





## SHORT TAKES

JAGAN TO VISIT  
POLAVARAM  
PROJECT TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, DEC. 13

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will visit Polavaram Project in West Godavari district on Monday. He will arrive from Tadepalli and land at a helipad site near the project. He will inspect project works and its progress and review with the officials and the contractors. Later, he will leave for Tadepalli by 1.30 pm.

FARMER ATTACKS  
ASI WITH KNIFE IN  
WEST GODAVARIDC CORRESPONDENT  
VEERAVASARAM, DEC. 13

A farmer, A.R. Kumar, on Sunday attacked an assistant sub-inspector of Veeravasaram police station P. Pardha Saradhi in at Veeravasaram of West Godavari district with a knife.

Veeravasaram police plice said that farmer Ch. Gopi had lodged a complaint with the police station against Kumar over a crop issue. The ASI along with a constable P.S. Murthy went to the field and were making enquiries when Kumar took out a knife and allegedly stabbed the ASI injuring him severely, and fled the scene.

The ASI was admitted to a hospital at Bhimavaram. Veeravasaram police registered a case.

Meanwhile, West Godavari superintendent of police K. Narayana Naick visited the ASI at the hospital.

Director General of Police Gowtham Sawang reacting to the incident instructed the police officials to investigate the issue and take action.

POLICE SEIZE  
₹1.9CR FROM A  
BUS PASSENGERDC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, DEC. 13

The police seized ₹1.9 crore unaccounted cash at Panchalingala check post near Kurnool city from a passenger who was travelling from Hyderabad to Kurnool in an APSRTC bus belonging to the Kuppam bus depot.

According to Kurnool DSP K.V. Mahesh, the police conducted raids on various vehicles including the suspected RTC bus part of routine checks near Panchalingala check-post on late hours of Saturday on NH 44.

Meanwhile, the police found ₹1.9 crore and no documents were justifying the said amount with the passenger. The passenger was identified as K. Rama Chowdary, resident of Maruthinagar in Anantapur district headquarter, a real estate agent.

'NAIDU HAS  
ALWAYS BEEN  
ANTI-TRIBALS'DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

Deputy Chief Minister Pamula Pushpa Sriyani alleged that Leader of the Opposition N. Chandrababu Naidu has no right to talk about tribals in the state as he never worked for the development of tribal communities.

Addressing a press meet here on Sunday, she strongly condemned Mr Naidu's false propaganda alleging negligence by YSRC government in protecting rights of tribals.

Pushpa Sriyani said that their government was tribal-friendly. She recalled that the government had filed a review petition on the instructions of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to reconsider the Supreme Court judgment on striking of GO No. 3 on behalf of the tribals. She alleged that tribals were all aware that Mr Naidu was instrumental in doing away with the GO as the TD government did not respond properly in that case.

She alleged that Mr Naidu did not even include a tribal in his Cabinet and treated them as untouchables. She stated that an ST Commission was set-up for tribals and under the ST sub-plan ₹5,177 crore was spent for the benefit of tribals in the state. She further said that Jagan Mohan Reddy had also given a record number of ROFR patta lands to tribals and permanent employment to them.

Palnadu battle memories  
passed on to generations

The battle ended with a cockfight deciding the winner

MD ILYAS | DC  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

A traditional celebration remembering the warriors of Palnadu by passing down on story of *Palnati Yuddham* (Battle of Palnadu) to newer generations is continuing for decades at the ancient and historical village of Karempudi in Guntur district. People of Palnadu have been protecting the centuries-old *Veerula Gudi* (temple) and the culture by conducting the Palnati *Veeraradha Utsavalu* (celebrations). The famous story of the Battle of Palnadu, registered in 1182 CE at Karempudi, is retold in the village every year for five days through plays. The story in short is the fight for power between brothers was the cause of the battle which ended with a cockfight deciding the winner.

The story has it that the battle took place between Nalagamaraju King who ruled the area of Palnadu and his step-brother Malidevaraju. Nalagamaraju was supported by Reddy woman Nagamma while Malidevaraju was supported by social reformer Recherla Brahmanaidu. Brahmanaidu was a staunch Vaishnavite and founded a new sect called Veera Vaishnavism as against Veera Saivism which was prevalent then and which allowed the Sudras into its fold but not the "untouchables".

Brahmanaidu accorded equal status to untouchables. The social reforms like *Chapa Koodu* (having food sitting side by side on a mat irrespective of caste) initiated by Brahmanaidu antagonised the conservatives of Palnadu society.

The story goes that the conservatives found an able leader in Nagamma, known as Nayakuralu, who joined the court of Nalagamaraju and gained his confidence. She made Nalagamaraju remove Brahmanaidu's men from key positions. The differences in the court and the royal family grew which led to the division of the kingdom.

Nalagamaraju's half brother Malidevaraju moved to Macherla with Brahmanaidu and set up a separate kingdom there. Mutual suspicion between the two kingdoms grew and Nagamma under the pretext of Malidevaraju's defeat in a cockfight exiled them for seven years from Palnadu. After the exile Brahmanaidu sent Alaraju, the brother in law of Malidevaraju, to claim Malidevaraju's share. The demand was turned down and Alaraju was poisoned in Cherlagudipadu on the orders of Nagamma. His wife Perindevi committed *sati* (jumping into the pyre of the husband) with Alaraju. This enraged Malidevaraju and Kommaraju who was the father of Alaraju. Brahmanaidu then declared war on Gurajala. The battle was fought at Karempudi on the banks



In this file photo the successors of Palnati Brahmanaidu carrying the weapons of Palnati Brahmanaidu decorated in a procession during Palnadu Veerula Utsavalu in Karempudi village of Guntur district.

— DC

Coronavirus dampens  
Palnadu battle festivityDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

The Covie-19 pandemic has impacted the traditional Palnati Veeraradhana Utsavalu as the five-day event will be held amidst strict protocol which allow only limited people. The Palnati Veeraradhana Utsavalu started as a low-key affair on Sunday at Karempudi.

Macharla MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy formally launched the celebrations. He said that due to Covid-19, the celebrations will be restricted and only selective groups mainly heirs and priests would be allowed.

Mr Reddy said that near-

ly one lakh and above people will join the celebrations from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana state, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. He said that all traditional programmes would be held for five days but in restrictive mode and *Chapakoodu* (sitting on the mat and eating) and *Kodiporu* (cockfight) would be conducted on the concluding day. He said that this is the only traditional celebration in the state which is protected and revealed to new generations every year and said that the Battle of Palnadu was being remembered mainly because of the yearly festivities down the ages.

Karempudi tahsildar J. Prasada Rao said that every year Thirunallu would be conducted and cultural programmes including plays will be demonstrated resembling the Battle of Palnadu but this time it was restricted due to Covid-19. He said that traditional warriors were arriving in Karempudi and they will conduct the devotional worship programme to the martyrs of the age old war.

Devotees K. Srinivas and others said that the Palnadu battle earned Palnadu a brave name still continues to hold it apart from making factions thrive in the Palnadu region.

Battle of Palnadu inspired many  
movies, books, plays, TV serialsDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

The Battle of Palnadu has been etched in memory in the form of films, books, plays and TV serials. The first movie on the battle was made in 1947 under the direction of legendary Gudavalli Ramabrahmam and L.V. Prasad.

In 1966, another movie *Palnati Yuddham* was produced in which another legend of the Indian cinema N.T. Rama Rao acted in the lead role. Interestingly, NTR's son Balakrishna acted as hero in the *Palnati*

of the river Naguleru in which Nalagamaraju's side emerged victorious with Malidevaraju dying in the mele.

Brahmanaidu was forced to reinstate Nalagamaraju. Balachandrudu, the valiant son of Brahmanaidu, dies in the battle along with his wife Manchala. With this a whole generation of Andhra warriors perish in the battle.

The annual five-day cele-

brations remembering Palnati warriors (warriors of Palnadu) kicked off on Sunday and will conclude on December 17. On the first day of the celebrations, the story of the Battle of Palnadu will be recited in various forms.

On the second day, actors in the attires of warriors come from various areas and conduct *Gramotsavam* (display with their weapons) and

poems and plays. The ancestors formed a society to remember the martyrs and also displays age old swords, knives and other weapons used in the battle apart from offering prayers to them during the five-day celebrations

Interestingly, according to the history, two soldiers who took part in the battle, Jaffar and Fareed, constructed the *Palnati Veerula Gudi* (temple of the brave warriors) on the battle ground at Karempudi. The two who died at Karempudi are also buried on the same ground and their graves also present there.

*Rayabaram* (talks) between the two warring groups episode. On the third day, *Chapakud* (all sitting on mat and eating) would be conducted. On the fourth day, cockfight in which minister Brahmanaidu is defeated in the hands of Nayakuralu Nagamma would be played.

The concluding fifth day will see the Battle of Palnadu, with warriors enacting the battle.

## DC | IMPACT

The survey process was reported in these columns

Mining survey halted at the  
Anantapur-Bellary borderDC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, DEC. 13

The Andhra Pradesh-Karnataka state border dispute has not come to an end after the team of Survey of India reportedly stopped the survey process and finalising borders between Anantapur-Bellary districts.

High-level authorities from the Centre and teams from both states reacted after the entire episode was published in *Deccan Chronicle*, and the survey process has reportedly been put on hold, sources said.

This paper reported on contradictions and alleged influence of leaders from

● The Union Government is conducting the survey to fix the borders following dispute for the past one and a half decade after borders were destroyed by the mining companies. Illegal mining of 29 lakh tonnes of rich quality of iron ore from reserved forests had caused damage to the border areas

Karnataka over fixing of rich mining lands at state borders. Mining companies objected to the present system and demanded a change in the survey process order to avoid any

Rumours about mysterious  
illness in Dachepalli fakeDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13

Rumours about people fainting due to convulsions at Dachepalli, similar to the mysterious illness at Eluru, went viral across social media on Sunday leaving the public a worried lot. Officials immediately plunged into action and found that they were fake news. The rumours gained ground after a young person fainted in Nadikudi colony of Dachepalli on Sunday.

According to reports, 25-year-old Pallapu Ramakrishna soon after he fainted suddenly was rushed by his relatives to a private hospital. The doctors, after primary treatment, suggested that he be shifted to Guntur for better treatment. Doctors at the private hospital where Ramakrishna was taken found that he was suffering from convulsions and

● Medical team tests water after youth faints. They were sent for tests to clear doubts about water contamination

had a past history of the ailment. He recovered after he was given treatment. District medical and health officer Dr J. Yasmin said that five teams were sent to find out about the incident and conducted tests on locals. She said that the teams found that Ramakrishna was an epilepsy patient and had experienced convulsions attack last year. She said that similarly Ramakrishna fainted due to epileptic attack on Saturday night.

Dr Yasmin said that only Ramakrishna had fainted but the medical teams collected water samples from locals in Dachepalli as a precautionary measure. They were sent for tests to

clear doubts about water contamination.

Dachepalli tahsildar G. Levi said that medical and revenue teams had conducted household surveys in various colonies but did not find any cases of fainting. He said that the revenue officials started an investigation about water pollution because of chemical waste released into canals from three chemical factories and action would be taken on the basis of investigation. He urged the locals not to worry as there was no mysterious disease in Dachepalli.

Gurazala MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy appealed to people not to believe rumours about mysterious illness in Dachepalli.

Meanwhile the mysterious illness cases were brought to zero as nobody was admitted in hospitals in West Godavari on Sunday.



Housing complexes being constructed on either side of the National Highway from Yendada to Anandapuram in Visakhapatnam.

— DC

Builders going outskirts  
for affordable housingK.M.P. PATNAIK | DC  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 13

Hoping that the rapid transit system would reduce the travel time, builders are going for construction of affordable houses on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam to attract the middle-class segment in north Andhra for whom houses in the city limits are no more within reach.

However, the development is moving towards Bhimili, which would be

close to the Bhogapuram International airport and very few are having their ventures in the industrial suburbs on the south side of the city.

The prices per square foot of an apartment are at a minimum of ₹2,500 in Anandapuram, about 28 km from city and Tagarapura (Bhimili), which is 30 km from the city on the highway. The proposed flyovers and metro rail are planned from Kommadi, not far from

Anandapuram. Whereas in the city the price had gone up to ₹5,500 per square foot.

"The builders have made a wise move presuming the flyovers and metro rail would reduce the travel time between Tagarapura and the city and put the prices within in the reach of the middle-class segment," president of Vizag unit of CREDAI Mr B. Srinivasa Rao said.

He said around 10,000 units are coming up in these areas.

Mercury dips in  
AP, rains for SeemaDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 13

Temperature dipped in many parts of Andhra Pradesh and Anantapur was the coldest place with a drop of 3.4°C in the minimum temperature recorded on Sunday morning. The temperature was 14°C. Nandigama recorded 14.1°C. Tuni in coastal Andhra was hottest with 31.1°C and

Kurnool in Rayalaseema with 31.1°C. The dip was due to north easterly winds, said S. Stella, director of IMD, Andhra Pradesh.

She also said an Easterly trough in Bay of Bengal may bring in moderate rains to Nellore and Kadapa in another two days and the region including parts of Tamil Nadu will have moderate rains for three days.

AP NEEDS TWIN  
POLL SURGICAL  
STRIKES: GVLDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, DEC. 13

Alleging that both the YSR Congress and the Telugu Desam parties are indulged in communalism and vote bank politics, BJP MP G.V.L. Narasimha Rao said that the people of Andhra Pradesh will soon make twin electoral surgical strikes – one on the ruling YSR Congress and the other on opposition Telugu Desam.

Addressing the media persons here on Sunday, the BJP MP hit hard at the YSRC and the TD, stating that both the parties are competing with each other in playing religious politics in the state.

