

COVID-19  
COUNT

CASES

(+22,214)

1,00,53,832

DEATHS

(+295)

1,45,804

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+592)

(+3)

TS: 2,81,414

1,513

(+438)

(+2)

AP: 8,78,723

7,076

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

7,69,02,835

DEATHS

16,96,433

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

218

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana  
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha  
Saptami till 4.18 pm  
Star: Purvabhadra till 11.05 pm  
Varjyam: Nil  
Durmuhurtam: 12.35 pm to 1.19 pm; 2.47 pm to 3.31 pm  
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am  
HJRI CALENDAR  
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 5, 1442 AH  
PRAYERS  
Fajar: 5.08 am  
Zohar: 12.05 pm  
Asar: 4.11 pm  
Maghrib: 5.47 pm  
Isha: 7.02 pm  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM  
SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM  
MOONSET 7.04 AM  
MOONRISE 7.06 PM

COUNTER POINT

Not religion, it's a political conversion!

SHORT TAKES

BJP, JD(S) deny merger rumours

Bengaluru: The BJP and JD(S) in Karnataka on Sunday dismissed reports of their merger after a saffron party leader opined that political polarisation was likely in the state, giving rise to speculations about the parties coming together. Both Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and JD(S) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy termed reports in this regard as 'imaginary'. A certain section of media speculated that the merger of parties may take place in February after 'Makar Sankranti' and there would be a change of guard at the top by Ugadi in April, with Kumaraswamy leading it.

SURPRISE | MOVE

First phase of elections scheduled for April-May

Oli dissolves Nepal Parliament

Kathmandu, Dec. 20: Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Sunday sprang a surprise on his rivals and got the President to dissolve Parliament, a controversial move amidst a prolonged tussle for power between him and former premier Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" within the ruling dispensation.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament's House of Representatives at Oli's recom-

and announced mid-term general election in April-May, a decision termed "unconstitutional, impulsive and autocratic" by the Opposition and dissidents in the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Earlier in the day, an emergency meeting of the Cabinet chaired by Oli decided to recommend the president for the dissolution of Parliament, a senior Standing Committee member of the NCP said. The first phase of the mid-term

election will be held on April 30 and May 10 for the second phase, the Rashtrapati Bhawan said. The 275-member House of Representatives, which is the lower House of Parliament, was elected in 2017 for a five-year term. The upper House is the National Assembly.

The move comes as the intra-party feud reached climax in the ruling NCP which has been witnessing months long tussle between two factions, one led by 68-

year-old Oli and Party's chairman and another led by 66-year-old "Prachanda", also the executive chair of the party and former premier.

Expressing dissatisfaction over Oli's move, seven ministers from his Cabinet resigned. The seven ministers, belonging to the Prachanda faction, announced their resignation in a joint statement issued during a press conference here.

— PTI



TOMATO PRICES  
CRASH TO ₹1  
AT PATHIKONDA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, DEC. 20

Tomato prices have crashed to just ₹1 per kg at Pathikonda market, the largest market for tomato in AP after Madanapalle in Chittoor district.

Most of the agents had been entering out-of-market settlements in past couple of days by offering just ₹2-3 per kg to farmers. This was even though Rythu Bazar prices per kg was ₹15 and above per kg.

The price commanded by tomato at the farm level on Sunday was, however, just ₹1 or even less. While this is so, Pathikonda marketing ADM Satyanarayana Chowdary maintained that at present quality tomato was selling at ₹5 to ₹7 per kg in Pathikonda market yard.

He acknowledged that though the model price is ₹3 to ₹4 per kg, the minimum rate offered in the yard was ₹1 on Sunday.

A farmer said though the rate is only ₹1 per kg, what they are actually getting is below 50 paise per kg after deduction of transport expenses and market yard commission.

■ Page 2: 18 tonnes of tomatoes arrive



Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib on the occasion of the 400th Parkash Parv of Guru Tegh Bahadur, in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

Farmers' unions to stage  
24-hr relay hunger strike

SANJAY KAW | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

Amid the ongoing impasse between the farmers and the Centre, the farmers' unions have announced a 24-hour relay hunger-strike Monday across all protest sites. The unions also decided to block toll collections at highways in Haryana for three days from December 25. They have issued a call to oppose Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Mann ki Baat" programme to be relayed next Sunday, November 27.

At the Delhi-Haryana

border, the farmers' leaders refused to budge and said they would intensify their stir if their demands are not immediately met. Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav said a team of 11 members at the protest sites will observe a hungerstrike on Monday. He urged all those demonstrating against the laws across India to observe a day-long fast at their protest sites. Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait urged people to skip a meal on "Kisan Diwas" on December 23.

The unions have also

decided to write to the NDA allies, urging them to oppose the Centre's stance and request a rollback of the three farm laws. "If the government's allies refuse to do so, protests would be held against them as well," Mr Tikait said.

As Delhi recorded its coldest morning this season on Sunday, with the mercury dipping to 3.4 degrees Celsius, thousands of farmers protesting at the national capital's borders continued with their agitation and were firm on their demand to get the three farm laws repealed.

CAA on hold for  
now, says Shah

Cites absence of rules, ongoing pandemic

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday dismissed any prospect of the immediate implementation of the Citizenship Amend-ment Act (CAA), a key promise made by the BJP to refugees, citing the absence of its rules and the ongoing nationwide Covid-19 pandemic.

Mr Shah told the media at Bolpur in West Bengal's Birbhum district, at the end of his two-day West Bengal tour: "The CAA rules are yet to be made. Such a big exercise cannot be undertaken now because of the corona. When the vaccine drive will get underway and the Corona cycle will also end, we will definitely give it a thought then. You will be informed when it will be done."

His statement punctures BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya's recent claim that the CAA's implementation will get underway soon, from either January or February, to placate the resentment among the Matuas, a community of Hindu migrants who

SHAH TO EXTEND  
STAY FROM JAN.  
AFTER DEFECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

Overwhelmed by the large-scale defections from the ruling Trinamul Congress and other parties to the BJP in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah will extend the duration of his two-day monthly visits to the state from January.

■ Full report on Page 4

voted for the BJP in the last Lok Sabha polls, over the delay in implementing the CAA. Incidentally, when Mr Shah was speaking about the CAA's fate, Mr Vijay-vargiya was sitting next to him. Asked about the National Register of Citizens, the home minister added: "Let first in the chronology end." Rejecting TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's slogan of "outsider" against the BJP, he

pointed out: "When she was in the Congress and Indra Gandhi or Pranab Mukherjee or Narasimha Rao used to come here, what did she say? Was it then interference in the internal politics of Bengal? Didi, we do not need to defeat you by bringing someone from Delhi. A bhoomiputra will rise and will fight you. We are going to give Bengal a son of the soil as its next CM." Mr Shah, referring to Ms Banerjee's challenge to the BJP to impose President's Rule in West Bengal, observed: "She is perhaps trying to gain sympathy. Such issues are limited to (discussion) between the Centre and the state (government). It cannot be decided openly." On the home ministry's recent order for the Central deputation of three IPS officers, Mr Shah explained: "The letter that the Central government wrote to Ms Banerjee is totally constitutional and legal. The letter is very much within the purview of the federal structure. Ms Banerjee should quote the rules to talk to the Central government and the people."

DEVOTEES STAGE  
PROTEST OVER  
TIRUMALA TOKENS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, DEC. 20

Tirumala-bound devotees staged a protest for a brief while at the ticket issuing counters in Vishnu Nivasam complex here on Sunday, denouncing issuance of darshan tokens by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in advance for darshan on December 22, 23 and 24.

A group of devotees, who had queued up at the ticket issuing counter, expressed unhappiness when they received darshan tickets for 24th of this month. They questioned TTD staff why they had not been given darshan tickets for at least Monday or Tuesday. The staff told devotees that sarva darshan tickets quota for the next three days were exhausted. Because of this, they could issue free darshan tickets only for December 24.

Unhappy with the TTD reply, devotees entered into heated arguments with devasthanams' staff and later staged a protest, raising slogans against TTD. Following this, TTD vigilance and security wing personnel, apart from police, rushed to the spot and pacified devotees.

■ Page 2: Darshan tickets increased by 3,000

AP frees more  
land 'grabbed'  
by TD leaders

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 20

The revenue department took possession of a government land at Rushikonda here with the help of police on Sunday morning. The land, measuring 293 square yards, is located at survey number 21 and was under the possession of TD Visakhapatnam East legislator Velagapudi Ramakrishnababu and is valued at ₹3 crore.

However, followers of the MLA said that Ramakrishnababu purchased this private land from a medical professional 15 years ago but some people raised a dispute claiming owner-

ship. The revenue department was quite all these years and now they have plunged into action, they said.

Similarly, revenue officials pitched a board warning trespassers in a D patta land in Anandapuram mandal measuring 20 acres, about 30 km from the city. The land is adjacent to a 69-acre private land owned by former Anakapalle MLA Peela Govind Satyanarayana.

The former MLA told Deccan Chronicle that revenue officials did not touch his land, which he owned to an extent of 69 acres. He said rumours were spread that the officials put boards in all the 69 acres.

Ongole MP tests  
Covid positive

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, DEC. 20

Ongole MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy has tested positive for Covid-19. Following this, he is undergoing treatment at Apollo Hospitals in Chennai.

The MP has appealed to people, who have come in contact with him in the last few days, to get themselves tested.

According to a release on Saturday, though the MP has tested positive, the percentage of his virus load is low.

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## SHORT TAKES

## 18 TONNES OF TOMATOES ARRIVE

FROM PAGE 1

The Pathikonda marketing ADM said nearly 18 tonnes of tomatoes have arrived at the Pathikonda market yard on Sunday. Other markets like Alur, Aspari and Yemmiganur received only 2-3 tonnes of tomato, he stated.

The quality of tomatoes has been affected mainly due to untimely rains in the past month, said a market official.

## JAGAN TO LAY FOUNDATION TO IRMA-AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 20

The Institute of Rural Management Anand, one of the country's premier institutions in management education, is setting up its campus at Pulivendula in Kadapa district.

The objective of IRMA-AP is capacity building of rural youth, with a special focus on rural women empowerment, as the state government has decided to revive and strengthen the cooperative dairy sector by creating an enabling environment, a senior official, involved with the project, said.

IRMA-AP will offer certificate courses in the first year of its establishment and diploma courses from the next academic year. The first year certificate courses will be launched in May-June.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will lay the foundation stone for IRMA-AP campus in his hometown on December 24. It will come up on the premises of AP Centre for Advanced Research on Livestock (APCARL).

The state government will spend ₹83.59 crore to improve the facilities at APCARL and raise the buildings required to accommodate IRMA-AP, a senior official said. He added that IRMA offered mentoring support to IRMA-AP and assistance in curriculum development, besides providing support in faculty recruitment and training.

## SARVA DARSHAN TICKETS HIKE BY 3,000

FROM PAGE 1

Later, authorities also increased the sarva darshan quota by 3,000 tickets to facilitate darshan for some protesting devotees within the Monday slot. However, those who got the darshan slot for December 24 were not given any advancement.

Following this, these devotees, who had come from far off places with families, were left fuming. "TTD has issued us darshan tickets for December 24. How can we afford to stay in Tirupati for three days? It is the responsibility of devasthanams to provide us a devotee-free darshan. The problem is TTD neglects common devotees," they retorted.

