

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | WEDNESDAY | 30 DECEMBER 2020

## WEATHER



Max: 31.0°C  
Min: 16.0°C  
RH: 73%  
Rainfall: NIL

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

## COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+18,035)	(+246)
1,02,42,306	1,48,426
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+397)	(+2)
TS: 2,85,465	1,535
(+326)	(+2)
AP: 8,81,599	7,100

### CASES AROUND THE WORLD

	8,20,00,970
<b>DEATHS</b>	
	17,88,015
<b>COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES</b>	
	218
worldometers.info/coronavirus	

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Dakshinayana  
**Tithi:** Margasira Shuddha Purnima till 8.55 am  
**Star:** Ardra till 6.51 pm  
**Varjyam:** Nil  
**Durmuhurtam:** 11.56 am to 12.40 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 12 noon to 1.30 pm  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
**Jamadi-ul-Awwal 14, 1442 AH**  
**PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)**  
**Fajar:** 5:30 am  
**Zohar:** 1:30 pm  
**Asar:** 4:15 pm  
**Maghrib:** 5:38 pm  
**Isha:** 8:30 pm  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM**  
**SUNSET TODAY 5.39 PM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 5.53 PM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 7.26 AM**

## COUNTER POINT



**You are lucky! You tested positive for Covid-19, not its variant!**

## SHORT TAKES

### Pierre Cardin passes away at 98

**Paris:** Pierre Cardin, 98, the French designer whose name embossed everything from wristwatches to bedsheets after his iconic Space Age styles shot him into the fashion stratosphere in the 1960s, has died, the French Academy of Fine Arts said.

### Sudha Bharadwaj seeks books

**Mumbai:** Three accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoists links case have moved a court here seeking access to books and newspapers in prison. Activist Sudha Bharadwaj filed separate plea through their lawyer Chandni Chawla in NIA court.

## DEATH | ROW

### BJP, JD(S) slam Congress after note blames party

# K'taka Council Dy Chairman ends life

VINAY MADHAV | DC  
BENGALURU, DEC. 29

A fortnight after creating a controversy by being part of a no-confidence motion against the Karnataka Legislative Council chairman, the Upper House's deputy chairman, S.L. Dharme Gowda, committed suicide by jumping in front of a running train.

His death note, where he

said the recent Legislative Council incident, where he was dragged down from the Chair by Congress members, had hurt him a lot, has created a controversy with BJP and JD(S) leaders pointing fingers at the Congress. The 65-year-old JD(S) leader, killed himself between 11 pm and 12 midnight on Monday at the Manken-ahalli railway track, about 20 km from his

home. Family sources said he left home at around 6.30 pm with his driver and asked him to stop the car at a place called Gunasagar, just 3 km from the spot where he committed suicide. He asked his driver to go home, as he had to meet someone.

Later, he called one of his followers and enquired at what time the Janshatabdhi train from Bengaluru-

Shivamogga was due. Later he switched off his mobile. When he did not return till late in the night, his family members and the police found his body on the track. In his suicide note, Gowda apologised to his mother and wife, and wrote down details about his property and gave other financial details, advising his family to complete the house that was under construction.

### India strike back, level Test series 1-1 with Oz



Australian captain Tim Paine congratulates his Indian counterpart Ajinkya Rahane, right, on winning the second Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, on Tuesday. India beat Australia by eight wickets to level the series at 1-1. ■ **Page 8** — AP

# Ban on UK flights likely to be extended: Minister

### Passengers from Nov. 23 being monitored

VINEETA PANDEY  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

With the samples of six UK returnees to India being found to be positive with the new mutated Covid-19 variant genome by the labs in Nimhans-Bengaluru (three samples), CCMB-Hyderabad (two) and NIV-Pune (one), the ban on incoming flights from the UK is likely to be extended for some more time.

Minister of state for civil aviation Hardeep Singh Puri indicated this on Tuesday, saying: “I foresee a short extension on this temporary suspension. I do not see the extension to be long or indefinite.”

All passengers who have travelled to India since November 23 are being monitored and will now be tested in the states. The number of such passengers is about 30,000.

Health ministry officials said “the situation is under careful watch”, and regular advice is being given to the states for enhanced surveillance, containment, testing and dispatch of sam-

## AP woman tests +ve to UK mutant strain

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

AP health authorities confirmed that the woman from Rajahmundry who returned from London recently tested positive to the UK mutant strain of Coronavirus.

The test was done at the Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology. Health and family welfare commissioner K. Bhaskar said there, however, was no spread of the UK strain

ples to designated government labs. In addition, five per cent samples of all daily detected Covid-19 positive cases in the states/UTs will be sent for genome sequencing.

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said, meanwhile, that the rising Covid-19 cases in the UK was a cause for concern.

However, PM's princi-

pal scientific adviser K. Vijay Raghavan said the Covid-19 vaccines would be effective against the new variant of the virus as there is “no evidence so far that they will fail to protect against new variants”.

It is learnt that next month's Republic Day parade may also see a limited crowd in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

■ **Page 2: Samples of 24 Covid +ve sent to CCMB**

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It is learnt that next month's Republic Day parade may also see a limited crowd in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

# Now, licence to rear dogs, pigs

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

The state government on Tuesday issued an order specifying rules relating to issue of licences for rearing dogs and pigs and control of unlicensed pets and animals.

The department of panchayat raj and rural development issued GO MS No. 693 on Tuesday specifying rules on grant of licence for dogs and pigs; logistic arrangements for con-

trol of stray dogs and obligations of the gram panchayats; capturing/sterilisation/immunisation/release of dogs; identification and recording of sterilised or immunised dogs; sterilisation or putting to sleep dogs found with voice impaired or dumb rabid dogs; disposal of carcasses of dogs; formation of monitoring committees; general functions of the gram panchayat level monitoring committee and control on pigs.

## STATE | 2

**No law and order in state, says Naidu**



## NATION | 4

**Mufti promises not to give up fight**

## WORLD | 5

**Biden sees danger in transition stalling**



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## HC TELLS STATE, SEC TO RESOLVE GP POLL ISSUES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

The AP High Court has directed both the state government and the State Election Commission to hold alks and resolve the issue amicably on the latter's move to conduct gram panchayat polls in February 2021.

A division bench headed by justice A.V. Seshasai held the hearing on Tuesday and issued the order asking both the parties to start consultations in three days from the date of receipt of the order copy. The court said that the SEC would decide the date and venue for taking up consultations and asked the state government to depute officials in the rank of principal secretary to consult the SEC.

The court suggested to the state to submit a series of guidelines issued by the Centre on Covid-19 and its recommendations to contain spread of the virus before the SEC in a written format and advised it to submit all relevant documents also. It may be mentioned that panchayat raj principal secretary Gopala Krishna Dwivedi had filed a petition in the HC earlier challenging the issue of proceedings by the SEC to conduct gram panchayat polls in February 2021 in the state. The Judge asked both the parties to resolve the issue, in an amicable manner through consultations keeping in mind the directions of the SC.

■ **Page 2: AP raises issue of SEC's month for election**

# No New Year fete in Vijayawada: Cops

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

No New Year celebrations will be allowed in Vijayawada city to contain the spread of Covid-19. Vijayawada city police commissioner Battina Srinivasulu said that the police department has not given permission for the celebrations and appealed to people to ring in the New Year at their homes by following Covid-19 protocol.

## BOTSA REVIEWS HOUSE PATTAs DISTRIBUTION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIZIANAGARAM, DEC. 29

Minister for municipal administration Botsa Satyanarayana along with local MLA Kolagatta Veerabhadra Swamy, S. Kota MLA K. Srinivasa Rao and collector Dr M. Hari Jawaharlar reviewed the arrangements being made at Gunkalam village in the district where Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will distribute house pattas and land and address a public meeting on Wednesday.

The Chief Minister will be participating in the programmes at three places in the state including Gunkalam.

He will arrive in Visakhapatnam in a special aircraft from Vijayawada and fly to Gunkalam by helicopter. After making an aerial survey of the lands being given to the beneficiaries, he will arrive at the venue and interact with the women beneficiaries.

Botsa said 1,07,181 beneficiaries have been identified in Vizianagaram district who would get houses and house site pattas. Of them 71,237 will be new beneficiaries who would be given houses and possession certificates would be given to 24,237 who have built houses on government land and living.

# CM releases third YSR sop tranche

₹1,766 cr released to benefit 8.34 L farmers

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday released the third tranche of ‘YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan’ funds. The ₹1,120 crore relief is accompanied by a compensation of ₹646 crore for crops damaged during the Nivar cyclone. This will support 8.34 lakh farmers. A total sum of ₹1,766 crore was deposited in the farmers' bank accounts with a single click. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that the state government has spent ₹61,400 crore towards farmers welfare in the last 18 months.

He said that he believes the state would be better of when the farmer is happy and doing well. He stated that his government provided ₹13,101 crore under YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan by giving ₹13,500 every year to 51.59 lakh farmers, including tenant farmers and those cultivating the forest lands.

The CM slammed TD president and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for being irresponsible and playing cheap political dramas pretending to have a concern about farmers. He said, “The Opposition leader lives far away from the land and close to the zoom app. Naidu had landed his son (Lokesh) and adopted



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

● **The Chief Minister said he believes the state will do well when farmers also do well**

son (Pawan Kalyan) in the state but he doesn't have trust either of them as people rejected them both. The cyclone relief was announced on multiple occasions and the state had also purchased the damaged crops even though they are moist and germinated. Under relief measures, 43,000 quintals of seeds were given at 80 per cent subsidy. Despite taking so many measures, the Opposition leaders are still trying eke out political mileage by levelling false allegations.”

The Chief Minister stated, “The previous government that had abandoned the farmers and cheated them by promising to waive off ₹87,612 crore of farm loans, had hardly spent ₹12,000 crore in their five-year rule. The

previous TD government left a huge pile of debts on farmers including the subsidy for crops, seeds, insurance, electricity arrears, and zero-interest loans. The arrears left by the previous government were paid by the YSRC government including providing an ex gratia to 434 farmers families who committed suicide during Telugu Desam rule.”

With regard to the input subsidy, the Chief Minister said that the state government had paid ₹1,038.46 crore between June-November compensating the crop loss due to heavy rains and floods. He said, “Also, the government had cleared the unpaid dues of the previous government of ₹960 crore for paddy procurement, arrears of ₹383 crore were also paid under the seed subsidy, ₹17,430 crore on free electricity and aqua farmers, including ₹8,655 crore of debt. To provide 9 hours of free electricity during day time, the state government had initiated to strengthen the feeders at an expenditure of ₹1,700 crore. He said that the government had cleared ₹904 crore of pending arrears for zero-interest loans put by the previous government and credited ₹510 crore towards YSR Zero-interest crop loans and given ₹1,968 crore under YSR Crop insurance.”

roads or cut cakes for New Year on the Bandar Road and all shops in the city should close by 10 pm on December 31.

He stated that there was no special permission for New Year celebrations at hotels, functions or other gatherings.

He said that wine shops would be allowed till 8 pm and bar and restaurants till 11 pm on December 31 following the Covid-19 protocol.

Wishing the people, the top cop said that the police will increase patrolling and security arrangements for the protection of law and order in the city on December 31.

Srinivasulu said that in view of the new strain of Covid being identified in a passenger from the UK and fears of a second Covid wave, people should avoid public gatherings.

He said that there was no permission to gather on

He warned of stern action against those selling liquor to people under 21 years and those conducting New Year programmes violating norms at bars, restaurants and hotels.

He warned that vehicles would be seized for violation of norms like drunken driving and not wearing helmets and seat belts. He appealed to people to cooperate with the police by celebrating New Year in at homes.

# Lulu's loss is CMR's gain, concession to continue

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 29

A major decision by the YSR government soon after winning power last year was to cancel the MoU signed between the TDP government and multinational Lulu group for setting up hyper market at RK Beach in Visakhapatnam. Now, it turns out that Lulu's loss is CMR group's gain.

The cabinet decision was taken on October 30 last year. As per the MoU, Lulu got 13.4 acres of land, of which the CMR Group had owned 3.4 acres. In lieu of the 3.4 acres, the government gave CMR 1.36 acres at Siripuram close to the HSBC complex, 0.91 acres in MVP Colony, 0.33 acres in Kirlampudi, 1.49 acres in MVP Double road, 065 acres in Seethammadhar and 0.11 acres in Lawson's Bay Colony together worth ₹132.53 crore as per the SRO value.

Minister for tourism and culture Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao said on June 19 last year that the land parcels given to the CMR Group would be revised. “We have objection to the land exchange between the CMR group and the previous government under which the former got Rs 200 crore worth of land for

● **After cancellation of the MoU with Lulu for a hyper mart in Visakhapatnam, many thought the YSRC government would take back the lands given to CMR Group.**

● **Instead, by GO No 219, the government allowed 25 per cent ‘setback relaxation’ to all sides in the proposed six pieces of land and agreed for extra floors as per the request of CMR Group. This a major gain for the CMR group. CMR group got six most valuable lands in the heart of Visakhapatnam city and an extra 1.45 acre, which itself would cost around ₹75 crore**

lands worth less than Rs 100 crore. We will not allow a loss to the government,” the minister had said.

After cancellation of the MoU with Lulu, many thought the YSR government would take back the

lands given to CMR Group. Instead, by GO No 219, the government allowed 25 per cent ‘setback relaxation’ to all sides in the proposed six pieces of land and agreed for extra floors as per the request of CMR Group. This a major gain for the CMR group. CMR group got six most valuable lands in the heart of Visakhapatnam city and an extra 1.45 acre, which itself would cost around ₹75 crore, said a prominent realtor in Visakhapatnam.

Now, APIIC has a huge chunk of land admeasuring 13.40 acres.

“The government has not taken any decision on the use of this prime land,” said APIIC zonal manager C Yethi Raju.

Former chief minister Chandrababu Naidu had gone all the way to Kochi to meet Lulu promoter Mohammed Yusuf Ali and invite him to open a hyper mall in Visakhapatnam on the same lines Ali did on a massive scale in Kochi. On February 24, vice president M Venkaiah Naidu laid the foundation stone for the CMR project at RK Beach site in the presence of Yusuf Ali, Chandrababu Naidu and several ministers. Naidu said the hyper market will create 5,000 jobs with an average salary of ₹10,000.



## SHORT TAKES

TD LEADER  
MURDERED IN  
PRODDATURDC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, DEC. 29

A Telugu Desam district official spokesperson and advocate Nandam Subbaiah was murdered in Proddatur of Kadapa district on Tuesday morning. His body was found among the newly distributed house sites at Proddatur.

The police have registered a case and are investigating.