"Have you ever seen a state government given licence to celebrate Christmas in police stations? How can the YSR Congress do this? Have we ever seen Dasara celebrations held at police stations?" he questioned, while saying that it is the responsibility of both parties to answer these questions before going to contest in the Tirupati by-elections.

He found fault with both the political parties trying to do vote bank politics in the name of secularism in the episode of late Salaam family of Nandyal. He alleged that the government is conducting religious campaigns by allowing such celebrations at police stations.



## OTHER STORIES

## 506 new Covid cases in state

**Vijayawada:** The decreasing trend in Corona positive cases continued in AP State with the 506 new Covid-19 positive cases in the past 24 hours on Sunday. Only five deaths, one each reported in Chittoor, Guntur, Krishna, Vizianagaram and West Godavari districts and the total deaths climbed to 7,057 while the death rate remains at 0.81 per cent. Total Covid cases increased to 8,75,531 and 613 patients recovered from the infection on Sunday which increased the recovery rate to 98.63 per cent and the total number of recoveries increased to 8,63,508. For the fifth consecutive day more than 60,000 samples were tested. The positivity rate of the 63,873 Covid tests conducted during the past 24 hours was 0.79 per cent and the overall positivity rate of the 1.08 crore samples tested was 8.08 per cent.

## Cops counsel rowdysheeters

**Visakhapatnam:** Officers from various police stations and task force counselled the rowdy sheeters at the police barracks on Sunday. The officers warned them to mend their ways and lead a normal life to maintain law and order in the city. A senior officer told them to intimate their absence from the city to the police station in their area. He told them that if any violence takes place in the city, they would be summoned to the police station and would be told to explain their involvement. There are about 400 rowdysheeters in the city and of them 150 are very active. They are mostly involved in extortion and violence related to real estate.

## 2 held, 650 kgs of PDS rice seized

**Kadapa:** Rajampeta town Mannur rural police seized 13 bags of PDS rice on Sunday morning. According to the information from Rajampeta sub-divisional police officer Siva Bhaskar Reddy, based on a tipoff about the illegal rice transportation, he directed the Mannur rural police to inquire into the issue. Sub-Inspector Shaik Roshan along with his staff raided the spot, and found an auto rickshaw carrying 13 bags of PDS rice, weighing 650kg at Isukapalli cross road, on the outskirts of Rajampeta at 9.30 am on Sunday. They seized the rice along with autorickshaw and arrested two from Anantapuram district. Police filed a case and investigation is on.

## SEARCH ON TO TRACE MINOR FALLEN IN RIVER

**DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13**

The police, along with fire and revenue departments, launched a search on Sunday to trace a nine-year-old girl, who fell into the Swarnamukhi river following an accident involving two motorcycles late on Saturday night in Naidupeta.

According to the Circle-Inspector of Naidupeta, G. Venugopal Reddy, Pravalika is the daughter of Mangalapuri Murali, 30, and Sujatha, 27.

The mishap took place when the family was returning home after offering prayers at Sri Vinayaka temple in Thimmaraju Kandriga village.

The child, along with her parents, fell into the river from their bike, when another speeding bike, hit their vehicle from the rear on the causeway to Venkatagiri from Naidupeta.

Some bystanders saved Murali and Sujatha, but they could not find the girl, who got washed away in the river by then.

Two riders of the other bike identified as Treenath, 20, of Ichhapuram and Sai, 22, of Visakhapatnam were killed on the spot when their heads hit the pillars of the causeway in the accident.

However, the driver of the bike Naguru of Modugulapalem escaped with minor injuries.

All three of them are employees in the Green Tech Company located at Menakuru village and were in an intoxicated condition.

The CI said that their efforts to trace the girl did not yield any results till late on Sunday evening and they would continue the operation on Monday.

Sullurpeta legislator Kiliveti Sanjeevaiah joined the search team for a while on Sunday and directed them to put all their efforts to locate her.

## Pig menace plagues Kurnool

Rearers spreading pens in city with political leaders' support

**D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC KURNOOL, DEC. 13**

In the wake of the Eluru health crisis, where a mysterious disease made hundreds of people sick with convulsions, and the residents of Kurnool city were shivering even at the sight of pigs. The pig rearers in connivance with ruling party leaders have been expanding the pig pens across the city.

Kurnool Government General Hospital (KGGH) with special Covid-19 wards is populated with pigs. A senior doctor at the hospital said that pigs are thrown into the hospital campus during night times, and they are freely strolling around majestically carrying viruses risking patients' health.

The swine rearers are densely populated in Budhavarapet, Sareen Nagar, Vaddegeri, Saibabasanje-evaliah Nagar, Mujafarnagar, Geethamukarji Nagar, Aroranagar and other several colonies in the city. The pigs were regularly transported from Kurnool to Bengaluru where the pig is sold in the wholesale market at much better rate.

There are 54 wards in the Kurnool Municipal Corporation limits and nearly 200 residential colonies in the city. Of them, Bhudavarpet, Swamireddy-nagar, Krishna Nagar, Devanagar, Vitalnagar, Aroranagar, Mahalakshmi Nagar, Kallur, Abbaas Nagar, Ayyappanagar, Mujafar Nagar and other localities have faced troubles with pigs.

Kurnool MLA Hafeez Khan said a drive was launched last month before the Tungabhadra Pushkarams and pigs were driven out. However, a KMC official said that only 680 pigs were caught last month. Prod C. Prabhakar Red-



Stray pigs spark health scare in Kurnool city as they could be carriers of diseases and infections.

dy, deputy superintendent of KGGH said that pigs are the source of several diseases like brain fever and swine flu. He said human infections with H1N1v, H3N2v and H1N2v viruses had been detected in several countries including India.

Diseases spread between pigs, and people is thought to happen mainly when an infected pig (or human) coughs or sneezes and droplets with influenza virus in them spread through the air. If these droplets land in the nose or mouth, or are inhaled, that person (or pig) could be infected.

He further said that there also is some evidence that the virus might spread by touching something that has a virus on it and then touching the

mouth or nose. A third way to possibly get infected is to inhale particles containing influenza virus. Influenza is not contagious to people when they eat well-handled food and prepared pork or other products derived from pigs.

In a hospital environment, the presence of pigs throws several challenges in patient disease management, he said.

The civic authorities appear to have turned a blind eye to the problem created by pigs. Except for some main roads, pigs are sighted on almost all the residential localities. Children are afraid to play in front of their houses in residential colonies. As per rough calculations at least fifty thousands pig populations is in the city.

More than 90 families depended on the rearing of pigs in the city.

"During the night time, residents complain that dogs are barking and causing a lot of noise. They are taking away the peaceful sleep of residents," Ms M. Soundarya, a resident of Abbas Nagar, said.

The Kurnool civic authorities should wake up to the problem and give relief to residents, she added.

"Hotel waste has become a source of nuisance to the residents. Especially pigs, dogs and other animals carry the garbage and deposit nearby the houses. As the waste is from the hotels and residences are very high that it may cause the spread of diseases," P. Krupakar, a resident of Krishnanagar said.

## YSRC involved in insider trading in Vizag, alleges TD

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13**

Leader of Opposition in AP Legislative Council Yanamala Ramakrishnu-du alleged that the ruling YSR Congress was involved in insider trading by purchasing lands in Visakhapatnam before the announcement of three capitals decision citing why Jagan Mohan Reddy was trying to move the capital from Amaravati to Vizag. He further alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy from the beginning; hence he did not attend the foundation laying ceremony of Amaravati despite being invited by the Telugu Desam government.

Mr Ramakrishnu-du praised the continuous protests of Amaravati farmers, women and agriculture workers who were fighting for the protection of Amaravati as solo Capital of AP for the past

● Mr Ramakrishnu-du claimed that all sections of the society in 13 districts were supporting Amaravati and demanded the YSRC government to cancel three capitals decision honouring the year-long continuous protests of Amaravati farmers and women.

361 days. He said that farmers had sacrificed 34,000 acres of livelihood farmlands for the construction of new capital for the sake of people of 13 districts but the YSRC government is damaging Amaravati which is the spine of AP.

He claimed that the TD government brought 130 institutions belonging to Central and state government and PSUs but Jagan Mohan Reddy adhered to

destroy the wealth created by Amaravati.

Mr Ramakrishnu-du alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy did not abide for the development of Visakhapatnam and Kurnool, but he was interested in the lands of the two regions which is why he was provoking people there in the name of three capitals.

TD MLA Anagani Satyaprasad said that TD demanded referendum or fresh election on Amaravati, but CM Jagan Mohan Reddy flinched from the battlefield without taking their challenge due to fear of defeat.

Mr Satyaprasad claimed that all sections of the society in 13 districts were supporting Amaravati and demanded the YSRC government to cancel three capitals decision honouring the year-long continuous protests of Amaravati farmers and women.

## YSRC CAME TO POWER WITH SUPPORT OF SCs

**DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, DEC. 13**

Kapu Welfare Corporation chairman and Rajanagar MLA Jakkampudi Raja has said that the YSRC Congress came to power with the whole support of people belonging to the Schedule Caste

The SCs are extending their support to the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy since Mr Jagan delinked with the Congress party, he added. He said that the YSRC government under the leadership of the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is striving hard to improve the living conditions of the Schedule Castes.

Mr Jakkampudi Raja was addressing a meeting of SCs organised on the occasion of the auspicious Karthika Masam. AS the SCs in the state had supported the YSRC and enabled it to come to power, the state government would take all welfare measures and development schemes for the SCs. As Rajanagar MLA, he said he would also do his best for the purpose and gave assurances to the SCs that they could always depend on him.

He said that the state government was taking up several activities with the inspiration from Dr B.R.Ambedkar and Mahatma Jyotirao Phule.

**DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 13**

District Electoral Roll Observer P.A. Shobha directed Revenue officials and BLOs to work responsibly in compiling the 2021 special voters list in the district without any mistakes. She was in the district on Sunday to review voter registration, changes, additions, settlement of claims, data entry and other issues related to the design of the 2021 Special Voter List.

On Sunday afternoon, she toured the field with Revenue officials in C.K. Dinne, Khajipet and Kamalapuram mandals to see how these programmes were going on.

She first inspected the Moolavanka 202 polling station in Kadapa suburb,

203, 204, 205 polling stations at C.K. Dinne Mandal ZP High School and the 27th polling station at Kamalapuram Mandal Appaipalli.

She closely examined the data entry issues. On this occasion, booth level officials were asked for details on voter registration, amendments, resolution of objections etc. and appropriate instructions were issued.

The concerned tahsildars have been directed to conduct a campaign to create awareness among the people through volunteers on the special voter amendment and registration programme. Booth level officials were advised to check back and correct eligible voters, mismatching, and address errors in the voters' list.

## KARTHIKA MASA VISHNU PUJA DEEKSHA CONCLUDES WITH DHANWANTARI PUJA

**DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, DEC. 13**

The month-long fete of vratas and pujas organised by TTD as part of Karthika Masa Vishnu Puja Deeksha has concluded with Dhanwantari puja on the occasion of Dhanwantari Jayanti at Vasantha Mandapam in Tirumala on Sunday.

Before the commencement of puja, the Vaikhanasa Agama advisor of TTD Mohana Rangacharyulu narrated

the significance of the Karthika Sri Dhanwantari puja and said that Dhanwantari is worshipped as God of Medicine, who emerged during Samudra Madhanam.

Later, the utsava idols of Lord Malayappa and his two consorts were seated in Vasantha Mandapam, while the idol of Lord Dhanwantari was also seated facing the deities and special pujas performed. The programme included Vishnu puja Sankalpam.

## STATE URGED TO INSTALL ALLURI STATUES

**DC CORRESPONDENT RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, DEC. 13**

Alluri Sitaramaraju Yuvajana Sangham urged the government to install the statues of revolutionist and the freedom fighter Alluri Sitaramaraju in Taylor High School in Narasapuram of WG and National High School at Ramachandrapuram in EG where Sitaramaraju studied.

The Sangham held a meeting here on Sunday. The Life Time Achievement award was presented to the Sangham founder president Padala Veerabhadra Rao.

**DC CORRESPONDENT RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, DEC. 13**

Rajamahendravaram Rural MLA Gorantla Buchaiah Chowdary criticised that the YSRC government failed to bring proper sand policy in the state and the construction activity has not been recouped yet due to lack of knowledge on it by rulers.

Participating as a chief guest in TNTUC meeting here on Sunday, Mr Chowdary said that the construction workers lost their livelihood for the past 18 months due to non-availability of the sand and the construction cost has also increased drastically, which the property owners are unable to bear.

He said that due to hike in of liquor prices, many people were attracted to illicit liquor and arrack and now the deaths due to illicit liquor has increased

more than Covid-19 deaths in the state. He alleged that the Building Welfare Funds have been diverted to other schemes and it has caused a great loss to the construction workers.

Presiding over the meeting, the TNTUC district president Nakka Chittibabu said that the government would help the construction workers immediately by giving ₹10,000 each worker per annum as other profes-

sions like tailors, washermen, barbers and others.

He said that the Building Welfare Board should be strengthened and all schemes which were implemented previously for the benefit of the workers should be introduced again.

He said that due to hike in prices of petrol and oil, the transportation cost has increased heavily and the transportation field is facing hardships.

## Take special care of ailing migrant workers: Minister

**DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13**

Industries and IT minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy has directed the medical officers in the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Nellore to pay special attention to the ailing migrant workers from West Bengal undergoing treatment in the hospital. The minister elicited information on the health condition of ailing migrant workers from West Bengal during a visit to the GGH in Nellore on Sunday.

