

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
KARIMNAGAR | SATURDAY | 19 DECEMBER 2020



**NATION | 4**

**No drug at party,  
Johar tells NCB**



**WORLD | 5**

**Pence takes vaccine,  
Trump sparks confusion**

**SPORTS | 8**

**Ashwin bowls India  
back into game**



## CJI finds AP HC's order 'disturbing'

**Stays HC order on breakdown of constitutional machinery**

**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 18**

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the order issued by the AP High Court asking the Andhra Pradesh government whether there was breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde observed that they had not seen any order issued like this by the AP High Court in any case and the apex court found it to be disturbing. Justice Bobde directed issue of notice and stay and ordered the registry to list the case after the Supreme Court vacation.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, arguing for the AP government, said that the power to examine whether constitutional machinery had broken down or not was vested with the executive and not with the judiciary.

It may be mentioned that a AP HC division bench led by Justice Rakesh Kumar had rejected an application filed by the AP government asking for recall of its October 1 to examine the breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state. The AP HC while hearing habeas corpus petitions on that day asked the state government's counsel to come prepared to assist the court to record the finding

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● **SOLICITOR GENERAL**, arguing for the AP government, said that the power to examine whether constitutional machinery had broken down or not was vested with the executive and not with the judiciary.

whether there was a constitutional breakdown in the state or not.

In response, the AP government had challenged the order, contending that it impinges on the doctrine of separation of powers. It is the President who is empowered to go into the question of breakdown of constitutional machinery under Article 356 and not the judiciary.

The petition filed by advocate Mahfouz Nazki said that under the constitutional framework, it is not for the courts to decide as to whether there is a constitutional breakdown in a state or not.

On Friday, the AP High Court adjourned the hearing on the issue following the Supreme Court stay order.

■ **Page 2: HC puts off hearing after SC's stay**

## KCR to sort out Dharani issue

**DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18**

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has called for a high-level meeting on Saturday to take a call on registration of non-agriculture properties in view of the High Court order.

A division bench of the Telangana High Court on Thursday had directed the state government to delete all references to caste and social categories, Aadhaar numbers of family members from the user manual for non-agriculture properties and in application forms

for the Property Tax Identification Number.

Against this backdrop, the Chief Minister will take stock of the situation with officials from revenue, law and registration departments at Pragathi Bhavan.

According to the Chief Minister's Office, the order copy of the High Court order was yet to be received by the government.

The CMO said Chandrashekar Rao would discuss whether to file an appeal against the court orders or prepare guidelines in accordance with the court's directive.

## Defending farm laws, PM says talk of ending MSP biggest lie

**Claims Oppn parties are envious of him getting credit for farm reforms**

**DC CORRESPONDENTS  
NEW DELHI/BHOPAL, DEC. 18**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a scathing attack on the Opposition for "peddling lies" to mislead farmers on the new agricultural reform laws, which have triggered nationwide protests, and said he was ready "with folded hands" to "discuss every issue" with the farmers and allay their fears.

Addressing a *Kisan Sammelan* (farmers' conference) at Raissen, Madhya Pradesh, via video-conferencing on Friday, the PM claimed the measures were discussed by every government over the past two decades, and that the talk about Minimum Support Price (MSP) ending with the new laws "is the biggest lie ever".

"These laws were not brought in overnight. In the past 22 years, every government, every state has discussed these in detail. Farmers' groups, agricultural experts, economists, scientists and progressive farmers have called for reforms. Parties opposing these laws today promised these reforms in their manifestos," Mr Modi said.

"If anyone has any concerns, then with our heads bowed and our hands folded, with humility, we are willing to discuss with them and assuage their fears," he added.

"The (Opposition) parties are pained today. They are asking themselves how Modi could achieve what they couldn't do in all this time. They are worried Modi will get credit. My reply to them is — you keep the credit. I don't want credit. I only want farmers' lives to improve. Stop misleading the farmers."

The PM has in most of his recent speeches tried



Hundreds of farmers along with their family members protest against the new farm laws on Friday, at Kundli border in Sonapat on the Delhi-Haryana border.

— PTI

## Centre hopeful of solution to farm law row by Dec. 31

**SANJAY KAW | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 18**

With negotiations between the farmers' unions and the Centre locked in an impasse, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Friday said the government was hopeful of resolving the farmers' agitation over the three new farm laws before the new year and was continuing its informal dialogue with various groups to defuse the crisis.

Speaking to a news

agency, Mr Tomar reiterated that the new laws were beneficial for farmers and the government was ready to give a written assurance that the minimum support price (MSP) and mandi system will continue.

"We have been constantly holding discussions with farmers' unions. Overall, our effort is to reach a solution through dialogue with them. We are still open for talks. I hope through dialogue we can move towards reach-

ing a solution," he said. Despite the government's repeated assurances that the new laws were for the benefit of farmers, thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana have been protesting at Delhi's borders for over three weeks.

Several protesting leaders have even threatened to step up the agitation and have said they are prepared to celebrate Republic Day next year with a tractor rally on Delhi's borders.

## 3 injured as cricket tiff leads to firing

**DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, DEC. 18**

A petty quarrel between boys while playing cricket took a serious turn and resulted in a MIM leader opening fire in Tatiguda Colony here on Friday.

Police said that after the children began quarrelling, their parents came out. Suddenly Farooq Ahmed, MIM leader and former Adilabad municipal vice-chairman, opened fire with his licensed revolver.

Syed Zameer and Syed Mouthesin received bullet injuries and Syed Mannan, 52, father of 16-year-old Mouthesin, sustained head injury. Videos posted on Facebook showed that Ahmed had opened fire from close range.

Ahmed also used a sharp weapon in the attack. News doing the rounds is that the incident was not accidental but stemmed from an old enmity between the TRS and the MIM.

● **POLICE SAID** that after the children began quarrelling, their parents came out. Suddenly Farooq Ahmed, MIM leader, opened fire with his licensed revolver.

● **NEWS DOING** the rounds is that the incident was not accidental but stemmed from an old enmity between the TRS and the MIM.

quently arrested. Adilabad Two Town police booked Ahmed under Section 307 IPC and Section 27/30 of Indian Arms Act. Police also set up picketing to maintain peace in the colony. Giving details to the

media along with Two Town circle inspector P. Srinivas, Adilabad OSD Rajesh Chandra said on receipt of information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. The injured persons were shifted to

RIMS Hospital. He said as Mouthesin's condition was critical he was shifted to Hyderabad. They said Ahmed has been arrested. Adilabad Zilla Parishad chairman Rathod Janardhan and MLA Jogu Ramanna visited the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences and interacted with the victims.

Ahmed had contested as a councillor and lost to a TRS candidate. Ahmed's wife was elected as councillor in the last municipal elections.

**RIPPLE | EFFECT** **Even after unlock, people fail to cope with lifestyle changes; psychiatrist consultations on rise**

## Covid-19 fear triggers cases of mental illness

**KANIZA GARARI | DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18**

Months of 'unlocking' the lockdown has not brought down anxiety, adjustment disorders and chronic loneliness in a section of people who still fear that they could contract Covid-19.

Anxiety and adjustment disorders are being noted in all age groups, doctors said. People are having problems coping with the change in lifestyle, continuing to stay together and dealing with online sessions.

Out-patient departments of city hospitals have seen a 20-per cent increase of people with mental health problems. Online consultation has seen an increase by 45 per cent.

The most common com-

plaint is fear of the disease, anxiety in those who suffered from Covid-19, stigma suffered by family, inability to cope with loss of a family member, financial constraints and staying together which caused recurrent clashes between family members.

Take the case of Sangeetha (name changed), a working woman, who is finding it difficult to deal with the demands of family members. Work from home is difficult for her as each family member is dependent on Sangeetha and no one is willing to share household chores. This led to constant fights.

Fed up, Sangeetha took an overdose of sleeping pills. At the hospital, she narrated her dilemma of interpersonal and anxiety

## Bright kids find eClasses tough

**DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18**

Coping with online education is turning out to be a challenge not only for teachers but also students even as examinations, especially the Class 10 and 12 Boards, are approaching. Those who are academically inclined are also complaining of inability to keep up with the

lessons. Some of them are facing challenges in online tests and find that the exam papers are tough.

Teachers are suffering from stress as they are constantly working and attending school meetings online. The work has stretched to 12 hours.

There are also complaints of online pranks by students, which many of the teachers are not

able to understand or control. Students who are not from the school are logging into online sessions. The major complaint is of the number of absentees. Schools state that their efficacy is down by 50 per cent in their assessment to understand the impact of online classes.

■ **Page 2: Students miss face-to-face interaction**

problems. Those working from home are not able to concentrate on work as there are many disturbances and this is affecting their productivity.

Dr Charan Tej, psychiatrist at KIMS Hospital, said adjustment disorders were being seen in people as they are not able to function like before.

"For the first three months of lockdown, it was an emergency but now fatigue is setting in. Productivity has seen a decline. These are leading

to problems in the working population as they are downgrading themselves which is not right," Dr Charan Tej said.

Many of them are trying to reassert themselves leading to unhealthy behaviour in online working groups.

Those who have recovered from Covid-19 are also suffering from anxiety as they are scared that they will contract the infection again. They are not venturing out and are keeping to themselves, leading to chronic loneliness.

They have suffered from the stigma of the disease; they are not being accepted after recovery which is causing stress.

Dr Jyotirmayi H, consultant psychiatrist at Continental Hospitals,

said, "Post-Covid mental health problems are being seen online as people continue to be scared. There is one section of people who are not worried but another section which is very scared. They are scared of the second wave and its impact. They fear re-infection. Post-Covid coping mechanisms are compromised and they require therapeutic and medical assistance."

Those who have lost family members to the disease are not able to return to their routine. To add to this is the compromised state of financial resources. Those who have lost jobs or closed business establishments are under severe financial constraints and that is leading to anxiety.

**WEATHER**

**Max:** 30.2°C  
**Min:** 17.6°C  
**RH:** 48%  
**Rainfall:** Nil

**Forecast:** Partly cloudy. Moderate rains likely. Max/Min temp. 30/18 °C

**COVID-19  
COUNT**

**CASES** (+26,860)  
**DEATHS** (+338)

1,00,04,620 1,45,167

[covid19india.org](https://covid19india.org)

**STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS**

(+551) (+1)

TS: 2,80,195 1,506

(+458) (+1)

AP: 8,77,806 7,070

**CASES AROUND THE WORLD**

7,56,26,856

**DEATHS** 16,74,385

**COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES** 218

[worldometers.info/coronavirus](https://worldometers.info/coronavirus)

**ASTROGUIDE**

**Sarvari:** Dakshinayana  
**Tithi:** Margasira Shuddha Panchami till 2.19 pm  
**Star:** Dhanistha till 7.14 pm  
**Varjyam:** 3.20 am to 5.51 am (Sunday)

**Durmuhurtam:** 6.44 am to 8.12 am

**Rahukalam:** 9 am to 10.30 am

**HILJRI CALENDAR**

Jamadi-ul-Aakhir 3, 1442 AH

**PRAYERS**

Fajar: 5.35 am

Zohar: 12.23 pm

Asar: 4.10 pm

Maghrib: 5.52 pm

Isha: 7.06 pm

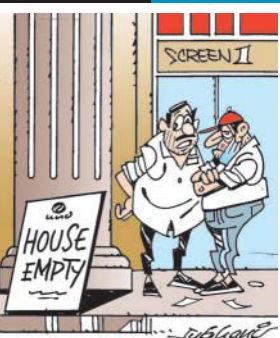
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.40 AM**

**SUNSET TODAY 5.46 PM**

**MOONSET TODAY 10.25 PM**

**MOONRISE TOMORROW 10.46 AM**

**COUNTER POINT**



When will we get to see 'House Full' boards again?

