

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
KARIMNAGAR | THURSDAY | 17 DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER

Max: 28.0°C
Min: 14°C
RH: 63%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 28/14 °C

NATION | 4

LDF surges ahead in Kerala's local elections

WORLD | 5

McKenzie gives \$4.2 b to help 'vulnerable'

SPORTS | 8

India vs Oz Day-Night Test from today



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COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+18,708)	(+377)
99,51,072	1,44,487
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+536)	(+3)
TS: 2,79,135	1,502
(+478)	(+4)
AP: 8,76,814	7,067

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

7,41,15,931
DEATHS
16,48,567
COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Titthi: Margasira Shuddha Tadiya till 3.23 pm
Star: Uttarashada till 7.17 pm
Varjyam: 11.16 pm to 12.51 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.22 am to 11.06 am; 2.46 pm to 3.29 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HILJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Aakhir 1, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.34 am
Zohar: 12.22 pm
Asar: 4.09 pm
Maghrib: 5.51 pm
Isha: 7.05 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.39 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.45 PM
MOONSET TODAY 8.31 PM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.08 AM

COUNTER POINT



People are anxiously counting the days to get rid of the Covid year!

IN BRIEF

Farmer injured in leopard attack

Anantapur: A leopard attacked and injured an old villager Pathanna at Nachepalli village in Rolla mandal of Anantapur district early on Wednesday. According to residents of Nachepalli village, located close to a hillock near a forest, Pathanna came out of his house to answer nature's call early in the morning. Suddenly, a leopard attacked him. Pathanna started screaming which alerted the villagers who ran towards the leopard. Following this, the wild cat vanished into the nearby hillock area. The old man suffered injury in his knee region. He was shifted to Hindupur hospital for treatment, where he is stated to be out of danger. Villagers demanded that the forest department put cages with bait around the forest, as the leopard was frequently visiting the village.

LPG prices hiked by ₹50 a cylinder

New Delhi: Cooking gas LPG price on Wednesday was increased by ₹50 per cylinder, the second hike in rate this month following firming of international prices. Non-subsidised LPG price was increased to ₹694 per 14.2-kg cylinder from ₹644 earlier, according to a price notification of state fuel marketing companies.

SC for setting up panel to resolve farmers' stir

Farmers to protest till three laws are repealed

SANJAY KAW and PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

Noting that the Centre's negotiations with the farmers protesting against the agricultural reform laws have not yielded any results, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said it could form a committee to work out a solution between the two sides. The court said the proposed committee will comprise representatives from the government and farmers' unions across the country in an attempt to break the deadlock.

The protesting farmers described the court's suggestion on forming such a committee as their "moral victory" but remained firm on their stand that they will continue with their agitation till the three laws are repealed by the Centre. The ongoing protests, that are now in their third week, have seen thousands of farmers, primarily from Punjab and Haryana, gathering at the borders of the national capital.

"Even if a committee is formed, our agitation will continue until the three laws are withdrawn," the All India Kisan Sangarsh Coordination Committee, a pan-India organisation of 250 farmers' groups, said. The AKSSC said the formation of the committee would be fruitful only if it has the representatives of all national and regional farmers' outfits.

The farmers' unions also sent a written reply to the Centre rejecting its December 9 proposal in which it offered significant concessions. In an email to agriculture min-



Farmers shout slogans during their protest against the new farm laws, at Singhu Border in New Delhi on Wednesday.

PG 4 | PILs FILED TO REMOVE FARMERS

istry joint secretary Vivek Agrawal, Sanyukt Kisan Morcha leader Darshan Pal said: "With reference to the proposal and letter received from you, we want to inform the government that the farmers' unions had held a joint meeting on the same day and discussed your proposal and rejected it because it was the written format of the proposal verbally offered by the government representatives on December 5, 2020."

Mr Pal also asked the government to stop maligning the farmers' movement. "We want the government to stop

maligning farmers' movement and stop parallel negotiations with other farmer organisations," he said. The written response from the protesting farm unions came a day after agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the government was awaiting a written response on its proposal sent to the farmers. Five meetings have taken place between the protesting farmers and the minister. Union home minister Amit Shah also met the farmers once, but the deadlock has persisted, with both sides sticking to their stance.

JEE Mains 4 times a year, more choice for students

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The JEE-Mains for admission to engineering colleges will be held four times a year starting 2021 to offer flexibility to students and a chance to improve their scores, Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank announced on Wednesday.

The first edition of the Joint Entrance Examination-Mains (JEE-Mains) will be held from February 23 to 26, followed by rounds in March, April and May.

"We have examined the suggestions received from students and various quarters, and it has been decided that JEE-Mains will be held in four sessions in February, March,

April and May," Nishank said.

The first session will be held from February 23 to 26 and the results will be declared within five days from the last date of exams, he said. "The move will ensure that students do not miss out on opportunities due to clash of exams or due to the COVID-19 situation at present," the minister said.

Nishank also said that students will be given a choice to answer 75 questions — 25 each in physics, chemistry and mathematics — out of 90 in the JEE-Mains paper.

In the exam paper of 90 questions, 30 questions each will be from physics, chemistry and mathemat-

ics, he said.

The minister informed that a candidate need not appear in all the four sessions. "If they appear in more than one session then his or her best of scores in 2021 will be considered for ranking."

The question paper will contain 90 questions, in which the candidate will have to attempt a total of 75 questions. In the new paper pattern, there will be no negative marking in the 15 alternative questions," Nishank said.

"The candidates have to attempt 75 questions out of 90, or 25 questions out of 30 in each section of chemistry, physics and maths," he said.

—PTI

WEDDING | SEPARATION | Petitioner wants anomalies in divorce laws removed without prejudice on religion, race or caste

SC to hear plea on uniform grounds for divorce

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear a plea seeking "uniform grounds of divorce" for all citizens, keeping with the spirit of the Constitution and international conventions.

A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian orally observed that it may consider the prayer for directing the Law Commission of India to examine the laws relating to divorce and suggest 'uniform grounds of divorce' for all citizens in the spirit of Articles 14, 15, 21, 44 of the Constitution

within three months.

The top court issued notice to the Centre on the plea and sought its response.

The plea sought directions to the Centre to take steps to remove anomalies in divorce laws and make them uniform for all citizens, without any prejudice on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

"Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains have to seek divorce under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. Muslims, Christians and Parsis have their own personal laws. A couple

SC: DON'T EVICT DAUGHTER-IN-LAW UNDER SENIOR CITIZENS ACT

New Delhi, Dec. 15: The right of a woman to stay in a shared matrimonial household cannot be defeated by securing an order of eviction under the Senior Citizens Act 2007, the Supreme Court has said.

The top court said object of the Protection of Women from Domestic

violence Act 2005 (PWDV) is to provide and recognise the rights of women to secure housing and reside in a matrimonial home or a shared household, whether or not she has any title or right.

"Allowing the Senior Citizens Act 2007 to have an overriding force and effect in all situations,

al that person has to seek divorce under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. Hence, the grounds of divorce are neither gender neutral nor

irrespective of competing entitlements of a woman to a right in a shared household within the meaning of the PWDV Act would defeat the object and purpose which Parliament sought to achieve in enacting the latter legislation," a bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said.

—PTI

religion neutral, the plea said. The PIL said that the "injury" caused to the public due to this is large

because divorce is among the most traumatic misfortunes for both men and women, but even after 73 years of independence, divorce procedures are very complex.

"Hence, grounds of divorce are neither gender neutral nor religion neutral. For example, adultery is a ground of divorce for Hindus, Christians and Parsis, but not for Muslims. Incurable leprosy is a ground of divorce for Hindus and Christians, but not for Parsis and Muslims. Impotency is a ground of divorce for Hindus and Muslims, but

not for Christians and Parsis," the plea said.

Underage marriage is a ground of divorce for Hindus, but not for Christians, Parsis and Muslims, the plea said. It further said that many other grounds of divorce are neither gender-neutral nor religion-neutral.

"The ongoing distinction is based on a patriarchal mindset and stereotypes and has no scientific backing, perpetrates de jure and de facto inequality against women and goes against the global trends," the plea said.

—PTI

PM sets off 50th jubilee fete of victory over Pak

Lights victory torch; Year to be called Swarnim Vijay Varsh

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday lit the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' from the National War Memorial's eternal flame marking the launch of the 50th anniversary celebrations of India's decisive victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war, which led to the creation of Bangladesh.

This year is also being celebrated as 'Swarnim Vijay Varsh'.

"On Vijay Diwas we recall the unwavering courage of our armed forces that resulted in a decisive victory for our nation in the 1971 war. On this special Vijay Diwas, had the honour of lighting the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' at the National War Memorial," Mr Modi said in a tweet.

Four Victory Mashaals (flames) will be carried to different parts of the country, including to villages of Param Vir Chakra and Maha Vir Chakra awardees of the 1971 war.

The soil from the awardees' villages and from the areas where major battles were fought in 1971 are being brought to the National War Memorial.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi lights the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' on Vijay Diwas which commemorates the victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war that led to the independence of Bangladesh, at the National War Memorial in New Delhi.

Each year, December 16 is celebrated as "Vijay Diwas" to commemorate India's historic victory over Pakistan.

The swift and professionally planned operations, executed by the Indian armed forces led to one of the greatest military victories recorded in the annals

of world history. It was on this day that the largest military surrender after World War II took place in Dhaka when Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, accepted the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani troops from Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi of the Pakistan Army.

This year various commemorative events will be held across India in which war veterans will be felicitated and events like band displays, seminars, exhibitions, equipment displays, film festivals, conclaves and adventure activities are planned.

KCR PREPARES FOR WARANGAL, KHAMMAM POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

Keeping the experience of the recent GHMC elections in mind, TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has begun a rigorous exercise for the upcoming elections to the Warangal and Khammam municipal corporations.

tions, which would most likely be held in February next, party sources said.

Sources disclosed that Rao found party workers at the booth level were not so effective in mobilising voters, and that the candidates also solely depended on the positive vote without working to mobilise voters.

Sources said the party chief felt that there was an urgent need to strengthen the booth level mechanism.

■ **Page 2: BJP leaders look for strong leaders**

Fiat Chrysler drives into Hyd with ₹1.1K-cr digi hub

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) on Wednesday decided to invest \$150 million (approximately ₹1,100 crore) to set up a new global digital hub in Hyderabad.

The innovation and technology development facility will be the company's largest digital hubs outside of North America and EMEA. The investment significantly expands the automobile manufacturing group's presence in the country, a company press release said.

FCA ICT India will create nearly 1,000 cutting-edge technology jobs by the end of 2021, the official statement said. FCA has plans to increase hiring over the next two to three years. The newly recruited staff will work on exciting products and concepts that will define the future of mobility at FCA. The global digital hub will serve as a 'transformation and innovation engine' for FCA and drive global IT strategy and deliver excellence through a robust platform, technology and

● **THE INNOVATION and technology development facility will be the company's largest digital hubs outside of North America and EMEA.**

● **THE INVESTMENT significantly expands the automobile manufacturing group's presence in the country.**

● **THE CENTRE will create nearly 1,000 cutting-edge technology jobs by 2021**

service centers of excellence, it said. The hub will focus on building strategic competencies in niche technology areas like connected vehicle programmes, artificial intelligence, data accelerators, and cloud technologies.

"In the digital era, data is the new currency. Our goal is to build an innovation powerhouse that harnesses the intelligence enabled by data to build exciting new products and services to deliver at the speed of our customers' expectations," said Mama-

tha Chamarthi, CIO, FCA, North America and Asia Pacific.

The availability of talent coupled and culture of innovation and pro-business policies led FCA to pick Hyderabad.

The hub will expand FCA's relationships with several ecosystem partners, including strategic partners, start-ups, digital accelerators and universities, and accelerate an innovation agenda, Mr Chamarthi said. FCA has a major presence in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, with headquarters in Mumbai and employs over 3,000 people. With the global digital hub, FCA will be expanding its presence in Telangana. The firm has a joint venture vehicle and powertrain manufacturing facility in Ranjangaon, Maharashtra. Its engineering and product development operations are located in Pune and Chennai.

"The investment in Hyderabad cements our continued commitment to India and our customers," said Dr Partha Datta, president and managing director, FCA India.

SHORT TAKES

INDRAKARAN: TS TAKES LEAD IN SAVING FORESTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

Minister A. Indrakaran Reddy said the Telangana government had adopted precautionary measures to safeguard forests well before any other state.

The minister was speaking at the convocation of the Forest College and conferred degrees on its 50 students as well gold medals to those who had excelled, at the Mulugu College campus in Siddipet district. Minister Harish Rao said proposals to upgrade the Forest College into a university and giving reservation for its students were under study. As per the Chief Minister's aspirations, students of Forest College should top the all India services exams, said academic counsellor chairperson R. Shoba.

HYD ZOO FIRST TO GET UK AWARD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

The Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad, has become the first zoo in the country to be awarded the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standards Certification from ASCB of the United Kingdom. The ASCB (Accreditation Service for Certifying Bodies) gave the certificate after an audit conducted in a phased manner. It expressed satisfaction with the standards particularly in fields of sanitation, food processing, animal breeding, zoo hospital, animal care, hygiene maintenance and establishment. It also appreciated the efficiency, team work and commitment of the staff. Transparency, response to any emergency round the clock, and standards being followed fulfill the criteria for ISO certification.

MAN CONSUMES ADULTERATED TODDY, DIES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

A 40-year-old man died and another fell sick after consuming toddy that was allegedly adulterated at Jalpally in Pahadi Shareef on Wednesday. Police said the victim, Srinivas, was a toddy addict and a regular at the place. "He went to drink on Tuesday night and was reportedly fine until 3 am of Thursday but was found dead later in the day. We also found out that another person, Ravi, who works at the place, complaining of stomach pain and was admitted to a hospital where his condition is said to be stable," the police officials said. A case was booked under Section 174 (suspicious death) of the CrPC and Srinivas' body was shifted for the post-mortem examination. Officials have also sent a sample of the toddy to laboratories to check for adulteration.