Officials have maintained that TTD administration has repeatedly been announcing that they can only facilitate darshan of 30,000-35,000 devotees a day due to prevailing Covid-19 restrictions. They have also been requesting devotees to make advance reservations for darshan before reaching Tirumala due to restrictions because of Coronavirus.

Officials lamented that some pilgrims are continuing to arrive at Tirupati without any advance bookings.

## EX-TD MLA REVOLTS AGAINST ASHOK

DC CORRESPONDENT VIZIANAGARAM, DEC. 20

Former MLA Meesala Geetha has raised a banner of revolt against former Union minister and Telugu Desam politburo member P. Ashok Gajapathi Raju by opening a parallel party office in Vizianagaram.

In a quick action, party state president K. Atchannaidu took up damage-control exercise on advice of party high command and requested her to close the office opened by her.

Geetha was the sitting MLA on eve of 2019 Assembly elections but denied TD ticket to contest from Vizianagaram Assembly constituency, as Ashok Gajapathi Raju had chosen his daughter Aditi Gajapathi as the party candidate.

## Guinness bid for Jagan's b'day

YSRC MLAs plan world record in blood donation on the occasion of CM's 49th b'day today

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, DEC. 20

YSRC MLAs throughout the state are gearing up for a "never-before-ever-after" celebrations to mark the 49th birthday of their leader and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Monday.

YSRC central office has directed all its MLAs to organise blood donation camps in their respective constituencies across the state. Attempts are also being made to gain entry into the Guinness Book of World Records by organising record-breaking blood donation camps. Party leaders feel this could well be possible with Covid-19 receding in the state and party cadre, apart from Jagan fans, being enthusiastic about donating blood at all mandal headquarters in the state.

Srisailem executive officer K.S. Rama Rao said Vedashirwada Vachanam will be rendered by temple priests on occasion of the Chief Minister's birthday.

Bakers are also doing brisk business and many MLAs have announced plans of ordering 49-kg cakes to mark the 49th birthday of their leader.

Nandyal MLA Silpa Ravichandra Kishore Reddy announced that 300 party activists will be donating blood. "Though more than 1,000 cadres have come forward, doctors have advised us to limit the donors to 300, as they only have limited storage facilities," Ravichandra Kishore maintained.

Kurnool legislator Hafeez Khan said a large number of activists have voluntarily come forward to donate their blood to mark the birthday of CM Jagan. Pathikonda MLA Cherukulapati Sridevi said her constituency is full of Jagan fans and they are planning some surprise celebrations on Monday. "I have heard they have ordered a cake weighing 49 kg to match the age of Jagan. We will be cutting the mega cake on the day and share it with public," she said.

Adoni MLA Y. Sai Prasad



Srikalahasti YSRC MLA Biyyapu Madhusudhan Reddy distributes 100 pushcarts worth ₹10,000 each to poor vendors in his constituency on Sunday.

Reddy said apart from organising the blood donation camp, party activists will go around hospitals and distribute fruits and bread to convalescing patients. "I have ordered 500 bed sheets, which will be given to the destitute and orphans on occasion of Jagan's birthday," the Adoni legislator stated.

Panyam MLA Katasani Rambhupal Reddy said, "My constituency comprises of die-hard Jagan fans. We are planning blood donation and other charitable activities." Banaganapalle MLA Katasani Rami Reddy said at least 200 people will participate in the blood donation camp.

Bakers in Kurnool city are receiving massive orders from YSRC activists. Nagaraju of Peevi Bakers asserted that they can meet the orders placed by Jagan followers as they have a big oven to bake large cakes. Mongini Cake Shop's Afsar Pasha said only select people have placed orders.

## Jagan turns messiah of masses with welfare sops

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 20

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has become the new idiom of Andhra Pradesh polity with his sharpness in decision making, precision in work style, eye for detail, and commitment to usher in a welfare state which earned him a place of pride of being among the best heads of state in the country.

For Mr Reddy, who celebrates his 49th birthday on Monday, the political ride was not a smooth sail, but he had to weather many a storm, handle difficult and complex situations and walked straight into the hearts of people by being with them.

Mr Reddy must be among the very few founder leaders of a political party to become Chief Minister at a young age and created a record of sorts winning 151 of 175 seats in Assembly and 22 of the 25 Parliament seats despite the hostile media and conspiratorial adversaries.

Led by the demagogue former chief minister, the tirade against him by adversaries continues even 18 months after assuming office, and they explored and took recourse in other options after being routed in the parliamentary system.

Mr Reddy has shown determination, stubbornness, and his hallmark commitment in carrying out the governance with

transparency and has been rolling welfare schemes, more than what was promised in the manifesto and winning hearts of the people even during the testing times of Covid-19.

The young Chief Minister has effectively used direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to bring in transparency and shunt out intermediaries and people are now having the feel of governance as money started coming into their bank accounts.

He introduced the Spandana programme, which has brought governance closer to the people with stunning transparency. His promise of prohibition in a phased manner is being effectively implemented.

## AP gears up for comprehensive resurvey of lands after 100 years

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 20

The mega task of a comprehensive resurvey of lands after 100 years will be launched across all 13 districts and is aimed at resolving land-related disputes and objections.

The resurvey will be carried under YSR Jagananna Saswatha Bhau Hakku-Bhu Raksha scheme and would spread over 1.26 lakh sq kms across the state. As many as 17,000 villages would be covered in three phases. People are hoping for an end to land disputes and upgraded land records.

As many as 5,000 villages will be covered in the first phase, 6,500 in the second phase, and 5,500 in the third phase. The survey will be conducted on 3,345.93 sq km in towns and cities covering 10 lakh open plots and 40 lakh assessment lands and 2.26 crore acres of land belonging to 90 lakh pattadar passbook holders.

Officials, who made arrangements for a smooth resurvey, stated that a land titling card, consisting of a unique identification number,

## HIGH-FREQUENCY CAMERAS, DRONES TO FACILITATE RESURVEYING IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 20

Drones will play an important role in the resurveying of lands in the state. The state government, along with Survey of India (SoI), will conduct the resurvey using drones and high-frequency cameras.

SoI is arranging drones for the survey and 30 base stations will be required for up-gradation of data

measurements of the property, name of the owner along with the photo, and the total area would be given to the individuals after the survey. Digitized cadastral maps would be prepared on its completion.

All details of the lands in the village would figure in the maps. Survey stones would be installed once the marking of land is completed. Digitized property register and title register and a register for complaints would be made

under the first phase of the programme. As many as five base stations are established and the remaining would get started in the coming days.

As many as 14,000 surveyors had been appointed for the mega resurvey under which training was given to 9,423 staff about electronic survey, modernisation of data through Autocad, ETS and Differential Global Positioning System.

available at village secretariats.

According to reports, as a majority of disputes pertain to land boundaries and encroachments, the resurvey would be held according to government records. Considering that the absence of boundary stones with survey numbers are also creating differences among landowners, the government will now install boundary stones with details for every land.

As many as 52,866 land

dispute cases are pending in revenue courts while there are 79,405 applications pending with regard to modifications of records in the 13 districts. The absence of an upgraded survey records is also creating problems for landowners.

Landowners K. Amaranath and A.V. Ramana Rao said, "The surveying is a very lengthy process and we have to pay fee and further the surveyors would measure lands with long chains but it would be accurate."

They said that the new measurements process with drones and Continuous Operating Reference Stations (CORS) network should give accurate measures otherwise it would create new disputes. They said that the government should take all precautionary measures for a flawless resurvey and clear doubts of landowners about electronic surveying methods.

Revenue minister Dharmana Krishna Das said that this is a historical survey initiative because the earlier one was taken up during the British rule.

## FIRST GATE OF POLAVARAM PROJECT TO BE ERECTED TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, DEC. 20

The mega Polavaram Project on Godavari River has reached a crucial stage with all arrangements made for fixing the first gate at the spillway on Monday. A total of 48 gates will be installed at the project, which will be operated hydraulically on the spillway at a height of 55 metres.

Engineers of Polavaram Project say this is the first time in the country that hydraulic gates are being installed at a project. The 98 cylinders required for gates have been imported from Germany.

Polavaram Project Authority (PPA) chief executive officer (CEO) J. Chandrasekhar Iyer and his team members D. Ganesh Kumar, DD-PPA, and K. Lalitha, AE-PPA, visited the project on Sunday. They inspected spillway bridge gates, upper coffer dam and fish ladder works. Project chief engineer B. Sudhakar Babu and superintendent engineer M. Nagireddy, apart from staff of Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited (MEIL) explained to PPA top officials various stages of the project's progress. PPA CEO Chandrasekhar expressed satisfaction at the progress of project works.

According to engineers, work on the first gate will start on Monday and completed by the same evening. Each gate will be 20.835 metres height and 15.96 metres in width. There will be eight arm-girders for each gate. Total 384 arm-girders and 192 horizontal girders with a height of 16 metres each will be installed. Skin plates will be fixed after the work on girders is over.

Recently, Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy visited the project area.



Nagadasari Munikumar at the inscription near Siddavatam in Kadapa district.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

## 7th c inscriptions found in Kadapa

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 20

Nagadasari Munikumar, a researcher from old Kadapa area, has found Seventh Century AD inscriptions at the Kapartheeswara Swamy Kona in Lankamala forests near the mandal headquarters of Siddavatam.

Kamakshi, Kapartheeswara Swamy Temple had been built by Chola kings in the Seventh Century. Munikumar, an alumnus of Telugu Department in Yogi Vemana University,

found the inscription engraved on a hill on way to the temple. Realising that they could be valuable, he sent a photograph of them to Acharya Muniratnam Reddy, director, Archaeological Survey of India in Mysore.

Muniratnam Reddy examined them and confirmed that they are Sanskrit inscriptions written in Devanagari script of the Seventh Century.

Munikumar is presently working as a teacher at the Kadapa Public School.

## FINANCIAL | DISTRESS CPM demands government pay teaching and non-teaching staff ₹10,000

## Covid-hit private schools seek bailout package

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 20

AP Private Schools Association (APPSA) sought the government to help private budget schools to recover from the Corona impact by providing financial assistance.

Addressing APPSA meeting on Sunday, CPM state secretary P. Madhu lamented that private schools were pushed into deep financial difficulties

due to Corona pandemic. He said that the government is aiding various sectors hence it should give a package to private budget schools which were offering good education for reasonable fees. APPSA leaders lamenting over the severe financial crisis, sought Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to provide ₹10,000 financial aid each to teaching and non-teaching staff.

The meeting of APPSA conducted a meeting on



CPM AP State general secretary P. Madhu addresses "Education sector - In crisis" seminar at Venkateswara Vignana Mandiram, Guntur on Sunday. — E. TEJO RAO

"Education sector-in crisis" in Venkateswara Vignana Mandiram at Guntur on Sunday. Mr Madhu lamented that the government failed to control fee extortion of Corporate schools but trying to suppress private budget schools during this Corona crisis with heedless norms. He demanded that the government form separate categories to Corporate and budget schools in private schools section and stop imple-

mentation of Corporate schools norms to budget schools.

Mr Madhu recalled that during the last 10 years the population has increased in the State but no new government schools were established. He said that Budget schools are imparting quality education to the students by collecting lesser fees unlike private and corporate institutions and demanded the government to announce a package.



