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New Delhi, March 27: The Union transport ministry on Sunday extended the validity of motor vehicle documents like driving licence (DL), registration certificate (RC) and permits till March 31, 2021, in view of the Covid pandemic. "The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has extended the validity of vehicular documents. Ministry has today issued a directive to the states and UT administrations in the regard," a Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) statement said.

■ Report on Page 7

**GST CASH RULE
WON'T HIT SMALL
BIZ, SAYS FINMIN**

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

■ Report on Page 11

Merit twist: AP students enter Gandhi
Local students deprived of chance to join top-ranked institutes

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

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

adopted by the Kaloji
Narayana Rao University
of Health Sciences
(KNRUHS) in Phase 2
counselling resulted in at

least 40 students from AP,
a majority of whom are
otherwise ineligible, mak-
ing it to the government
colleges in Telangana state
and locals losing an equal
number of seats.

The process also virtual-
ly converted the "un-
reserved category", in
which meritorious stu-
dents compete for the seat
irrespective of their local
status, caste or religion,
into a "reserved" category
for non-local students.

All the students in
Gandhi and Osmania med-
ical colleges who got
admission in the un-
reserved category in the
Phase 2 counselling belong
to either Andhra Uni-
versity or Sri Venkateswara
University regions and
same is the case with
many other government
colleges in Telangana
state.

■ Page 2: 'Both universities
cannot be right'

Home ministry fears largescale poll violence

Centre may start WB poll work in Jan

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC 27

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

run-up to the Assembly
polls for which adequate
security deployment
would have to be done.

Already Bengal has wit-
nessed clashes between the
BJP and the Trinamul
Congress workers, with
the latest incident of vio-
lence being the attack on
the convoy of BJP presi-
dent J.P. Nadda on the out-
skirts of Kolkata a few
days ago. Even though for-

mal discussions are yet to
begin between the Home
Ministry and the EC for
the security deployment,
Centre has already started
making advance preparation
for the same. Sources
claim that according to the
initial assessment, any-
thing between 800 to 1000
companies of central para-
military forces could be
deployed during the
Bengal elections.

**Rythu Bandhu
aid starts today**

End regulated farming, officers tell govt

S.A. ISHAQUI | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao announced on Sunday that the Rythu Bandhu financial assistance to farmers for the Rabi season will be deposited in their accounts from Monday. He said ₹7,515 crore will be deposited into the accounts of 61.49 lakh farmers covering an area of 1.52 crore acres at a rate of ₹5,000 per acre.

The CM held a review of
the scheme at Pragathi
Bhavan.

He held extensive discussions
on purchase of various
crops, a regulated
farming policy, sale and
purchase of agriculture
products in the markets,
responsibilities of the
Rythu Bandhu Samitis,
utilisation of Rythu
Vedikas, keeping the
required seed and fertilisers
in adequate quantity
to be distributed on time,
transfer of the required

tech-skills to farmers and
related matters.

The officers suggested
that there was no need for
regulated farming and
there was no requirement
for the government to sug-
gest the crop pattern from
the next year.

The government should
forthwith stop issuing
guidelines on the crops to
be cultivated. Farmers
should decide by them-
selves what crops they
should cultivate.

They should sell their
produce wherever it gets a
higher price, the meeting
said.

■ Page 2: Farm produce
purchase to be streamlined

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SHORT TAKES

PVT COLLEGE TEACHERS DEMAND SALARY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

The Telangana Schools' Technical Colleges Employees Association on Sunday protested outside Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao's residence at Pragathi Bhavan against the non-payment of salaries to private teachers, as well as the termination of several teachers during the pandemic.

They were detained by the Punjab police and taken to the Goshamahal police station.

Association president Prof. A. Santhosh Kumar and seven members reached Pragathi Bhavan and demanded to meet the Chief Minister to raise their grievances. They complained that GO 45 was not being followed or implemented in any institutions.

They said that the association had raised several complaints in this regard with officials in the education department, university authorities, Chief Secretary as well as the Special Chief Secretary in the past, but no action was taken.

The association has put forward three demands — ensure that all private institutions pay salaries to all employees and withdraw their termination and to implement Education Act 1982, Section 84 and 79, as well as GO No. 1 of Education Act 1994. According to the police, at about 12.30 pm, about eight members of the association, identified as Dr Rama Devi, 47, Sugnakar Mamidala, Vishnu Murthy, A. Veerachary, Dev Singh, Uday Bhaskar, 30, and his wife Sunitha, apart from association president Santosh Kumar reached the spot.

They went towards the BB1 gate of the camp office at Begumpet and demanded to meet the Chief Minister without appointment. When the police staff stopped them, they started shouting to express their demands for the implementation of payment of salaries, the police said.

REMAINS OF NEOLITHIC PERIOD FOUND

DC CORRESPONDENT
MAHABUBNAGAR, DEC. 27

A Neolithic celt made of solarise stone has been hit upon at Somasila village of Kollapur mandal in Nagarkurnool district. The find was taken out from the agricultural field of Telugu Pentaiha. This was the same village where Neolithic tools like discoids, pestles and grinding stones were found two decades ago, which are kept in the local museum.

Dr E Sivanagireddy, archaeologist and CEO of the Cultural Centre of Vijayawada and Amaravati, has reported about these findings. He was on a survey of the potential sites in and around Somasila village on the left bank of River Krishna.

"I chanced on to a Neolithic tool (axe) measuring 4 x 2 x 1 inches with sharp cutting edge," he said.

Dr Reddy said the celt is coated with patina of lime and ash, denoting it was dumped in a pit after its use for some time. Based on a similar evidence from nearby Chinnamarur village, where a Neolithic habitation was excavated by the Department of Archaeology and Museums in the 1980s, and on the features of the stone tool that were noticed at Somasila village, he feels it was in use between 4000-2000 years BC.

This was the period when domestication of animals, intensification of agriculture and settling down of people in groups started.

He urged the Department of Heritage, Telangana, to do a scientific survey to know of the archaeological potential of the site.

Dr Reddy said prehistoric rock paintings are seen at Amaragiri-Bollarum close to Somasila village. There is scope for introducing Somasila as a site for pilgrimage tourism because of the presence of the Somasila temples (7 th-17th centuries AD). Archaeological tourism to the sites of the rock paintings in the area can be promoted as also eco-tourism to areas of water bodies and the chain of hillocks and picturesque spots in the region, he proposed.

THIS WAS the period when domestication of animals, intensification of agriculture and settling down of people in groups started. He urged the Department of Heritage, Telangana, to do a scientific survey to know of the archaeological potential of the site.



Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy distributes masks during 'Wear a Mask' campaign to contain the spread of Covid-19, in Hyderabad on Sunday.

— R. PAVAN

Task force to monitor Covid situation: Kishan

Centre funding Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers: Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy on Sunday clarified that the Union government has not accorded any permission so far for a Covid vaccine in the country.

He was addressing a gathering after launching immunity booster syrup of a company here in the city. He said that the Centre had constituted a task force for monitoring the Covid situation, trials of the many vaccines that are becoming available and the progress in creating

● HE SAID that the Centre was funding Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers to ensure that the vaccine is made available to be administered to the people of the country as early as possible. He said that the world is eagerly looking at the vaccine from the Serum Institute of India, Bharat Biotech and Cadila rather than those from Pfizer and the Russian Sputnik.

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was funding Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers to ensure that the vaccine is made available to be administered to the people of the country as early as possible.

Kishan Reddy said that the world is eagerly looking at the vaccine from the Serum Institute of India, Bharat Biotech and Cadila rather than those from Pfizer and the Russian Sputnik.

Stating that the vaccines which were on trial in India are showing good results, he said, "We are hoping that the vaccine will become available in

the next few days. Several precautions have to be taken to store and administer the vaccine." He said that priorities have been finalised by the Centre to administer the vaccine.

Kishan Reddy said that the steps taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to contain the spread of Covid-19 had yielded good results. Referring to the Covid-19 pandemic, he said that the world never faces this kind of crisis in the past.

The Union minister appealed to the people to take precautions till the vaccine came.

TWO MORE UK RETURNEES TEST COVID POSITIVE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Two more persons who returned from the United Kingdom in the recent past have tested positive for the Coronavirus. All UK returnees are being tested in light of the discovery of a highly infective mutant strain of SARS-CoV-19 which causes Covid-19.

A total of 1,216 people had returned to Telangana state from the UK of whom 970 of them were identified and tested. The two who tested positive on Sunday were residents of Medchal Malkajgiri district.

So far, 20 returnees have tested positive — four from Hyderabad, eight from Medchal Malkajgiri, two from Jagtial district and one each from Mancherial, Nalgonda, Ranga Reddy, Sangareddy, Siddipet and Warangal Urban districts. Officials said they had been placed in special wards in different hospitals. Of those who landed in the city from the UK, 92 were from other states. The information regarding these people has been provided to the respective states.

The thanda has sent two of its children to the Army out of which one, Hav. Parusuram, lost his life in a freak condition, said a village elder.

Shanti Bai, 35, wife of Hav. Parusuram said her future was bleak as she has to raise two kids, aged eight and six, all by herself.

Sobbing uncontrollably, she said the government had announced financial aid and a house site for her but it should show magnanimity and extend liberal benefits as it had done in the case of other Army personnel who lost their lives.

She said a government job suiting her qualification would give more sup-



(Top) Grieving family members pay respects to Army Havildar Parusuram who died in a landslide in Leh, Ladakh. A large number of villagers participate in the last journey on Sunday.

port and strength to her. She has studied up to Class 10.

● SOBBING UNCONTROLLABLY, she said the government had announced financial aid and a house site for her but it should show magnanimity and extend liberal benefits as it had done in the case of other Army personnel who lost their lives.

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BACK | HOME

The megastar flew back to Chennai on Sunday

Rajini discharged from hosp

DC CORRESPONDENTS
HYDERABAD / CHENNAI
DEC. 27

Actor-politician Rajinikanth was discharged on Sunday afternoon from Apollo Hospitals in Hyderabad where he was being treated for blood pressure fluctuation. After his condition improved he was allowed to go home with advice to take rest for at least a week and not to involve in any activity that may risk his picking up the Covid-19 infection. "In view of his improved

medical condition, Rajinikanth is being discharged from the hospital today (Sunday). His blood pressure has been stabilised and he is feeling much better," the hospital said in an official statement.

Rajinikanth, 70, flew back to Chennai on Sunday evening with his daughter Aishwarya Dhanush and was driven straight to his Poos Garden residence.

His political functionary Tamilaravi Manian told the media that preparations for the launch of

● HIS POLITICAL functionary Tamilaravi Manian said that preparations for the launch of Rajinikanth's party were at an advanced stage and that an announcement could be expected in mid January 2021. Rajini might still be resting at home but can interact by videoconferences with his supporters and party people. Mr Manian said.

It appears that despite the latest health setback that Rajinikanth suffered while shooting for the final parts of the film 'Annath' in Hyderabad the plans for the launch of his party, possibly on January 17, the birth anniversary of former chief minister and iconic matinee idol MGR, are still very much on.

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Telangana finally gets a Women's Commission

DC CORRESPONDENTS
HYDERABAD, ADILABAD,
DEC. 27

After two and a half years, Telangana state can now boast of fully functional Women's Commission. The state government late on Sunday night announced the appointment of Vakiti Sunitha Lakshma Reddy as chairperson and six members of the statutory body. Sunitha Lakshma Reddy has earlier served as a minister in the cabinets of Chief Ministers Y.S. Rajasekhar Rao and K. Rosaiah.

As per the government order, commission will have a tenure of for a five-year tenure. The members include Shaheena Afzole, Kumra Eshwari Bai, Kommu Umadevi Yadav, Gaddala Padma, Sudham Lakshmi and Katari Revathi Rao.

The fight for a fully functional women's panel was led by the NGO 'Women's Commission Matters' and Spurthi Kolipaka hailed the decision.

"This is a victory for all those who fought legal battles and challenges for this



Vakiti Sunitha Lakshma Reddy

day. We can finally have a body that can prioritise the safety and issues concerning women in the state, and make policies, accordingly. I believe that those appointed today are experts in their respective fields and will do well for us," said Spurthi. This is a surprising move by the state government as it was expected to fill corporation and commission posts after Sankranti.

Kumra Eshwari Bai, 45, a former mandal president of Indravelli, was personally informed about the nomination by minister K.T. Rama Rao. Her husband Kumra Raju is a teacher. Eshwari Bai is district vice president of



Kumra Eshwari Bai.

the Kolam Seva Sangam. Eshwari Bai belongs to Kolam tribal group which is considered as a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG). She is probably the first person in her community to reach this position. She has been associated with Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao since the inception of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti and actively participated in the statehood agitation.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, Eshwari Bai said she joined the TRS just three months after its inception and added that she joined the party being the MPP in the interest of the Telangana agitation.

Crop purchase centres not needed: Babus to CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Senior state government officers on Sunday pointed out to Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao that with the new farm laws allowing farmers to sell their crop anywhere, the state government need not set up purchase centre in the villages.

They were speaking during the review meeting that the Chief Minister chaired on the distribution of Rythu Bandhu assistance to farmers for the Rabi season.

The officers told the Chief Minister that the government was not a business organisation or a trader and that sale and purchase of agriculture produce is not the responsibility of the government.

They felt that it was not possible to set up procurement centres in the village from next year, as the state government incurring huge losses which

ing of the Rythu Bhima scheme, supply of seeds, fertilizers etc, and providing latest technology to farmers and helping them with new seeds.

The officers were instructed by the CM that they ensure meetings are held with farmers regularly at the Rythu Vedikas and they should discuss and decide as to which crops farmers should cultivate in various regions based on the emerging market conditions.

burdened the exchequer due to direct purchase of farm produce from farmers by setting up procurement centres across the state.