BJP LOOKS FOR STRONG LEADERS

From Page 1

The TRS felt the need to first concentrate on strengthening booth level committees in the Khammam and Warangal municipal corporation areas. Though the BJP previously had no stronghold in Warangal and Khammam municipal corporations, Congress, TD and Left leaders in both cities are rallying towards the party after the GHMC election results. The Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation has 58 divisions of which the TRS had won 44 in 2016, and the BJP one. The BJP did not win a single ward in the Khammam Municipal Corporation in 2016. After the GHMC elections, BJP leaders are extensively touring both cities to attract strong leaders from other parties into the BJP to build up the party base, as well as galvanise the cadres and voters. Sources in the TRS said that Chandrashekar Rao was watching political developments in both cities. He has asked the district ministers to keep a tab on movements of Congress and BJP leaders as they could try to poach TRS leaders. Sources revealed that Chandrashekar Rao was likely to tour both cities in the coming days to gear up the party cadre and leaders.



Farmers stage a protest at Dharna Chowk opposite Indira Park in Hyderabad on Wednesday, in protest against the Centre's farm laws and the proposed Electricity Bill.

— DEEPAK DESHPANDE

TS farmers take to the streets against new agriculture laws

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

Farmers of Telangana have shown solidarity with their protesting counterparts in Delhi, who are agitating against the three farm bills enacted by BJP-led NDA government, which have become laws with President Ram Nath Kovind okaying them.

The 'Telangana farmers' solidarity is by way of an indefinite protest they have started at the Dharna Chowk abutting Indira Park in the city. Those who protested included tenant and women farmers, agricultural labour from different parts of Telangana, social activists, and general public.

Damarakonda Kumaraih from Warangal Rural district, who is a agriculturist and owns one and half acres of land, told *Deccan Chronicle*: "These three farm laws will turn farmers like us into slaves of corporate bigwigs. The Union government has sold the fate of Indian farmers to rich corporates. We are protesting as we want the centre to rescind the laws to protect families whose livelihood depends only on cultivation," he stated.

Among the protestors is Duddeda Sugunama, 45, an agriculture labourer with three daughters. She had received the Best Farmer Award in 2010 in the United States of America (USA). When she got the US award, the then state government promised to grant her agriculture land, which has not fructified so far. As such, Sugunama continues to be a tenant farmer. Sugunama's son committed suicide when the family went into debts after their crops had failed due to drought and pest

Sad tale of Sura Radha amid farmers' protest

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

Sura Radha, a 27-year-old agriculture farmer who has seen enough turmoil in her young age, is now the lone breadwinner for her seven-year-old son as also her old parents. She used to cultivate her three-and-half acres of land after her husband committed suicide in 2014 when crops repeatedly failed and he ran into huge debts.

Radha lives at Katkur village in Bachanapet mandal of Jangaon district. She returned to her parents soon after her husband's suicide when she found no support from her in-laws. She was well supported by her brother till fate played a cruel joke. Their crops failed again and they ran into debts, leading to her brother too committing suicide.

The unfortunate Radha was among the farmers protesting at the Dharna Chowk who spoke to *Deccan Chronicle*. Misfortune has not left her. Authorities razed her

attacks, due to which they could not pay rent for the land they were cultivating.

Says Sugunama: "There have been many farmers who have committed suicide after they repeatedly failed to make any profit on their crop. These new laws, which have been framed by the central government, will force many more farmers to take their own lives in the coming



Sura Radha

dilapidated house, where she lived with her parents and son. At the time of dismantling her house, officials promised her a double bedroom house within the complex of such rooms they were going to build after razing several houses including that of Radha. She never got it though.

"We are living in another dilapidated house. We suffered heavily during rains and recent floods. All our food grains too got washed off."

Radha sold one acre of her three-and-a-half acres of land to drill a bore well. That too failed and she is now left clutching at straws.

times, as corporate entities will squeeze them for their own profits."

Rekha of Katkur village in Jangaon district maintained: "All governments are anti-farmer. Funds under the Rythu Bandhu scheme of TRS government are being given mostly to those who own farm lands. These funds are being denied to tenant farmers and agricultural labour, as they have not

"Lives of poor and marginal farmers are very tough. Those dependent on rains find it tougher. Their survival is solely dependent on God and what He lets us produce," she stated.

Radha wants to educate her seven-year-old son in an English medium school, who also helps her in her field.

"I have admitted him into a private English medium school. This year, I have failed in paying his fees, which is more than Rs. 10,000 per annum. Unfortunately, government schools never provide good education, which is a fact known to all," she remarked.

The last straw on her back is that she is unable to educate her son, as she could not pay the dues of fee. She can only console herself saying he is helping her in farming.

"Government gives lakhs and lakhs to rich landlords in the name helping some farmers. Policy makers should actually help poor and marginal farmers, identifying them after a proper survey," she added.

been put on the beneficiaries' list." Rekha maintains that the KCR government is depositing Rythu Bandhu funds into accounts of absentee farmers, many of whom are working in USA.

The protest at Dharna Chowk is being organised under the auspices of AIKSCC, Makam, CCC, Rythu Swarajya Vedika, Palamur Adhyana Vedika, and TVVU.

MAN ARRESTED FOR SPREADING FAKE MESSAGES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

The Rachakonda cyber-crime police arrested a man from Kurnool for forwarding a fake message on WhatsApp and creating panic among the public. He had forwarded two voice notes which claimed that a government hospital was providing 'chemical masks' to the public which kills the wearer.

The accused, Sadik Basha, 29, is an electrician and resident of Amaravathinagar of Adoni in Kurnool district, said Rachakonda police commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat. The officer said Basha had received the voice messages from an unknown number. Basha forwarded them to his friends, relatives and other contacts through WhatsApp and created panic, which might lead to disturbances, Bhagwat said.

Fungal infection in Covid recovered

Use of high-end steroids to combat Covid is considered one of the reasons for this

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

Steroids used in the treatment of Covid-19 are causing severe side-effects in a few patients which is leading to fungal infection. The reason is stated to be that those who have recovered from Covid-19 are severely immune-compromised.

So far, 50 patients have reported to corporate and small hospitals in the city with fungal infections. It is found that patients developed the infection in the middle and later stages of recovery.

The use of high-end steroids to combat Covid-19 is considered to be one of the reasons for this. Steroid use is increased in patients who are critically ill to control the cytokine storm in the body. But the steroid use allows opportunistic fungal infections like deadly mucormycosis to enter the body.

This infection is also noted in patients who have undergone liver and kidney transplants, and they are duly cautioned about it. Among Covid-19 recovered patients, fungal infection is found in those suffering from ENT problems, diabetes, kidney problems, sinusitis and dental problems.

Dr Srinivas Kishore Sistla, consultant ENT surgeon and sleep specialist at Star Hospitals, said doctors had seen 10 patients with fungal infection in the last 15 days.

"All of them had recovered from Covid-19. The fungal infections are found in different parts of the body such as eyes, brain and bones. This is worrying as it can also lead to permanent loss of eye sight and damage the organs. Those who have recovered from Covid 19 need to be alert," Dr Sistla said.

A senior doctor on condition of anonymity said, "In order to control the situation, patients in the moderate category were also given steroids. The cases of fungal infection emerging now are mostly due to the excessive use of steroids. The medical fraternity has to check on its use of medicines as the side-effects are harmful."

The nature of Covid-19

TELANGANA RECORDS 536 FRESH COVID-19 INFECTIONS, THREE DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

The state recorded 536 cases of Covid-19 and three deaths on Tuesday, the state health department bulletin said on Wednesday. The three deaths took the toll to 1,502. The total number of cases is 2,79,135.

The toll is based on the Covid-19 positivity report. However, there have been sudden deaths among those suffering from Covid-19, and it is not known if they died of the Coronavirus disease or there was some other cause.

Sudden heart attacks, death in sleep have come to the fore but are not being recorded. Municipal workers who are asked to sanitise the place which is creating panic as it is an indication that it could be a probable Covid-19 case.

A senior government

doctor said, "We really do not know. Those who are tested are tracked. But it is not clear in the case of those who do not get tested or have gone too late. Municipal authorities are carrying out the process of sanitization based on the information given to them by health authorities."

The government states that they have asked people to come forward to get tested in case they are suffering from Covid-19 symptoms of cold, cough, fever, headache and fatigue. Those who are suffering from loss of smell and taste must get tested as that is the first indication of Covid 19 disease.

There were 52,057 tests carried out on Tuesday and a total of 62,57,745 tests have been done in the state so far.

In the GHMC limits, a total of 107 cases were confirmed.

Symptoms of fungal infections:	Who is at high risk?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Severe headache Pain in teeth Body pains and breathing problems Pain in the face Weakness and fatigue after mild exertion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covid-19 recovered patients who are also suffering from sinusitis, diabetes, ENT disorders, dental and kidney problems. Organ transplant patients also need to be alert.

and the speed at which the virus spread has led to the use of different medicines. Dr C. Shekar Singh, senior ENT surgeon, explained, "We are seeing patients now. This means those who had recovered earlier were either missed or minimal numbers reported to clinics."

Dr Singh said there are two conditions which must be taken into account: The immune compromised state of the patient and the use of medicines for recovery from Covid 19. "Since immunity is compromised, development of disease is inevitable as it was noted in organ transplant cases. If it is due to

use of medicines, there has to be a rethink as to how to minimise its use and stabilise the patient," Dr Singh said.

These aspects are important as fungal infections are not only dangerous but treatment is also expensive. Experts state that re-building of immunity with proper supplementation of protein, vitamins and minerals must be taken up. Guidance from a nutritionist must be sought so that there is proper intake of fruits, vegetables and low-fat proteins. Adequate rest and sound sleep will also allow the body to rejuvenate back stated experts.

MLA Ramesh is German citizen, Centre tells HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

The Union home ministry on Wednesday informed the Telangana High Court that TRS Vemulawada legislator Dr Ramesh Chennamaneni was a citizen of Germany, and he has a German passport which is valid up to February 2023.

Rajeshwar Rao, assistant solicitor general, representing the Centre, filed a memo and some documents stating that information was obtained from the German Embassy.

Justice Challa Kodandam, after going through the memo, expressed dissatisfaction and raised certain queries as there was a discrepancy in the dates on which the information was sought from the German Embassy.

While dealing with the petition filed by Adi Srinivas, the Congress rival of Dr Ramesh, the court had during a previous hearing sought the citizenship details of the TRS MLA afresh.

The secretary, Union ministry of home affairs, New Delhi, filed the memo stating that he had contacted the German Embassy over mail on December 6, 2020, to get the citizenship details. But, the documents and the memo showed that the German Embassy had given the details on

February 28, 2020.

Justice Kodandaram pointed out the discrepancy and asked, "Is this is the method of performing of duties by the higher authorities? If the authorities of the home affairs ministry have even failed to get the details of this small issue, how can you get back those who bankrupted the country?"

Justice Kodandaram observed: "Are the authorities are not aware that a sworn affidavit should be filed before the courts? Just by throwing a memo, you are trying to misguide the court."

The judge directed Rajeshwar Rao to ensure that the secretary, home ministry, files a sworn affidavit for better understanding of the issue, and adjourned the hearing to January 20, 2021. Till then, the stay on the home ministry's proceedings suspending the Indian citizenship of Dr Ramesh will remain in force.

WHY IS GOVT ASKING FOR AADHAAR: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

The Telangana High Court on Wednesday faulted the Telangana state government for compelling those who want to get their non-agriculture properties registered to submit their Aadhaar details.

The court was informed that despite the undertaking submitted by the Advocate General, officials were asking owners for their Aadhaar card details at the time of booking slots for registration through the old method. On hearing this, the division bench of Chief Justice Raghavendra Singh Chauhan and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy observed that the government was adopting surreptitious methods and ignoring the undertaking submitted before the court.

The bench was dealing with a batch of petitions opposing the decision of the state government to collect Aadhaar and caste details of property owners to upload on the Dharani portal.

Advocate General B.S. Prasad informed the bench that a Cabinet Sub-Committee has been constituted to reconsider the Dharani portal issue, and sought time to file a counter-affidavit. The court directed the Chief Secretary to file an affidavit by Thursday with an assurance that Aadhaar and caste details will not be asked from citizens while updating details in the portal.

OTHER STORIES

MIN: TAKE ACTION AGAINST SPURIOUS SEED SELLERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, DEC. 16

Minister for roads and buildings, housing and legislative affairs V. Prashanth Reddy has directed officials to initiate stringent action against errant seed dealers.

He said, "If any dealer is found guilty of selling spurious seeds, the PD Act will be registered against them."

A district advisory board meeting was held at Pragathi Bhavan on Wednesday.

At the meeting, the minister asked the agriculture department officials to keep a tab on seed dealers, and spare no dealers if they are involved in the sale of spurious seeds.

District collector C. Narayana Reddy, district agriculture officer M. Govind and others were present.

KARIMNAGAR DAIRY OPENS UNIT IN PADTHANAPALLI

DC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, DEC. 16

The Karimnagar Milk Producer Company which is popularly known as Karimnagar Dairy has opened its first Bulk Milk Cooling Unit (BMCU) in Padthanapalli village of Hazipur mandal in Mancherial on Wednesday.

The new unit is part of its expansion. Karimnagar Dairy chairman Ch. Rajeshwar Rao and company MD P. Shankar Reddy, Mancherial MLA Diwakar Rao, the first unit was inaugurated.

The BMCU at Padthanapalli has a capacity of 5,000 litres will collect milk from the surrounding 33 villages.

The company chairman said, "Efforts are on to open a second unit at Lingapur village to additionally procure milk from the farmers."

TWO KILLED, FIVE INJURED IN ROAD MISHAP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, DEC. 16

Two persons were killed and five injured, including two pedestrians when the driver of the car lost control and crashed on Wednesday.

The deceased were identified Mallikarjuna Reddy and Vallavula Dhanalaxmi and native of Yadavalli village in Kanigiri mandal in Prakasam district in Andhra Pradesh.

The mishap took place at Tummalapalli under Penuballi mandal. The car was coming from proceeding to Odisha from Vijayawada.

Three persons were travelling in the car. They were travelling to Odisha to buy malted grain to sell in Prakasam district. The case is being investigated.

MOTORCYCLES COLLIDE, 3 KILLED, 1 SERIOUSLY HURT

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, DEC. 16

Three persons were killed and one severely injured, when two speeding motorcycles collided with each other on the outskirts of Sangem in Warangal Rural district on Wednesday.