## OTHER STORIES

## REGISTRATION OF LAND NOW IN VILLAGES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 20

Taking another step towards decentralisation of services by establishing village secretariats, the government, on Sunday, issued a GO (380) facilitating land registrations at the village level.

As per the GO, a pilot project would be established in Takkellapadu in Jaggaiahpetta mandal in Krishna district where the people can register their properties.

According to the notification, special chief secretary Rajat Bhargava said in terms of section 7(1) of the Registration Act, 1908, Takkellapadu village secretariat in Jaggaiahpetta mandal in Krishna district is declared/notified to be the office of sub-registrar to carry out all or any of the functions contained in the Indian Stamps Act, 1899 and the Registration Act, 1908.

The special chief secretary asked the principal secretary (PR and RD), district collector, gram volunteers and village secretaries to provide necessary infrastructure including building, web cameras, space for record room, furniture, computer room, scanner, printer, biometric devices and networking for making registration office set up in the Takkellapadu village secretariat.

## KADAPA SP IN FIRING PRACTICE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, DEC. 20

District Superintendent of Police Karur Karunapati Nagendra Kumar Anburajan on Sunday inaugurated the annual firing practice camp for police officers.

SP Anburajan himself participated in the firing practice in this camp. He congratulated the police officers who showed talent in the firing. The firing practise camp started on Sunday morning at the firing range in Rajiv Smritivanam. District Additional SP (Admin) Qasim Saheb, OSD Devaprasad, District AR Additional SP Rushikeshava Reddy, Sub-Divisional Police Officers, DSPs of other departments, Circle Inspectors, Reserve Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors were present.

## JS DEMANDS WITHDRAWAL OF DIVIS PLANT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, DEC. 20

The Jana Sena Political Affairs Committee chairman Nadendla Manohar demanded the government should withdraw the proposal of setting up a pharma unit by Divis company in Kothapakalu village area of Thondangi mandal of East Godavari district and also lifting the criminal cases against the protesters immediately.

He visited Kothapakalu village on Sunday and said that he gave an ultimatum to the state government on withdrawal of the pharma unit in the area and also lifting of criminal cases on the people within 10 days.

## CHRISTMAS AT PUTTAPARTHI TO BE LOW KEY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, DEC. 20

Puttaparthi gears up for Christmas but, this year, there is a decline in the number of foreigners and devotees from other states expected due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Only devotees settled in Puttaparthi will participate in the Christmas celebrations.

Prasanthi Nilayam, the international spiritual centre, has celebrating most of the festivals of all religions and various countries for the past five decades. Sri Satya Saibaba has devotees in more than 130 countries in the globe and decades-old tradition of celebrating Christmas by foreigners during their visit to India. A group of foreigners stay in Prasanthi Nilayam while a few more join Christmas in Goa every year.

The Covid-19 pandemic has restricted tourists to Puttaparthi for the past one year. The 95th birth anniversary celebrations of Sri Satya Saibaba were also celebrated with a limited number of devotees and guests at Prasanthinilayam.



Caption Airports Authority of India southern regional executive director R. Madhavan inaugurates solar power plant at rajamahendravaram airport on Sunday.

## Pvt schools worried over 'Amma Vodi' enrolment

Managements appeal to government to rectify discrepancies

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, DEC. 20

Private schools have appealed to the state government to rectify discrepancies in uploading data of students for eligibility to Amma Vodi scheme. Representatives of private schools say they are facing rough weather from officials owing to many discrepancies in records of students admitted in private and government schools.

In particular, private schools are facing problems, as many of their students are now opting to join government schools as the state government has introduced English as the medium of instruction. Certain parents are also shifting their children to government schools, unable to bear the high fee charged by private schools, apart from

getting attracted by the Amma Vodi scheme.

The state government has stated that if a parent gives declaration of shifting his or her child from a private institution to a government school, there will be no need for a transfer certificate (TC) for admitting the student into the government school.

According to sources, nearly 50,000 students have enrolled in government schools from private institutions in East Godavari district alone. However, according to sources, a student's name will remain in records of a private educational institute until the student takes the transfer certificate from that school.

District Private Schools Organisation (DPSO) president M. Srivijay said as per the Education Department, private educational institutions will have to

upload their students' data for the Amma Vodi scheme as per their enrolment records. Otherwise, strict action would be taken against the institution. Srivijay, however, maintained that they have clear instructions from the government that though a private school student gets admitted to a government school with declaration of the parent, it will be the parent's responsibility to take TC from the respective school and submit it to the government school.

The DPSO president said during inspections of students' houses by ward volunteers, the latter delete certain names due to reasons like power bill crossing ₹300, possession of a four-wheeler and other parameters. He questioned how the government could make private schools liable for such errors.

Officer (DEO) S. Abraham said if any mistakes are made by private educational institutions, such as Aadhaar number being wrongly uploaded, strict action will be taken against the private school concerned. Compensation to the student will then have to be provided by schools.

Abraham said the first list of Amma Vodi will reach the district headquarters on Monday for finalisation of beneficiaries. If any student, who has taken the Amma Vodi amount last year but is not eligible for this year, he can be given another chance to rectify the mistake, as the lists can be modified up to January 9.

The DEO said that the government's motive is that every eligible student should be enrolled under Amma Vodi scheme without fail.

Two minor students Barre Tataji, 7, and Barre Durga, 17, died at Tuni on Sunday, when the bike on which they going to a brick manufacturing unit was hit by a speeding lorry. They died on the spot.

According to Tuni police, the victims' father Barre Venu of Gollapeta village in Kotaravutla mandal of Visakhapatnam district is working in a brick manufacturing unit.

After noticing the situation, the present legislator of the segment Kakani Govardhan Reddy took the initiative to develop the two temples after holding discussions with the locals and temple administration.

His initiative led to sanction of ₹25 crore for the renovation of the temples using special stones procured from Kotappakonda to retain the ancient look of the temples.

The unique seven-storey Rajagopuram was renovated.

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According to Tuni police, the victims' father Barre Venu of Gollapeta village in Kotaravutla mandal of Visakhapatnam district is working in a brick manufacturing unit.

## AP may allow commissioning of Anrak in Vizag: Vijaya Sai

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 20

The AP government is all set to allow Anrak Aluminium Limited to commission its alumina refinery in Rachapalli in Makavarapalem in Visakhapatnam.

At a press conference in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, Rajya Sabha member and incharge for YSRC north Andhra affairs Mr V. Vijay Sai Reddy said the government has been planning to allow Anrak Aluminium Ltd to commission their plant since it has invested over ₹5,000 crore and promised to provide jobs to local youth.

"But we will not allow mining of Bauxite in the Visakhapatnam Agency. The company has to import from outside or source it from Odisha," Vijay Sai Reddy said and

● The company, in an earlier announcement, said it would provide 500 direct jobs and over 2,000 indirect jobs.

added that the YSRC had assured the Adivasis that mining of Bauxite had been stopped for good.

Paderu MLA K. Bhagyalakshmi said the Adivasis in Vizag Agency would not have any objections if the plant operates in a non-tribal area far from the Agency tracts.

"As long as they do not mine in the Agency, we have no objection," he said.

Anrak Aluminium (AAL), a joint venture of Penna Group and Ras Al Khaimah Investment Authority, completed its trials in 2014 and obtained environmental clearance from MOEFCC in 2018.

However, the company could not commission the plant after APMD, with which it signed an MoU in 2007, could not supply Bauxite. The 1.5 million tonne capacity alumina refinery was set up after acquisition of 2,300 acres of land through the AP Industrial Infrastructure Corporation at Rachapalli.

The project was completed, along with a 72x3 MW captive power plant, in 2013 with a total investment of ₹6,000 crore.

Sources said till APMD supplied the mines, the AAL has to buy from Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation or the Orissa Mining Company in an auction. The other option is to import, they said.

The company, in an earlier announcement, said it would provide 500 direct jobs and over 2,000 indirect jobs.

## CPM objects to opening of Anrak

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 20

The district committee of CPI(M) strongly objected to the proposed opening of Anrak Aluminium Ltd alumina refinery in Rachapalli near Makavarapalem in Visakhapatnam district by allowing the company to source Bauxite mines from outside states and foreign countries.

District secretary of the CPI(M) K. Lokanadham said the state government also appointed a committee with higher officials to ensure supply of the mines.

He said the government is doing great injustice to the people of Visakhapatnam and north coastal AP.

The refinery would pollute ground and surface water and endanger the lives of the people with new diseases.

CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy promised to cancel all the GOs related to the Bauxite mining.

"We wonder why CM Jagan Mohan Reddy pressuring the Central government to open Anarak refinery after cancelling GO No 97," Mr Lokanadham said.

The chief minister has to explain who would benefit from the refinery-people or the company, the CPM leader asked.

The state government is trying to wash its hands off by putting all the responsibilities on the shoulders of the central government, he said.



Former minister Vadde Sobhanadreeswara Rao, Rythu Sangham leaders paying tributes to farmers those who died during protest against farm laws at Sri Sri Bhavan in Vijayawada on Sunday.

- C. NARAYANA RAO

## Facelift for 2 ancient temples near coast

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, DEC. 20

A facelift is being given to the most ancient Sri Siddeshwara Swamy Temple and Sri Venugopala Swamy temple located close to the coast in Krishnapatnam village, 30 km from Nellore, in Muthukurum mandal of SPSR Nellore district.

As per the scriptures, both the temples were built when King Manumasiddhi was ruling Nellore region in the 12th century. The temples had

more than 550 acres of land in the past.

However, the lands were purchased by Reliance and few other firms to establish thermal power projects about 12 years back.

The revenue of nearly ₹100 crore from the sale has been deposited in the bank, and it is generating ₹7 crore annual revenue for the holy places.

Despite the availability of funds, development eluded the shrines, which are located in Sarvepalli constituency, for decades.

After noticing the situation, the present legislator of the segment Kakani Govardhan Reddy took the initiative to develop the two temples after holding discussions with the locals and temple administration.

His initiative led to sanction of ₹25 crore for the renovation of the temples using special stones procured from Kotappakonda to retain the ancient look of the temples.

The unique seven-storey Rajagopuram was renovated.

## 2 CHILDREN DIE AS SPEEDING LORRY HITS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, DEC. 20

Two minor students Barre Tataji, 7, and Barre Durga, 17, died at Tuni on Sunday, when the bike on which they going to a brick manufacturing unit was hit by a speeding lorry. They died on the spot.

According to Tuni police, the victims' father Barre Venu of Gollapeta village in Kotaravutla mandal of Visakhapatnam district is working in a brick manufacturing unit.

## 25 per cent of the vehicles do not have FASTag yet

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, DEC. 20

Although the Union surface transport ministry has been insisting on FASTags for four-wheelers and trucks since 2018, so far only 75 per cent of the vehicles in Kadapa district have got FASTag installed.

Incidentally, the Centre has issued a directive making FASTag mandatory for all vehicles crossing toll gates from

January 1. Owners may even face penalty if FASTag stickers are not affixed to their vehicles thereafter. The only lane currently available for cash payments at toll plazas will be closed. Shifting to FASTag will thus become compulsory for all vehicles.

FASTag system is being implemented by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to avoid wastage of time at toll gates,

check corruption and save fuel of vehicles. While making FASTag compulsory from January 1, 2021, the ministry has directed all states to issue fitness certificates to lorries, trucks and other vehicles only if they are carrying FASTag. The Centre has amended the Central Motor Vehicles Act, 1989, in this regard. There are three toll plazas in Kadapa district at Palempalli.