**SHORT TAKES**

### 3rd Trinamul legislator quits

**Kolkata:** Following in the footsteps of Shubendu Adhikari and Jitendra Tiwari, another heavyweight MLA, Silbhadra Datta, and former West Bengal textiles minister Shyamapada Mukherjee have quit the Trinamul Congress to join the BJP before the elections next year. Datta is the third legislator to have snapped ties with Mamata Banerjee's party ahead of home minister Amit Shah's two-day visit to the state starting Saturday. Datta, who won as a Trinamul candidate from Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas in two terms, did not resign as MLA.

### Kamra gets SC's contempt notice

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Friday issued show-cause notices to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and cartoonist Rachita Taneja on Friday for their alleged scandalous tweets against the apex court. A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah sought response from both in six weeks on the notices issued in two separate cases. It, however, exempted them from personal appearances in the cases. "Issue notice returnable within six weeks. The contemnor-respondent not to appear in person," the bench said in its order.





## IN BRIEF

## 4 cruise boats for Hyd lakes

**Hyderabad:** Two cruise boats have been acquired for the Hussainsagar which will be launched soon, minister for tourism and youth affairs V. Srinivas Goud said on Friday.

Two boats have been acquired for Durgam Cheru and they will also be launched soon. The launch of the boats had been withheld due to the fall in tourist traffic amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The government is gearing up to see more tourists visiting the state next year and is working out packages and adding attractions to cater to them.

## Students miss face-to-face class

**From Page 1**  
Dr Preeti Swaroop, senior psychiatrist, said, "The fear of not excelling like they were the last few years is unsettling them. Face-to-face interaction is something that they are missing and that is also causing loss of interest in studies. This is leading to disorders, low self-esteem and anger. Parents are reaching out to doctors as an obedient child is behaving badly which is causing worry."

While schools want to reopen, fear of the disease is making them continue with online classes.

## HC puts off hearing after stay

**From Page 1**  
When the High Court division bench comprising justice Rakesh Kumar and Justice Umadevi continued the hearing on the issue earlier in the day, government pleader Y.N. Vivekananda said that the government had appealed in the Supreme Court. When the court resumed the hearing in the afternoon, Justice Kumar asked about the development in the apex court. Vivekananda informed that the Supreme Court had issued a stay order. Based on this, the judge adjourned the hearing on the issue of constitutional breakdown.

## WOMAN DIES BY SUICIDE WITH LOVER

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
WARANGAL, DEC. 18

A married woman and her lover were found dead in an agricultural well in Nakkalapalli village in Khila Warangal mandal in Warangal Urban district on Friday. They reportedly committed suicide by tying up their hands and legs and jumping into the well.

The first inkling that anything was amiss came when villagers noticed a two-wheeler, two mobile phones near the agricultural well. They immediately informed the Mamnoon police who went to the scene, inspected the well and retrieved the bodies with the help of swimmers.

The deceased were identified as Manne Sai Kumar, 23, a resident of Nakkalapalli village and K. Ashwini, 21, a resident of Koyyada village of Siddipet district.

According to the police, Manne Sai is pursuing B.Tech second year in New Delhi. Ashwini was studying degree course in local college in the Siddipet district. They were in a relationship since their intermediate, and proposed their marriage to their parents.

However, Ashwini's parents did not accept them and forcibly married her to another man on August 6 this year. Unable to tolerate the developments, they decided to commit suicide and met at Warangal on Thursday. Ashwini came from Koyyada to Nakkalapalli and they were suspected to have jumped in the well at midnight. Her parents registered a complaint in Siddipet police station stating that their daughter was missing, said police.

Police identified the bodies with the help of Aadhar and Pan cards found on the location and informed their parents.

Mamnoon Inspector, S. Raju said the bodies were retrieved from the well and shifted for autopsy in MGM Hospital. A case of suspicious death was registered under Section 174 of CrPC.

● **POLICE SAID** Manne Sai is pursuing B.Tech second year in New Delhi, Ashwini was studying degree course in local college in the Siddipet district. They were in a relationship since their intermediate, and proposed their marriage to their parents.

## Loan apps' threat turns ugly

Apps label borrower as defaulter in social circle for non-payment of loan

**NAVEEN KUMAR | DC**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Desperate citizens who, during the lockdown, opted for 'get quick cash' schemes from money-lending mobile apps and are unable to repay the money are facing mental harassment from the agents.

At least three persons have committed suicide, unable to bear the harassment and humiliation meted out by the 'collection agents'.

The rules drawn up by the lenders allow them to access their borrowers' contact data from the mobile phones. They can message every one on the contact list and brand the borrower a 'fraud' or 'defaulter', police said, while booking cases of abetment to suicide against the companies. It is not clear if the borrowers read the terms, or understood the implications.

On Thursday, K. Mounika, 24, a newly-recruited agricultural extension officer in Siddipet, ended her life a lending company branded her a defaulter in messages sent with her photo and name to her contacts and on social media.

Finance minister T. Harish Rao visited Mounika's family and said that he would direct the police to initiate action against app-based finance firms as per the laws for exploiting those vulnerable. "Several apps claiming to be instant loan enablers are reaching out to people, especially to the specific, digitally educated youngsters with small-scale jobs with high interest rates. The application seeks permission access to the user's location, contacts and storage at the time of installing it even before availing the loan," police sources said.

Six more cases of suicide are suspected to be linked to such humiliation, though they have not been

## Harassed by recovery agents, techie ends life

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

A former software employee died by suicide at his residence in Rajendranagar on Friday after allegedly being harassed by operators of an online loan app.

The deceased, identified as Sunil, a native of Guntur, lost his job at a software company a few months ago and the firm allegedly refused to pay him two months salary that was due to him.

"He lost his job during the lockdown and has been facing financial hardships ever since. He started availing of micro-personal loans of between ₹2,000 and ₹10,000 through several online apps," said G. Suresh, Rajendranagar inspector.

linked with default of these micro-loans.

Speaking about the police action, Prakash Reddy, the Shamshabad deputy commissioner of police, said one should not answer calls from agents and must report the numbers to the police.

"We will be taking action against them under Section 306 (abetment to suicide) of the IPC and will also be charging the call centres running this business," said a police official, with regard to the companies outing the borrowers in their social circles. City police officials appealed to the public not to instal the loan-based application, or borrow from them. Police in an advisory said that all apps offering micro loans appear to be built upon one software development kit, which is suspected to be provided by a foreign country.

He allegedly kept availing fresh loans from different mobile applications to pay his lenders. "After availing loans from about 40 such apps, he failed to repay the loans. The representatives of these apps accessed his phone contacts and rang up his friends and family to step up pressure on him to pay up," said Prakash Reddy, deputy commissioner of police, Shamshabad, adding that the police are yet to determine the total amount that Sunil availed as loans.

Police have gathered details on the apps and their representatives and have also sought help from the cybercrime cell to take the investigation forward. "We will be investigating all those applications and also be

cracking down on these call centres making repeated calls to harass the lenders," added the DCP.

According to the police, Sunil could be the third person who has ended his life in the face of harassment by companies looking to recover their loans.

A police advisory said that Eddu Sravan Yadav, 23, from Narsapur in Medak district and Kirni Mounika, 28, from Siddipet are known to have taken their own lives in separate incidents in the last one month.

The police advisory said that calling up friends and relatives is a violation of the Information Technology Act. All the apps have uncanny commonality in their methods. the police said.

## Police says loan apps are illegal

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

The police has issued an advisory stating that most loan apps were fraudulent and not sanctioned by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). At least 60 such apps available in Google Play Store.

Police said three persons had ended their lives, unable to bear the harassment by personnel from the companies running these apps in the last one month. "People should not accept terms and conditions of any loan app. They should be more cautious as all the phone con-

tacts, photos, locations and memory will be compromised by these money lenders and can be used to harass or blackmail later. The money lenders might threaten stating that a criminal case would be registered against you. Contact police in such cases," the police said.

"The hosting of these applications also violates certain conditions laid by Google App store. Google can be asked to take these down. Almost all of them have similar privacy policies which gather almost every bit of data available on a user's phone," the advisory said.

## Farmers decry forcible takeover of their land for proposed Pharma City

**SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Farmers belonging to villages in Yacharam, Kadthal and Kandukur mandals of Ranga Reddy district are worried ever since the government began "forcing" them to hand over their land for the proposed Pharma City. Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Panga Maniamma, a farmer, said her would family consume poison if the government goes ahead with the takeover.

"In my 22 acres I produce all kinds of vegetables and sell them in Hyderabad. It is our only source of livelihood."

Kundarapu Narayana Yadhav from Talipati village said, "More than one lakh people who are dependent on agriculture will be affected in 18 villages because of Pharma City."

We are three brothers and we together cultivate crops in our four acres.

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao inviting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the ground-breaking ceremony of Pharma City has drawn flak from farmers belonging to almost 18 villages in Ranga Reddy district.

What has infuriated them is the CM's assertion that 11,000 acres of land had been acquired and shortly the remaining land would be acquired.

Those protesting under the banner of Pharma City Vyathireka Porata Committee told reporters on Friday that in his bid to build the world's largest

## After ruckus, OU to shut hostels

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Following trespassing on the campus, the Osmania University administration has decided to shut all its hostels and disconnect water and power supply. The orders were issued on Friday.

This follows the manhandling law student Suresh Yadav on Wednesday night, which is being stated as one of the reasons for the decision to shut the hostels. The university has also

noticed that a few people in the guise of students have occupied hostel rooms. Due to this there was a law and order problem in the campus recently. Academic activity has stopped on the campus from March onwards but a few had occupied hostel rooms. The university has now decided to completely shut down the hostels. If the students do not leave there will be police and legal action taken against them according to the order issued by university officials.

## CBI: Transstroy in biggest loan fraud

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

The CBI has registered bank fraud case to the tune of ₹7,926.01 crore on Friday, the biggest so far in India, against the Hyderabad-based Transstroy India Ltd of former MP Rayapati Sambasiva Rao.

The CBI booked Transstroy's CMD Cherukuri Sridhar, additional directors Sambasiva Rao and Akkineni Satish, among others on a complaint filed by Canara Bank.

Searches were conducted at the premises of Transtroy and the accused at Hyderabad and Guntur, which led to recovery of incriminating documents, the CBI stated.

"It was alleged that the private firm based at Hyderabad and its directors had availed credit facilities on multiple banking arrangements. It was further alleged that the accused had involved in falsification/fabrication of books of accounts, fudging of stock statements, tampering of balance sheets, round tripping of funds etc," the

CBI said. The accused misappropriated bank funds and allegedly diverted the loan amount sanctioned by the banks and caused loss of approximately ₹7,926.01 crore to Canara Bank and other member banks. The account had become a non-performing asset and the fraud was reported.

According to the CBI, diamantaire Nirav Modi had allegedly siphoned off ₹6,000 crore while his uncle Mehul Choksi had swindled ₹7,080.86 crore.

The CBI said it had carried out simultaneous searches on the premises of the former TDP MP at his native place in Guntur district and in Hyderabad in connection with a bank fraud case booked against him, wherein he was charged for allegedly siphoning around ₹3,822 crore.

Special teams from New Delhi with support from their colleagues in the regional offices in Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh conducted the searches in Guntur and Hyderabad, the CBI said here.