According to the police, Hamsa Sampath and his sister-in-law, Sangaboina Swapna, along with her four-year-old daughter, Harsha were travelling from Sangem to Gandhi Nagar. Hamsa Sampath was overtaking a tipper lorry when Raktapuram Shiva Kumar and Bonagiri Harish were coming from the opposite direction on their two-wheeler and collided with them.

Sangem sub-inspector (SI) K. Suresh said that the injured were shifted to the MGM Hospital in Warangal for treatment. However, four-year-old Harsha, Hamsa Sampath and Bonagiri Harish died while undergoing treatment. A case is registered and an investigation is on.

● **ACCORDING TO the police, Hamsa Sampath and his sister-in-law, Sangaboina Swapna, along with her four-year-old daughter, Harsha were travelling from Sangem to Gandhi Nagar.**

● **HAMSASAMPATH was overtaking a tipper lorry when Raktapuram Shiva Kumar and Bonagiri Harish were coming from the opposite direction on their two-wheeler and collided with them.**

KCR's priority is women's empowerment: Errabelli

₹100 cr worth loans handed over to over 4,000 women of Dwera groups

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, DEC. 16

Minister for panchayat raj, rural development and rural water supply, Errabelli Dayakar Rao visited Palakurthy in Jangaon district on Wednesday.

He handed over ₹100 crore worth of loans to nearly 4,000 women of Dwera groups under the Stree Nidhi scheme.

The scheme allows women to earn livelihoods through poultry, distribution of buffaloes, electric autos and other small trade.

He said, "Once upon a time, women never stepped out of their homes. But today, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has provided opportunities for them to grow financially and increase their self-esteem."

He added that the CM is planning to provide monetary help under the Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak schemes on the day of the wedding itself in the future.

Nowhere in the country are schemes like these implemented.

He told the women, "You must avail the loans and live life with dignity. If a member who took a loan dies, the CM has



Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao speaks to a woman who received buffaloes under the Stree Nidhi scheme on Wednesday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

directed that the loan be written off.

The kin of the deceased will receive ₹1 lakh as insurance. This scheme begins today."

Panchayat raj and rural

development secretary Sandeep Kumar Sultania said that Mr Errabelli Dayakar Rao has been longing to help the poor.

"Women should be given as much support as

possible. They can help run the family by earning through the Stree Nidhi scheme," he said.

Shahina Sultana of Devaruppala, who benefited from the Stree

Nidhi Scheme said, "I put up a cloth shop with the loan and was able to build a house. I also bought an auto for my husband. I am now financially strong."

KCR IS WEAKENING AGRI EDUCATION IN STATE: BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, DEC. 16

Former BJP national general secretary P. Muralidhar Rao said that the Modi government has been working to increase the profitability of the agricultural sector from the beginning.

The Central government is striving to provide minimum support price (MSP) to farmers with the new farm laws, but misinformation about MSP not to be continued is being spread.

"The laws will not harm the farmers. Political parties are doing selfish politics on the farmer laws. The government will not go back on the farm bills at any cost. However, suggestions would be accepted and there is scope for change in the laws," he said.

He blamed Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao for not letting farmers in the state to benefit from the Central government scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. He asked that the CM pay compensation to the farmers for their loss.

"The state government did not cooperate with the Central government for the implementation of the scheme," he complained. It is KCR who has been weakening agriculture education in the state. None of the three agriculture universities have vice-chancellors or boards.

Muralidhar said that the BJP would conduct awareness programmes in all the villages regarding the new agri laws.

BJP Warangal Urban president Rao Padma, former MLA Marthineni Dharma Rao, BJP leaders Achcha Vidyasagar, Ravula Kishan and others were present.

fearing Covid-19.

Deliveries registered at the MSK in August were 210, in July 435 and in September 497. About 680 women joined in October and 673 in November. Nearly 401 deliveries were done in December, till date. Hospital superintendent B. Venkateswarlu said, "The MSK conducted deliveries on par with the corporate hospitals. Khammam MSK stood second with the highest institution deliveries after Hyderabad".

New council building of GWMC inaugurated

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, DEC. 16

The new building of the governing body of the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) was inaugurated on Wednesday.

Panchayat raj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao and city mayor Gunda Prakash Rao inaugurated the building which is constructed at a cost of ₹8 crore. A statue of Mahatma Gandhi installed in front of the building was also unveiled.

Mayor Gunda Prakash Rao announced that the statue of Dr B.R. Ambedkar would be unveiled on January 26 next year. The government is constructing sewers, roads and retaining walls at the cost of ₹25 crore sanctioned for flood relief.

● **DEVELOPMENT works like grave yards, parks development, monkey food courts, children's park, open gym, Vanitha Vanams, 325 new toilets, loo cafe are some of the highlights.**

He said, "We are providing infrastructure to each division. The opposition leaders are also appreciative of the development works like grave yards, parks development, monkey food courts, children's park, open gym, Vanitha Vanams, 325 new toilets, loo cafe and mobile toilets. High mast lighting at junctions, central lighting are also being set up. Even the roads are being developed

under the Smart City Mission," he said.

Errabelli Dayakar Rao said that the government is working hard for the all-round development of Warangal city, which is emerging as the second capital and fastest-growing city after Hyderabad.

"The CM and minister K.T. Rama Rao are working tirelessly to beautify the city in a phased manner.

Drinking water would be provided to households every day and soon, water will be provided round the clock," he said. Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar, MPs Banda Prakash, Pasunoori Dayakar, MLAs, collector Rajeev Gandhi Hanumanthu, GWMC commissioner Pamela Satpathy were present among others.



GWMC council building and Mahatma Gandhi statue inaugurated on Wednesday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

WHAT A | FEAT

401 deliveries done in December till date

5,432 babies born at MSK Khamma

RAVINDRA SESHU | DC
KHAMMAM, DEC. 16

The Matha Sishu Kendram (MSK) in the district headquarters hospital in Khammam saw many deliveries during Covid-19. The gynaecologists of the centre conducted 5,431 deliveries since Lockdown commenced.

The Kendram was a boon for pregnant women in rural areas especially, the poor. The centre conducted 944 deliveries in April followed by 828

● **THE CENTRE did not stop their services, despite seven members of the staff, including gynaecologists, tested positive for Covid-19.**

in May and 763 in June.

The centre did not stop their services, despite seven members of the staff, including gynaecologists, tested positive for Covid-19. Head of the centre Kripa Ushasri said, "We have conducted even 30 deliveries in a day when the Coronavirus was at its peak.

The staff worked hard to safeguard the mother

and newborns in the hospital. The staffs at the centre were present for pregnant women even during the night."

New mothers were given KCR kits along with cash, on their discharge. The mothers received ₹13,000 on the birth of a girl child and ₹12,000 for a male child. Many of the private hospitals stopped deliveries

Gang stealing vehicles arrested

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, DEC. 16

Police caught an inter-state gang of thieves who would steal vehicles, drive them to Bodhan in Nizamabad from different districts in the state, crush them and sell them to Abdul Lateef, a scrap dealer in Bahadurpura, Hyderabad.

The gang had stolen nine stationed Bolero pickups, eight from erstwhile Adilabad district and one from Jagtial.

They would steal the vehicles at night using duplicate keys. The thefts took place in the period between June to November 2020.

The accused would sell the stolen vehicles to prospective buyers, by changing the engine, chassis and body.

On the instruction of SP Vishnu S. Warrior, the Utnoor and Ichoda police intensified vehicle checks to nab the persons involved in the series of incidents of stealing Bolero pickup vehicles. Police got crucial information when they apprehended one Seik Samad Khan, 30, who was driving a new car during vehicle checking at Roll Mamada Toll plaza in Neredigonda mandal recently.

Another accused, Hazrat Khan of Mumbai in Maharashtra is absconding. Police said, "Sheik Samad Khan, an electrician from Nizamabad, played a key role in stealing the parked vehicles outside the houses or on the roadside. CCTV



● **The gang stolen nine stationed Boleros, eight from erstwhile Adilabad district and one from Jagtial. They would drive the vehicles to Bodhan in Nizamabad and crush them before selling them to scrap dealers.**

camera footage and new technologies also helped in arresting the accused."

Of the stolen nine Bolero pickup vehicles, the Ichoda police could recover only four vehicles worth ₹12 lakh and a swift car belonging to the accused used for carrying out the thefts. The other vehicles were either converted into scrap or sold. The police also seized the chassis of four vehicles and 12 tires.

Ichoda CI K. Ravinder said, "The thieves used to hide the stolen vehicles in a rented shed on the outskirts of Bodhan town in Nizamabad. After modifying the vehicles, they would erase the details on the engine and chassis before selling them."

Vaikunta Ekadasi



Presiding deity in Bhadrachalam is adorned in Kurmavatharam as part of Vaikunta Ekadasi Aradhanostavalu. The deity is taken in a palanquin in a procession in Bhadrachalam on Wednesday. — RAVINDRA SESHU

ACB seizes ₹1.99 crore from ex-IMS director

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 16

The officials of Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) seized ₹1.99 crore in cash from Devika Rani, former director of Indian Medical Service (IMS) and accused in a medical purchase scam. The cash seizure was in addition to the ₹6.76 crore recovered earlier from her.

Apart from Dr Rani, government officials including

Dr Padma, K. Vasantha Indira, M. Radhika and V. Harshavardhan were arrested by the officials apart from Omni Medi managing director K. Srihari Babu and company representative Siva Nagaraju.

The ACB said the money seized on Wednesday was in the form of a demand draft from a chit fund company in which Dr Rani and her family members had invested in Telangana state and

Tamil Nadu. The seized demand drafts will be deposited in the court, ACB officials said. The scam came to light following a vigilance inquiry that was launched into purchases made by the IMS for ESI hospitals in the state. The inquiry found that medicines which were not needed were purchased to favour a few firms and the medicines were purchased at relatively high prices.

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SHORT TAKES

WASNIK WARY OF CHANGE IN MP LEADERSHIP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, DEC. 16

All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge of Madhya Pradesh affairs Mukul Wasnik on Wednesday remained non-committal on change of guard in state Congress amid growing demand in the party here to replace Kamal Nath as PCC chief.

Wasnik who arrived here in the morning on a 3-day-visit to the state to review preparations of the party for the upcoming civic body polls, told reporters that the party needed senior leaders for their experience and the young ones for revitalisation of the organisation.

He was replying to a question as to if change in leadership in MP Congress was imminent.

When insisted by reporters to clear the air on the matter, he quipped "Do you expect me to answer all your questions today itself".

Nath's recent statement that he needed 'some rest' and wanted to stay at home has given birth to speculation that he may pave the way for a new PCC chief.

J&K SOUTHERN DISTRICTS SEE LOW VOTER TURNOUT

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, DEC. 16

The seventh phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first ever District Development Council (DDC) elections recorded an overall 57.22 per cent voting on Wednesday.

State election commissioner (SEC) K.K. Sharma said that the polling was by and large peaceful in the 31 constituencies where voting took place.

He said Jammu division recorded an average voter turnout of 71.93 per cent with frontier district of Poonch highest 80.12 per cent followed by Reasi district with 76.75 per cent and Udhampur 75.63 per cent.

The lowest 58.82 per cent turnout in Jammu division was reported from hilly Doda district.

The Kashmir Valley reported 39.52 per cent average voter turnout with Bandipora district recording the highest polling at 70.47 per cent followed by Baramulla with 59.53 per cent and Kupwara district recorded 59.23 per cent polling, he added.

Once again, the southern districts of the Valley — Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama and Shopian — considered to be the hotbed of militancy saw majority of voters staying away from the polling.

As per the official statistics, Anantnag recorded 22.46 per cent, Kulgam 17.98 per cent, Pulwama 11.06 per cent and Shopian just 6.55 per cent polling.



Ex-servicemen join farmers' protest against the new farm laws at Singhu Border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Govt clears ₹3,500 cr aid for sugarcane farmers

Move to benefit 5 crore farmers, 5 lakh workers in sugar mills

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

The government on Wednesday cleared financial assistance of ₹3,500 crore to sugar mills for the export of 60 lakh tonnes of sweetener during the ongoing marketing year 2020-21 as part of its efforts to help them clear outstanding dues to sugarcane farmers.

Briefing media after the meeting, information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved a subsidy of ₹3,500 crore on exports of 60 lakh tonnes of sweetener and the subsidy amount will directly be given to

● THIS SUBSIDY aims at covering expenses on marketing costs including handling, upgrading and other processing costs and costs of international and internal transport.

farmers.

The dues will be directly credited to their accounts on behalf of sugar mills against the cane price dues, and the subsequent balance, if any, will be credited to mills' accounts.

Farmers sell their sugarcane to the sugar mills, however, they don't get their dues from the sugar mill owners as they have surplus sugar stock. To address this concern, the government has facilitated the evacuation of surplus sugar stock. This will enable payment of dues of

the sugarcane farmers.

The CCEA has approved the subsidy at the rate of ₹6 per kg for the current year, much lower than about ₹10.50 per kg in the 2019-20 marketing year keeping in view favourable international prices.

According to official sources, the government will incur about ₹3,500 crore for this purpose, and this assistance would be directly credited into farmers' accounts on behalf of sugar mills against cane price dues and subsequent balance, if any, would be

credited to mill's account.

The decision will benefit five crore farmers and 5,00,000 workers employed in sugar mills and related ancillary activities. Sugar mills will be able to earn ₹18,000 crore revenue from the export, said Javadekar, who is also Union environment minister.

This subsidy aims at covering expenses on marketing costs including handling, upgrading and other processing costs and costs of international and internal transport and freight charges on the export of up to 60 LMT of sugar limited to Maximum Admissible Export Quota (MAEQ) allocated to sugar mills for the sugar season 2020-21.

Adhikari resigns as TMC legislator

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 16

Dealing yet another blow to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress, rebel leader Shubhendu Adhikari quit as Nandigram MLA a day before his visit to New Delhi and likely induction in the BJP. Adhikari, fearing a "political vendetta" against him by the TMC, also sought Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar's "intervention" in a letter for his and his aides' protection from being implicated by

the state police in false cases.

At around 4 pm on Wednesday Adhikari, accompanied by Congress MLA Sudip Mukherjee from Purulia, went to the West Bengal Assembly and handed over his resignation letter to his resignation letter to Assembly secretary Abhijit Som, in the absence of Speaker Biman Banerjee. He also sent a copy of his resignation letter to Banerjee via email. His move came nearly three weeks after he had resigned from the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet.

