand rally in Midnapore.

Revealing his long connection with Mr Shah for the first time, he said, "My relation with him has been since when he was the BJP all India general secretary in charge of East Uttar Pradesh. He led the party's victory in Lok Sabha polls in 2014 and steered the saffron storm in UP. I met him in a small room in the party's old office at Ashoka Road. The present UP health minister Siddharth Nath Singh had arranged the meeting. But he never asked me to join the BJP."

Mr Adhikari claimed, "When I was infected by Covid-19, none from the party, I then belonged to, inquired about me. But Mr Shah did twice. I offer my Naman to him."

Lashing out at Ms Banerjee and her nephew for branding him as a "traitor," he alleged, "They (TMC) are claiming of my betrayal to mother. Mother is who gives birth to a child. My mother is Gayatri Adhikari. There is another: Bharatmata as my motherland. None else. Yesterday an old TMC friend sent me a video showing my slogan 'BJP Hatao, Bharat Banchao' before the Lok



Union Home Minister Amit Shah being garlanded by party leaders during an election rally ahead of West Bengal Assembly polls 2021, in West Midnapore district, on Saturday.

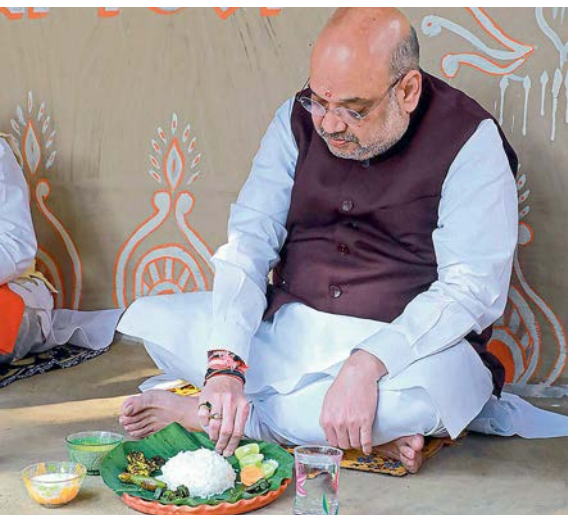
— PTI

Shah has lunch at house of farmer in West Bengal

Midnapore (WB), Dec. 19: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday had lunch at the house of a farmer in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district as part of his exercise to strengthen relations with the agriculturists ahead of the Assembly elections in the state.

Shah's move assumes significance in the wake of the ongoing farmers' protests in Delhi against the three farm laws. Shah, who is on a two-day visit to West Bengal to take stock of the BJP's affairs in the state, arrived here on Saturday and offered puja at a local temple. Then, the union minister went to the residence of Sanatan Singh at Balijhuri and had lunch there, sitting on the floor of the house.

Shah was accompanied by BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, BJP national vice-president Mukul Roy and state party chief Dilip Ghosh. It was a vegetarian platter of Bengali delicacies, served on a



Union Home Minister Amit Shah having lunch at the house of Jhunu Singh and Sanatan Singh, at Belijuri village in Midnapore, on Saturday.

— PTI

banana leaf by the women family members of Singh. Shah and other guests, who sat on the floor of the verandah of the two-storey house with a tin roof, had 'saak bhaja', 'lou daal', 'shukto' (mixed veg stew which is slightly bitter), 'phulkupi tarkari' (ca-

uliflower curry), 'posto' (potato cooked in poppy seed paste) and 'tok doi'.

Earlier, the union minister and other BJP leaders were greeted by ululating and blowing of conch shells by the women members of the household, including Singh's wife. — *PTI*

Sabha polls. I replied to him my slogan today here would be 'Tolabaj Bhaipo

Hatao' (Remove Extortionist Nephew)." Mr Adhikari also

released his open letter to TMC workers urging them to join BJP.

TIWARI SEES DISSENT IN BJP, BACK IN TMC

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, DEC. 19

Stung by a massive dissent against him in the BJP, heavyweight Pandabeshwar MLA Jitendra Tiwari, who quit the ruling Trinamul Congress on December 17 hoping to join the saffron party, took a U-turn barely few hours before union home minister Amit Shah's arrival in West Bengal on Friday night on a two-day visit.

Apologising to West Bengal chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, the former Asansol Mayor returned to her party within 24 hours of his exit in an overnight drama after state minister Aroop Biswas, accompanied by TMC election strategist Prashant Kishor, called, placated and finetuned him at a meeting in his club: Suruchi Sangha in New Alipore of south Kolkata.

Mr Tiwari told the media, "I have no grievance. I am also not a big leader who will go to Didi for a discussion about my grievance. I was, am and will be in the TMC. Did you ever hear me saying anything against Didi? Did I ever talk of joining the BJP? I will request my party not to accept my resignation letter sent earlier. I want to withdraw it. Those I met now are my well-wishers who love me too."

He said, "I felt sad to learn from Aroopda that Didi was hurt by my behavior (resignation from the party). I am not after getting something by hurting her. I will personally apologise to her by offering my Pranam. It was my misunderstanding and fault which have been sorted out. I have forgotten everything now. When I respect Didi, all others in her party must be respected also."

Mr Biswas said, "A family can have problem over which brothers do not leave their mother however. Mr Tiwari, as a soldier of Ms Banerjee, will continue to fight against the BJP."

ED attaches Farooq assets

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, DEC. 19

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached former chief minister and National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah's six properties worth ₹11.86 crore including his residential houses in twin capitals of Srinagar and Jammu in connection with a probe into alleged scam in Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA).

Mr. Abdullah termed the move as an attempt to "make me now". He, however, pledged, "But I won't...let them do what they want to. I will do what I have to do."

The NC said that the ED's attaching its president's properties is "political vendetta, meant to settle political score". In a joint statement, the party's general secretary Ali Muhammad Sagar, MPs Mohammad Akbar Lone and Hasnain Masoodi and ten other senior functionaries and leaders said "such acts are nothing but unwarranted and unjustified as there is no evidence worth the name on record to justify the order of attachment of the property".

The ED sources here said that it has received an order from its headquarters in Delhi listing six properties of Mr. Abdullah including three residential buildings and

four plots of land. The sources added that the properties have been attached under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The move has been necessitated by the "laundering of funds" of JKCA under the PMLA, an ED statement confirmed. It reads "The attached properties include three residential houses, one at Gupkar Road, Srinagar, one at Tehsil Katipora, Tangmarg, and one at Bhatindi, village Sunjwan, (Jammu), commercial buildings at posh Residency Road area of Srinagar. The lands at four different places in J&K have also been attached."

The 83-year-old Abdullah, J&K's three-time chief minister, was recently interrogated by the ED and earlier also by a team of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the alleged scam. The CBI had filed a charge-sheet against him and three others in alleged ₹13.66 crore scam in in Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Court in Srinagar in July 2018.

The alleged scam surfaced in March 2012 and Mr. Abdullah, the then JKCA president, along with several others, was named accused in it. Mr. Abdullah had not denied there has been a scam in the association but had insisted on him not being involved.

MLAs, leaders, cops in poll cash row: MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, DEC. 19

Unaccounted money was sent to MLAs, a particular political party, some senior leaders of Congress by individuals, government departments and a number of private companies ahead of 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the investigation wing of the income-tax department has found.

The Election Commission has sent a report of Central Board of Direct Taxation (CBDT) to Madhya Pradesh government seeking action against those involved in the alleged 'poll cash scam' that came to light

following raids by IT sleuths at 52 places in Madhya Pradesh and Delhi in April 2019.

The CBDT's report has listed names of purported donors and receivers of alleged poll cash reportedly used in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

"The CBDT report was deliberately leaked. It (leakage) amounted to breaching of confidentiality by CBDT and IT department. A probe should be done into leakage of the report", Congress veteran and former chief minister Digvijay Singh who was among a few senior Congress leaders those figured in the list told reporters here on Saturday.

RSS ideologue Vaidya passes away

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
Mumbai, Dec. 19

Veteran Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologue Madhav Govind Vaidya (97) passed away in Nagpur on Saturday after a brief illness. He was the first official spokesperson of the organisation.

Mr Vaidya was undergoing treatment for illness at a private hospital in Nagpur, where he breathed his last at 3.35 pm. The final rites will be held at Ambazari Ghat on Sunday.

The veteran RSS leader was the father of RSS Sah-Sarkaryawah (joint general secretary) Manmohan Vaidya,

who tweeted, "Shri MG Vaidya, my father breathed his last today at 3.35 pm at Nagpur after completing 97 years of active, meaningful and inspiring life. He was a veteran journalist, a Hndutva "Bhashyakar" and active Sangh (RSS) Swayamsevak for 9 decades."