TD's Kadapa parliamentary party president Mallela Linga Reddy said that party national general secretary Nara Lokesh will be attending the final rites of Subbaiah at Proddatur on Wednesday.

TD politburo member Reddeppagari Srinivasa Reddy condemned the murder of the party leader. He said that the people were left without protection in the Jagan Mohan Reddy government and an anarchic rule was going on in the state.

NO LAW AND  
ORDER IN STATE,  
SAYS NAIDUDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday blamed the ruling YSR Congress leaders for the murder of weaker sections leader Nandam Subbaiah at Proddatur in Kadapa district. He alleged that Subbaiah was targeted because he held a press conference where he exposed the local YSRC MLA's corruption and other illegal activities. He shot off separate letters to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and DGP Gautham Sawang expressing concern that the Rule of Law has collapsed in the state.

Mr Naidu stated that Subbaiah, who belonged to the weaker section community was brutally murdered for questioning the role of the MLA and his brother-in-law in the illegal transportation of sand and cricket bettings. He alleged that the criminal gangs were becoming emboldened and Nandam Subbaiah's murder revealed yet again how the law and order had totally collapsed in Kadapa district in particular and in AP in general. He termed Subbaiah's killing as a 'Government murder' and demanded the Chief Minister take responsibility for the incident.

Mr Naidu addressed separate letters to the Chief Minister and the DGP in which he described the latest attack in Tadipatri as a rarest of rare incident recalling how the ruling YSRC MLA Pedda Reddy along with his gang attacked the house of a former MLA and Opposition leader there. He claimed that this was enough evidence to say that there was no law and order.

YSRC REFUTES  
CLAIMS OF TD IN  
MURDER CASEDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

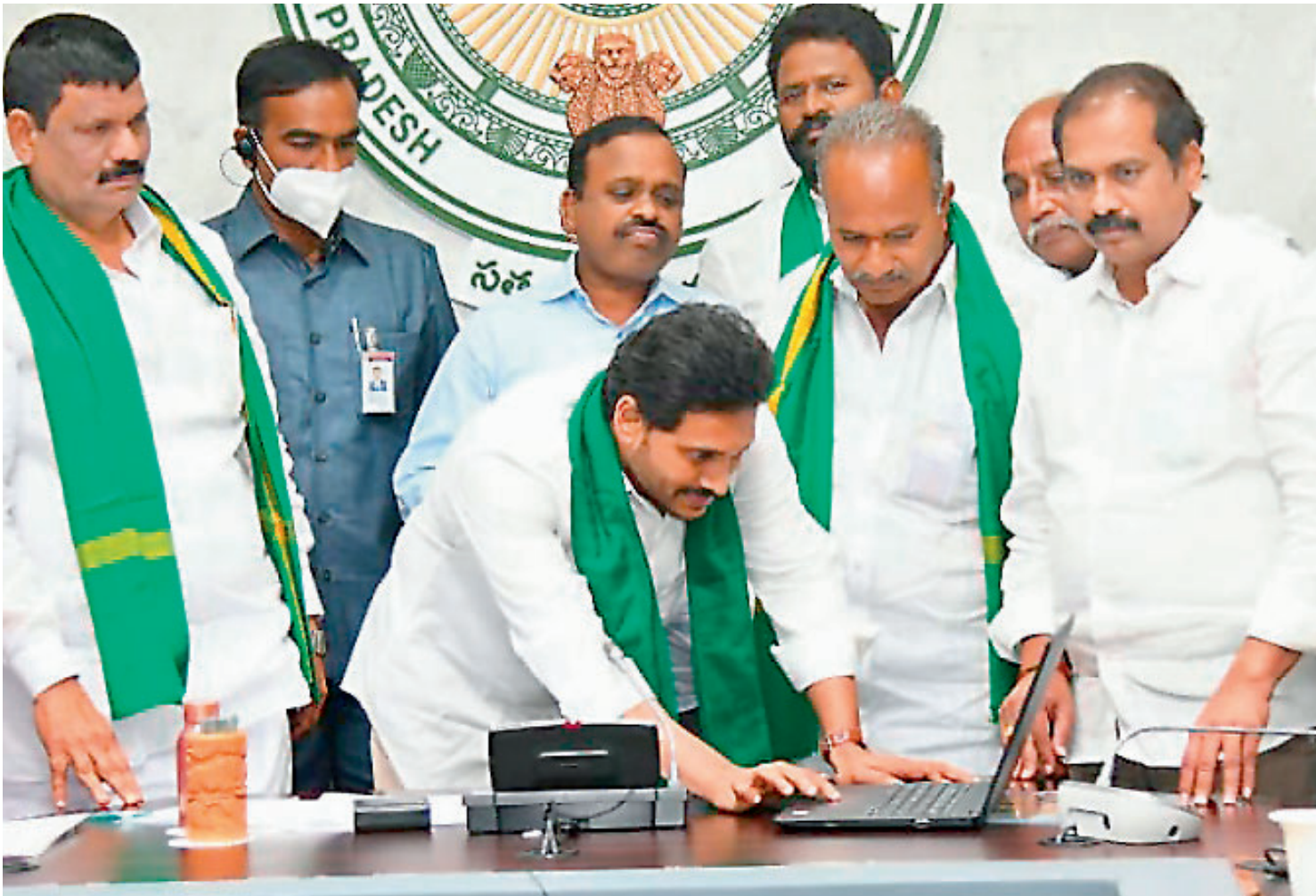
YSRC Congress objected to the comments made by Chandrababu Naidu and his son Nara Lokesh in connection with the murder in Proddatur as highly irresponsible. YSRC MLA Jogi Ramesh and YSRC MLC and BC wing president Janga Krishnamurthy refuted the allegations that Telugu Desam is known for encouraging murder politics.

These allegations were amid news that Naidu and K.E. Krishnamurthy's men were behind Narayana Reddy's murder in Pattikonda. They alleged that after facilitating the destruction of peace in Rayalaseema through his murder politics, Naidu is acting innocent. They stated that propagating lies by saying that BCs in the state are under attack is highly irresponsible, and whoever is responsible for this murder should be punished.

Rumours were spread concerning Proddatur MLA Siva Prasad Reddy resorting to murdering Nanadam Subbaiah because the victim exposed his corruption, are baseless and false. They alleged that just because the victim belongs to a family in the handloom business, TD is trying to drag political mileage out of the incident by saying that this is an attack on BCs.

The duo YSRC legislators recalled that when the TD was in power from 2014 to 2019, Subbaiah was booked in as many as four criminal cases. It is also important to note that he was also convicted in two of these cases. They said that Subbaiah has a history of being booked in criminal cases.

## Click of a button



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy releases "YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan" input subsidy to farmers at the camp office on Tuesday, Minister K. Kannababu and others also seen.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

AP volunteers provided  
succour in year gone by

3.95 lakh are working in 15,004 Village and Ward Secretariats across the State

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

The innovative first of its kind, Ward Village Secretariats and Volunteers turned a boon to the government and people in 2020. The volunteers played a crucial role during Corona for the identification of Covid-19 infected persons, shifting them to hospitals for quarantine and further offered services in the containment zones. Besides this majority other services offered at doorsteps giving people a big relief in 2020. As many as 3.95 lakh are working in 15,004 Village and Ward Secretariats across the State, including the volunteers who are

given the charge of 50 households in rural and 100 in urban areas offering over 500 services.

The State government had brought the village and ward secretariat system to ensure that government services reach people to a maximum extent and make it more accessible.

Village and Ward Secretariats have brought governance closer to the people and shown to the nation a functioning Gram Swaraj and initiative has won wide acclaim from far and wide.

Launched on Gandhi Jayanti, the village and ward secretariats stand as a true reflection to Gram Swaraj. The network came in handy during the times of pandemic and distribution of social security schemes in an effective, transparent and corruption-free manner. The village/ward secretariat system has become an effective force in fighting coronavirus, where the volun-

teers have been able to collect data throughout and put the State on high alert.

Locals of Corona containment zones, D. Raghu and J. Syamala Rao said that during curfew days, the volunteers rendered valuable services by providing essential commodities to their houses including milk and praised that they would not forget 2020 mainly the services of volunteers and Corona impact till last in their lives. They said that further volunteers offered priceless services by shifting Covid-19 infected persons without fear.

In 2020 as part of good governance, the State government had launched 'Spandana' according high

priority to resolve the public grievance within a stipulated time frame. The grievances can be registered through Village/ward secretariats, 1902 Call Centre, Spandana web portal, and Collectorate grievance day on Mondays. This year 28,03,766 grievances have been registered across the state of which 27,23,909, have been resolved and 79,857 are under process.

Minister Perni Venkatarajaramaiah alias Nani said that the Governance has been visible to everyone in the form of village and ward secretariats, volunteers calling home to deliver social security and informing every detail of government decisions.

Samples of 24 Covid  
+ve sent to CCMB

FROM PAGE 1

The authorities then sent samples of these 24 Covid-19 positive patients to the CCMB for genome sequencing test to check whether they were infected with the UK strain. Out of them, one sample of the woman from Rajahmundry confirmed the UK strain while the test results of the remaining 23 samples were yet to come from the CCMB.

East Godavari health authorities maintain that the woman, admitted at Rajahmundry district hospital and kept in an isolation ward from the early hours on Dec 24, was asymptomatic. She was being given treatment for Covid-19.

The woman, after arrival from London to Delhi was

subjected to an RTPCR test at Safdarjung Hospital and she tested Covid-19 positive. She was advised 'home isolation'. The doctors there were not aware of her place of residence and the woman also did not disclose this to be Rajahmundry. Unaware of the implications of her travel, she being a Covid-19 positive patient, she travelled from Delhi to Rajahmundry by train in a first class coach accompanied by her son and then stayed at her home in isolation.

At present, her son too is in an isolation ward at the GH in Rajahmundry and will be tested for Covid-19 again. In case, he tests positive, his swab samples may be sent for genome sequencing.



Damaged Gollapudi bypass road turns a health hazard to motorists in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

WELCOME | 2021

Public representatives asked people not to meet them due to Covid-19

## Political leaders to skip New Year celebrations

## NO 'OPEN HOUSE' AT RAJ BHAVAN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

No 'Open House' to be held at Raj Bhavan on the eve of New Year in the wake of prevailing situation of Covid-19 pandemic.

In a statement from AP Raj Bhavan here on Tuesday, the authorities said that the customary practice of meeting the

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan to exchange pleasantries by the general public and the prominent citizens for the New Year, would not be arranged.

However, the Governor appealed to the people to celebrate the New Year in a restrained manner in compliance with Covid-19 guidelines.

demise of the leader, he wants to keep away the new year greetings.

Mandapeta MLA Vegulla

Jogeswara Rao (TD) called upon the people to hold New Year celebrations within their houses, and

400-year-old Lord  
Rama idol defacedDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 29

Unidentified persons sneaked into the Ramateertham hilltop Sri Kodanda Ramaswamy temple in Nellimerla in Vizianagaram district and defaced the 400-year-old idol of Lord Rama. The head part of the idol is missing and the police have launched a search.

District superintendent of police B. Raja Kumari and other officials visited the temple and inspected the site and the debris.

She said some unidentified persons entered the temple and vandalised the statue of Lord Rama and took away the head. Other idols of Sita, Lakshman and Anjaneya were untouched.

The SP said a police team searched for the missing part in the bush-

Some unidentified persons entered the temple and vandalised the statue of Lord Rama and took away the head. Other idols of Sita, Lakshman and Anjaneya were untouched

es around the hill and the nearby villages but in vain.

Explaining the seriousness of the case, she said a case has been registered in Nellimerla police station and special teams have been formed to locate the culprits and the missing head.

Sniffer dog and CLUES teams were dispatched to the temple to collect fingerprints and other evidences.

"We will catch the culprits very soon," the SP told the local reporters.

New system for  
GST tax returnsDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 29

The government has launched the Quarterly Return Filing and Monthly Payment of Taxes (QRMP) scheme in a bid to ease the return filing experience of the GST taxpayers. The new return filing system will be introduced from January 1, 2021.

Joint commissioner (state tax), Visakhapatnam, N. Srinivasa Rao on Tuesday told reporters that the new scheme is completely optional and applicable to taxpayers having turnover less than ₹5 crore in a financial year.

He said that under this scheme, the taxpayer has to file GSTR 3B and GSTR 1 on a quarterly basis and pay tax on a monthly basis. The taxpayers are

migrated to the new scheme by default subject to some conditions by the GST Network. The taxpayer has the facility to Opt-in or Opt-out from the scheme.

The taxpayer has to pay taxes by the 25th of the succeeding month for the first two months in a quarter. The quarterly return in GSTR 3B shall be filed by 22nd of the succeeding month for the entire quarter. In case of late payment of tax, interest will be levied at 18 per cent and late fee will be charged a maximum ₹5,000 in case of late filing of returns.

E-invoicing is mandatory from January 1, 2021, for taxpayers with a turnover more than ₹100 crore. For any queries and complaints, taxpayer can write to gstcellvsp@gmail.com.

Man pushed to  
death in choultryDC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, DEC. 29

A man working as the mess in-charge was pushed to death at Kakatiya Kamma

Satram, a choultry providing accommodation to pilgrims at Srisaillam, on Tuesday following an altercation with four visitors in the dining hall. The deceased was identified as Srinivasulu, a native of the Guntur district.

Atmakur DSP Y. Sruthi said four people including a postmaster, in the age group of 25 to 40 years, came to the choultry for lunch. They were told that they offer self-service.

The four got enraged and pushed Srinivasulu following which he sustained injuries and died while undergoing treatment, the DSP said.

The DSP said Bandarupalli Nareish, a postmaster, and Durgampudi Rama Rao, a farmer were taken into custody while Gunthakalla Venkatesh, Potla Venkata Kotaiah were at large. All the accused belong to Guntur district. They had come to Srisaillam to surrender the Siva Mala after observing penance for 42 days, it is learnt. A case has been registered and the investigation is on, the DSP added.

## AP RAISES ISSUE OF SEC'S MONTH FOR POLL

FROM PAGE 1

However, government pleader Ch. Suman asked the court to allow the state government to raise the issue of the month fixed by the State Election Commission to conduct gram panchayat polls and also the

Centre's move to conduct the trial run for Covid-19 vaccination programme in AP.

Responding to it, the court made it clear that the state government could take up all such issues before the SEC during the consultations.

Centre's move to conduct the trial run for Covid-19 vaccination programme in AP. Responding to it, the court made it clear that the state government could take up all such issues before the SEC during the consultations.

Anaparti MLA Suryanarayana Reddy said that he also wants to keep away New Year celebrations as he got Covid-19 previously and recovered well.