## GOOD HEALTH

The study helps to understand the spread of infection

## 46% develop antibodies for Covid-19

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR I  
DC  
NELLORE, DEC. 20

As many as 45.8 per cent of the people have developed antibodies against the Covid-19 causing SARS-CoV-2 in SPSR Nellore district, according to the second sero surveillance study carried out by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The survey covering 4,500 people from different walks of life was conducted in November. The third round will be launched on Monday.

The study is an important tool to estimate the antibody levels against infectious diseases in the population and is considered as the gold standard for measuring population immunity. The study helps to

understand the spread of Covid-19 infection and plan its management. While the study shows a large percentage of people has having got Covid-19.

District collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said that the focus of the second round of the ICMR survey was on VIPs, medical professionals and people travelling daily to different places such ven-

dors moving from villages to towns and vice versa for livelihood.

He said samples were also collected from areas with zero cases or those totally unaffected by Covid-19.

Referring to the third round of ICMR survey, Mr Babu said the study is a continuous process since antibodies may come down drastically since their lifetime is

three months.

According to the collector, the antibodies percentage as per the studies of ICMR and the state government was 0.51 per cent in May (infection phase), 8.2 per cent in (pre-peak phase) in July and 17.7 per cent in September (peak phase) and 45.8 per cent in November in what is being called the plateau phase in Nellore district.

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SHORT TAKES

### DMK LAUNCHES ‘WEREJECTADMK’ CAMPAIGN IN TN

**Chennai, Dec. 20:** Months ahead of Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, principal opposition DMK on Sunday launched a campaign against arch-rival AIADMK on what it called “lack of governance” by the Palaniswami government and touching sensitive issues such as the NEET-related suicides.

The party’s campaign launched on Sunday is titled “werejectadmk” and the DMK released a video, flagging issues in sectors like agriculture and education as it urged people to defeat the AIADMK in the elections, likely in coming April-May. In the video, released during a meeting of DMK’s key office-bearers, including district secretaries, party chief M.K. Stalin said senior party functionaries will visit over 16,000 villages and wards to conduct “gram sabhas” where resolutions will be adopted against the AIADMK government as part of the campaign.

At the meeting, Stalin set a target of winning 200 seats for his party office-bearers and claimed DMK was facing attacks from many fronts, including “some being forced” to start their own political ventures as part of a “conspiracy.” The DMK, out of power since 2011, is making a full throttled bid to storm back and dethrone the AIADMK.

### AT 3.4°C, DELHI RECORDS COLDEST MORNING SO FAR

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

A cold wave swept Delhi on Sunday as it recorded the coldest morning of the season so far at 3.4 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. On Saturday, the minimum temperature at the Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, had settled at 3.9 degrees Celsius.

“The observatory recorded a minimum of 3.4 degrees Celsius, five notches below the normal, on Sunday morning. The maximum temperature is likely to settle around 22 degrees Celsius,” an IMD official said.

The mercury dipped to 3.3 degrees Celsius at Lodhi Road, as icy winds from snow-laden Western Himalayas barrelled through the city, the IMD said.

On Friday, the minimum temperature had plunged to 2.7 degrees Celsius at Jafarpur. The city had recorded a “severe” cold day on Thursday as the maximum temperature dropped to 15.2 degrees Celsius, seven notches below normal and the lowest this season so far.

However, it rose to 19.8 degrees Celsius on Friday and 21.8 degrees Celsius on Saturday.

### PARL. ROW: RAUT URGES MODI NOT TO GO PUTIN WAY

**BHAGWAN PARAB | DC**  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

Continuing its attack on the BJP-led Union government over the cancellation of the winter session of the Parliament, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut has claimed that the Centre wanted to avoid discussion on the ongoing farmers’ agitation in Delhi. He has also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi going Russian President Vladimir Putin’s way by not holding the parliament session.

“What is the need of spending ₹1,000 crore on Central Vista project of new Sansad Bhavan, when the government was not interested in holding debates and parliamentary work? The winter session of Parliament has been cancelled so that there can be no debate on the ongoing farmers’ protest near Delhi,” said Raut in his weekly column Rokthok (fort-right) in the Sena mouth-piece Saamana on Sunday.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting at Delhi borders since November 26 against the new agri laws. They have been demanding a repeal of the legislations.

Citing the visit of Britain Prime Minister Boris Johnson as a chief guest for the Republic Day ceremony on January 26, Raut asked, “Will we show him the closed parliament? We adopted the parliamentary democracy from Britain, but such things do not happen there. Had democracy been alive here, talks would have been held with the protesting farmers in Delhi. But attempts were made to ensure no debate over it in the parliament.”



Union home minister Amit Shah during a roadshow at Bolpur in Birbhum district on Sunday, ahead of West Bengal Assembly elections 2021.

— PTI

# Shah to extend Bengal visit duration from Jan.

## Home minister overwhelmed by large-scale Oppn defections

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC**  
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

Overwhelmed by the large-scale defections from the ruling Trinamul Congress and other parties to the BJP in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah has extended the duration of his two-day monthly visits to camp in the poll-bound state from January to three days, which will gradually go up to four days or even a week in the later stages, closer to the elections, apparently in a bid to attract more switchovers as part of his party’s poll preparations.

State BJP chief Dilip Ghosh said on Sunday, “Shah will keep visiting here every month. The (number of) days will also increase gradually. So far,

● **AMIT SHAH** chalks out the plan after being impressed by the huge number of defections, including Shubhendu Adhikari and nine other MLAs from the TMC, Congress and Left parties, and dozens of other TMC leaders to the saffron fold.

he has visited here for only two days a month. His visits will now be extended to three days and then up to a week.”

Shah, on a two-day West Bengal tour, chalked out the plan, sources said, to camp monthly after being impressed by the huge number of defections, including Shubhendu Adhikari and nine other MLAs from the TMC, Congress and Left parties, and dozens of other TMC leaders to the saffron fold in his presence in Midnapore.

Another batch of defections by TMC MLAs, including a heavyweight,

is expected during Shah’s January visit.

Ghosh added, “Many have contacted us. The number will go up in the coming days. At a review meeting, Shah went through the role and performances of ministers and leaders from other states who are working for the party’s poll preparedness here. He also gave us a roadmap of what to do.”

In the afternoon, Shah visited Visvabharati, the Central university at Santiniketan, near Bolpur, and paid tribute to its founder Rabindranath Tagore.

He also attended a musical performance by students in a bid to connect with Bengali culture.

The TMC criticised the BJP for belittling Tagore over a controversial poster in which the iconic legend was depicted below Shah before his visit to Santiniketan.

“We condemn this disrespect to Tagore. We are protesting against it at Jorasanko, Tagore’s residence in Kolkata, all through the day. Those who do not even know Tagore want to grab Bengal,” said TMC minister Subrata Mukherjee.

Shah, later, had lunch at the home of a Baul artist, Basudeb Das, and led a mega BJP roadshow in Bolpur to make the saffron party’s presence felt in a stronghold of the Trinamul Congress.

# Maha makes masks must for the next six months

**SANJAY KAW | DC**  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

India recorded 26,624 new cases of the Coronavirus disease, 341 related deaths and 29,690 recoveries in the last 24 hours.

Delhi recorded 1,091 fresh cases the lowest in around four months, as the total number of such cases climbed to 6,17,005 in the national capital, authorities said. 26 more fatalities pushed the death count due to the disease to 10,277 in the city. The positivity rate stood at 1.31 per cent.

This is the sixth consecutive day when the positivity rate has remained below two per cent. It stood at 1.3 per cent on Saturday, 1.6 per cent on Friday and 1.51 per cent on Thursday.

Maharashtra, which along with Kerala accounts for 40 per cent of total the Coronavirus cases, has made wearing of

● **MAHA CM** says experts are in favour of imposing night curfew or another lockdown, but he was not in favour of these steps.

masks mandatory for the next six months.

While addressing people of the state on social media, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddav Thackeray said experts were in favour of imposing night curfew or another lockdown, but he was not in favour of these steps.

He said, “The Coronavirus situation in the state is under control, though not completely... Prevention is better than cure. Wearing of mask at public places should be made a habit for another six months at least.”

In India, the number of fresh infections was 5.8 per cent higher than Saturday, when the country registered 25,152 cases to take the total infections to over one crore mark.

## METRO | PROJECT

## Bombay HC has stayed metro car shed work at salt pan land in Kanjurmarg

# Uddhav seeks Centre’s help to settle car shed row

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday urged the Opposition BJP to help resolve the deadlock over the salt pan land, which the state government wants to use for Metro car shed.

Thackeray denied the opposition’s charge that he has made the Metro car shed an ego issue. Thackeray had scrapped his predecessor Devendra Fadnavis’ decision to construct the car shed at Aarey Colony and moved

the project to salt pan land at Kanjurmarg area.

However, the Bombay high court has stayed the work at Kanjurmarg. Responding to Thackeray, Fadnavis alleged that the Chief Minister is still misleading the people and he doesn’t seem to have read the incriminating report submitted by the committee set up by his own government.

Addressing the people of state via social media for 34 minutes, Thackeray said that he was called “arrogant”, but if wanting the best for Mumbai and Maharashtra was “arro-

● **FORMER CM** Devendra Fadnavis alleges that Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray is misleading the people and he doesn’t seem to have read the incriminating report submitted by the committee set up by his own government.

gance” then he acceded to his fault.

“I am being called ‘arrogant’ on the subject of the Metro car shed. Yes, I am arrogant for Mumbai. We sent the car shed to Kanjurmarg because building it in Aarey was destroying the forest there. First, trees would have been chopped off for a car shed... then for something else... and slowly the

whole forest would have been eliminated,” the Chief Minister added.

Justifying the choice of land at Kanjurmarg for the Metro car shed, Thackeray said the state government gave “costliest” land in the Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) for the central government’s bullet train project, despite opposition. “We did not create

# India wary of new PLA’s Western Command head

**PAWAN BALI | DC**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

India is keenly watching the developments after China appointed a new military commander for its Western Theatre Command and how it will reflect on the ground as the two nations’ armies continue to remain in a standoff in eastern Ladakh.

The People’s Liberation Army’s Western Theatre Command is responsible for whole of China’s border with India — from Ladakh to the Northeast.

China’s President Xi Jinping, head of the Central Military Commission, the PLA’s overall high command, has appointed Gen. Zhang Xudong as the new head of the Western Theatre Command, replacing veteran Gen. Zhao Zongqi.

The Western Theatre Command is one of the PLA’s most crucial units. It is also its biggest command. The outgoing Gen. Zhao was its commander since 2016 and had headed it during the Doklam crisis in 2017 with the Indian Army.

It was under his watch this year that China had launched its most aggressive military buildup against India since the 1962 war.

Gen. Zhao had earlier this year reached the upper limit of 65 years to hold such commands in China.

The new commander, Gen. Zhang, is reported to have no experience of the Western Theatre Command and was earlier posted in the Central Theatre Command, in charge of the capital

# India wary of new PLA’s Western Command head

# Modi, Vietnam PM to hold talks today

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

In what is being seen as a strong strategic signal to China, the stage is set on Monday for a crucial virtual summit at the Prime Ministerial level between India and its own all-weather close friend in south-east Asia, Vietnam after which a number of agreements and announcements are likely to be made, covering areas such as defence, energy, development partnership and healthcare.