Born in Taroda village in Wardha district, Mr Vaidya joined the RSS from his college days. He became a member of the RSS in 1943 while at the Morris College in Nagpur. When the RSS was banned after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, he did the organisational work by going underground.

SALARY | DEFAULT

New Delhi, Dec. 19: A week after violence broke out at its Narasapura facility in Karnataka, contract manufacturer Wistron on Saturday said it has fired its vice-president who was heading India operations even as iPhone maker Apple placed the Taiwanese firm on probation.

Wistron, which assembles the latest version of the iPhone SE at the violence-hit plant, admitted that there were faults in its wage payment processes. A section of workers at Wistron Corporation's facility in Narasapura Industrial Area in Kolar district near Bengaluru

went on rampage last week over non-payment of their wages.

"We are removing the Vice President who oversees our business in India. We are also enhancing our processes and restructuring our teams to ensure these issues cannot happen again," the Apple's contract manufacturer, Wistron, said in a statement.

While Wistron did not name the executive removed, sources said Vincent Lee has been fired. Wistron said the company has been investigating the matter and has "found that some workers were not paid correctly, or

● **COMPANY SAID** it has established an employee assistance programme for workers at the facility, and has set up a 24-hour grievance hotline in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and English to ensure all workers can voice any concerns they may have, anonymously.

on time". "We deeply regret this and apologise to all of our workers. This is a new facility and we recognise that we made mistakes as we expanded," Wistron said.

The Taiwanese company noted that some of the

processes put in place to manage labour agencies and payments, need to be strengthened and upgraded and that it is taking "immediate action to correct this, including disciplinary action".

Wistron has increased its headcount from 2,000 in the middle of this year to around 9,000 recently. "Our top priority is to ensure all workers are fully compensated immediately and we are working hard to achieve that," Wistron said.

The company said it has established an employee assistance programme for workers at the facility, and

has set up a 24-hour grievance hotline in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and English to ensure all workers can voice any concerns they may have, anonymously.

Apple, in a separate statement, said it has placed Wistron on probation and that the contract manufacturer will not receive any new business from the US-based company before corrective actions are completed. Apple is also undertaking a detailed investigation in this matter.

Apple said while these investigations are ongoing, preliminary findings

indicate violations of its Supplier Code of Conduct by failing to implement proper working hour management processes that led to payment delays for some workers in October and November.

"We have placed Wistron on probation and they will not receive any new business from Apple before they complete corrective actions. Apple employees, along with independent auditors, will monitor their progress. Our main objective is to make sure all the workers are treated with dignity and respect, and fully compensated promptly," Apple said. — *PTI*

Taiwan firm admits lapses in its wage payment processes in Apple probe

Wistron put on probation, fires India head

SHORT TAKES

SOMALIA SUICIDE BOMBING KILLS 15, MISSES PM

Mogadishu, Dec. 19: A suicide bomber attacked a stadium in Somalia's central city of Galkayo Friday, killing 15 people shortly before the arrival of the country's new prime minister, according to police.

Ali Hassan, a police officer in Galkayo, said others were injured in the blast, which occurred at the entrance to the sports stadium. Some high-ranking members of the Somali army were among those killed in the explosion, according to local reports.

The bombing has been claimed by Somalia's al-Shabab jihadist rebels, according to the group's Andalus radio station.

Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble, who took office in September, was visiting the city as part of a tour of the central state of Galmudug.

RAPE CHARGE ON EPSTEIN-LINKED MODELLING AGENT

Paris, Dec. 19: A modeling agent associated with disgraced US financier Jeffrey Epstein has been charged in France with sexual harassment and the rape of minors over 15 years old.

Jean-Luc Brunel was arrested as part of an ongoing investigation on Wednesday at Charles de Gaulle airport as he was preparing to take a flight to Senegal.

The Paris prosecutor announced in a statement Saturday that the charges were handed out Friday by a magistrate at the end of Brunel's custody period. It said Brunel was not handed any human trafficking charges, which was one of the main lines of inquiry.

The magistrate decided that there was not currently enough evidence to rule on that count, but he was not acquitted and could be charged in the future if anything new emerges. Brunel was remanded in custody.

'LAST ATTEMPT' TO GET BREXIT TRADE DEAL: EU

Brussels, Dec. 19: The European Union and the United Kingdom are heading into the weekend on a "last attempt" to clinch a post-Brexit trade deal, with EU fishing rights in British waters the most notable remaining obstacle to avoid a chaotic and costly changeover in the new year.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday that the only way to get a deal is for the 27-nation bloc to compromise since "the UK has done a lot to try and help, and we hope that our EU friends will see sense and come to the table with something themselves." "That's really where we are," Johnson said, adding "no sensible government" could agree to the EU demands as they stand.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier told the EU parliament both sides were in the "home straight of the negotiations", which have already come a long way in nine months of talks but are still short of a final compromise. Barnier called it "a very serious and sombre situation".

IMRAN: PAK ARMY WORKS UNDER ME

Islamabad, Dec. 19: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has asserted that the Army is a state institution which works under him, amidst Opposition's allegations of the powerful military establishment's interference in the country's politics and elections.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a 11-party opposition alliance, has been holding massive rallies since its inception in September to seek Khan's ouster and press the military to stop interfering in politics. The PDM has been accusing the Pakistan Army of installing "puppet" Prime Minister Khan through a manipulated election in 2018.

The Army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 70 plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in the matters of security and foreign policy. However, the military has denied meddling in the country's politics. Khan also denies that the army helped him win the election in 2018.

According to the 'Lahore Declaration' signed by the Opposition parties on Monday, the military establishment had stolen the people's mandate in the 2018 election.

As new Covid strain spreads faster, UK discusses action

New higher set of curbs, govt to cut back relaxation rules over Christmas

London, Dec. 19: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson discussed with his senior ministers on Saturday what urgent action to take after it was confirmed that a new strain of the Covid-19 virus could spread more quickly and lead to a surge in cases.

The BBC reported that London and southeast England would be placed in a new higher tier of restrictions and the government would cut back on a planned relaxation of the rules over Christmas, but gave no further details.

Johnson will hold a news conference at about 1600 GMT during which he will discuss what his plans are in light of a rise in infections across London and southeast England linked to a new, more transmissible variant of the virus.

England's Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty said that while there was no current evidence the variant of the novel Coronavirus caused a higher mortality rate or impacted vaccines, urgent work was underway to confirm this.

"We have alerted the World Health Organisation and are continuing to analyse the available data to improve our understanding," Whitty said in a statement.

Britain reported 28,507 new Covid-19 cases on Friday and 489 deaths, with the reproduction "R" number estimated to be between 1.1 and 1.2, meaning the number of cases is rapidly increasing.

Johnson said on Friday he hoped England would not need a third lockdown after Christmas and has so far resisted calls to change plans to ease restrictions for five days over the festive period, allowing three separate households to meet indoors.

UK to bring in new higher tier of Covid restrictions for London, southeast England -BBC

Much of the country, including London, is currently in the highest of a three-tier system of restrictions to curb the pandemic's spread. The *Daily Telegraph* newspaper said ministers could now announce curbs on travel between southeast England, including the capital, and the rest of the country.

The BBC said these areas would now be placed in a new "Tier 4", with a tightening of rules for Christmas.

"Failing to act decisively now, will mean further suffering," Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust and a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, said on Twitter: "It has been apparent for some days that the virus is again out of control in parts of the country," said Jonathan Ashworth, Labour's health spokesman. — *AFP*

Meanwhile, at least nine Coronavirus patients died on Saturday after an oxygen tank explosion triggered a fire at a hospital in southeastern Turkey.

The blaze in an intensive care ward of the hospital in Gaziantep broke out when a tank on an artificial respirator exploded. "We are saddened by this tragedy," Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said before a planned visit to the hospital. — *AFP*

The move marks the world's first authorisation for Moderna's shots.

The vaccine is very similar to one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech that's now being dispensed to millions of health

care workers and nursing home residents as the biggest vaccination drive in US history starts to ramp up.

The two work "better than we almost dared to hope," NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins said. "Science is working here, science has done something amazing." Early results of large, still unfinished studies show both vaccines appear safe and strongly protective although Moderna's is easier to handle since it doesn't need to be stored at ultra-frozen temperatures.