## OTHER STORIES

## Case registered against loan Apps

**Visakhapatnam:** The Vizag city police registered a case following a complaint from one person against the loan Apps. As per the reports, one B. Satyanarayana availed a loan of ₹4 lakh from the 50 to 60 loan Apps. Though he paid 90 per cent of the loan, he had received several phone calls from the loan App call centres and he was harassed to pay the rest of the loan amount. They also called his family members and sent a WhatsApp message citing that if the amount is not paid with in stipulated time the Aadhaar Card and Pan Card will be blocked and also send a legal notice through WhatsApp. Based on the complaint from the victim, the police registered a case and investigation is on.

## ISO recognition to Nannayya varsity

**Kakinada:** Adikavi Nannayya University secured ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) certification. University Chancellor Mokka Jagannadha Rao said the University got great achievement to get the ISO Certificate in 2020 and he praised the University ISO Coordinator Dr Pervis and his team for achieving the success. He said that in the same spirit, the University officials should make efforts to get NAAC recognition in 2021. He said that the University has drawn quality education programmes and are being implemented in the educational institutions in East and West Godavari districts.

## STUDENTS PROTEST AGAINST FEE HIKE

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NELLORE, DEC. 29

ABVP national executive council member G. Manoj said that the Minister for Higher Education is not available for responding to student issues in the state.

He addressed the media persons while taking part in a protest demanding the abolition of G.O. No. 77 in Gudur town on Tuesday.

Taking a dig at the Fee Regulatory Committee for failing to contain fees structure for professional courses, Manoj Kumar alleged that many students from the state have been shifting to other states for admissions in engineering and other streams.

The ABVP leader said the state government's failure to provide admissions on time in B.Sc and courses including engineering stream is one reason for students' migration to other states.

Mr Manoj Kumar also found fault with the state government to do away with scholarships to the students studying in private P.G. colleges in the state.

Mr Manoj Kumar also rebuked the government for not offering any clarity on PG Law CET.

The government has cancelled the Vidya Deevana and Vasathi Deevana schemes in the state, he alleged.

He said that they would obstruct the minister's visit for water resources Dr P. Anil Kumar Yadav to Guduru on Wednesday to highlight their demands.

Meanwhile, the police took ABVP leaders into their custody and released them later.

## Shortage of TLE drug hits HIV/AIDS patients in AP

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

Shortage of the first line drug regimen called TLE (Tenofovir, Lamivudine and Efavirenz) is causing hardships for the HIV/AIDS infected patients in Andhra Pradesh.

Andhra Pradesh AIDS Control Society supplies TLE tablet for the infected patients to be taken at bed-time every day.

Nearly 2.20 lakh HIV/AIDS infected patients are enrolled for availing antiretroviral therapy in the state as the National Aids Control Society supplies drugs to APSACS which in turn distributes drugs to the Nodal ART and ART centres located in the state. All drugs are being supplied to the patients for lifetime free of cost.

Among those who are on antiretroviral therapy, nearly 35-40 per cent are using TLE. Patients at the

● **THOUGH THE HIV/AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 specifies appointment of an Ombudsman, lack of such authorities results in deficiency of service.**

Nodal ART and ART centres are now being told that there is a short supply of the drug, adding that state health authorities have informed them that patients be given a new combination drug called TLD (Tenofovir, Lamivudine and Dolutegravir) as an alternative drug for TLE.

A patient in Rajahmundry said, "We are facing shortage of TLE in the last two months. Though the ART counsellors advise us to take drugs on a regular basis without

fail to help us overcome our health problem, they themselves are expressing helplessness to give us TLE for want of supply to them. As we cannot afford to purchase such drug in the open market, we are unable to consume such drug and it is resulting in aggravating our health problem."

Health authorities maintain that if the patients fail to use such the drug on a regular basis, it will result in rise in their viral load and make them vulnerable to other infections and may also lead to fatality. Some patients are also complaining about side-effects like insomnia, development of rash on skin and other health problems after using TLD as an alternative drug for TLE.

The patients are urging the government to intervene and direct APSACS to ensure regular supply of all drugs.

## TASK FORCE CONSTABLES FALL OFF CLIFF CHASING RED SANDERS SMUGGLERS, HURT

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, DEC. 29

Two constables of AP red sanders anti-smuggling task force fell from a small cliff and sustained injuries while chasing red sanders smugglers in Seshachalam forests near Karakambadi road under Tirupati rural limits on Tuesday early morning. Though the constables and their team failed to catch the smugglers, they managed to seize 18 red sanders logs and 16 axes.

According to task force DSP KC Venkataiah, a team of task force personnel led by RSI Vasu and DRO Narasimha Rao has been conducting a combing operation in Seshachalam forest near Tirupati since Monday evening.

During the operation, the team encountered smugglers carrying logs in the forest area backside to Haritha colony near Karakambadi. On noticing the task force team, the smugglers fled from the spot, leaving behind the logs.

● **Meanwhile, the task force team has managed to seize 18 logs, 16 axes and some bags with clothes and Aadhaar cards of some woodcutters.**

In a swift reaction, Venkatesh and Hussain's task force constables chasing the woodcutters through the slopes and cliffs in the forest area. While fleeing, the woodcutters climbed a small cliff and escaped.

The constables also tried to climb the cliff but fell from a height suffering injury. The officials later took them to a hospital, and they are doing well now.

Meanwhile, the task force team has managed to seize 18 logs, 16 axes and some bags with clothes and Aadhaar cards of some woodcutters.

The task force found that the woodcutters are from Thirupathur district of Tamil Nadu based on the available details. A team was sent to Thirupathur for further investigation.

## CCMB finds new variant of Covid highly transmittable

New variant of coronavirus shows 17 mutations in its genetic material

**SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC**  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

The new variant of the Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 that causes Covid-19, has been found to be B.1.1.7 and believed to be 71 per cent more transmittable than the other variants.

The Hyderabad based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology is one of the 10 research institutes in India involved in tracing the new variant.

In a statement from CCMB issued on Tuesday, Dr Divya Tej Sowpati, who is leading the Coronavirus genome sequencing efforts at CCMB, said, "We need to expedite the viral genome sequencing efforts and check for the presence of the new variant in India. We have used both the traditional Sanger sequencing method and modern next-gen sequencing tools."

The CCMB authorities

## Swab of 7-year-old UK returnee sent to CCMB

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 29

A seven-year-old boy who returned from the UK recently along with his parents tested positive on Monday and his swab has been sent to CCMB, Hyderabad, to check for the new strain.

His parents tested negative. The boy has been sent to institutional quarantine, said Andhra Medical College principal and OSD for Covid-19,

say that the new variant shows 17 mutations in its genetic material and of them, eight affect its spike protein which expresses on its outer

north coastal Andhra Pradesh Dr P.V. Sudhakar. He said in all 1,216 returned from the UK in the last couple of days and tests were conducted on all of them. Only the boy tested positive, he added.

Meanwhile, positive cases have come down in north coastal Andhra during the last few days. On Monday, two cases were reported from Vizianagaram, four in Srikakulam and 41 in Visakhapatnam. Active cases

have also come down proportionately.

Srikakulam has 95 active cases with 32 undergoing treatment in hospital, 45 in Vizianagaram and 251 in Visakhapatnam. Vizianagaram district, which remained green for over two months after the outbreak, reported zero cases on December 27 and 28. "Positive cases came down due to increased awareness and people following the Covid-19 protocol," Dr Sudhakar said.

virus and the receptors facilitating its entry into the host of cells.

They say that the mutations have not worsened the symptoms or the dis-

ease outcomes and are also not an impediment to the vaccine development and add that the testing protocol also remains the same except the only problem is that the new variant spreads more easily than the others.

CCMB director Dr Rakesh Mishra said, "The measures to avoid infection including from the new variant still remains the same like using masks when in presence of others, avoiding crowded places and maintaining physical distancing as they are found to be most effective and feasible. It is now very important to launch an extensive genome surveillance of the virus to assess the extent of the spared of the new virus. We should also keep an eye on the other variants that might emerge independently as India houses the second largest population infected with the virus."

## AP RECORDS 326 COVID CASES, TWO DEATHS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 29

Andhra Pradesh registered 326 new Covid-19 cases and two deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities issued Covid-19 bulletin on Tuesday reporting that out of 50,794 samples tested, 326 persons were infected with the Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,17,08,678 samples tested so far, 8,81,599 persons were found infected with the Covid-19 and of them, 8,71,116 were recovered in the course of treatment while 3,383 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of confirmed Covid-19, Krishna registered the highest number of 67, followed by 56 in Guntur, 52 in Chittoor, 41 in Visakhapatnam, 24 in Kadapa, 23 in West Godavari, 21 in East Godavari, 15 in Anantapur, nine in Prakasam, six each in Nellore and Srikakulam, four in Kurnool and two in Vizianagaram.

## STAGE SET TO PROVIDE VACCINATION

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NELLORE, DEC. 29

Arrangements are being made to provide Covid-19 vaccine to 28,000 health workers followed by 50,000 frontline warriors in SPSR Nellore district.

District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu has directed the Medical and Health department officials to be ready with an action plan, to provide vaccination for 30 lakh population of the district, by the time they launch the first phase of vaccination.

During a visit to the cold chain facility at the District Medical and Health Office on Tuesday, he told the officers to identify session sites to administer the vaccine and offer training to the teams, including vaccinators being deployed at war-footing sites.

He has also instructed them to keep medicines and injections ready to handle any reactions after the vaccination.

The officials told the Collector that there is space to store additional stock of vaccine if cooling machines are made available when he elicited information on the feasibility to store more than the present capacity of 16 lakh doses.

Joint Collector N. Prabhakar Reddy, SP Bhaskar Bhushan, Municipal Commissioner Dinesh Kumar and DMHO Dr G. Rajyalakshmi was present with the Collector.

Collector told the officers to identify session sites to administer the vaccine

## Liquor sales dip, but generates sizeable revenues for govt

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, DEC. 29

The overall consumption of alcohol and alcoholic beverages in Andhra Pradesh fell drastically this year compared to the corresponding period last year, thanks to the prices of various brands being hiked up as part of the government's ambitious plan to implement liquor prohibition in a phased manner.

The sales report of AP prohibition and excise department from all the 29 depots across the state, however, reveals that the state's revenue from the sale of liquor hasn't affected much this year despite the dip in volume of sales and the Covid-19's impact on liquor business.

According to the report, the overall liquor sales across the 29 depots in the state between January 1-December 28 this year were to the tune of ₹19,122.24 crores, whereas during the same period last year the sales were ₹20,006.44 crore. This means the overall sales between this period dipped at only 4.5 per cent (approx.), compared to previous year.

Despite the excitement

over the revenue made this year, a quick look at the sales volume gives a different picture. The volume of IML and beer cases sold this year has declined at approximately 41 and 75 per cent respectively. Only 1.90 Cr IML cases and 61.19 lakh cases of beer have been sold so far this year, while last year around this time, about 3.23 coreIML cases and 205 crore beer cases were sold in the state.

Officials from the state excise department were attributing the rise in revenue to multiple factors: The state government taking control over the entire liquor business, crackdown on belt shops and illegal smuggling of liquor from other states, fall in arrack sales and especially prices of various brands going up.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Deputy CM and minister for prohibition and excise K. Narayana Swamy said that the decline in liquor consumption was due to the new excise policy rolled out by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, who vowed to make Andhra Pradesh liquor-free state by 2024 by implementing a total prohibition in a phased manner.

## Kakinada MP seeks funds for road works

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KAKINADA, DEC. 29

Kakinada MP Vanga Gita requested the Union minister of environment, forest and climate change Prakash Javadekar to sanction funds for developing the road from Kakinada to Edatam through Uppada shore.

Ms Gita who is also the member of Consultative Committee of Environment submitted a memorandum to the Union Minister, stating that the road frequently meets with sea erosion during ebb and tide times and it is causing significant losses to the fishermen and also the residents of the villages on the stretch of nearly 50 km. She said that the villages from Subbampet to Konapappeta are merged with the sea due to the erosion. The World Bank Team visited the area and studied and submitted a recommendation report to the Prime Minister's Office. She also requested the minister take immediate steps for immediate sanction of the project to protect the people and the

area from sea erosion. She said that proposals had been sent to the Union Government to curb the sea erosion and development of the area under Enhancing Coastal and Ocean Resource Efficiency (ENCORE) as Kakinada to Thondangi area will be vastly developed in future due to Kakinada Special Economic Zone, two ports and upcoming new port and others. She stressed the need for the development of the area by taking steps for curbing sea erosion.

According to sources, ENCORE aims to strengthen integrated coastal zone management in all coastal states and Union Territories and the project seeks to assist the government of India in enhancing coastal resource efficiency and resilience, by building collective capacity including communities and decentralising and implementing integrated coastal management approaches. The Kakinada-Uppada seashore area is suitable for developing it under ENCORE.

## TD stages protest over Nehru statue

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KAKINADA, DEC. 29

Telugu Desam staged a protest at Balaji Cheruvu area where a private individual demolished the first PM Late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's statue and Praja Vedika. The Telugu Desam activists led by the former MLA of Kakinada City, Vanamadi Venkateswara Rao (Kondababu), went to the spot and expressed their protest. He said that the ruling party has decided to ruin the city with such demolitions.

Meanwhile, the police entered the scene and scattered the agitators from the spot. There were heated

arguments between Mr Kondababu and the police.

The TD leaders Mallipudi Veeru and Gadula Saibabu questioned the police and said they had the right to express their protest in our democratic country. The police took these two leaders into their custody. Mr Kondababu said that the ruling party leaders demolished Nehru's statue and Praja Vedika during the night time and Nehru statue was thrown in Raja Tank park. When the people asked Kakinada Municipal Commissioner about the act, he said there was no connection with the Municipal Corporation in the incident.

## JANA SENA ACTIVISTS APPEAL TO POLICE TO LIFT CASES ON DIVIS VICTIMS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KAKINADA, DEC. 29

Jana Sena appealed to the Superintendent of Police of East Godavari Adnan Nayeem Asmi to lift all criminal cases against the victims of Divis Company and file FIR on Divis management on the charges of contempt of the court.

Jana Sena Political Affairs Committee member Pantam Venkateswara Rao (Nanaji) and the people of Kothapakalu and Pampadipeta villages of Thondangi Mandal met Mr Asmi and submitted a representation to him.

Mr Nanaji said that the High Court gave a stay order for not entering or not taking up any construction

works or project works at the proposed pharma unit. But, the Divis management launched the construction works, and the people of the area questioned their act.

He said that the people of the area had lodged a complaint with Thondangi police against Divis Management. Based on the complaint, the police should register cases against the liable persons and arrest them immediately.

Meanwhile, the Citu Committee called upon the people of Kothapakalu, Pampadipeta and Tatakulapalem villages to fight against the proposed pharma unit by the Divis.