It was reliably learnt on Sunday that India’s Defence Line of Credit for high speed guard boats for the Vietnamese armed forces will “be further progressed”. The two countries continue to have a shared interest in a “free, open, peaceful, prosperous and a rules-based regional order” which is expected to be reiterated at the Summit.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will co-

chair the virtual summit with Vietnam’s Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc during which “the two leaders will exchange views on wide-ranging bilateral, regional and global issues and provide guidance for the future development of India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)”. They are also likely to issue a joint vision for this.

Both India and Vietnam are understood to have been in constant touch with each other regarding their concerns over the aggressive Chinese military behaviour on various fronts in the past few months. While India is facing Chinese military intransigence in the Ladakh sector, Vietnam has been facing tensions with China in the South China Sea where it has a maritime territorial dispute with Beijing. Both countries have fought border wars with China in the past and they continue to have military tensions with Beijing.

Beijing’s security. He will be heading the PLA’s land forces, air force and rocket force in the region.

Last week, during the foreign ministry-level talks — Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs — the two sides had agreed to hold the next round of

military talks at an early date. However, sources said that right now no date has yet been set for a corps’ commanders meeting between the two sides.

The military standoff between India and China in eastern Ladakh has entered in its eighth month, with no agreement on disengagement in sight.

# MP university’s new course for ‘quacks’ stirs row

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC**  
BHOPAL, DEC. 20

A university in Madhya Pradesh has announced to introduce an online certificate course for ‘Jholachap doctors’ (quacks) to legalise their profession, inviting criticism from health experts.

Atal Behari Vajpayee Hindi University run by the state government here has issued an advertisement seeking application from quacks for admission into one-year-online certificate course, christened as ‘first aid treatment specialist diploma course’, costing ₹24,000.

The advertisement which has pictures of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former PM late Atal Behari Vajpayee and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, has said the quacks can practice legally by opening their first aid treatment clinics to treat the patients after completing the course.

The ad has invited criticism from health experts and Opposition Congress here. “It (the course) is a move to give legal cover to quacks to save them from law. This will have a serious repercussion on the health sector in the state. The Medical Council of India (MCI) should take note of it urgently”, leading anti-burn specialist of

Madhya Pradesh Dr Bhubaneswar Garg told this newspaper.

Besides, the university which has announced to give online certificate courses is not a medical institution to module the particular certificate course, he added. “Instead of upgrading the knowledge of the traditional healers, the focus of the government should be on exposing them to the modern health facilities to integrate them in the health sector”, he said.

Congress spokesman here J.P. Dhanopia described the course as ‘license to kill patients’ and said there was a move by the state government to legalise quackery to cover up its failure to develop health infrastructure in MP.

BJP spokesman Rahul Kothari, however, defended the university saying that those who have opened their clinics have been given an opportunity by the state government to run their business.

University vice-chancellor R.C. Bhardwaj said the course was being introduced as per the guidelines of University Grant Commission (UGC) and the objective behind introducing the course was to upgrade the knowledge of the traditional healers to help the victims in emergency cases by giving them first aid treatments.

## HP: FORCED CONVERSION ACT COMES INTO FORCE

**Shimla, Dec. 20:** A more stringent law against conversion by force, inducement or through marriages solemnised for the “sole purpose” of adopting a new religion, with a provision of up to seven years in jail for violators, has come into force in BJP-ruled Himachal Pradesh, over a year after it was passed by the State assembly.

The Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2019 was notified by the state home department on Friday. It replaces a 2006 law that has been repealed by the Assembly.

The development comes in the backdrop of the Uttar Pradesh government notifying an ordinance last month against forcible or fraudulent religious conversion that provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years and a maximum fine of ₹50,000 under different categories.

## MAN FLEES AFTER MARRYING 2 WOMEN IN 5 DAYS

**Khandwa, Dec. 20:** A 26-year-old software engineer allegedly married two women in five days in Madhya Pradesh and then fled, police said on Sunday.

Based on a cheating complaint filed by a woman’s family here on Saturday, the police are conducting a probe into the matter, police said. The accused, resident of Musakhedi area in Indore, allegedly married a woman in Khandwa on December 2 and another woman at Mhow in Indore on December 7, the official said quoting the complaint.

According to the complaint, one of the Khandwa victim’s relative who had gone to a wedding dinner in Mhow tehsil of Indore sent photographs to her family through mobile phone on December 7 of the accused’s second marriage in five days, the police officer said. Subsequently, the Khandwa woman’s family lodged a police complaint here, seeking registration of an FIR against the accused. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

NOV. 2 VIENNA  
ATTACK: TWO  
MORE NABBED

Vienna, Dec. 20: Austrian prosecutors said Sunday that another two suspects have been arrested for alleged involvement in the November 2 terrorist attack in Vienna.

The two men — one of whom is a 26-year-old Austrian of Afghan origin — were arrested on Friday, a spokeswoman for the prosecutors' office said.

She declined to reveal the nationality of the other suspect.

A request would be made later on Sunday for them to be held until trial, the spokeswoman added.

Last month, an Islamic State supporter who had been convicted and imprisoned for trying to join the IS group in Syria went on a shooting rampage in central Vienna, killing four people, aged between 21 and 44.

JIHADISTS KILL 5  
SOLDIERS, KIDNAP  
35 IN NIGERIA

Kano, Nigeria, Dec. 20: Five Nigerian soldiers were killed when Islamic State-aligned jihadists ambushed a military convoy and more than 30 civilians were also kidnapped in another attack, military sources said on Sunday.

The military convoy was hit in northeast Borno state on Saturday, and militants also attacked a transport convoy in the same region a day before, abducting 35 people and killing one woman.

Nigeria's Boko Haram and a splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province, have killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million as part of a decade-long conflict. Saturday's attack on the military convoy took place outside of Mafa, 44 kilometres north of the regional capital Maiduguri. "The terrorists fired an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) on the convoy which hit one of the vehicles with five soldiers in it," one security source said.

BIDEN, MEXICO  
PREZ DISCUSS  
MIGRATION

Washington, Dec. 20: US President-elect Joe Biden told Mexico's president Saturday he was committed to addressing the root causes of poor Latino migrants crossing the border into America.

Outgoing President Donald Trump made tightening the southern frontier against what he called the free and dangerous flow of people entering the US from Mexico and Central America a key pillar of his US-centric policy on immigration, including his fitful plan to build a border wall.

Biden spoke Saturday with President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and emphasized "the need to reinvigorate US-Mexico cooperation to ensure safe and orderly migration," the Biden transition team said in a statement.

"The two leaders noted a shared desire to address the root causes of migration in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and southern Mexico and to build a future of greater opportunity and security for the region," the team said.

'ICE MAN' SETS  
NEW RECORD IN  
FREEZING CABIN

Wattrelos, France, Dec. 20: Frenchman Romain Vandendorpe on Saturday set a world record for sitting immersed in ice cubes for the longest time, enduring the extreme challenge to raise money for childhood cancers.

The 34-year-old health worker remained buried up to his neck in ice in a plexiglass cabin for two hours, 35 minutes and 43 seconds, breaking the previous record by 40 minutes in the northern French town of Wattrelos.

He said he trained to "overcome human limits" by neuro-cognitive techniques based on "imagination and concentration" to put himself in "a state of daydreaming." The feat was performed before some 50 people and Vandendorpe's mantra for success was simple.

"If we train, if we give our all, we can advance (and) obtain results that can improve things." His training techniques included sitting in an ice-cold jacuzzi, training in a 500-litre freezer and then remaining buried in snow in the French ski resort of Chamonix.

He aims to donate the money raised through his feat to the Wonder Augustine association founded in Wattrelos.

## England, Italy get ready for curbs

As Christmas approaches, Europe battles a winter surge including a more infectious new strain

Belgians, Dutch  
halt UK flights  
over virus variant

Berlin, Dec. 20: The Netherlands and Belgium on Sunday banned flights from the UK and Germany considered limiting such flights in attempt to ensure that a new strain of Coronavirus sweeping across southern England does not establish a strong foothold on the continent.

The Netherlands banned flights from the UK for at least the rest of the year while Belgium issued a flight ban for 24 hours starting at midnight and also halted train links to Britain. German officials were considering "serious options" regarding incoming flights from the UK, but have not yet taken action.

The Netherlands said it will assess "with other European Union nations the possibilities to contain the import of the virus from the United Kingdom."

The three EU governments say their response comes in reaction to tougher measures imposed Saturday in London and surrounding areas by British PM Boris Johnson. He immediately put those regions into a new Tier 4 level of restrictions, saying that a fast-moving new variant of the virus that is 70 per cent more transmissible than existing strains appears to be driving the rapid spread of new infections in London and southern England.

"There's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness," the British prime minister stressed, or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said Sunday said he was issuing the flight ban for 24 hours starting at midnight "out of precaution." "There are a great many questions about this new mutation and if it is not already on the mainland," he said. He hoped to have more clarity by Tuesday.

Germany has not yet

● **THE WORLD** Health Organisation is calling on its members in Europe to strengthen measures against Coronavirus due to the new variant circulating in the United Kingdom, its European branch said.

● Outside Britain, nine cases of the new strain have been reported in Denmark, as well as one case in the Netherlands and another in Australia, according to the WHO.

● "Across Europe, where transmission is intense and widespread, countries need to redouble their control and prevention approaches," a WHO Europe spokeswoman said.

spelled out a ban but is considering limiting or halting flights from the UK as well. A high-ranking German official said that restrictions on flights from Britain are a "serious option." Germany, which holds the rotating presidency of the 27-nation EU, was in contact with its neighbours and was following all developments about the new variant closely. Europe has been walloped this fall by soaring new infections and deaths due to a resurgence of the virus, and many nations have reimposed a series of restrictions to reign in their outbreaks.

Britain has seen over 67,000 deaths in the pandemic, the second-highest confirmed toll in Europe after Italy.

Johnson on Saturday closed all non-essential shops, hairdressers, gyms and pools and told Britons to reorganise their holiday plans. No mixing of households is now allowed indoors in Tier 4 areas, including London, and only essential travel is permitted into and out of such areas.

— AP



A pedestrian, wearing a face mask or covering due to the Covid-19 pandemic, walks through an almost deserted concourse at Charing Cross train station in London on Sunday.

— AFP

Bibi gets Covid vaccine  
jab, Israel rollout starts

Ramat Gan, Israel, Dec. 20: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a Covid-19 vaccine jab on Saturday, kicking off a national rollout over the coming days.

Netanyahu, 71, and Israel's health minister were injected with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine live on TV at Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv. "I asked to be vaccinated first, together with Health Minister Yuli Edelstein, to serve as personal examples and encourage you to be vaccinated," Netanyahu told the television audience.

Each recipient must receive a booster shot in three weeks for optimal protection from the novel coronavirus. Latest Israeli health ministry figures reported over 370,000 people had tested positive for the

● **SANTA CLAUS** can safely deliver gifts to good girls and boys on Christmas, after a special visitor went all the way to the North Pole to deliver a Coronavirus vaccine. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease official in the United States, said Saturday he personally gave Old St Nick his jab.

give a booster shot in three weeks for optimal protection from the novel coronavirus. Latest Israeli health ministry figures reported over 370,000 people had tested positive for the

virus since the Jewish state confirmed its first case in February.