The sick workers are part of the 49 workers who came to Verubotlapalli in Kaluvoya mandal for paddy transplantation work a few days back. Nine among them were shifted to the GGH after they fell seriously ill following suspected food poisoning late on Friday evening.

Mr Reddy interacted with the workers undergoing treatment and enquired about their health condition. Speaking to media persons, the minister said that the 49 migrant workers from West Bengal have reached to Verubotlapalli under Kaluvoya mandal for agriculture labour works.

"Suddenly, 17 among them took ill on Friday evening, and nine workers were shifted to Government General hospital in Nellore city in critical condition on Saturday. Now, the condition of the workers has improved. The balance workers were

## CAMPS TO IDENTIFY KIDS SUFFERING FROM HEART AILMENTS IN PRAKASAM

**DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 13**

The Prakasam district administration is contemplating over providing orientation to the ANMs working in Village/Ward Secretariats in association with Sangamithra Hospital in Ongole to identify children suffering from heart diseases in the district.

Collector Pola Bhaskar has disclosed this while appreciating the doctor's team in the hospital for carrying out heart surgeries to four children below 13 years under the Arogyasri scheme after interacting with the parents of the children during a visit to the hospital on Sunday.

Reminding that hitherto patients have to rush to Hyderabad, Chennai or Vijayawada for heart operations, he said there is no more need to look outside for specialised treatment. Chief Operations Officer of Sangamithra, Hari Kumar Reddy and senior cardiologist Dr Senthil Kumar were present with the collector apart from Arogyasri coordinator Dr Sravan Kumar among others.

also admitted in the hospital for observation for the next three days as a precautionary measure," said the minister.

He said water samples of an abandoned borewell were sent to a laboratory for testing as the workers consumed water drawn from the borewell.

**MAJOR | HURDLE** State govt has not contributed due share

## Kotipalli-Narsapur rail work stalled

**DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, DEC. 13**

Konaseema Railway Sadhana Samithi has requested Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to release funds for the construction of Kotipalli-Narsapur Railway Line works as it's share.

The Samithi submitted a memorandum to the Social Welfare Minister Pinipe Viswaroop and requested the minister to take the initiative of releasing the funds for the railway line.

The Samithi convenor Dr E.R. Subrahmanyam said that the Central government has earmarked a total of ₹1,760 crore in the Union Budgets over the

past five years and has released ₹797.88 crore as on, 30 November.

However, Dr E.R. Subrahmanyam said that the construction works of the Kotipalli-Narsapur Railway Line, considered as the dream project of the Konaseema people. However, it has met with a major hurdle following the recent decision of the South Central Railway officials of not to progress with the project, till a final decision is taken, by the Railway Board.

This decision has been taken, as the state government has not contributed its due share, of 25 per cent. Except for the initial amount of ₹2.695 crores, The railway authorities

have also stated that there would be no works, except the wells of the bridges, which are in progress.

It follows, that the process of calling for tenders for earthworks, track works and slab works would be stopped.

Dr E.R. Subrahmanyam said that these issues might lead to inordinate delay in the project works. He said that the state government should give its 25 per cent share of ₹797.88 crore which was released by the Railways.

He requested the state government to release funds for the project and pave the way for expediting the construction works and early completion of the entire project for the

all-round development of Konaseema.

Dr Subrahmanyam said that the Passenger Reservation Centre of the South Central Railway in Amalapuram Town, which was closed in March due to lockdown, had not reopened, even though many important trains are running via Rajamahendravaram and Kakinada.

He said that passengers are forced to go to Rajamahendravaram or Kakinada for reservation, or cancellation during these difficult times.

He requested the state government to take steps for reopening the reservation counter in Amalapuram.

## Series of statewide protests against tax hike in state

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 13**

The Communists and allied organisations decided to conduct a series of statewide protests against the hike of taxes in AP under which agitations against the government would be conducted on December 28 and 29 opposing the increase of tax component on urban people in the state.

AP Urban Citizens Forum (APUCF) convener and CPM state leader, Ch. Babu Rao, said that a protest against the government would be initiated on December 28 and 29 on the increase of tax component on urban citizens in the state. He said that on 28 and 29 they would protest at Secretariats in the urban

● Babu Rao demanded the state government to roll back the decision of increasing taxes with immediate effect due to Covid-19

areas. He further said that on 6 January 2021 they would conduct agitations at municipalities and corporations.

Mr Babu Rao said the government heedlessly increased the taxes including property tax hence they would conduct a massive signature campaign by collecting 10 lakh signatures all over the state. He deplored that while Telangana has cut down the taxes by 50 per cent for the convenience of the people, the AP state government was

enhancing them. He appealed to all the civic society associations throughout the state to cooperate and make the agitations a grand success. He also appealed to the state BJP unit to be on the side of people in this critical hour.

Mr Babu Rao expressed concern over the mysterious illness that attacked people in Eluru town where more than 600 turned patients leaving people in distress and fear. He said that people in some other municipal areas all over the state are suffering from dengue, malaria and other ailments. He lamented that instead of taking remedies to the problems people are facing, the state government had prepared the GOs, ordinances, etc and got them passed in the Assembly.



## IN BRIEF

**2 ULTRAS KILLED,  
THIRD HELD IN  
POONCH GUNFIGHT**DC CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR, DEC. 13

Two militants were killed and their associate was arrested during a gunfight that took place in Dugran area along the Mughal Road in Jammu and Kashmir's frontier Poonch district on Sunday.

"Two (militants) killed. One associate arrested at Poshana area in Poonch in a joint operation by JKP and Army," the police said in a tweet.

Giving the details of the encounter, the officials said that the J&K police's counter-insurgency Special Operations Group (SOG) and the Army's 16 Rashtriya Rifles jointly launched a cordon-and-search-operation in the area in the Pir Panjal range early Sunday, soon after a resident of neighbouring Dogrian Buffliaz village Ghulam Hussein filed a report with the local police that his son Talib Hussain went missing on December 9.

The J&K police late on Sunday said that the militant duo killed in Poonch encounter has been identified as Pakistani nationals Sajid and Bilal — both affiliated with Lashkar-e-Tayyaba. IGP Jammu Mukesh Singh said that two AK 47 rifles, one UBGL and one Thuraya Satphone were found on the slain men.

DG police Dilbag Singh said that these militants are known to had sneaked into J&K from PoK recently.

**BENGAL'S FAMED  
'POUSH MELA'  
CALLED OFF**

Kolkata, Dec. 13: The annual 'Poush Mela', a heritage cultural event attracting lakhs of travellers to West Bengal's Santiniketan, will not be held this year due to Covid-19 restrictions, an official said.

The over-a-century-old handicraft, handloom, art and music festival, is usually held in December-end. "We are not sure about getting the nod from the local administration in view of the Covid-19 situation. Most students, an integral part of Poush Mela, are not coming to the campus. Keeping all these factors in mind, we had to take this unpleasant decision for public health safety," a member of Visva-Bharati's executive council said.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting of the executive council. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore had first organised the fair in 1894 and Visva-Bharati, the university founded by the bard, started organising it from 1951.

The 'Poush Utsav', including prayers and singing of devotional songs in the varsity campus, will, however, take place (on December 23 this year), he said. The fate of the Poush Mela has been a subject of conjecture in the last few months, with an official of the council claiming in July that Visva-Bharati authorities had decided to scrap the event.

**NORMALCY BACK  
AT REMOTE  
ARUNACHAL TOWN**

Itanagar, Dec. 13: Normalcy returned to the remote Arunachal Pradesh town of Vijonagar, which saw violent protests with several government offices burnt over the voting rights of former Assam Rifles personnel in the panchayat polls, a senior official said on Sunday.

Security has been tightened in the sensitive town, which is surrounded by Myanmar on three sides, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Kime Kaming said after returning from the area.

Paramilitary forces along with the police have been deployed in Vijonagar to ensure peace, he said, adding that vandalism will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Vijonagar, in the state's Changlang district, saw widespread arson on Friday as a mob of around 400 people led by the Yobin Students' Union set fire to the offices of the Extra Assistant Commissioner, Special Branch of the state police and the post office, besides ransacking the local police station.

The civil helipad was also partially damaged by the mob. Ex-employees of the Assam Rifles have been living in the town since the early 60s. They originally hailed from outside the state but form the majority of the local population now, official sources said.



BJP leaders being rescued after a shikara carrying them capsized in the Dal Lake in Srinagar on Sunday. — PTI

**Shikara, part of BJP poll  
rally, capsizes in Dal Lake**DC CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR, DEC. 13

A group of BJP activists and a couple of TV reporters escaped narrowly when a shikara (water gondola) they were riding capsized in Srinagar's Dal Lake on Sunday.

The boat was part of a 'shikara rally' organised by the BJP ahead of the seventh phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections scheduled to take place early next week.

The rally was being led by Union minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur who is in-charge of the BJP's election campaign in J&K and it's national general secretary

● **BJP DENIES** any of its activists were riding the boat which met with the mishap and alleged that a section of media was 'spreading negative propaganda against the party'.

Tarun Chugh. The others who attended the rally included Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, BJP's national spokesperson, and the party's local leaders including Sofi Yousuf and Altaf Thakur.

Witnessed said that one of the shikaras carrying a few BJP activists and a couple of TV reporters and camerapersons capsized near Ghat No.17 of the lake.

However, all of them

were rescued immediately by local boatmen. The videos of the incident went viral on social media platforms with some netizens mocking the BJP.

However, the BJP denied any of its activists were riding the boat which met with the mishap and alleged that a section of media was 'spreading negative propaganda against the party'.

"It was a boat carrying three TV journalists that capsized. None of the BJP leaders or workers was onboard," claimed party's media in-charge Manzoor Bhat.

The police said that those who fell in chilly waters of the lake were given medical attention "as a safety measure."

**WOMAN JUDGE  
DIES DURING  
COVID TREATMENT**

Indore, Dec. 13: Justice Vandana Kasarekar of the Indore bench of Madhya Pradesh High Court died on Sunday while undergoing treatment for Coronavirus at a private hospital here, a medical officer said.

Kasarekar, 60, had also been suffering from a kidney ailment since a long time, he said. "Justice Vandana Kasarekar of the high court's Indore bench died while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in the city. She had been in a critical condition at the hospital since the last few days," district nodal officer for Covid-19 prevention Amit Malakar said.

"Justice Kasarekar had tested positive for Covid-19 a few days back. Besides, she had been suffering from a kidney disease since a long time," he said.

State Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed grief over her death in a tweet. Before being appointed as a judge, Justice Kasarekar was the lawyer of civil and constitutional matters in the Indore bench of the high court.

She was the only woman judge of the Indore bench at present. She had been appointed the high court judge in October 2014 and her term was to end in July 2022.

● **JUSTICE VANDANA KASAREKAR, 60, who had been suffering from a kidney ailment was tested Covid-19 positive a few days back.**

## HEALTH | REPORT

New Delhi, Dec. 13: The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has found a drastic rise in obesity among children under five years of age in 20 of the 22 states where the study was conducted, with experts attributing it to lack of physical activity and unhealthy food habits. According to the NFHS-5, several Union Territories, and states, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Mizoram, Tripura, Lakshadweep, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, have registered several folds increase in the percentage of obesity among children below five years of age in comparison to NFHS-4

**Experts say unhealthy food choices, lack of physical activities are major causes****Survey finds drastic rise in obesity among kids**

between 2015 and 2016. Only Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu registered a drop in the number of overweight children under five years of age, the data showed.

About 13.4 per cent children under the age of five were found to be obese in Ladakh which was highest among the 22 states and Union Territories surveyed, followed by Lakshadweep at 10.5 per cent, Mizoram 10 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir, and Sikkim 9.6 per cent each. Not just children, rise in obesity has even been recorded in adults in the latest survey in comparison to NFHS-4.

According to the survey data, 16 states and Union Territories registered a rise in obesity among women while 19 states and UTs recorded an increase in obesity among men. Kerala and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at 38 per cent.

Also, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at over 40 per cent. Men and women were counted as obese whose body mass index was found to be over or equal to 25.0 kg/m<sup>2</sup> while children's obesity was counted in terms of

weight-for-height. Healthcare experts have attributed the rise in obesity to unhealthy food choices and lack of physical activities among children and even adults.

Sheila Vir, a public health nutrition expert and founder director of Public Health Nutrition and Development Centre, said there is also lack of awareness on what are good food habits. Also, high-fat and high-sugar foods are easily available and so there is higher consumption of it, she said.

"We have a double burden of undernutrition, malnutrition and overnutrition occurring together. So, I think what to feed a

child is what we are going wrong in," Vir said.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, she also raised concern over the rise in obesity. "There might be an increase in obesity among children in view of Covid-19 pandemic as after closure of schools, there was lack of physical activity among children and even in adults in some cases," she said.

Dr. Khan Amir Maroof, Professor at Department of Community Medicine, University College of Medical Sciences and GTB Hospital termed the rise in obesity a "very disturbing sign".

"Obesity is a manifestation of what is rapidly

changing in our environment. Of late, we see trends which increase the risk of developing obesity. Environmental factors, such as availability and consumption of junk foods, poor complementary feeding, lack of outdoor activity, and increased screen time on may be the reason for this trend," he said.

"For children, we need to flag screen time as it has multi-dimensional effects on children, obesity, being one of them. The focus has been on breastfeeding, but now it's time that complementary feeding is also focused upon," Dr Maroof suggested.

— PTI

**Covid positive min Vij  
shifted to Rohtak hosp**

67-yr-old BJP leader complained of discomfort at civil hosp

Ambala, Dec. 13: Haryana health minister Anil Vij, who had tested positive for Coronavirus recently, has been shifted to the PGIMS hospital at Rohtak from the civil hospital here after he complained of discomfort, doctors here said on Sunday.