A drama, however, unfolded later as Adhikari's resignation

was not immediately accepted till reports last came in, according to sources, since an MLA is required to submit his resignation letter physically in front of the Speaker to ensure that there is no pressure on him for his decision. Adhikari remained silent. But his loyalists under the banner of *Dadar Onugami* (elder brother's followers) hoisted the BJP flag at his office in Heria in East Midnapore in jubilation.

In the evening Dhankhar tweeted Adhikari's letter, which states: "I am constrained to seek your inter-

vention as constitutional head so that the police and the administration apparatus in the state is dissuaded from implicating me and my associate followers in criminal cases out of political motivation and vendetta. I am in public life now for 25 years, during which my prime focus has been and is to be in service of the people. I have passionately involved myself with commitment and dedication to serve the people in all positions, including as a minister in the government till my resignation on 27.11.2020."

CPM-led LDF registers big win in local body polls

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 16

The CPM-led ruling Left Democratic Front in Kerala on Wednesday registered a significant victory in local body polls considered as the semifinals ahead of crucial Assembly elections next year.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan termed the success of ruling front as "peoples victory."

"It's a befitting reply from the people of Kerala to the forces who tried to destroy our achievements, central agencies which worked with ulterior motive, communal forces which wanted to weaken the unity of the people and the forces which unleashed lies against the government," he said.

The Chief Minister said the people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, region extended wholehearted support to LDF.

"The mandate reflects the secular mindset of

RESULTS 2020	TOTAL SEATS	LDF	UDF	BJP	OTH
G. Panchayats	941	514	377	22	28
B. Panchayats	152	108	44	0	
D. Panchayats	14	10	4	0	
Municipalities	86	35	45	2	4
Corporations	6	5	1	0	

(G) Grama; (B) Block; (D) District

the people of the state," he said.

For the LDF, the victory is vital as it comes in the backdrop of serious allegations related to gold smuggling, corruption in mega projects faced by the government and Chief Minister's office.

Almost all central agencies including CBI, ED, Customs, NIA are camping in the state in connection with the investigations into various cases forcing even Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to accuse the BJP-led government at the Centre of misusing these agencies to derail the pro-people projects and topple democratically elected state government.

Despite facing such

an adverse political situation, the LDF managed to keep its rural base almost intact winning 514 grama panchayats.

The UDF which was expected to do better this time, ended up with 377 grama panchayats. However, the UDF maintained its upper hand in municipalities winning 45 of the 86. The LDF won 35 while BJP added one more to its 2015 tally.

Meanwhile, Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala claimed that the UDF had improved its performance compared to 2015. "LDF cannot claim a big victory as its tally in grama panchayats and municipalities has gone down," he said.

SC SEEKS CENTRE'S REPLY ON PILS FOR REMOVING FARMERS

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued a notice to the Centre and others on a batch of petitions seeking removal of farmers camping at several roads near Delhi borders in protest against the three new agri laws.

A bench comprising Chief Justice S.A. Bobde, and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian also indicated that the court may form a committee having representatives of the government and the farmer unions across the country to resolve the deadlock over the legislations.

In a hearing conducted via video conferencing, the bench directed the petitioners to make protesting farmer unions parties to the pleas and posted the matter for hearing on Thursday.

"Your negotiations with protesting farmers have not worked apparently till now," the bench told the Centre.

Meanwhile, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench that the government will not do anything against the interest of farmers.

Multiple pleas have been filed in the SC seeking a direction to authorities to immediately remove the farmers, saying commuters are facing hardships due to the road blockades and the gatherings might lead to an increase in the number of Covid-19 cases.

— PTI

India, UK panel to study recognising of degrees

New Delhi, Dec. 16: India and the UK on Wednesday agreed to set up a joint task force consisting of designated higher education organisations from both the countries to work towards mutual recognition of academic qualifications.

Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' said. A decision in this regard was taken in a bilateral meeting between Nishank and UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab here on Wednesday.

"India and the United Kingdom have agreed to set up a joint task force consisting of designated higher education organisations from both the countries to work towards mutual recognition of academic qualifications. This will support India's agenda for internationalisation of higher education. "The agreement to work towards mutual recognition of academic qualifications aligns with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for creating a globally mobile workforce and internationalisation of Indian higher education, as proposed in the National

Education Policy (NEP) 2020 rolled out in July this year," Nishank said.

The meeting was also attended by minister of state for education Sanjay Dhotre and senior officials of the education ministry. Raab hailed India's National Education Policy 2020 as visionary and said the proposed reforms will open up opportunities for students, the economy and for deeper engagement and collaboration between the two countries.

"This policy will help make the bridge of education between India and the UK stronger. The UK has a lot of respect for the academic rigour coming out of India, and the contribution of the Indian student community is highly valued by our country. The UK has made several changes in its visa and immigration rules to facilitate student mobility," he said.

Both sides expressed hope and confidence that they would further enhance mutual engagement in the field of education, research and innovation, leading to deeper and stronger bilateral relations. — PTI

Volunteers 'tolerate' Covaxin in Phase-I

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The interim findings of phase 1 clinical trial of Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the ICMR, showed that it was well tolerated in all dose groups with no serious or adverse events.

The vaccine induced robust binding and neutralising antibody responses which were comparable to those observed in the convalescent serum collected from patients who had recovered from Covid-19, according to the findings which have appeared on medRxiv, a preprint server. A preprint is a version of a scientific manuscript posted on a public server prior to formal peer review.

One serious adverse event was reported, which was found to be unrelated to vaccination, the

Tomorrow: Modi's Economics

Sangh suffers from Islamophobia but sincerely wants to eradicate caste animosity: Vinay Sitapati

SRIRAM KARRI HYDERABAD

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was critical of every kind of religious bigotry, says Vinay Sitapati, author of *Jugalbandi*, in the second part of this interview. He defends the RSS and Sangh, saying they are actually keen to eradicate caste differences. Excerpts.



Vinay Sitapati

QIn your background regarding the birth of Hindutva, you emphasise a historical irony, maybe even an anomaly, that Ambedkar supported Partition siding with Jinnah against Gandhi and Congress but for exactly an opposite view, possibly keeping his quote on Islam being a close corporation, or as Asaduddin Owaisi would say – Jai Bheem, Jai Meem – is the most likely formidable answer to Modi's Hindutva? How would India's first law minis-

ter, Dr Ambedkar, have responded to acts like CAA or the NRC?

Ambedkar was critical of every kind of religious bigotry. But in a different way Ambedkar too was focussed on the welfare of his own community, the Dalits. It is the nature of democracy in a group-based society that different ideologies subscribing to electoral politics will try to fashion their own coalition. Democracy in India has always been largely about the arithmetic of group numbers.

For example, Savarkar had simple task. Hindus are 80 per cent of India, and can easily dominate election. The problem for him is that Hindus don't think of themselves as

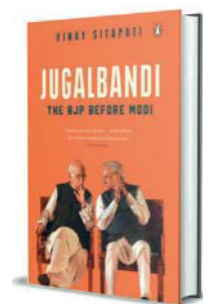
one. If they did, it would be easy for any Hindu party to win elections. But his math was right – get the Hindus to feel united and win power. In the process, the Muslims are alienated, even demonised. But lower caste Hindus are co-opted, and made partners.

The underlying logic – trying to form coalitions for the sake of a numerical majority – is not unique to the BJP. Every party does it. The Communist party says we will unite the have-nots, workers and farmers and win, while demonising capitalists, traders and businessmen. All OBC and Dalit parties have this formulation of a majority too. They demonise the upper caste, in a bid to consolidate the SCs, STs and OBCs; to which then you add Muslims.

There are many ways to get to a majority in elections and each ideology is a reflection of a particular calculation to reach it. Owaisi is trying to fashion his own majority.

The BJP is playing the same game, with a different set of blocks. In that sense, every political party pursuing power in a democracy is therefore

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW PART - 2



Title: Jugalbandi: The BJP Before Modi
Author: Vinay Sitapati
Category: Non-fiction narrative, Indian politics
Publisher: Penguin
Pages: Hardback / 424
Price: ₹799

majoritarian in that sense. They are all playing a game of stitching together a sustainable majority and advocating and justifying policies to benefit constituents of their groupings.

QBut how viable is Owaisi's argument of Muslims and Dalits – in argument both victims of upper caste Hindus – to create a subaltern's government?

The BJP, at this point of time, under Narendra Modi has already succeeded in stitching together a sustainable majority, which is across the caste hierarchy of Hindu society. My critique of Owaisi is that he is not a liberal counter-argument against the RSS, merely the other side of the coin.

He says he opposes a ban on beef but not because he believes every individual must have the right to eat what she or he wants. Owaisi says there should be no ban on beef because lots of people eat beef, especially Muslims and Dalits. The BJP beats him and the likes of him at this game because there is no significant liberal constituency in India, who want to keep the state away from their private choices.

QA strong critique of RSS is it is a thinly veiled Brahmanical hegemony?

I don't agree. If that was the case, why are OBCs, Dalits and Tribals voting for the BJP more than for any other party? Do they not know their own interests? The RSS idea of India has, for over a century, has been

articulated by upper-castes who nonetheless have rejected a Hinduism that is only for upper-castes. In fact, no one wants the abolition of caste differences between Brahmin and Dalits more than the RSS and the BJP. Of course this was initially entirely for electoral reasons – to create a Hindu 'vote-bank'. But if you wear a mask for a 100 years, that mask becomes your face. And today, with a Dalit President and OBC Prime Minister ruling the country, it is obvious the mask has become the face. The correct criticism of Hindu nationalism is that they are anti-Muslim. There is no way to dilute this charge. But don't group Muslims and lower-castes Hindu together. That is, in a way, creating another kind of vote-bank politics in India. And that vote-bank has failed.

QLet us understand your argument correctly. You are saying RSS is anti-Muslim but not anti-Dalit. It means it wants unity between all castes and polarisation only on communal lines? So the allegation they are anti-Dalit and anti-Muslim is half



SHORT TAKES

ANIME STUDIO
ARSON: JAPAN
DETAINS MAN

Tokyo, Dec. 16: Japanese prosecutors on Wednesday charged a man with murder over the 2019 arson attack on Kyoto Animation that killed 36 people, the country's deadliest violent crime in decades.

Shinji Aoba, 42, was detained in the aftermath of the July attack, but has been under constant medical supervision since then after sustaining severe burns in the incident.

The charges include murder, attempted murder, arson, trespass and breach of the arms-control law, the Kyoto prosecutor's office said, without giving further details.

More than 30 people were also injured in the attack, in which Aoba is accused of breaking into the studio's building, spreading gasoline around the ground floor and setting it alight.

TRYING TO FLEE:
CHINA INDICTS 10
HK RESIDENTS

Hong Kong, Dec. 16: Chinese prosecutors on Wednesday announced the indictment of 10 people from Hong Kong over an attempt to flee the city amid a crackdown on opposition political activity.

The Yantian district prosecutor's office in the city of Shenzhen just across the border from Hong Kong said on its microblog that 10 of the suspects were charged with illegally crossing the border while two were also charged with organising the attempted journey.

Two others are minors and a decision on how to handle their cases will be made at a later time, the office said. Relatives of the 12 say they have been prevented from hiring their own lawyers and that the accusations against them are politically motivated. The 12 were arrested at sea in August while they were apparently attempting to flee to Taiwan after a tough national security law took effect in Hong Kong.

FIJIANS TOLD TO
SEEK SHELTER
FROM CYCLONE

Suva, Dec. 16: Fijians living in the path of an approaching super cyclone were told to hunker down at home or head to emergency shelters immediately on Wednesday as authorities warned of the storm's potential to uproot buildings and cause mass destruction.

The Fiji Meteorological Service said Cyclone Yasa had intensified into a top-of-the-scale category five storm, with gusts of up to 280 kilometres per hour (174 miles per hour).

It is on track to hit Fiji late Thursday and the National Disaster Management Office said around two-thirds of the island nation's population of 900,000 were in its path.

National Disaster Management Office director Vasiti Soko said anyone who doubted their home's structural integrity should prioritise survival over protecting their property and flee right away.

"If you need to move to an evacuation centre, we are pleading that you move before it gets dark."

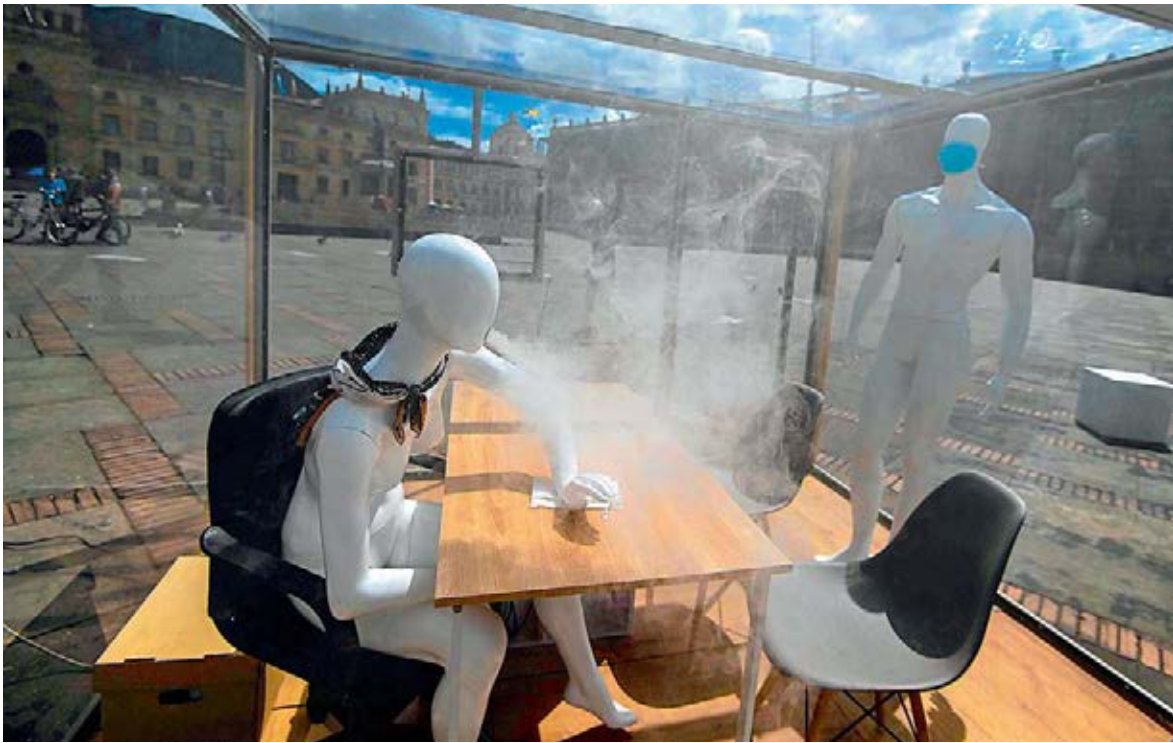
PIG GENETICALLY
MODIFIED FOR
FOOD GETS NOD

New York, Dec. 16: US regulators have approved a genetically modified pig for food and medical products, making it the second such animal to get the green light for human consumption.