## PROTESTERS URGE MODI NOT TO ATTEND FETE

pharmaceutical city, the state government has sounded the death-knell of Yacharam, Kadthal and Kandukur mandals in whose 19,333 acres of land the project is coming up.

Committee office-bearers Dr D. Narasimha Reddy and Saraswathi Kavula said, "The Chief Minister has been telling lies. The villagers have not sold their land. We are united on this issue and we will not surrender our land."

Saraswathi Kavula said, "Not only farmers but all people staying in the area are openly opposing the project. Despite such a determined stand taken by us, the government is trying to bulldoze its way.

We have brought the critical nature of the project to the notice of the Union Government. We urge Modi not to come for the ground-breaking ceremony respecting the sentiments of the people."

Dr Narasimha Reddy said, "There are too many red category industries in Telangana state, and this government is inviting most of them in blatant violation of environmental laws.

Already, pollution levels are high in the state. It has become easy for corporate houses to establish units and pollute the atmosphere in the state. The government seems unconcerned about the well-being of the people."

Pharma companies will not only deprive us of livelihood but will also pollute environment. This is our ancestral property.

What are we supposed to do after that?" Anusuya of Kurmidda village stated, "My three sons and I are into agricul-

## WILL PROBE ALL IRREGULARITIES OF TRS: BJP

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

BJP general secretary Tarun Chugh called Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao 'Raja Babu' and said that the TRS was like a HUF (Hindu Undivided Family). He said there would be a full-fledged inquiry into the corrupt dealings of TRS leaders.

Chugh, in-charge of Telangana BJP affairs, was received on his maiden visit to the city by party state chief Bandi Sanjay, MP D Arvind, former MP Vivek Venkataswamy and others.

Chugh conducted a review with key leaders and informed them that he will conduct regular meetings.

## Bandi says TRS MLAs in touch to jump ship

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Alleging that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao was trying to lure BJP corporators, BJP state president Bandi Sanjay on Friday warned him that if he went ahead with such a devious plot, the BJP would open the floodgates for TRS legislators, many of whom were already in touch with him.

Sanjay, along with MLA T. Raja Singh and 46 corporators, visited the Bhagyalakshmi temple at Charminar and offered special puja. Later, he

administered pledge to the corporators to contribute to development in all possible ways while always being available to the public.

Sanjay said that BJP's aim was to work for a Hyderabad free from TRS and MIM. Speaking to the media, he said that Hyderabad was called Bhagyanagar because of Goddess Bhagyalakshmi. He said that the people of Bhagyanagar gave them a great opportunity to develop the city and serve the people. Asking the Old City people to realise why their areas were not devel-

oped, he said the BJP was committed to develop Old City.

He slammed MIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi and told him not to consider the Old City as his personal domain. BJP has penetrated into it and they would score an encore in the next Assembly elections, he said.

Repeating that Chandrashekar Rao would go to jail, the BJP leader wanted to know why, despite holding the GHMC elections in a hurry, he has not conducted elections to the posts of Mayor and deputy Mayor.

## Macca Masjid gates reopen

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

All gates of Macca Masjid were opened on Friday at the instance of local MLAs Muntaz Ahmed Khan and Ahmed Pasha Quadri. The gates were closed down about eight months ago when the Covid-19 related lockdown was imposed in March.

The masjid comes under the direct management of the minorities welfare

department. The department has imposed restrictions on attendance at prayers during the lockdown which continued even after the lockdown was lifted. The department has restricted the worshippers to 100 even for Juma prayers.

Speaking to the media, Ahmed Pasha Quadri said masjid superintendent Moulana Abdul Quadeer was instructed to open the gates on Friday. He said

the main gate was closed before the lockdown for renovation but this was also opened on Friday.

Mumtaz Khan said there was a delay in reconstruction of the cistern for ablution. He clarified that the contractor has started the renovation work of the cistern without keeping in mind of leakage and it was being redesigned. He said the work of constructing lavatories was under progress.



# Centre biased towards irrigation in TS: Errabelli

Claims Central govt ignored Niti Aayog's recommendation

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC  
WARANGAL, DEC 18

Despite repeated requests from the Chief Minister and Telangana MPs, the BJP-led Central Government has not sanctioned a single rupee for the Mission Bhagiratha. The Niti Aayog had also recommended funding for the mission but the Centre ignored it, said minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Water supply, Errabelli Dayakar Rao.

He pointed out that funds of ₹883 crore were sanctioned to Gujarat, and criticised the Centre for its biased approach.

● **ERRABELLI ALSO** criticised the Centre for not providing funds to the KLIP.

"Mission Bhagiratha scheme which aims to provide safe drinking water to each and every household in the state has become a model for other states in the country to provide household drinking water. However, the centre failed to cooperate with the state," he said.

Errabelli also criticised the Centre for not providing funds to the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP). Time and again, the

Centre had appreciated several projects implemented in Telangana, but never came forward to allocate funds.

The minister who inaugurated the monitoring cell of the water grid at Bheemaram here on Friday said that Mission Bhagiratha is now supplying protected drinking water to households in 99 per cent villages in the State.

Although the estimated cost of the water grid project was ₹46,000 crore, the state government had saved nearly ₹8,000 crore, the minister added.

Mission Bhagiratha is a

replication of the Siddipet Comprehensive Drinking Water Scheme conceived and implemented by KCR as the MLA of Siddipet about two decades ago, Errabelli said.

"Due to the sincere efforts of the State Government in implementing Mission Bhagiratha, fluorosis cases also have come down significantly in Nalgonda district," the minister noted.

Later, the minister who inspected Dharmasagar filter beds, said that efforts are on to supply drinking water every day from February and 24x7 from March.

## Minister slams Bandi for comments on CM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, DEC. 18

Minister for Panchayat Raj, Errabelli Dayakar Rao issues warning against BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar for his comments against Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao at the Bhagyalakshmi temple in the old city.

Addressing a media conference in Warangal on Friday, Dayakar Rao said that Bandi Sanjay is trying to create a religious strife in Hyderabad, which has been peaceful like Ganga-

Jamuni Tahzeeb until now.

He pointed out that Bandi Sanjay made no contributions either towards the formation of the Telangana state or towards its development.

"If you really have the guts, bring the state's share of water from the Centre. Did you bring funds to Mission Bhagiratha and Mission Kakatiya? Did you bring money for the Kaleshwaram project? Can you tell me what you did or what you brought from the Centre to the state?" he questioned BJP state president.

"Speaking against a leader like Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao does not bring you on par with him. He fought and brought Telangana state. He was even prepared to die for it. The BJP, which is not speaking about the farmers' agitation at Delhi, is just talking about Hyderabad and the Chief Minister to create a hype in the media," he added.

Speaking about the GHMC elections he said that due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the elections had to be postponed. "There are

still two months left for the mayoral election. Why is the BJP bothered now?" he sought to know.

He warned Bandi Sanjay that if he continued such behaviour, he would be ousted by the same people of Karimnagar who elected him as MP.

Addressing the delayed land registration through Dharani portal, Rao said the issue would be resolved within a week. "We have brought in the new revenue law just for the people who are already appreciating it," he said.

## Warangal's water plants under scanner

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, DEC. 18

A surprise raid was conducted by Mahbubabad District Additional Collector Abhilasha Abhinav on unauthorised water plants in Thorur town on Friday.

Abhilasha found 13 water plants running without complying with the rules and regulations and without proper permissions. Their licenses

have been seized and also fined ₹80,000.

The inspections were carried out after local water plant owners approached the Human Rights Commission and the district administration alleging that they were suffering despite following the permits from the government and running the water plants as per the regulations because of the plants being set up without any permits.

## OPPN UNHAPPY WITH TRS RULE

RAVINDRA SESHU | DC  
KOTHAGUDEM, DEC. 18

Two MLAs of Telugu Desam and Congress expressed their discontent over the two years of TRS rule in Telangana state.

At the same time, the ruling party MLAs claimed to be fulfilling their promises.

Aswaraopet MLA Macha Nageswara Rao said that TRS government completed the two years with just passing words.

## MAN DROWNS IN SEETAVAGU RIVULET

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOTHAGUDEM, DEC. 18

A 45-year-old Chekkala Venkanna drowned in Seetavagu, a stream in Parnasala in Dummugudem mandal on Friday. Venkanna, who went to Parnasala along with his family from Mahabubabad mandal, descended on the rivulet for bath. He drowned in the stream and search for his body is on.

## Khammam officials undergo RT-PCR tests

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, DEC. 18

The officials and local body representatives in Khammam district have undergone RT-PCR tests after Minister for Transport P. Ajay Kumar tested positive for Covid-19.

Collector R.V. Karnan, MROs of Raghunathapalem and Khammam Urban mandals and various party functionaries have taken RT-PCR tests.

After testing negative, they decided to be observe self-quarantine for a few days.

The media persons who met the minister also got tested. Chairman of Stambadri Urban Development Authority (SUDA) B. Vijay Kumar, Khammam agricultural market committee chairman N V Ramana, corporators Kamarthapu Murali, S Uma, Valaraju and K Krishna tested negative.

## 5 ARRESTED FOR LOOTING BANK

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, DEC. 18

The Karimnagar police on Friday nabbed five persons who allegedly tried to break into an SBI bank in Uturu. Officials recovered a sword, an iron rod, a bag and two motor bikes from the possession of Dulam Sampath, 45, Dulam Raju 19, Balasani Ajay, 19, and Madishetty Rakesh, 20, residents of Peddapalli district and Vennapusa Rakesh Reddy, 20, resident of the Jangaon district.

## 120 WOOLLEN BLANKETS GIVEN TO NEEDY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, DEC. 18

Adilabad Municipal chairman Jogu Premender distributed 120 woollen blankets provided by Hyderabad-based NGO Peace Forum, with the support of one P. Sadu Sunder in the Khanapur colony in the Adilabad town on Friday.

Dayanad Haliga, managing trustee of the NGO was present at the event.

## Lambada leader passes away at 77

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, DEC. 18

Rich tributes were paid to senior Lambada leader Banoth Jalam Singh, 77, who died of ill health. Jalam Singh's funeral was performed in Narnoor mandal headquarters on Thursday.

Leaders of Lambada community bid a tearful farewell to the departed leader who died while undergoing treatment in Niz-

amabad on Wednesday night.

A large number of Lambadas and political leaders attended the funeral and paid last rites.

AT the funeral, leaders recalled Jalam Singh's contributions to the empowerment of the community and the tireless social work for the community till his last breath. In the past, Banoth Jalam Singh also served as Narnoor ZPTC.

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SHORT TAKES

PM'S VARANASI OFFICE LISTED FOR 'SALE' ONLINE

**Varanasi (UP), Dec. 18:** Four people have been arrested for allegedly posting an online advertisement listing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi office for "sale", police said on Friday.

The accused had taken a picture of the "Jansampark Kaaryalay (public relations office)" of Modi, who represents Varanasi in the Lok Sabha, and put it "up for sale" on OLX website, they said.

The office is located in the Jawahar Nagar locality of the city, and it falls under the Bhelupur police station limits, Varanasi Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Amit Pathak said. "Yesterday, it came to our notice that the Prime Minister's office here has been put up on sale on OLX website. An FIR was immediately lodged at the Bhelupur police station, and the matter is being investigated," Pathak said.

"Four people involved in the case have been taken in custody," the SSP said, adding that the person who took the picture and put it on the website is among them. The accused are being questioned, and further legal proceedings are being carried out, he said.