Doctors said the minister was shifted on Saturday night. Ambala's Civil Surgeon Dr Kuldeep Singh said a team of doctors at the Rohtak hospital was monitoring his condition.

Vij, who had last month got one shot of the two-dose trial of the Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin after he offered to be a volunteer, had on December 5 tested positive for the Coronavirus. The 67-year-old BJP leader had offered to be the first volunteer in the phase three trials for Covaxin, an indigenous potential vaccine being developed by Bharat Biotech against Covid-19. He was administered the dose on November 20 at the Civil Hospital in Ambala Cantonment, about 50 km from Chandigarh.

Bharat Biotech had said that clinical trials of the vaccine are based on a two-dose schedule, given 28 days apart. The vaccine

SANJAY KAW | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

India's Coronavirus tally is nearing the 9.9 million mark with 30,254 fresh cases and 391 more deaths reported in the last 24 hours.

Amid a downward trend in active cases and a surge in the number of people recovering from the disease, the country is reportedly planning to deploy its vast election machinery to deliver 600 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccines to the most vulnerable people in the next six to eight months through conventional cold chain systems.

The Centre has lined up cold storage facilities with temperatures ranging

between 2 to 8 degrees Celsius (36-48°F), said V.K. Paul, who heads the group of experts on vaccine administration which advises Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

With the first priority given to frontline health workers and those highly vulnerable to the infection, states and Union Territories are also ensuring that vaccines for all others are administered swiftly.

As many as eight Covid vaccine candidates, including three indigenous ones, that are under different stages of clinical trials, could be ready for authorisation in the near future.

India is actively considering Pfizer's Covid-19

vaccine after the American pharma giant sought emergency use authorisation in India.

The country is also considering two more vaccine candidates, one being developed by the Serum Institute of India in partnership with AstraZeneca and Oxford University and the other one by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech.

Both SII and Bharat Biotech are now conducting Phase 3 trials of their respective vaccine candidates in the country. The applications of Pfizer, SII, and Bharat Biotech are being reviewed by the subject expert committee (SEC) on Covid-19 at the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.

specific number of days pass after the second dose of the vaccine is taken. This is a two-dose vaccine. The minister in question has taken only one dose of the vaccine," the ministry had said in a statement.

that Covaxin is a two-dose anti-Coronavirus vaccine and that Vij was given only the first dose a fortnight before he tested positive.

"The antibodies against the infection build up in a human being only after a

efficacy will be determined two weeks after the second dose, it said.

Covaxin has been designed to be protective 2 weeks after volunteers receive the 2nd dose. The Union health ministry had also stepped in to say

specific number of days pass after the second dose of the vaccine is taken. This is a two-dose vaccine. The minister in question has taken only one dose of the vaccine," the ministry had said in a statement.

— PTI

**ASSAM OKAYS  
SHUTDOWN OF  
MADRASAS,  
SANSKRIT TOLS**

Guwahati, Dec. 13: The Assam cabinet on Sunday approved a proposal to close down all government-run madrasas and Sanskrit tols (schools), and a bill in this regard will be tabled during the upcoming winter session of the state Assembly, parliamentary affairs minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said.

"Existing laws related to madrasas and Sanskrit tols will be repealed. A bill will be introduced in the next session of the Assembly," Patowary, who is also the spokesperson of the Assam government, said.

The winter session of the Assam Legislative Assembly will begin from December 28. The decision to shut down all the state-run madrasas and Sanskrit tols was taken during the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, he said.

Education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had, in October, said there were 610 state-run madrasas across Assam and the government had been spending ₹260 crore annually for these institutes.

He had also said the State Madrasa Education Board, Assam would be dissolved. The minister had also mentioned that all the government-run madrasas would be converted to high schools and new admissions would be held for existing students as regular ones.

According to Sarma, the Sanskrit tols would be handed over to Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University.

The infrastructure of Sanskrit tols would be used to convert them to centres of learning and research where Indian culture, civilisation and nationalism would be studied, he had said.

Senior BJP leader and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly Aminul Haque Laskar had said madrasas run by private parties would not be shut down.

"These (private) madrasas will not be shut down as these have kept Muslims alive," Laskar had said while laying the foundation stone for a madrasa in Cachar district in November.

— PTI





## SHORT TAKES

**NIGERIA: GUNMEN  
ATTACK SCHOOL,  
400 KIDS MISSING**

Lagos (Nigeria), Dec. 13: Hundreds of Nigerian students are missing after gunmen attacked a secondary school in the country's north-western Katsina state, police have confirmed.

The Government Science Secondary School in Kankara was attacked Friday night by a large group of bandits who shot "with AK 47 rifles," Katsina State police spokesman Gambo Isah said in a statement. Police engaged the attackers "in a gun duel which gave (some of) the students the opportunity to scale the fence of the school and run for safety," Isah said. About 400 students are missing, while 200 are accounted for, Isah said. The school is believed to have more than 600 students.

**AZERBAIJAN  
DECLARE BREACH  
IN PEACE DEAL**

Baku, Dec. 13: Azerbaijan announced on Sunday that four of its troops had been killed in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region since a peace deal with Armenian separatists was agreed in early November.

The defence ministry said a group of Armenian fighters remained in the mountainous province — breaking the terms of the Russian-brokered truce — and had recently launched fatal attacks on Azerbaijan's forces.

The ministry said three servicemen were killed in a separatist ambush on November 26 and another sustained fatal injuries during an attack near the village of Hadrut on Tuesday last week.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of breaching the truce that ended six weeks of fighting between the longstanding foes for control of the breakaway region.

**IRAN SUMMONS  
EU ENVOYS FOR  
PROTESTING**

Tehran, Dec. 13: Iran on Sunday summoned the German envoy to Tehran after the European Union condemned the execution of an Iranian journalist whose work helped inspire nationwide economic protests in 2017, Iranian state media has reported.

IRNA said that an Iranian foreign ministry official summoned the German ambassador because of EU statements on the exiled reporter Ruhollah Zam, 47, who was hanged on Saturday. Zam was being held in jail in Iran after Iranian authorities seized him while he was traveling in neighbouring Iraq last year.

The German Foreign Ministry on Saturday expressed its shock about the circumstances of Zam's sentencing and what it described as his "abduction from abroad" and forced return to Iran. Iran will also summon today the French ambassador to Tehran over European reactions to the journalist's execution, IRNA added.

**MANY HELD AT  
PARIS STIR OVER  
SECURITY BILL**

Paris, Dec. 13: Paris police took nearly 150 people into custody at what quickly became a tense and sometimes ill-tempered protest Saturday against proposed security laws, with officers wading into the crowds of several thousand to haul away suspected trouble-makers.

Police targeted protesters they suspected might coalesce together into violent groups like those who vandalized stores and vehicles and attacked officers at previous demonstrations.

The interior minister said police detained 142 people. Long lines of riot officers and police vehicles with blue lights flashing escorted Saturday's march through rain-slickened streets. They hemmed in protesters, seeking to prevent the flare-up of violence that marked many previous demonstrations.

A police water cannon do-used demonstrators at the end of the march, as night fell. Marchers were protesting against a proposed security law that has sparked successive week-ends of demonstrations and against a draft law aimed at combating Islamist radicalism. The security bill's most contested measure could make it more difficult to film police officers. It aims to outlaw the publication of images with intent to cause harm to police.

**Brexit deadline  
goes 'extra mile'****Johnson feels Brexit failure still 'most likely'**

Ursula von der Leyen

simplicity in that approach that has its own advantages. It's not where we wanted to get to... but the UK is prepared," he said.

"Either way, whatever happens, the UK will do very, very well." UK businesses welcomed the agreement to keep talking, but disagreed strongly with Johnson's cheerful forecasts for Britain's future if it severs all ties with its biggest overall trading partner from the New Year.

"We now need negotiators to finish the job and agree the deal we all so desperately need," Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders chief executive Mike Hawes tweeted.

Hawes added: "'No deal' would be nothing less than catastrophic for the automotive sector, its workers and their families, and represent a stunning failure of statecraft. Quite simply, it has to be

ruled out." Nissan has warned that a no-deal Brexit would make its Sunderland car factory in northeast England, which employs more than 6,000 workers, unviable due to the restoration of tariffs on cross-Channel trade.

Last week, Japanese automaker Honda suspended production at its British plant for a day after suffering a shortfall in parts, owing to blockages at ports caused by the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit stockpiling.

Even with a trade deal, Britain will still be out of the EU's common market and businesses will face new customs regulations and paperwork.

They warn the government has failed to get vital IT systems ready in time, leading to fears of transport gridlock on roads and at ports.

Confederation of British Industry director-general Tony Danker said the news of talks continuing "gives hope", but demanded the government fix the IT rollout and offer more support to businesses.

"A deal is both essential and possible. It is the only way to build upon the extensive support for the economy given by all governments during the pandemic. Without it, that progress is undermined," he said in a statement.

The British Chambers of Commerce appealed to London and Brussels not to give up. — AFP



Thousands of red-hatted protesters filled Washington streets to demand 'four more years' for Donald Trump's presidency and to denounce, without proof, the 'massive fraud' they insist gave the election to Joe Biden. — AFP

**Clashes erupt after pro-Trump rallies**

Washington, Dec. 13: Four people were stabbed and one shot as rallies backing President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud led to clashes in major US cities on Saturday.

Scuffles broke out in many places between rally-goers and counter-protesters who turned up to criticize the president, who lost the November 3 election to Democrat Joe Biden but is yet to concede.

Washington State Police said in a tweet late Saturday that a shooting had taken place after clashes near the capitol building in Olympia, and that a suspect had been detained.

In the US capital, DC Fire and EMS Department communications chief Doug Buchanan said that four people had been stabbed and were now hospitalised, "with serious injuries." The *New York Times* reported that 23 had been arrested throughout the day.

There was no indication of whether any of the victims had been involved in the protests, on either side of the divide.

The day had begun with a festive atmosphere as thousands of red-hatted protesters filled Washington's streets to support the president, undeterred by the US Supreme Court's rejection

on Friday of what may have been his last chance to overturn the results.

Similar events took place in Olympia, Atlanta and St. Paul, Minnesota, as well as in smaller towns in Nebraska, Alabama and elsewhere.

Demonstrators at the DC rally — noticeably smaller than a similar protest last month — said they were steadfast in their support for the embattled president. "We're not gonna give up," said Luke Wilson, a sixty-something protester who had come all the way from the western state of Idaho.

"I believe there is a big injustice being done to the American people," added

Dell Quick, a regular at Trump's political rallies, as he brandished a flag defending gun rights.

Protesters offered no shortage of explanations for the poll results, even though they have been affirmed by state election officials — several of them Republican — and by judges in several key states.

Every state has now certified the results, giving Biden 306 votes in the Electoral College to Trump's 232. Electors are to formally cast their votes on Monday. But protesters insisted, as Trump has repeatedly, that there was widespread fraud in the election. — AFP

**US set for Covid vaccine rollout****Non-essential shops, schools to close in Germany, says Merkel**

Washington, Dec. 13: The first trucks carrying a Covid-19 vaccine for widespread use in the US were set to pull out of a Michigan manufacturing plant Sunday, with the shots that are critical to stopping the nation's coronavirus outbreak destined to reach states a day later.

Shipments of the Pfizer vaccine will set in motion the biggest vaccination effort in American history at a critical juncture of the pandemic that has killed 1.6 million and sickened 7.1 million worldwide. Initially, about 3 million doses were expected to be sent out, and the priority is health care workers and nursing home residents as infections, hospitalizations and deaths soar in the US. With numbers likely to get worse over the holidays, the vaccine is offering a bright spot in the fight against the pandemic that's killed nearly 3,00,000 Americans.

Federal officials say the first shipments of Pfizer's vaccine will be staggered, arriving in 145 distribution centers Monday, with an additional 425 sites getting shipments on Tuesday, and the remaining 66 on Wednesday.

The vaccine, co-developed by German partner BioNTech, is being doled out based on each state's adult population. Pennsylvania health care giant UPMC has chosen staff who are critical to operating its facilities as among those getting the first round of vaccinations, said Dr. Graham Snyder, who led the center's vaccine task force. "It's very exciting. I will be thrilled, that moment when we administer our first dose," Snyder said Saturday. — AP

Berlin, Dec. 13: Shops selling non-essential goods, hair-salons and schools in Germany will close from Wednesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel said, to halt an "exponential growth" new in coronavirus infections in Europe's biggest economy. The partial lockdown will apply until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or offer extended company holidays, under the new measures agreed by Merkel with regional leaders of Germany's 16 states on Sunday.

Alcohol sales would be banned in public places,

essentially outlawing the business of mulled wine stands, which have proved popular in the days running up to Christmas.

"The Corona situation is out of control," said Bavarian state premier Markus Soeder, welcoming the tougher restrictions which he pledged to implement in his state.

Germany in November closed leisure and cultural facilities and banned indoor dining in restaurants.

The measures had helped to halt rapid growth of infections after the autumn school holidays, but numbers had plateaued at a high rate.

Over the last week however, the country's disease control agency reported that the infections trend has taken a worrying turn.

"With increasing mobility and the therefore linked additional contacts in the pre-Christmas period, Germany is now in exponential growth of infection numbers," said the policy paper agreed by regional leaders and Merkel.

It was therefore "our task to prevent an overload of our health systems and that's why there is an urgent need to take action," said the chancellor. — AFP

**JAPAN, S. KOREA  
SET NEW DAILY  
COVID RECORDS**

Tokyo, Dec. 13: Japan's daily coronavirus cases have exceeded 3,000 for the first time while the government delays stricter measures for fear of hurting the economy ahead of the holiday season.