A second vaccine represents a ray of hope amid despair as the virus continues to spread unabated



Protesters march up Whitehall after gathering in Parliament Square at an anti-lockdown demonstration, "Unite in the Fight" in central London on Saturday. British PM Boris Johnson resisted calls to tighten Covid restrictions over Christmas, as London faced stricter measures and concern grew about rising case numbers. The government has been under mounting pressure to toughen proposals allowing up to three households to meet indoors during the festive window from December 23, as European neighbours curb their easing plans amid surging infections. — *AFP*



BIDENS TO GET 1ST VACCINE DOSE TOMORROW

Washington, Dec. 19: President-elect Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, will be getting their first dose of the Coronavirus vaccine on Monday.

That's according to Biden's incoming press secretary, Jen Psaki. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, will receive their doses the week after next.

The announcement was made Friday, hours after Vice President Mike Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi became the highest-ranking government officials to receive their first doses of a vaccine. Psaki told reporters that Biden would be receiving the shot in public, as Pence did Friday. — *AP*

Nod to Moderna vaccine in US, 2nd shot in arsenal

Washington, Dec. 19: The US added a second Covid-19 vaccine to its arsenal on Friday, boosting efforts to beat back an outbreak so dire that the nation is regularly recording more than 3,000 deaths a day.

The much-needed doses are set to arrive on Monday after the Food and Drug Administration authorised an emergency rollout of the vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health. The move marks the world's first authorisation for Moderna's shots.

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A second vaccine represents a ray of hope amid despair as the virus continues to spread unabated

even before holiday gatherings that are certain to further fuel the outbreak.

The scourge has claimed more than 3,12,000 US lives and killed 1.7 million people worldwide. New cases in the US are running at over 2,16,000 per day on average. Deaths per day have hit all-time highs, eclipsing 3,600 on Wednesday. California has emerged as a lethal hot spot, with hospitals running out of intensive care beds and ambulances lining up outside emergency rooms in scenes reminiscent of the calamity around New York City last spring. California on Friday reported over 41,000 new cases and 300 more deaths. — *AP*

WHO: Expert team off to China in Jan.

Geneva, Dec. 19: The head of emergencies at the World Health Organisation says a team of international experts looking into the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic will travel to China the first week of January.

Dr Michael Ryan says there will be quarantine arrangements for the team, which will visit the suspected site of the outbreak in the city of Wuhan. "The purpose of the mission is to go to the original point at which

human cases were detected and that we fully expect to do that," he said. He says the team of international experts will work "with our Chinese colleagues," and he adds they "will not be ... supervised by Chinese officials."

Ryan says the world should celebrate the arrival of vaccines, but the "next three to six months are going to be tough." He seemed to allude to the Americas, which is home to roughly three-fourths of the global cases. — *AP*

China 'obstructing' WHO probe: US

Washington, Dec. 19: Urging the international community to demand transparency from China about the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, the US has accused Beijing of "obstructing" a WHO probe into the origin of the deadly virus in the central Chinese city of Wuhan and "peddling" questionable vaccines one year after the disease

broke out. "Even today, nearly a year after the world first learned of the outbreak, the Chinese Communist Party is still spreading disinformation regarding the virus and obstructing a World Health Organisation (WHO) investigation into its origin and spread," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday. — *PTI*

Seoul, Dec. 19: Long lines are snaking from Coronavirus testing sites in the South Korean capital of Seoul on Saturday as the country reports 1,053 more confirmed cases, the fourth straight day over 1,000.

Thousands are taking advantage of free tests being offered temporarily in the capital area. The government is struggling to decide whether to increase social distancing to maximum levels, which officials fear would further shock the economy. — *AP*

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OXFORD VACCINE TO BE CLEARED BY YEAR-END

London, Dec. 19: The Oxford University vaccine against Covid-19 being produced by AstraZeneca is likely to get regulatory approval from the UK's independent regulator by the end of this year for a rollout to begin in early 2021, according to a UK media report. The Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency is expected to authorise the vaccine by December 28 or 29 after the final data is provided on Monday. — *PTI*

2ND REPORTED SEVERE REACTION TO COVID VACCINE

Fairbanks, Dec. 19: A second healthcare worker has experienced a severe reaction after receiving the Covid-19 vaccine, officials said Friday. Both cases were in Alaska. A worker, identified only as a female clinician, began experiencing probable anaphylactic symptoms about 10 minutes after receiving the shot Thursday in Fairbanks. Symptoms included tongue swelling, hoarse voice and difficulty breathing. — *AP*

CASES SURGE: S. KOREANS LINE UP FOR TESTS

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Russians hack into networks, cause alarm

Hack against US is 'grave risk': Cybersecurity agency

Washington, Dec. 19: Federal authorities have expressed increased alarm about an intrusion into US and other computer systems around the globe that officials suspect was carried out by Russian hackers.

The nation's cybersecurity agency on Thursday warned of a grave risk to government and private networks.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency said in its most detailed comments yet that the intrusion had compromised federal agencies as well as critical infrastructure in a sophisticated attack that was hard to detect and will be difficult to undo.

CISA did not say which agencies or infrastructure had been breached or what information taken in an attack that it previously said appeared to have begun in March. The Department of Energy acknowledged in a separate statement that it was among those that had been hacked.

This threat actor has demonstrated sophistication and complex trade-craft in these intrusions, the agency said in its unusual alert. CISA expects that removing the threat actor from compromised environments will be highly complex and challenging.

The hack, if authorities can indeed prove it was carried out by a nation such as Russia as experts believe, creates a fresh foreign policy problem for President Donald Trump in his final days in office.

Trump, whose administration has been criticised for eliminating a White House cybersecurity advisor and downplaying Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, has made no public statements about the breach.

President-elect Joe Biden said he would make cybersecurity a top priority of his administration, but that stronger defences are not enough. We need to disrupt and deter our adversaries from undertaking significant cyberattacks in the first place, he said. We will do that by, among other things, imposing substantial costs on those responsible for such malicious attacks, including in coordination with our allies and partners.

The cybersecurity agency previously said the perpetrators had used network management software from Texas-based SolarWinds to infiltrate computer networks. Its new alert said the attackers may have used other methods, as well.

Amid reports that the Treasury and Commerce departments were breached, CISA directed all civilian agencies of the federal government to remove SolarWinds from their servers. — *AP*

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CYBERATTACK ON US: POMPEO BLAMES RUSSIA

Washington, Dec. 19: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says Russia was "pretty clearly" behind the gravest cyberattack against the United States on record, the first administration official to publicly tie the Kremlin to the widespread intrusion at a time when President Donald Trump has kept silent on the failure to protect government and private-sector computer networks.

It's not clear exactly what the hackers were seeking, but experts say it could include nuclear secrets, blueprints for advanced weaponry, Covid-19 vaccine-related research and information for dossiers on key government and industry leaders. "We're still unpacking precisely what it is, and I'm sure some of it will remain classified," Pompeo said in an interview late Friday with radio talk show host Mark Levin.

"But suffice it to say there was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially embed code inside of US government systems and it now appears systems of private companies and companies and governments across the world as well. This was a very significant effort, and I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity." — *AP*

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Rana extradition case to continue till Apr. 22: Judge

Washington, Dec. 19: The case of extradition of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, a key accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, to India will continue till April 22, a federal US judge has determined.

Rana, 59, has been declared a fugitive by India, where he is facing multiple criminal charges for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack in which 166 people, including six Americans, were killed. He was rearrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India.

"The Extradition Hearing in this case is continued to April 22, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.," Magistrate Judge Jacqueline Chooljian, the US District Court of Los Angeles, said in his order dated December 17. Rana is a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, the Pakistani-American LeT terrorist who was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. Headley, 60, was made an approver in the case, and is currently serving a 35-year prison term in the US for his role in the

attack. Judge Chooljian said Rana will file opposition to the request for extradition by not later than February 1. The US government, which is supporting the extradition of Rana to India, has time till March 22 to file its reply motion. Both the parties have agreed that their motion either in support or opposition to the extradition request by India would not be of more than 50 pages. — *PTI*

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Geeta Chandran

Off the beaten track

Of dancers, artists and the new normal

While the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been food for analysis across all sectors of the economy, one glaring omission is the artist! What has the lockdown and the slowdown done to all of us and our work? This is a silence that is deafening in our public discourse.