Both universities cannot be right, says petitioner

From Page 1

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

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

"Both universities cannot be right because the procedures they followed are completely opposite," said Dr Ala Venkateswarlu of Guntur, who complained against the faulty procedure in AP and got it rectified. "The only difference between the two procedures is that local students of Telangana state were deprived of seats because of the Kaloji University procedure," he added.

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

As per the admission rules, 15 per cent seats in each college are declared "unreserved" and the remaining 85 per cent are reserved exclusively for local students. The Phase 2 counselling was held strictly by this procedure in both states.

But, when a vacancy arises in the "unreserved" quota during Phase 2 counselling, a student who has already got a seat in Telangana state under

the "local quota" should be pushed up into the "unreserved" quota if she is more meritorious than the student from AU or SVU regions.

In such case, there will be a vacancy in the "local quota" which can be filled with another Telangana state student.

But, the KNRUHS authorities retained the TS local student in the local category and filled the vacancy in the "unreserved" category with non-local students.

Asked what if they did join the college, he said that the admission committee members would be able to better explain the procedure followed by the university.

He assured this reporter that a member of the admission committee would call and clarify but none approached till the report was filed.



When contacted, KNRUHS registrar Dr Praveen initially tried to justify the decision saying that students from other states did not join and hence those vacancies would be filled by local students in the Phase 3 counselling.

Asked what if they did join the college, he said that the admission committee members would be able to better explain the procedure followed by the university.

He assured this reporter that a member of the admission committee would call and clarify but none approached till the report was filed.



WEATHER



Max: 31°C
Min: 14.5°C
RH: 34%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Fog or mist early in the morning. Max/Min temp. 31/14 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+18,712)	(+248)
1,02,07,065	1,47,907
covid19india.org	

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+472)	(+2)
TS: 2,84,863	1,531
(+349)	(+2)
AP: 8,81,061	7,094

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

8,09,26,235	DEATHS
17,68,844	

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Chaturdasi full day

Star: Rohini till 3.35 pm

Varjyam: 6.49 am to 8.34 am; 9.38 pm to 11.21 pm

Durmuhurta: 12.39 pm to 1.23 pm; 2.51 pm to 3.34 pm

Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 12, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajr: 5.39 am

Zohar: 12.27 pm

Asar: 4.14 pm

Maghrab: 5.56 pm

Isha: 7.09 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.45 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.50 PM

MOONSET 4.58 AM

MOONRISE 4.24 PM



Shh! They are political infiltrators!

IN BRIEF

10 tolas of gold stolen on RTC bus

Hyderabad: Ten tolas of gold ornaments were stolen from a passenger in an RTC bus at Amberpet road on Sunday afternoon. According to the police, the victim was travelling in a TSRTC bus when a co-passenger, also a woman, told her that her coins had fallen down and sought help to pick it up. "When the victim bent down to pick up the coins, the offender allegedly opened her handbag, took a small bag containing the gold ornaments and got down from the bus at the next stop," said the police.

STATE RECORDS
472 NEW COVID CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Telangana state added 472 fresh Covid-19 cases until 8 pm on Saturday, pushing the cumulative caseload to 2,78,599, according to the state's health department medical bulletin issued on Sunday. The toll rose to 1,531 with two more fatalities in the last 24 hours, and the fatality rate stands at 0.53 per cent, the bulletin said.

The GHMC area recorded the maximum of 106 cases, followed by Medchal-Malkajgiri (45), Rangareddy (44), Nalgonda (23), Mancherial (19), Warangal Urban (18), Karimnagar (17), Khammam (16), Bhadrakali Kottagudem (15), Nizamabad and Peddapalli 10 cases each. As many as 509 people recovered between Friday and Saturday, taking the total number of recovered patients state to 2,76,753.

Influentials have 7,000 illegal taps

Over 90,000 drawing water without payment

MADDY DEEKSHITH | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Due to the apathy of water board officials, over 7,000 consumers are openly and over 90,000 consumers illegally drawing drinking water here without making any payment.

This was revealed in a survey by a team of water board officials a year ago. Overall, they have detected irregularities in 10,000 connections; of them, 3,000 were regularised. Some 7,000 influential people are still drawing water illegally, to the extent of over 1,400 million litres per day (MLD) per month, according to the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWS&SB).

The Voluntary Disclosure Scheme (VDS) introduced by the board in November last allowed all consumers who had unauthorised water connections to get them regularised. Of the estimated one lakh consumers having illegal water connections in Greater Hyderabad limits, only 10,000 have responded to the scheme till date.

As per permission accorded by the state government, the water board

THE VOLUNTARY
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said it would implement the regularisation scheme for a period of 90 days.

The board's warning to take advantage of the VDS to avoid risk of being levied heavy penalties and criminal cases just remained on paper for a year and the water board is making no effort to check the connections.

The connections fetch them over ₹200 crore. The board has said illegal connections caught beyond the above moratorium period would have to pay two times the connection charges, plus the past three years of consumption charges, as also service charges of ₹300. If they failed to pay up, criminal charges would be filed against them.

A senior board official

said the recent decision by the government to provide free drinking water to some segments has left the board in the lurch. This would give a chance to all elite consumers who draw water illegally.

The official said that no field-level survey has been conducted in recent times to check the extent of illegal connections. If these are detected and money collected with the arrears, the water board would mop up at least ₹200 crore. This, despite supplying free drinking water to consumers who fall under the purview of the scheme.

When asked if the board would fix metres to check the irregularities in all gated communities, apartments and independent houses beyond 600 square yards, the official said the board will take call in January after discussing the matter with the government.

Meanwhile, as regards the VDS offered a few years ago, only 23,000 consumers have regularised their connections under the scheme out of the estimated 1.25 lakh consumers who were found to have had illegal water connections in Greater Hyderabad limits.

Tough ride



Motorists face a tough time on the 7.5-km Uppal to Narapally stretch. The construction of the elevated expressway is raising dust. The contractors are supposed to regularly pour water along the stretch so that dust doesn't rise to the ground level.

People in city upset over ban on New Year parties this year

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Restrictions effected by the Cyberabad Police on New Year's Eve celebrations have come as a major dampener, especially to the large numbers of fun-loving youths and families in the city.

It was on December 25 that the CP commissioner banned gatherings in gated communities, hotels, resorts, farm houses, play grounds, stadiums and the like for December 31, while he also said only regular activity will be allowed at restaurants, hotels and pubs under strict surveillance.

Since the announcement, several plans have been abandoned in a huff. Hoteliers and resort owners who expected a windfall after the dry months of Covid scare since March are bearing the

RESORT OWNERS
especially in the
Cyberabad division
expressed serious dis-
appointment. A resort
owner in the CP limits said it
was unfair a ban is
imposed even on small
family gatherings while
allowing pubs to carry out
daily business on New
Year's eve.

brunt. After a lull of nine months, businesses had started to get back on track. We had hopes that this holiday season will bring in some gains for us', stated a hotel owner.

'Even with the permission granted for regular activity at restaurants, it is unlikely very many people will turn out for dining this year-end. Fear of Covid and the new strain persists. The only option left with us is to host buf-

fet lunch. For this too, there is the restriction on capacity,' said Pradeep Kumar Dutt, vice president of the hotels and restaurants associations of Telangana.

Resort owners especially in the Cyberabad division expressed serious disappointment. A resort owner in the CP limits said it was unfair a ban is imposed even on small family gatherings while allowing pubs to carry out daily business on New Year's eve.

It is understandable to restrict large gatherings, or parties, but to shut down farmhouses or resorts from being given out on rent for individuals or small family gatherings for a New Year getaway is too much of a pain,' said a resort owner in Moinabad.

Ashok Hemrajani, president of the State Hotels

Association and group VP at Minerva Grand Boutique Business Hotels & Restaurants, said, 'Such events are planned a month or two in advance. This ban is being imposed just five days before the New Year's eve.'

Following the police diktat, resident welfare associations have also urged members to not allow large gatherings or celebrations in gated communities. They have also put curbs on entry of outsiders, said BT Srinivasan, general secretary, United Federation of RWAs.

Furthermore, the state government would soon release a set of guidelines vis-a-vis restrictions for New Year's Eve.

16 BOOKED FOR ATTACK ON INSPECTOR

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Sixteen persons were booked for attempt to murder and placed under arrest by the Jawaharnagar police on Sunday after they caused severe burns to station house officer of Jawaharnagar police, P. Bhikshaphati Rao last week during removal of encroachments.

Rachakonda police commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat, said that on Dec. 24, the inspector had accompanied the revenue and municipal officials who were removing two encroachments of a land parcel measuring around 1,500 square yards.

He said that the accused and some local political leaders, identified as Rangula Shankar, Shobha Reddy, Sangeetha Rajashekhar and their associates, obstructed the officials, abused them in filthy language and throwing chilli powder at them.

Two of the accused were hiding in a room with bottles of inflammable liquid and chilli powder with them. On seeing the police trying to open the door, they started throwing chilli powder at inspec-

tor Saini. "Later, with an intention to create a scene of suicide, they set a cloth on fire and smoke started coming out. Noticing this, the inspector tried to rescue them but they threw the inflammable substance on him," police said. The accused were identified as Poonam Chand Kumawat, 50, Nihal Chand Kumawat, 27, Nirmala Kumavath, 26, Shanthi Devi, 45, Bal Singh, 40, Chennavam Patel, 24, Madan Lal, 45, Ruparam Kumavath, 43, Yogi Kamalnath Solanki, 21, Om Prakash Kumavath, 32, Geetha Devi, 40, and Godavari Kumavath, 40, said the police.

RAVINDRA SESU | DC
KHAMMAM, DEC. 27

The academic year 2020-21 for tenth standard students will be quite peculiar. Students, who are attending online classes being organised by schools, are not happy with the conduct of the classes.

The common answer from the students on how the online classes were going on is "our doubts are not being cleared".

With this, there is a demand from the students and their parents to conduct online classes at least two months from now. Respecting those sentiments, headmasters of twenty schools are running direct classes, especially for tenth standard students. Though conducting direct classes are against Covid-19 guidelines, the headmasters

are against Covid-19 guidelines, the headmasters yielding to the pressure

INFORMED SOURCES said that headmasters of schools like Chintakani, Bonakal, Konigerla, Wyra and Kallur are conducting direct classes for the sake of students.

from students are going forward.

N. Suresh, parent of a tenth standard student here, said "My kid is encountering audio problems in online classes and he is unable to understand what the teacher is saying. The other problems are signal and network connections".

There are 32,292 tenth standard students and nearly 50 percent of them are suffering because their doubts on various subjects remain unanswered.

Informed sources said that headmasters of schools like Chintakani, Bonakal, Konigerla, Wyra and Kallur are conducting direct classes for tenth standard students and we are awaiting its assent."

Bonakal, Konigerla, Wyra and Kallur are conducting direct classes for the sake of students.

N. Nagender, a teacher from Ramakrishnapuram school in Chintakani mandal, said, "We have been facing immense pressure from the parents. Signal problems are playing spoilsport".

Pabbathi Suryatej, a tenth standard student, said, "We are accustomed to learning directly in the classroom where can jot down in our notebooks. Moreover, teachers can clear our doubts immediately. This remains a lacuna as far as online classes are concerned".

District education officer Madanmohan said, "Education Commissioner has sent proposals to the government to allow direct classes for tenth standard students and we are awaiting its assent".

DRUNKEN DRIVING

Below 18 yrs	2
18-20 years	38
21-30 years	1,027
31-40 years	896
41-50 years	303
51-60 years	73
61-70 years	12
Total	2,351

license will be permanently revoked if it is second or subsequent offence." Drunken driving tests are being conducted following all safety precautions in view of the prevailing Covid situation. "Drunk people driving a vehicle are posing a serious threat to safety of commutes on city roads," traffic police advised.

Cyberabad traffic police

said: "Driving licences of

all these offenders will be seized and suspended for

three months in case it is

the first offence. Driving

apart from taking legal action, we are also informing their employers or educational institutions," police stated.

Any person involved in a

road accident while driv-

ing a vehicle under influ-

</

SHORT TAKES

BJP STRONGER BECAUSE OF TRS MLAS: MIM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, DEC. 27

Since TRS party and its MLAs are not focusing on development of streets and divisions where minorities and Dalit communities reside, Bharatiya Janata Party is turning stronger by the day in erstwhile Karimnagar district, observed Gulam Ahmed Hussain, in-charge of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) in united Karimnagar district.

Addressing a meeting of district AIMIM leaders, corporators and councilors, he said Muslims and Dalit communities had given power twice to TRS, as it is a secular party. But they are now disenchanted with ruling party's legislators in Jagtial, Korutla and Peddapalli district for discriminating against them. TRS MLAs are not showing any interest in development of colonies and divisions, where Muslim minorities and Dalit communities reside. Even the state government's welfare schemes are not being implemented in these areas, he charged.

Ahmed Hussain alleged that Shaadi Mubarak and Kalyana Lakshmi cheques have not been distributed since the past one-and-a-half years to Muslims and Dalits. Because of such discrimination BJP is becoming stronger in united Karimnagar district, he remarked.

He asked his party workers to focus on public issues and strive hard for strengthening AIMIM from gross-root level to counter religion-based BJP in days to come.

Speaking on the occasion, former deputy mayor Abbas Sami maintained that there must be no place for religious parties in Telangana. All people who believe in secularism must come onto one platform and stop BJP in the state, he said. He wanted party workers to focus on issues related to people living in Muslim and Dalit divisions and colonies in the four districts of Karimnagar, Jagtial, Peddapalli and Rajanna Sircilla.

MIM party leaders Barkath Ali, Younus Nadeem, Sabeeb Habubullah Masrath and Mustafa, corporators Akhil Feroz, Sharifuddin, Athenea, Ali Baba, Azhar Dabeer, A. Suresh, T. Shankar Babu, K. Bal Raj, Sajid, Shobuullah Khan and Waseem were among those present on the occasion.

Caption for Photo: Gulam Ahmed Hussain, AIMIM in-charge of united Karimnagar district addressing a meeting of party workers in Karimnagar on Sunday.