The 3,030 new cases, including 621 in Tokyo, took Japan's national tally to 1,77,287 with 2,562 deaths, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region: — South Korea has set another record for its daily coronavirus tally with 1,030, as authorities struggle to suppress the viral spread. — AP

Lahore, Dec. 13: The Pakistan Democratic Movement, an 11-party Opposition alliance seeking the ouster of "puppet" Prime Minister Imran Khan, is set to hold its final rally here on Sunday, despite a ban on the gathering of more than 300 people owing to an increase in Covid-19 cases across the country.

A number of workers of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) have reached Minar-i-Pakistan. They broke the locks of its main gate, placed chairs and have installed lights for Sunday's much-hyped power show of the Opposition.

The rally will be addressed by former prime minister and PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif from London, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, Jamiat Ulema Islam chief and PDM head Maulana Fazlur Rehman and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

"The government has not given permission to the PDM to hold a rally at Minar-e-Pakistan Lahore because of the rise in Covid-19 cases. Action will be taken against those who will take the law into their hands," Punjab Law Minister Basharat Raja said.

So far, police in Lahore have booked more than 3,000 workers of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for violating Covid-19 SOPs during this week's meetings held here by its vice-president Maryam, he said. PDM's Minar-i-Pakistan public meeting will be the last one in its first phase of rallies that had begun

**Pakistan Oppn set to stage  
final showdown in Lahore  
Slain Taliban chief  
took life insurance**

Islamabad, Dec. 13: Slain Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour purchased a life insurance policy using a fake identity in Pakistan and paid ₹3 lakh in premium before being killed in a US drone attack, according to a media report on Sunday.

Mansour, who was killed in a US drone strike along the Pakistan-Iran border on May 21, 2016, assumed the leadership of the Taliban in July 2015, replacing its founder and the one-eyed reclusive long-time spiritual head Mullah Mohammad Omar who died in 2013.

The details about the insurance policy were revealed during the hearing of a terror funding case against him and his absconding accomplices on Saturday.

The insurance company provided this information to an Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Karachi

during the hearing of the case registered against Mansour and his accomplices by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) last year, Dawn news reported.

It emerged during the investigation that the Taliban leader and his accomplices were involved in generating funds for terrorist activities through the purchase of properties on the basis of "forged identities".

He had purchased five properties including plots and houses, estimated to be valued at ₹32 million (\$1.99,812) in Karachi.

The report said that it surfaced during the investigation that Mullah Akhtar Mansour had purchased the "life insurance" policy by using a fake identity and had paid up to ₹3,00,000 to the company before his death in the drone attack on May 21, 2016.

— PTI

over two months ago. The PDM will announce the 'decisive phase' of its struggle against Prime Minister Khan's government in this public meeting.

The alliance has already announced that all Opposition parties will resign from the national and provincial assemblies to pressure the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government for fresh elections.

The long march towards Islamabad is also on the cards for the PDM. Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar has asked the PDM to delay its Minar-e-Pakistan rally in light of 'terror threat alerts' and the coronavirus situation. "I ask the Opposition to resolve issues through talks. Discuss their issues through dialogue and not by playing with people's lives," Buzdar said. — PTI

**FARMERS | SUPPORT****Car rally to Indian embassy hijacked by separatist Sikhs who were carrying Khalistani flags****Khalistan supporters vandalise Gandhi's statue in US**

Washington, Dec. 13: A violent group of Khalistani separatists has desecrated Mahatma Gandhi's statue outside the Indian embassy here in the US during a demonstration by Sikh-American youths in support of farmers protesting against the recently enacted agriculture laws in India.

Hundreds of Sikhs from in and around Greater Washington DC area, Maryland and Virginia, along with many from

other states like New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio and North Carolina, on Saturday undertook a car rally to the Indian embassy in downtown Washington DC, where they gathered to express solidarity with the protesting Indian farmers.

However, the peaceful protest was soon hijacked by the separatist Sikhs who were carrying Khalistani flags with anti-India posters and banners. During the protest, many

of the pro-Khalistan Sikh youths flashing kirpans jumped on the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and pasted a poster over it.

The group raised anti-India and pro-Khalistan slogans. The Indian embassy condemned the "mischievous act" by hooligans masquerading as protesters. "The statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Mahatma Memorial Plaza in front of the embassy was defaced by Khalistani elements on 12 December 2020. The

Embassy strongly condemns this mischievous act by hooligans masquerading as protesters against the universally respected icon of peace and justice," it said in a statement.

The embassy said it has lodged a strong protest with the US law enforcement agencies and also taken up the matter with the Department of State for an early investigation and action against the culprits under the applicable law. — PTI

**Congressman Ro Khanna seeks  
fair, peaceful solution to farmers**

Washington, Dec. 13: Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna has hoped for a peaceful and fair solution to the farmers' issues in India, saying he is encouraged by the ongoing dialogue between the protesting farmers and the government.

Khanna, 44, was recently elected for a third consecu-

tive term from the congressional district representing Silicon Valley. "India and the US share a rich tradition of democracy and peaceful protests.

Farmworkers are the backbone of both our nations and must have their voices heard. "I hope there's a peaceful and fair solution so they can pro-

vide for their families," Khanna said in a tweet on Saturday. "I am encouraged by the ongoing dialogue," he said, joining other American lawmakers who have expressed their views on the ongoing farmers' protest in India, several of whom have expressed their concerns. — PTI



DECCAN  
Chronicle

14 DECEMBER 2020

Russian ‘concerns’ drew  
a fitting Indian response

In a speech last week at the Russian International Affairs Council, a government think tank, the country’s veteran foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, noted that “currently” India was “an object of the Western countries’ persistent, aggressive and devious policy as they are trying to engage it in anti-China games”. New Delhi has done well to respond with alacrity — and clarity.

The external affairs ministry noted at a briefing, responding to questions, “Our relations with Russia stand on their own merits including in the sphere of Military and Technical Cooperation (MTC).” Mr Lavrov had made a special mention of MTC, saying it was the “goal of the US (to bring to bear) very tough pressure on New Delhi” in the MTC area.

The Indian reaction seeks to reassure Moscow on continuing close bilateral relations, including in the defence domain. At the same time, by making no reference to China, New Delhi has conveyed to Moscow that it is free to make decisions as regards the world stage in light of its own perception of self-interest.

Recently India signed on to the last of the four “foundational” agreements of the US. Without these, America does not extend special partnership deals with any country. These agreements include exchanging logistics and bases, joint training of forces, and military cooperation in the limitless geo-spatial field. In addition, India has signed the Defence Technologies and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with the US. These have understandably made Russia somewhat nervous.

On the other hand, India signed up two years ago to purchase the Russian S-400 Triumf air defence system that can neutralize incoming aircraft, missiles and even drones 400 km away. The system is scheduled to be delivered by end-2021. Meanwhile, in July this year, Russia confirmed supplies of anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems months after the face-off with China had begun in eastern Ladakh. This point is of special relevance since Russia has special ties with China. It is not inconceivable that Mr Lavrov’s formally expressed anxiety about India being roped into an anti-China configuration is to deflect possible head-shaking from Beijing.

Meanwhile, Washington is upset with India’s planned sourcing of advanced anti-missile systems from Moscow and the Trump administration even contemplated penalising India under CAATSA (Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), but held back. In light of India’s expanding warmth with it in a multi-faceted way, Washington has had to be indulgent about India’s ties with Iran and Russia.

Moscow has proved India’s all-weather friend. This has been India’s most abiding strategic relationship, regardless of personalities, systems and parties in power. With no country have such ties subsisted. This is on account of geo-strategic realities and geography. It would be unwise of either side to lose sight of this. Moscow has to understand that while it may have close ties with Beijing — and also a few worries in the Central Asia theatre — India has its reasons to bolster itself in the diplomatic and strategic domains all round in light of the difficulties posed by China’s rise.

India has spoken, while responding to Mr Lavrov’s talk centred on multipolarity and US moves to go back to a unipolar world, of its “independent” foreign policy. Even if some questions have arisen about it, as a middle-level power India would do well to remind itself of the need for such independence, which permits it the latitude to negotiate with contending parties.

Lessons from Delhi border

It’s all in the ‘mindset’. The farmers’ barricade at the capital’s borders that has entered its 16th day and is stubbornly refusing to go away, to the chagrin of the Narendra Modi government, is now beginning to expose the hypocrisies of the ruling party and its constituents. And in so doing, embarrass them. On December 10, Human Rights Day, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan’s colleagues had held posters of jailed human rights activists arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case. It drew a reaction from the usual suspects — this time in the shape of Union minister Piyush Goyal — who tossed out at them his party’s overused salvo — that of being “hard Left” and “antinational”. However, the former soldier was nonchalant.

Mr Ugrahan, whose organisation recently moved Supreme Court to have the three contentious farm laws repealed, has a question for the government. Is the government afraid to engage with him on the points that he is making regarding the laws? For whatever they are worth, Mr Ugrahan can’t very well be expected to be punished for his beliefs, or the positions he has taken on these other matters, empowered as he is to have done so by dint of Articles 19, freedom of expression, and 25, freedom of conscience and religion, of our esteemed Constitution. On the flipside, Mr Goyal can’t properly be said to have indulged in whataboutery either, because it is socialists who have historically upheld the humanitarian cause. Be on the Left to fight for the right.

As evidenced by the tweets sneering at fox nuts and foot massages at the protest venue, the government’s propaganda machine, however, is jealous of the confident, new farmer. For them, the kisan bhai, and he needs must be a bhai, even as 60 per cent of India’s subsistence farmers today are female, so farmer’s rights are equally women’s rights, is cast in the image of the emaciated ploughman. The government is stereotype-bound and lack ideas — for actual agro-reform — and imagination. There is hope yet. A way to avoid more embarrassment is to learn from one’s mistakes.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

**Hyderabad:** 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256  
**Vijayawada:** No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

**Visakhapatnam:** Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

**Rajahmundry:** Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

**Anantapur:** Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

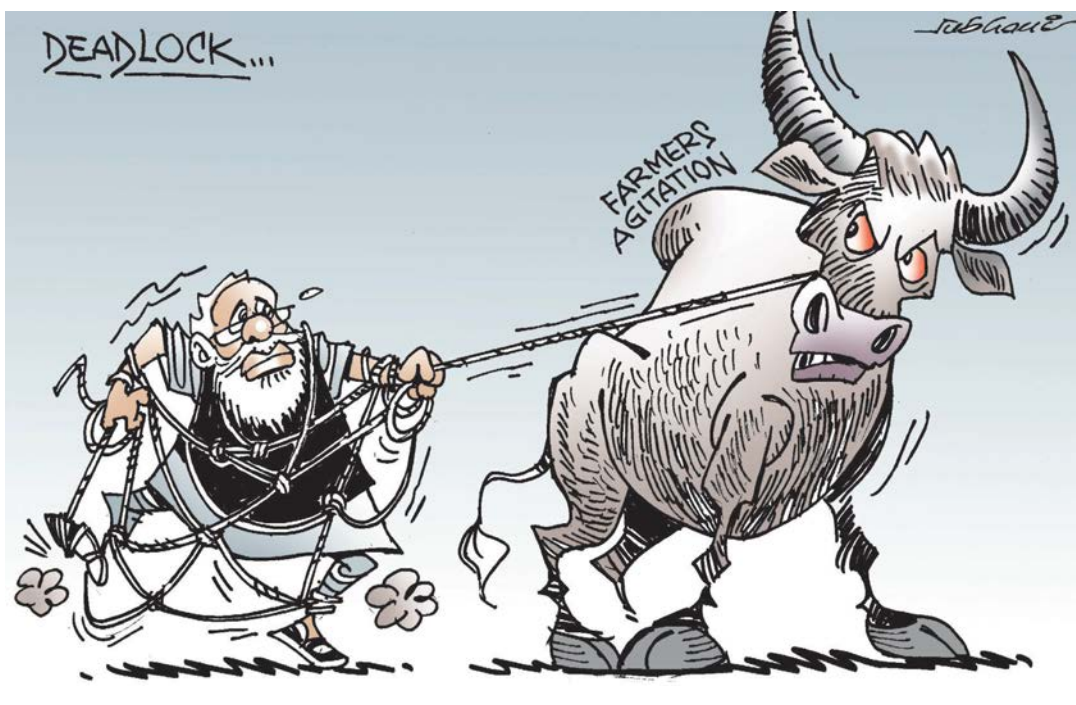
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**Nellore:** Survey No.527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

**Chennai:** SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22524747/48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

**Coimbatore:** 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255  
Gram: CHRONICLE      Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Justice hurried can  
be justice buried



V. Vijayasai Reddy

Benjamin Franklin’s maxim that “it is better 100 guilty persons should escape than that one innocent person should suffer” has been staple legal thinking for centuries.

Would a time bound and hurried disposal of cases be more of a quantitative exercise than a qualitative one? Would not this unwarranted haste totally invalidate the maxim given by Franklin?

Earlier this month, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, acting as an amicus curiae, informed the Supreme Court that as per the latest data available after collating inputs from various high courts, the number of cases against public representatives stood at 4,859. The report submitted by him also recommended that the high courts be directed to prepare a blueprint for expeditious disposal of cases with the conclusion of trials by no later than one year. The chief justices of each high court may be personally requested to look into the matter and submit an action plan. Now, a lot is being discussed as to this recommendation and whether it would create more logistical and legal problems than it would solve.

For such special treatment of expedited trial to be given to all serving and former public representatives, it must first pass the requirement of constitutionality. When the Constitution speaks of the fundamental right to equality why is it a public representative’s case merits priority over a longer pending case?