Just over 3,000 people have died. The vaccine will be rolled out at 10 hospitals and vaccination centres around Israel for healthcare workers from Sunday, according to the health ministry.

During the course of the week, a ministry statement said, vaccinations will be extended to the general public, starting with those aged over 60.

Netanyahu spent Monday to Friday in self-isolation after coming into contact with a confirmed virus patient.

— AFP

SYDNEY REPORTS  
30 COVID CASES  
IN LAST 24 HOURS

Sydney, Dec. 20: The outbreak in Sydney's northern beach suburbs has grown to 70 cases with an additional 30 in the last 24 hours, and authorities say they may never be able to trace the source.

While the numbers are rising, New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said Sunday there has not been evidence of massive seeding outside the northern beaches community. A new list of cases, however, shows the virus had spread to greater Sydney and other parts of the state. The government has imposed a lockdown in the area until Wednesday.

Residents will only be permitted to leave their homes for five basic reasons, including medical care, exercise, grocery shop, work or for compassionate care reasons. State Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant said that contact tracers are yet to locate patient zero.

— AP

HIGHEST DAILY  
SPIKE OF 548  
IN THAILAND

Bangkok, Dec. 20: Thailand reported more than 500 new Coronavirus cases on Saturday, the country's highest daily tally.

The 548 new cases, most of them connected with an outbreak at a wholesale seafood market on the outskirts of Bangkok, come after the country saw only a small number of infections over the past several months due to strict border and quarantine controls. Health officials said 516 of the new cases, most of them migrant workers from Myanmar, were found in connection with the outbreak at the Klang Koong shrimp market in Samut Sakhon province.

All of those infections were linked to a 67-year-old seafood vendor who tested positive for the virus earlier, the director-general of the Department of Medical Sciences, Opas Karnkawinpong, said in a news conference broadcast to all TV channels on Saturday night. The first case at the market was confirmed on Thursday.

— AP

'Be transparent in  
rollout of vaccine'

Tokyo, Dec. 20: Pharmaceutical firms must be "very transparent" about the risks and benefits of vaccines in efforts to end the coronavirus pandemic, the head of Asia's largest drugmaker has said.

Takeda, one of the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies, is not developing its own vaccine but has contracts with several firms to distribute their jabs in Japan and is also testing a virus treatment.

"We have to manage the situation well, be very transparent and extremely educative in the way we introduce products," chief executive Christophe Weber said in an interview.

"Medicines or vaccines are never perfect... there are always some side effects," said Weber, who joined Takeda in 2014 and took the top job a year later after nearly two decades at Britain's GlaxoSmithKline. But he is optimistic the industry can explain the risks and benefits properly.

The Frenchman even sees a chance that the inoculation could help push back the growing tide of

uncertainty and outright opposition to vaccination worldwide.

"It will be interesting to see. Vaccine hesitancy is strong, especially in some countries, but many vaccines are protecting against diseases that people never see," he said.

"Here it's different, everybody is seeing the impact of the coronavirus... so it could actually demonstrate the value of vaccines."

Takeda inked a deal with the Japanese government and US firm Moderna Therapeutics in October to import and distribute 50 million doses of its vaccine in Japan from the first part of 2021.

The US Food and Drug Administration on Friday granted emergency authorisation for the Moderna jab — the same permission already granted to the Pfizer/BioNTech version.

Takeda has also signed a deal with US biotech firm Novavax to produce and deliver its vaccine in Japan, if ongoing clinical trials prove successful.

— AFP

A fire broke out at an ex-lung clinic a few metres from the church in 2013, damaging its structure

## Atheists to save historic German church plank by plank

Stiege, Germany, Dec. 20: Ask Hans Powalla if he is a believer and the immediate response is a firm "no".

Yet he and other villagers in and around the German town of Stiege have embarked on the Herculean task of saving a picturesque church by moving it from the middle of a forest into the centre of town.

Former electrician Powalla, 74, said they were driven by the "unique architecture of the building" and the "meaning that it gives to the region" in the Harz mountains.

The object in question is a stave church, or wooden church, complete with dragon ornaments on the

roof, built in the Nordic style in 1905.

It is one of only three such churches from that era still standing in Germany, and is classed as a monument of national significance.

Unlike most churches which have prominent spots in town centres, this site of worship was built as a private sanctuary for patients recovering from lung diseases at a sanatorium located in the woods.

But the sanatorium was shut, and by 2009, the church fell out of use. Its isolated location makes it a target for vandals.

A fire broke out at the former lung clinic just a few metres away from the church in 2013, damaging

its structure.

"From the village, we saw the black plumes of smoke and thought 'oh no, there goes the church'," said Regina Nowolski, 69, a member of the Stiege Stave Church Association, co-founded by Powalla.

But as it turned out, the church was undamaged. "And there came the idea that something must be done now or the church will one day collapse," said Regina Bierwisch, spokeswoman for the association.

"The only solution to save the church was to take it away." While the idea was clear-cut, it was far easier said than done.

The challenges were plentiful: getting permission to move the structure,

finding a new home, and working out how to get it there. At one point, lifting the whole building with a Bundeswehr military helicopter was mulled.

Linked to all those issues is the million-euro question of how to finance the project. Undeterred, members of the association took the matter to the mayor, wrote to federal authorities on conservation and made public appeals to fundraise.

"In the beginning I found it a funny idea. But I quickly noticed that they're not giving up, they are there to see it through," Ronald Fiebelkorn, mayor of the Oberharz am Brocken region, said.

Buoyed by the wave of

enthusiasm, Fiebelkorn took it to state and federal authorities whose initial reaction had been "you're crazy". But soon, the officials also relented.

With backing and funding secured, the 1.1 million euro project (\$1.3 million) to move the church is now in its last lap.

A plot of land has been secured in Stiege town, offered by the regional authorities to the association at a symbolic price of one euro.

The association also purchased the private church from current owners, a real estate company in Berlin, for a single euro.

Groundbreaking at the new site began in November.

— AFP



View of vandalised stained-glass windows inside the Stabkirche, a stave church built in 1905 as part of the "Albert House" sanatorium for patients with lung diseases, in a wooded area outside the town of Stiege, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany.

— AFP



# DECCAN Chronicle

21 DECEMBER 2020

## Oz ‘summer of 36’ a blot that can never be erased

Team India were bowled out for their lowest score (36) after 88 years in Test cricket. Compare that with a home record of eight victories in home Tests in the last three years, each win by huge margins and the genesis of the batsmen’s problems becomes apparent. The fact that this stunning collapse of technique happened in the most modern professional era, in which players even have mental conditioning coaches aiding their preparation and fine-tuning, multiplies the shame heaped upon Virat Kohli’s men at the Adelaide Oval. This is the first time in 143 years of Test cricket that 11 batsmen plus Mr Sundries have failed to get into double figures in an innings. Such a statistical adornment further erodes the reputation of Indian batting, built by such men as Col C.K. Nayudu, Nawab of Pataudi Jr, Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar and many others.

The Australian bowlers were brilliant in executing flawlessly their plan of attack on a fresh day of the Test. They preyed upon an atavistic weakness of Indian batsmen on foreign pitches and atmosphere against a ball that moves in the air and/or off the seam at great pace.

And they did so with sustained precision with the trio of fast bowlers suppressing their egos and invariably pitching the ball right up to the batsmen and moving it just that fraction to entice the edge and bring into play the cordon of close-in catchers. Indian batting collapses may have been common enough in South Africa, England, Australia and New Zealand where Team India has won only one series in the last eight years, and that against an Australian team weakened by the absence of Smith and Warner. This one stung more.

The fear is not without basis that Indian cricketers have become too complacent in life and career as “white ball” millionaires. That none except the captain Kohli averages 40 in away Tests in the last three years is illustrative of the current teams failures. On the slow, turning pitches of home, the same men can appear invincible. The quality obviously lacking in our batsmen is mental toughness to perform their best in alien conditions, which is the eternal barometer of cricketing merit in which M.S. Dhoni’s team excelled. The team led by the current captain boasts of neither winning World Cup performances nor great Test wins outside the subcontinent.

Kohli is coming back home on paternity leave, which is an empathetic concession to family in modern life. Kane Williamson of New Zealand is another who availed of it most recently. Brian Lara named his first daughter Sydney after his favourite city with an attractive cricket ground but it is unlikely that Kohli would name his daughter after Adelaide, a British queen. While the granting of such latitude for to-be fathers in pro sport is to be lauded, Kohli would have to mind what he says publicly as any contentious comments like his being a “representation of a New India” would be subject to severe scrutiny after the Adelaide “day & nightmare”. At most times, Kohli’s bat does the talking and it is better it remains that way.

## High-stakes game in J&K

The Enforcement Directorate, a financial fraud investigation agency of the Centre, on Saturday attached residential and commercial properties of Farooq Abdullah, arguably Kashmir’s most eminent mainstream political leader. Dr Abdullah is the president of the storied political party of Kashmir, the National Conference, which had been founded by his late father, the legendary Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah. This is the party that ushered in the modern era in Kashmir with the closure of feudal rule and voluntarily opted to link its fate with “Gandhi’s India”, as Dr Abdullah recently had occasion to remind Delhi. Dr Abdullah is also a former chief minister and president of the Gupkar Alliance, a coalition of mainstream parties committed to restore J&K’s autonomous state ended forcibly — constitutionally speaking — on August 5 last year.

The ED is evidently investigating a scam in the J&K Cricket Association of which Dr Abdullah was president for about 10 years. The investigating agency’s action against Dr Abdullah rests on its belief — it is no more than that — that the former CM swindled about ₹12 crore of JKCA funds by laundering money. This is not a new allegation and there has been ample opportunity over the years for the Centre to investigate and bring charges. But instead of proving its case before a competent court, the investigating agency has taken *suo motu* action. On the face of it, this doesn’t sit right at all.

Under the Narendra Modi government, prominent opponents of the BJP in several states have had serious allegations of corruption against them scuttled once they switched sides to join BJP. Dr Abdullah has done the opposite. He has mobilised mainstream political opinion in Kashmir along with PDP leader (and also a former CM) Mehbooba Mufti to challenge New Delhi’s action of ending J&K’s constitutional autonomy on which its joining the Union of India was conditional in 1947. It is easy to see that Dr Abdullah’s political stance has irked the Centre. If it hopes to break him and by doing so break the mood of resistance in Kashmir to the ending of autonomy, New Delhi is playing a high stakes game.

### DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Printer & Publisher

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 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



## Parl dysfunctional due to competitive politics



Mohan Guruswamy

Nothing much need be said as to how dysfunctional our Parliament has now become. The blight has been a long time in the making and Parliament has now become a place more for political theatre than thoughtful consideration of the nation’s many problems. The first Lok Sabha worked for almost 4,000 hours while the 16th Lok Sabha functioned for just 1,615 hours.

Democracy is not just about an elected Parliament and periodic elections. Democracy is point-less without debate and discussion. Democracy is a system of government by compromises and accommodation. That is why it’s called a reconciliatory system, where the myriad aspirations of individuals, groups, regions and nations are sought to be reconciled towards the common good. It is hence a government by discussion and debate, for the method of making choices is by common consent and acceptance. A prime prerequisite for democratic functioning is institutional order and coherence.