SHIV SENA MAY OPPOSE PM'S PET PROJECTS IN MAHA

PRASAD PATIL | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 18

The Shiv Sena, rattled by the Bombay High Court's stay on the construction of Metro car shed at salt pan land in Mumbai, is preparing for direct confrontation with the Union government led by the BJP.

The HC stayed the Metro car shed work after the Centre's salt pan department challenged the state's decision in the court. Now, as part of its strategy to take on its erstwhile alliance partner head-on, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party has decided to oppose the proposed port in Palghar district. The ₹65,000 crore project was approved by the Narendra Modi government in February this year.

The Maharashtra government is also considering moving the Metro car shed to a site earmarked for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project — another pet project of PM Modi.

The locals are opposing the Vadhvan port project, which is part of Centre's Sagarmala initiative, in Palghar district. According to reports, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray met groups opposing the Vadhvan port as well Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project — another pet project of PM Modi — and assured them that he will not allow any project against the wishes of locals.

SC NOTICE TO KAMRA, TANEJA IN CONTEMPT CASES

**New Delhi, Dec. 18:** The Supreme Court issued show-cause notices to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and cartoonist Rachita Taneja on Friday for their alleged scandalous tweets against the apex court.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah sought response from both in six weeks on the notices issued in two separate cases. It, however, exempted them from personal appearances in the cases.

Issue notice returnable within six weeks. The contemnor respondent not to appear in person, the bench said in its order passed in a plea against Kamra.

Similar order was passed by the bench in the plea against Taneja.

The top court in its two orders noted that Attorney General K.K. Venugopal has given his consent to initiate contempt proceedings against both the comic artists in separate cases.

Venugopal had granted consent for initiation of criminal contempt proceedings against Kamra, saying the comedian's tweets were in "bad taste" and it was time that people understand that attacking the apex court brazenly would attract punishment.

The attorney general had also given consent to initiate criminal contempt proceedings against Taneja, stating that the caricatures posted by her on social media were intended to denigrate the Supreme Court and lower its authority in the eyes of the public.

# Dissent in Bengal BJP over TMC exodus

Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul are up in arms against the TMC deserters' overnight induction to BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 18

The sudden trend among heavyweights deserting the ruling Trinamul Congress to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ahead of the Assembly election in West Bengal has triggered strong dissent within the saffron party in the state.

Prominent BJP leaders like Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul and even state president Dilip Ghosh are up in arms against the TMC deserters' overnight induction to their party without any assessment of their past.

They have started voicing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari, Pandabeshwar MLA and former Asansol Mayor, left the TMC on Thursday.

Referring to Tiwari, Supriyo, Asansol MP and Union minister, wrote on Facebook, "What my Top Bosses decide is a different thing but I will try my very best with all my might & honesty to ensure that NO #TMC leader who tormented, tortured (both physically & mentally) my grass root level BJP colleagues in Asansol, don't get an entry in BJP!!"

Paul, the state BJP women wing chief, said, "Suddenly after nine years

● **BJP LEADERS** started voicing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari left the TMC on Thursday.

Tiwari felt that he could not do his welfare work for Asansol as crores of money for projects were returned. Where were these thoughts in him? These came to his mind four months before the Assembly elections. He opposed Supriyo. Moreover the people of Asansol do not like him. Many told me to ensure he does not come to our party (sic)."

Ghosh, the Midnapore

BJP MP, said, "There is a tiff between Supriyo and Tiwari because when Tiwari was the Asansol Mayor and TMC district president, he did not allow Supriyo to work in his Lok Sabha constituency. Bricks were hurled on Supriyo on the road. So Tiwari was his rival there. Now when he shows a prospect to join the BJP, it is natural for Supriyo to voice his complaint against him."

Tiwari, however, claimed that he had no plan to join the BJP.

On Barrackpore MLA Silbhadra Datta's prospect Ghosh observed, "Quitting the TMC and joining the

BJP are two different issues. We have seen that many leaders left the TMC earlier. That does not mean all of them came to the BJP or they were roped into our party."

In Bankura, a group of BJP workers came out on road and organised a demonstration near their party office after former state textiles minister Shyamapada Mukherjee quit the TMC on Thursday evening and hailed his ex-party colleague Shubhendu Adhikari as his leader with a hope to join the BJP. They made it clear that Mukherjee should not be allowed to join the BJP.

## AMID GROWING REBELLION IN TMC, SHAH ON TWO-DAY VISIT TO BENGAL

**Kolkata, Dec. 18:** Home Minister Amit Shah will arrive in Kolkata on Friday night on a two-day visit to Bengal and take stock of the BJP's affairs and activities in the districts, ahead of 2021 Assembly elections.

According to a press statement issued by BJP national media in-charge, Anil Baluni, Shah will participate in various programmes and functions during the weekend.

"In the wake of ensuing

Assembly elections, Amit Shah will also hold strategic and preparatory meetings," he said.

Shah will be putting up at a hotel in Newtown after arriving in Kolkata around 11 PM, another BJP leader said.

Shah will also review election management work during a meeting with central ministers from West Bengal, organisation secretaries, zonal observers and BJP state general secretaries. — PTI

# Mobile phones now have longer reach than missiles, says Rajnath

DC CORRESPONDENT With agency inputs NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, while referring to the impact of social media on conflicts between nations, on Friday said the reach of the mobile phone now is bigger than that of a missile.

Addressing the annual Military Literature Festival here, Singh warned that different kinds of security threats may emerge in the future. This event is important from another point of view, he said through video conference.

"As times change, the nature of threats and wars is also changing. In the future, other security-related issues may come before us."

He added that conflicts are gradually becoming comprehensive in the manner never imagined earlier.

Possibly alluding to the power of social media and mobile apps, he said, "Today the range (*marak Kshamta*) of a mobile has crossed even the reach of a missile, he said. He added that the enemy can now reach people even without crossing any borders, and urged everyone to play the role of a soldier.

We should remain alive



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh handovers Border Surveillance System (BOSS) to Chief of Army Staff General M.M. Naravane, during the DRDO awards function, in New Delhi on Friday.

to these dangers and save ourselves from wrong and misleading information and save others too, and festivals like this can play a key role in this, he said, urging literary figures to make use of their talent to the full for this. The defence minister did not specifically refer to China.

But in recent months, since the standoff between the two sides began at the Line of Actual Control, India has

banned several Chinese mobile apps, citing concerns related to national security and privacy. These included the popular TikTok and WeChat apps.

Meanwhile, a satisfactory resolution on the ground to the situation in the Ladakh sector between deployed Chinese and Indian troops still remains elusive despite several rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military

level in the past several months.

Nevertheless, India and China on Friday decided to "continue to work towards ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the LAC in the Western Sector at the earliest" and noted that the 7th and 8th rounds of Senior Commanders meetings held recently "had also contributed to ensuring stability on the ground".

## DAGGERS OUT IN KERALA'S CONG, BJP UNITS

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 18

Blame game has begun in the Kerala units of Congress-led UDF and BJP following the defeat in local body elections.

The Congress-led UDF which expected to do well riding on the anti-government sentiments, ended up with a disappointing performance.

In the political affairs committee meeting held a day after the results were announced, the leadership drew flak for its failure to cash in on the favourable political conditions.

Quite understandably, daggers are out in BJP as well. At least two factions in the party have demanded the removal of state president K. Surendran.

# CBI confirms Hathras gangrape, murder

**New Delhi, Dec. 18:** The CBI on Friday filed a chargesheet against the four men accused of the gangrape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit woman in a village in Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh, officials said.

After nearly two months of probe, the agency concluded in its final report that the accused — Sandeep, Ravi, Luv Kush and Ramu — allegedly gangraped and murdered the woman when she had gone to the fields to collect fodder on September 14 in her village Bhulgarhi, they said.

In its findings submitted before the competent court in Hathras, the agency has slapped Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections pertaining to rape, murder and gan-

● **CBI HAS** slapped IPC sections pertaining to rape, murder, gangrape apart from those under the SC/ST Act against the four accused .

grape apart from those under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act against the four accused men from the village, they said. The maximum sentence in the above charges is capital punishment.

The agency has based its findings on the dying statement of the woman in which she is understood to have named the accused, besides scientific and forensic evidence collected by the CBI and statements of witnesses and the victim's family members recorded by it. The findings submitted

by the CBI have left red faced the top officials of Uttar Pradesh Police who had claimed that no evidence of rape was found in forensic tests.

Uttar Pradesh's additional director general (law and order) Prashant Kumar had said, "The report of the FSL has come. It says clearly that samples did not contain semen. It makes clear that there was no rape or gangrape".

The ADG had also claimed that the woman in her statement to police "did not mention rape but talked about 'maar-peat' (beating) only". An embarrassed UP government had to hand over the case to the CBI after the incident triggered massive public outrage and a political slugfest. — PTI

INTERNAL | TIFF

23 leaders had written to Sonia demanding changes in the party

# Sonia to meet 'letter writers' today

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

After four months of wait, Congress president Sonia Gandhi will be meeting with a core group of letter writers. The meeting is scheduled to be held on Saturday morning at the official residence of Sonia Gandhi Ten Janpath.

Insiders claim that apart from five or six members from the letter writers camp there will also be General Secretary Organisation K.C. Venugopal, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok

Gehlot and the senior leader Kamal Nath who played the role of a mediator between the leadership and the group of 23 letter writers.

After the demise of senior leader Ahmed Patel who was the go between the leadership and the letter writers the role is now taken up by Kamal Nath.

Rahul Gandhi and his sister and General Secretary of Uttar Pradesh Priyanka Gandhi are also expected to be at the meeting.

As the internal elections of the party are

approaching the demand to make Rahul Gandhi the president again has gained momentum.

General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala said, "party will soon start the procedure to elect a new party president. 99.9% including me want Rahul Gandhi to be elected as Party president."

Interestingly, the Congress is downplaying the entire exercise and is just calling it a meeting with senior leaders as there will also be leaders who are not signatories to the letter that was written

in August this year.

Several issues are expected to find mention in the meeting regarding the functioning of the party especially the demand for an active and visible leadership.

The meeting also assumes significance as the Congress has been facing electoral debacles not only in state Assembly elections and by-elections but also in local body elections.

Several leaders have come out in the open and have said that there is no remedy available within the party hence they are

constrained to speak out in the open. Some have gone ahead and said that the time for introspection is over and now its time for action.

In August this year, 23 leaders of the party had written to Congress president Sonia Gandhi demanding sweeping changes in the functioning of the party.

The letter writers include former union minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, Shashi Tharoor, Veerappa Moily, Manish Tewari among others.

SHASHI BHUSHAN | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

India on Friday registered a landmark achievement in its fight against the Covid-19 when total recoveries in the country crossed a crucial peak of 95 lakh.

Union health ministry, meanwhile, said that getting vaccinated for Covid-19 will be voluntary, while emphasising that the vaccine introduced in India will be as effective as any vaccine developed by other countries.

The Union health ministry listed a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) on Covid-19 vaccine. Replying to a question whether it is mandatory to take the vaccine, the health ministry said that vaccination for Covid-19 is voluntary, however, it is advisable to receive the complete schedule of Covid-19 vaccine for protecting oneself against this disease and also to limit the spread of this disease.

## Odisha 'love jihad' victim rescued

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHBANESWAR, DEC. 18

Odisha police on Thursday night rescued a 21-year-old woman of Jajpur district who was allegedly kidnapped by a youth around two weeks ago from Cuttack. The girl's family members had alleged it was a case of 'Love Jihad'.