The question, therefore, is whether public representatives form a separate class of citizens

within the society to enable them preferential adjudication. If the answer is yes on the basis of their role, responsibilities and powers, then shouldn’t judges and heads of all statutory bodies, serving and retired, too, fall in the same category? The Supreme Court refrained from answering this question in 2013 and has, therefore, left it open to interpretation. Disproportionate focus on cases against public representatives, most of which are either political or cases with less than five years’ jail term if the accused is convicted, takes away from our focus cases against hardened criminals and repeat offenders.

The prospect of disposal of cases within one year against public representatives may make headlines but it also brings up a disturbing matter for discussion. Can a time frame be set to elicit information and verify the veracity in statements recorded by the prosecution from witnesses? Is not “justice hurried justice buried”? Normally, examination of witnesses in trials is filled with research and production of data beyond what was filed by the prosecution in Courts. Would not a trial court judge be pressured to deny time just

**Disproportionate focus on cases against public representatives, most of which are political or with less than five years’ jail term if the accused is convicted, takes away from our focus cases against hardened criminals**

**The pressure on the trial courts to dispose a case within one year and limited resources may lead to disastrous results. One wrong conviction would lead to immediate disqualification of an incumbent MP...**

because he has a deadline to catch? How can we ensure that all efforts have been made and sufficient time devoted to elicit the truth? What is the logic behind fixing a timeframe? Is it that the judiciary is again pushing against the boundaries of the doctrine of separation of powers and thereby sacrificing our constitutional right to equality?

This speedy disposal paradigm also conflicts with the present condition of fast track courts in the country. The fast track courts were meant to dispose of criminal cases. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data from January this year, the trials in fast track courts, set up in several states to allow quick trials in cases of serious crimes such as rape, take longer than those in regular courts. The data also showed that of the more than 28,000 trials completed in India’s fast track courts in 2018, only 22 per cent took less than a year to complete and about 42 per cent of the cases took more than three years to complete. While the Supreme Court has lamented about the pending cases against public representatives, it has overlooked the delay in the trial of much more heinous crimes such as crimes against women and children.

Further, the resources needed to be able to dispose of a case within one year are huge. As of 2018, India roughly has just 19 judges per million population with a shortage of over 5,700

judges in the trial courts, themselves. To squander the limited infrastructure of the judiciary, in terms of lack of judges, limited judicial time and physical resources in one type of mostly political cases would be unjust to victims of much more heinous crimes who would see further delay getting justice. The judiciary and the justice delivery system has limited infrastructure and it is important to efficiently use them for the greater good of the people. Rather than making an un-implementable law, the focus should be on distributing resources with focus on matters, which are of higher judicial importance, such as cases of rape, murder and even habeas corpus. The amicus curiae’s report if implemented would see the judiciary jump to the end result without providing for a path to enable the same.

Lastly, the pressure on the trial courts to dispose a case within one year and limited resources may lead to disastrous results. One wrong conviction with over two years’ jail term would lead to immediate disqualification of an incumbent MP or MLA and tarnish the reputation which he or she built over decades. Rather than actually cleaning politics, it shall clean up all the politicians, good and bad.

Of late, we have been witnessing several bills being passed by the legislatures, which stipulate a timeframe within which the judiciary is expected to adjudicate. How feasible is it and are we jumping upon the result rather than creating an enabling environment for it? That is a question that only the passage of time will answer.

*The writer is YSR Congress Parliamentary Party leader and general secretary. He can be reached at venumbaka.vr@sansad.nic.in.*

LETTERS

US DEMOCRACY

The independence of judiciary from the lower courts in states to the Supreme Court in the US was demonstrated in dethroning an all-powerful President Trump. This is the way a democracy should function. The brick and mortar construction of Parliament buildings without the spirit of democracy does not serve any purpose.

P.A.S. Prasad  
Visakhapatnam

MYSTERY ILLNESS

It is encouraging and appreciable to read that there are only two more patients afflicted by the mystery illness and that they are out of danger (*Mystery illness in control, DC, Dec. 13*). At the same time, authorities cannot be complacent and need to leave no stone unturned to contain it so that it does not recur in future.

Dr C. Ghanshyam  
Visakhapatnam

PAWAR’S GROUSE

If Sanjay Gandhi had not died prematurely, he would have succeeded his brother (*Praful: Pawar couldn’t be PM due to coterie, DC, Dec. 13*). PV becoming the PM at old age was an aberration from dynastic politics. Maharashtra government can fall if the Congress is incensed of Pawar being praised belittling Rahul Gandhi’s actions and his doubtful prospects for the future.

Parthasarathy Mandadi  
Tirupati

6 Air Force pilots to  
man IA’s planes

BOMBAY, Dec. 13.

Six Indian Air Force pilots arrived in Bombay today to man, in two teams, the Bombay-based AVRO HS-748 aircraft of the Indian Airlines from tomorrow as the threat of Corporation employees to go on a one-day token strike midnight tonight still loomed large.

Loaders, traffic assistants and cabin crew at Bombay stopped work hours before the scheduled start of the strike in pursuance of a directive from the Air Corporation Employees’ Union this morning. Traffic officers and outside loaders worked on the Boeing chartered from Air India and few Delhi-based Caravelles by which the Airlines again maintained a skeleton service. Meanwhile deputy minister of civil aviation, Dr Sarojini Mahishi was meeting unions.



A.G. Noorani

On farm bills,  
govt needs to  
consult Opp.  
& cultivators

Since Independence, India has seen many a protest, some massive. But never before has it seen such an organised, mammoth demonstration in which old as well as young participated. I am referring, of course, to the protests by the farmers of Punjab. Schoolboys left their homes and schools to be counted among the protesters. All were overshadowed by elderly women, whose presence made this unprecedented show of righteous wrath even more impressive.

It was a unique, unmatched feat of organisation. They travelled on their tractors, on and under which they slept, covered with blankets, under open skies in bitter cold. The traditional Sikh langar is another story. There were giant tawas to cook food for the huge crowds that had assembled — all united by clear, precise demands that the Modi government could have easily anticipated when it inflicted the three laws on a host of sites pertaining to the farmer, from farm to mandi.

The demonstrations, covered by

the Indian and international press, have evoked strong reactions among the Punjabi, particularly Sikh, diaspora. It has united a fragmented opposition. There have been some rounds of talks with government representatives, all to no avail.

The episode holds a lesson in democratic governance. A government ‘majority’ in parliament cannot, must not, govern without consulting not only the opposition but also the affected parties.

The government refused to even refer the three offending agriculture bills to a joint committee of parliament. It would have studied them far more closely than either house of parliament possibly could. It would have asked the farmers’ representatives to appear before it with facts and figures, expound their case and answer questions thoroughly, and satisfy themselves that they had been heard fully. Experts would have studied the committee’s report. An informed public opinion would have been evolved. In the time thus taken, the heat would have subsided.

This process is an integral part of participative government. In Deep Citizenship, P.B. Clarke wrote, “Democracy is unfinished business. It has yet to widen and institutionalise the crucial dimension of public participation.” To that I would add, old as it is, democracy has not passed the age of childbearing. The last half-century has sprouted the ombudsman; call him the mohtasib or lok pal.

Both in formulating policy and introducing it as a bill, the government may embark on a process of consultation with outside interests, and sometimes issue consultation documents to invite public comment.

This can help to improve and legitimise a bill, and win the support of those whose cooperation is needed if the legislation is to be effective.

The UK’s Hansard Society Commission on the Legislative Process made a number of recommendations for more timely, open, and sufficient consultation so that bills could be got into “a form fit for enactment, without major alter-

ation, before they are presented to parliament”. A few years later in 1997, the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons found there was little or no consultation within parliament or with other bodies before bills were introduced. Subsequently, the government issued a code of practice that urges departments to consult widely throughout the process of policy development and sets out criteria for effective consultation.

Pre-legislative scrutiny by parliament as well as outside bodies is facilitated if bills are published in draft well before their formal introduction. It has been said authoritatively that proper consultation is a crucial part of the process of determining the most effective way of achieving a policy objective, and where legislation is deemed to be necessary. It is important therefore that, when a law comes before parliament, it should have been exposed to those who will be affected by its provisions and its suitability reviewed in the light of their reactions.

Some enabling acts oblige the minister concerned to consult organised interests or other bodies before making regulations. The particular organisations to be consulted may be specified by the act, or left to the judgement of the minister in accordance with some general formula.

In the UK, legislation is sometimes virtually the product of negotiation with affected groups. Some policies are not so much influenced by pressure as produced in a joint effort by a government department and one or more groups with which it shares a common interest. For example, a continuous dialogue takes place between the department for environment, food and rural affairs and the farmers’ union on questions of agricultural policy.

In his masterpiece, *Parliament*, Sir Ivor Jennings refers to the practice of consultation between the government and Opposition, if arrangements are arrived at “behind the speaker’s chair”. Narendra Modi has no use for that.

By arrangement with Dawn



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,099.01	0.30
Nifty 50	13,513.85	0.26
S&P 500*	3,663.46	-0.39
Dollar (₹)	73.64	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.75	0.35
Euro (₹)	89.31	-0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,594	102 0.20
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.03	-0.22
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.956	0.040
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.883	-0.025

\* As of Friday/Saturday

Third tranche of Bharat Bond ETF likely this fiscal

The Centre is likely to launch the third tranche of Bharat Bond ETF, the exchange traded fund that invests in PSU debt, this fiscal. "Central public sector enterprises have fund raising plans of about Rs 12,000 crore. We are thinking of launching the next tranche of Bharat Bond ETF in a couple of months," a source said. The second tranche of Bharat Bond ETF, launched in July, was oversubscribed more than three times.

EPFO may credit 8.5% interest on EPF by Dec.-end



Retirement fund body EPFO is likely to credit 8.5 per cent rate of interest for 2019-20 in the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) accounts of around six crore subscribers in one go by the end of December. Earlier in September this year, the EPFO had decided to split 8.5 per cent interest into two installments of 8.15 per cent and 0.35 per cent in its trustees meet headed by labour minister Santosh Gangwar.

Triumph plans 9 new bikes in India in H1

Triumph Motorcycles has an aggressive product pipeline for India market in the next six months, with nine new bike models, including some special editions, slated for launch as the British premium bike-maker looks to consolidate its position further in the niche space, an official said. Triumph India has 16 motorcycles in its portfolio ranging from modern classics to adventure motorcycles, including the iconic Rocket 3R.

Bharti Infratel gets nod to be Indus Towers

Bharti Infratel has got approval from the RoC for changing its name to Indus Towers, following the recent merger of the two firms. The company has initiated due process for final approval from stock exchanges for updating the name change. In a BSE filing, Bharti Infratel said it "has received approval from the Registrar of Companies, NCT of Delhi and Haryana for change of name of the company."



Person days rise but fewer households get 100 days job Job guarantee scheme utilises 90% of funds

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 13

Person days generated by the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme have already crossed last year's numbers and fewer people are turning up for work in rural areas from September. However, the total number of households which have received 100 days of guaranteed employment is lagging far behind compared to last year.

The scheme has used up over 90 per cent of the allocation for the fiscal so far. With the government increasing the allocation of MGNREGA this year due to the pandemic, the number of person days have already touched 276.51 crore against 265.43 crore in last fiscal.

However, the goal of providing 100 days of employment to households has been met only for 20.81



lakh households. This is almost half of 40.60 lakh households covered last fiscal.

Average days of employment per household too are lower at 41.76 days against 48.4 days last year. But a larger number of households, 6.62 crore, participated in the job guarantee scheme this year against 5.48 crore households last year. The total number of individuals too has been higher at 9.6 crore against 7.89 crore last year.

"People from a single household participating in the scheme would have been more this time. Both individuals and households are higher," said Kruti Shah, economist, Emkay Global Financial Services.

The work demand—those seeking work—has been tapering down since September. This month, the work demand stood at 1.44 crore households against 2.27 crore in November. Work demand was the highest in June at

4.47 crore. At 3.89 crore, the employment provided to households was also at the highest level in June.

The scheme has undertaken 1.84 crore new and spillover works this fiscal against 1.91 crore last year. The expenditure on agriculture and allied works has been higher this year at 69.42 per cent against 66.12 per cent last year.

The scheme has utilised 90.85 per cent of the Rs 85,124 crore available till now. The total expenses made till now stood at Rs 77,337 crore against Rs 68,286 crore last fiscal. The scheme had utilised 90.43 per cent of the available funds last year.

The government had increased the allocation for MGNREGA this year by Rs 40,000 crore and this had taken the total allocation to Rs 1 lakh crore. With the work demand tapering and four more months left, it will have to be seen whether the scheme utilises the total allocation.

GSTN enables auto-populated GSTR-3B return form from Nov.

New Delhi, Dec. 13: Businesses will now get complete auto-populated monthly sales return form GSTR-3B, the GSTN said on Sunday.

"For ease of taxpayers, now the system will auto populate GSTR-3B (monthly) on the basis of details filed in GSTR-1 and auto-drafted ITC statement GSTR-2B from November 2020 tax period onwards," the Goods and Services

Tax Network said.

Based on the supplies return GSTR-1 filed by businesses, GSTN will auto-populate the liabilities, while input tax credit (ITC) would be populated from system-drafted statement GSTR-2B.

"If the total liability of a particular period is negative on account of debit/credit notes, the same will be auto-populated as zero liability," GSTN said.

While businesses file GSTR-1 of a particular month by the 11th day of the subsequent month, GSTR-3B is filed in a staggered manner between 20th-24th day of the succeeding month.

Also, the facility of communication between taxpayers has been enabled on the GST portal.

EY tax partner Abhishek Jain said the GSTN has enabled the facility for sup-

pliers and recipients to communicate with one another over the online portal itself.