But the company behind it says there are no imminent plans to sell it for meat. The pig is genetically engineered to eliminate the presence of alpha-gal, a type of sugar found in many mammals. The sugar makes its way into many products — including medications, cosmetics and food — and can cause allergic reactions in some people.

The main goal of the company behind the pig, United Therapeutics Corp., is to develop medical products, such as blood thinners, that won't set off such reactions, said its spokesman Dewey Steadman. Eventually, the Silver Spring, Maryland-based firm hopes to develop a way for the pig's organs to be transplanted into people.

The pig, called GalSafe, also has commercial potential as food, but Steadman said the company doesn't know when it might be able to secure an agreement with a meat producer to process and sell it.



Smoke comes out of a mannequin's mouth to show how bacteria can spread in the air during a campaign to raise awareness for the prevention of the Coronavirus, in Bogota on Tuesday. — AFP

Many European nations impose
pre-Christmas virus restrictions

Berlin, Dec. 16: Several European countries on Wednesday imposed tighter Coronavirus restrictions ahead of Christmas, as the United States reported another record number of new infections.

Hopes for an end to the pandemic were boosted by positive assessments of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine, but a study warned that at least a fifth of the world's population in poorer nations may not have access to vaccines until 2022.

With the virus resurgent in Europe, Germany closed non-essential shops and schools, swathes of England came under tighter curbs, and Denmark extended its restrictions.

"It's very good that we're closing the shops, it's for our health. We can't wait for things to fall apart," said shopper Jurgen in Berlin, where people were rushing to finish their Christmas purchases before the shutdown.

Germany had coped relatively well with the first wave in the spring, but it has struggled to contain a resurgence in recent months and its health minister said it wanted the European Union to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine "before Christmas".

Calls have been growing for the EU health regulator to speed up its vaccines decision process, with the bloc lagging behind a growing number of nations that have authorised the drug.

Britain has already started using it, but high infection numbers forced London on Wednesday to join large parts of central and northern England under tough, economically painful restrictions.

Pubs, bars, restaurants and other hospitality sites will close, apart from take-aways, as will theatres and other entertainment venues. "The hospitality business needs this week, and it's devastating. It is devastatingly awful," said Lesley Lewis, owner of The French House, a London pub.

"But if this is what it takes to save lives, that's what we have to do." The Netherlands, France and Turkey have also announced restrictions to be in force over the holiday season.

— AFP

Charity: Bezos's
ex-wife gives \$4bn

San Francisco, Dec. 16: MacKenzie Scott, the ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, said Tuesday she has given \$4.2 billion to groups helping the vulnerable as the pandemic hits lives like "a wrecking ball," Scott, who formerly went by the name MacKenzie Bezos, last year signed a "giving pledge" to donate the bulk of her wealth to charity.

In a round of donations early this year, Scott gave nearly \$1.7 billion to groups devoted to race, gender and economic equality, as well as other social causes.

"This pandemic has been a wrecking ball in

the lives of Americans already struggling," Scott said in a post detailing her second round of giving this year. "Economic losses and health outcomes alike have been worse for women, for people of colour, and for people living in poverty." Meanwhile, she noted, the wealth of billionaires has substantially increased.

Such billionaires include her ex-husband, although Scott did not mention his name. Bezos's wealth has reportedly grown almost 80 percent during the pandemic.

— AFP

Record death toll in Germany

Frankfurt Am Main, Dec. 16: Germany registered a record number of deaths from Covid-19 on Wednesday, the first day of a new partial lockdown to try and cope with a surge in infections.

A total of 952 people died in the previous 24 hours, according to the Robert Koch Institute disease control centre.

It said 27,728 new Coronavirus cases were registered, a figure close to the daily record of nearly 30,000 infections reported on Friday.

The previous daily record for fatalities was also reached Friday, when almost 600 people were reported to have died as the number of those in intensive care in the country reached alarming levels. Some 83 percent of intensive care beds in hospitals were occupied on Wednesday, the Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine said. — AFP

Germany had coped relatively well with the first wave in the spring, but it has struggled to contain a resurgence in recent months and its health minister said it wanted the European Union to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine "before Christmas".

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"But if this is what it takes to save lives, that's what we have to do." The Netherlands, France and Turkey have also announced restrictions to be in force over the holiday season.

— AFP

INDIAN UN'S
CHINA RESIDENT
COORDINATOR

United Nations, Dec. 16: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appointed senior UN official Siddharth Chatterjee of India as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in China. Resident Coordinators are the UN Secretary-General's representatives for development at the country level.

They lead UN teams supporting countries to recover better from the Covid-19 pandemic through the Sustainable Development Goals. Guterres appointed Chatterjee as the Resident Coordinator in China, with the host government's approval. — PTI

Virus hunt: WHO
to sift Chinese data

Falkensee, Dec. 16: A German scientist who is part of a small team of experts assembled by the World Health Organisation to investigate the origins of the Coronavirus says they plan to sift through samples and medical data from China to help determine where the bug first jumped from animals to humans and which species it came from.

The search for the source of the new Coronavirus has sparked claims of cover-ups and fuelled political tensions, particularly between the US administration of President Donald Trump and Beijing. Most researchers think that the virus, also known as SARS-CoV-2, originated

in animals in China, probably bats, and the WHO has put together a 10-person team to examine the science. Mission member Fabian Leendertz, a biologist at Germany's Robert Koch Institute who specialises in emerging diseases, said that the goal is to gather data to be better prepared for possible future outbreaks.

"It's really not about finding a guilty country," Leendertz said. — AP

Senate run-offs:
Biden campaigns

Nominates Buttigieg as transportation secy

Atlanta, Dec. 16: President-elect Joe Biden threw his weight into the Democratic battle for control of the US Senate on Tuesday, as his White House win was finally acknowledged by top Republicans and holdout foreign leaders.

Biden flew into Georgia — a southern state he won in an upset against President Donald Trump — to host a rally for two Democratic candidates in run-off races that will determine the Senate's balance of power.

"Honk for your next United States senators Jon Ossoff and Rev. Raphael Warnock," Biden told the crowd at the drive-in event in Atlanta — urging voters to turn out in force on January 5.

"Send me these two men, and we will control the Senate!" One day after the Electoral College affirmed Biden's victory, attention shifted to the looming Senate battle — and to the shape of the incoming administration, as Biden also announced he had nominated Pete Buttigieg, a former Indiana mayor and presidential rival, as secretary of transportation. He would be the first openly gay person confirmed by the Senate to a presidential cabinet post — in sync with Biden's pledge to usher in the most diverse cabinet ever when he takes office on January 20.

Rouhani: 'Happy'
Trump leaving

Tehran, Dec. 16: President Hassan Rouhani said Wednesday that Iran was "very happy" over the looming departure from office of US counterpart Donald Trump, who led a campaign of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic republic.

President-elect Joe Biden, who defeated Trump at the ballot box in November, has signalled a willingness to return to diplomacy with Iran after four tense years under the outgoing president.

"Some say you are over-excited by the advent of Mr. Biden. No, we are not, but we are very happy to see Trump leave," he said in televised comments at a cabinet meeting.

"Thank God, these are his final days," Rouhani added, calling Trump a "tyrant", "the most unruly, lawless president" and a "terrorist and murderer." The electoral college confirmed Biden as the next US president on Monday even as the incumbent continues to refuse to accept defeat.

The formal handover of power will take place on January 20 when Biden is sworn in.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington soared during Trump's presidency as his administration sought to bring Israel and the Gulf Arab states closer together with a hard line against Iran. — AFP

And while Trump still refuses to concede — continuing to tweet baseless allegations of mass fraud that have been rejected in dozens of lawsuits — top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell finally broke his silence with a message to the president: It's over. "The Electoral College has spoken. So today I want to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden,"

McConnell said on the Senate floor, adding that Americans can also "take pride" that they will have their first female VP in Kamala Harris. Biden said that he had a "good" phone conversation with McConnell, a longtime Senate colleague. "I told him that while we disagree on a lot of things, there are things we can work together on," he said. — AFP

Afghan, Taliban in
Pak to talk peace

Islamabad, Dec. 16: A high-level Afghan-Taliban delegation arrived here on Wednesday to hold talks with the top Pakistani leadership as part of efforts to push forward the reconciliation process, amid growing

incidents of violence in Afghanistan. The Taliban Political Commission (TPC), headed by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, is on a December 16-18 visit to Pakistan, according to the Foreign Office (FO). — PTI

ERDOGAN: U.S.
CURBS ATTACK
SOVEREIGNTY

Ankara, Dec. 16: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday called US sanctions against Ankara over its purchase of a Russian missile defence system an "open attack" on the NATO member. — AFP

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DECCAN Chronicle

17 DECEMBER 2020

Facts don't back PM's theory on farmers' stir

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech in Kutch on Tuesday, in which he spoke of "a great conspiracy to mislead farmers, in and around Delhi", can be said to mark a new stage in the agitation of farmers of North India, in the vanguard of which are Punjab farmers. This stage bespeaks the hardening of the government's stand against the farmers knocking on the doors of the nation's capital for the past 20 days.

After six rounds of dialogue between the government and the farmers' representatives, including a session with Union home minister Amit Shah, the food growers maintain their opposition to the three controversial agri-laws, passed in controversial circumstances last September. The government is just as adamant and will not agree to their repeal, the farmers' key demand. The farmers have rejected the government's implied offer of amending specific sections of the three laws if farmers can pinpoint them.

In Parliament, and in various statements made by the government's representatives outside the legislature, not excluding the remarks of the PM at various forums, the government is yet to cogently explain to the need for the laws that have created a storm, other than to say that these represent much-needed "reform" that will benefit farmers and the farm sector, and will not leave them worse off. The agriculturists are not persuaded, however. The government's bland assurances have done nothing to reassure farmers that the real reason for these "reforms" was to not to benefit big industry, rather than the owners of farmland.

Ironically, even as Mr Modi attacked the Opposition parties — and when he does that he specifically means the Congress since he says "they" were unable to bring reforms when in power — the real attack on the government has come from Akali Dal president Sukhbir Badal on the same day that the PM was accusing the Opposition of misleading farmers and playing politics in the guise of backing farmers. The Akalis depend principally on the votes of agriculturists.

Such was the force of the Dal's opposition to the three farm laws that its announcement of leaving the Narendra Modi government came on the floor of the Lok Sabha, in the course of the discussion on the controversial farm laws. Subsequently, the Punjab party left the ruling alliance. Therefore, the notion of innocent farmers being "misled" by the Opposition — assiduously propagated by the government and the BJP — does not square with the facts. In the first instance, this opposition to the agri-laws came from the Akali Dal when it was a member of the ruling NDA until three months ago. This was clearly a case of opposition from within.

In a newspaper interview, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the BJP under Mr Modi came back with an increased majority in 2019 because of the "transformative" policies of demonetisation and GST. The extremely negative economic effects of these policies did not concern him and he equated more seats in Parliament with approval of these policies by the people. In the same way, he noted, the farm laws, that have triggered a tsunami of protest, will also be backed by the electorate.

The farmers seem to be up against the strength of ideology rather than economic logic.

Naked power grab

The fracas in the Karnataka Legislative Council may be par for the course in many a legislature, but it did nothing for the reputation of a House of Elders. The physical pushing and shoving of the deputy chairman, who was the presiding officer at the time and the kind of street language members used against each other made this a new low so far as meetings at the majestic Vidhana Soudha building in Bengaluru goes. The issue does run deeper and the incident only further illustrates the naked power grabbing politics gripping places reserved for people's representatives.

It appears the ruling party BJP was in a tearing hurry to pass the contentious Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill 2020 and the Congress, afraid of losing the chairmanship and control of the council, was hell bent on stopping the proceedings and the Bill. But the Congress chairman had no right to duck legislative business in adjourning the House on December 10 even as the BJP and JD(S) had no right to forcibly occupy the chair through deputy chairman Dharmegowda to try and pass the Bill.

The Congress' fear of losing the last vestige of power in Karnataka it had enjoyed in its alliance of convenience with the JD(S) till 2019 may have led it to such subterfuge in blocking legislation the BJP is keen to enact. The cattle protection laws are in keeping with BJP's pursuit of Hindutva, to enable which it has been seen enticing the JD(S) into its sphere of influence by dangling the carrot of an alliance that may stretch into the next Assembly elections.

The JD(S) is a past master in the art of gravitating towards political power as evidenced in its supreme H.D. Devegowda once becoming Prime Minister of India in a large coalition with a minuscule number of MPs. Its effort to remain relevant in Karnataka politics today is understandable. However, the least expectation is presiding officers of legislatures will meticulously follow the rule book so as not to deny a majority from having its say, such majority always being on the floor of the House.

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Gymkhana divided on suspension of ex-cop

Due to various complex rules around admission, the Delhi Gymkhana Club has maintained its exclusive "aura" for 107 years. Its governing body is comprised of various retired government and defence officials as well as other private citizens. Its elections are a hotly contested affair, often leading to accusations of use of "illegal" and "unlawful" means between the contestants.

These days the club is roiled by a letter written by 50 members collectively to the club president expressing their outrage at the "arbitrary decision" of the governing body. One of the issues that has riled members is the proposed suspension of a member, Dr Parvez Hayat, a retired IPS officer, for a day and further debarring him from contesting the club elections. Sources say that the member's suspension was the result of allega-

tions levelled against him by vice-admiral B.S. Randhawa. The letter alleged that the club authorities did not observe the rules and due process before taking the decision to suspend the retired IPS officer.