SPEAKING ON the occasion, former deputy mayor Abbas Sami maintained that there must be no place for religious parties in Telangana. All people who believe in secularism must come onto one platform and stop BJP in the state, he said. He wanted party workers to focus on issues related to people living in Muslim and Dalit divisions and colonies in the four districts of Karimnagar, Jagtial, Peddapalli and Rajanna Sircilla.

BJP to free TS from KCR, his family: Bandi

DC CORRESPONDENT
PEDDAPALLI, DEC. 27

It is time to start another phase of Telangana movement for liberating the state from clutches of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao and his family, declared state BJP chief and Karimnagar MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Sunday.

Inaugurating the statue of former Union minister G. Venkateswamy at the Venkateswamy Foundation in Sultanabad of Peddapalli district, Sanjay Kumar said KCR had come to power in Telangana with the slogan of water, funds and employment opportunities. But he has forgotten all these promises after becoming CM of the state.

The state BJP chief recounted that TRS has betrayed Dalits and has not kept its promise of distributing three acres of land and double bedroom houses to shelter-less poor families. All welfare schemes being implemented in the state belong to the central government, he stated.

Speaking about former Union minister G. Venkateswamy, he credited the late leader of being an inspiration for people of Telangana. Even though Venkateswamy got opportunities to become chief minister and vice-president of India, it is Congress that created obstacles in his path, the state BJP chief charged.

Former MLAs Somarapu Satyanarayana, Gujala Rama Krishna Reddy and Katakam Murthyunraya were among those present at the meeting along with others.

New TPCC chief soon

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Consultations at the All India Congress Committee level are said to have commenced at Delhi to appoint the president for the state unit.

Sources in the party said that AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal and AICC in-charge of Telangana affairs Manickam Tagore on Sunday had consultations with some of TPCC core committee mem-

bers and ascertained their views on appointment of new president. Outgoing TPCC president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, contenders like Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, A. Revanth Reddy, Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka and others were camped at Delhi.

Sources revealed that the consultations will likely be continued on Monday and the AICC will take final call in the next couple of days.

For MLC polls BJP pushes 'Sab Ka Saath Sab Ka Vikas'

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, DEC. 27

As part of the campaign for the ensuing Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda graduates' constituency Member of Legislative Council (MLC) elections, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Gujjuji Premender Reddy and district leaders, under the leadership of district President K. Chandrashekhar Rao and put an end to his family rule.

HE SAID that the Chief Minister was behaving like a joker and hoodwinking people with his theatrical gimmicks. The government cheated teachers and government employees by not giving PRC.

alleged.

"Telangana youth were rendered jobless because of his negligence. When he said that there would not be any contract employees in the state, everyone assumed that their services would be regularised. To their dismay, even these posts are to be removed," the leader said.

Reddy noted that the universities are in a state of complete neglect and even lands belonging

to varsities are being occupied blatantly.

He slammed Chandrashekhar Rao for deceiving pensioners after promising incentives. Health cards given to the employees were rendered useless, he stated.

"The Modi government at the Centre is working for the development of people from all walks of life under the slogan 'Sab Ka Saath Sab Ka Vikas'. Hence, the educated people must support the BJP in order to fulfill the aspirations of the people of Telangana," the leader said.

The party's local and district leaders like Kondeti Sridhar, Mandanti Vinod, D. Amarnath Reddy, Kandagatla Satyanarayana, Pashikanti Rajendra Prasad, Gankidi Srikrishna Reddy, Kolagani Niranjan, Malothu Nanu Nayak, Chiluka Vijaya Rao, Gankidi Venkat Reddy, Gadipally Rajeshwara Rao, Buri Uma Shankar, Mandanti Siddhartha, among others were present on the occasion.

RURAL ECONOMY IN STATE IS STRONG SAYS JAGADISH REDDY

HYDERABAD, DEC. 27: Energy minister G. Jagadish Reddy on Sunday said the initiatives of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao including steps for the revival of caste-based professions led to the strengthening of the rural economy in the state. He said fishlings

were being released into Nagarjunasagar Project (NSP), he said the CM took up several welfare schemes and development programmes which changed the face of villages and improved the living conditions of people of all sections in the state. He said fishlings

were being released into village tanks and reservoirs by the fisheries department free under the Integrated Fisheries Development Scheme. The state government has given equal importance to the welfare sector and infrastructure development. Listing out the welfare schemes includ-

ing Rythu Bandhu, welfare pensions, Kalayana Lakshmi and Shadi Mubarak, he said that the state government has continued the welfare schemes including pensions to the aged, disabled and single women as it is during the financial crunch faced due to lockdown.



OBITUARY

Bandi Sanjay Kumar
SIMHA S. JAYARAO
(IAS, Retd.) Former Registrar-General of Census of Andhra Pradesh (15-04-1926 to 27-12-2020)

Due to Covid restrictions, the family will not be receiving any visitors.
Son: Ajaya, Daughter: Arundhati, Daughter-in-law: Tara, members of their families.

PRARTHANA SABHA

SRI. LALJEE JETHALAI SARAIYA
S/o Late Sri B. Papaliah DOB: 25-12-2020 at 4:30 to 5:00 PM at our Residence. Inserted by: SARAIYA FAMILY Mob: 9985155445 (S/2021/D01003)

SHRADHANJALI

Dr. B. SRINIVAS RAO
S/o. Late Sri B. Papaliah Left for his Heavenly Abode on 18th Dec 2020 Your memories always be with us May his soul rest in peace. Inserted by: Gopathi Pratapgiri & Vittleshwari

THANKSGIVING MEMORIAL SERVICE

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Ps 23:6)

Mr T. BHASKER

(BA, BCOM, MA, Diploma in Library Science)

Retd. Librarian, Library Science, Badruka Colony

Born on: 18-02-1933 Promoted to Glory on 23-12-2020

Memorial Service at Residence on 03-01-2021 at 1.30 PM Address: Plot No.40, Suryanagar Colony, Karkhana, (Lane Beside Centro Showroom), Secunderabad - 500009

Wife: MANIKYAM BHASKER & FAMILY MEMBERS Ph: 9868573433, 9849073542, 9000111774

SHRADHANJALI

Dr. B. SRINIVAS RAO

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10th DAY CEREMONY

Late Smt. MOLOGU SUMITHRA DEVI

D.O.B.: 13-01-1952, D.O.D.: 19-12-2020

10th Day Ceremony

at 1-10-7, Road No.2B, Dwaramapuram Colony, Dilsukhnagar, Hyderabad.

Cell: 7288882277 Inserted by: FAMILY MEMBERS

2nd DEATH ANNIVERSARY

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalms 23:6

Mr. BATHULA SOLOMON JOHN

B.Com., LLB, BD

Chief Accounts Officer (Retd) APSEB, BURSAR ACTC, Senior Member CSI Wesley Church, Ramkote, HYD.

Called to glory on 28 December 2018. Inserted by:

MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY.

SHRADHANJALI

Dr. B. SRINIVAS RAO

S/o. Late Sri B. Papaliah Left for his Heavenly Abode on 18th Dec 2020 Your sudden demise is an irreparable & immense loss to all of us.

Insert by: M. Durvasulu & Sulochana Laxmi, Gopi & Jayaprada Nageshwar Rao & Sunitha

Address: Students of Kakatiya Medical College Warangal: 1975-1981 Batch

3rd ANNIVERSARY

NIRMALA CHUTKE

Dod: 28-12-2017

Life took you away from us, too young.

You will always be, our hero unsung. We miss you Mummy - Remembered by Family

Insert by: WIFE & SONS Ph: 040 27751556

IN FOND REMEMBRANCE

Mr. K.K. GEORGE

"We shall always Cherish

Your memories, your ideas

shall always guide and inspire us".

Insert by: WIFE & SONS

Ph: 040 27751556

SHRADHANJALI

Dr. B. SRINIVAS RAO

S/o. Late Sri B. Papaliah Left for his Heavenly Abode on 18th Dec 2020 Your memories always be with us May his soul rest in peace. Inserted by: Gopathi Swaroopa & Aniroop

2nd Death Anniversary

I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever

Mr. M. Robert Vijay Kumar

D.O.B: 06-11-1951 D.O.D: 28-12-2018

"The dead in Christ will rise first and we who are alive will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air."

1 Th 4:16-17

You will remain forever in our hearts, thoughts and memories

Insert by: Vijaya (wife), Joy and Rathna (daughters)

SHRADHANJALI

Dr. B. SRINIVAS RAO

S/o. Late Sri B. Papaliah Left for his Heavenly Abode on 18th Dec 2020 Time cannot erase your memory from our thoughts since you live in our hearts for ever.

Insert by: Students of All Saints High School 1971 & 1973 SSC Batch

47th DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Late KANUKULA PENTAMMA YELLAREDDY

D.O.D.: 28-12-1973

Your Life is an inspiration to us,

filled with your memories,

We seek your blessings.

Inserted by: Sons:

Smt. & Sri Kanukula Krishna Reddy

Smt. & Sri Kanukula Janardhan Reddy

Ex-MLC, Telangana Congress Sevak Chairman

All India Congress sevak Chairman

AICC Member

& Kanukula Family Members

Inserted by: Baile Ramesh, Baile Krishna, Baile Janardhan & Family

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SHRADHANJALI

Dr. B. SRINIVAS RAO

S/o. Late Sri B. Papaliah Left for his Heavenly Abode on 18th Dec 2020 Your memories always be with us

May his soul rest in peace.

IN BRIEF

2 KILLED IN SPORTS BIKE MISHAP

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Two persons were killed in a road mishap at Uppal on Sunday evening when their sports bike crashed into a mechanical excavator. The deceased were identified as Naresh, 22, a native of Bhubaneswar; and Ganesh, 20, of Ghatkesar.

"They were speeding on their sports bike towards Uppal from Ramanthapur when they crashed into a JCB near a bakery at Uppal. Both of them were not wearing any protective head gear and succumbed to injuries on the spot," said the police.

The bodies were shifted to the Osmania General Hospital for the post-mortem examination and the Uppal police booked a case to investigate.

CM'S CPRO PRESENTS HIS BOOKS TO KCR

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Chief Minister's Chief Public Relations Officer V. Jwala Narasimha Rao on Sunday presented a copy of the books written by him, 'Telangana District and Land Administration at a Glance' and 'Srimad Bhagawata Kathalu' to Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao at Pragathi Bhavan.

The book on land administration is a compilation of articles written by Narasimha Rao on several platforms, his regular columns in daily newspapers, his personal blog and the media releases he prepared as CPRO to the CM.

'Srimad Bhagawata Kathalu' is a compilation of stories based on Bammerla Pothanna's Maha Bhagavatam. Congratulating Narasimha Rao, the CM said he had written on topics, which were useful to the people.

AP EAMCET OPTION ENTRY FROM TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

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

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

Eamcet convener has said eligible candidates, who have participated in web counselling process, comprising payment of processing fee and certificate verification from October 23 to November 3 will be able to exercise their options. Verification of certificates belonging to candidates, who got status in the web portal as "not eligible", will also be conducted.

Apps firms gave loans without victim asking

Cyberabad cops arrest Chinese national, 2 Indians

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

The cybercrime police of Rachakonda arrested three persons including a Chinese woman from a call centre at Pune, in a harassment case linked to an instant loan-lending app. Police seized 101 laptops, 106 mobile phones and other materials from them.

Police said the Pune-based call centre, the Jiya Liang Infotech Pvt. Ltd, was linked to fraudulent instant loan apps. The arrested were Parshuram Lahu Takve 31, Liang Tian Tian 35 and Sk. Aaqib 20. The police sent a notice to the company under Section 91 of the CrPC, ahead freezing its bank accounts.

The arrests were made following a complaint on November 18 from Uppal resident Bhumana Prasad, who borrowed ₹3,500 from 'My Bank'.

"After repaying the loan within a week, he borrowed ₹4,500 and re-paid the amount. Later, when he checked his bank statement, he found that an ₹26,000 was credited unsolicited from 14 different loan applications."

They charged a high rate of interest of more than 50 per cent without following the RBI rules and regulations. If the loan was not repaid within the due date, they would start harassing the



Liang Tian Tian



Parshuram Lahu Takve



Sk Aaqib

defaulters. The call centres would call the family and friends of the defaulters and harass them, stated the official.

Explaining the modus operandi further, police said that in 2013, Parshuram Lahu Takve married Liang Tian Tian, a Chinese national. "In June this year, Parshuram started the Jiya Liang InfoTech Pvt. Ltd. at the Business Avenue Centre in Koregaon park, Pune. At present, the firm has around 650 employees. They call the defaulters, their relatives, and friends and insist they repay the loan along with the interest immediately."

They also collect personal data, contact details and photos of the borrower at the time of sanctioning the loan.

The company's clients had developed around 16



Debashis Das



Sanjay B.R.



Santhosh Kumar Naik

Mobile phones and laptops seized from the culprits.

Accused Debashis Das, Sanjay B.R. and Santhosh Kumar Naik arrested

Gang-members were taken into custody in Bengaluru and brought to Jangaon

"If the customers failed to pay, the gang would threaten them via its tele-callers. The gang

used to send abusive messages to customers besides labeling them as defaulters. They also spread the messages to the customers' friends and relatives," he said.

Three of the gang-members were taken into custody in Bengaluru and brought to Jangaon. Two laptops, three cell phones and SIM cards were seized from them. A manhunt has been launched for Erick Penglu and Padra Binda Ray.

The commissioner praised the team of Jangaon inspector Malleshwar, cybercrime inspector Janardhan Reddy, cyber SI Ravi Kumar, Sathish, assistant analytical officer Prashanth.

police under the supervision of West Zone DCP Srinivas Reddy.

The gang secured the contact list of the customers through their app. The police started a probe after one Bandaru Srinivas of Jangaon lodged a complaint on December 18. Srinivas borrowed ₹45,000 through the app. The organisers harassed him as he failed to repay the loan.