As a performing artist, I of course — like all others in my fraternity — lost out on all my scheduled performances and stage shows, both group and solo, and all the travels associated with that. This had two impacts — first, of course, was the loss of income; but also then, my creative graph was ruptured since my interaction with musicians was forced into a hiatus. However, this seemed inconsequential when one realised what was happening to the wider artists' community at various levels. We are a large sector, very unorganised, scattered and diverse. From folk performers to dancers who are part of group shows, to classical artists — just the "dance" category within the performing arts group is incredibly large. The folk performers who largely depended on weddings and tourist groups were suddenly completely out of their jobs and many had to seek to alternate ways to survive. Nobody in the media or in the government is even talking about this sector, and that is appalling.

SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING

There were silver linings, of course. In the performing arts' community, we saw that there was lot of sharing that hadn't happened before. Artists were talking about their lives, the way they learnt their art forms, the way they practised, and the problems that they had had and continue to face at various points in their career. One also saw a lot of discussion and engagement on various subjects relating to the arts, that was a welcome development. Of course, these were the first few months when one could engage with a lot of things happening online. But with the passing of time these, too, have given way to the predictable; and too much of the good thing is now leading to "art reflux".

As far as performances online go, it has been a mixed bag. Everybody seems to be performing, and that may be a good thing in terms of short-term self-gratification. But sharing everything for free, and placing valuable professional skills acquired over a period of time in the public domain without any thought of monetising them, has become an extremely worrying trend. Economic models of sharing work have not been deliberated upon, and hence there is a danger of the arts being further marginalised.

Let's face it: Even before the pandemic, artists were not really in a great place in terms of economic viability. Buying a ticket to watch a show was getting more and more difficult. Now with so much happening for free at the click of a button, one worries even more about how artists will manage to survive in the future. Would people ever again buy tickets at all to watch performances?

I agree that artists are anxious and worried about their uncertain future and hence want to be a part of the social media, lest they be left out of some imaginary race. We are all in an introspective mode. But this mood cannot last for too long. We realise that as well.

Artists need to perform, and they need to be watched. Their self-esteem and self-confidence takes a huge beating if performances do not happen. The government hasn't spoken a word about artists and their concerns. Even existing skeletal schemes for artists are not being honoured. The sector as a whole has taken a huge beating, even though everybody acknowledges the fact that during the lockdown all the arts — dance, music, theatre and the visual arts — have kept the morale of everybody high and helped them to stay sane.

In India, the problem is even more daunting as the arts and performers in general are not an organised sector. The diversity in art forms and the geography of this country has not helped in creating a roster — be it folk or classical. Hence organising the artists' community and helping them has become a huge challenge. A *nadaswaram* player who earned his bread and butter by playing in temples during festivals or played at weddings is today at his tether's end, with both tourism and temple gatherings in moratorium. How does, for example, can one reach support and help to artists located in a remote village in Tamil Nadu?

Could this time be used by all of us to put our heads together and think of ways to reimagine culture for the "new normal" times to come? And what about our future? What happens when things open up once again? What place will the arts then have in our lives? Will the economy be resilient enough to support the arts? And will audiences return to auditoriums to watch live performances? We need to start thinking of the role of artists in our society, what they mean to us and what we must do for them. But (alas!) will it happen?

Delhi-based classical dancer **Geeta Chandran** is a force multiplier in the world of the arts, and is the founder-president of *Natya Vriksha*

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com, Else, send to Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110002.

Subhani



Is farm bills' real aim to cover fiscal deficit?



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

With the farmers' agitation now entering the 25th day jamming the borders of the national capital the time has come to ask a fundamental question. Are the farm bills aimed at addressing a problem that the government is even terrified of acknowledging?

The NDA/BJP government inherited a robust economy from its predecessor the United Progressive alliance despite protestations to the contrary. Between 2004 and 2014 the India economy grew at 7.8 per cent year on year for 10 long years with 2004-05 as the GDP base year. At the revised base year 2011-12 the growth figure is 8.13 per cent. Despite strong global headwinds in the form of the economic meltdown of 2008 and the Eurozone crisis of 2011 this robust rate of economic growth not only increased the size of the economy, created jobs and employment opportunities but, most importantly, it helped create a robust social security infrastructure in the form of Right to Information, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment programme (MGNREGS), Right to free and compulsory education Education (RTE) and the National Food Security Act, to name but a few of the initiatives in this direction. As many as 27.1 crore people were lifted out of poverty between 2004 and 2014. The flipside of this high growth paradigm was high inflation but then again there is no free lunch in life. On balance, ordinary people benefited as growth with equity brought all around prosperity.

The NDA/BJP government could not sustain this growth trajectory and then on the 8th of November 2016 it inflicted a grievous blow on the body economic. It demonetised 500 and 1,000 rupee notes thereby sucking liquidity out of the economy. In its overzealousness to reform it overlooked a basic fact that India was a 2.6 trillion dollar formal economy riding on an almost similar sized non-formal economy and all cash is not black money. This was followed by a badly implemented Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime that further sucked the remaining liquidity out of the economy.

Even before Covid-19 knocked the bottom out of India's economic paradigm the Indian economy was in serious trouble. In H-1 (April-September) of 2019-20, the total flow of funds from banks and non-banks that include public issues, commercial papers (CPs), external commercial borrowings (ECBs) and foreign direct investments (FDIs) crashed by 87.63 per cent to ₹90,995 crores. It was ₹7.36 lakh crore for the corresponding period of 2018-19 as per to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) monetary policy report.

On the 23rd of March, 2020, the day before the country went into the harshest lockdown on planet earth, Parliament passed the Union Budget of 2020-21 of ₹30.42 lakh crores. The projected revenue receipts were 22.45 lakh crores leaving a fiscal deficit of 7.96 lakh crores. With the Indian economy now officially in recession and expected to contract by over 10 per cent the country is up the proverbial creek without a paddle, with all budgetary projections up in the air.

What does this economic havoc have to do with farm bills? Quite a lot, in fact. For it has everything to do with the food subsidy component of the Union Budget. The Food Corporation of India is the state instrumentality that oversees the purchase and supply of food grains. Founded in 1965 under the Food Corporations Act it is

mandated to procure food grains at Minimum Support prices (MSP) stow them, create buffer stocks including a strategic reserve of food grains in addition to disseminating them through the Public Distribution System (PDS) to identified beneficiaries. The Union government determines the MSP for purchasing food grains as well as their distribution price also called issue price. This is the rate at which food grains are supplied to the states. Variance in these two rates along with supply costs are recompensed by the government to FCI in the form of food subsidy. The FCI, therefore, is totally reliant on the central government and does not have any other sources of revenue.

Prior to 2014 the Union government used to try and fund the entire food subsidy as a line item in the Union Budget. In other words the money for this activity was appropriated directly from the Union budget. Even then the FCI used to borrow some amount of money from banks backed by a sovereign guarantee or even get a ways and means advance from the Union government. However, these repayments were manageable. When the UPA demitted office FCI had a debt of 91,409 crores.

In 2016-17, realising that the economy was in trouble primarily because of demonetisation and mismanagement from 2014-16 and to window dress its budgetary deficit, the government moved a substantial component of the food subsidy off budget and compelled FCI to borrow from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). It is entirely another matter that lending to government organisations like FCI was not the initial mandate of NSSF.

First, it would bring the food subsidy deficits under control and since the government would not procure it also then would not have to distribute food grains thereby ending its obligation under the NFSA

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

The National Small Savings Fund was set up in 1999 to pool together all the money collected from small saving schemes. This includes public provident fund deposits, savings deposits and savings certificates such as the National Small Savings Certificate. The fund is administered by the ministry of finance.

As a consequence of this sophistry as of 1st of April 2021 FCI's projected borrowing from NSSF would be to the tune of 3.5 lakh crores backed by a sovereign guarantee of the Government of India, meaning, thereby, if FCI defaults, the government would be liable. This amounts to 10 per cent of the current year's Union Budget. In the Union Budget for FY 2020-21 while the budgeted food subsidy was ₹77,983 crores, FCI's borrowing from NSSF was pegged at 1.36 lakh crores.

With a devastated economy and crumbling public finances, the government hit upon a harebrained scheme. In the name of reforms it wagged that it would pass off public procurement to private players. This would kill two birds with one stone; first, it would bring the food subsidy deficits under control and since the government would not procure it also then would not have to distribute food grains thereby ending its obligation under the National Food Security Act.