The Rajamahendravaram and Kakinada Citu leaders visited the area.



## SHORT TAKES

## GOA: NO APPROVAL GIVEN FOR GANJA CULTIVATION

Panaji, Dec. 29: Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday said a proposal has been moved before the state government to allow cultivation of marijuana, but no approval has been granted in the matter. His statement came a day after Goa Forward Party (GFP) president Vijai Sardesai claimed there was a proposal to cultivate marijuana (ganja or grass) in the state for medicinal purposes.

Talking to reporters here, Sawant said a file on marijuana cultivation in the state has been moved before the government, but it has not been approved. "There is a proposal, but that does not mean we have given approval. It is for the government to take a decision. That way, there are many things which are proposed to the government, but are never approved," he said.

Sardesai, a former Goa deputy chief minister, on Monday asked how the government will ensure that cultivation of marijuana will be limited to medical purposes.

## COURT GRANTS BAIL TO MAN IN DELHI RIOTS CASE

New Delhi, Dec. 29: A Delhi court has granted bail to a man in a north east Delhi riots case, saying there was no CCTV footage of the incident and the victim did not identify the accused when his statement was recorded the first time.

Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat granted relief to Osama on furnishing a bail bond of ₹25,000 with one surety of like amount in the case related to gunshot injuries received by one Rohit Shukla during the riots at Maujpur Chowk.

The court said the victim did not identify Osama when his statement was recorded in March but in another statement recorded in April, he identified the accused as allegedly being a part of the unlawful assembly.

"Rohit had given a statement on March 9, 2020 but had not disclosed about the identification of the applicant. However, he had given another statement on April 1, 2020 whereby he stated that on February 24, 2020 at about 1.30 pm there were two groups of people, who were shouting slogan and protesting against CAA and NRC. In the crowd, one Sonu Chikna and his brother Aatir and Osama and were shouting slogans. The crowd got violent and started stone pelting. Out of this crowd, one boy aged 24-25 years having red color hair wearing red color T-shirt and blue color pyjama and his mouth was tied with handkerchief, came out with pistol and tried to kill him. He also fired at the witness who received injuries in his left thigh and blood started oozing out. Thereafter, the boy ran away. There is also no CCTV footage of the present incident," the court noted in its order passed on December 19.

## 4 ANMs HELD FOR ENTERING TEMPLE WITHOUT PERMIT

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 29

Four Auxillary Nurse Midwife (ANM) workers were on Tuesday caught while entering Jagannath temple at Puri without having valid permits from the appropriate authorities.

The four ANM workers were placed under suspension by the chief district medical officer (CDMO) for allegedly entering the temple without any prior permission. They were reportedly deployed at the Singhadwar (Lion's Gate) to conduct thermal screening of the devotees visiting the 12th-century shrine.

In view of the risk posed by the Covid-19, the Jagannath temple (also known as Srimandir) which reopened on December 23 after a nine-month hiatus allowed phase-wise entry of public for darshan of Lord Jagannath. Family members of the temple priests and servants were allowed to have darshan from December 23-25.

The residents of Puri Municipality area have been allowed entry to the temple from December 26-31.

After a hue and cry, working professionals, as well as tenants in the pilgrim town, were also given an opportunity to visit Srimandir. Those who have been allotted entry tokens can visit Srimandir from Tuesday (Dec. 29), informed Sri Jagannath Temple Administration administrator (development) Ajay Kumar Jena.

## Control room set up to watch NY celebrations

Centre to coordinate with states to ensure norms are followed

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

Following the sharp increase in Corona cases during the Diwali festival, home ministry is clearly not taking any chances for the New Year celebrations. The Ministry has set up a centralised control room to co-ordinate with major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore among others to ensure that all safety and health protocols are strictly followed. Earlier on Monday, home ministry had extended the earlier issued Covid-19 containment guidelines till January 31.

Home ministry officials admitted that during the Diwali celebrations it was observed that people had become careless and it did not follow the health protocols which led to a sharp increase in number of cases particularly in big cities. Centre now clearly wants to avoid a repeat of the same and is thus closely co-ordinating with all metro cities and states to ensure all necessary "safety and health protocols are in place."

"We have learnt from the experience of the Diwali festival season when people had become extremely careless which led to a sharp increase in Coronavirus cases. Now we have asked states and those cities which record high football during New Year's to strictly follow all health and Covid protocols," a senior home min-



A medic demonstrates administration of Covaxin, an Indian government-backed experimental Covid-19 vaccine, to a health worker during its trials, at the Urban Primary Health Centre at Tezpur in Sonitpur district of Assam on Tuesday.

istry official said.

Earlier in its advisory issued to states on last Monday evening, the ministry had said that, "while there has been a continuous decline in active cases in India, there is a need for surveillance, containment and caution due to a surge globally and the emergence of a new variant of the virus in the UK"

The ministry also asked the states and union territories to keep a strict vigil to prevent any rise in cases during the New Year celebrations and the winter season.

It also asked the states and UTs to actively support central authorities in the preparations for an expected vaccination drive.

"Accordingly, containment zones continue to be demarcated carefully; prescribed containment measures strictly followed within these zones; Covid-appropriate behaviour promoted and strictly enforced, and the standard operating procedures (SOPs) prescribed in respect of various permitted activities followed scrupulously," the MHA said.

## MUMBAI AIRPORT INTRODUCES EXPRESS TESTING

Mumbai, Dec. 29: The city's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) on Tuesday said it has introduced a new 24x7 Covid-19 testing facility, which gives test results in flat 13 minutes at a cost of ₹4,500.

Since its launch on December 15, CSMIA has witnessed an average of 30-35 such tests per day, CSMIA said in a release.

A total of 400 express tests have been carried out at the airport till December 28, which include passengers who had connecting flights to destinations outside Maharashtra, it said.

In compliance with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) standards, CSMIA is the first airport to adopt the express test method by Abbott 'ID Now, which is aimed at providing arriving passengers with quick and accurate diagnosis, CSMIA said in the release.

The round-the-clock testing facility option is available for all international arriving passengers at the airport at a cost of ₹4,500, CSMIA said.

— PTI

## JAWANS HURT IN SEPARATE J&amp;K CLASHES DIE

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, DEC. 29

Two security forces officials injured in separate militancy-related incidents in Jammu and Kashmir last week succumbed to their injuries on Tuesday.

The officials said that Army's Havildar Anil Kumar Tomar who was critically injured during a 20-hour long gunfight with militants in Kanigam village of southern Shopian on Saturday lost his battle with life in a military hospital here.

Separately, an ASI of the CRPF identified as Netrapal Singh who was injured in a grenade attack by militants in central Ganderbal district on December 24 died in Srinagar's Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences on Tuesday.

involvement in anti-party activities.

Neog while joining the BJP in presence of state BJP president Ranjeet Dass said that the Congress has now become an undisciplined party.

"There is a communication gap between the party leadership and the grass-root workers," she said.

"There were some ideological differences between me and the Congress," Neog added.

## Rajini does a U-turn; says not going to join politics

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, DEC. 29

With just a couple of days left for the scheduled announcement on his new political party, actor Rajinikanth, citing health reasons, called off his entry into electoral politics on Tuesday through a statement issued on Twitter.

In a three-page statement, Rajinikanth said that he would do whatever good he could to people without contesting for the elections and that he considered his taking ill at the shooting of the film 'Annaathe' in Hyderabad as a warning from God.

Narrating the sequence of events, he said he went for the shooting despite the advice of doctors. Though the around 250

members of the film unit underwent tests for Covid-19 infection daily, maintained social distancing and wore face masks and shields, four of them tested positive, leading to the immediate cancellation of shooting.

"My test results were negative, but my blood pressure was not stable and constantly fluctuating. As per my medical conditions, I should not have constant fluctuations in blood pressure, as it would severely affect my transplanted kidney," Rajinikanth said.

If he were to start the party he would not be able to create the sort of revival he wanted only through media and social media campaigns, he said, adding, "I will have to meet people, attend meetings and go on campaigns

that would hamper my health".

In view of an expected second wave of Coronavirus infection, even though vaccines might be available soon, if he, who had been on immunosuppressants, took ill, it would put those accompanying him in his political journey into trouble, both economically and emotionally, he said.

"If I enter politics just because people would talk ill of me for going back on my promise, I would be making a scapegoat of the fellow travellers, reposing faith in me," he said.

He sought forgiveness from members of Rajini Makkal Mandram and his fans, who have been expecting him to start a political party, for disappointing them.

## Assam: Expelled Cong MLAs join BJP

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, DEC. 29

Two Congress legislators — Ajanta Neog and Rajdeep Gowala and former MLA of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) Banendra Mushahary have on Tuesday joined the BJP at Assam BJP office.

Asserting that Neog was considered to be one of the tallest leaders in the Congress party, state finance minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma said that her joining the BJP will strengthen the saffron party.

While welcoming the two sitting legislators in the party, Sarma said, "Her vast administrative and political experience will definitely strengthen the BJP in Assam. Gowala was the chairman of the public accounts committee and his joining will also strengthen our party."

Just before joining the

party, four-time legislator Neog — who was the cabinet minister in Tarun Gogoi-led government and Lakhimpur Assembly constituency — legislator Rajdeep Gowala had met Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday evening in Guwahati during his three-day visit to Assam and Manipur.

Just before their meeting with the Union home minister, the Congress party had expelled the duo from the party accusing them of



Farmers shout slogans during their protest against the new farm laws at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— PTI

## Farmer unions firm on repeal of 3 laws

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

A day before the next round of talks, protesting farmers' unions took a hard stand and wrote to the Centre tightly ring-fencing the discussion scheduled to take place on Wednesday. In their letter to the government on Tuesday, the farmers unions wrote that the discussion will only be on the modalities of repealing the three farm legislations, giving a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Price, and on two other issues they proposed earlier this week.

The letter was sent on the day Union home minister Amit Shah chaired a high-level meeting with his Cabinet colleagues — Narendra Singh Tomar and Piyush Goyal — to discuss measures which could put an end to the farmers' month-long agitation at the Delhi borders.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella organisation of 40 farmer unions, also wants a detailed discussion on the amendments which can be effected to get farmers excluded from the penal provisions of the Commission for the Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020.

The farmer unions have deferred till Thursday their proposed tractor march against the three agriculture laws, so that the rally does not clash with their talks with the government. Earlier this week, the farmer leaders had announced a tractor march from the Singhu and Tikri borders to the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) highway on December 30.

Shah's meeting on Tuesday with his Cabinet colleagues was the second one in two days. A meeting was held on Monday, following which the Centre invited representatives of 40 protesting farmers' unions for the next round of talks.

Maintaining that the government is always ready to talk to the farmers with an open mind, agriculture secretary Sanjay Agarwal reiterated the Centre's commitment to address all issues with an honest intent. So far, the Centre has stuck to its stand of not repealing the new farm laws. But it has been open to suggestions that will help break the deadlock with the protesting farmers, including tweaking the laws or even setting up a committee as suggested by the Supreme Court.



Farmers prepare green colour Jalebis, symbolising green revolution, at Singhu border in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— PTI

## Farmers choose unique protests

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Serving 'green jalebis' to taking out a 'baraat' (wedding procession), farmers protesting at Singhu border here are using innovative ways to communicate their grievances and demands to the central government.

A group of farmers from Mohali in Punjab have been serving special green jalebis (sweet), saying it symbolised the colour of their crops and the prosperity associated with it.

"We have been distributing green jalebis from the last few days. Nearly five quintals of the sweet are distributed everyday," Jasvir Chand, a protesting farmer, said.

"The green colour of the sweet symbolises Green Revolution as well as peace and tranquillity," Chand's companion Baldev Singh (65) said at the protest site. "We have been peacefully protesting against the three new farm laws of the central government for over a month. Although the government has not accepted our demand, we are determined to continue the protest peacefully," he said.

Notably, many curious people queued up to taste the 'green jalebi' which is usually available in golden colour. Meanwhile, some youths from Karnal

in Haryana took out a marriage procession at the protest venue to draw attention towards their agitation.

"We thought a marriage procession will be an interesting way to communicate to the people and the government our demands and issues with the farm laws," said 22-year-old Jagdip Singh from Dabri village in Karnal.

The procession with a protester wearing the full attire of a groom and sitting on a tractor passed through the crowded highway attracting lot of merriment from the protesting farmers camping there for over a month.

Farmers mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have been camping at different border points of Delhi for over a month to demand repeal of the three agriculture laws, which were voted through in Parliament in September amid strong protests by opposition parties.

"We are requesting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government to give legal status to MSP to empower the farmers. The government should also address our genuine concerns over the three farm laws," Chand said.

— PTI

Shah, Tomar, defence minister Rajnath Singh and top officials have also been engaged in back-room channel talks with socio-political groups and Sikh community leaders to find a "middle path" to put an end to the ongoing agitation.

While the Centre has also been blaming the

Opposition parties for "misleading" the farmers on the new laws, Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait, who is at the forefront of the protests at Delhi border, said, "If the Opposition were strong, there would have been no need for farmers to launch the agitation?"

## PDP chief emphasises that dialogue is pivotal for restoration of lasting peace in J&amp;K

## I won't raise white flag, give up fight, says Mufti

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, DEC. 29

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) president, Mehbooba Mufti, said on Tuesday that she won't raise a white flag but continue to fight against "injustice" meted out to the people of the erstwhile state and BJP's "gunda raj" over the country.

While speaking at a function held here to felicitate the PDP's newly elected District Development Councils (DDCs) members, she said that their

"resounding success" has come as a shock to those who had sought to write political obituaries of the party. "In their arrogance they thought by not allowing me to campaign, intimidating us and arresting our leaders, the PDP will not perform. Ours is not just a party but a movement which will never compromise on its ideals and core political philosophy of dialogue and reconciliation," she said.

Emphasising that for the restoration of lasting peace in J&K dialogue was pivotal, she said, "We will not allow Kashmir to be a



PDP president Mehbooba Mufti addresses her supporters during a function organised to felicitate newly elected DDC Councilors, Sarpanchs and Panchs, at party HQ in Srinagar on Tuesday.

— PTI

battle ground but work relentlessly so that J&K acts as a bridge of peace

between India and Pakistan". She renewed her and the

party's "pledge" to fight for the rights and dignity of the people of J&K and asserted "No amount of coercion can force the people into submission. We will fight for our rights. We are not the ones who will raise white flags despite fatal blows being dealt to our identity, economy and livelihoods".

She claimed that her refusal to endorse BJP's plan of not handing over the bodies of the slain militants to their families for performing their last rights, massive police crackdown on the Jamaat-e-Islami and similar dis-

agreements became reasons for the fall of the PDP-BJP government led by her in June 2018.