The CP formed a special team with the Cybercrime and Jangaon

temple town is lost because of this clandestine operation, which the tacit support of political leaders.

An advocate said that the continuance of Sai Kumari in temple service is against the provisions of law as she is married to a Muslim.

Temple authorities, aware of the facts, hid it from public gaze all these years. He wanted to make public whether her marriage was according to Hindu or Muslim customs.

Meanwhile, Razzaq, in a media interaction, said that everyone has the right to serve in a temple and he had not done anything wrong.

Srisailam MLA Chakrapani Reddy caught in the vortex of religious controversy is desperate to get out of it, said a BJP leader. He said that Tirupati and Srisailam are particularly targeted by minorities.

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

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The sanctity of the Hindu

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

The residents of the Secunderabad Cantonment Board have been urging the state government to provide them with drinking water as is being done in the GHMC area. To highlight the disparity with their neighbours, a few residents conducted a dharna at the Karkhana police station to express their displeasure.

Besides, there is another issue. While the SCB procures water from the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWS) at ₹13.60, the GHMC gets water only at ₹7 per unit.

"I live in Threemoorthy Colony which falls under the SCB, but the colony next to us falls under the GHMC. They get water regularly without a hitch. Why are we being deprived of water? This disparity has gone on for long enough," rued Krishna Rao. He said that when Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao had promised 20,000 litres of water free, why are residents of the SCB area



Residents of the Secunderabad Cantonment area stage a protest on Sunday demanding free drinking water from January 1 as the state government had promised to give 20,000 litres free. The protest was organised by the BJP at Kharkhana.

- S. SURENDRA REDDY

being treated this way. The water supply is owned and operated by the water board and the pump houses and other paraphernalia is owned by the SCB. "Despite being charged exorbitant amounts, the hidden costs of sewerage cess and commencement charges are being

claimed by the board. Also, any additional water drawn from a particular tapping point costs us ₹52 per unit. This is far too high for the people of the area to bear," said J. Rama-krishna, former vice president of the SCB. The residents demand that the water supply

rates be on par with the GHMC. "When we are all part of the same city, there mustn't be separate rule or charge for us. For us we are asked to pay a higher amount than what is being paid for in the GHMC, this is unfair," said Radhakrishna, a resident of Vasav Nagar Colony.

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rates be on par with the GHMC. "When we are all part of the same city, there mustn't be separate rule or charge for us. For us we are asked to pay a higher amount than what is being paid for in the GHMC, this is unfair," said Radhakrishna, a resident of Vasav Nagar Colony.

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claimed by the board. Also, any additional water drawn from a particular tapping point costs us ₹52 per unit. This is far too high for the people of the area to bear," said J. Rama

DECCAN Chronicle

28 DECEMBER 2020

Challenge to Vodafone ill-advised, withdraw it

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

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

Months later, the government held Vodafone liable for its failure to deduct tax at source from the payment that it had made to Hutchison. The Bombay high court favoured the government, while the Supreme Court upheld Vodafone's interpretation. However, the United Progressive Alliance government amended the law, empowering officials to levy tax with retrospective effect on any foreign transaction that resulted in direct or indirect transfer of an asset located in India.

The result of the amendment was that Vodafone had overnight become one of the biggest tax defaulters in the country. The legislation attracted harsh criticism inside and outside the country. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the prime Opposition of the day, was the harshest critic of the retrospective taxation, though it did not vote against the amendment in Parliament. In 2018, Arun Jaitley, the finance minister of the day, categorised the retrospective taxation as an erroneous decision.

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

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

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

A step forward, two back

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

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

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

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Faizan
Mustafa

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subhani



Kashmir looks ahead at a winter of discontent



A.S. Dulat

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

FARMERS STRIKE

I do not think there is any point in farmers holding further discussions with the government which is in no mood to repeal the farm laws (*Farmers send draft for talks on December 29*, DC, Dec. 27).

The farmers need to be flexible as the PM had indicated he would consider their just demands. Further, the Opposition ruled governments have passed their own laws. The government should give permission to the agitating farmers to opt for Central or state government rule.

Manik Sathie

Hyderabad

Instead of listening and solving the problems of farmers, the Modi government is unnecessarily blaming the Opposition, giving political colour to the demands of farmers and ignoring their difficulties. Farmers have the right to submit their demands. We hope the government will listen to their problems.

Zakaria Sultan

Hyderabad

CHINA MUST PAY

It is ironic that China is boasting of controlling the pandemic and the Chinese politburo is taking credit for the achieving this extraordinary 'success' forgetting that their initial negligence brought catastrophe on many nations (*Ahead of WHO probe, China hails handling of virus*, DC, Dec. 27).

P.J. David

Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

LS dissolved, polls in Lower House

NEW DELHI, DEC. 27. The fourth Lok Sabha has been dissolved. The nation will elect a new House early in March in all probability.

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

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

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SHORT TAKES
**NITISH GIVES
JD(U) CHIEF
POST TO AIDE**

NAYEER AZAD | DC
PATNA, DEC. 27

Amid strains with alliance partner BJP, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar resigned from the post of JD(U) national president on Sunday and handed over charge to one of his closest aides and a member of the Rajya Sabha, R.C.P Singh.

The decision was taken during the national executive meeting of the JD(U). Mr Singh's elevation was on expected lines since he was actively involved in most of the party's policy decisions including advising Mr Kumar during Bihar Assembly elections.

Mr Singh will now look after the party's affairs, including its dealings with the BJP. His appointment to the party's top post is also crucial from the perspective of upcoming Assembly elections in West Bengal and Assam.

The development comes at a time when the JD(U) is on the backfoot after six of its seven legislators in Arunachal Pradesh quit the party and joined the BJP. The JD(U) has been indirectly referring to it as poaching and saying it is "against the coalition dharma".

**MAHA SEEKS
SSR DEATH
CAUSE FROM CBI**

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 27

Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh on Sunday urged the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to reveal if Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death was a suicide or murder. It has been five months since the investigation was handed over to the CBI and people still don't know if the actor's death was a suicide or murder.

The state minister said this while addressing a press conference in Nagpur.

Rajput was found dead at his residence on June 14 and initially the Mumbai Police had filed an accidental death report and they were probing the case. However, on August 19, the Supreme Court had upheld the transfer of an FIR, lodged by Rajput's father at Patna in Bihar against the actor's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty and others for allegedly abetting his suicide.

Anil Deshmukh said that it has been more than five months since the investigation began but the CBI has not revealed if Sushant Singh Rajput was murdered or died by suicide. He also said, "I request CBI to reveal the findings of the investigation at the earliest."

Deshmukh said he was being questioned by people on what the outcome of the CBI investigation has been so far.

BJP MP snubs Shah for delay in CAA, threatens to resign

Matua community leader questions Covid excuse to delay exercise

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, DEC. 27

Coronavirus. Was there any link between them in Bihar Assembly polls?"

His target was the Union home minister who, during his last state tour a week ago, said, "The CAA rules are yet to be made. Such a big exercise can not be undertaken now because of Covid. When the vaccine drive will get underway, we will definitely give it a thought."

Giving a veiled threat that he would mount pressure on the Centre for the CAA, Thakur indicated that he may quit the BJP, in a stand that appears to spell sign for the saffron party four months ahead of the election.

Thakur, the grandson of Matua matriarch, the late Binapani Devi, added, "If the CAA is not implemented, I will continue to be with the greater community of refugees including the Matuas and Nama-shudras irrespective of where I stand."

Varsha Raut, wife of Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut, for questioning in the PMC Bank money laundering case on December 29, officials said on Sunday.

Varsha Raut has been asked to appear before the federal agency in Mumbai. This is the third summons issued to her after she skipped the earlier two on health grounds, they said. The summons for questioning has been issued to her under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ED wants to question Varsha Raut with regard to "receipt" of some funds that were allegedly siphoned from the bank, official sources claimed. The ED had filed a PMLA case to probe the alleged loan fraud in the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative Bank in October last year against the HDIL, its promoters Rakesh Kumar Wadhawan and his son Sarang Wadhawan, its former chairman Waryam Singh and managing director Joy Thomas. — PTI

TMC 'admits' chit scam in slamming ex-min Adhikari

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 27

Abhishek Banerjee, Diamond Harbour TMC MP and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew, appeared to have scored two self goals on Sunday when he alleged that newly-inducted BJP leader Shubhendu Adhikari had a role in swindling money in the multi-crore Saradha chit fund scam and in the Narada sting operation case.

"An opportunist leader, who has sold his spine after defecting from the TMC, attacked me from his Midnapore rally with a slogan: Tolabai Bhaito! Banerjee said a at a party rally in his Lok Sabha constituency.

Banerjee claimed, "I am neither involved in the Saradha nor in the Narada case. Neither the CBI nor the Enforcement Directorate can do anything to me." Banerjee's attack on Adhikari backfired on the ruling Trinamul as the latter was in Mamata Banerjee's party and came un-

der the central agencies' scanner for his alleged links when the two high-profile cases had unfolded.

In the Saradha case, Adhikari faced questioning by the CBI and ED for his suspected role but he was never arrested or charged with the chit fund company owner Sudipta Sen's reference to him despite the TMC's claims of political vendetta by the BJP against its leaders.

In the Narada case, nearly a dozen TMC leaders including Adhikari was booked and charged with the CBI after they were caught on tape during a sting operation allegedly taking cash.

Centre extends validity of DL, RC

New Delhi, Dec. 27: The union transport ministry on Sunday extended the validity of motor vehicle documents like driving licence (DL), registration certificate (RC) and permits till March 31, 2021, in view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) had earlier issued advisories dated March 30, 2020, June 9, 2020 and August 24, 2020 in connection with extension of validity of documents related to Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989.

"The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has extended the validity of vehicular documents like DLs, RCs, permits etc till March 31, 2021 in the light of need to prevent spread of Covid-19. Ministry has today issued a directory to the states and Union Territory administrations in the regard," a MoRTH statement said. Earlier through various

notifications, it was advised that the validity of fitness, permit (all types), licence, registration or any other concerned document(s) may be treated to be valid till December 31, 2020.

The latest advisory says, "Taking into consideration the need to prevent the spread of Covid-19, it is further advised that the validity of all of the above referred documents may be treated to be valid till March 31, 2021. This covers all documents whose validity has expired since 1st February, 2020 or would expire by March 31, 2021."

Enforcement authorities are advised to treat such documents valid till March 31, 2021, the MoRTH said, adding that "this will help out citizens in availing transport related services, while maintaining social distancing". All the states and union territories have been requested to implement this advisory in letter and spirit so that the citizens." — PTI

**PMC SCAM: ED
TO QUIZ
RAUT'S WIFE**

New Delhi, Dec. 27: The ED has summoned Varsha Raut, wife of Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut, for questioning in the PMC Bank money laundering case on December 29, officials said on Sunday.

Varsha Raut has been asked to appear before the federal agency in Mumbai. This is the third summons issued to her after she skipped the earlier two on health grounds, they said. The summons for questioning has been issued to her under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ED wants to question Varsha Raut with regard to "receipt" of some funds that were allegedly siphoned from the bank, official sources claimed. The ED had filed a PMLA case to probe the alleged loan fraud in the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative Bank in October last year against the HDIL, its promoters Rakesh Kumar Wadhawan and his son Sarang Wadhawan, its former chairman Waryam Singh and managing director Joy Thomas. — PTI

ENSURING ACCESS TO BIGGER OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARMERS

Flagging off of

India's

100th Kisan Rail

from Sangola, Maharashtra to Shalimar, West Bengal

SALIENT FEATURES

• 100th Kisan Rail will cover distance of 2132 km within 40 hours

• Fresh farm produce like pomegranates from Sangola, oranges from Nagpur, musk melon and other produce from Jeur, Belvandi and Kopargaon will be easily transported to regions across eastern & north eastern parts of the country

KISAN RAIL: A GAME CHANGER INITIATIVE FURTHERING FARMERS' PROSPERITY

- Kisan Rail is enabling farmers from various regions to sell agricultural produce to far off markets all across the country
 - 50% subsidy makes transportation of fruits and vegetables cheaper
 - With access to urban markets, farmers are ensured better profit margins
 - Within 3 months, 27 thousand tonnes of agricultural produce has already been transported through Kisan Rail
 - Enroute halts of Kisan Rail have loading and unloading facilities that will especially benefit local produce

by

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister

(Through Video Conferencing)

In the August presence of

Narendra Singh Tomar

Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj and Food Processing Industries, Government of India

Piyush Goyal

Minister of Railways, Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India

28 December, 2020 at 4:30 pm

Join the event live at -

<https://pmindiawebcast.nic.in/>

Use #100thKisanRail to widely spread information about the work done for agricultural development and farmer welfare.

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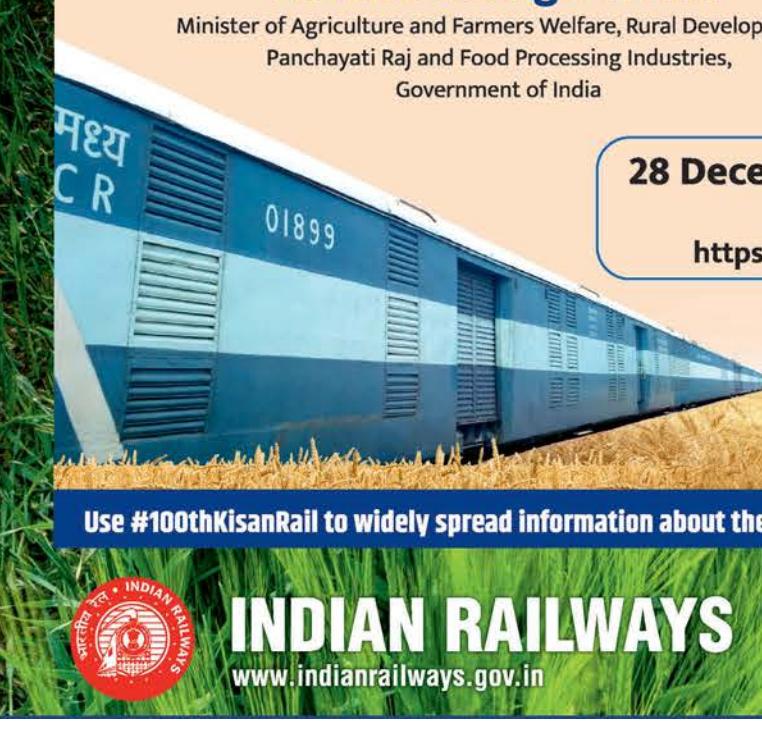
Fadnavis alleges Maha policies aids few realtors

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 27

BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis has written a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray regarding government policies drafted to help the real estate sector.