"This shall enable the businesses to raise a red flag to their suppliers/recipients in relation to various discrepancies at their end, as well as receive their comments. This development by the GSTN should facilitate better reconciliation of GST credits," Jain said. —PTI

Maruti Suzuki to re-enter diesel segment next year

New Delhi, Dec. 13: The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSIL) is looking to enter the diesel segment once again next year as the vertical continues to draw customers, especially in the high-selling SUV and multipurpose vehicle segments, as per industry sources.

The auto major had discontinued diesel models from its portfolio with the onset of stricter BS-VI emission norms from April this year.

As per the sources, MSI has initiated the process to upgrade its Manesar-based powertrain plant so that it can start rolling out BS-VI diesel engines starting the middle or festive season next year.

Sources also confirmed that the company plans to utilise the BS-VI compliant diesel powertrain in the Ertiga and Vitara Brezza to start with in the domestic market.

The auto major, however, did not specify any



reasons for reentering the diesel segment.

When contacted, an MSI spokesperson said in a statement: "We cannot give any guidance on future technologies."

Sources said the company is looking to upgrade the current set-up at the Manesar plant, which earlier used to produce its in-house developed BS-IV compliant 1,500-cc diesel engine.

MSIL had used this powertrain briefly in its mid-sized sedan Ciaz and Ertiga before deciding to pull the plug on diesel.

The company's other models like Vitara Brezza, Dzire, Swift, S-Cross and Baleno at that time used to be powered by the Fiat-sourced 1,300 diesel unit.

MSI's entire model range is currently powered by BS-VI compliant 1 litre, 1.2 litre and 1.5 litre gasoline engines. The company sells CNG versions of some of the models.

On April 26, 2019, MSI chairman R.C. Bhargava had announced that the company will phase out all diesel cars from its portfolio with effect from April 1, 2020.

He reasoned that small diesel cars would see the maximum impact in terms of pricing with the coming of BS-VI compliant engines.

He, however, at that time had added that if there is a demand for BS-VI diesel cars the company might go ahead and cater to that demand. —PTI

Investors keen on how Vedanta deal with structural challenges

RAHUL SATIJA, BIJU GEORGE & AMEYA KARVE DEC. 13

Investors in Vedanta Resources Ltd are turning their attention to the miner's longer-term plan to streamline a complex group structure that has kept the parent from easily accessing cash at its units.

Vedanta Resources, controlled by billionaire Anil Agarwal, allayed some immediate concerns this week when it received vital funding by selling \$1 billion notes due 2024 at 13.875 per cent, albeit at one of the highest yields for a dollar bond in Asia this year. The company plans to use that cash to finance a buy-back offer for \$670 million of notes due next year, and the rest to repay other debt or to increase stakes in its Indian units.

However, the company has yet to announce a plan on how it wants to address its structural challenges. A failed plan to simplify its corporate layout by delist-

ing its Indian unit Vedanta Ltd in October had triggered concerns on its ability to refinance its biggest wall of debt maturities in years.

Neel Gopalakrishnan, an analyst at S&P Global Ratings, expects the company to again focus on the inefficient structure after the bond sale. "We believe the company intends to improve its corporate structure by increasing its ownership in Vedanta Limited," he said.

The company had called the privatisation in May as "the next logical step" in addressing the structure to provide more financial flexibility in the business.

A spokesperson for Vedanta Resources declined to discuss the next steps, only saying the \$1 billion bond sale last week amounted to a vote of confidence from investors in the company.

But another attempt at the buyout of the Indian unit won't be easy. In October, shareholders of Vedanta Ltd thwarted the plan to delist it as some

investors including LIC of India, among the biggest public shareholders, demanded a higher price for tendering their shares.

If the company tries to privatise the unit at too high a price, "it might encounter funding issues again," said R. Lakshmanan, an analyst at Credit-Sights Singapore LLC.

Moody's Investors Service, which is reviewing the credit ratings for downgrade, said it could confirm Vedanta Resources' grades if it simplifies its group structure and refinances debt maturities with long-term debt.

Analysts expect liquidity concerns to persist at Vedanta Resources, worsened by the difficulty in accessing cash from the money-spinning Indian units. The trouble resurfaced last month when a \$956 million loan from Vedanta Ltd—channelled through Cairn India Holdings Ltd—to parent Vedanta Resources led to a spat with a hedge fund. —Bloomberg

FPIs stock up on equities, inflows hit record ₹1.4 L cr

SHILPI PANDEY NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Excess liquidity, attractive valuations and weakness in the US dollar propelled foreign investors to flock to the Indian stock market in a big way, with the highest-ever net inflow of Rs 1.4 lakh crore in 2020, but they also dumped debt securities worth a little over Rs 1 lakh crore.

The market men expect a similar trend to continue for a few months unless there is a major change in the overall investment scenario.

"With some major developments on the Covid-19 vaccine front, India stands to benefit. Also, growth in the economy will improve investor sentiments and their outlook towards India. From the risk-reward profile perspective, these aspects make India a good investment destination," said Himanshu Srivastava, associate director manager research, Morningstar India.

However, if the economy remains weak for a longer period of time, that could be a big deterrent. Also, if there is another wave of the coronavirus pandemic resulting in re-implementa-



tation of lockdown measures, that could dampen sentiments and turn foreign investors risk-averse, he added.

As the year 2020 draws to a close, the FPIs have so far made a net inflow of Rs 1.42 lakh crore—the highest in a calendar year since 2002.

This is the fifth time in history when net investment by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) in equities has crossed the Rs 1-lakh crore mark in a year.

Prior to this, the feat was achieved in 2019, 2013, 2012 and 2010, when overseas investors infused a net sum of Rs 1.01 lakh crore, Rs 1.13 lakh crore, Rs 1.28 lakh crore and Rs 1.33 lakh crore, respectively.

On the other hand, debt markets have seen FPIs turn net sellers in 2020 as they withdrew a massive Rs 1.07 lakh crore from debt, however, they invested a net amount of Rs 23,350 crore in debt-VRR. The voluntary Retention Route (VRR) channel was introduced by the Reserve Bank of India in March 2019 to attract long-term and stable FPI investments into debt markets.

Broadly, investments through this route are free of macro-prudential and other regulatory norms applicable to FPI investments in debt markets, provided FPIs voluntarily commit to retaining a required minimum percentage of their investments in India for a certain period.

The year 2020 marked the biggest outflow by foreign investors from debt markets since 2002, when bifurcation of net investments data became available. The previous record

in comparison, the net inflow into Indian capital markets was at Rs 1.36 lakh crore in 2019.

This comprised a net investment of Rs 1.01 lakh crore in equities, Rs 25,880 crore in debt and around Rs 9,000 crore in hybrid securities.

Experts said availability of excess liquidity in the global financial market, attractive valuation compared to developed markets, and weakness in the US dollar have supported buying in Indian equities. —PTI

UP okays sops for Samsung display factory



New Delhi, Dec. 13: Uttar Pradesh said it will give financial incentives to South Korea's Samsung Electronics Co to set up a Rs 4,825 crore (\$654.36 million) display factory.

Samsung is re-locating the factory to the state from China, the Uttar Pradesh administration said in a statement, a move that will help boost Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship drive to make India a manufacturing hub.

India is the world's second-biggest smartphone market with significant growth potential, which has driven companies such as Samsung to expand locally.

New Delhi earlier this year also approved financial incentives—under a \$6.65 billion central plan to boost domestic smartphone production—for 16 companies, including Samsung and top Apple suppliers Foxconn, Wistron and Pegatron.

On Friday, Uttar Pradesh said Samsung will receive Rs 700 crore in financial benefits and will also get an exemption from a tax payable on the transfer of land for the factory.

Samsung had sought tax and other incentives from Uttar Pradesh for this smartphone display manufacturing plant, Reuters previously reported.

The unit, expected to create 510 direct jobs, is expected to be operational next year.

Samsung already operates one of the world's biggest mobile phone manufacturing plants in Uttar Pradesh. —Reuters

HOT MONEY | AGAIN

Positive global trends buoying traders' desire for both real and paper barrels

Oil rises from the ashes as a Covid recovery bet

ALEX LONGLEY & JAVIER BLAS DEC. 13

Brent crude topped \$50 a barrel last week for the first time since March, a milestone for an oil market that's been grinding its way back out of a deep slump for months.

Things aren't back to normal yet, but the positive signals are proliferating. The enormous glut of fuel that accumulated this year on everything from tiny barges to giant supertankers is being steadily depleted.

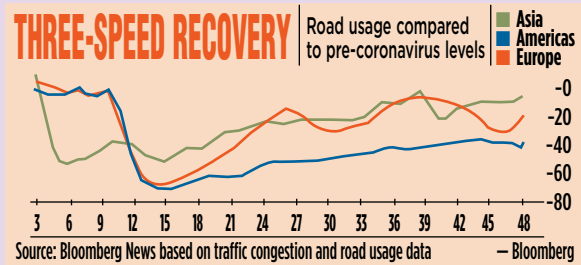
While the coronavirus pandemic is worse than ever in the US, demand in Europe is bouncing back as a second wave of lockdowns eases and Asia continues to pull in huge volumes of crude.

But there's more to this

than a realignment of supply and demand—huge financial flows are also driving the price rally. In a world that's expecting to see travel recover sharply next year, crude has become a hot Covid-vaccine trade.

"Oil is the cheapest of all refraction assets," said Amrita Sen, co-founder of London-based consultant Energy Aspects Ltd. "With vaccines slowly rolling out, we expect investors to start returning to the oil sector and for prices to continue firming."

In some corners of the world, the recovery in demand is almost complete. India's largest refiner said last week its plants are processing at full capacity and it's expecting a v-shaped rebound in fuel use. Consumption of petrol is also at or near



pre-Covid levels in China and Japan, the world's second and fourth biggest oil consumers.

European motorists are hitting the roads again as governments relax national lockdowns in countries including the UK, Spain, and France, according to an index of road usage and traffic compiled by Bloomberg News. Road freight is sharply higher as companies rebuild inventories and the

Christmas shopping season gets in full swing.

As demand is recovering, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies are keeping tight limits on production. The group cancelled January's 1.9-million-barrel-a-day supply hike and will instead add no more than 500,000 barrels a day to the market each month in 2021. Estimates for US shale oil output are still falling.

Cargoes of crude are changing hands at higher prices from the North Sea to the US shale heartland of Midland, Texas as consumers trawl the globe for extra supplies. Saudi Arabia raised the cost of its oil for Asia—a benchmark for the world's refiners—by the most since August last week.

A more subtle shift in the market has also got traders excited. For most of December, nearby crude futures have been trading at a premium to later-dated ones, a price structure known as backwardation.

That buying of contracts at the front of the so-called price curve is evidence that managed money is flowing into the market, Eagle Commodities said. The steeper the backwardation, the greater the

return from holding futures from one month into the next, which encourages further buying in a "self-reinforcing cycle," the brokerage said.

In recent weeks, cash has poured back into energy markets. Holdings of energy contracts rose by \$3.6 billion through early December, according to JPMorgan Chase & Co, driven by inflows into Brent and West Texas Intermediate. Investors pumped money into US exchange-traded energy funds last week, with a swing of almost \$400 million from the prior period's outflows.

For now, positive trends in fuel consumption are buoying traders' desire for both real and paper barrels. There could be more hot money coming down the pipe. —Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Manchester derby ends in stalemate

**London:** Manchester United and Manchester City did their Premier League title ambitions little favours in a drab 0-0 draw at Old Trafford as Chelsea's challenge also suffered a setback in a 1-0 defeat at Everton on Saturday. The pressure on United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was ramped up after his side crashed out of the Champions League with a mid-week defeat at RB Leipzig. He desperately needed an uplifting result in the derby to win back some support, but there was little for either side of the Manchester divide to get excited about as both teams failed to fire. A penalty was the difference between the sides at Goodison Park as Everton fed off the atmosphere created by 2,000 fans for the first time since March to arrest their slide. — *AFP*

## Verstappen wins Abu Dhabi GP

**Yas Marina, UAE:** Max Verstappen claimed his second win of the season and the 10th of his career on Sunday when he drove to a clinical victory for Red Bull in a pedestrian season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. He dominated from start to finish as he turned his third pole position into a demonstration of speed, talent and flawless strategy to leave both Mercedes men well beaten behind him. Verstappen eased home 15.976 seconds clear of Valtteri Bottas, who at least recovered some pride by taking second after his forlorn showing at the Sakhir GP, and 18.415 ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton. On his return to action after recovering from a bout of Covid-19, Hamilton struggled to make any impact as he battled through ahead of Alex Albon, who finished fourth in the second Red Bull. — *AFP*

## Honda Erula finish with 7 podiums

**Chennai:** The curtain went down on Sunday at the Madras Motor Race Track with final day of 2020 Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship & IDEMITSU Honda India Talent Cup Round 1. Marking their dominance, ENEOS Honda Erula Racing team now lead the ProStock 165cc class of the total 7 podiums including 2 wins. Sunday's races saw Mathana Kumar stamping his first victory and a total of 4 podium finish while Rajiv Sethu bagged another podium finish for Honda in PS165cc category. Alongside the national championship, the IDEMITSU Honda India Talent Cup saw the energetic young guns Sarthak Chavan, Kavin Quintal & Varoon S leading at top 3 in the NSF 250R open class whereas Shyam Babu leads the CBR150R Novice class.