Such controversies are not new. Earlier this year, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had ruled that the club was acting in a manner "prejudicial to public interest" and, therefore, must be probed. It said that a five-member central government appointed panel should investigate the affairs of the club, including land usage and its admission policy for members.

UPRIGHT BABU RILES UTTARAKHAND MINISTER

These days your average babu can rarely say "no" to a minister. Blind obedience is what is expected from them, leaving little room for independent decision-making.

But like always, there are exceptions to the rule. An instance from Uttarakhand has recently come to light. There is even a touch of the bizarre about it!

The state's minister of women and child welfare, Rekha Arya, reportedly wrote to the DIG of Dehradun, Arun Mohan Joshi, inquiring about her additional secretary V. Shanmugam, who, she said, was "missing". And since the officer was "incommunicado", she feared he might have been kidnapped!

As it turns out, according to sources, trouble had been brewing between the minister and the IAS officer for some time. Matters came to a head sometime in September when Mr Shanmugam awarded a contract in a tender possibly against the wishes of the minister. Subsequently, he went into a two-day "self-isolation" and did not take any calls from his

office or the minister.

The irate mantri forced chief minister Trivendra Rawat to order an inquiry into the award of the contract, but additional chief secretary Manisha Panwar has reported that the probe did not find any misconduct by Mr Shanmugam. Further, Mr Panwar has stated that the officer had followed due process while awarding the contract and while going on leave. This is where matters rest, for now. It remains to be seen whether the minister will pursue the issue further or let it fly. It would also be interesting to see if the babu manages to hold on to his post or gets transferred elsewhere.

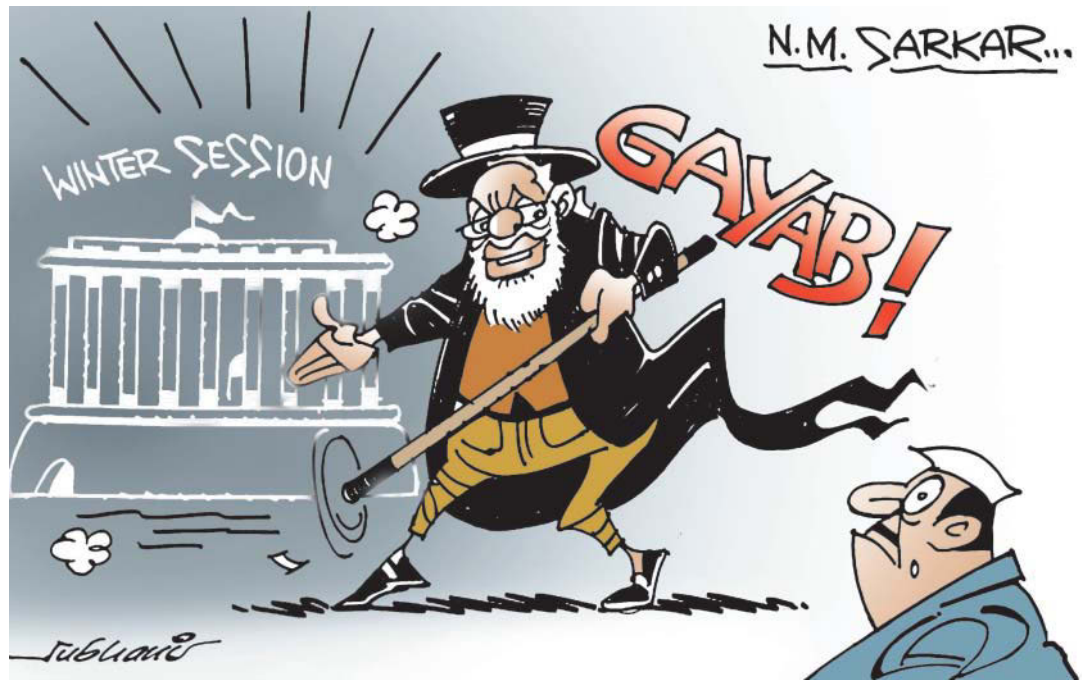
Contrast this with a powerful babu in Delhi who did not vanish after his "gaffe". Immense sweeping powers and other capabilities were exercised in Delhi and his statement vanished instead. What

One issue that has riled up members is the proposed suspension of a member, Dr Parvez Hayat, retired IPS officer, for a day and further debarring of him from the club elections. The member's suspension was the result of allegations levelled against him by vice-admiral B.S. Randhawa.

was reported in the media (of course, the story was promptly withdrawn, though the video exists!) on questioning the credentials of democracy itself led to much speculation whether this was just a gaffe or something more!

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

Subhani



Child nutrition crisis may derail India's aspirations



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

It can be tempting to blame every crisis on the Covid-19 pandemic. But quite often, facts get in the way. Many things were bad enough even prior to the onset of the pandemic, that gutted so many lives and livelihoods.

The latest data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) is a case in point. It shows that several states across the country are doing worse since the last NFHS was conducted in 2015-16. They have reversed course and are showing worsening levels of child malnutrition despite improvements in sanitation and better access to fuel and drinking water.

Arguably, the first set of findings from the NFHS-5, conducted in 2019-20, four years after the last one (2015-16), relates to only 22 states and Union territories and does not include major states like Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Data for these states will be released sometime in the middle of next year.

It is also true that not everything in NFHS-5 reeks of gloom.

Immunisation coverage has expanded in many states, the number of households using clean fuel has improved. Ditto with sanitation facilities. The total fertility rate (TFR) across most Indian states is also declining.

All this is good news. But we can't afford to take the eye off the ball and gloss over the heart-breaking reality of growing numbers of stunted and undernourished children in India.

In Maharashtra, the percentage of children in the 6-59 months group who are anaemic has shot up from 53.8 per cent (2015-2016) to 68.9 per cent in 2019-2020. Rural children are more severely affected. In the same period, the percentage of children under five who are stunted (low height for age) has gone up from

34.4 to 35.2.

What leapt out at me was the data from Mumbai. Children in the 6-50 months group who are anaemic has risen from 65.7 per cent in 2015-2016 to 72.8 per cent in 2019-2020.

Or take Gujarat, a relatively affluent state. The percentage of children under five who are stunted has risen from 38.5 (2015-2016) to 39.0 (2019-2020). In the same period, children under five who are severely wasted has gone up from 9.5 per cent to 10.6 per cent and those between 6-59 months who are anaemic has shot up from 62.6 per cent in 2015-2016 to 79.7 per cent in 2019-2020.

Nutrition experts point out that out of 22 states and Union territories for which we have data, there is a surge in severe acute malnutrition cases in 16 states/UTs, compared to NFHS-4 conducted in 2015-2016.

Even Kerala, that usually leads in social policies, has problems: anaemia is growing among children.

The underfed hugely outnumber the overfed but alongside the crisis of child under-nutrition, we are also seeing a rise in child obesity, perhaps due to more junk food consumption.

All this is exacerbated by widespread under-nutrition and anaemia among women, including those who are pregnant.

What is going wrong and what has changed between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020?

"We don't have granular data for all states and Union territories as yet but the first lot of data from NFHS-5 points to worsening malnutrition and anaemia in several states. From the data that's available, it's hard to pinpoint why malnutrition worsened even before the pandemic set in, but it's important to note that the period when it worsened coincides with the time India suf-

fered economic shocks. We had demonetisation in 2016, which gutted much of the informal sector which dominates the Indian economy. We don't know to what extent those who took a severe hit during demonetisation have recovered. The GST rollout also affected small businesses and rural wages have stagnated," says Dipa Sinha, assistant professor of economics at New Delhi's Ambedkar University and a key figure in India's Right to Food Campaign.

"The other unknown for which we don't have much data is the impact of the weakening of the social protection framework with inadequate budgetary support and no expansion in response to the economic slowdown which could have affected affordability of diets. PDS (public distribution system) provides only rice and wheat in most states. Some states also give pulses and oil, but many poorer states don't," she adds.

Some experts point out that the work of the Narendra Modi government's flagship National Nutrition Mission and Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) campaign, with an ambitious target of reducing anaemia by three percentage points per annum till 2022, are not really captured in the NFHS-5 data because they really got going only recently.

Even if that is so, it is vital to review what is actually happening on the ground. There are enough indications that all is not well with many programmes. Take the mid-day meals, for example — the Central government's flagship school-based feeding programme aimed at improving the nutritional status of students and promoting the universal

isation of elementary education.

According to the Accountability Initiative of the Centre of Policy Research, only 14 states in India could utilise 100 per cent of the funds allocated to them for mid-day meals for the year 2018-2019, and states like Telangana, Assam and Goa used only two-third of the money allocated to them under this head. Gujarat and Haryana used only 40 per cent of the funds allocated to them for mid-day meals. All this goes to show that there is a lot that is dysfunctional on the ground.

India's child nutrition crisis should give policymakers sleepless nights.

Stunting is a marker of chronic or recurrent undernutrition, usually associated with poor socioeconomic conditions, poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness, and/or inappropriate infant and young child feeding and care in early life.

Children who suffer from stunting may not only not grow to their full height, there is also a risk that they would not develop their full cognitive potential.

Experts say mothers who suffer from under-nutrition are more likely to have children who suffer from stunting or wasting, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and undernutrition. Anaemia is also hugely debilitating. It can affect children's cognitive performance and physical growth. In women, anaemia can adversely impact the capacity to work and can lead to poor pregnancy outcomes.

Children are India's future, on whom the country's dreams rest, but they are paying the price of adult bungling and apathy. We can't afford that. Nor can we afford diversions like the needless hullabaloo over serving boiled eggs, a source of protein, to poor children in government programmes.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com

LETTERS

FARMERS' AGITATION

Instead of making political statements, why can't Prime Minister Narendra Modi call leaders of farmers' leaders and tell them what is the conspiracy and who is behind it and present a viable solution to end the agitation? (*PM sees conspiracy behind farmers stir, DC, Dec. 16*). Adamant hardening of stance, accusations and counter-accusations lead nowhere.

Dr O.Prasada Rao
Hyderabad

The farmers' agitation has reached a stage where it is adversely affecting the movement of goods and services. It is testing the Central government that has kept its door open for discussion to resolve the issue. Farmers must talk and help end the agitation.

S.D.Mukherji
Hyderabad

VACCINATION

The fears and doubts expressed over Covid-19 vaccine are still persisting due to messages on social media, debates with medical experts and TV channels. Due to corporate hospitals and their treatment and exorbitant medical bills that give absolutely no results, the government should ensure the procurement and distribution of the vaccine properly.

Garlapaty Sitharamaiah
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

S.C. VERDICT NO DEFEAT OF GOVT. — PM

NEW DELHI, Dec. 16 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi emphatically declared amid cheers in the Rajya Sabha today that the Supreme Court judgement striking down the princes derecognition order did not constitute any defeat of the Government.

Hitting back firmly at interpellation from the Jana Sangh and Swatantra benches on a calling attention motion tabled by Mr Bhupesh Gupta (CPI) about the judgment and the situation arising from it, Mrs. Gandhi also declared that the Government was not in any predicament as a result of the court order. The discussion which lasted two hours was marked by noisy interruptions by various members. To the thumping of desks from her colleagues, Mrs. Gandhi said the Government fully anticipated "obstacles in every path in the march to progress".

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,666.46	0.87
Nifty 50	13,682.70	0.85
S&P 500*	3,703.40	0.24
Dollar (₹)	73.58	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	-1.25
Euro (₹)	89.49	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,059.215	0.43
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.70	-0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.944	0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.928	0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

SBI: GDP to dip only by -7.4%, full recovery in 7 qtrs

India's GDP growth is expected to be at (-) 7.4 per cent in FY21 on better than projected recovery, said a SBI research report, upgrading its earlier forecast of (-) 10.9 per cent. The report also said it would take seven quarters from the fourth quarter of FY21 for GDP to reach the pre-pandemic level in nominal terms. It said the revised estimates are based on SBI 'Now-casting Model' with 41 high frequency indicators.

LPG price raised again by ₹50; ATF costlier by 6.3%



Cooking gas LPG price was increased by Rs 50 per cylinder, the second hike in rate this month following firming of international prices. Also, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was raised by a steep 6.3 per cent. Non-subsidised LPG price was increased to Rs 694 per 14.2-kg cylinder from Rs 644 earlier, according to a price notification of state fuel marketing companies. On Dec. 1, price was hiked by a similar Rs 50 per cylinder.

Reforms window for states open till February 15

The finance ministry has extended the deadline till February 15 for states to implement reforms—one nation one ration card, ease of doing business, urban local body/ utility and power sector reforms—to become eligible for additional borrowing this fiscal. To meet the extra fund requirements of states on account of Covid-19, the Centre in May had decided to raise the states' borrowing limit by 2 per cent of GSDP.

Kia Motors sells 1 L 'connected cars' in India

South Korea's Kia Motors said it has crossed 1 lakh cumulative sales milestone of its 'connected cars' in India within 16 months of starting operations in the country. One out of two Kia cars sold in India is a connected car—equipped with Kia's UVO connect system, an advanced and dynamic solution that seamlessly integrates smart-phone or smartwatch with the car and its infotainment system into a single unit, the firm said.



Guv's advice for raising credit-GDP ratio Lend by cash flow, not collateral: Das

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 16

Banks should rely less on collateral security for lending and instead focus more on cashflow-based lending to help improve the credit-to-GDP ratio in the country, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das said on Wednesday. The credit bureaus and the proposed public credit registry (PCR) are expected to improve the flow of credit as well as credit culture, the apex bank chief added.

India is ranked amongst the most financially underpenetrated economies, which suffered from a bad loan problem with industrial credit while also having an underpenetration in last mile credit. As per RBI data, the scheduled commercial banks' credit as a per cent of GDP came down to 50.99 per cent in FY20 from 51.51 per cent in FY19.

On the other hand, the credit-to-GDP ratio in advanced economies and China is in the range of 150 to 200 per cent.