The opposition leader in Maharashtra Assembly said the state government policies rolled out to help the real estate sector and mitigate the impact caused by Covid-19 pandemic are only helping a few real estate developers to gain. Asking the CM to take remedial steps, Mr Fadnavis said he will file a PIL in the high court if the CM fails to act. In his letter to the chief minister, the BJP leader alleged that on the pretext of reviving the real estate sector, the government is safeguarding the interest of few private people leading to loss of the thousands of crores from the state exchequer. Therefore, the government should immediately give a stay on the policy.

The letter said that in a bid to revive the real estate sector, a committee headed by Deepak Parekh (co-founder of HDFC Ltd.) was formed to suggest measures to revive the ailing real estate sector. "The Parekh committee had recommended few things to the Maharashtra government. But certain selected



SHORT TAKES

SHOPIAN FAKE ENCOUNTER: CASE ON ARMY OFFICER

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

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

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

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

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

FALL IN LINE OR LEAVE, AIADMK TELLS BJP, ALLIES

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 27

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

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

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



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

— PTI

INDIA RECORDS LOWEST COVID CASES IN SIX MONTHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

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

Union health ministry said the country has reported a trend of sustained decrease in the number of active cases and there has been a sharp rise in recoveries, taking the Recovery rate to 95.82 per cent. Officials said 72.37 per cent of the new recovered cases are observed to be concentrated in 10 states and union territories. Kerala has reported the maximum number of single day recoveries with 3,782 newly recovered cases followed by West Bengal (1,861) and Chhattisgarh (1,644).

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

Among the new cases 76.52 per cent are concentrated in 10 states and UTs. Kerala reported the highest daily new cases at 3,527, followed by Maharashtra (2,854).

Delhi, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana that were reporting a very high number of daily cases are now witnessing a low tide with a sharp drop in Covid-19 daily cases.

RAHUL GOES ON FOREIGN TOUR FOR SHORT PERSONAL VISIT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Pick 'Made in India' goods, urges PM

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

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

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

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

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

The "thali bajao (clang plates)" protest was decided upon by the farmers last week.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

farm sector which has been vehemently denied by the Centre.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

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

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— PTI

Lawyer from Punjab commits suicide

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

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

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

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

few became an inspiration for the whole world, when the country felicitated our corona warrior

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

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

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

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

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

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

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niscences of that too."

The "Delhi Chalo" protest by farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana,

protest site near the Delhi border.

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

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and some other states have been protesting at various border points of Delhi against the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, and

the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

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

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

— PTI

has been continuing for more than a month. Thousands of farmers have been camping at the borders of Delhi, demanding that the farm laws, passed in September, be scrapped.

Disparity in income limits for open category, tribal category biggest hurdle**Tribal girl struggles to get overseas scholarship**

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 27

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

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

category is the biggest hurdle for getting the benefit of the scheme for tribal community.

State agriculture minister Dada Bhuse has recommended her name to the tribal minister for the scheme in October 2020, but even that has not helped her.

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

department, the income limit for open category is ₹20 lakh (₹ 20 Lakh).

The disparity between the income limits for open category and tribal community caused a hurdle for the tribal girl in pursuing of higher education in abroad. The girl's family hails from Gadchiroli district which is a remote and naxal affected area. I have completed my BTech (four years of Bachelor of Technology) in Textile. I have applied to North Carolina State University (NCSU) for Master of Science in Textile.

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

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

I am an independent student and I can't afford the expenditure in the said university. With all due respect, my father too cannot afford the expenditure stated by NCSU for a year is approximately \$ 50,000 USD," she said in the letter.

The student also requested the tribal development minister to remove the barrier of income and consider her for this scholarship on basis merit.

Ms Atram also questioned the rationality behind the different yardstick of income for overseas studies for students of open categories and ST categories.

SHORT TAKES
**TURKEY HIT BY
 5.5 MAGNITUDE
 EARTHQUAKE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**EIGHT KILLED IN
 AVALANCHES
 NORTH OF TEHRAN**

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

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

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

State TV reported seven climbers were missing.

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

**THREE KILLED, 3
 WOUNDED IN
 ILLINOIS SHOOTING**

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

A suspect in his 30s was in police custody.

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

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

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

He did not specify whether the shooter had a motive.

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

**2 WOMEN, 3 GIRLS
 FOUND DEAD IN
 ARKANSAS HOME**

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

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

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

EU nations roll out vaccine campaign

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



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

Biden warns over 'devastating' delay in aid package

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

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

ices and paychecks for military personnel at risk," Biden added.

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

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

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

— AFP

96-year-old is first Spaniard vaccinated for Coronavirus

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

She felt "nothing" from the shot, Araceli Rosario Hidalgo Sanchez said with a smile after being injected. With her short white hair, the pensioner living in the Los Olmos retirement home in Guadalajara got up

slowly after pulling on her black jacket and walked off using a frame for support.

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

No cases of Covid-19 have

so far been detected among the staff or residents.

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

— AFP

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

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

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also condemned the "dangerously short-sighted" cycle of throwing cash at outbreaks but doing nothing

to prepare for the next one, in a video message marking Sunday's first International Day of Epidemic Preparedness.

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

"We throw money at an outbreak, and when it's over, we forget about it and

do nothing to prevent the next one. This is dangerously short-sighted, and frankly difficult to understand."

The Global Preparedness Monitoring Board's September 2019 first annual report on world readiness for health emergencies — published a few months before the Coronavirus broke out — said the planet was woefully unprepared for potentially devastating pandemics.

— AFP

Investigators search home in Nashville bomb probe

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

The army said it arrested two Lebanese nationals and six Syrians over a personal dispute... between a number of Lebanese men and Syrian workers," according to a statement.

"The Lebanese men fired bullets in the air and torched the tents of Syrian refugees," it added, without elaborating on the cause of the altercation.

The fire on Saturday night tore through the tented shelters of some 75 families near the town of Bhanine in the north Lebanon Miniyeh region, leaving only a charred wasteland.

The camp's more than 370 residents were forced to flee, according to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, and at least four people were taken to hospital for injuries.

On Sunday, dozens of refugees returned to the remains of the camp to try to salvage anything that might have survived the blaze.

"I came back to check on belongings inside our small tent only to discover that we no longer own anything," said Amira Issa, a 45-year-old mother of five who fled Syria eight years ago. — AFP

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

Troubled Central African Republic goes to elections

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

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

UN peacekeepers and local and Rwandan sol-

diers were patrolling the streets throughout the capital, with armoured vehicles posted outside voting places armed with machine guns, AFP journalists saw.

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

"It's very important for me to be here, as a citizen. I think this vote will change our country, whoever the president will be," teacher Hortense Reine said outside a vot-

ing place in Boganda secondary school in the city's east, where around 30 people were queuing.

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

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

Discovery in Pompeii buried under lava when volcano erupted in 79 AD

2,000-year-old fast food shop unearthed

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

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

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

Archaeologists continue to make discoveries there. The thermopolium —

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

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

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

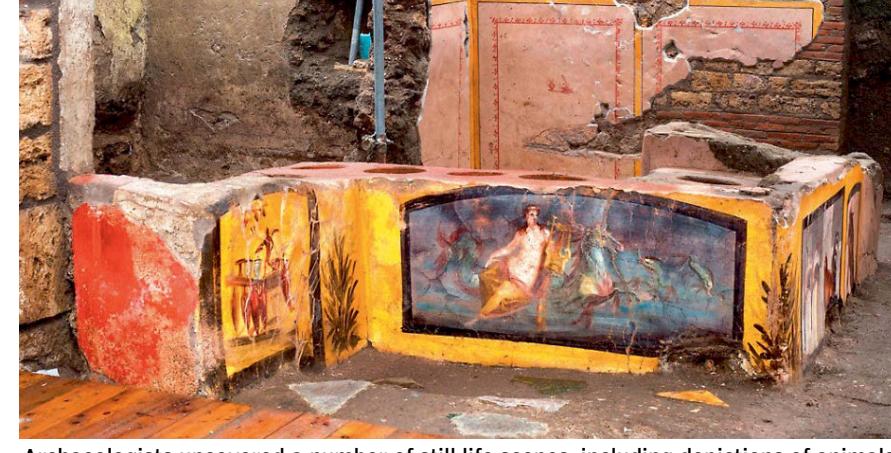
The counter appears to have been closed in a hurry and abandoned by its owners — perhaps as

the first rumblings of the eruption were felt — Massimo Osanna, director general at the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, told Ansa news agency.

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

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

In the latest stage of their work, archaeologists uncovered a number of still life scenes, including depictions of animals



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

— AFP

IN BRIEF

SEVEN KILLED IN KNIFE ATTACK IN CHINA

Beijing, Dec. 27: At least seven people were killed in a knife attack in China's northeast Liaoning province, officials said on Sunday. The suspect has been arrested by the police, state-run CGTN reported.

The incident in Kaiyuan city also left seven people injured, including a police officer who was involved in the arrest of the suspect. The officials confirmed the death of seven people in the attack. The injured have been taken to hospital, but their condition was not immediately known.

Violent crimes are rare in China as compared to many other countries, but there has been a series of knife and axe attacks in recent years. Knife attacks by disgruntled people have been reported from different parts of the country in the past few years. The attackers generally target kindergarten or primary schools or general public to vent their anger.

CHOPPER CRASH IN PAK KILLS 4 ARMY PERSONNEL

Islamabad, Dec. 27: Four Pakistan Army personnel were killed when a military helicopter crashed during a casualty evacuation due to technical reasons in Gilgit-Baltistan, the army said on Sunday.

The chopper crashed in Minimarg area of Astore district on Saturday evening, the army said in a statement. It was transporting the body of a soldier to the military hospital in Skardu.

The pilot, co-pilot and two soldiers were killed in the accident, the statement said, adding that the crash occurred due to technical reasons. Gilgit-Baltistan Information Minister Fatullah Khan has expressed deep sorrow over the tragedy.

GULF TO DISCUSS 'COOPERATION' AHEAD OF SUMMIT

Kuwait City, Dec. 27: Top Gulf Arab officials held a virtual meeting on Sunday to bolster "cooperation" ahead of a summit next month amid efforts to end a rift between a Saudi-led alliance and Qatar.

The foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait took part in the meeting hosted by Manama, while Qatar was represented by its minister of state for foreign affairs.

The participation of Qatar's foreign minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, would have been seen as another sign towards ending the diplomatic dispute.

Saudi Arabia led its allies the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt to cut ties with Qatar in June 2017, saying it was too close to Iran and funding radical Islamist movements — charges Doha staunchly denies.

After severing ties, the countries issued a list of 13 demands for Qatar, including that it shut down its broadcaster Al Jazeera.

WILL RETALIATE AGAINST ANY ATTACK: TURKEY

Tripoli, Dec. 27: Turkey's defence minister said that any attack by eastern Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar on its personnel in the North African country would be met with force.

"A war criminal, murderer Haftar and his supporters must know that they will be seen as a legitimate target in case of any attack on Turkish forces" by his troops, Hulusi Akar said in an address to Turkish units in Tripoli late on Saturday and made available to media on Sunday.

His comments come days after Haftar said his forces would "prepare to drive out the occupier by faith, will and weapons," referring to Turkish troops operating in support of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA).

"If they take such a step, they will be unable to find any place to flee to," Akar said, referring to Haftar's forces.

"Everyone should come to their senses." Turkish support for the GNA earlier this year helped repel a 14-month offensive against the capital by Haftar, who is backed by Russia, Egypt and United Arab Emirates. The two sides struck a ceasefire agreement in October, setting the stage for elections at the end of next year.

Storm Bella strikes

High waves and strong winds hit The Four Lighthouse (Lighthouse of the Four d'Argenton) at Porspoder, western France on Sunday, as Storm Bella strikes the coast of Brittany. — AFP

Chinese officials arrive in Nepal to 'take stock'**Guo Yezhou to hold high-level talks during his 4-day stay**

ALTHOUGH NO specific details about the agenda of the visit are available, the four-member delegation, led by Vice Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Guo Yezhou, will hold high-level talks during its four-day stay in the country, according to highly placed sources.

The Chinese embassy here and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are tight-lipped about Guo's visit. His visit is aimed at "taking stock of Nepal's evolving political situation after the dissolution of the House of Representatives and subsequent split in the ruling Nepal Communist Party."

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Guo is expected to meet President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli, former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and Madhav Kumar Nepal, who has replaced Oli as chairman of the Prachanda-led faction of the party, sources said.

China is not happy with the split in the largest communist party of Nepal, according to

sources. Guo, who personally knows all senior NCP leaders, will make efforts to patch up differences between the two warring factions of the ruling party — one led by Oli and the other led by Prachanda — during his four day stay in Nepal, according to the Kathmandu Post.

Earlier, Gou travelled to Kathmandu in February 2018 when Oli-led CPN-UML and Prachanda-led NCP (Maoist Centre) were all set to merge and form a unified communist party following victory of their alliance in the 2017 general elections. Later in May, 2018, the two communist parties merged and formed a new party named Nepal Communist Party, the paper said.