## Datta signs off with a double

**Coimbatore:** Chennai's Ashwin Datta (Dark Don Racing) and Kottayams Amir Sayed (MSport) signed off with a double each in the first round of the 23rd JK Tyre FMSCI National Racing Championship here on Sunday. Datta cashed in on the chances that came his way to win both races in the national championship class for Formula LGB4 cars. However, it wasn't a great start to the day for the youngster from Chennai as the placings had changed, based on protests and official observation, for Saturdays final race, which Datta won. The revised result saw him placed 12th and Sarosh Hataria was declared the winner. That did not deter Datta who won an incident-free first race in the morning. He followed it up with yet another fighting win in the second race.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Big Bash League:** Sydney Thunder vs Brisbane Heat from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

**Lanka Premier League:** Semifinal-2 from 7.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

## WWE

**RAW:** Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2018-20

Printed and Published by **K. Sudhakar** on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: **Kaushik Mitter**

## HANUMAN ON FIRE

## Vihari confident of contributing to team's cause

**Sydney, Dec. 13:** The reticent Hanuma Vihari has slowly but surely cemented his place in the Indian Test team and is confident of contributing to the team's cause, saying he is well-equipped to execute plans in the traditional format.

Vihari scored a hundred and also got a wicket with his part-time off-breaks against Australia A in the pink ball warm-up game. He looks set to bat at number six in the first Day/Night Test at Adelaide.

"In 2018, it was my second overseas tour (after England) and it was a good challenge for me back then. Although I contributed a little (back then), I feel I am more well equipped with my game and pretty sure with my gameplan as well and looking forward to the Test series," Vihari said after the end of the warm-up tie.

While he will be batting at number six in the Test match, during the warm-up game, he did get a chance to bat at number 4 and 5 along with seasoned pros like Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane

"At number four, I always feel you have more time than you think. In domestic cricket, I have always batted number three, so I am a bit familiar batting up the order," he said.

"Obviously, batting with Pooji (Pujara's nickname) is completely different. We always have a good communication and he tells me what the bowler is trying to do," he observed.

His assessment of Rahane is that the Mumbaier is more flamboyant and has a good grip on game situations.

"Batting with Ajinkya, he is more flamboyant and he has also got a good sense of game situation

"...but coming to bat at number six is a total different game situation. You have to bat with the keeper or an all-rounder or the bowlers. I enjoy batting at both position and it's about what the team needs," he said.

Having been in Australia for a month along with two first-class matches under their belt, Vihari said the players are now well-prepared to tackle the pace and bounce of Australian tracks. — *PTI*

## NEW ZEALAND CLOSE IN ON VICTORY IN SECOND TEST

**Wellington, Dec. 13:** New Zealand were in touching distance of an innings win and series sweep over the West Indies on Sunday when bad light stopped play on the third day of the second cricket Test.

The West Indies were 244/6 in their second innings at stumps drawn early because of the light still trailing New Zealand by 85 runs after being forced to follow on 329 behind.

West Indies captain Jason Holder was 60 not out and involved in an unbroken seventh-wicket stand with Joshua da Silva (25) which was worth 74 by stumps and frustrated

New Zealand's push to victory.

The umpires offered the batsmen the light around 5.30pm local time as dark clouds gathered over the Basin Reserve and with no improvement in conditions, players were unable to return.

Earlier, opener John Campbell reached his highest test score of 68, his second half century, in an 89-run third-wicket partnership which provided a further obstacle to New Zealand's push for victory. — *AP*

**Brief scores:** New Zealand 460 vs West Indies 131 & 244/6 (Campbell 68, Holder 60\*, Boult 3/75, Jamieson 2/43).



Hanuma Vihari in action during the warm-up match against Australia 'A'. — *BCCI*

## Ben &amp; Jack shine in drawn game

**Sydney, Dec. 13:** The Indian cricket team will head into the first day-night Test against Australia with a lot of optimism and happy selection dilemmas, having managed to tick most of the boxes before drawing the three-day pink-ball dress rehearsal against Australia A here on Sunday.

Australia A gave a better account of themselves on an eased out third day track, despite being reduced to 25/3, ending

● **Australia 'A' gave a better account of themselves on an eased out third day track to end on 305/4 after picking themselves up from 25/3, thanks to Ben McDermott and Jack Wildermuth's tons.**

on 305/4 riding on Ben McDermott and Jack Wildermuth's centuries. Both the batsmen survived a barrage of bouncers under lights from Indian pacers.

The talented McDermott (107 off 167 balls), younger son of

Craig McDermott who was India's tormentor during the forgettable 91-92 series, along with his skipper Alex Carey (58, 111 balls) added 117 runs in a counter-attacking fourth wicket partnership to partially save the game.

The four-Test series gets underway from December 17 in Adelaide.

Rookie Wildermuth (111 off 119 balls) also got his ton and added 165 runs with McDermott but Virat Kohli and Ravi Shastri, watching the proceedings from the dug-out, will be happy with multiple options that emerged from the game. — *PTI*

**Brief scores:** Indians 194 & 386/4 drew with Australia 'A' 108 & 307/4 (Wildermuth 111\*, McDermott 107\*, Carey 57).

## NorthEast remain unbeaten

**Vasco, Dec. 13:** NorthEast United extended their unbeaten run in the Indian Super League after a goal-less draw with Chennaiyin FC here on Sunday.

With one point from the match, the Highlanders are placed joint second with ATK Mohun Bagan on 10 points while Chennaiyin have now failed to pick up a win in their last four matches. NorthEast United made three changes to their side as Idrissa Sylla started upfront ahead of Kwesi Appiah.

## BFC CLIP KERALA WINGS

Bengaluru FC walked away with three points after a 4-2 win over Kerala Blasters at the Fatorda Stadium.

The teams were tied 1-1 at the break with Rahul K.P. (17') giving Kerala a sur-



Bengaluru FC players celebrate their 4-2 win over Kerala Blasters in an ISL-7 match in Fatorda on Sunday. — *ISL*

prise lead which was canceled out by Cleiton Silva (29'). The second half saw four goals being scored in the span of 14 minutes. Erik Paartalu (51') and Dimas Delgado (53') scored

in quick succession to give BFC breathing space but Jordan Murray (61') gave some hope to the away team. Sunil Chhetri (65') put the game to rest with a fine header. — *Agencies*

## ■ Raina bags doubles crown

## Ankita ends year on high

**Dubai, Dec. 13:** Top Indian tennis player Ankita Raina won her third doubles title of the pandemic-hit 2020 season, clinching the Al Habtoor challenge with Ekaterine Gorgodze here.

The unseeded Indo-Georgian pair won 6-4 3-6 10-6 against Aliona Bolsova and Zadoinov from Spain and Slovakian Kaja Juvan in the final of the \$100,000 hard court event on Saturday.

Ankita said success on the singles circuit is unparalleled but a deep run in doubles draw is not without significance.

"The doubles has always helped me in singles. Playing well in doubles has always been followed by good run in singles in my career. You get to practice with good players, get to play and can work out a few things in matches," Ankita said.

It was the fourth doubles final of the season for Ankita but the biggest trophy of the calendar since her earlier two titles were at the \$25,000 level.

In February this year, Ankita had made three finals, winning back-to-back titles in Nonthaburi

(Thailand) with Bibiane Schoofs and ending runners-up in Jodhpur with compatriot Snehal Mane.

The 27-year-old said returning to the circuit after a long break too was relieving.

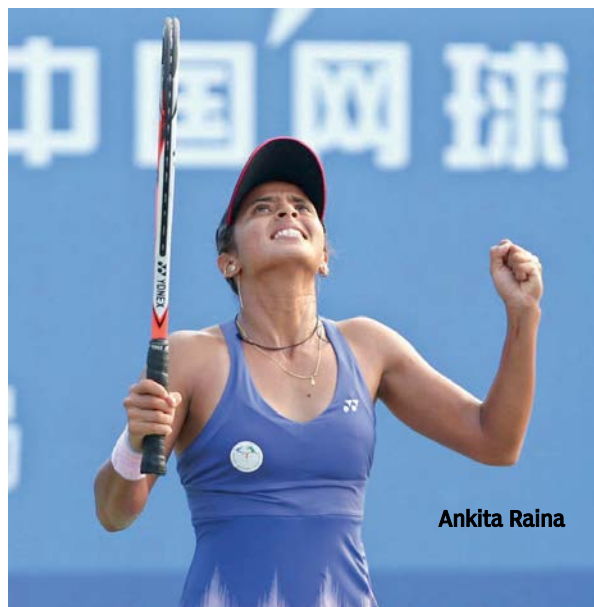
"It's really good that I am able to travel again. I was doing a bit of training, both physical and mental at home and it was different coming back to tour. Europe had already opened up and their players already had two months of match sharpness behind them.

"Most of the matches were on clay at that time and I had never played so many back-to-back clay court matches. It was a good learning curve."

During the last three months, Ankita also got exposure of playing on the US circuit.

"I have mostly played on hard courts and this time I got to play a lot in the US. Thankfully I had my coach Hemant Bendre's friend Shrish Deshpande to help me out. He has been there for long as a coach.

"It was good to have someone watching your matches and giving feedback." — *PTI*



Ankita Raina

## Mushtaq Ali T20 from January 10

**New Delhi, Dec. 13:** The BCCI will start its much-delayed domestic season with the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy from January 10 to 31 in six different states where bio-secure hubs will be created. The participating teams will be expected to report to their respective hubs on January 2.

It is learnt that BCCI secretary Jay Shah has e-mailed all the state units that Mushtaq Ali will kick-start the domestic itinerary although there is no clarity as to when the Ranji Trophy will start. The schedule has been thrown haywire owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"After having gone through your responses and in accordance with the feedback received, I am pleased to inform you that BCCI is planning to start the domestic season 2020-21 with the scheduling of the T20 tournament for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy,"

Shah wrote to state units.

"By Saturday, January 2, 2021, teams will have to assemble in their respective hub. From Sunday, January 10, 2021, tournament will start and the final will be played on January 31, 2021."

Shah, however, said that a decision on Ranji Trophy and the Vijay Hazare Trophy will be taken once the group stage of the Mushtaq Ali gets over. Feedback from members will be factored in.

"BCCI will subsequently seek feedback from the members on organising any other domestic tournament after the group stage of Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy," he stated.

It is understood that Mushtaq Ali is being held because the BCCI wants to have a mega players' auction in early February ahead of the next IPL which may have nine or 10 teams. — *PTI*

## Vihari has made a strong case for his inclusion



Hemant Kenkre  
Silly Point

**F**ormer Indian opener, Wasim Jaffer neatly summed up the situation that is currently being faced by the think tanks of both the Australian and the Indian teams as they prepare for the first, pink ball, day/night Test match at Adelaide. Jaffer gave a fitting reply to ex-Australian spinner Brad Hogg who had questioned the technique of the Indian top order batsmen while playing the Australia 'A' team in a practice match at the Sydney Cricket Ground. In a social media interac-

tion, Hogg had suggested that the "Indian top order need to know where their off stump is, learn to leave the ball off a good length, and not chase the ball moving away outside off stump." Jaffer, known for his mild manner during his playing days, took to humour telling Hogg: "Australia need to know who their top order is."

At this point in time, both teams are struggling to finalise their playing elevens for different reasons. The Aussies will miss their regular opener David Warner who is out

due to a groin injury he suffered during the second One Day International. Will Pucovski, the likely debutant, was declared out of contention due to the concussion he suffered after being hit on the head while batting in the first practice match against India 'A'.

Joe Burns, the third opener is in miserable form notching just 5 runs in 4 innings against the visitors. Marcus Harris who was drafted into the Aussie Test squad as a replacement for Pucovski will probably open the innings with Burns, unless the hosts decide to take a punt with Marnus Labuschagne who has had a tremendous run in Test cricket over the last season. The ominous form showed by the Indian pacers, particularly

Mohammed Shami (who accounted for Burns and Harris in the last practice match) and Jasprit Bumrah has made the task of the Australian selectors a bit more difficult.

For India, the two practice matches in Sydney gave their batsmen an opportunity to test their form in the middle — which was grabbed by those who intend to make the cut for the Adelaide Test. Currently, three batsmen (in the top/middle order) are certainties to be on the list to be exchanged at the toss: Cheteshwar Pujara, skipper Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane. The dilemma that the Indian team management faces centres around the openers, the number six position, the wicket keeper and the bowling attack.

For the opening slots, the

choice will be between the experienced Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw and the uncapped Shubham Gill. Of these three, Agarwal looks to be more certain to walk out to bat at Adelaide considering his past record playing Test cricket in Australia coupled with the 61 runs that he scored against Australia A in the second innings at the SCG. Gill, who had a fruitful outings in the two practice matches and has impressed many with his technique in trying conditions, will be a strong contender as the second opener.

The point is will the Indians open with Gill, a debutant, in a crucial game or go in with Shaw who has four Tests under his belt. Or, will they take a chance with KL Rahul who has the maximum Test

match experience of the lot. For the sixth batting position, Hanuma Vihari has made a strong case for inclusion with an unbeaten century in his last innings at the SCG. The wicket keeper's position seemed to be fixed with Wriddhiman Saha sure to play until his deputy, Rishab Pant, threw a spanner in the works with a beligerent, unconquered 103 runs in the practice match.

The biggest issue facing the Indians will be to go into the Test with the most balanced side. For starters, the game will be played with a pink ball and partly under lights — a tough scenario. The fluorescent ball tends to swing a lot more than its red and white cousins; a big factor when Kohli sits down to finalise his playing eleven. With all-rounder Ravindra

Jadeja out of the equation, the Indian team will have to go in with four (instead of five) regular bowlers to bolster their batting line up.

Team India will look at three parameters while picking the side: 1) form, 2) technique and 3) experience. If one was to don the selectors cap, one would reverse the order considering the pink ball and the match being a day-nighter. Technique and experience would matter more than mere form, which has proven (comparatively) to be a fickle criterion. My openers will be Agarwal and Gill with Vihari at six followed by Saha, the best gloveman. The experienced Ravichandran Ashwin and Umesh Yadav would be my choices to support Shami and Bumrah.