In a telephonic conversation between the young woman and her mother that came to fore earlier in the day, the young woman was heard informing her mother that she was being tortured and kept by the abductors at a hotel near beach in Puri.

Also, the young woman said she will be taken to a Masjid at Sutahtat in Cuttack for solemnisation marriage with the abductor in accordance with Islamic rituals.

According to reports, the

young woman had gone to VN College, Jajpur Road on December 5 for obtaining her migration certificate.

Later in the evening, she went missing while her mobile phone was found to be switched off.

As per the complaint lodged by the young woman's family members, one Shaikh Abdul Sehmat Khan alias Bobby of Choramuhan village under Dharماسala police limits abducted her.

Khan was earlier forcing the girl to have a love affair with him and change her religion. As the girl refused to do so, Khan threatened to kidnap her.

On Thursday, the police had arrested Shaikh Abdul Hamid Khan, father of Shaikh Abdul Sehmat Khan, for his alleged involvement in the abduction and threatening the parents of the girl to kill them.

— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## 15 KIDS KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN BOMB BLAST

Ghazni, Dec. 18: At least 15 children were killed when a motorbike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in eastern Afghanistan on Friday, officials said.

The children had gathered at a home in Ghazni province to recite *Quran* verses, a regular activity on the Islamic holy day of Friday, when the blast happened. "Unfortunately, as a result of this incident 15 people, all children, were martyred," said Wahedullah Jumazada, spokesman for the province's governor.

Ghazni police confirmed the blast and that all victims were children. Twenty other people, including some children, were wounded.

Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian earlier said the group had gathered in Gilan district to recite the *Quran*.

## SUPER CYCLONE YASA FLATTENS VILLAGES IN FIJI

Suva, Fiji, Dec. 18: Super cyclone Yasa flattened entire villages as it tore through Fiji, aid agencies said on Friday, with a baby among two confirmed deaths and rescue workers racing to the worst-hit communities.

Yasa made landfall at the Pacific Island nation late Thursday as a top-of-the-scale Category Five cyclone, lashing Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu.

The storm triggered floods, landslides and blackouts before moving out to sea early Friday, where it rapidly weakened to a Category Three system.

Zalim Hussein of Savusavu, a small town of a few thousand people on Vanua Levu, said he feared for his life sheltering at home in the dark as screeching winds ripped apart houses around him.

"I could hear roofs of neighbouring houses flying, trees falling and branches breaking outside and big waves crushing on the shore," he said.

## UN SAYS 'DEEPLY TROUBLED' OVER THAI DETENTIONS

Geneva, Dec. 18: The UN human rights body expressed alarm on Friday over Thailand's detentions of democracy activists, including a minor of 16 years, under royal defamation laws.

"We are deeply troubled by the move by Thai authorities to charge at least 35 protesters in recent weeks, including a 16-year old student protester, under Article 112 — the lese majeste provision of Thailand's criminal code," the UN Human Rights Committee said in a statement.

The activists are facing charges for headlining recent demonstrations demanding reforms to the monarchy and more scrutiny of the royal family's financial arrangements. The kingdom's lese majeste laws shield the super wealthy King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the royal family from criticism.

"The offence carries sentences of between three and 15 years' imprisonment for defaming, insulting or threatening the country's royal family," the committee's spokeswoman, Ravina Shamdasani said.

## MEGHAN SETTLES CASE OVER ARCHIE PHOTOS

London, Dec. 18: Meghan Markle has settled a claim against a news agency which took photographs of her and her young son Archie in a Canadian park, the High Court in London was told on Friday.

The Duchess of Sussex brought privacy and data protection claims against the Splash News and Picture Agency in March over the long-lens photographs.

A lawyer for the American former television actress, who married Prince Harry in 2018, said Splash UK went into administration after the claim was issued and served. Judge Matthew Nicklin told the hearing: "In light of the administration, the parties have agreed to settle the claim against Splash UK."

"The administrators of Splash UK have undertaken that, should the entity come out of administration, Splash UK will not take any photographs of the duke and duchess or their son in the future." The photographs were taken on January 20 this year, showing Markle walking with Archie in a baby sling, and her two dogs, in North Hill Regional Park on Vancouver Island.

## Pence gets Covid jab on live TV, Trump sparks confusion

Don jumps gun on FDA, says Moderna vaccine 'overwhelmingly approved'

Washington, Dec. 18: The US vice president received a Covid-19 vaccine shot live on television on Friday in a public display designed to boost national confidence in the drug even as President Donald Trump sparked confusion over approval for a second anti-Covid drug.

"Building confidence in the vaccine is what brings us here this morning," VP Mike Pence said after being injected at the White House, quipping: "I didn't feel a thing." Pence, his wife Karen and the lead public health official in the country, Surgeon General Jerome Adams, were all given the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in the annex to the White House.

Signalling the importance given to the event, top infectious diseases Anthony Fauci and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Robert Redfield were also in the room.

The notable absence was Trump himself. He has sent mixed messages about the seriousness of Covid-19 throughout the crisis, even as the US death toll topped 3,00,000 this month.

However, he has been keen to take credit for the historic speed of vaccine development. Early Friday he tweeted that a second drug made by Moderna had been "overwhelmingly approved" and that "distribution to start immediately." This sparked some confusion — while an advisory panel recommended emergency use approval for Moderna's vaccine on Thursday, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to give the final verdict allowing distribution — expected later Friday.

US President-elect Joe Biden's incoming White House senior advisor, congressman Cedric Richmond, has tested positive for Covid-19 after having open-air "interactions" with Biden, the transition team said on Thursday.

Richmond traveled independently to the state of Georgia to campaign Tuesday with Biden for a pair of Democrats in tight



Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria, state health secretary Jean Gorinchteyn and Butantan Institute director Dimas Covas pose for photographs holding doses of the CoronaVac vaccine against Covid-19 next to a container unloaded from a cargo plane that arrived from China at Guarulhos International Airport in Guarulhos, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, on Friday. Brazil on Thursday recorded more than 1,000 deaths from Covid-19 over a 24-hour period for the first time since September, according to a government tally.

## Macron rides out virus, fever at Versailles retreat

Paris, Dec. 18: As French President Emmanuel Macron rides out the Coronavirus in a presidential retreat at Versailles, French doctors are warning families who are heading for the holidays to remain cautious because of an uptick in infections — especially at the dinner table.

While Macron routinely wears a mask and adheres to social distancing rules, he hosted or took part in multiple group meals in

runoff elections against incumbent Republican senators.

Biden, 78, tested negative for Covid-19 on Thursday, his team said.

The head of the World Health Organisation said on Friday that the UN

the days before testing positive on Thursday.

Critics say that's a bad example for compatriots advised to keep their gatherings to six people. Macron is suffering from fever, cough and fatigue, officials with the presidency said on Friday.

They wouldn't provide details of his treatment. He is staying at the presidential residence of La Lanterne in the former royal city of Versailles.

Macron's positive test comes as French health authorities are again seeing a rise in infections and warning of more as French families prepare to get together for Christmas and New Year festivities.

France reported another 18,254 new infections on Thursday and its death toll is just under 60,000. France's Pasteur Institute released a study on Friday suggesting that meal times at home and in public are a major source of contamination.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the agreements mean that some 190 countries and economies taking part in the COVAX initiative will have access to vaccines "during the first half of next year."

— AFP/AP

## US warships to be 'more assertive' against China

Washington, Dec. 18: The US military warned on Thursday its warships would be "more assertive" in responding to violations of international law, citing in particular Beijing, which has expansionist ambitions in the South China Sea.

In a document setting objectives for the US Navy, Marines and Coast Guard for the coming years, the Pentagon stressed that several countries, notably Russia and China, "are contesting the balance of power in key regions and seeking to undermine the existing world order."

"Our globally deployed naval forces interact with Chinese and Russian warships and aircraft daily," the document said, noting their "growing aggressiveness" and calling

China "the most pressing, long-term strategic threat."

The latest incident between the US and China naval forces took place in late August, when Beijing said it had driven an American warship from the disputed Paracel archipelago.

The Asian power claims almost all of the islands of the South China Sea, territorial claims disputed by other countries in



Ratan Tata

Commerce, said.

The 82-year-old industrialist and philanthropist is the recipient of two of

India's highest civilian awards — Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan. The opening of the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber of Commerce's international chapter in Dubai is the first such initiative aiming at tapping business opportunities together in other countries, and developing trilateral collaborations.

This is expected to pave the way for several other such international chapters for the bilateral Chamber in other parts of the world, Byron noted.

"There is a large presence of Indian diaspora in the UAE and Bahrain which includes top professionals who are well established and respected. Given the close ties between Israel and India, we can definitely work together to develop a framework for trilateral cooperation in the Gulf", he added.

The Tata Group has invested millions of dollars in Tel Aviv University's (TAU) Technology Innovation Momentum Fund. As the lead investor in the fund, Tatas have the right of first opportunity to negotiate licence agreement on areas that have

been defined as start-up fields like automotive, point of care for medical devices, cleantech, etc.

In 2018, TAU and Tata Trusts announced the launching of the Indian Centre for Agri & Allied Tech (I-CAT) that would facilitate bringing Israeli know-how and innovation to the farmers of the state of Andhra Pradesh, initially, and was to be later extended to all the other parts of India.

The initiative, supported by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, includes creating an advanced R&D centre, as well as

promoting activities of agricultural experts in villages and farms — aiming to overcome various technological, agronomic and economic barriers, and promote sustainable agriculture and food security.

During his visit to Israel in 2013, Tata had signed an agreement with Israel Aerospace Industry (IAI) to jointly develop, manufacture and support a wide range of defence and aerospace products including missiles, UAVs, radars, electronic warfare systems and homeland security systems.

— PTI

## Biden backs son Hunter after tax probe revealed

Washington, Dec. 18: US President-elect Joe Biden has expressed full confidence in his son Hunter, a frequent target of Republican attacks, after it was revealed last week that he was under a federal tax investigation.

During his unsuccessful re-election campaign, President Donald Trump launched repeated accusations against Hunter and said the Bidens were a "corrupt" family and a "criminal enterprise."

"We have great confidence in our son," Biden said, sitting next to his wife Jill, in an interview on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," which aired Thursday on CBS.

"I am not concerned about any accusations that have been made against him. It used to get to me. I think it's kind of foul play but... as long as he's good, we're good," he said in his first full remarks on the issue since the tax probe became public.

Trump and his allies have regularly assailed Hunter for his business dealings in Ukraine and China.

From 2014 to 2019, while his father was vice president, Hunter, a lawyer and lobbyist, served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

Trump has accused Biden of seeking the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect Burisma — and his son — from a corruption investigation.

Hunter, 50, now an artist based in Los Angeles, has admitted to displaying "poor judgment" in some of his business dealings, but denied any wrongdoing.

— AFP

## Human error behind oil spill in Mauritius

Tokyo, Dec. 18: The Japanese operator of a bulk carrier that struck a coral reef and caused an extensive oil spill off the coast of Mauritius said Friday that the accident occurred after the ship shifted its course two miles (3.2 kilometers) closer to shore than planned so its crewmembers could get cellphone signals.

Mitsui O.S.K. Lines said its investigation showed the accident was caused by human error, including inadequate nautical charts, navigation systems and risk awareness, and a lack of supervision and safety monitoring. The company said the tanker's nautical chart provided little information about depth and other necessary information.