For a country where 65 per cent of the population lives of agriculture and 36.4 crores are poor this is nothing short of suicidal. The government must grow the economy so that it has enough revenue to meet its commitments. It cannot roll up the social safety nets of farmers and the poor, namely MSP and the NFSA. It must, therefore, repeal these ill-conceived farm bills and give an unequivocal statutory guarantee that it would continue open-ended public procurement at MSP and would fulfill its obligations under NFSA.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

LETTERS

NOT A GOOD SIGN

In a tug of war between Centre and West Bengal, the victims are high ranking IAS and IPS officers (*Punishing a state*, Dec. 19). They have to tread a cautious path, keeping two warring masters in good humour. With TMC green leaves deserting Mamata for BJP's lotus, Amit Shah's two-day visit to further make inroads into Writer's Building and unsolicited advice from Governor Dhankar, temperamental Mamata is having a field day lambasting the so-called outsiders, Nadda, Shah and Modi with choicest epithets. It is a free-for-all as cadres of both parties attack each other with blessings from above and blame game ensues. Controlling furious mobs becomes wellnigh impossible for law enforcers, who blink an eye. For Bengal, the African proverb sticks to a tee — "When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers".

Parthasarathy Mandadi, Tirupati

ONE FOR THE ROAD

IN A bid to reduce traffic congestion, the Chennai traffic police have introduced "Zero violation junction" in a few places like Anna Salai's Spencer signal etc. According to the new scheme, violations like helmetless driving, not wearing seat belt, talking on cellphone while driving, jumping the signal and crossing the 'Stop' line would be dealt with severely. Repeat offenders even run the risk of revocation of driving licence. Strict punishment for these offences is already there under the provisions of the existing laws. Why do the authorities need a "new scheme" as such to implement these? Can't they do it in the normal course itself at all places? Why select a particular area? Lack of fear of punishment is the root cause of violation. Iron hand in a velvet glove is what is required for the cops to deal with law-breakers.

P.G. Menon, Chennai

SUMMER OF 36?

DURING 1974 tour to England, Ajit Wadekar and his boys were bowled out for just 42 at Lord's, which was then branded as "Summer of 42." Now Kohli and his boys have gone one step ahead to get bowled out for just 36 within one session. Right from the beginning of day 3 it was a horrible batting performance by our star studded lineup, including the captain. It was a painful sight to see our players poking at balls to give catching practice to Paine & his boys. As avowed by Australian star bowler, Glenn McGrath, the whole session was like seeing a highlights package. Definitely we lack a solid opening pair, who could tackle new ball for at least an hour or so. Will our coach and captain wake up to the fact?

Capt. N. Viswanathan, Coimbatore

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

James Forsyth



How to fight 'wolf warrior diplomacy' of Xi's China

The most significant and lasting change brought about by Covid-19 is that it has woken the West up to the threat posed by Communist China. The fact that the pandemic's initial severity was covered up by the Communist Party of China authorities didn't surprise Western governments. It was Beijing's "wolf warrior diplomacy" as the virus raged worldwide that made them grasp the true nature of President Xi's China.

In March, Britain was taken aback by the extreme misinformation by the CPC as it tried to suggest that the American military was somehow to blame for the virus' emergence. The shortages of personal protective equipment reminded Western governments how reliant they had become on Chinese manufacturing and also exposed the difference between dealing with China and dealing with companies in democratic countries: ministers hesitated to criticise the CPC for fear that the next plane loaded with PPE wouldn't take off. This was a valid concern. When Australia suggested there should be an independent inquiry into the virus' origins,

Beijing aggressively slapped tariffs on its goods. The CPC's behaviour shows that if you develop a close economic relationship with China, it will be used to "bully you politically".

All this has led to a shift in UK government policy. At the start of the 2010s, David Cameron and George Osborne wanted the UK to be China's best friend in the West. This approach was inherited by Theresa May and, at first, Boris Johnson. In early 2020, Britain was still on track to have Huawei, a Chinese firm with close links to the PLA, play a key role in the building of its 5G network. This is changing, thanks to pressure from both the United States and Tory backbenchers.

A new national security and investment bill, now in Parliament, is meant to stop Chinese firms from buying up British companies in strategically important fields. This is overdue, given how vital technology will be to the coming rivalry between China and the West. To allow Chinese firms, which are not independent of the state, to purchase technology start-ups is extremely shortsighted. There is a strong case for far stricter rules

regarding universities' research deals with Chinese companies too.

During his presidency, Donald Trump reversed Barack Obama's overly passive approach to China's rise. But Mr Trump was ill-suited to galvanise the West to respond to this threat. First, his fondness for autocrats made him wholly unfit for the role of moral leader in this struggle. Second, pushing back on China requires building of alliances and working through multilateral institutions — which Mr Trump was atrocious at. He withdrew the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, that was to act as an economic counter to China, and his decision to pull America out of the World Health Organisation only increased China's influence within it.

Joe Biden's incoming administration in many ways represents a return to the Obama era, but US ties with China will be an important exception; Mr Biden will take a much more headline approach. There is now a bipartisan consensus in the US that China is a strategic threat. In his recent memoir Mr Obama suggests he would have taken a stricter line if he hadn't also had to deal with the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

As the host of next year's G-7, the UK has a major role to play in this Western pushback and intends to use the meeting to launch the D-10, an alliance of democracies to counter China. Australia, South Korea and India — all countries vital to any strategy to contain China — will be invited. Boris Johnson's government believes it has a vital role to play in bringing India into this alliance, given that relations between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Biden will not be easy.

In Whitehall there is also interest in the idea of a T-12: a grouping of democracies with a particular interest in technology. Any attempt to contain China must produce an alternative to its technological solutions. But the West is hampered by the split between the US and EU over data and privacy rules. This divide has led to two separate tech ecosystems and held back the effort to respond to China. The West must overcome these internal divisions if it is to prevent Beijing from taking a decisive lead in the industries of the future. This is just as important as coordinating investment in 6G technology to prevent a repeat of the current situation, where

Huawei offers a dramatically cheaper solution than any company from a democratic nation.

China's technological edge is one of the reasons it is in so many ways a more formidable competitor than the Soviet Union was. Another is its position in the world economy. It is no coincidence that no leading Hollywood studio has made a movie critical of China since Seven Years in Tibet in 1997.

China's integration into the global economy also means there are many in the business world who don't want anything to change. One influential Tory pushing for a tougher line on Beijing laments: "You didn't have UK corporates calling to express disappointment if you criticised the Soviet Union."

2020 has been an awful year for the world. Nearly every Western country has handled the pandemic badly. The IMF estimates China will be the only major economy to grow in 2020. But the rapid development of vaccines should restore some of the democratic world's intellectual self-confidence. It will need that in the coming generational struggle with Xi's China.

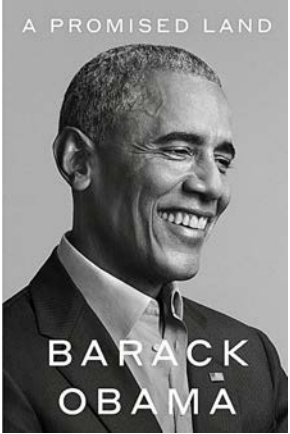
By arrangement with the Spectator

KAUSHIK MITTER Editor, R. MOHAN Resident Editor

INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS

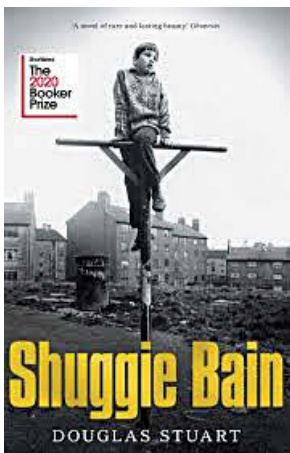
NON-FICTION

- 1 A PROMISED LAND**
Barack Obama
Penguin Viking, ₹1,999
- 2 JUGALBANDI: THE BJP BEFORE MODI**
Vinay Sitapati
Penguin Viking, ₹799
- 3 THE BATTLE OF BELONGING**
Shashi Tharoor
Aleph, ₹799
- 4 REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**
Aanchal Malhotra
HarperCollins, ₹599
- 5 THE COMMONWEALTH OF CRICKET**
Ramachandra Guha
4th Estate, ₹699
- 6 THE INDIA WAY**
S. Jaishankar
HarperCollins ₹699
- 7 JINNAH: HIS SUCCESSES, FAILURES AND ROLE IN HISTORY**
Ishfaq Ahmed
Penguin ₹999
- 8 TILL WE WIN**
Dr Chandrakant Lahariya, Dr Gagandeep Kang, Dr Randeep Guleria
Penguin Viking ₹299
- 9 MY OWN WORDS**
Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Simon & Schuster, ₹599
- 10 THE BOOK OF INDIAN ESSAYS: TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF ENGLISH PROSE**
Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (Editor)
Black Kite Press, ₹699