However justifying the PDP's decision to cobble up alliance with the BJP in 2015, she asserted that her father Mufti Muhammad Sayeed did it only to "cage a jin" in a bottle so that Article 370 was not touched. "It was after an agreement between PDP and BJP that Article 370 won't be touched, historic roads (with PoK) will be opened and a dialogue with Hurriyat Conference leaders and Pakistan would be

held that the PDP joined hands with the BJP. That was the Agenda of Alliance," she said.

Mufti also said that separatist Hurriyat Conference leaders' closing their doors to an All Parties Delegation who had come to Srinagar in September 2016 set a bad precedent. "Their refusal to meet the delegation set a bad precedent about Kashmiris across India. After that another opportunity was lost by not responding to the repeated offers of home minister of India who had stated 'my doors are open for everyone'," she said.



SHORT TAKES

EU DEMANDS CHINA RELEASE ZHANG ZHAN

**Brussels, Dec. 29:** The European Union on Tuesday demanded that China release citizen journalist Zhang Zhan and several other jailed reporters, lawyers and human rights champions.

The EU statement was issued just ahead of Brussels signing a major investment pact with Beijing, despite concerns about China's labour and civil rights record.

Zhang was jailed on Monday for four years over allegations of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" during her coverage of the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak in epicentre Wuhan, her lawyer said.

"Prior to her detention, Ms Zhang Zhan had been reporting about the coronavirus pandemic in Wuhan," EU foreign policy spokesman Peter Stano said in a statement.

EXPLOSIVE KILLED 3 FRENCH ARMY IN MALI

**Paris, Dec. 29:** The French presidency said three soldiers were killed in Mali when an improvised explosive device hit their armoured vehicle.

The soldiers were participating in a military operation in the Hombori area of Mali's central Mopti province, part of a larger mission aiming at fighting Islamist extremists in Africa's Sahel region, the French presidency said in a statement on Monday.

Defense Minister Florence Parly said the soldiers were working "in an area where terrorist groups are attacking civilians and threatening the regional stability".

Parly said they were involved in a mission aiming at helping Mali to gradually be able to ensure its own security.

The defense minister did not provide further details.

France has more than 5,000 troops deployed in West Africa to help fight extremist groups as part of Operation Barkhane.

GAZA MILITANTS FIRE ROCKETS OUT TO SEA

**Gaza City, Dec. 29:** Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired a salvo of rockets into the Mediterranean Sea on Tuesday as part of a self-styled military drill aimed at preparing for a possible war with Israel.

The Islamic militant group Hamas has ruled Gaza since seizing power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. It has fought three wars and numerous smaller skirmishes with Israel since then. A fragile, informal truce has mostly held in recent years, with only occasional exchanges of fire.

Authorities in Gaza restricted movement along the main coastal road and barred fishing for the duration of the exercises, which were to continue for a period of 24 hours and included the use of aerial drones.The drill was held by the Joint Command Room, which brings together a dozen militant factions but is dominated by Hamas.

A masked spokesman for the militants said the "defensive maneuvers" also demonstrated their rejection of the "agreements of shame," referring to the recent U.S. brokered normalization accords between Israel and a number of Arab states.

FRENCH FASHION DESIGNER PIERRE CARDIN DIES AT 98

**PARIS, Dec.29:** French fashion designer Pierre Cardin, hailed for his visionary creations but also for bringing stylish clothes to the masses, died Tuesday aged 98, his family told *AFP*.

Cardin, who was born to a low-income family in northern Italy but became a France-based fashion superstar, died in a hospital in Neuilly in the west of Paris, his family said.

"It is a day of great sadness for all our family. Pierre Cardin is no more,"the statement said.

It said after a lifetime spanning a century he had left France and the world a "great unique artistic heritage" and not only in fashion.

Born into poverty in 1922 near Venice in northern Italy, his family emigrated to France when he was a small child.

"Italian by birth, Pierre Cardin never forgot his origins while bringing unconditional love to France," said his family.

VP- elect takes the jab



Registered nurse Patricia Cummings administers the Covid-19 vaccine to Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris December 29, 2020 at the United Medical Center in Washington, DC. — AFP

More people hospitalised in UK than peak of first virus outbreak

**London, Dec. 29:** Official figures show more people are currently hospitalised with Covid in England than at the first peak of the outbreak in the spring.

There were 20,426 patients in hospitals as of Monday morning — the last day for which figures are available — compared to the previous high of 18,974 on April 12.

However, case figures do not include Scotland and Northern Ireland, which did not report over the Christmas period.

"Many of us have lost family, friends, colleagues and — at a time of year when we would normally be celebrating — a lot of people are understandably feeling anxious, frustrated and tired," said NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens.

"And now again we are back in the eye of the storm with a second wave of coronavirus sweeping Europe and, indeed, this country."

Health trusts have been told to begin planning for the use of Nightingale field hospitals, the temporary facilities created during the first wave that have largely gone unused.

London and southeast England are currently bearing the brunt of the outbreak, with paramedics in the capital saying they are receiving up

WHO: Be ready for worse pandemics

**Johannesburg, Dec. 29:** The Coronavirus has devastated lives and economies across the globe, but the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that worse pandemics could like ahead, urging the world to get serious about preparedness.

"This is a wakeup call," WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan told reporters at a briefing marking a year since the UN agency first learned of the new virus spreading in China.

"This pandemic... has spread around the world extremely quickly and it has affected every corner of this planet, but this is not necessarily the big one," Ryan added.

"We need to get ready for something that may even be more severe in

the future." While huge scientific progress was made to study the virus and develop vaccines at record speed, WHO senior adviser Bruce Aylward cautioned that the world was far from ready for the next pandemic.

"We are into the second and third waves of this virus and we are still not prepared to deal with and manage those," he said.

"While we are better prepared... we are not fully prepared for this one, let alone the next one."- 'Good riddance, 2020!'

Meanwhile, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa banned alcohol sales and made masks mandatory in public from Tuesday after a surge in Coronavirus cases. — AFP

TOURISM REOPENS IN SRI LANKA AFTER 9 MONTHS

**Colombo, Dec. 29:** Sri Lanka has reopened to tourists after more than nine months.

The Indian Ocean island nation closed to tourists in March, amid the first wave of the coronavirus. Authorities also closed the two main international airports. The government says a pilot program to attract tourists is now being implemented. The first tourists arrived on a special flight from Ukraine on Monday. The 186 tourists are expected to stay in Sri Lanka for 10 days.

Under the pilot program, which will run to Jan. 24, 2,580 tourists are expected to arrive in Sri Lanka, mostly from CIS countries.

Covid-19 has dealt a severe blow to tourism, a vital economic sector for Sri Lanka, accounting for about 5% of its GDP and employing 250,000 people directly and up to 2 million indirectly.

Previously, the government announced that the country would reopen to tourists on Aug. 1, but the date was pushed back after new clusters of Covid patients emerged. — AP

Pak fights for Basmati in EU without locus standi

**Islamabad, Dec. 29:** While Pakistan is fighting a case in the European Union against the Indian move to get Basmati rice registered as its product, the commodity is still not registered as a local product in the country, according to a media report.

Laws require that before applying for registration of any product in the international market it has to be protected under the geographical indication

(GI) laws of that country. *The Dawn* reported that there are no rules of the Geographical Indications (Registration and Protection) Act, 2020 enacted in March this year and as a result, Basmati is not yet a protected product in Pakistan.

A rice exporter told the Dawn that exporters, particularly the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan, had been urging the government since early 2000

to formulate the GI laws. "The laws were finally made in March this year, but the authorities have not yet framed the rules of GI law. As a result many local exportable products cannot be registered anywhere in the world with Pakistani GI tagging," the exporter said. "Even now the pressure of the case at the EU is driving the authorities to finalise the rules for GI law at the earliest," he added. — PTI

Biden sees risk in transition stalling

Trump's Pentagon appointees giving hard time

**Wilmington, Dec. 29:** President-elect Joe Biden said that Donald Trump's appointees at the Pentagon were stalling on the transition and warned that the US faces security risks as a result.

After he and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris were briefed by their transition teams on national security, Biden said that political appointees at the Pentagon as well as the Office of Management and Budget had put up "roadblocks." "Right now, we just aren't getting all the information that we need from the outgoing administration in key national security area(s)," Biden said after the briefing.

"It is nothing short, in my view, of irresponsibility," Biden said he was seeking a "clear picture" from the outgoing administration on the force posture of US troops around the world.

"We need full visibility into the budget planning underway at the Defense Department and other agencies in order to avoid any window of confusion or catch-up that our adversaries may try to exploit," Biden said.

Trump has refused to concede the November 3 election, which Biden won by some seven million votes and by 306-232 in the state-by-state Electoral College. The president has made unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud.

The Trump administration has drawn concern

Mike Pence sued to overturn Biden win

**Washington, Dec 29:** Several Republicans have sued US Vice-President Mike Pence in an improbable bid to overturn President-elect Joe Biden's victory, according to media reports.

The last-ditch legal effort, filed on Sunday, came from Representative Louie Gohmert, an eight-term congressman from Texas, along with 11 Arizona residents who had been nominated by that state's Republican Party to serve as electors, The Hill reported.

It comes over a week before Pence is scheduled to preside over a joint session of Congress where the Electoral College votes for Biden and President Donald Trump will be tallied.

Electors have already cast their votes two weeks earlier. Biden received 306 electoral votes 36 more than he needed to win while Trump

received 232.

The lawsuit focuses on Pence's role in the January 6 meeting of Congress to count states' electoral votes and finalise Biden's victory over President Trump. The lawsuit challenges the 1887 Electoral Count Act, which dictates the vice president's role in announcing the results as a ceremonial one, The Dallas Morning News reported. The Republican lawsuit, which was filed against Pence in his official capacity as vice president, asks a federal judge in Texas to strike down the law as unconstitutional. The Republican plaintiffs go further: They ask the court to grant Pence the authority on January 6 to effectively overturn Trump's defeat in key battleground states.

Election law experts have dismissed the lawsuit's prospects for success. — PTI

by shaking up the leadership of the Pentagon since the election including firing defence secretary Mark Esper, who had distanced himself from the president's use of force against unarmed anti-racism demonstrators earlier this year.

Trump's new acting defence secretary, Chris Miller, has said that the outgoing administration had agreed with Biden's people to pause briefings for the holiday season, an assertion that the incoming team called untrue. — AFP

Kin of Hong Kongers told accused had 'pleaded guilty'

**Hong Kong, Dec. 29:** Relatives of the 10 Hong Kongers accused of fleeing the city by speedboat during a government crackdown on dissent say they've been informed that the group pleaded guilty and that the verdicts will be delivered by a court in mainland China on Wednesday.

The families were informed by court-appointed lawyers on Tuesday, according to the 12 Hongkongers Concern Group, which is assisting the families of the detainees.

The 10 defendants all faced charges of illegally crossing the border, while two of them faced additional charges of organizing the attempt, according to an indictment issued in the southern city of Shenzhen. The trials began on Monday afternoon, according to a statement issued by the Shenzhen Yantian District court.

Separate hearings were expected for two minors who were also aboard the boat that was apparently heading for Taiwan when it was stopped by the Chinese coast guard on Aug. 23.

The defendants are believed to have feared they would be prosecuted for their past activities in support of Hong Kong's democratic opposition. Hong Kong media reports said at least one may have had a warrant out for his arrest under a tough new national security law imposed on the semi-autonomous territory by Beijing in June.

Relatives of the defendants say that they have been prevented from hiring their own lawyers and that the accusations are

TEEN JAILED FOR INSULTING CHINESE FLAG

**Hong Kong, Dec. 29:** A Hong Kong teenager was ordered to spend to four months in prison on Tuesday for insulting China's national flag and unlawful assembly as Beijing increasingly targets prominent activists from the financial hub.

Tony Chung, a 19-year-old who led a now-disbanded pro-democracy group, was convicted earlier this month for throwing the Chinese flag to the ground during scuffles outside Hong Kong's legislature in May 2019.

While serving his sentence, Chung will be waiting for trial over a charge of "secession", which could land him life imprisonment according to the draconian national security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong on 30 June. — AFP

politically motivated.

The defendants can be sentenced to up to a year in prison for crossing the border and seven years for organizing the trip.

They were picked up after entering mainland Chinese waters for crossing the maritime border without permission. While Hong Kong is part of China, travelers must still pass through immigration when going to and from the mainland. The defendants apparently needed to pass through Chinese waters to get to open seas. — AP

TOP TURKISH COURT RULES JAILING OF RIGHTS DEFENDER KAVALA LEGAL

**ISTANBUL, Dec. 29:** Turkey's Constitutional Court on Tuesday rejected rights defender Osman Kavala's appeal for an immediate release pending trial, narrowly ruling that his detention immediately after acquittal was lawful.

A respected figure in international circles, Kavala, 63, has been in prison for over three years despite being acquitted in February in connection with 2013 anti-

government protests. He was immediately re-arrested and jailed on fresh charges of espionage and involvement in a failed 2016 coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The next hearing is scheduled for Feb 5. The official Anadolu news agency said the Constitutional Court ruled by an 8-7 margin that Kavala's ongoing detention did not violate his rights to liberty and security. — AFP





## DECCAN Chronicle

30 DECEMBER 2020

# New strain demands a relook at measures

Reports of six returnees from United Kingdom testing positive for the new coronavirus strain are reason enough for the government and the people to be alert again against the threat of the pandemic Covid-19 marking another deadly wave across the nation. Experts are of the opinion that the new strain spreads at a faster pace than the original variant, and hence the government must put in place stringent measures to stop its spread.

The government has already decided that the guidelines for surveillance, which were to be effective till December 31, will continue to be in force till January 31. This is welcome, but it must consider if this is enough. Schools and colleges across the country, as well as entertainment centres, are in the process of opening, though under strict controls. Mass transport systems, such as railways are also easing the controls, albeit slowly. The government must examine the option of pressing the pause button on the “unlock” process in view of the discovery of the new strain, taking, of course, the nation’s economic interests, also into account. It must ensure that there is an aggressive contact tracing, isolation and treatment for all the affected in all the cases, unlike the way the country handled it when the virus arrived first time earlier this year. It must also consider relaunching the mass awareness programme it kicked off ahead of the festival season as the new strain could find the New Year festivities a perfect medium through which to afflict more people.

**The government must examine the option of pressing the pause button on the ‘unlock’ process in view of the discovery of the new strain, taking, of course, the nation’s economic interests, also into account**

That the reports come at a time when India has been showing a regular decline in the number of new coronavirus cases offers no solace and no reason to us for lowering the guard. There is no case to be careless until scientists and manufacturers are ready with the vaccine and the government has put in place a proper policy and mechanism to inoculate all the susceptible groups of people. It is reassuring that the government is now rolling out a dry run for the vaccination drive. But the real issue will be the availability of the vaccine in the required quantity in time, meeting the logistical challenges such as cold chain and the financial wherewithal to carry out the operation.