Crewmembers on duty also failed to conduct safety checks visually or by radar, it said. The captain and crewmembers were also using their cellphones while on duty, the company said. It said it will invest about 500 million yen (\$4.8 million) to provide electronic nautical charts, training to strengthen safety culture and other systems to

enhance safety.

The environmental disaster began July 25 when the ship MV Wakashio strayed off course and struck a coral reef a mile (1.6 kilometers) offshore. After being pounded by heavy surf for nearly two weeks, the ship's hull cracked and on Aug. 6 began leaking fuel into a lagoon, polluting a protected wetlands area and a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

The company apologised for the damage and in September offered 1 billion yen (\$9 million) to fund environmental projects and support the local fishing community in Mauritius.

About 3,000 tons that remained on the ship was pumped into barges before the Wakashio broke in two several days later.

— AP

## BIDEN NAMES 1st NATIVE AMERICAN TO CABINET

Washington, Dec. 18: US President-elect Joe Biden unveiled his environment team on Thursday, choosing congresswoman Deb Haaland to serve as the first Native American interior secretary and Jennifer Granholm, a former Michigan governor, as energy secretary.

He also nominated Michael Regan, a North Carolina environmental regulator who is Black and brokered the nation's largest coal ash cleanup, to be administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The choices fit with Biden's much-publicised pledge to form the most diverse White House cabinet in history.

"This brilliant, tested, trailblazing team will be ready on day one to confront the existential threat of climate change with a unified national response rooted in science and equity," Biden said in a statement.

Colbert asked Biden if there was anything he could "sincerely" thank Trump for accomplishing during his time in the White House.

After a short pause, Biden responded: "There are some things... Getting the vaccine moving has been positive, but by and large, he has been a president who's decided that the way he succeeds is by dividing us."

— AFP

INNOVATION | HONOUR Virtual ceremony will be attended by senior officials from Israel, India, UAE on Dec. 21

## Israeli peace, sustainability award for Ratan Tata

Jerusalem, Dec. 18: Veteran industrialist Ratan Tata will be honoured by the Indo-Israel Chambers of Commerce for promoting innovation that supports sustainability and peace in the region, including with the Palestinians.

The chairman emeritus of the Tata group will be honoured with 'Global Visionary of Sustainable Business and Peace' award during the launch of the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber of Commerce's international chapter in Dubai on December 21.

The virtual ceremony will be attended by senior officials from Israel, India and UAE. "Tata has done a lot for India-Israel ties. He has generously contributed towards promoting innovation that supports sustainability and has been a promoter of peace in the region, including with the Palestinians. He has visited Israel a few times which has been extremely beneficial in promoting ties between the two countries. He very well deserves this honour," Raviv Byron, President of Israel-India Chamber of



Ratan Tata

Commerce, said.

The 82-year-old industrialist and philanthropist is the recipient of two of

India's highest civilian awards — Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan. The opening of the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber of Commerce's international chapter in Dubai is the first such initiative aiming at tapping business opportunities together in other countries, and developing trilateral collaborations.

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promoting activities of agricultural experts in villages and farms — aiming to overcome various technological, agronomic and economic barriers, and promote sustainable agriculture and food security.

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— PTI



# DECCAN Chronicle

19 DECEMBER 2020

## Kerala: Big triumph for LDF, Cong rudderless

The brilliant show put up by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala in the elections to the local bodies is sure to offer the ruling front a solid base to prepare for the state Assembly elections hardly four months away while raising the bar higher for the Opposition, United Democratic Front (UDF), to win the race. The LDF has won 11 of the 14 district panchayat councils, 108 of the 152 block panchayats (the state has 140 assembly seats), 42 of the 86 municipalities and five of the six municipal corporations. Among the gram panchayats, the leftists won 514 of the 941, leaving 375 to the UDF and 23 to the National Democratic Alliance (BJP).

That the LDF has improved its own tally of 2015 local bodies elections when it was in the Opposition indicates that it faces little anti-incumbency threat in a state which alternates its ruling dispensation in every election without fail ever since 1977. While the Pinarayi Vijayan government's creditable performance in fighting virus attacks, first by Nipah in 2018 and by the coronavirus in 2020, its successful handling of two successive floods in 2018 and 2019, its focus on improving infrastructure especially in education and healthcare, its determined efforts to push through mega projects which includes the natural gas pipeline and the national highway project gave it the image of a government that works, its focus on welfare measures, which includes the construction of 2.5 lakh homes for the poor, the timely distribution of enhanced welfare pensions for the elderly and food kits during the pandemic, Covid-19, convinced the people that it is a government that cares.

**This image, coupled with the failure of central investigation agencies to come up with a credible case against people associated with the government vis-a-vis gold smuggling, has helped the LDF**

This image, coupled with the failure of the central investigation agencies to come up with a credible case against people associated with the government vis-a-vis gold smuggling, has helped the LDF keep its head above water. The smart political manoeuvring with which it got a section of the Kerala Congress which held sway in central Kerala to its side has paid rich dividends for the LDF while denting the prospects of the UDF of which the regional party was a major part for the last 50 years.

The Congress, which leads the UDF, has party machinery that covers the entire spectrum, starting from the booths but a rudderless leadership squandered them all away, thinking that the relentless and one-sided media scrutiny of the government will carry the day for them. The UDF, which recorded a spectacular victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections on the back of the entry of then Congress president Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad constituency and the Sabarimala issue which put the LDF in a dock, was a house divided this time. It would take enormous efforts on the part of the leadership to put it in order and take on the resurgent LDF if it were to keep its hope of returning to power. As for the NDA, its hopes replacing the Congress after decimating it lie shattered with the poor showing, especially in the capital Thiruvananthapuram. The party needs to cover a lot of ground before it gains a critical mass to emerge a major force in the state politics.

## ‘Punishing’ a state

While it is not yet clear what elements attacked the car convoy of BJP president J. P. Nadda at Diamond Harbour near Kolkata recently — one theory points the finger at hooligans sponsored by the ruling Trinamul Congress and the other says it is an internal BJP job to discredit the Mamata Banerjee government as an excuse for punitive action — the Union government brought the hammer down on three IPS officers of the West Bengal cadre. Their services have been compulsorily requisitioned by the Union home ministry.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee has responded with fury. She has threatened to take recourse to legal action. Ordinarily, the Centre requests a state to release a particular officer when there is special need since an officer of the IAS or the IPS is assigned to a state on being selected.

There may be scope for emergency procedures if a particular officer is badly needed with the Centre. But here the Union home ministry is forcing three IPS officers out of the state in one go. Is this dictatorial? Is it a “colourable” exercise of power, as the CM has observed? How the judiciary deals with the issue will be keenly watched if Ms Banerjee goes to court. It will be a precedent-setting order and will have a bearing on the broader question of Centre-state relations.

Before the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there was an instance of violence at a poll rally of then BJP party chief Amit Shah in Kolkata. The police commissioner was relieved of his charge by the Election Commission and subsequently asked by the state to report to the Centre. The officer who replaced him was also changed, along with three other IPS officers. These were not decisions of the Union home ministry as in the present instance, but of the EC. And yet it is the bulk nature of transfers, which makes these cases look like punishment.

Political antagonism between the Centre and a particular state government has probably not gone in this direction before and it is not a good sign for federalism, “cooperative” or otherwise, although Prime Minister has made renewed avowals of cooperative federalism.

### DECCAN CHRONICLE

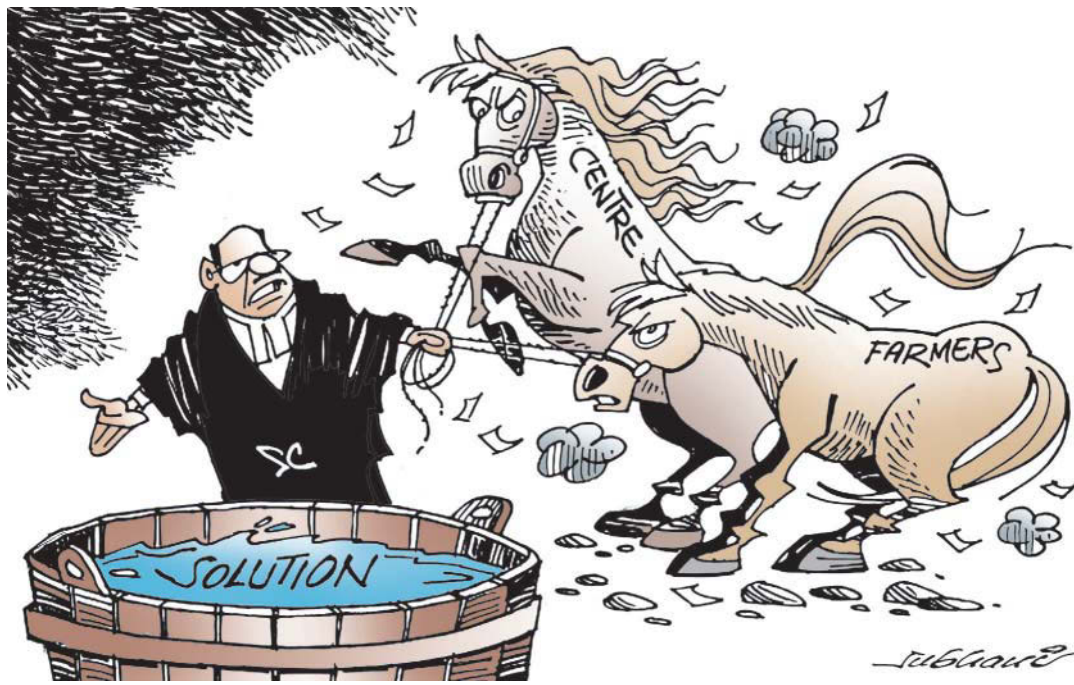
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Subhani



## As schools reopen, try to bridge digital divide



Rukmini Banerji

**The digital divide is layered on to existing divisions in our society**

increase in smartphone ownership is visible across states. Nationally, in 2018, 29.6 per cent families whose children went to government schools owned smartphones. This number rose to 56.4 per cent by 2018. For families who send their children to private schools, the figure in 2018 was 49.9 per cent, which increased to 74.2 per cent in 2020. A significant rise in access to smartphones in rural families is a striking feature of the last two years.

Overall, households reported that about 75 per cent children get some help at home in terms of learning support, and despite the crisis, close to 30 per cent children continued to attend paid tuition classes. Obviously, in families where parents have more education, they are able to help children more. However, even in families where both parents have less than five years of schooling, close to 25 per cent parents help children. Significant help in low education families also comes from siblings (in households where both parents have not even studied up to Class 5, 23.2 per cent children get help from older brothers and sisters.)

In the reference week before the survey in September, about a third of all children reported receiving learning materials and activities from their school. 67 per cent families whose children go to government schools and 87 per cent of those whose children go to private schools reported receiving materials via WhatsApp. Interestingly, 31.8 per cent of government school children's families also added that materials came via visits (either to the school by parents or by teachers to the child's home).

Interestingly, 80 per cent of all children in the sample had textbooks of their current grade. This number was slightly higher for

government school children. State governments across India made extensive efforts to deliver textbooks to children, and this statistic is testament to these endeavours.

Asked about where children were learning at home during the reference week, 70 per cent families said their children did some learning activities in that week. While a majority of these activities were with traditional materials like textbooks and worksheets, fewer children (usually below 20 per cent) accessed learning programmes on television, radio or online.