FICTION

- 1 SHUGGIE BAIN**
Douglas Stuart
Picador, ₹499
- 2 THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING**
Marieke Lucas Rijneveld,
Faber & Faber, ₹499
- 3 HAMNET**
Maggie O' Farrell,
Tinder Press, ₹699
- 4 HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT**
Jeffrey Archer
Pan Macmillan, ₹450
- 5 DAYLIGHT**
David Baldacci,
Pan Macmillan, ₹650
- 6 THE HEART ASKS PLEASURE FIRST**
Karuna Ezara Parikh,
Picador, ₹699
- 7 WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS**
Shauna Singh Baldwin
Tara- India Research Press, ₹599
- 8 VANISHING HALF**
Brit Bennett
Dialogue Books, ₹799
- 9 THE ARCHER**
Paulo Coelho,
Penguin Viking, ₹250
- 10 A TIME FOR MERCY**
John Grisham,
Hodder & Stoughton ₹699



Bahrisons, New Delhi

A top cop's gripping diary



Anand K. Sahay

review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

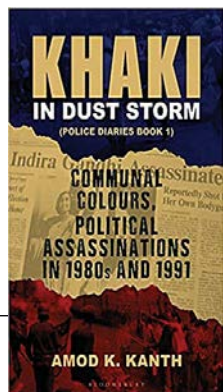
When Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her police bodyguards in 1984, medieval era-style mayhem broke out in the nation's capital, as this reviewer was witness. Anti-Sikh riots broke out. Thousands were killed. In certain cases, young Sikhs sought to take revenge and this took the form of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

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

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

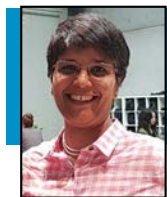
High profile assassinations were par for the course in that Delhi, and spraying of bullets by car-borne terrorists killing innocent civilians was something that was known to happen. In the centre of that story stood the author of this book. He has won a gallantry award on the recommendation of the Army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

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



KHAKI IN DUST STORM
By AMOD K. KANTH
Bloomsbury ₹799

HOW CULTURE FILLIP CAN FAST-FORWARD PANDEMIC RECOVERY



Jaya Bhattacharji Rose
essay

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

Unesco survey "Cultural Times" (2015), the first global map of the cultural and creative industries, acknowledges the societal value of arts and culture. It assesses the contribution of cultural and creative industries to economic growth. It estimates that they generate US\$250 billion in revenue a year, creating 29.5 million jobs worldwide. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared the Covid-19 pandemic; drastically impacting national economies. Essential industries were permitted to function but other sectors suffered terribly. Many governments did not offer any support, and certainly not for the creative industries. But there were some exceptions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Art and literature can generate critical insights that policy makers need to factor for bringing about a sustainable recovery of the economy

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

According to World Bank (August 2020 report), in 2013, creative industries around the world generated revenues of over \$2 billion and employed 29 million people. The market for creative goods is estimated to be \$508 billion as of 2015. In 2015, developing economies exported more than 250 billion creative products including design goods, fashion, and films. Top exporters included China, Turkey, India, Mexico, El Salvador and Pakistan. In the United States, the non-profit arts and culture industry generated \$166.3 billion of economic activity in 2015, supporting 4.6 million jobs, while receiving only \$5 billion in arts allocations by the public sector. A phenomenal return on investment at 3,326 per cent!

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

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

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

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

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

Jaya Bhattacharji Rose is an international publishing consultant

The importance of being earnest in a villainish and banal world



Kushalrani Gulab

review

It was at about page 243 of this 264-page book that I actually fell off my chair. I was laughing so hard. Laughing not at poor Ruby, the protagonist of Moni Mohsin's novel *The Impeccable Integrity of Ruby R.*, whose whole concept of her own existence had just been upended, but at myself.

Because I had read this book so earnestly right from the start, mentally noting a Modi here, a Trump there, possibly even a Putin lurking in a sentence or two. I had muttered darkly to myself throughout about messiah-type politicians, the trolls who worship them and the apparently global inability to think. I had begged Ruby again and again to use her head and open her eyes and see what was happening in front of her. But it was only when I got to page 243 that I understood that I had been reading this book all wrong.

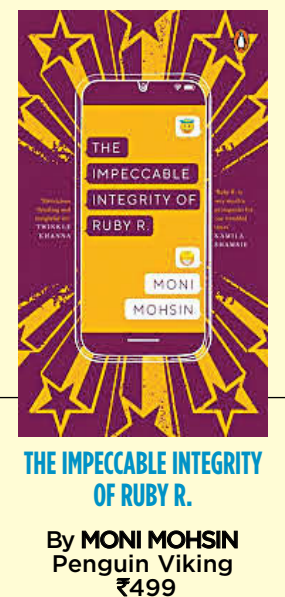
I could easily tell you what happened on page 243 to bring me to this revelation; it certainly would not be a spoiler because there are zero points of surprise in this book. Ruby Rauf, a hard-working and ambitious young woman, is focussed on her studies with the aim of working for a bank and returning to the upper middle class lifestyle she and her mother had lost when her banker father died, when she listens to a brand new politician speak and falls for his sincerity.

The brand new politician, Saif, a former film-star, says what every politician says, but with such charm and conviction that Ruby genuinely believes he will change the country. So when her mother, who works as a visiting tutor, is humiliated by a drug baron with such strong political connections that he is untouchable, Ruby abandons her education and ambition and joins Integrity, Saif's political party, as its social media head.

At no point in the book is Mohsin subtle about Ruby's inevitable fall from her great height at Integrity. Nothing is hidden from the reader or even Ruby herself. Saif's sliminess and sexually predatory behaviour, Integrity's complete lack of honour, Ruby's increasing belief that the end so justifies the means that even her closest friend can become social media prey — everything is made as clear as crystal. In fact, the author's total openness in the telling of this story almost makes it dull: you know right at the start that Ruby's life will be a trainwreck and sure enough, it is.

But then page 243 arrives. And you understand the importance of the book. *The Impeccable Integrity of Ruby R.* is not a political novel. It's a novel set in politics, but it's about Ruby and no one else. It is, in fact, a coming of age novel about a young woman, her insecurities and dreams and what her first decisions as an adult make of her. It is also about its readers, like me: how we lose ourselves in the ephemera of politics; how we must come of age ourselves. In one word, it's brilliant.

Kushalrani Gulab is a freelance editor and writer who dreams of being a sanyasi by the sea



By MONI MOHSIN
Penguin Viking ₹499



FAST FACT

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

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

Sam Leith

review

Well, it's quite the title, isn't it? It tends to invite comparisons. The first one that occurred to me, though, was that the original Promised Land guy managed to get all the important stuff down on two stone tablets. His would-be successor doesn't have quite that gift for compression. As he semi-apologises in the opening pages, this memoir was originally envisioned as a 500-pager. *A Promised Land* is just north of 700 pages, and there's another volume to come.

That speaks of a certain self-regard. Then again, Barack Obama has a good bit to be self-regarding about. He overcame a modest background, a Muslim-sounding middle name and the melanin thing to win the presidency, in large part thanks to an unsurpassed gift for oratory. He helped avert a global depression after the 2008 crash. He passed the Affordable Care Act in the teeth of a ferociously obstructionist GOP. He kept a lid on

the Iranian nuclear programme, just about negotiated the Arab spring with honour intact, saw off Colonel Gaddafi — and it was on his watch that they got Osama Bin Laden, a thrilling account of which closes the book. He managed to win the Nobel Peace Prize ("what for?" he was self-aware enough to wonder) even as he sent tens of thousands more troops to Afghanistan and waged unceasing drone war in the sovereign territories of other nations. What's more he has a good singing voice, a nifty jump shot and a smart, smoking hot wife — he notes, approvingly, the "cult of Michelle's arms" taking hold of the media.

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

A Promised Land is long, in part, because it wants to do two things: to serve the historical

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

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

Obama's cool conscientious pragmatism, rather than his optimism, is the takeaway from his memoir

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

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

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

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

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

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

anything done in office required a steely political operator. Obama, the centrist dad's centrist dad, is again and again confronted by the hard arithmetic of the caucus at home, and of tangled interests abroad. He really shows you how the sausage is made — and his cool, conscientious, covering-all-the-angles pragmatism, more than his optimism, is the real fascination in this book.