Vaccination is going to be a massive process given that the government is considering vaccinating about 30 crores of the population. There are reports that a sizeable section of the global population is resisting the idea. That must be true for India, too, and it will necessitate another major public awareness campaign. There are already exaggerated reports about the after-effects of the vaccination flying thick and fast in mainstream, alternate and social media. The government must take early steps to ensure that such propagandists face the legal music. All its actions must be guided by the fact that the virus has not gone away and that it is making an attempt to make a virulent return. A stitch in time can save nine, so goes the saying.

## Just not cricket

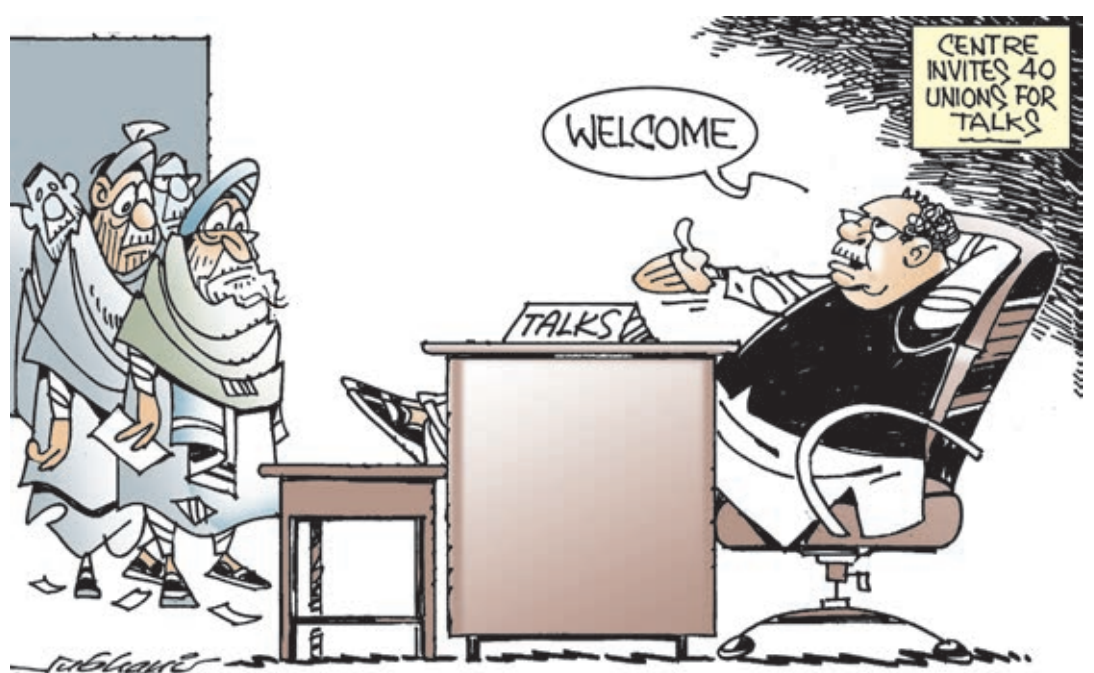
Naming a cricket stadium after a politician-administrator is not new to India. But to have his statue erected as well as to name the historic Feroz Shah Kotla after him appears a bit of a stretch even if the personality honoured thus was Arun Jaitely, who was a leading BJP figure in his lifetime. In a country known to relish the celebration of death and birth anniversaries, it may have been par for the course to perpetuate the memory of a leader. In this case, encomiums for a departed soul comes at the cost of the traditions of the great game of cricket, which has principally recognised sporting talent on the field.

Sports lovers grow up worshipping their heroes and, as they age they learn to respect athletes for their skills and for sweat and blood they shed to perform in a competitive environment. The administrator is a different breed. In India, most of them are attracted to the so-called honorary posts in sports admin because of perquisites and privileges. Furthermore, cricket is not only a social entree but also a key to the powerful inhabiting spaces in the corridors of politics and bureaucracy.

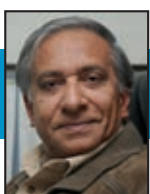
Politicians have been drawn to Indian cricket admin like moths to a flame. Many made sport their fiefdom, ruling like martinets while basking in reflected glory as champions have to interact with them. This is one reason why Bishan Bedi, a cricketer famous for calling a spade a shovel, found his hackles rising with the decision to erect a 800-kg statue for Jaitley who made himself a fixture at the Delhi & Districts Cricket Association.

An incensed Bedi has threatened to sue if his name is not removed from the stand honouring him and feting his achievements in the game as a bowler of spin in a seductive arc with a graceful action that was poetry in motion. Jaitley, for all his intellectual attainments as a forceful lawyer with a gifted gab and the country’s finance minister, had no claim to mastery of an art form. So why should his name adorn a sporting arena?

Subhani



# After DDC: Will Centre further alienate J&K?



Anand K. Sahay

Far & Near

Propaganda apart, the result of the recent District Development Council elections in Jammu and Kashmir cannot have pleased the Narendra Modi government. This was the first proper test of popular endorsement in J&K after the willful destruction by the Centre of the erstwhile state’s constitutional autonomy in August 2019, imbuing the elections with more than ordinary significance.

While the Hindutva party won three stray seats (with no linking thread, or political meaning) in the Kashmir Valley, it lost quite heavily even in Hindu-dominant parts of the Jammu division. In these, the Valley-centric parties picked up seats.

Indeed, the BJP fared a lot worse here than it had in the Assembly election of 2014, which is a kind of comment on its all-round militaristic control of J&K since it scuttled its coalition government with Mehbooba Mufti’s People’s Democratic Party in 2018, possibly with the ulterior motive of playing games to install a Hindu chief minister, if feasible, for the first time in Muslim-majority J&K, or at least a BJP CM by roping in a Muslim.

Since the end of the rule of Maharaja Hari Singh — a Hindu ruler of mostly Muslim subjects — after he signed the Instrument of Accession in October 1947, the Hindu Right has been at odds with all CMs of Kashmir on account of their religion. There was a sense of loss of a “Hindu kingdom” in their narrative.

Breaking up the erstwhile state and making it a Union territory under “Hindu nationalist” control from the Centre might produce a

sense of catharsis. But that’s as far as it goes. Much sought success in the BJP’s bid to seek to stamp its political authority in J&K through the DDC polls failed to materialise. How the Modi government negotiates the terrain here on will therefore be keenly watched. Hindu nationalists are dealing with Muslim citizens in a sensitive region.

The BJP’s outsize celebration of the three Valley seats appears misplaced and pointless in the circumstances. Its chief purpose would appear to be to shore up the morale of the faithful when the picture is one of setback. Although the BJP government held a tight grip over Kashmir from the Centre, the electoral submission of Kashmir has not come to pass.

Obstacles were placed in the way of campaigning of the Kashmir parties. Kashmir’s best-known leaders were maligned as corrupt and their properties sought to be confiscated. Their key cadres were detained. To prevent voting in South Kashmir, cordon and search operations were mounted on polling day in certain constituencies to assist candidates of the BJP or the Apni Party — the quising party. The BJP’s opponents were detained yet again before the counting of ballots and after the counting. Does this look like democracy to anyone except the Prime Minister? And yet, it was BJP’s opponents who made themselves heard through the ballot box.

Even in the Hindu-majority area of Jammu, the saffron party could win only about half the seats, facing defeat in the constituencies of some of its key leaders. A below par showing in the Jammu division should be a matter of strategic

concern for the saffron party.

At first glance it suggests that the Hindu populace is no longer gung-ho about the abrogation of Article 370, as appeared to be the case initially. As in some other hill states and remote regions, in J&K too special constitutional protection was given to land rights and government employment for the local population. That has now gone in J&K and the Jammu Hindu is as aggrieved as the Kashmir valley Muslim (or the Pandit).

The story was the reverse in the Valley. The BJP’s bête noire, the People’s Alliance for the Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), a conglomerate of regional parties — National Conference, PDP, People’s Conference and some smaller parties, although traditional rivals, have banded together. Their larger aim is to work for the restoration of J&K’s autonomy. They practically swept the polls in the Valley and made inroads in Jammu.

The formation of the PAGD is the result of a lesson learned. The mainline parties of Kashmir had boycotted the panchayat election two years ago to protest against the Centre’s overbearing attitude after it had imposed Governor’s Rule. The result was that the BJP’s candidates or Independents backed by it won everywhere since there was no contest — in some places by as few as six votes. The Narendra Modi government’s publicised aim was to put the mainstream parties out of business, accusing their leaders of corruption and dynastic rule, and to grow a fresh crop

of politicians in the Valley.

To prevent a repeat of the farce of the panchayat polls, the mainstream parties came together as the PAGD. They decided to contest the DDC polls as well as to prevent a division of the anti-BJP vote. But more, it is the people of Kashmir, including those who have no love lost for the mainstream parties, who expressed their determination to keep the BJP and its proxies out of the reckoning.

The reason was straightforward. The saffron party’s government in New Delhi had snatched away Kashmir’s even largely technical autonomy, with which was linked its people’s identity and sense of dignity. The Centre was also impervious to Kashmir’s every need as a society. The Narendra Modi government had reversed the approach of late PM Atal Behari Vajpayee for whom showing respect to Kashmir’s sentiments was bound with India’s strategic imperatives.

In the DDC election it might have served the BJP’s cause best if the Hurriyat Conference (which doesn’t take part in elections) had given a boycott call, as it usually does. Then the BJP would have had a field day. But the Hurriyat did not oblige. The militants too stayed quiet. All of Kashmir appeared determined to show that it was not pleased with what had happened on August 5 last year.

However, the Centre can take revenge if better sense does not prevail. Fifty Independent candidates have been elected to the DDCs. Through the misuse of the official machinery, an effort could be mounted to ensure their defection, a process that has already begun in Shopian district with the defection of a National Conference member. The method honed in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka and the Northeast could well make an entry in J&K. But the more that New Delhi alienates Kashmir, the harder it would be to deal with the Pakistan-China axis.

## LETTERS

### STYLISH RETURN

Kudos to Team India for their emphatic win in the second Test against Australia. Coming as it did soon after an ignominious defeat in the first Test, this victory is a double delight as Team India’s star players Virat, Shami and Umesh were out of the team. The stand-in Captain Ajinkya Rahane led the team with gusto while Siraj and Gill exhibited their skills rather eloquently.

**Govardhana Myneedu**  
Vijayawada

### RAJINI’S U-TURN

Superstar Rajinikanth’s U-Turn from politics is disappointing. Citing the Covid-19 pandemic for his change of mind is not convincing enough. Though he is right in being concerned about his health and those of his cadre, the situation which he fears now is not a bolt from the blue.

**Dr D.V.G. Sankararao**  
Vizianagaram

### CONGRESS’ LOSS

It is most unfortunate day that Congress president Sonia Gandhi and former party chief Rahul Gandhi skipped the party’s 136th Foundation Day.

**P. Govardhana Rao**  
Kankipadu, Krishna district

50 YEARS AGO IN

## DECCAN Chronicle

### School of automation in Bangalore

MADRAS, Dec. 29

A school of automation is being set up at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, in accordance with Soviet-Indian inter-governmental agreement on economic and technical cooperation. The Moscow Power Institute is taking part in this work.

The school will enroll Bachelors of Engineering. It is planned to train them within two years, as Masters of Science in the specialities of automation, computer engineering and electronics. Staff members of the laboratory of automation and computer engineering of the Moscow Power Institute have evolved a detailed curriculum, taking into account the latest achievements of science and technology. A list of laboratory and research equipment have been complied. Twentyfive Soviet scientists and engineers (led by Igor Gratsinsky and Guram Chkhartashvili) are to go to Bangalore in time for the beginning of the academic year.

Raj Mohan Tella



# In 2020, did smart words keep you company?

Words have an awesome power. We all know that words can help us express our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, likes and dislikes. Words also help us describe situations — how about *slightly touchy* or *demographically explosive*? Arm them and you can spread both positive or negative energy — *You mean the world to me; I hate you*. The same word can take on a completely different meaning given the context. Some examples are “fire”, “sound”, “kill it”. What do you think this sentence means? *“Dude, Raja killed the biryani!”* A favourite word grouping of millennials, but if you are unaware, to “kill” actually means “to do something exceedingly well”. Words have many ways of actually reflecting our current preoccupations and trends. I believe that words are also lessons about humankind.

So what have we learnt about ourselves from words in 2020? “Lockdown” is the Collins Dictionary’s word of the year. For

Merriam Webster it is “*pandemic*”. The lexicographers at Oxford University Press could not find a winner for 2020. A report explained, “*Given the phenomenal breadth of language change and development in 2020, Oxford Languages concluded that this is a year which cannot be neatly accommodated in one single word.*” Some of the words they found ubiquitous were “bushfire”, “impeachment”, “acquittal”, “coronavirus”, “Covid-19”, “lockdown”, “social distancing” and “reopening”.

So we were largely a worried, panic-stricken lot. Coping with the virus and our lives. Searching for light at the end of the tunnel in the form of a vaccine!

But if you were a brand or a business that was interacting on a daily basis with audiences, would you not worry about the words that are getting associated with your activities and presence? Especially during the pandemic where the messaging load and anxieties are already high. The difference

between being noticed, staying relevant and getting lost was a matter of choice. So if food brands did not talk about safety, hygiene and the extra care in the manufacturing process and the supply chain, they have lost an opportunity. If a bank hasn’t emotionally packaged its digital banking services, then it, too, was on the wrong side. Another example is salon care where proximity is a given and the tensions of touch are high. So we had F&B brands talking about that *taste you could trust and serving happiness with extra care*. A salon chain stated its range of safety measures and its “*Touchology*” principle that would be at play when customers walked in with prior appointments.

Words, narratives and the meanings associated with them — all are important to brand messaging. Words to describe your brand. Words that express the sense of loyalty and belonging. The key for a business is how well the audience is grasping the intent of the brand.

Because beyond semantics lie emotions, feelings and attitudes. You ought to possess a way of keeping track of the words and the associated sentiment around them. Certainly, you could take the aid of search words and keywords to reflect your brand and business but these have the limitation of not bringing out the concepts associated with the words. To me, it makes business sense to chart out a plan of getting the most appropriate and relevant set of words associated with your business and brand narratives.

Three quick examples here: 1. For a producer of organic brown rice, the words that need to get linked up as concepts could be *has all parts of the grain, healthy nutrients, keeps you fuelled and fit*. 2. For a cloud migration company, the words could be *technology that grows with your business, pay as you use, unifying the data, securing the cloud with automated cloud anti-virus checks* and more. 3. For a chocolate company the words

could be *happy moments and memories*.