Gou will assess the situation inside the ruling party and will encourage both factions of the NCP to seek some kind of common ground for party unity, the Post said, quoting party leaders. He will communicate the message

of Chinese leadership, including that of President Xi Jinping's, to the NCP leadership, a ruling party leader said.

"Besides this, the Chinese side has not communicated to us anything about the visit," the leader told the Post on condition of anonymity. China has carefully chosen and sent Gou at a time when unity inside our party is shaken, a Standing Committee member said.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis last Sunday after Prime Minister Oli, known for his pro-Beijing leanings, in a surprise move, recommended dissolving the 275-member House, amidst a tussle for power with Prachanda.

Acting on the prime minister's recommendation, President Bhandari dissolved the House the same day and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10, sparking protests from a large section of the NCP led by Prachanda, also a co-chair of the ruling party. — PTI

Next round of Afghan peace talks to take place in Doha

Doha," he tweeted, adding that many of the countries that had earlier volunteered to host the talks withdrew their offers because of Covid-19.

In a separate statement, the presidency tweeted that Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the council, held a meeting on Sunday. The two "discussed the venue for the next round of talks" after which Ghani announced the government's support for a second stage of talks with the Taliban, the presidency said.

Earlier in December, negotiators from both sides decided to take a break after months of often frustrating meetings which were bogged down by disputes on the basic framework of discussions and religious

interpretations. Prior to going on the break, negotiators finally announced they were ready to proceed on preliminary lists of agenda items when talks resumed on January 5.

But Ghani and some other top Afghan officials immediately called for the next round of meetings to be held in Afghanistan.

"It is not appropriate to insist on holding talks in luxurious hotels. It is necessary that the people see how the talks happen, which issues are focused on and why," Ghani said soon after the break in talks was announced.

The Taliban did not comment on Ghani's call, but they have in the past always refused to hold the negotiations in Afghanistan. — AFP

Ski time

The ski jump area of Oberstdorf, southern Germany, is pictured on Sunday on the eve of the Four Hills Ski Jumping competition (Vierschanzentournee). The first event of the Four Hills Ski jumping competition takes place in Oberstdorf, before the tournament continues in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, (Germany), in Innsbruck (Austria) and in Bischofshofen (Austria). — AFP

Long queues of customers stand in scorching Australian summer sun to replace lost biz**Oz lobster sector claws back trade after China ban**

A fisherman Joe Paratore displaying his catch of western rock lobsters aboard his boat to customers at the Fishing Boat Harbour that features a bronze statue of a lobster fisherman in Fremantle in Western Australia. — AFP file

politically charged "shadow trade war".

"It has affected us drastrically," third-generation fisherman Fedele Camarda said. "Our

income has been reduced considerably." Relations between Canberra and Beijing have been in freefall for most of this year, with China hitting out at a list of issues including Australia's call for an inquiry into the origins of Covid-19 and a ban on Huawei's participation in the nation's 5G network.

The row has seen more than a dozen Australian sectors hit with import levies, with the barley and wine industries particularly badly hit. Exporters stand to lose as much as US\$2.4 billion worth of sales.

So far, the broader Australian economy has weathered the storm. The economy returned to growth in the last quarter, exiting a Covid-induced recession.

But individual businesses have been forced to find new customers and markets overnight to avoid red ink, job cuts or bankruptcy.

Some barley farmers have planted other grains or re-routed shipments to the Middle East, and wine-makers have focused on selling more in Japan.

But the lobster industry is looking closer to home.

In a bid to help the ravaged sector, local authorities recently changed legislation to allow commercial rock lobster fishers to sell large quantities from the back of their boats during December and January.

On one muggy pre-Christmas weekday, sweat-drenched customers bought the world-renowned western rock lobster direct on the quay for US\$34 a kilogram — a 36 percent markdown.

"That's just enough to break even," Camarda said. "But we have been selling out almost every day. We are taking pre-orders as people want it for Christmas."

Ensuring they were set up to manage orders and make the product available to the public had been "a crash course," he admitted. — AFP

Sindh Govt not to release 4 accused in Pearl murder

Islamabad, Dec. 27: Pakistan's Sindh province government has decided not to release British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, accused of kidnapping and murdering US journalist Daniel Pearl, in view of a Supreme Court order, according to a media report.

In a surprise move, a two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court on Thursday directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under "any sort of detention" and declared all notifications of the Sindh government related to their detention "null and void".

The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal". The court, however, had clarified that the accused should not be released if there is a Supreme Court restraining order regarding their detention.

The sources said the Sindh government will also challenge the SHC's December 24 order in the apex court on Monday. In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment.

The court also acquitted his three aides who were serving life terms in the case — almost two decades after they were found guilty and jailed.

A three-judge apex court bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam, which is hearing the appeal by the Sindh government and the family of the slain journalist against the acquittal of Sheikh by the Sindh High Court in April, on September 28 noted that till the next date of hearing, the accused shall not be released.

Citing its sources, the Express Tribune newspaper said that the provincial government will not release these men in view of the Supreme Court's order also clarified that

MAN HURT AS TEENS THROW BRICKS AT CARS

Worcester (US), Dec. 27: Four teenagers threw bricks at moving cars in Massachusetts, severely injuring one man who was struck in the face by a brick that went through his windshield, police said.

The four teenagers — two males ages 15 and 16 and two females also ages 15 and 16 — threw a total of 19 bricks on Saturday in Worcester, police said.

A 37-year-old man was taken to a hospital after a brick went through his windshield. "It caused very serious, permanent injuries," police said.

Boko Haram has stepped up attacks in recent days.

In a video it released on Saturday the group claimed responsibility for a Christmas Eve attack on a village in which 11 people died as well as the kidnapping of a priest who appeared in the video.

The attack forced residents to flee into the bush and three killed near the border with Cameroon.

— AFP

The teenagers are facing charges including aggravated assault and battery by means of a dangerous weapon. The 16-year-old male was also charged with carrying a dangerous weapon after police said he was caught with brass knuckles, Masslive.com reported.

— AP

quick BITES

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

*As of 9:30 PM IST, Friday

No going back on privatisation of BPCL, Air India

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

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



India registered a growth of 3.5 per cent in crude steel production at 9,245 million tonne (MT) in November, according to World Steel Association. The country had produced 8,933 MT crude steel during the same month last year, the global industry body said in its latest report. According to the worldsteel data, China registered eight per cent year-on-year growth in steel output at 87,660 MT during November.

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

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

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

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

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Centre for biz-friendly laws

Directs ministries and states to reduce compliance burden on businesses

New Delhi, Dec. 27:

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

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

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

LEGAL MAZE

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

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

"So we are looking at wherever there is any section where criminal prose-

cution is involved, can it be relooked. Whether it is necessary to have criminal punishments or civil punishment will also do like penalty or something else," the official added.

According to a recent

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

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

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

Chief Secretaries of all

the states have been advised to identify burdensome regulations and ways to reduce that burden for businesses.

The ministries and states would have to examine central laws which can be repealed or subsumed or replaced. Issues which are being looked into for the exercise include removing licence renewals or increasing its periodicity, risk-based inspection system, simplification of number of filings, removal or rationalisation of maintaining registers or records, and minimising or eliminating number of display requirements for licences.

Panel cites PM to reject India's Cairn tax claim



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

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

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

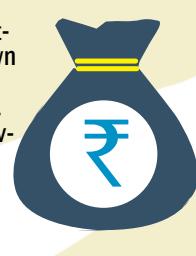
This view was confirmed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, 2016. The Prime Minister was quoted in the *Financial Times* as saying that the government "will not resort to retrospective taxation; we are making our tax regime transparent, stable and predictable", the tribunal said.

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

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

BLOCKBUSTER YEAR FOR MUTUAL FUNDS

- Mutual funds have emerged as one of the success stories in the Covid-ravaged year of 2020 by attracting more funds and more investors.
- Asset under management grew by 13 per cent to an all-time high of Rs 30 lakh crore in 2020 by the end of November. AUM was ₹26.54 lakh crore at the end of December 2019.
- Robust inflows in fixed income schemes helped mutual funds add a staggering ₹3.5 lakh crore to their asset base.
- The investor count is estimated to have grown by over 65 lakh during the year. This was, however, way below than 99 lakh folios added in the entire 2019.
- The year 2020 will mark the eighth consecutive yearly rise in the industry AUM after a drop for two preceding years.



- Investors are getting inclined towards debt mutual funds due to low-interest rates in fixed deposits.

Investment in safe haven doubles in pandemic year

SANGEETHA G | DC

CHENNAI, DEC. 27

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

against 1,064 tonnes in 2019. This was the lowest jewellery demand in the past several years.

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

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

This convergence of rural-urban inflation supports the relevance of one inflation target as nominal anchor at the national level, said the article prepared by Binod B. Bhoi, Himani Shekhar and IpsitaPadhi, Department of Economic and Policy Research, RBI. "Rural urban inflation dynamics in India reveals close co-movement, with episodic divergences driven by different components food, fuel or ex-food and fuel which do not persist long," it said.

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

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

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

The RBI said the views expressed in the article

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

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

RBI paper roots for one inflation metric

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

This convergence of rural-urban inflation supports the relevance of one inflation target as nominal anchor at the national level, said the article prepared by Binod B. Bhoi, Himani Shekhar and IpsitaPadhi, Department of Economic and Policy Research, RBI. "Rural urban inflation dynamics in India reveals close co-movement, with episodic divergences driven by different components food, fuel or ex-food and fuel which do not persist long," it said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Broadband firms want fair price for spectrum

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

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

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

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

FUTURE | FORWARD Morgan Stanley says 2021 likely to favour small and midcap firms

Market outlook hinges on five factors in 2021



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

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

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

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

tive and could outperform large caps in the next year.

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

OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

The burden of proof is hers alone

Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors

CAST: Kirti Kulhari, Pankaj Tripathi, Jishnu Sengupta, Adrija Sinha, Anupriya Goenka, Mita Vashisht, Ashish Vidyarthi, Deepi Naval, Khushboo Atre, Kalyanee Mulay, Shilpa Shukla

DIRECTOR: Rohan Sippy and Arjun Mukherjee

STREAMING ON: Disney+ Hotstar

RATING: ★★★

SUPARNA SHARMA

Murder is a crime against the Union of India and it is designed to rise to defend itself.

Marital sexual abuse is not a crime. Not in the eyes of the Union of India. It is trained not to react.

Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors is an eight-part series that conducts the forensic examination of our *purush-pradhan samaaj* and some of its institutions while it investigates a murder.

As the series goes about interrogating the accused, digs into the actions and personality of the victim, it lays bare the most horrific abuse that goes on in the privacy of homes, behind bedroom doors, where nightly assaults leave no scars.

Bikram Chandra (Jishnu Sengupta) is a well-regarded, well-heeled lawyer who fights the cases of the dispossessed. He is also a devoted husband to Anu Chandra (Kirti Kulhari) who is a quiet, even strange sort. She's forgetful, nervous, in constant need of reminders and calming pills.

Outwardly it seems like a straight-

forward crime involving a husband, a wife and an eyewitness.

But the series, sharply tuned to catch overt misogyny and micro sexism of the police force, the legal system and the family, takes us into confidence right at the beginning. It shows us the obsessive, controlling actions of one and the fear-stricken jitters of another, thus casting us in the role of an anxious juror who is the keeper of a secret. But things are kept suitably ambiguous, everything is not made clear — his actions and hers, their motivations. This adds an element of desperate urgency for us to get to the truth.

Like us, Bikram and Anu's 13-year-old daughter Rhea (Adrija Sinha), an eyewitness to what happened that night and on several other nights, knows some things for sure but is confused about others.

Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors is in slow-burn mode. While it keeps its main focus on unravelling what happened, it spends a considerable amount of time on the tangents that spring from this one crime, and the tributaries that join it.

After the murder is reported and the wheels of the criminal justice system start to move, an ecosystem begins to take shape for several to feed off and benefit from.

Lawyers are either out to earn some money or to bolster their reputation while restoring the balance of patriarchy and earn kudos from brother lawyers.

Cops want to earn brownie points or make money.

Jail inmates need a friend or a foe. Family members and friends pick sides.

This entire ecosystem of criminal justice is pivoted on one inherent belief — of man's innate goodness. Running parallel to this is the belief that women are evil.

And

if they prove that they are not, then they are either wrong, misguided or mad.

Thus, the

system is designed to give the man the benefit of the doubt and make the woman carry the burden of proof, even when she is the victim.

Thankfully, *Criminal Justice* is not simple minded. Everything is layered here, everyone carries patches of grey. There is no innocent, blemish-free victim here.

There's the accused who doesn't speak, not even in her own defence, and like her lawyers Madhav Mishra (Pankaj Tripathi), Nikhat Hussain (Anupriya Goenka) — her silence haunts us, especially because we know what happened. And then we are told that she is flawed.

Criminal Justice challenges us, makes us struggle to decide which side we are on even as we watch active misogyny at play that taints everything, from evidence collection and interrogation to what gets asked and how it gets presented in the media. We see whose character the system is interested in "exposing" and whose character it would rather not discuss.

The show ventures behind several closed doors, including those of several bedrooms, the jail and the chambers of powerful lawyers. Through three couples — cops Gauri (Kalyanee Mulay) and Pradhan (Ajeet Singh Palawat), and advocate Madhav and his adorable wife Ratna (Khushboo Atre), Nikhat's amma and abbu — we see varying degrees of sexism.

But it's the marriage of the Chandras that shows us, in disturbing detail, how marital abuse works. How the perfect son, brother, lawyer, husband exorcises all his demons and complexes when bedroom doors are shut. How fine that crack between words and actions is.

"I love you, I will take care of you." *Criminal Justice* shows how these sweet, simple words get weaponised, disappointment, disapproval and

anger is used to cover abuse, and a woman's belief in herself, her abilities is shaken to the core, so much so that till the very end she thinks she deserved it.

The second season of *Criminal Justice*, which is based almost verbatim on the 2009 BBC series, carries along a few worthies from the first season — advocates Madhav Mishra, Nikhat Hussain (Anupriya Goenka), and Mandira Mathur (Mita Vashisht), the high-powered corporate lawyer.