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

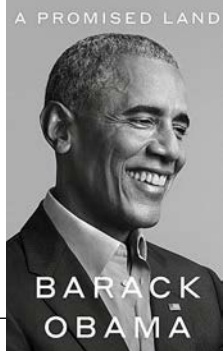
And the man himself? He likes vodka neat, has a weakness for nicotine, loves to play basketball, golf and spades. He's uxorious, devoted to his kids, introspective and self-questioning. He doodles in his meetings. He psyches himself up for rallies by listening to Jay-Z and Eminem. And as a young man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

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

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

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

By arrangement with the Spectator



A PROMISED LAND
By BARACK OBAMA
Penguin Random House, ₹1,999

SHORT TAKES

Panghal clinches gold at World Cup

New Delhi: World silver-medalist Amit Panghal (52kg) notched up a gold medal without having to fight his final bout, while veteran Satish Kumar (+91kg) settled for silver after an injury prevented him from competing in his summit clash at the Cologne World Cup in Germany on Saturday. Panghal was given a walkover by Germany's Argishti Terteryan. Satish, who made the final after beating France's Djamil Dini Moindze in the semifinal on Friday night, had to withdraw against Germany's Nelvie Tiafack owing to an injury. Also making the final were Sakshi and Manisha in the women's 57kg category. Asian Games bronze winner Pooja Rai, Mohammed Hussamuddin and Gaurav Solanki settled for bronze medals. — *PTI*

Shami suffers wrist fracture

Adelaide/New Delhi: Indian pacer Mohammed Shami is set to miss the remaining three Tests against Australia after suffering a fracture on his bowling wrist during the series opener here. The fast bowler was hit on the elbow by a Pat Cummins short ball during India's second innings on Saturday which ended at a record lowest 36 for nine. He was taken to a hospital for scans, which revealed a fracture. "Mohammed Shami has a fracture and the chances of him taking part in the remaining three Test matches is next to nil," a BCCI source said on conditions of anonymity. He added that Mohammed Siraj, for his impressive show in the two warm-up games, will be in line for a Boxing Day Test debut in Melbourne. Shami has been one of India's most lethal weapons and his absence will weaken the bowling attack. — *PTI*

Real Kashmir lift maiden IFA Shield

Kolkata: Real Kashmir FC clinched their maiden major trophy by lifting the IFA Shield after beating George Telegraph 2-1 in the summit clash here on Saturday, though the 127-year-old tournament was held without some of the country's top sides. This year, four I-League teams and eight Calcutta Premier League sides took part. Besides RKFC, Mohammedan Sporting, Gokulam Kerala and Indian Arrows were the other I-League sides. Fresh from a hat-trick against Mohammedan Sporting in the semifinals, Nigerian forward Lukman Adefemi broke the deadlock (38th minute) from a penalty but the Georgians restored parity in the second half with a terrific solo run by substitute Gautam Das (50th). — *PTI*

Tamil Nadu pacer tests positive

Chennai: Veteran Tamil Nadu batsman Murali Vijay has opted out of the upcoming Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament owing to personal reasons. Meanwhile, medium-pacer K. Vignesh, who tested positive for coronavirus, was replaced in the probabilities list by R.S. Jaganath Srinivas. L. Suryaprakash has been included in place of Vijay who was among the established names in the 26-strong probabilities list announced on December 16 along with Dinesh Karthik and Vijay Shankar.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Brighton vs Sheffield from 5.30 pm; Tottenham vs Leicester from 7.45 pm; Manchester United vs Leeds United from 10 pm; West Brom vs Aston Villa from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Indian Super League: Hyderabad vs Mumbai from 4.50 pm; Kerala Blasters vs East Bengal from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Torino vs Bologna from 5 pm on Sony Ten 2; Sassuolo vs AC Milan from 7.30 pm; Atalanta vs Roma from 10.30 pm; Lazio vs Napoli from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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NEW LOW

India slump to their lowest score as Australia clinch first Test

Adelaide, Dec. 19: The Indian cricket team under Virat Kohli faced their worst hour of embarrassment while collapsing to their lowest Test score of 36 as a rampaging Australia cruised to an emphatic eight-wicket victory inside two and half days in the opening Day/Night Test here on Saturday.

There were no demons in the pitch but Josh Hazlewood (5-38-5) and Patrick Cummins (10.2-4-21-4) displayed fast bowling of highest quality to dismantle the visitors.

The sequence of 4, 9, 2, 0, 4, 0, 8, 4, 0, 4, and 1 on the scorecard will rankle the fans but more so this team, for a very long time.

"Very hard to put those feelings into words. We had a lead of 60-odd coming and just collapsed," said Kohli, who would be heading home on paternity leave now.

India's earlier lowest score was 42 at the Lord's in 1974 against England, known in Indian cricket parlance as the "Summer of 42". Saturday's total was also the lowest score in the brief history of D/N Tests and the joint fifth lowest overall.

The easy target of 90 runs was achieved by the home side in only 21 overs without much fuss.

They only lost Matthew Wade (33) and Marnus Labuschagne (6) in pursuit of the easy goal and in the process, opener Joe Burns (51) got a confidence-boosting half century.

The home team collected 30 World Test Championship points from the win, while its skipper Tim Paine was adjudged player of the match for his gritty first innings knock of 73.

"I said this morning in the media that both these attacks have the ability to take quick wickets. Didn't expect



India captain Virat Kohli (right) leads his players off the field after their loss to Australia on the third day of their first Test in Adelaide on Saturday.

SCORECARD

India 1st Innings: 244 all out
Australia 1st Innings: 191 all out
India second innings (overnight 9/1): Prithvi Shaw b Cummins 4, Mayank Agarwal c Paine b Hazlewood 9, Jasprit Bumrah c and b Cummins 2, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 0, Virat Kohli c Green b Cummins 4, Ajinkya Rahane c Paine b Hazlewood 0, Hanuma Vihari c Paine b Hazlewood 8, Wriddhiman Saha c Labuschagne b Hazlewood 4, Ravichandran Ashwin c Paine b Hazlewood 0, Umesh Yadav not out 4, Mohammed Shami retd hurt 1.
Extras 0. Total (for 9 wks, in 21.2 overs) 36.
FoW: 7-1, 15-2, 15-3, 15-4, 15-5, 19-6, 26-7, 26-8, 31-9.
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 6-3-7-0, Pat Cummins 10.2-4-21-4, Josh Hazlewood 5-3-8-5.

Australia 2nd Innings: Matthew Wade run out 33, Joe Burns (not out) 51, Marnus Labuschagne c Agarwal b Ashwin 6, Steven Smith (not out) 1. **Total (For 2 wks, in 21 overs) 93.**
FoW: 70-1, 82-2.
Bowling: Umesh Yadav 8-1-49-0, Jasprit Bumrah 7-1-27-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 6-1-16-1.



The OTP to forget this is 49204084041.
— VIRENDER SEHWAG
Ex-India opener

Wait what happened? I just went to play 9 holes came back game over. What a spell by The Australians. Pace matters.
— WASIM AKRAM
Pakistan cricketer

Unreal win by the lads today, bowlers what an effort today!! Simply unbelievable day of cricket. @joeburns441 hits winnings runs so good. So happy for you legend.
— DAVID WARNER
Australian batsman

With the way India batted & bowled in the 1st innings, they were in the driver's seat, but the Aussies came back really hard this morning. That is the beauty of Test cricket. It's NEVER over till it's over. India was out-classed in the 2nd half. Congratulations to Australia!
— SACHIN TENDULKAR
India great

Very disappointed with the result. We all expect the Indian team to play better cricket #INDvAUS
— IRFAN PATHAN
Former India pacer

Gavaskar hails Aussie bowlers

Adelaide, Dec. 19: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Saturday sympathised with the Indian team after it slumped to its lowest Test score, saying it would be a bit unfair to be critical given that the Australian pace bowlers were simply "superb".

The trio of Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc produced a sensational performance as the visitors collapsed to their lowest Test score of 36. India's earlier lowest score was 42 against England at the Lord's in 1974 and Gavaskar was a part of that team.

"I mean, any team that is all-out for its lowest Test score since the time it started playing Test cricket, that's never good to see," Gavaskar told 'Channel 7' after India's eight-wicket loss here.

"But having said that, if any other team had been facing that kind of bowling, they would have also got out, maybe be not all-out for 36, maybe 72 or 80-90 but the way Hazlewood, Cummins bowled and the earlier three-over spell from Starc, they asked a lot of questions," he explained.