So, if you would like to build relevant narratives here’s a short framework: first thoroughly understand the needs of your audience; then brainstorm for the word concepts associated with them; don’t try to create big words, keep them simple and sometimes an uncommon combination works well too (examples: “*mobilise your data*” or the famous “*I love you Rasna*”); lastly test the word concepts out.

Remember, getting to the right words is a creative process and not a mechanical one. You need to connect with the audience. With your words. And don’t forget what Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said, “*The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them.*” This applies to words, too...

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quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,973.54	1.14
Nifty 50	13,749.25	1.09
S&P 500*	3,703.06	0.35
Dollar (₹)	73.42	0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.92	0.70
Euro (₹)	89.95	0.08
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,985.28	0.06
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	51.29	0.00
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.929	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.926	0.00

\* As of 9:30 PM IST

Steel makers demand ban on iron ore exports

A steel producers' body has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, explaining that the metal price hike was due to surging raw material costs, and demanded a ban on iron ore export for six months, an official said on Tuesday. Hot-rolled coil prices have increased by 46 per cent to Rs 52,000 per tonne in November as compared to Rs 37,400 per tonne in July this year, industry sources said.

ICICI Bank buys 9.09% stake in edtech firm



ICICI Bank on Tuesday said it will acquire 9.09 per cent stake in educational technology platform Myclassboard Educational Solutions Pvt Ltd for cash consideration of Rs 4.5 crore. "ICICI Bank has entered into an agreement... in relation to an investment in Myclassboard Educational Solutions Pvt Ltd (MESPL)," ICICI Bank said. MESPL offers an online school management platform.

Godrej Consumer forays into home cleaning products

Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL) on Tuesday said it has forayed into home cleaning products, a segment which is witnessing fast growth after the pandemic. The Godrej group firm would provide surface cleaning and disinfecting solution under its newly-launched brand Godrej ProClean, the company said. The home cleaning products segment is estimated to have Rs 2,600-crore market.

Dhanlaxmi Bank plans to appoint Shivan JK as MD



Debt-ridden Dhanlaxmi Bank has proposed Shivan J.K. as its new managing director and chief executive officer and has sought shareholders' approval for the same. Shivan retired as chief general manager of State Bank of India and handled various roles, including forex operations. It has sought the approval from its shareholders to authorise the board to appoint Shivan as MD and CEO of the bank.

Auto parts biz revenue to grow 16% in FY22

Mumbai, Dec. 29: Ratings agency ICRA on Tuesday said that it has revised its outlook on the auto component industry from negative to stable, on the back of demand revival across original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), replacements and exports. ICRA expects the domestic auto component industry's revenue to grow 16-18 per cent in the financial year starting April 2021, supported by factors such as increasing content per vehicle, low base effect, and higher realisations.

Long-term demand drivers include increased focus on localised supply chains by Indian OEMs. Diversification of supply chain risk by global OEMs is also expected to lead to increased sourcing from India in the coming years, ICRA said in a statement. OEMs, which account for over 56 per cent of the auto component demand, have recorded a sharp increase in demand since September across all segments, barring the medium and heavy commercial vehicle industry, it added.

Volumes of the automotive industry will take 2-3 years to revert to the pre-Covid-19 highs. Schemes such as production-linked incentives could encourage OEMs and large auto component vendors to advance their investment plans, targeted at exports. It said the M&HCV demand has also bottomed out and increased in the December quarter of the current financial year. Thriving demand from the rural markets across the country has supported demand for two-wheelers and tractors, the rating agency added. ICRA has a stable credit outlook on the tractors, two-wheelers and passenger vehicle industries, it said. — PTI

Airbags may become a must for front seats

Centre proposes to implement new policy from April 1, 2021

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 29

In a bid to increase safety in cars, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways on Tuesday proposed to make airbags for front passengers mandatory in Asia's third biggest car market. The move is aimed at improving passenger safety in case of accidents.

According to a draft notification prepared by the Transport Ministry, the Centre plans to implement this safety norm for all new models of cars which are manufactured from April 1, 2021, onwards.

And, for already existing units, the date for complying with the new rule is proposed to be June 1, 2021.

In this regard, the



Centre has invited stakeholders to comment on its proposed new rule in the next one month.

Earlier, the Centre had made having an airbag mandatory for the driver's seat in all cars. This had come into effect on July 1, 2019.

"Vehicles manufactured on and after 1st Day of April 2021, in the case of new models, and 1st

day of June 2021, in the case of existing models, shall be fitted with airbags for the person occupying the front seat, other than the driver. The requirement for such airbags shall be as per AIS 145...under the Bureau of Indian Standards act, 2016," the draft notification issued by the Transport Ministry stated.

For now, only the driver's seat airbag is mandatory for all cars.

However, this leaves the passenger in the front seat completely vulnerable to severe injury or even death in case of accidents as the passengers in the front seat are not protected by the airbag.

Low-cost inclusions such as speed alert, reverse parking sensors and seat-belt reminders are some of the standard features in most cars but life-saving airbags are still not mandatory in India. The government has invited the concerned stakeholders to give suggestions on the matter in the next one month. Airbags for drivers were made mandatory by the Union government from July 2019.

Two-wheeler, car sales to see double-digit growth in Dec

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 29

Wholesale growth would be in double digits for tractors, two-wheelers and passenger vehicles in December 2020, the latest research note from Emkay Global Financial Services said on Tuesday. "In two-wheelers and passenger vehicles, there is favorable base effect due to BS4 inventory de-stocking last year," Raghunandhan NL, auto analyst at Emkay Global Financial Services, said. He pointed out that the channel checks in the

● The passenger vehicle industry volumes are likely to grow by 12 per cent compared to last year. Retail sales in December are likely to be notably higher than wholesales.

market indicated retails were better year-on-year in tractors, while it is lower in passenger vehicles and two-wheelers.

The tractor wholesales should be robust due to healthy retails and channel filling, Raghuna-

ndhan said, adding that dealer checks indicated an increase in inventory levels by up to one week.

He said Escorts domestic volume should grow 21 per cent while M&M, the market leader, should see 19 per cent growth.

Raghunandhan said the domestic two-wheeler volume should grow year-on-year in the country, pointing out that TVS by 21 per cent, Royal Enfield by 16 per cent, Bajaj Auto by 13 per cent and Honda Motorcycle & Scooter by 10 per cent.

The dealer inventory levels stood at 4-6 weeks

for mass-market OEMs, while it stood at below 1 week for Royal Enfield motorcycles.

He said the passenger vehicle industry volumes are likely to grow by 12 per cent compared to last year. Domestic volumes should grow 60 per cent for Tata Motors, India's biggest automaker by revenues, 7 per cent for Maruti Suzuki and 6 per cent for Mahindra and Mahindra, utility vehicle specialist. Retail sales in December are likely to be notably higher than wholesales due to inventory clearing.

IT sector gears up for growth opportunities

New Delhi, Dec. 29: Covid-19 may have thrown curveballs this year but the \$191 billion-Indian IT sector has shown resilience and 2021 promises more growth opportunities as digital spends go up to tackle the challenges amid the 'new normal'.

Rapid rise in corona cases at the beginning of the year led to governments enforcing lockdowns in various countries, including India. This posed twin challenges for Indian IT firms — how to ensure business continuity for customers and how to ensure safety of their own staff.

IT firms like Infosys, Wipro and Tech Mahindra booked chartered flights to bring home employees and their families, who were stranded overseas due to the pandemic and visa issues. And almost overnight, IT companies — big and small — embraced work from home.

There were initial hiccups but almost 98 per cent of the IT workforce was working from home at the peak of lockdown in India. Internal meetings, customer engagements and townhalls moved online.

"2020 has been a year of a lot of change and uncertainty... (but) technology is no more being seen as just an enabler, it has become much more integral. We were able to transition to a new hybrid operating model with very less downtime for our global customers that has enormously proven the capability of the Indian IT industry," Nasscom senior vice-president and chief strategy officer Sangeeta Gupta said.

She added that customers appreciated the resilience of the industry and IT companies too continue to be agile and hungry for business. Unlike the 2008 financial crisis, where technology and the economic crisis were intertwined and technology spending dipped amid economies slowing down, year 2020 saw technology adoption growing much faster than economy and businesses. "The linkage between technology and economic downturns has got decoupled. This reiterates that technology is going to be integral for future growth. What this pandemic has done is made digital no more just as good to have, but a must have," Gupta said. Industry experts said the pandemic has given digital transformation an acceleration that would have taken years to achieve. And IT companies are now making a bigger push for their digital offerings as technology gets ingrained across sales, customer service and operations. However, there has also been a manifold rise in cyber attack cases, which highlights the need for enterprises to strengthen their IT systems as such threats could affect customer experience and brand image. — PTI

Fall in ATMs stopped in 2020: RBI

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, DEC. 29

The deceleration in the total number of ATMs (on-site and off-site) operated by banks has reversed during the year 2020, aided by all categories of banks, except public sector and foreign banks, according to an RBI report.

In a report titled *Trend and progress of banking in India* released on Tuesday, the RBI said the total number of ATMs increased to 2.34 lakh during 2020 compared to 2.21 lakh ATMs in 2019, a rise of six per cent.

Interestingly, small finance banks (SFBs) operated more than twice the number of ATMs operated by foreign banks as at end-March 2020, despite their smaller balance sheet size, said the RBI. Ten scheduled SFBs operated 1,926 ATMs compared to 903 ATMs by foreign banks. The number of ATMs with public sector banks fell to 1.34 lakh in the country compared to 1.36 lakh last year.

On the other hand, private sector banks increased their share by operating 73,052 ATMs compared to 63,340 ATMs in the previous year.

The high growth of white label ATMs (WLAs) for the second consecutive year was fuelled by regulatory support such as permission to source cash directly from the Reserve Bank and permission to offer non-bank services.

More than 82 per cent of the WLAs are located in rural and semi-urban areas with high unmet demand for ATMs.

Data available for 2020-21 so far indicate that the growth in WLAs continued as the rural economy was not as severely impacted as the urban areas due to the lockdown associated with Covid-19 pandemic.

GDP can be rebuilt in 3 ways, says ex-gov

Hyderabad, Dec. 29: Though Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown left a trail of economic devastation on most countries, India can potentially build upon three positive aspects — push in the rural economy, stronger federalism and a huge consumption base, former RBI Governor Duvvuri Subbarao Rao has said.

In his foreword on a Telugu book titled *Maandhyam Mungita Desam* (Nation in Recession) authored by Tummala Kishore, the former RBI governor said the challenge for the government in the months and years ahead is clear: to put the economy back on a healthy growth trajectory and ensure that growth is inclusive, with lower income households too enjoying the benefits of rapid growth.

"The expanded MNREGA provided a lifeline when most needed, and the frontloaded transfer payments to women, pensioners and farmers have put money in the hands of households and have helped revive demand. The



brisk procurement by Food Corporation of India has buttressed farmers' incomes while it helped the government extend the food security programme until end November," he said.

Subbarao said the second positive aspect he sees is India's federalism, which, "warts and all", has withstood the test of vigorous democracy.

He said the third positivity is the country's huge consumption base with 1.35 billion people and a per capita income of just over \$2,000. "In a setting like this, any increase in income of the bottom half will quickly turn into consumption, which in turn will spur production," he explained. — PTI

Gold gives 2nd highest return in 10 yrs

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, DEC. 29

Gold prices have provided 27 per cent returns in 2020 — the highest since 2011. With economic uncertainties and lower interest rates prevailing, the gold prices are expected to move past ₹60,000 during the first half of next year.

Moving up from ₹39,280 per 10 gm in the Indian market at the beginning of the year, gold prices have almost ended the year around ₹50,000, providing handsome returns of 27 per cent. This is the highest

return the yellow metal has provided after 2011 when it had appreciated 31 per cent.

In the international market, gold moved up 19 per cent from \$1,574 per ounce at the beginning of the year to \$1,878. In between gold prices had made fresh highs by moving past \$2,000 per ounce in August. Silver provided spectacular returns of 45 per cent in the domestic market as well as the international market.

Lower interest rates across economies, bond-buying programmes and



dollar weakness supported gold prices throughout the year. In addition, Covid-19 fears and the impact it had on the economies further accelerated gold's bull-run.

"Equity markets were overbought and the valua-

tions remained high. This also favoured gold's movement," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

Investors flocking towards safe havens saw gold ETF inflows touching record high in 2020.

In the Indian market too, gold ETF AUMs saw fresh highs and sovereign gold bond purchases went up much higher than the previous years.

However, expectations about the release of a vaccine and stronger dollar in the second half of the year kept gold prices under control.

BDB lifts ban on lab-grown diamond trade

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, DEC. 29

In a move that will streamline lab-grown diamond processing in the country and help it grow as a separate segment, Bharat Diamond Bourse (BDB) has revoked an earlier ban on its trading.

By revoking the ban, Bharat Diamond Bourse has accepted the expansion of lab-grown processing happening in India. BDB had passed a resolu-

tion to ban the trading of lab-grown diamonds in 2015.

Increasing processing activity, De Beers launching its Lightbox jewellery brand of lab-grown, detection becoming cheaper and quicker, advent of blockchain technology for tracking diamonds through the pipeline and greater consumer acceptance are some of the reasons that led to the decision.

"Five years back, machines to detect lab-

grown diamonds from natural diamonds were not readily available and were expensive. But now we have advanced machines available at reasonable rates. Further, enough awareness has been created around the world and across the full pipeline and the demand for lab-grown also has immensely increased across the globe," said Vipul Shah, the vice-chairman of GJEPC. Import of rough lab-

grown diamonds as well as exports of polished ones have been significantly growing in the recent past.

The pandemic has further increased demand for lab-grown compared to mine diamonds in the United States and the European countries.

Between April and November, the exports have grown 61 per cent to ₹1,943 crore and import of rough diamonds were up 55 per cent.

PANDEMIC | DIPLOMACY

China aims to sell vaccines for influence, but people refuse to trust Sinovac

China struggles to get world to trust its vaccines

Hong Kong/Karachi, Dec. 29: Of all the developing countries testing China's Covid-19 vaccines, few are friendlier to Beijing than Pakistan. In the years leading up to the pandemic, China financed nearly \$70 billion across the South Asian nation.

Yet interviews with people in Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city — as well as in other developing nations from Indonesia to Brazil, together with surveys and official comments — show that China has failed to assure the millions of peo-

ple who may have to rely on its vaccines.

"I won't take it," said Farman Ali Shah, a motorcycle driver in Karachi for local ride-hailing app Bykea, as local shops closed early ahead of an 8 p.m. virus-induced curfew. "I don't trust it."