"To improve the credit to GDP ratio, access to credit and cost of credit need to be addressed by lesser reliance on collateral security and greater cash-flow based lending. Credit bureaus and the proposed Public Credit Registry (PCR) framework are expected to improve the flow of credit as well as credit culture," Das said in his keynote address titled the National Strategy on Financial Education 2020-



25 at the webinar on 'Investing in investor education in India: Priorities for action' organised by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

The views had earlier been put forth by former deputy governor Viral Acharya, who, in July this year, said that an estimated 50 per cent of Indians were employed informally and remained invisible to the banking system despite earning as much as their peers in the formal system. "When they want a loan, the bank denies them credit unless they provide a hard asset collateral, which is not easy to come by if you are the last mile and below the poverty line," Acharya had said.

He said the average Indian could not provide collateral and hence resorted to informal finance which remained infamous for 'extraordinary high rates, onerous terms and inhuman collection policies'. Acharya had cited the example of micro entrepreneurs and said that "if the formal financing system can observe the cash flow patterns of

micro entrepreneurs through other transactions that they are doing, they can start doing cash flow lending and can start serving the unique needs of the customers based on the specific maturity profile and their cash flows."

India, with a large section of population in the working age group, is already the third largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity and is aiming to become a \$5 trillion economy.

"We need to harness the demographic dividend by meeting the aspirations of a large young population. This necessitates creating an enabling environment and infrastructure in the form of education, training and opportunity.

Among all the prerequisites for achieving demographic dividend and accelerated growth, quality of human resources, greater formalisation of economy, a higher credit to GDP ratio and greater financial inclusion are the differentiating factors that would elevate our economy to the desired level," Das added.

400 foundries stop work over high raw material price

Coimbatore, Dec. 16: About 400 small and tiny foundries in the district remained silent on Wednesday as part of their indefinite strike to draw the attention of the Centre to the spiralling price of raw materials in the last two months.

The foundries, affiliated to the Coimbatore Tiny and Small Foundry Owners Association (Cosmafan), stopped production indefinitely, resulting in a loss of Rs 30 crore daily, its president Shiva Shanmugha-kumar said.

The increasing prices would not only affect the foundries but also related industries such as wet grinder, pump & motors, textiles and automobiles, who are the large-scale customers of foundry products, he said.

The price increase ranged from 30 to 55 per cent compared to the pre-lockdown period, he said.

Hoarding by the traders, thus creating artificial scarcity of the materials, also contributed to the price hike, he said, adding the entire industrial sector is seeking the intervention of the Centre to bring down the prices for its survival.

The Coimbatore and Tirupur Medium Industries Association, with nearly 50,000 units, has also given a call to down shutters for a day on Wednesday to express solidarity with striking foundries. Nineteen SME associations had already staged a demonstration here on Tuesday. — PTI

Sebi relaxes norms for CIRP firms, MF sponsors

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 16

The Sebi board on Wednesday made changes to the shareholding norms for corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) companies, relaxed mutual fund sponsor eligibility criteria and also decided to relax minimum promoter contribution in follow-on public offer.

The regulator said firms that remain listed due to implementation of resolution plan under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code will be required to have at least 5 per cent public shareholding at the time of their admission to deal on a stock exchange.

There is no such minimum requirement now.

Further, such companies will be provided 12 months to achieve public shareholding of 10 per cent from the date shares are admitted for dealings on the stock exchange and 36 months to achieve public shareholding of 25 per cent. For this, the current timelines are 18 and 36 months, respectively.



The Sebi also decided to relax the profitability criteria for becoming a mutual fund sponsor, aiming to facilitate innovation and expansion in the sector.

The regulator has also decided to segregate and ring-fence assets and liabilities of mutual fund schemes. This is in addition to the existing requirement of segregating bank accounts and securities accounts.

On sponsor eligibility, the Sebi said sponsors that

are not fulfilling the profitability criteria when applying will also be considered eligible to sponsor a fund. "This is subject to having a net-worth of not less than Rs 100 crore for the purpose of contribution towards the net-worth of the Asset Management Company (AMC)."

The net-worth of the AMC has to be maintained till it makes profit for five consecutive years.

The new rules will open the gates for new players to come in as mutual fund-sponsors with high net-worth but no profitability. At present, a sponsor has to show profits in three out of the immediately preceding five years.

The board approved the proposal to do away with the applicability of minimum promoters' contribution and the subsequent lock-in requirements for the issuers making a Further Public Offer of specified securities subject to conditions.

Covid steals 81 mn jobs in Asia-Pac

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 16

Covid-19 wiped out some 81 million jobs in the Asia-Pacific while 364-429 million casual workers were affected by the Indian lock-down measures, says the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in a study.

The report estimates that in Asia and the Pacific, the Covid-19 crisis has led to a gap of 81 million jobs compared with the pre-crisis numbers. The regional jobs gap in 2020 is largely

driven by South Asia, where the employment estimate is nearly 50 million jobs below the pre-crisis baseline, corresponding to a 7.4 per cent drop in employment.

"India implemented one of the strictest lockdowns among the large middle-income countries...An estimated 364-429 million workers have been adversely affected by the lockdown measures," the report said.

While India's total Covid-19 fiscal response package as a percentage of GDP

was higher than the median among the Asia-Pacific countries, government support to income or revenue, as part of the Covid-19 policy expenditure, was on the lower side and lesser than countries like Paki-stan, China and Australia.

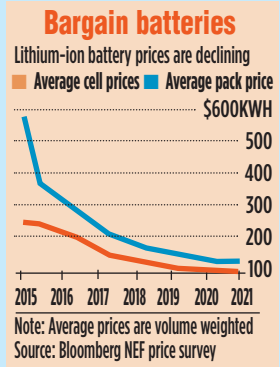
Overall, in Asia-Pac, labour income is estimated to have declined by 9.9 per cent in the first three quarters of 2020. An additional 22-25.4 million persons could be added to working poor or those living on less than \$1.90 a day.

Electric cars to get cheaper as battery costs plunge

DAVID R. BAKER DEC. 16

Electric vehicles may cost about the same as their fuel-guzzling brethren in just three or four years—and only get cheaper from there, shows a new report from Bloomberg-NEF.

Electric cars and buses have long been saddled with bigger up-front costs than those burning petrol or diesel, due to the cost of batteries. But researchers say that price premium will disappear once battery packs reach \$100 per kilowatt-hour—a tipping point BNEF expects to occur in 2023, according to its Battery Price Survey. Battery costs have



plunged nearly 90 per cent in the last decade, from \$1,100 per kilowatt-hour in 2010 to \$137 this year. Packs built for cars—as opposed to home solar arrays or pieces of the

power grid—cost even less. They now average \$126 per kilowatt-hour.

The survey also found examples of batteries for electric buses in China selling below \$100 per kilowatt-hour, said lead author James Frith. China's average pack price for electric buses is only slightly higher, at \$105.

"Within just a few years we will see the average price in the industry pass this point," said Frith. "What's more, our analysis shows even if prices for raw materials were to return to the highs seen in 2018, it would only delay average prices reaching \$100/kWh by two years."

— Bloomberg

WHATSAPP TO HELP BUY 'SACHET-SIZED' HEALTH POLICIES

New Delhi, Dec. 16: WhatsApp on Wednesday said it expects to facilitate the purchase of 'affordable sachet-sized' health insurance through its platform by the end of the year as part of its efforts to provide users in India with

greater access to financial solutions.

The Facebook-owned company noted that its 'Payments' feature is now available to users across the country (having 20 million users) with support from banking partners

State Bank of India, HDFC, ICICI and Axis Bank.

"WhatsApp is deeply committed to India with over 400 million active users, this is our largest market," said WhatsApp India head Abhijit Bose at an event. —PTI

Double-digit dip in growth likely: Acma

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 16

The Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India, or Acma, on Wednesday said the sector will see a double-digit decline in growth this fiscal, after a 34 per cent drop in the first half of the year due to coronavirus-induced disruptions.

The industry body said it would take two to three years, depending on how steep the recovery is, for the component makers to work out a whole-sector capex planning.

In the first half of the fiscal, Acma said, the turnover of the automotive components industry stood at Rs 1.19 lakh crore (\$15.9 billion), registering a de-growth of 34 per cent as compared to Rs 1.82 lakh crore (\$26.2 billion) in the first half of the previous fiscal.

The performance was mainly affected by the first quarter when the auto sector had almost "zero revenue" due to the nationwide lockdown, with restrictions continuing in

the second quarter as well.

"Going forward, obviously this year as well, because of the lockdown and the challenges we continue to face, we will have a double-digit contraction. As you know 34 per cent, we have already contracted in the industry in H1.

"Although we are optimistic about our H2 performance, we will not be able to completely recover from the Q1 and Q2 fiascos," Deepak Jain, president at Acma told reporters in a video conference.

The auto components sector has been set back by three to four years due to the pandemic and it could take two to three years for the sector to reach the peak levels of 2018-19.

Jain, however, said the performance of the industry during the festive season has been heartening and there are indications the vehicle demand would be sustained.

According to Acma, exports of auto components declined by 23.6 per cent to Rs 39,003 crore (\$5.2 billion) in H1 FY21.

Term plan purchases taper down from July



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 16

In the initial months of the pandemic the fear for life was higher among Indians, especially the youth. The term insurance buying pattern shows this fear tapered down as the country started coming out of the lockdown.

Between March and July, when the country was under the lockdown, the purchase of term insurance policies surged 60 per cent year-on-year. However, after July when the country started opening up, the growth came down to 30 to 40 per cent, as per data from Policy Bazaar.

"When the pandemic was spreading fast in China, Europe and the US, the fear was higher in India. The lock-down further increased the fear. This saw people rushing to secure their lives. However, the lower mortality rate in India alleviated the fear among the citizens and the country also had started opening up by July," Amit Garg, business head, term insurance, PolicyBazaar told Financial Chronicle.

The trend was largely seen in metros and tier-I cities, which have a larger share of educated and employed people. Tier II cities also saw 40 per cent growth between March and July and then it fell to 20 to 30 per cent post-July.

Term insurance purchases by self-employed people saw the highest surge, accounting for 30 per cent of the term insurance buyers. The number has now gone up to 40 per cent.

Beware of these pests coming to eat your crops

AGNIESZKA DE SOUSA & MICHAEL HIRTZER DEC. 16

Climate change is opening up new habitats to old pests, transforming them from a nuisance into a growing menace and placing unprecedented threats on the global food supply. Here are bugs to keep an eye on.

■ Fall Armyworm—Spodoptera frugiperda Found in: Africa, Australia, East and South Asia, and North and South America Eats: Corn, rice, sorghum, sugar cane, wheat

Native to tropical areas of the Western Hemisphere, this invasive species has spread rapidly, causing "major damage to economically important cultivated grasses," according to CABI, the non-profit Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International. The pest infested about 15 per cent of Zambia's corn crop this year. It also contributed to a 4 per cent decline in China's corn harvest—a difference of about 11 million tonnes—sending prices skyrocketing and

forcing the country to open its strategic stockpile, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

■ Coffee Berry Borer—Hypothenemus hampei Found in: Tropical climates—i.e., almost all coffee-producing countries Eats: Coffee

These tiny beetles make their home inside the fruit of coffee plants, eating them from the inside out. The bug used to stick around lower, warmer elevations, but rising temperatures have coaxed them higher uphill. That's affecting the more expensive arabica coffee varieties, which prefer to grow on the slopes. Controlling the beetle population requires careful, labour-intensive monitoring. And farmers, who are already seeking higher ground because of climate change—coffee plants are particularly sensitive to temperatures—are running out of room.

■ Desert Locust—Schistocerca gregaria Found in: Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; plus a few cases in Europe Eats: Pretty much anything



This pest has a Biblical appetite. In the past year it's ravaged crops in regions as far-flung as East Africa and northern India. Both outbreaks were made possible by warmer seas, which generate more hurricanes and typhoons, which in turn create the perfect breeding ground for locusts. Ample rains moisten the soil, helping eggs thrive and encouraging vegetation growth in typically arid regions. As the climate gets more volatile, locust swarms are expected to become both more frequent and more severe.

■ Soybean Gail—MidgeRessel-iella maxima

Found in: US Great Plains, creeping into the Midwest Eats: Soybeans

This tiny up-and-comer has been appearing in soybean fields in some US states. Its larvae attack the stems of soy plants that are in flower. There's no known effective defence. "Nothing was significant enough to suppress the larvae," says Erin Hodgson, associate professor of entomology at Iowa State University. "Plants can experience straight-up death."

■ Spotted wing drosophila—Drosophila suzukii (Matsumura) Found in: Asia primarily, but increasingly in the Americas and Europe Eats: Summer fruits, such as berries, cherries, and grapes

The flying pest's small larvae feast on soft, expensive fruit varieties, rendering them non-saleable and costing farmers millions of dollars. Although it showed up in North America only a decade ago, it's already wreaked havoc on US berry farmers. Rising temperatures will expand the drosophila's potential habitat, allowing it to push farther north each year. — Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Moody is SRH director of cricket

New Delhi: Australian Tom Moody has been appointed director of cricket at Indian Premier League side Sunrisers Hyderabad, who are captained by his compatriot David Warner.

Moody, 55, was the Hyderabad coach for seven years and led them to their only IPL title in 2016. He was replaced by another Australian, Trevor Bayliss, last year and late on Tuesday the franchise announced that Moody would be returning. The former batsman switched to coaching and TV commentary after retiring in 2001 and helped Hyderabad reach the play-offs five times during his stay as coach.

Hyderabad, who also have New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson and Afghanistan spin ace Rashid Khan in their ranks, failed to reach this year's final when they lost to DC in the playoffs in November. —*AFP*

Shuttler Foo Kune banned for doping

Geneva: Mauritian badminton player Kate Foo Kune, her country's flag-carrier at the 2016 Rio Olympics, was banned for two years for doping on Wednesday after failing to prove her drink was spiked.

Foo Kune tested positive for a banned steroid last year but she escaped a ban when the Badminton World Federation's anti-doping panel accepted her explanation that she was the victim of sabotage. But after a BWF appeal against its own panel's decision, the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport said there was no evidence of foul play. "The CAS panel found the athlete's assertion of intentional spiking during the 2019 African Badminton World Championships devoid of supporting evidence," said a statement from the court, announcing a two-year ban from December 15. — *AFP*

Floyd, Laila voted to Hall of Fame

Canastota, New York: Floyd Mayweather, who captured 11 world titles in five weight divisions and retired unbeaten, former heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko, and Laila Ali have been elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame and Museum. The Class of 2021 announced Tuesday also includes former Olympic champion Andre Ward, Ann Wolfe, Marian Trimiari, and Dr. Margaret Goodman. Elected posthumously were: Davey Moore, Jackie Tonawanda, cut man Freddie Brown, manager-trainer Jackie McCoy, journalist George Kimball, and television executive Jay Larkin. Honorees were selected by members of the Boxing Writers Association and a panel of international boxing historians. Induction day is scheduled for June 13 and also will include last year's class. — *AP*

Prez candidate wants Leo to stay

Barcelona: Barcelona presidential candidate Jordi Farre said on Tuesday he would work to make sure Lionel Messi stays at the Catalan giants should be elected next month, and hinted at a improbable bid for Neymar by the cash-strapped club.