Australia's Pat Cummins celebrates the wicket of India's Cheteshwar Pujara on Saturday.

"So it's not fair to blame the Indian batsmen for the way they got out because it was just simply superb bowling by the Australian bowlers," he added.

After ending the second day with a handy 62-run first innings lead, India faced a batting collapse in the first session of day three.

None of their batsmen reached double-digit scores as Hazlewood (5/8) and Cummins (4/21) terrorised the tourists into submission. — *PTI*

ZERO FOR FOUR WAS MORE SHAMEFUL, SAYS GAEKWAD

BY BIPIN DANI

1-0 (Pankaj Roy), 2-0 (Datta Gaekwad), 3-0 (M.K. Mantri) and 4-0 (Vijay Manjrekar). India losing four wickets without a run on the scoreboard against England at Leeds in 1952 was more shameful than Virat Kohli & Co.'s second innings debacle at Adelaide, according to former India opener Dattaji Gaekwad.

"Team India's 36 all out at Adelaide is not as shameful as our debacle," Gaekwad, one of the two surviving members of India's 1952 team, said.

"There have been other international teams who have scored lesser than 36 runs but losing four wickets without a run on the board was very hard to digest. Even today, I am ashamed of this (zero for four) debacle".

Hazlewood warns India of aftershock

Adelaide, Dec. 19: India will feel the aftershocks of crumbing to their lowest Test total of 36 heading into the remainder of the four-match series against Australia, Adelaide Oval's wrecker-in-chief Josh Hazlewood said Saturday.

Virat Kohli leaving for paternity leave from the second Test will also add to the visitors' woes, according to Hazlewood.

"Getting bowled out for 36 is going to leave a few headaches here and there and their best batter (Virat) is leaving as well, it is going to leave a bit of whole," Hazlewood said at the post-match press conference.

Kohli's absence is also an opportunity for others to prove their mettle after the forgettable outing at the Adelaide Oval.

"...But they have got plenty of class batters on the side-lines to come in, not of Virat's class. But in terms of the series, it is great to be one up, it is better than being one-down, as we found out last time," he added.

The pacer though cautioned his teammates that



Australia's Josh Hazlewood acknowledges the applause after taking five Indian wickets in Adelaide on Saturday.

the win is history now and they must look forward to the coming matches.

"It is probably a fresh start to a degree for the batters and bowlers, and they have a player coming for Virat and they have got some class players on the bench to be honest, so good players are going to come in and we will have some plans for (them) no doubt," he said. — *PTI*

Our worst batting show: Kohli

Adelaide, Dec. 19: India captain Virat Kohli can't remember a "worse batting performance" by his team than the lowest ever Test score of 36 against Australia here but at the same time, he has urged people not to "make mountain out of a mole-hill".

He did speak about batsmen "lacking intent" to take forward the lead and although he didn't take names, Mayank Agarwal's approach (9 off 40 balls) in the morning was hard to explain when the team had a 62-run overnight advantage.

"I don't think we have ever had a worse batting performance than this. So we can only go upwards from here and you will see guys stepping up and realising their true char-

INDIA'S LOWEST TOTALS IN TESTS				
Score	Overs	Opponents	Venue	Season
36	21.2	Australia	Adelaide	2020-21
42	17	England	Lord's	1974
58	21.3(x8)	Australia	Brisbane	1947-48
58	21.4	England	Manchester	1952
66	34.1	South Africa	Durban	1996-97

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

acters," Kohli said.

The Indian captain desperately tried but looked at pains to defend the indefensible — another inept overseas batting show with six successive scores of less than 250 just this year.

"It's a strange one to be honest in my opinion. The ball didn't do much but we didn't have too much intent of going out there and taking the

game forward," he lamented.

"Everything happened so quickly that no one could make any sense of it," Kohli was unable to fathom what hit his team.

Under Kohli, save the 2018 series in Australia, the Indian team has had way too many batting collapses including six on the trot, starting with New Zealand early this year, but strangely the

skipper felt there isn't anything alarming about it.

"I don't think it's alarming and we can very well sit here and make a mountain out of a mole-hill, it's basically looking at things in the right perspective," he reasoned.

In fact, there has been close to 15 innings in SENA countries (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia) where the team has failed but the skipper could remember only six in 8-9 years.

"You have just spoken about five or six batting collapses in 8 to 9 years if I am not wrong. There will definitely be collapses again and again and we have to accept our mistakes and what we need to work on." — *PTI*

Chennaiyin FC end winless streak, get better of Goa 2-1

Goa, Dec. 19: Chennaiyin FC finally managed to register a win after five games, with 2-1 victory over FC Goa in the Indian Super League at Fatorada Stadium, Goa, on Saturday. In a game that saw 39 shots at goal, Rahim Ali (53') scored the match-winner after Jorge Ortiz (9') cancelled out Rafael Crivellaro's (5') olympic-goal opener.

It was an easy win for the visitors who should have finished with a bigger goal margin, had it not for their poor finishing.

Brandon Fernandes returned to the side as Goa coach Juan Ferrando named three changes to the line-up



CFC's Raheem Ali celebrates after scoring goal.

that lost against ATK Mohun Bagan with Aiban Dohling and Jorge Ortiz being the other two.

Following their 0-0 draw against NorthEast United, Coach Csaba Laszlo preferred to start with influential mid-

fielder Anirudh Thapa and Rafael Crivellaro. And the duo troubled the FC Goa defence from the first whistle.

Chennaiyin FC fired warning shots early in the game. Thapa made a darting run on the right and cut the ball back to an unmarked Crivellaro. The latter's first-time shot was pushed behind by Mohammad Nawaz.

The visitors were soon ahead in the game and it came from a moment of individual brilliance. Crivellaro got his corner-kick to loop over the Goa defenders and land in goal. But the lead lasted for just four minutes as the Gaurs came up with an instant response in the 9th minute.

Ann regains national racing title

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 19

Juggling racing and online exams, 19-year old Ann Jennifer (Sparks Racing) from Chennai kept her nerves to regain the title in the Girls category with her fourth consecutive win in the MRF MMSC fmsci Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship at the MMRT, here on Saturday. Ann Jennifer had previously won the title in 2018, but a couple of poor rounds cost her the championship last year.

Earlier, 40-year old Rajini Krishnan, a former multiple National champion, rolled back the years, and came up with a masterly display to win the premier Pro-Stock 301-400cc race. Equally impressive victors were Jagan Kumar (TVS Racing) in the Pro-Stock



Ann Jennifer

165cc race, and Bengaluru's Ullas Santrupt (RACR Castrol Power Racing) and Navneeth Kumar (Rullex Rockers Racing) from Puducherry in the two Novice (Stock 165cc) category races.

Reflecting on her Championship win, Ann Jennifer said: "It was tough to deal with back-to-back race weekends and my

online exams. So, immediately after the races, I had to do my online exams. This weekend, I was nervous. I had bad starts in both the races, but managed to make up. Yes, I am extremely happy to win the championship for the second time." She yet again had a poor start from pole position, but recovered to win easily from Gusto Racing pair of Lani Zena Fernandez and Arpitha Bhat, who both finished second and third, respectively, in the championship.

RESULTS
Pro-Stock 301-400cc (Race-2): 1. Rajini Krishnan (RACR Castrol Power Racing) (11mins, 46.271secs); 2. Jagan Kumar (TVS Racing) (11:48.020); 3. Amarnath Menon (SpeedUp Racing) (11:52.450).
Pro-Stock 165cc (Race-2):

1. Jagan Kumar (TVS Racing) (12:13.737); 2. KY Ahamed (TVS Racing) (12:13.810); 3. Kevin Kannan (RACR Castrol Power Racing) (12:20.027).
Novice (Stock 165cc, Race-2): 1. Ullas Santrupt (RACR Castrol Power Racing) (13:12.455); 2. Sudheer Sudhakar (Gusto Racing) (13:13.228); 3. Mohan Babu (Pvt, Chennai) (13:13.481).
Race-3: 1. Navneeth Kumar (Rullex Rockers Racing) (13:06.810); 2. Alwin Xavier (Rockstar Racing) (13:06.813); 3. Sudheer Sudhakar (Gusto Racing) (13:10.864).
Girls (Stock 165cc, Race-2, 5 laps): 1. Ann Jennifer (Sparks Racing) (10:55.561); 2. Lani Zena Fernandez (Gusto Racing) (11:05.599); 3. Arpitha Bhat (Gusto Racing) (11:26.174).