Unfortunately, what we have been witnessing in the recent past is the collapse of institutional order and coherence. Parliament is where these aspirations are intended to be reconciled, and Parliament has become increasingly dysfunctional.

Politics in India has been becoming increasingly adversarial and anything goes as long as it accrues to the gains of the adversaries. Imagine a game of chess where instead of two sides — black and white — we have one more side say in red playing on a three-sided board. The objective of each of the players would be to destroy the pawns and powers of the other sides and capture

their kings. Now complicate this a bit more. The rules of the game could allow any two sides to combine for a certain length of time against the third or any other combination. This game then gets very complex, with colours switching sides at will to make gains.

The Indian political system might very well have more than three colours. But we can see three major sides in the political spectrum for now. These are the BJP, the Congress and the loose alliance of the former Janata Dal factions and the regional parties, commonly called the Third Front. From 1969 to 1989 the BJP (formerly Jan Sangh) and the precursor factions of the Janata Dal used to combine against the Congress. The political and economic goals of the three major groupings in Indian politics do not differ very much. They are all committed to a raucous democracy and an increasingly populist economic system.

The evolution of our politics into a non-ideological political competition has seen the demise of discussion and debate within Parliament. The expansion of 24x7 television news channels and their vacuous talk shows aimed at garnering TRPs rather than spreading light has only accelerated this process. Parliament still meets and passes bills and enacts laws, but most of this is done without the debate and discussion that they require and which we expect. Even the Union Budget is barely discussed. The defence budget has not been discussed for years now. Parliament even functions without quorums for most of the time.

In this situation, the political adversaries pick issues to stall important political statements the ruling party is invested in. The GST Bill is a case in point. The BJP opposed

a GST as long as it was in the Opposition. The BJP states, including Gujarat led by Narendra Modi, were very vociferous in their opposition. To the Congress then, the GST was a symbol of its commitment to the reforms process. Now the sides have been reversed. The Congress is hoisting the BJP on its own petard.

One has to look beyond sundry ambitions of individual politicians for this dysfunctionality. There are serious institutional flaws in our parliamentary system too. For instance, the Opposition has little say on the agenda for discussion. Our rules allow for somewhat stronger governmental control over the agenda than many other Parliaments.

The Speaker of Britain’s House of Commons presides over its debates, determining which members may speak, for maintaining order during the debate, and may punish members who break the rules of the House. Unlike the presiding officers of legislatures in many other countries, the Speaker remains strictly nonpartisan, and renounces all affiliation with his or her former political party when taking office as well as when leaving office. Customarily, the House of Commons re-elects Speakers who desire to continue in office for more than one term.

On the other hand, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives is an active and partisan leadership position, and the incumbent actively works to set the majority party’s legislative agenda. The office of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha is modelled after the British Speaker. But in India, with its rather lesser regard for convention, the Speaker continues to be a

**The BJP opposed a GST as long as it was in the Opposition... Now the sides have been reversed. The Congress is hoisting the BJP on its own petard.**

party hack and works closely with the government that chose him or her to further the party’s political agenda. It is little wonder then that the Lok Sabha Speaker, despite the show of deference and frequent reference by the MPs, actually commands little authority to control the House. On the other hand, Opposition members often feel stonewalled because of the Speaker’s political affiliations. This is perhaps why the Lok Sabha ever so often witnesses so much disorder and wilful disobedience. This convention of having a Speaker from within must be re-examined and we might be better served by having Parliament presided over by an eminent and commonly trusted individual, perhaps like a retired Chief Justice, who might bring a more enlightened view of right and wrong to the office.

Then there is the Anti-Defection Act that seriously limits free discussion by muzzling inner-party discussion and expression of dissent. This law disrespects the essential reality that Members of Parliament or the state legislatures are representatives of the people. That they are members of a political party is only incidental. The elected members are intended to represent and protect the interests of the people who elect them, and not that of a handful of leaders. It makes them subservient to the whip on the pain of expulsion. This tyranny of the whip has turned MPs virtually into marionettes who are forced to act according to the wishes of the party leadership. Most party leaderships are now vested within families and clans, and leadership is usually hereditary or extra-institutional.

So where do we go from here? And where will we discuss and debate just that?

*The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.*

### LETTERS

#### SHOCK TREATMENT

At Adelaide, India’s reputation as a strong batting side was laid to rest after they scored a dismal 36 and the match ended in two-and-a-half days.

Though it looks a disaster, such drubbings will act as a wake-up call and motivate the team to gel next time. The fast-paced pitch may be the Man of the Match and let us not make a mountain of a molehill, as dejected Kohli said.

**Parthasarathy Mandadi**  
Tirupati

#### AGRICULTURE LAWS

If the answer to Manish Tewari’s query, (*Is farm bills’ real aim to cover fiscal deficit? DC, Dec. 20*) is “yes”, then the government should come clean and explain to people its efficacy and how it won’t affect our *Annadata* financially since the Prime Minister is shouting from the roof-tops eulogising that the three farm laws are in the best interests of the peasants.

**K. Nehru Patnaik**  
Visakhapatnam

#### CONG CHOICE

Under the circumstances, the only choice for the Congress seems to be to get Priyanka Gandhi as party president. Rahul Gandhi could not cut ice either with the Congress seniors or with the people. One can see a lot of Indira Gandhi in Priyanka if she has the gumption to make a nationwide tour which can certainly resurrect the party.

**D.S.P. Rao**  
Kakinada

### 50 YEARS AGO IN

## DECCAN Chronicle

### Satellite to crash trunk rates

HYDERABAD, DEC. 20. Trunk call rates between main cities in the country will crash to 75 per cent and television service may almost become free, when the synchronous communication satellite is shot 40,000 km. high into the space from the Sriharikota satellite launching station (SHAR) in Andhra Pradesh towards the end of the seventies.

The communication project, based on a concrete plan of the Indian Space Research Organisation and approved in principle by the Union Government, will facilitate the operation of 3,600 telephone channels for putting through the crashed trunk call rates alone within one year. — UNI.

Kishwar Desai  
London Diary



## End in sight to Brexit limbo; Xmas lockdown a big dampener

It was the worst news that could have come for Londoners preparing for Christmas. Just as the high streets spilled over with people shopping for presents (with social distancing) the news came that a new strain of the Coronavirus is rampaging through the southeast of the country. Suddenly infections are going up more than 25 per cent. Instead of being freed up — Londoners are now looking at a very severe lockdown as this new strain has to be stopped in its tracks. The only good news is that the new strain will not “nullify” the impact of the vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine has already been administered to more than three lakhs in the UK... but of course that is just the first shot! The second shot is still awaited.

The reimposition of a severe lockdown has meant that instead of queuing up to buy presents — suddenly people are queuing up to abandon London. A Christmas spent in lockdown will be the worst blow to families who need to bond emotionally after a whole year spent, off and on,

in isolation. We have been lucky as where we live in London there are vast open green spaces — but other areas which are more crowded face the brunt of the problem.

Not more than a fortnight ago, we were told that for the five days around Christmas we will be free to celebrate Christmas almost as we used to. Three households could get together and celebrate and then part. It was great news.

No longer. Rules are changing so rapidly that it is hard to remember what you can and cannot do and there are severe and very public penalties for abandoning the rules.

Kay Burley heads the morning slot of Sky News. She can claim to be the woman with the longest time in front of camera on live TV as a journalist. We were even entertained with graphic details of her facelift a few years back, in the glossy magazines. So she is a celebrity with no hope of privacy! The morning slot is competitive and Kay has the biggest following. Recently, she

had a party for her sixtieth birthdays with friends — 10 people in all. They booked two tables at a “Covid-compliant” restaurant, one with six and the other with four guests. But then she was seen briefly popping into another club. Someone took a photo on their phone and it was in the news on an online channel, Guido Fawkes.

Sky News management took this breach (popping into another restaurant ) very seriously. Kay Burley was reprimanded and put on suspension till sometime in the New Year. She had to apologise. Her invited guests included Beth Rigby who is the Sky political correspondent. She was also suspended. No one is quite sure which regulation was broken but it looked bad in the public eyes. Yes, ministers and advisers had broken the rules six months back without as much as an apology. No longer.

Of course, there is also the continuing good news of the vaccine being administered systematically, largely to the 80 years and above group. Beginning Tuesday

of last week, the first few to be vaccinated included an Indian couple, Hari Shukla and his wife Ranjan. The Queen will get it soon along with Prince Philip. This is the first bit the government has got right after a year of blundering around Covid. But who is complaining? Meghnad just got his shot! NHS, that national treasure, follows up on each case, ensuring no one is left out.

Sadly, theatres had just opened full of hope 10 days ago but they have had to shut again. The Christmas Pantomime shows, which are a favourite of children where stars and even famous politicians play bit parts, were also revived. William and Kate took their children to see one. They were lucky. Now the Pantos are shut.

Our other anxiety is about Brexit. That is another contagion that gobbled up UK and spat out another Partition... when the UK leaves the European Union. It is a complicated process and negotiations have been going on forever.

It is a sort of push me plus pull you. We hear one day that the deal is done and the next that we will “Brexit” with no-deal. Either way the uncertainty will be over in the first week of January. But, meanwhile, we may run out fresh fruit and medicines, which come daily from the continent! Our export lorries will also be held up in long queues.

The deadline is midnight on December 31. At least, they are promising that Big Ben (which is still under repair) will chime the arrival of the New Year.

But the rest, no one knows. Between A for anxiety, B for Brexit and C for Coronavirus, we may need a new alphabet and a new language very soon to express our feelings about 2020, as it leaves us with a parting shot. V is both for victory and for vaccine!

*Kishwar Desai is an award-winning author. The Longest Kiss: The Life and Times of Devika Rani is her new book.*



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,960.69	0.15
Nifty 50	13,760.55	0.14
S&P 500*	3,709.41	-0.35
Dollar (₹)	73.56	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	0.66
Euro (₹)	90.10	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,644.21	0.042
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	52.17	0.67
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.959	0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.926	-0.004

\* As of 9:30 PM IST

India, US mutual fund sectors get thumbs up

The mutual fund industry of India and the US received “top” grade for robust disclosure practices in areas such as fees and transparency of fund holdings, according to a global study by Morningstar. However, India could work to improve the level of details provided by fund firms in discussions of performance and risk within fund literature, the Morningstar report said in its sixth edition

Foreigners invest ₹54K cr in Indian equities in Dec.



Foreign portfolio investors pumped in ₹54,980 crore in Indian markets in December so far amidst availability of excess liquidity in global markets and expectation of fresh stimulus package by various central banks. As per data, FPIs invested a net ₹48,858 crore into equities and ₹6,122 crore into debt segment between December 1 and 18. This took the total net investment to ₹54,980 crore during this period.

BoB completes integration of Dena, Vijaya

Bank of Baroda on Sunday said it has completed integration of 3,898 branches of erstwhile Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank with itself. In a first such amalgamation, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank were merged with BoB from April 1, 2019. It has completed the integration of 1,770 erstwhile Dena Bank branches in December 2020, and had completed the integration of 2,128 erstwhile Vijaya Bank branches in Sept. 2020.

Power usage in India grows in first half of Dec

India's power consumption grew 4.8 per cent to 50.36 billion units (BU) in the first half of December this year, showing consistency in economic activities, as per government data. Power consumption was recorded at 48.04 billion units during December 1-15 last year, according to the power ministry data. For the full month of December 2019, power consumption was 101.08 billion units.