Farre was promoter of the motion that led to previous club chief Josep Maria Bartomeu's resignation and with elections set for January 24 has been trying to attract support for his candidacy by offering free tattoos and pizzas with the Barca crest to fans who supported his bid for the top job.

The 45-year-old businessman and engineer said his priority is convincing Messi to stay despite the disillusioned Argentina forward's bid to leave in the close season and the fact he can begin negotiating a departure next summer in the new year. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: First Test — Day One from 9.30 am on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

Big Bash League: Hobart Hurricanes vs Melbourne Renegades from 5.40 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

FOOTBALL

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

English Premier League: Aston Villa vs Burnley from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Roma vs Torino from 1.15 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

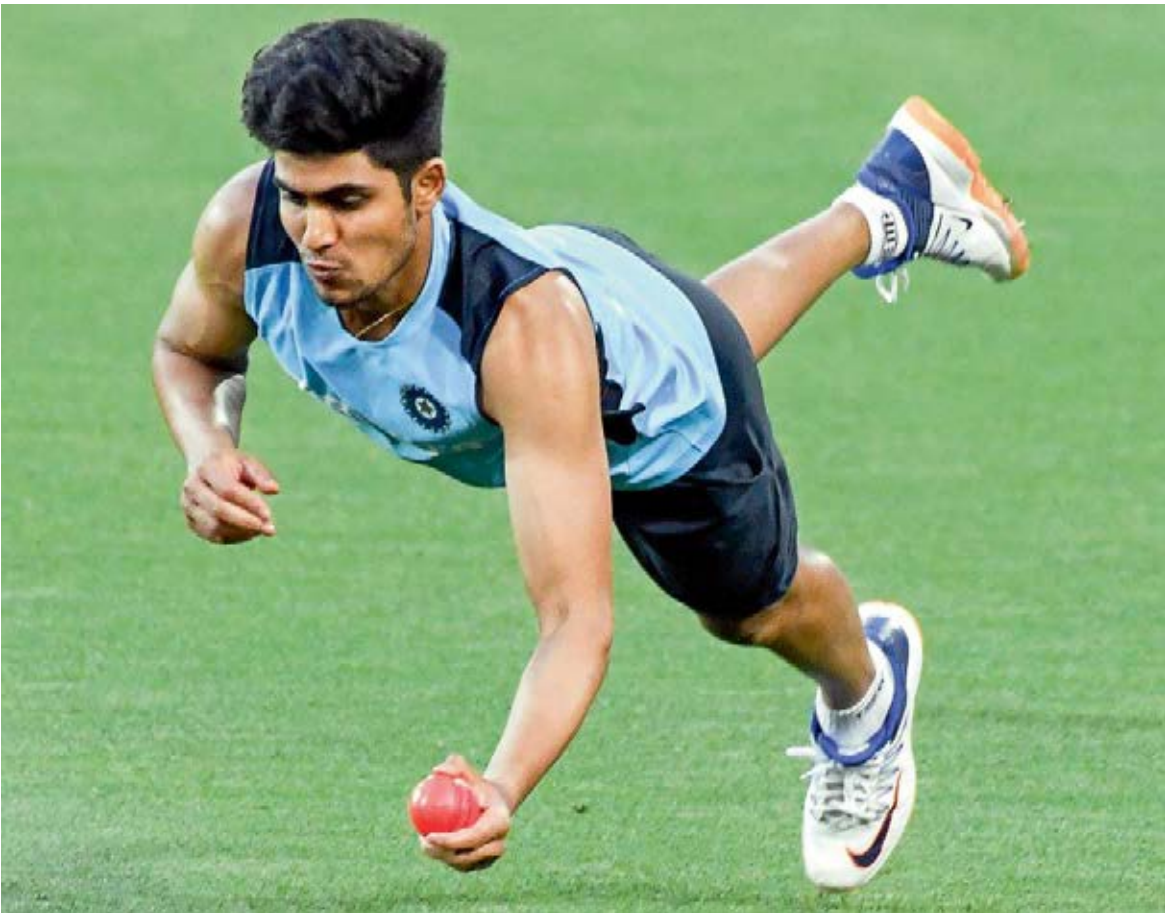
IT'S SHOWTIME

Tough India face Australian might in Pink Ball affair

Adelaide, Dec. 16: A peerless Virat Kohli and his "fearless" India would look to unleash their might on an Australian team which is ready for revenge but not exactly in 'pink of health' ahead of the first Day/Night Test starting here on Thursday.

Media mogul Kerry Packer, while promoting his path-breaking 'World Series Day/Night Test matches' on Channel 9 back in late 1970s, had an unforgettable caption "Big Boys Play At Night".

Even in 2020, there couldn't have been a more appropriate catch-line for a series where Kohli's magnificence meets its match in Steve Smith's manic consistency.



Shubman Gill of India dives to catch a ball during a practice session in Adelaide on Wednesday ahead of the first Test against Australia. — *AFP*

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA TO PLAY 1ST DAY/NIGHT TEST AWAY FROM HOME

- The first day/ night Test match of the four-match Border-Gavaskar series between India and Australia will be played at Adelaide Oval from Thursday (December 17). It will be the 99th Test match between the two teams and on 49th Test match on Australian soil.
- Australia have a good record against India in previous Test matches played between the two teams. They have won 42 and lost 28 in 98 previous encounters between the two sides. The remaining 27 matches ended with out a result which include one tied match. They have won 29, lost seven and drew 12 in 48 Test matches played against India at home.
- India have a better record against Australia since 2000. They have won 17, lost 15 and draw 10 in 42 Test matches from January 2000 to January 2019.
- Australia have won seven, lost two and draw three in 12 Test matches played against India at Adelaide Oval. India's victories here came in 2003-04 and 2018-19.
- Adelaide Oval is hunting ground for Indian skipper Virat Kohli, who has scored 431 runs at 71.83 in six innings of three Test matches with three hundreds at this ground.
- India are in third place in the Test Team rankings with 114 rating points, whilst Australia top the rankings with 116.46 rating points. New Zealand follow closely in second with 116.37 rating points. India will feel the pressure as the race to the World Test Championship final heats up.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

bowlers are at their peak once the sun sets, allowing the pink kookaburra to pick its pace up.

Never has an Indian team been so spoilt for choices with multiple options in place for various positions.

But Indian skipper Virat Kohli made it clear that Shubman Gill and KL Rahul will have to wait for their chances with the management deciding to stick to an out-of-form Prithvi Shaw in the opening slot.

— *PTI*

Prithvi to open as Saha keeps

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India have kept faith with opener Prithvi Shaw while opting for Wriddhiman Saha ahead of Rishabh Pant as wicketkeeper for the opening day-night Test against Australia in Adelaide starting Thursday.

Selectors also confirmed Umesh Yadav as the third seamer alongside Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah in the absence of the injured Ishant Sharma, while Ravi Ashwin won the race to be their frontline spinner ahead of Kuldeep Yadav.

The flamboyant Shaw was under pressure from another young talent — Shubman Gill, also 21 — to open the innings alongside Mayank Agarwal after just one decent knock in four warm-up innings.

But he will take the field for his fifth cap on Thursday while Gill continues his wait to earn a first.

"Prithvi has performed at the Test level, but he would be playing in Australia for the first time. I think it is very exciting to see his progress as well," the Indian captain Kohli said.

The dogged and experienced Cheteshwar Pujara will come in at number three, followed by Kohli in his only Test of the tour before heading home for the birth of his first child.

Pant, an explosive batsman who became a viral sensation on India's last tour of Australia with his banter behind the stumps, also stroked a quickfire ton against Australia 'A', but he was surprisingly overlooked in favour of Saha. India won their maiden series 2-1 in Australia in 2018-19. — *PTI*

City held; Wolves peg back Chelsea

Manchester, Dec. 16: Manchester City's faltering Premier League title challenge suffered another setback on Tuesday as lowly West Brom held out for a 1-1 draw at the Etihad.

City could have moved to within three points of leaders Tottenham and Liverpool, who face each other on Wednesday, but threw away two points against the side sitting second bottom of the table.

Ilkay Gundogan opened the scoring for Pep Guardiola's men but Ruben Dias's own goal just before half-time proved costly as City's problems in front of goal continued in a goalless second-half despite a siege on the West Brom goal.

A point edges City up to fifth on goal difference, while West Brom move to within two points of safety at the other end of the table.

West Brom had the first big chance of the game when the ball ricocheted off Joao Cancelo into the path of Karlan Grant and he forced Ederson into a fine save low to his left.

City's probing was finally rewarded on the half hour as Raheem Sterling got to the by-line and his cut back was fired home from the edge of the area by Gundogan.

Guardiola's men shot themselves in the foot by conceding for the first time in seven games two minutes before half-time as they failed to clear a free-kick into the box and Semi Ajayi's shot was deflected into his own net by Dias.

It was one-way traffic

THE RESULTS	
Manchester City (Gundogan 30)	1
West Bromwich Albion (Dias 43-og)	1
Wolverhampton (Podence 66, Pedro Neto 90+5)	2
Chelsea (Giroud 49)	1

after the break as City set up camp in the West Brom half but lacked the imagination or pace to open the visitors up.

Meanwhile, Frank Lampard believes Chelsea have become complacent after the Blues blew a lead to lose 2-1 at Wolves and suffer back-to-back Premier League defeats for the first time during his reign in charge.

Daniel Podence produced a moment of magic as he twisted and turned inside the Chelsea box to find space for a shot and his effort deflected off Reece James and inside Edouard Mendy's near post.

Neto thought he had won a penalty when driving past James, but after a VAR review referee Stuart Attwell overturned his original decision as there was no contact on the Portuguese winger.

However, Neto was not to be denied on the counter-attack deep into stoppage time as he accelerated past Zouma and drove low into the far corner to move Wolves into the top half of the table and within three points of the top four.

— *AFP*

Benzema on the double as Real win

Barcelona, Dec. 16: Karim Benzema scored two late goals to give Real Madrid a 3-1 win over 10-man Athletic Bilbao, helping lift his team level on points with the front-runners of the Spanish league on Tuesday.

Bilbao proved to be tough opponent at Alfredo Di Stefano stadium despite playing most of the match with only 10 men.

But when the Basque Country team was threatening to at least salvage a point, Benzema scored his team-high ninth and 10th goals of the season.

Madrid was in third place behind league leader Real Sociedad and second-place Atletico Madrid on overall goal difference. Atletico has two more games in hand to play.

Bilbao lost Ral Garcia in the 14th minute after the forward earned his second yellow card for a stomping the foot of Toni Kroos during a tackle.

Kroos put Madrid ahead on the last kick of the first half.

Madrid has won four matches in a row, three in La Liga and one in the Champions League.

Meanwhile, Sevilla won 3-0 at Ciudad de Lucena, Osasuna routed Tomares 6-0, and Valladolid beat Cantolagua 5-0 in the first round of the Copa del Rey.

LAZIO, BENEVENTO PLAY OUT A DRAW

Elsewhere, Lazio continued their patchy Italian League form with a 1-1 draw at Benevento on Tuesday as the Inzaghi brothers faced off on the sidelines.

Simone Inzaghi's Lazio qualified for the knockout stages of the Champions League for the first time in over two decades midweek but have been wildly inconsistent domestically and sit eighth on 18 points after 12 matches.

Promoted Benevento, led by former AC Milan, Juventus and Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi, move up to 13th after the draw, six points above the relegation zone.

— *Agencies*

I am representation of new India: Kohli

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India captain Virat Kohli on Wednesday declared himself a "representation of new India", forever ready to take up challenges with optimism, as he responded to Greg Chappell's view that he is "the most Australian non-Australian cricketer of all time".

On the eve of the first Test against Australia,

Kohli was asked about his aggressive brand of cricket coupled with a fighting attitude that the former Australia captain, who also served as India coach, found similar to the mindset of his countrymen.

"I would like to say that I have always been myself," the skipper said during a virtual media conference ahead of the opening Test against Australia here

starting Thursday.

"The way my personality and character is, I am the representation of new India. For me, that's how I look at it," he asserted.

"In my mind, it's not (about) being compared to the Australian mindset as such. It's how we have started to stand up as the Indian cricket team and my personality has been like this from day one,"

the Indian captain added.

The new India, according to one of the country's most followed sporting icons, is the one that's not afraid to take up challenges.

"The new India takes up challenges and is filled with optimism and positivity. We make sure that we are ready for any challenges that come our way," he added.

— *PTI*

I would like to say that I have always been myself. The way my personality and character is, I am the representation of new India. For me, that's how I look at it.

— VIRAT KOHLI Indian cricket captain

Less niggle, more respect, says VK

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India captain Virat Kohli vowed a "high-voltage" Test series against fierce rivals Australia Wednesday but also predicted a more respectful era between the cricketing powers, saying grudges and tensions were "pointless".

The superstar batsman, who has a reputation as one of the sport's most aggressive players, said this week's opening Test in Adelaide would be highly competitive, but would not get personal.

"It's going to be high-voltage cricket because we have quality players on both sides and they are all hungry and eager to perform... it's definitely going to be as competitive as it has always been," he said.

"There's going to be tension, there's going to be stress, there's going

to be emotions flaring every now and then, but I don't foresee anything getting personal anymore. I think all of us are getting smarter and a few more years into our careers so we want to make better choices," he added.

"I think this year has made people realise a lot of things which might not have been necessary in the past, where you hold grudges or you have unnecessary tensions between teams or individuals, which is absolutely pointless," he said.

"It could be a combination of playing a lot of IPL cricket together, Australia changing their approach to an extent and also just the way things have panned out this year. Everyone is just grateful for the opportunity to be back on the field," Virat further added.

— *PTI*

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