That mistrust, and the reliance of dozens of poorer nations on China to inoculate their populations could set the stage for a major global political headache if citizens offered the Chinese vaccine feel they are being



given an inferior product.

China's vaccines were meant to score a clear diplomatic win for Beijing, shoring up ties

with dozens of poorer nations amid an anticipated shortage of Western-developed shots. But there has been little information about how the Chinese versions have fared in final-stage clinical trials, with just the United Arab Emirates and China itself endorsing the vaccines for emergency use so far.

That uncertainty presents another roadblock in China's efforts to extend its political influence across Asia, Africa and South America.

Bolstered by its virus

success, Beijing sparred with the US, UK and Australia over everything from the origins of the virus to crackdowns in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. The pain of the pandemic also hardened the stance of the US and China in wider economic disputes, including American efforts to stop countries from adopting the technology of China's Huawei Technologies Co.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said in a tweet on Monday that Chinese-made vac-

cines may be the "only choice" for governments that haven't secured supplies since "wealthy countries" had booked three quarters of the estimated 12 billion vaccines set for production next year.

If Chinese vaccines aren't available, developing nations will turn to other suppliers "and China will lose leverage," Huang said. "We're not just talking about the economic loss — diplomatic and strategic gains will also will be undermined."

— Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Former NZ Test player Reid dead

**Wellington:** John F. Reid, who scored six centuries in 19 Tests for New Zealand including 108 in a famous win over Australia, has died. He was 64.

His death after a long illness was confirmed on Tuesday by New Zealand Cricket.

Reid's century against Australia at Brisbane's Gabba ground in November, 1985 was instrumental in New Zealand's win by an innings of 41 runs.

He shared a then-record 225-run partnership with Martin Crowe (188) for the third wicket which helped New Zealand to 553-7 in their only innings.

Richard Hadlee took 9-52 in Australia's first innings and 6-71 in the second to secure the win. Reid was an elegant left-hander known for his skill against spin bowling and the Brisbane innings, on a fast, bouncy pitch, proved his ability against pace.

— AP

## Sydney confirmed as third Test host

**Sydney:** Cricket Australia on Tuesday decided to retain Sydney as the venue for the third Test against India, ending speculation that the game could move to Melbourne because of stringent Covid-19 border restrictions that would have affected the players' movement for the fourth match in Brisbane.

The third Test is to be held from January 7. The series is currently locked 1-1 after India won the second Test in Melbourne, which was placed on standby in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak in Sydney's northern beaches before Christmas.

"Despite the many challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, I am delighted to say Cricket Australia remains on track to deliver the men's international series as scheduled," Cricket Australia's Interim CEO Nick Hockley was quoted as saying by 'cricket.com.au'.

— AP

## Australia fined 40% of match fee

**Melbourne:** The Australian cricket team was fined 40 per cent of their match fee and penalised four ICC World Test Championship points for maintaining a slow over-rate against India in the second Test, which concluded here on Tuesday. ICC match referee David Boon imposed the sanction after Tim Paine's side was ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration during the second Test, which the hosts lost by eight wickets. "In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 per cent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time," the ICC said in a statement.

— AP

## S. Africa hammer injury-hit Lanka

**Centurion, South Africa:** South Africa wrapped up victory by an innings and 45 runs shortly after lunch on the fourth day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Tuesday. Sri Lanka, needing 225 runs to avoid an innings defeat, were bowled out for 180. Kusal Perera hit a spirited 64 off 87 balls for the tourists and debutant Wanindu Hasaranga slammed 59 off 53 balls. — **AFP**  
**Brief scores: Sri Lanka 396 and 180** (K. Perera 64, W. Hasaranga 59 L. Ngidi 2-38) vs South Africa 621.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Big Bash League:** Hobart Hurricanes vs Brisbane Heat from 1.45 pm on Sony Six

## FOOTBALL

**Indian Super League:** Hyderabad vs Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

**English Premier League:** Tottenham Hotspur vs Fulham from 11.30 pm; Newcastle United vs Liverpool from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Star Sports Select 1

## WWE

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

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## IT'S A KNOCKOUT!

## India floor Aussies on Day Four of Boxing Day Test

**Melbourne, Dec. 29:** Hungry for redemption, India recorded a win for the ages under an inspirational Ajinkya Rahane, beating Australia by eight wickets in the second Test to level the four-match series 1-1 here on Tuesday. The target of 70 was never a big one but for a team that was bowled out for its all-time lowest score of 36 only 10 days back, one can't fault them if that played at the back of their minds.

Shubman Gill (35 not out) and skipper Rahane (27 not out) knocked off the runs in 15.5 overs to complete the victory.

This was after the quartet comprising Jasprit Bumrah (2/54 in 27 overs), debutant Mohammed Siraj (3/37 in 21.3 overs), Ravichandran Ashwin (2/71 in 37.1 overs) and Ravindra Jadeja (2/28 in 14 overs) showed maniacal consistency over a period of 100 overs on the flattest of decks, where extra bounce became their go-to weapon.

"The talk was all about showing attitude, intent and character. One hour took the game away from us in Adelaide, but we still have a lot to learn," Rahane said in the post-match presentation.

Indian teams, since the turn of the new millennium, have had some memorable overseas victories but when the backdrop and context of this Test at the iconic MCG is recorded for posterity, Rahane and his magnificent bowling unit will find more than an honourable mention in the pages of history.

"Really proud of all the players, credit to our debutants Gill and Siraj. The way they showed character was amazing," Rahane said.

Australia captain Tim Paine had nothing to offer as an explanation for why his side could not capitalise on the big absences.

— PTI



Captain Ajinkya Rahane (right) and opener Shubman Gill embrace to celebrate India's victory in the second Test against Australia at the MCG in Melbourne.

— AP

## SCORECARD

**Australia 1st Innings 195**  
**India 1st Innings 326**

**Australia 2nd Innings (overnight 133 for 6):** Matthew Wade lbw b Ravindra Jadeja 40, Joe Burns c Pant b Umesh 4, Marnus Labuschagne c Rahane b Ashwin 28, Steven Smith b Bumrah 8, Travis Head c Mayank Agarwal b Siraj 17, Cameron Green c Jadeja b Siraj 45, Tim Paine c Pant b Ravindra Jadeja 1, Pat Cummins c Agarwal b Bumrah 22, Mitchell Starc not out 14, Nathan Lyon c Pant b Siraj 3, Josh Hazlewood b Ashwin 10. Extras (lb-5, nb-3) 8. **Total (all out in 103.1 overs) 200.**

**FoW:** 1-4, 2-42, 3-71, 4-98, 5-98, 6-99, 7-156,

8-177, 9-185.

**Bowling:** Jasprit Bumrah 27-6-54-2, Umesh Yadav 3.3-0-5-1, Mohammed Siraj 21.3-4-37-3, Ravichandran Ashwin 37.1-6-71-2, Ravindra Jadeja 14-5-28-2.

**India 2nd Innings:** Mayank Agarwal c Paine b Starc 5, Shubman Gill (not out) 35, Cheteshwar Pujara c Green b Cummins 3, Ajinkya Rahane (not out) 27. **Total (For 2 wkts, in 15.5 overs) 70.**

**FoW:** 1-16, 2-19.

**Bowling:** Mitchell Starc 4-0-20-1, Pat Cummins 5-0-22-1, Josh Hazlewood 3-1-14-0, Nathan Lyon 2.5-0-5-0, Marnus Labuschagne 1-0-9-0.

## PRAISE APLENTY

**To win a Test match without Virat, Rohit, Ishant & Shami is a terrific achievement. Loved the resilience and character shown by the team to put behind the loss in the 1st Test and level the series. Brilliant win. Well done TEAM INDIA.**

— **SACHIN TENDULKAR**  
India great

**What a win this is, absolutely amazing effort by the whole team. Couldn't be happier for the boys and specially Jinks who led the team to victory amazingly. Onwards and upwards from here.**

— **VIKAS KOHLI**  
India captain

**Hats off to Indian cricket team, what a fantastic game after playing poor cricket in Adelaide, you made us proud. Ajinkya Rahane, you and your team, proud of you, you didn't have your captain but you showed the way... carry on doing that, well done.**

— **KAPIL DEV**  
Ex-India captain

**Stunning response from India after the 1st Test, Australia's top order have been horribly exposed, some tough decisions required.**

— **TOM MOODY**  
Former Australia player



Ravichandran Ashwin (right) celebrates after bowling out Josh Hazlewood during the fourth day of the second Test at the MCG in Melbourne on Tuesday.

— AP

## Ashwin says Rahane brought calmness in dressing room

**Melbourne, Dec. 29:** Ajinkya Rahane brought calmness in the dressing room in the absence of regular captain Virat Kohli, spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said on Tuesday after India recorded an epic series-levelling win in the second Test, here.

Shot out for a record low score of 36 in their second innings in the last pink-ball Test at Adelaide, India came into the blockbuster MCG Test with Kohli who is on paternity leave.

But the team under Rahane showed resilience to bounce back, effecting an extraordinary turnaround to level the four-match series 1-1.

"Getting bowled out for 36 was never going to be easy. We are quite a proud cricketing country and losing Virat was a bit of a setback," the star-off-spinner told 7 cricket.

"...but we stuck on really well. Jinks' calmness in the dressing room really provided us that stability to go out there

and express ourselves in this game."

Down 0-1, India received further setback after fiery pacer Mohammed Shami was ruled out because of a fracture to his bowling arm.

But Rahane's bold captaincy stood out from day one itself when he pressed in Ashwin in the 11th over with the ball still new, possibly to use the off-spinner's psychological upper hand over the Aussies batters in the pink ball Test.

— PTI

## Cricket fraternity hail Rahane &amp; Co

**New Delhi, Dec. 29:** The Indian cricket fraternity on Tuesday hailed the national team for the "resilience and character" it showed to redeem itself after the Adelaide debacle to win the second Test in Melbourne.

India, led by Ajinkya Rahane, levelled the four-match Test series 1-1 after defeating Australia by eight wickets in the second match at the MCG. Rahane led from the front with a match-winning 112 in India's first innings.

Star batsman Rohit Sharma, who will join the side in Melbourne on Wednesday after completing his mandatory quarantine, praised the team for showing composure in difficult times.

"Fantastic win for the Team India at the MCG. Character and composure shown throughout the game was excellent to watch @bcci," Rohit tweeted.

However, former India captain Bishan Singh Bedi had a word of caution for the 'Men in Blue' and advised them to stay calm.

"(The) 36 all out was terribly 'freakish' but an 8wkt

win is not ... I hope Indns can forget both ... one as a nightmare & the other as nothing to float on cloud nine ... still 2 more Tests to go.& plenty of work to do..stay calm Fellas as yur Capt @ajinkyarahane88 & 'think' how to outwit OZL," tweeted Bedi.

Former India batsman V.V.S. Laxman singled out debutants Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj for special praise.

"Lot of positives from this win. Rahane led the side brilliantly, bowlers were relentless but the biggest positive is the performance of two debutants. Both of them were confident and not over-awed by the big occasion. Strength of Indian cricket is their strong bench strength," he tweeted.

Former India opener Virender Sehwag also took to Twitter to praise the performance of Rahane and his team.

"A really special win at the MCG. Great Determination and great character. Rahane led from the front, the bowlers were terrific and Gill is chill," tweeted Sehwag.

— PTI



Mohammed Siraj (second from left) is congratulated by teammates after dismissing Nathan Lyon on the fourth day of the second Test at the MCG on Tuesday.

— AP

## Newbies Gill, Siraj impress Ajinkya

**Melbourne, Dec. 29:** India skipper Ajinkya Rahane on Tuesday singled out the debutant duo of Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj while commending the tremendous character shown by his side to turn it around in the second Test here for a series-levelling triumph. Gill scored 45 and 35 not out in the game here while Siraj returned with five wickets, including three in Australia's second innings.

"I am really proud of all the players. I want to give credit to the debutants Siraj and Gill, the character they showed after the Adelaide loss was great to see," Rahane said after the match.

"Character was important for us, especially after losing Umesh in the second innings," he added, referring to the mid-match injury suffered by pacer Umesh Yadav.

Rahane said it is never easy for debutants to be consistently disciplined in their game but Gill and Siraj showed how it is done.

"Shubman, we all know his First-class career and in this game, he has shown the intent to play shots at this level, has shown composure.

"Siraj has shown that he can bowl with discipline. It's really difficult for debutants to bowl with disci-

pline but that's where I think the First-class experience comes in handy," he said.

Asked what the team discussed before the match, Rahane said, "The talk was all about showing the attitude and intent on the field. As I said, character. Adelaide was about one hour that took the game away from us. Lots to learn for even now."

Rahane also acknowledged his own role as a leader, citing the five-bowler plan that yielded result.

"That worked well for us nicely. We were thinking of having an all-rounder and (Ravindra) Jadeja has been brilliant for us."

He also talked about the arrival of swashbuckling regular opener Rohit Sharma for the third Test beginning January 7.

"We're excited about Rohit coming back. Spoke to him yesterday, he's waiting to join the team," he said.

— PTI

## MELBOURNE, INDIA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL VENUE AWAY FROM HOME

■ With fourth victory in 14 Tests at Melbourne Cricket Ground, it became India's most successful venue away from home.

■ Previously they had won three Tests each at Queens Park Oval (Trinidad), Sabina Park (Jamaica) and at the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground in Colombo. No other team apart from England has won more than three matches at the MCG.

■ It was only third instance of teams coming back from 0-1

down to win the second Test in Australia in the last 50 years. The West Indies came back from 0-1 to win at the WACA, Perth in 1975-76. After that, it was New Zealand in 2011 in Hobart.

■ The last team that won back-to-back Tests at the MCG were Pakistan in 1979 and 1981, and before that India in 1977 and 1980.

■ No Australian batsmen scored fifty in this match. It is first time in 32 years when no Australian

batsman scored a fifty in a Test match at home. Incidentally, that was also at the MCG against the West Indies.

■ In the last thirty years, away from home, this has happened to Australia only three times.

■ Mohammed Siraj took 5/77 runs in the match. It was second best match figures for overseas debutants in Australia.

■ Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga (6/92) is the only bowler to have taken more than Siraj's five wick-

ets in such a scenario. Only four Indian pacers have taken more wickets on debut away from home than Siraj.

■ Marcus Harris' 70 in Sydney last year was the highest score for an Australian batsman in last six Test matches between India and Australia in Australia. Since the start of 2016 there have been just two batsmen who have scored Test centuries for Australia against India — Steven Smith (three) and Glenn Maxwell (one).

— S. PERVEZ KAISER



Indian coach Ravi Shastri (left) shakes hands with Australian coach Justin Langer at the end of the second Test at the MCG in Melbourne on Tuesday.

— AFP