Five major takeaways from this year's ASER exercise: First, the situation is likely to remain fluid for some months. With the clear inequities in our society, it is essential to track who is getting what opportunities and to assess what kind of learning loss is experienced. Second, ASER 2020 gives clear evidence of parental engagement and willingness to support children's learning. This family support must be leveraged by the school system in a systematic way. Third, traditional teaching-learning methods should be combined effectively with newer ways of reaching/learning. Fourth, in-depth assessments of “what works and how” is needed to improve digital content and delivery for the future. Just because families have devices and connectivity doesn't automatically mean learning is happening effectively. Finally, the digital divide is layered on to existing divisions in our society. Mechanisms to reach and teach children who are on the dark side of the divide must be worked out so their educational disadvantage can be ameliorated over time.

ASER 2020 completed the first wave in September. It's likely that a follow-up wave may be planned later in the current school year to track how children's learning journeys are progressing.

**Rukmini Banerji is the CEO of Pratham Education Foundation**

### LETTERS

#### WINTER SESSION

The reason for scrapping the Winter Session of Parliament has not gone down well with the public (*Covid not a good reason to scrap Winter Session, DC, Dec. 18*). The same politicians were going on road shows in Bihar and Hyderabad for poll campaigns. Now, it is suspicious that they are citing Covid.

**Dr Mohammed Abdul Mujeeb Siddiqui**  
Hyderabad

#### SATELLITE LAUNCH

Isro's consistent achievements come as a pleasant surprise to a nation where people are fed up with negative news like agitations, crimes, hate speeches, political challenges, etc (*PSLV places comm satellite in orbit after perfect launch, DC, Dec. 18*). ISRO's efficiency, team work and planning are an inspiration for political parties, governments and various institutions to resolve the burning issues the country is facing.

**Kshirasagara Balaji Rao**  
Hyderabad

#### COVID VACCINE

Thanks to doctors for enlightening us about taking Covid vaccine. The government should ensure that all phases of tests are cleared and that there are no side effects. Dr Gawande has rightly said it is a risk versus benefit situation and depends on immunity of people.

**Ausaf Butool**  
Hyderabad

### 50 YEARS AGO IN

## DECCAN Chronicle

### Probe into Shastri's death rejected

NEW DELHI, Dec. 18. The Government today rejected the demand for a probe into former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's death in Tashkent five years ago. The demand for setting up a commission of enquiry was made in the Rajya Sabha by Opposition Members of Congress(O), BKD, Jana Sangh and SSP while seeking clarifications on government statement relating to Shastri's death laid on the table of the two Houses of Parliament in the morning.

Minister of State for Home Affairs R.N. Mirdha said that no facts had come to light which called for an enquiry and that there was no question of any doubt in this case.

Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



*“If our hands bent both ways  
There'd be lines marked on  
the back.  
We'd call them life, fate and fortune  
Predicting ruin and rack.*

*With our palms already foretelling  
It'd be a sort of heads and tails  
And palmists would be confounded  
Not knowing which fortune  
prevails.”*

— *From Come, Say 'Come'*  
by Bachchoo

## Researching Wikipedia on the origins of toxic words

Idle days, my friend, idle days in terms of worldly commerce, but busy as a woodpecker tapping the imagined computer keys of a tree-trunk. And as random questions occur, sometimes pertaining to work. Sometimes thoughtful wanderings from questions about how one dodges British tax by registering companies in Nassau, to the origins of phrases one has used and never stopped to etymologise.

Praise be to Ahura Mazda for inspiring the founders and conspirators of Wikipedia. And yes, I do contribute small sums to their coffers now and then. We must all will their incredibly comprehensive and by-

and-large-accurate encyclopaedia(e) as the world has never known, to continue — till time and ingenuity replace the ethereal store of knowledge with some other scientifically invented miracle.

The triviality of what I resort to Wiki for will or may, gentle reader, prompt you to judge me harshly. Today it occurred to me that I had never investigated the origins of the phrase “oopsy daisy”! I am now fairly knowledgeable about the meanings of certain nursery rhymes such as Humpty Dumpty which wasn't an egg as mistakenly portrayed by cartoonists, but a cannon in the service of His Majesty's artillery. I also proudly know that ring-a-ring-a-roses is about the plague that swept Britain and nothing to do with necklace of blossoms as I had imagined when we played holding hands and forming a ring, at the age of three in the joyous hours of infant birthday parties.

And now Wikipedia corrects my lifelong notions and says the phrase is “Whoopsy Daisy”. There are several notes on the origin of the phrase, and they contradict each other and still leave the attribution of alarm, at an accidental slip, or as an encour-

agement to a child as you fling it into the air, mysterious. The appearance of this Daisy, presumably a girl and not a flower, doesn't figure in the explanations.

And in my idle researches I find that there are places where Wikipedia doesn't fear to tread. It very bravely, if casually, tells the literal meaning of the “F” word while incorporating the various expressions which use the single syllable without in any sense invoking its literal meaning. It is, as Bagwash Shri Ragwort noted in one of his rambles, used to express dismissal, disdain, disappointment and other “d's, not to mention the moods and utterances whose descriptions begin with other letters of the alphabet.

And so, with other words which we, in our graciously inoffensive era, shorten to their first letters. And in that context, after a few minutes of research in these idle hours, I have discovered, gentle reader, that Wikipedia gives us definitions and connotations of very many common Hindi or Urdu swear words, including those which the victims of the abuse may object to as “going on mothers/sisters”.

One stereotype for us Parsis is that

we punctuate our sentences with the MC and BC words. I sincerely protest that my family and their acquaintances never fell into the particular linguistic habit, but a friend in college was universally known as Adi “MC” Manekshaw. He would freely use the expletives and was famous for his expression of surprise or disbelief, which was “Good Lord MC!” — (the mouth-filling words not just initials).

The intriguing word, which I grew up hearing in the Parsi and wider Indian community, was “*saala*”. The word literally means brother-in-law, and of course can mean that the speaker had carnal relations with the sister of the one to whom the word is directed. That could be provoking and insulting, but in my hearing, it was often used as an endearment. How in such discourse has its negativity turned into its opposite? (All answers to this newspaper's letters page! — *fd*. Sub-editors: Delete this line, we have enough unprintable nonsense stimulated by his columns anyway — *Ed*)

And wandering outside the possible remit of Wikipedia, I have taken to wondering whether the Parsi surname Siganporia, based on an associ-

ation with place, as with Adenwalla and Billimoria, should really be “Singaporia”. It is easy to see how the eastern tongue twists the sound of “x” or “ks” into “sk”, as in the transformation of Alexander to Sikander, or as boys in school would say “I'll aks my bro”!

And so with the word signal, again in English two consonants “g” and “n” thrown together and rendered very often by the general Indian public as “singal”. Which is why I suspect, as there is no place in Gujarat called Siganpor, that the surname derives from some ancestor who pursued the opium trade, banking or some such in the far eastern colony.

Again, in idle intellectual mode, I wonder why my grandmother demonised the vegetable which we call “brinjal” and Europeans refer to as aubergine or eggplant, by characterising anyone who fell ill with the phrase “*veengra khaddha*”, meaning “ate brinjals”. In my short and happy life, I have never known the vegetable to be toxic or poisonous.

Where are the Parsi etymologists and phraseological historians when you need them? Come back, all is forgiven.



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,960.69	0.15
Nifty 50	13,760.55	0.14
S&P 500*	3,699.28	-0.62
Dollar (₹)	73.56	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	0.66
Euro (₹)	90.10	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,644.21	0.042
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	52.17	0.67
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.959	0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.926	-0.004

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

India Inc's FY21 FDI outflow at \$12.25 billion

Indian firms have committed overseas investments worth \$12.25 billion between April and November this year. Of this actual outflow would be \$6.35-2.97 bn through equity and \$3.38 bn in loan commitments. The rest, \$5.90 bn, would be in guarantees. Main investors are OVL (\$1852 million), JSW Steel (\$865 mn), Haldia Petro-chem (\$599 mn), HCL Tech (\$587 mn), M&M (\$551 mn) and Adani Properties (\$391 mn), Care Ratings said.

No cane price cut; Goyal asks mills to be efficient



Food minister Piyush Goyal said the government cannot reduce the fair and remunerative price (FRP), the minimum price at which sugar mills buy cane from farmers, and asked the industry to be efficient, profitable and diversify product portfolio with less dependency on the central subsidy. Addressing Isma, Goyal said the central subsidy of Rs 3,500 crore for exports will help in liquidating surplus sugar stocks.

Bank credit rises 5.73%, deposits move up 11.34%

Bank credit grew by 5.73 per cent to Rs 105.04 lakh crore while deposits increased by 11.34 per cent to Rs 145.92 lakh crore in the fortnight ended Dec. 4, RBI data showed. In the fortnight ended Dec. 6, 2019, bank credit had stood at Rs 99.35 lakh crore and deposits at Rs 131.06 lakh crore. In the previous fortnight ended Nov. 20, credit grew by 5.82 per cent to Rs 104.34 lakh crore and deposits by 10.89 per cent.

Forex reserves down by \$778 mn to \$578.56 bn

The country's foreign exchange reserves declined by \$778 million to \$578.568 billion in the week to Dec. 11, RBI data showed. In the previous week, the reserves had touched a lifetime high of \$579.346 bn after increasing by \$4.525 bn. Foreign currency assets dropped by \$1.042 bn to \$536.344 bn. The gold reserves rose by \$284 mn to \$36.012 bn. The SDRs with IMF dipped by \$3 mn to \$1.503 bn.



Instructed to clear goods fast, credit drawback in 3 days Customs asked to behave

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 18

In a major relief to exporters and importers, customs officials have been asked to credit duty drawback to the exporter in three days. They have also been asked to reduce unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices during the custom clearance of imported goods.

The Action Plan of CBIC 2020- 21 directs officials that at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback should be credited within three days. Further, the refund may be deposited into the customer account in T+2 days.

"The government's instruction to further reduce the timeline for crediting at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback claims to the exporters from seven days to three days, will definitely help



improve the cash flow of various industry players involved in exporting goods out of India, especially in these Covid times when a large number of businesses are still facing liquidity crunch," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner, EY.

Moreover all the remaining duty drawback claims should be positively disposed of by March 31, 2021 and while doing so the target of disposing of draw-

back in seven days should be achieved, said Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

A major cause of worry for importers has been the delay in clearances. Exports, after a positive growth in September, once again started de-growing in October and November. Delays in the clearance of goods at the customs department have been one among the various reasons for this. "Most of the

imports from Free Trade economies have been receiving queries and were getting delayed for days as well as months," said the Federation of Indian Exporters Association.

The customs officials have now been advised to ensure judicious application of Carotar 2020, which are rules pertaining to country of origin, without causing disruption to the supply chain. They were also advised to review the function of customs ports to ensure that unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices are not being resorted to during custom clearance of goods.

The CBIC observed that importers are often asked to directly seek clarifications of the exporting country on country of origin verifications. "Officers under your charge may also be sensitised to ensure that enquiry on origin of

imported goods is initiated only where there are sufficient grounds to suspect origin of a good, or where the same has been identified as a risk by the Risk Management System. They should be suitably supervised to ensure that unnecessary queries are not raised on account of goods origin," said CBIC.

"In order to resolve industry concerns around the Carotar 2020, CBIC has issued instructions to ensure that queries under the said rules are issued only when sufficient grounds to question the origin of goods are present. This is a smart move on the part of the government and will be much appreciated by the industry, as this, while preventing revenue leakage, will ensure that the shipments are not unnecessarily delayed at customs ports," said Jain.