That is partly because that's how it was in the BBC series but also because Pankaj Tripathi now has the power to make us smile everytime he is on screen. Here, however, he takes a courteous step back, letting the women around him shine.

Anupriya Goenka is efficient and with Khushboo Atre, who plays his adorable wife, insistent on initiating conjugal ties, is very good. Kirti Kulhari's silent, stoic but also quaking and crying performance is the series' centrepiece. She deserves awards just for the litres of tears she has shed.

Iti Vashisht has always had a powerful presence on screen. Though here she sometimes projects more than is required, as if she can't do light touch, she makes her presence felt as the mover-shaker. Matching her heavy footprint is the male lawyer she recruits, played by Ashish Vidyarthi. Ajeet Singh Palawat, who plays the cop Pradhan, is excellent. Deepi Naval brings a lot of class and manages to anchor this gritty crime-court drama.

Jishnu Sengupta has very few scenes and yet his presence lingers throughout. Much like the insidiousness of sexual abuse, long after a controlling partner is gone, his noose-like, suffocating grip remains.



An entertaining meta experience

AK vs AK

CAST: Anil Kapoor, Anurag Kashyap, Yogita Bihani, Sonam Kapoor, Harshvardhan Kapoor

DIRECTOR: Vikramaditya Motwane

STREAMING ON: Netflix

RATING: ★★★

SUPARNA SHARMA

I have always worried, rather needlessly up until now, at having to use the word "meta". I have always sensed a distinctive pretentiousness to it and despite looking up its meaning a hundred times, it has never sat well with me.

Meta means being self-referential, having and showing explicit awareness of oneself. And there really is no other way to describe *AK vs AK* except as a major meta experience and experiment.

Thankfully, unlike the word, the film is not just hugely entertaining but is also a sharp commentary on our current voyeuristic state of being.

In *AK vs AK*, actor Anil Kapoor and director Anurag Kashyap are playing themselves, their "characters" generously and

wickedly embellished by their real-life professional glories and glitches, as well as their personality traits and reputations.

Kashyap is a director who is riding a high after some critically acclaimed films and moves around with a camera constantly filming him.

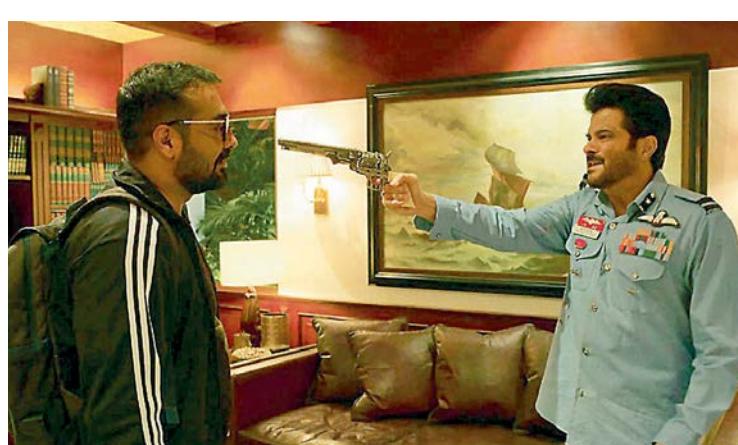
One Yogita is shooting a film school documentary on the best of Indian cinema and the first episode is on him. "Mere baad sab gobbar hai," he tells Anil Kapoor who is telling him that he is keen to work with him.

But Kashyap still cradles a 17-year-old grouse and reminds Kapoor how her turned down his dream project. And now, he tells Kapoor, "I have now moved on. And in any case, you are no longer hero material. You are playing grandfather in Dil Dhadkne Do." He says all this while texting. He's probably in the midst of another Twitter spat.

This being the mood before the two appear before an audience for a panel discussion, it takes just a few more insults and a glass of water to bring the two to a head-on collision.

A full-blown fight ensues and the industry takes sides. Anil Kapoor the star emerges as the winner and Kashyap sinks. And then he plots.

Kashyap barges into Anil Kapoor's set one day and then into his vanity van with the camera



lady in tow saying he is shooting a hostage thriller and Kapoor now has to look for his daughter, Sonam, who has been kidnapped.

He facetumes a hooded man who

lady in tow saying he is shooting a hostage thriller and Kapoor now has to look for his daughter, Sonam, who has been kidnapped.

Kashyap insists that Kapoor adhere to his rules if he wants to see his daughter alive, and that he has to find her by sunrise.

No cops, no outsiders, camera won't be switched off, all calls have to be on speaker mode and it's 14 hours to sunrise.

What follows are sequences that showcase how powerful and insidious real life is — even when an actor wants to shed it, it won't

leave them.

Some of these scenes, like the one in a police station, are funny, while others, where Kapoor is asked to dance for a bit of information, are scathing.

The idea for *AK vs AK* and to pull off its script required both — megalomania and humility. So, perhaps, it is appropriate that it's written by Anurag Kashyap. The writing is sharp, political, funny and the jokes are often on Kashyap himself.

While the dizzy, hand-held camera gives a reality *waali* feeling to *AK vs AK*, two interesting things happen simultaneously in the film — one

is entertainment that draws all its power, jokes and insults from the real lives of these two Bollywood personalities, and the other is us, the viewer, cringing at the gleeful voyeurism of people who don't see the reality and trauma of Kapoor, but treat it as an act, a performance.

The film recruits most of Anil Kapoor's family members and some of Kashyap's, but sometimes it is too made-up. This is because while the characters are real, Kapoor and Kashyap's silly fight, rivalry is not. It is not like, say, watching Rekha and Jaya fight over Amitabh Bachchan in *Silsila*.

There is a fakeness to it. And that is why, for a while in the middle, the film, which is mostly *fatu* fun, becomes a bit tedious and dull. But then a chase is thrown in, followed by a twist.

AK vs AK is a clever plot executed very well by director Vikramaditya Motwane and can be put down as a fun milestone of lockdown creativity.

Both Anurag and Anil Kapoor are very good and convincing.

While Kashyap exudes a certain creepy vibe laced with arrogance, Kapoor again reminds us of how good he is. While he is obviously acting, he has to swing between "acting" and "reality", or be meta within meta. That requires swag. And he still has it.

In 'Copperfield,' Iannucci brings Dickens to life

JAKE COYLE

It's not hard to draw a straight line from Charles Dickens to Armando Iannucci. In each there's a passion for human frailty and absurdity, and, above all, a richness of people. Nobody filled pages with a vivid cast of characters like Dickens, so who better to take a shot at "David Copperfield" than the man behind the teaming ensembles of "Veep," "In the Loop" and "The Death of Stalin"?

In his third film as director, following his farce of bumbling and bloody Kremlin power struggles, Iannucci has turned to Dickens' most quintessential and autobiographical novel with the same zeal he previously reserved for political parody.

"The Personal History of David Copperfield" is one of the more lively, colorful and whimsical Victorian costume dramas you're likely to see. It's a movie flowing with fresh air; which isn't something normally said of adaptations of 700-something-page books.

Iannucci, famed for his improvisational style and expletive-laden barbs, clearly finds in Dickens a writer simpatico in fondness for language and taste for multitudes. In many ways, they make a good match, with Iannucci's more anarchic, free-wheeling style animating the wit and idiosyncrasies of Dickens' tome.

And just as in the absurdly deep bench of "Veep," casting has made a difference. Dev Patel winningly plays Copperfield, once out of childhood (as a boy, he's played by compelling youngsters Jairaj Varsani and Ranveer Jaiswal), with wide-eyed wonder, always alive to the world around him, if generally

rather mystified by it. Still, the film belongs largely to the overall cast, including Tilda Swinton, as David's aunt Betsey Trotwood; Hugh Laurie as the mentally ill, King Charles I-obsessed Mr. Dick; Peter Capaldi as the creditor-evading Wilkins Micawber; Rosalind Eleazar as the romantic interest Agnes Wickfield; Benedict Wong as the wine-swilling Mr. Wickfield; Ben Whishaw as the plotting Uriah Heep.

The performers, a distinctly multicultural cast, add considerably to the vibrancy of the film, collectively making a fairly irrefutable argument for colorblind casting, for anyone who needs one.

But while "The Personal History of David Copperfield" keeps a restless, brisk pace as it rushes through Copperfield's life, Iannucci and his co-writer Simon Blackwell arrange the film in such distinct chapters that the movie feels more like a litany of scenes than the dramatic evolution of a young man. Some sections are better than others. The episode with Laurie and Swinton at their country home, flying kites and chasing away donkeys, is so good that you want a whole film of them.

Premiering in theaters and on HBO Max in North America, "Wonder Woman 1984" will close out a year largely absent of superheroes in a release plan that has upended the film industry. It's a very big film heading primarily to the small screen, at a time when the pandemic has made the escapist, popcorn-eating moviegoer that superhero movies are made for impossible, or nearly so. That makes "Wonder Woman 1984" a nostalgia act in more ways than one.

—AP

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SHORT TAKES

Murray gets Oz Open wild card

Paris: Former world number one Andy Murray has been handed a wild card for February's delayed Australian Open, pushed back three weeks as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Murray, 33, is a five-time runner-up in Melbourne but feared his last match at the tournament in 2019 would mark the end of his career due to chronic hip pain.

The injury pushed him to the brink of retirement but the three-time Grand Slam champion is battling to extend his career having undergone two hip surgeries.

The Scot's ranking of 122 is too low to qualify directly for the Australian Open main draw, which starts on February 8, and he has also accepted a wild card to the Delray Beach event early next month.

Murray played just seven tour-level matches this year as he returned to action in August following a lingering pelvic injury and the suspension of the tennis season.

— AFP

Bihar groups pick 2 teams for T20s

New Delhi: The controversy ridden Bihar Cricket Association (BCA) found itself in a new mess after warring factions led by president Rakesh Tiwary and secretary Sanjay Kumar released separate squads for upcoming Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament, starting January 10.

It is understood that BCCI brass is aware of the situation and a decision is expected in the next couple of days as to which among the two teams will be officially allowed to represent Bihar in the National T20 meet.

Bihar CA which has been in administrative mess for the longest time saw president Rakesh Tiwary's faction release a 20 member squad led by Ashutosh Aram while secretary Sanjay Kumar's camp also released a team that has Keshav Kumar as captain.

There are no common players in both squads. Interestingly, original IPL petitioner Aditya Verma's son Lakhan Raja has been named vice-captain of the team sent by secretary's faction.

When president Tiwary was asked about two teams, he said: "This is a non-issue. The BCCI provided us with ODMS software password which is used for registration of players. 30 rooms are booked by BCCI in Chennai bid bubble as per list sent by us. The secretary's team is a fake one." — PTI

Namita bags Ekalabya award

Bhubaneswar: India women's hockey team player Namita Toppo was on Sunday conferred with the prestigious 'Ekalabya Puraskar' for her contribution to the game.

Toppo was honoured for her performance from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2020 at both national and international levels. Complying with all Covid-19 restrictions, Toppo was presented with citation, trophy and Rs 5 lakh cash in a simple programme here.

This apart, weightlifter Sneha Soren and badminton player Rutaparna Panda were also honoured with a citation and ₹50,000 cash prize each.

The award instituted by IMPaCT, managed by IMFA, the leading Ferro Alloys producer in the country, in the year 1993 is given to encourage young sports talents of the state. — PTI

SOP to conduct sporting events

New Delhi: Eying resumption of sporting events in the coming months, the Sports Ministry has issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which allow 50 per cent attendance in venues while prescribing formation of Covid-19 Task Force by organisers of each competition.

The circular issued by the Sports Ministry on Saturday stated that the guidelines were formulated in consultation with all the stakeholders and the "competitions should be conducted strictly in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs."

"A Covid Task Force shall be constituted for each sporting competition by the organising committee to guide and monitor all athletes and Athlete Support Personnel (ASPs). This Task Force shall be responsible for overall implementation of protocols outlined in this SOP and other direction issued by the MHA and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare from time to time," the circular stated.

— PTI

City storm Castle

Torres hero in Manchester win; Arsenal bounce back

London, Dec. 27: Arsenal eased fears of being dragged into a relegation battle with a stunning 3-1 win over Chelsea on Saturday in Premier League.

Meanwhile, Everton moved into second place, two points behind leaders Liverpool with a 1-0 win at Sheffield United, while Manchester City climbed to fifth place after beating Newcastle 2-0.

Liverpool will go five points clear of Everton if they beat struggling West Brom on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta led Arsenal to win the FA Cup the last time they faced Chelsea in August, but less than five months on the Spaniard was under intense pressure after a run of one win in 10 league games.

Arteta had bemoaned his side's fortune in recent weeks, but the Gunners' luck turned on a night when he gave youngsters Gabriel Martinelli and Emile Smith Rowe the chance to shine in the absence of more experienced figures such as David Luiz, Willian and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

"It's a really big win for us," said Arteta.

"Hopefully it is going to be a turning point and elevate the level of confidence in the team," he added.

Kieran Tierney won a soft penalty for a push by Reece James and Alexandre Lacazette slotted home the spot-kick to open the scoring on 34 minutes.

Granit Xhaka then answered his critics after being stupidly sent off in a 1-0 defeat by Burnley earlier this month with a brilliant free-kick to double Arsenal's lead just before half-time.

A third consecutive away loss for Chelsea further damages their chances of competing for the title and there was no way back for Frank Lampard's men once Bukayo Saka chipped in off the inside of the post 11 minutes after the



Arsenal's Spanish defender Pablo Mari (right) and Chelsea's English striker Tammy Abraham jump for the ball during their English Premier League football match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Saturday. — AFP

EVERTON SHOCK SHEFFIELD 1-0

At Bramall Lane, Gylfi Sigurdsson killed off the bottom of the table Blades on 80 minutes with a clinical finish.

That sealed Everton's fourth successive league

win and set up a significant clash with

Manchester City on

Monday.