Logistics' competitiveness gap may cost \$500 bn by 2030

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 18

With the supply chain inefficiencies remaining high, the competitiveness gap of the Indian logistics sector is expected to go up from \$180 billion to \$500 billion in 2030.

The logistics cost in India stands at 14 per cent of GDP, compared to the global average of about 8 per cent, creating a competitiveness gap of \$180 billion and this could increase to \$500 billion by 2030, finds a report by global management consultancy Arthur D. Little.

India's supply chain and logistics sector is valued at \$215 billion and is growing at a CAGR of 10.5 per cent. It is marred by an unbalanced logistics modal mix, high indirect costs, poor infrastructure,

fragmented networks and lack of technology adoption. The pandemic further accentuated supply chain weaknesses.

Indirect logistics costs in India are four times the average of those in developed countries. The main reasons are excessive layers in distribution channels and inventory mismanagement. Inadequate demand forecasting due to lack of technology adoption leads to inventory mismanagement. It also leads to high inventory carrying costs, which include costs for holding and storing unsold goods. These costs alone amount to 15-25 per cent of inventory costs or \$120 to \$180 billion.

Transportation by road is at the root of the unwarranted logistics costs. Transportation represents

about 40 per cent of logistics costs, and heavy dependence on the road networks, combined with poor transportation infrastructure, makes transportation costs balloon. India's rail and sea network are highly under-utilised due to lack of supporting infrastructure.

Failing to address India's competitiveness gap of \$180 billion could expand it to \$500 billion by 2030. Greenfield manufacturing will not be viable because high logistics costs are a barrier to entry. High logistics costs will continue to impede local manufacturing and reduce demand for Indian products in the global markets.

"To bridge the current competitiveness gap of \$180 billion, India needs to halve logistics cost from 14 per cent of GDP to 7 per cent,"

said Barnik Chitran Maitra, managing partner of Arthur D. Little India and South Asia.

The study finds that India will have to optimise the logistics modal mix to global benchmarks, with roads constituting 25-30 per cent, railways comprising 50-55 per cent and waterways accounting for 20-25 per cent of transportation modes. It will have to reduce indirect or "hidden" costs to 20-25 per cent through efficient inventory management and monitoring. In addition, turnaround time should be optimised to 700-800 km per day, with the target of increasing truck trips by 50 per cent. The throughput of the road network has to be raised with better quality roads and a higher proportion national highways in the road network.

World's richest banker Kotak made \$16 bn after a brush with death

SUVASHREE GHOSH & ANTO ANTONY DEC. 18

If it weren't for a cricket accident that almost killed him, Uday Kotak probably wouldn't be the world's richest banker.

A ball that hit him in the head and led to an emergency surgery pushed a 20-year-old Kotak to abandon his dream of becoming a professional player. After a brief stint at the family's cotton-trading business, he went on to pursue his MBA at the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies in Mumbai before starting out in finance in 1985 at the age of 26.

Kotak, now 61, has a fortune estimated at around \$16 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

While India has been grappling with a shadow-lending crisis, his Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd has been able to rise through the crowd, gaining investors' trust by starting to slow lending to riskier sectors more than two years ago and keeping good corporate governance. When the coronavirus pandemic added to the industry's woes by eroding borrowers' ability to repay, the firm was one of the first to raise capital to fortify its balance sheet, helping boost investors' confidence.

The strategy paid off: Kotak Mahindra Bank shares are up 17 per cent



this year, the most among Indian peers, and Kotak just gained an extension to his chief executive officer term for another three years. A representative at the firm didn't respond to requests for comment.

"As far as I'm concerned, becoming the world's richest banker is only a proxy for Uday being one of the world's smartest bankers," said Anand Mahindra, the chairman of Mahindra Group in Mumbai, whose tie-up with Kotak back in 1986 led to the firm's name. "More importantly, he's understood that what makes a bank sustainable and durable is not just smart strategies but unsalable governance."

Kotak's company stands out in a country where lenders have some of the worst bad-loan ratios in the world. While its bad-loan ratio has risen in 2020, it ranked as the second lowest among peers, with its capital-adequacy score being the highest. The nation's second-largest lender by market value reported an unex-

pected 27 per cent profit surge in the September quarter.

The firm got another boost last month, when the central bank proposed increasing the ownership limit for founders, effectively reducing the risk that Kotak will be forced to dilute his 26 per cent stake in the lender as previously demanded by the Reserve Bank of India.

Kotak, a native of Gujarat, set up an investment company in 1985 with a Rs 30 lakh (\$41,000) loan from family and friends and partnered with Mahindra the following year. The firm, which started off discounting bills, later expanded its loan portfolio, got into stock brokering, investment banking, insurance and mutual funds. It converted into a lender in 2003 after getting the RBI's nod.

He has been Kotak Mahindra Bank's CEO since its beginning and gained more control of it in 2006 by ending a partnership of more than a

decade with Goldman Sachs Group Inc. Kotak rose through the ranks by keeping strong underwriting practices and avoiding lending to riskier sectors, focusing instead on expanding collateral-backed loans for farm equipment, mortgages and vehicles, according to Deepak Jasani, head of retail research at HDFC Securities Ltd.

While the RBI just approved the extension of Kotak's CEO term investors are starting to wonder what will happen after he hands over the reins.

Unlike many family-owned enterprises in India, Kotak has avoided enrolling family members into the lender's board or at top executive positions. That helped maintain investors' and depositors' confidence in a country where the lack of corporate governance and transparency has already brought down three banks and pushed two shadow lenders to bankruptcy in less than two years.

"It's been all Uday," said Ananth Narayan, a former banker and now an associate professor of finance at the S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research in Mumbai. "There are a lot of good people under him, but frankly, they are all overshadowed by Uday. Anybody who has to step into Uday's shoes has a tough job because he is an institution by himself."

—Bloomberg

Europe, US top markets for Indian IT contractors



**Mumbai, Dec 18:** The United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United States and South Africa are among the top five countries attracting and retaining highly skilled Indian workforce.

Further, it said since March this year there was a staggering 610 per cent growth in job postings for IT contractors across the Philippines, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Canada, Kenya and Brazil.

The information technology sector tops the charts with 48 per cent hiring of the contractual workforce. It is followed by insurance (18 per cent), banking and finance (16 per cent), telecommunications (12 per cent) and pharmaceuticals (6 per cent), the survey said.

"The IT contractual job market has always seen good traction. However, the growth for contractors in India has only been exemplified during the pandemic, which massively impacted the global job market.

"Gradually, companies in India, and around the world are making a shift in talent acquisition and embracing contractual hiring. As a result, there is a rising demand for our services," Techfynder Founder and CEO Praveen Madire said. —PTI

Sensex hits 47000 in opening trade



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 18

The Sensex breached the 47000-mark for the first time ever on Friday in opening trade, led by gains in the IT sector stocks post-Accenture's strong first quarter performance and US Federal Reserve's decision to keep rates unchanged.

The unrelenting bull run is now seen taking the benchmark index closer to 50000 points, the target set by some brokerages.

The index opened at 47026 as against the previous close at 46,890.34. But it closed below 47000 at 46,960.69, up 70 points or 0.15 per cent, as the market turned volatile post the big opening move and touched a low of 46,630.31.

The Nifty-50 also closed at a new all-time high of 13,760.55, gaining 0.14 per cent, or 19.85 points.

Recently BNP Paribas set a target of 50500 for 2021, earlier Morgan Stanley had said that the Sensex would cross 50000 by December 2021.

Who knows it may come even earlier by March 2021, going by the pace of index movement.

At the same time risks are increasing as the foreign money pouring into the equity market is large-

ly short-term funds, which could fly out on monetary policy tightening by global central banks like the US Fed.

Large-scale foreign buying continued, with Rs 2,720.95 crore net purchase reported by the exchanges on Friday.

"The Fed's decision to keep rates unchanged will help FIIs to maintain a positive view on emerging markets like India," said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services.

Strong first quarter FY21 performance by IT major Accenture led to a rally in Indian IT stocks.

The BSE IT index gained 1.70 per cent, led by gains for Infosys (2.64 per cent), Wipro (1.89 per cent), HCL Technologies (1.32 per cent) and TCS (0.87 per cent).

"Accenture's Q1 performance and guidance came in well ahead of expectations largely due to continued strong demand in outsourcing and recovery in the consulting business," said Emkay Global Financial Services. "A broad-based demand recovery and sustained healthy growth momentum in revenue/order booking of the outsourcing business augur well for Indian IT peers."

TS DEET TIES UP WITH EQUIFAX FOR STAFF VERIFICATION

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 18

Digital Employment Exchange of Telangana (DEET) has officially collaborated with consumer credit rating agency Equifax to streamline the process of employment verification.

"This strategic collaboration, through the introduction of new digital services on DEET app, will open gates for swift employment & ID verification for employees, easing out the tedious process of hiring," DEET said in an official release.

The current system of employee verification takes upto 10 days. With this collaboration, DEET and Equifax aim at enhancing the employment ecosystem in Telangana and make the process of recruitment and verification instant.

Equifax Analytics is the only significant employer-contributed employment data repository in the country, enabling instant employment verification.

Speaking on the collaboration, IT minister K.T. Rama Rao said, "I see this collaboration of DEET and Equifax as another stepping stone by the government towards a brighter future for the employment sector."

Copper tops \$8,000 as Goldman points to commodities super-cycle

**Dec. 18:** Copper topped \$8,000 a tonne for the first time in more than seven years, with Goldman Sachs Group Inc and BlackRock Inc pointing to the start of a new long-term bull market as supply lags an expected demand boom.

The market is witnessing the sharpest rally in more than a decade, with China's appetite for commodities and supply snags early on in the Covid-19 pandemic

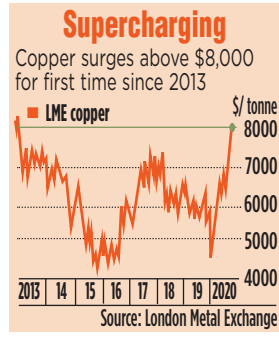
lifting copper about 80 per cent from its March lows.

Expectations for a deficit, the weaker dollar, and its role in green technology have also fuelled gains. Some banks and investors are now drawing comparisons to the spike in the early 2000s, when a jump in Chinese orders ushered in the last super-cycle for commodities.

"You have all the tell-tale signs of a super-cycle," Jeff

Currie, head of commodities research at Goldman Sachs, told Bloomberg TV. He cited metals hitting multiyear highs, the weaker dollar, crude oil reaching \$50, and rising global liquidity.

Copper spiked to \$8,028 a tonne, the highest price since 2013, on Thursday, on the London Metal Exchange. Most other metals also gained, with aluminum rising 0.5 per cent.



Singapore iron ore futures pushed above \$160 a tonne, hitting the highest level since trading began in 2013.

Goldman pointed to the start of a positive feedback loop between commodities, the dollar and emerging-market growth that has driven past structural bull markets. At the centre is strong, synchronized, policy-driven demand focused on wealth redistribution

and renewables and, with commodity supply-side spending outside of renewables still at very low levels, this demand growth should keep markets tight for the foreseeable future, it said in a December 17 note.

BlackRock expects copper to hit new all-time highs in the upswing of the cycle, Evy Hambro, the firm's global head of thematic investing, said.

China's success at containing the pandemic and optimism about global economic growth next year is fuelling gains across industrial commodities from iron ore to oil. It's been a remarkable turnaround for copper, which fell more than 50 per cent from a record high in 2011, trading below \$5,000 a tonne during a slump in 2015-16 and again earlier this year. —Bloomberg