City extended their unbeaten league run to six matches with a comfortable success at the Etihad Stadium.

Ilkay Gundogan put Pep Guardiola's side ahead in the 14th minute with a close-range finish from Raheem Sterling's pass.

City doubled their lead in the 55th minute after Newcastle's Miguel Almiron gave the ball away just outside his own area.

Despite a desperate attempt to clear by

Federico Fernandez, the ball rolled straight to Ferran Torres and the Spanish winger fired home.

"That is the tempo we need to play," Guardiola said.

"There are weird results for everyone this season. You have to be calm in the good and the bad moments," he further added.

Aston Villa are another unlikely challenger for the top four as they eased past Crystal Palace 3-0 despite playing the full

second half a man down after Tyrone Mings' red card.

Bertrand Traore gave Villa the perfect start but Mings made his teammates work hard for the win when he was sent off for two clashes with Wilfried Zaha.

Ignoring that setback, Kortney Hause and Anwar El Ghazi wrapped up the points for Villa.

Fulham edged to within a point of safety with a 0-0 draw at home with Southampton.

— AFP

HAFEEZ BLAMES FLIGHTS FOR PAK VIRUS

Karachi, Dec. 27: Senior batsman Muhammad Hafeez says a lot of Pakistan players contracted Coronavirus in New Zealand because they travelled in commercial flights where health safety measures were lax in economy class.

Ten players tested positive for the virus on arrival in Christchurch after a nearly 24-hour journey and it led to the New Zealand health authorities ensuring the Pakistani squad spent 14-days in quarantine, something which Hafeez didn't like in his interview to a television channel.

"I think the players contracted

the virus on the commercial flight since some of them had to travel in economy class where social distancing precautions were lax and our players got exposed," Hafeez said after returning home from New Zealand.

The Pakistan Cricket Board, which was criticised for sending players on a commercial flight to Auckland, said it was not cost effective to send the entire 53 member contingent on a chartered flight.

Earlier, the Pakistani players had travelled to England in the summer on a chartered flight because of the Covid-19 situation but the costs were borne by the

England Cricket Board.

Hafeez also lamented the treatment given to the Pakistani players and officials in New Zealand. "True we are supposed to be ambassadors of the country but I don't think we were treated like that in New Zealand. The attitude towards us was not right and we were treated like prisoners."

Hafeez said the two-weeks spent in quarantine was like time spent in jail for the players and officials. "It was not easy for us to prepare for the T20 matches after spending time in jail conditions and we had just days before the first match." — PTI

SWANSEA CLIMB TO SECOND SPOT

London, Dec. 27: Swansea moved into second place in the Championship with a 2-0 victory at struggling QPR, while new Watford manager Xisco Munoz made a winning start against leaders Norwich on Saturday.

Goals from Andre Ayew and Jamal Lowe lifted Steve Cooper's Swansea into the automatic promotion places.

Watford are up to fifth place after beating Norwich 1-0.

— AFP

Momota back with a bang after crash



Japan's badminton world number one Kento Momota plays a shot during the men's singles final match against Kanta Tsuneyama at the All-Japan National Championships in Tokyo on Sunday. — AFP

He admitted to feeling nervous as he returned to competition this week in Tokyo, and he was pushed to the limit by Tsuneyama, who took him to 16-16 in the final game only to clinch victory with a point.

"I was too cautious," said Momota, who also had to come from a game down in the quarter-finals.

"Before, my game was about using everything I'd built up over time, and my results gave me the confidence to do that."

"This week, I hadn't played for a long time so I was very anxious going into each match. But I think my game will start to return now that I've won this title," he added.

Momota is one of Japan's brightest hopes for a gold medal on home soil at the Coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Games next year.

Momota won a record-breaking 11 titles last year, and he is confident of adding more after tasting success this week in Tokyo.

"I'm 70 percent relieved and 30 percent happy. I'm known as world number one Momota, so I feel that I'm not allowed to lose."

"It wasn't easy for me to get the number one ranking. It's because of my experience and ability, and I really hate to lose."

"That pride helps me but there is also pressure, and I want to keep doing more. If I can, I want to get back to training tomorrow," he added.

— AFP

McCollum rocks, Port blaze a trail

Los Angeles, Dec. 27: Portland's CJ McCollum drained the game-winning three-pointer with 6.9 seconds left in overtime as the Trail Blazers edged James Harden and short-handed Houston 128-126 in the Rockets' belated NBA season opener on Saturday.

McCollum scored 44 points, with a career-high nine three-pointers, and Damian Lillard added 32 as the Trail Blazers withstood a 44-point, 17-assist performance by Harden.

Center Christian Wood added 31 points for the Rockets, who had just nine players in uniform — one above the NBA minimum of eight — after two players tested positive for Covid-19 and four more were listed as unavailable due to "health and safety protocols" after being declared close contacts of those with the virus.

The Rockets' scheduled season opener against Oklahoma City had been postponed when they could not field eight players.

Harden was among those unavailable on Wednesday after he was deemed to have violated NBA anti-Covid measures that ban players from attending indoor gatherings of more than 15 people.

He was fined \$50,000, in the latest instalment of the pre-season drama surrounding Harden, who turned up late to training camp amid reports he has demanded to be traded.

The three-time — and reigning — NBA scoring champion played more than 43 minutes. He connected on 12 of 22 shots from the field, including

● **CJ McCollum scored the most points (44) as Trail Blazers got past Houston Rockets 128-126 in a tight fought match.**

● **In another game, Cleveland Cavaliers rode on Collin Sexton's 32 points to get better of Detroit Pistons 128-119.**

six three-pointers.

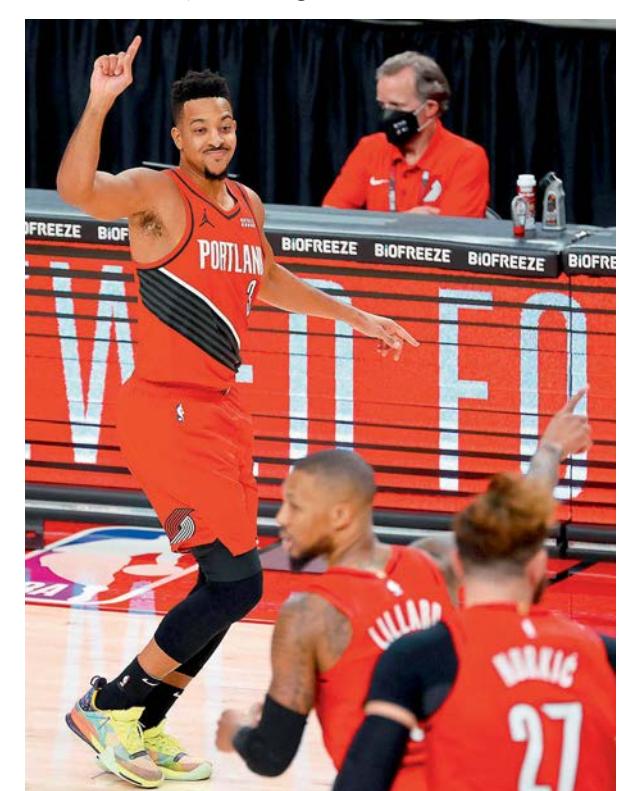
Harden's step-back three-pointer with 15.3 seconds left in overtime put the Rockets up 126-125.

But the Trail Blazers responded, Lillard driving toward the basket then kicking the ball out to McCollum, who calmly sank a three-pointer of his own.

Meanwhile, in Detroit, Cleveland guard Collin Sexton scored 32 points, including a layup to force a second overtime as the Cavaliers beat the Detroit Pistons 128-119.

Andre Drummond added 23 points against his former team, Cedi Osman scored 22 off the bench and Darius Garland chipped in 21 as the Cavaliers rallied from a nine-point deficit with 2:15 left in the first overtime.

The Pistons appeared to seize control in the third quarter, when Jerami Grant scored 14 of his 28 points. Blake Griffin scored 26 points and Derrick Rose had 13, but the Pistons could not hang on for the win. — AFP



C.J. McCollum (left) of the Portland Trail Blazers reacts after his three point basket against the Houston Rockets during the third quarter of their NBA game at the Moda Center in Portland, Oregon, on Sunday. — AFP

CLIPPERS STAR LEONARD HURT DURING NBA WIN

Los Angeles, Dec. 27: Los Angeles Clippers star Kawhi Leonard suffered a cut in his mouth that required eight stitches to seal but should be ready to face the Dallas Mavericks on Sunday.

Leonard was injured in a collision with teammate Serge Ibaka in the fourth quarter of the Clippers' 121-108 NBA victory at Denver.

The 29-year-old forward was struck by an elbow in the face and fell to the court, blood around him on the wood. Leonard was helped off, bleeding from his mouth, and did not return, the club later revealing details of the injury.

"He's going to be fine," Clippers coach Ty Lue said.

"He got up and walked off the floor so he's good," he further added. Leonard had 21 points, seven assists and five rebounds against the Nuggets to lift the Clippers to 2-0. — AFP

Abhinav half-ton spurs Warriors

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

P. Sai Abhinav emerged the highest scorer of Sunday's action at the TCA Kakatiya Cup T20 cricket tournament.

Abhinav scored 62 to help Warangal Warriors to 147 in 20 overs (P. Sai Abhinav 62) bt Khammam Lions 93/8 in 20 overs (Rohith 3/16).

■ Dilabrali Arrows 64/9 in 15 overs (Rishi Madhav 3/9) lost to Peddapally Panthers 65/3 in 9.5 overs.

■ Gadwal Gladiators 119/9 in 20 overs (M. Naresh 40, DSDK Praise 4/29, Raju Yadav 3/14) lost to Nalgonda Dependables 120/9 in 19.2 overs (Raju Yadav 40, Srinivas 3/29).

■ Medak Masters 85 in 19.2 overs (R. Ravi 3/14) lost to Bhadrak Sailors 86/3 in 9 overs.

■ Warangal Warriors 147/7 in 20 overs (P. Sai Abhinav 62) bt Khammam Lions 93/8 in 20 overs (Rohith 3/16).

SHORT TAKES
GM Harikrishna holds Carlsen

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

The game between Harikrishna and the Norwegian ended in 24 moves after the players repeated the moves.

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

SA batsmen fight back on Day Two

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

Dean Elgar (95) and Aiden Markram (68) put on 141 for the first wicket, while former captain Faf du Plessis (55 not out) and Temba Bavuma (41 not out) added an unbeaten 97 for the fifth wicket as the hosts scored at better than four runs an over.

Sri Lanka went into the match without leading fast bowler Suranga Lakmal because of a hamstring strain and suffered a major blow when opening bowler Kasun Rajitha limped off the field with what appeared to be a groin injury after bowling one ball in his third over. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 396 (Chandimal 85, Shanaka 66*, Sipama 4-76) vs South Africa 317/4 (Elgar 95, Markram 68, du Plessis 55 not out).

Sydney Test is a 50-50 bet

Melbourne: The possibility of Sydney hosting the third Test against India has now come down to 50 per cent in the wake of fresh outbreak of Covid-19 cases there and a final decision will be arrived at in two days.

Melbourne Cricket Club's chief executive officer Stuart Fox on Sunday said though he wants Sydney to retain the hosting rights of the third Test, the situation is "extremely complicated".

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

Kerala grab first win of season

Goa: Kerala Blasters dished out a complete performance as they edged Hyderabad 2-0 to secure their first win of the Indian Super League season here on Sunday.

Abdul Hakk's header (29') put Kerala ahead in the first half before Jordan Murray (88') sealed three points for Kibu Vicuna's side.

Vicuna rang in five changes to the side that drew against SC East Bengal while Hyderabad made two changes with Liston Colaco returning to the starting eleven. Both sides created chances in the first half but it was Kerala who headed into the break with a lead.

Live on TV

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

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

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

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

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JINKLE BELLS!

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

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

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

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

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

A day after earning rich praise for his tactical acumen while marshalling

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the bowlers, Rahane shone bright with the bat and was spot on with his reading of match situations during his stay in the middle.

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

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

Rahane got another reprieve when substitute fielder Travis Head put one down after diving forward from gully, but that was after he had got to the three-figure mark. To start with, Rahane was more watchful that he had ever been but as the day progressed, he went on to play super shots. — PTI

SCORECARD

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

Fow: 1-0, 2-61, 3-64, 4-116, 5-173.

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



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

GILL CREDITS RAHANE FOR HIS INNINGS

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

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

"This knock was all about patience, more importantly when you are playing such a high quality pace attack, sometimes you get into shell and not able to score runs, and the way Ajinkya bhai played, it was such a magnificent knock to watch from outside," Gill said during a virtual press conference.

"How to see off those tough periods, he made it sure that he put the loose balls away."

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

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

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

Strac rues missed chances for Oz

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

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

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

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

"He (Rahane) has batted

WARNER NOT SURE OF PLAYING THIRD TEST

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

Warner, whose absence was felt by Australia as they folded for 195 on the opening day of the ongoing Boxing day Test, will hit the MCG nets on Sunday.

"We saw him bat the day before the game, he's batting again this afternoon at the MCG, so in terms of his batting he's flying, it's just trying to ... he's still having some trouble with his groin and we know how dynamic he is," Langer told Ricky Ponting during an interview on Seven. — PTI

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

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

2/61.

Starc admitted Australia endured a tough day.

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

"So Jinx (Rahane) batted pretty well throughout the day, (there were a) couple of really good partnerships. I thought there was really good stuff from us as well, we couldn't capitalise on some of the chances we created, to finish in a better position."

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

The top awards, includ-



Mahendra Singh Dhoni

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

Dhoni is also in the running for four awards—ICC male cricketer of the decade, men's Test, ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, women's ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, will also be announced on Monday.

Dhoni has three other

comrades in the T20I team — Rohit, Kohli and skipper Virat Kohli.

Besides being named cap-

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

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The top awards, includ-

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

The teams of the decades