RIL, BP to get \$4.06 price cap for KG gas

New Delhi, Dec. 20: Reliance Industries and its partner BP will get only \$4.06 a unit for the new gas they have started to produce from the eastern offshore KG-D6 field even though they have discovered a higher rate in an open market auction, sources said.

Reliance-BP in November 2019 auctioned initial gas from the R-Series field at a biddable percentage of Brent crude oil price. If Brent crude oil stays in the current range of \$50 to \$51 a barrel, the price comes to \$4.2 to 4.4 per million British thermal unit, two sources at the buyers of R-Series gas said.

Even though operators have pricing freedom, they can't sell gas at a rate higher than the cap the government notifies every six months. The cap for six months to March 31, 2021, is \$4.06 per mmbtu and so Reliance-BP would get only that amount for the remainder of the current fiscal, they said.



Essar Steel, Adani Group and state-owned GAIL in November 2019 bought the majority of the initial 5 million standard cubic meters per day of gas planned to be produced from R-Series in the KG-D6 block by bidding between 8.5 and 8.6 per cent of dated Brent price. Emails sent to Reliance and BP for comments remained unanswered.

The rate discovered in the November 2019 auction at the lower end of the Brent price band is the same as the one that Reliance got in the first

five years of production from Dhirubhai-1 and 3 and MA fields in the KG-D6 block. These fields ceased to produce a few months back. Reliance got \$4.205 per mmbtu for gas from D1 and D3 and MA fields during April 2019 and March 2014. It would have got double of that rate if a new formula proposed by the Rangarajan committee was approved but the new BJP government scrapped it and brought a new formula on pricing gas at rates prevalent in export surplus nations

such as the US and Russia. The rates came to \$5.05 in 2014 and are currently at \$1.79 per mmbtu.

Sources said the government in 2016 allowed a higher price for any new gas to be produced from a difficult project such as the deep sea field. R-Cluster field fell in that definition and gas from it was free to be sold but subject to the price cap. The price cap for October 2020 to March 2021 is \$4.06 per mmbtu, down from \$5.61 in the previous six month.

Reliance and BP had on November 18 stated that they have the commencement of natural gas production from Asia's deepest gas project, R-Cluster or R-Series.

The two firms are investing USD 5 billion in bringing to production three deepwater gas projects in block KG D6 R-Cluster, Satellites Cluster, and MJ which together are expected to meet about 15 per cent of India's gas demand by 2023. — PTI

Network restructure increases cyber attacks

New Delhi, Dec 20: The sudden rush to provide remote access to employees by restructuring network and security systems during the lockdown made India vulnerable to ransomware attacks in the third quarter of 2020, according to cyber security firm Check Point Software Technologies.

Due to the immediate push, several IT companies were unable to scale up their cloud security

postures which led to increased opportunity for cyber criminals to carry out attacks, Check Point Software Technologies India and Saarc managing director Sundar N. Balasubramanian said.

According to the company's research, India was ranked second after the US among the top 5 countries most affected by ransomware attacks in the third quarter.

Sri Lanka, Russia and

Turkey were at third, fourth and fifth position, respectively, in the list of most affected countries by ransomware attacks.

In a survey by Check Point, 71 per cent of respondents globally, including in India, reported an increase in cyberattacks during February-March 2020, and 95 per cent said they faced added IT security challenges with provision of large-scale remote access for

employees and managing shadow IT usage.

"The pandemic outbreak resulted in lockdown restrictions being imposed, and working from home became a way of life for most employees. Organisations in India found themselves having to restructure their network and security fabrics overnight, compressing several years' worth of IT changes into just a few weeks," he said.

— PTI

GOLD DEALERS OFFER DISCOUNTS FOR FIRST TIME IN SIX WEEKS



Bengaluru/Mumbai, Dec. 20: Physical gold in India was sold at a discount for the first time in six weeks as a rebound in local prices to a one-month peak squeezed demand, while purchases slowed in other Asian hubs ahead of the year-end holidays.

India's local gold futures jumped to ₹50,642 per 10 grams on Thursday, the highest level since November 18.

"Demand is very subdued. Retail buyers are postponing purchases because of a price rise," said Ashok Jain, proprietor of Mumbai-based gold wholesaler Chenaji Narsinghi.

Dealers were offering a discount of up to \$1 an ounce over official domestic prices this week, inclusive of a 10 per cent import tax and three per cent sales tax, down from last week's premium of \$2.5.

In China, discounts of \$16-\$20 an ounce were being offered compared with last week's range of \$19-\$24, while gold was being sold at a premium of around \$0.50 cents in Hong Kong.

"It's the year-end and jewellers are trying to finish the inventories and they have adequate, so they are not making any new purchases," said Dick Poon, general manager at Heraeus Metals Hong Kong Ltd.

China, traditionally the world's biggest consumer of gold, saw a sharp drop in gold consumption due to the coronavirus pandemic, forcing bullion sellers to offer steep discounts in the past few months. "China is still fighting the aftermath of the virus... People are too cautious to spend their savings right now," said Ronald Leung, chief dealer for Lee Cheong Gold Dealers. — Reuters

Auto firms drive ahead with hope

New Delhi, Dec. 20: Having endured and managed to recover from the disruptions induced by a once-in-a-century event, the Indian auto sector is cautiously looking forward to 2021 with hopes of putting up a better show in the post-Covid-19 world, although a lot will hinge on how the economy grows.

Already battered by an unprecedented slowdown before the coronavirus pandemic, the resilience of the Indian auto industry was tested severely when the nationwide lockdown was announced towards March-end.

Passenger vehicle sales in India, the barometer of the automobile industry's performance, plunged 78.43 per cent in the April-June period this year hit by the pandemic, declining for the ninth straight quarter and making it the longest slowdown in 20 years.

It is estimated that during the prolonged lockdown, the auto industry suffered losses of more

than ₹2,300 crore in turnover for every single day of closure.

In order to overcome the unprecedented challenge, the auto industry players embraced digitisation to adapt to the new normal to serve customers while learning to be nimble footed to keep factories running under Covid-19 SOPs and concentrating on financial health by reducing costs and generating free cash flows.

The pandemic-induced lockdown also had an impact on the country's transition to BS-VI emission norm from April 1.

Reflecting on the impact of the global health crisis on the sector, Society of Indian Automobile Association director-general Rajesh Menon said that the growing preference for personal mobility and the gradual opening of economic activities have lent some momentum and the industry is now seeing signs of recovery in some of the industry segments. — PTI

Stainless steel firms seek zero duty on input metals

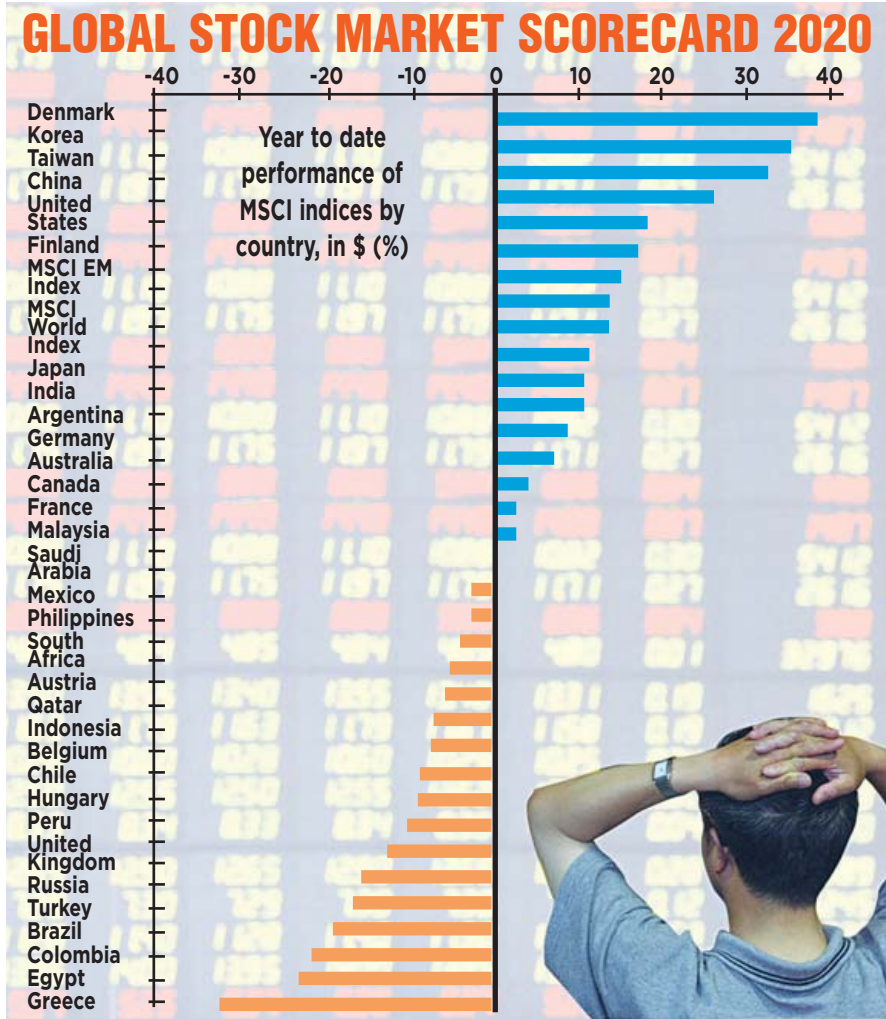
New Delhi, Dec. 20: Ahead of the Budget, the Indian Stainless Steel Development Association (ISSDA) has urged the government to remove import duty on ferro-nickel and stainless steel scrap.

Currently, ferro-nickel and stainless steel scrap attract basic customs duty (BCD) of 2.5 per cent. In its recommendations to the finance ministry for the upcoming Budget for financial year 2021-22, ISSDA has also sought removal of import duty on graphite electrodes.

ISSDA said "it has appealed to exempt the 2.5 per cent BCD levied while

importing key raw materials, including ferro-nickel and stainless steel scrap".

At present, both the raw materials are unavailable in India, making their import mandatory, it said. Removal of duty on ferro-nickel and stainless steel scrap is a long-standing demand of the industry.



Ethiopia sets up biz chamber in India

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 20

Ethiopia, a country with long standing trade and commerce relations with India, has become the first African nation to set up a chamber of commerce to strengthen the trade and commerce alliance between both the countries.

Ethiopia is one-third in size to India in area and is the second most populous country in Africa with population of 11.5 crore. India is the third important source of imports for Ethiopia, contributing 10.1 per cent of all of Ethiopia's imports.

Inauguration ceremony was held for the Indo Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce & Industry in the presence of the ambassador of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in India, Tizita Mulugeta and Demeke Atnafu Ambulo, consul general of Ethiopia in Mumbai.

"India is one of the top trading partners of Ethiopia and going forward we want to strengthen our ties with leading Indian Business Groups," he said.

"For more understanding of market demand and such types of associations will be very helpful for the business community to get familiar each other's country," said Mukund Mehta, director, Indo-Ethiopian Chamber Of Commerce.

Centre identifies 1.3 lakh housing units for poor

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 20

The government has identified 1.32 lakh government-funded vacant housing units for the Affordable Rental Housing Scheme meant for migrant workers in 21 states. However, all the states, which have such identified units, have not signed Memorandum of Agreement for the scheme.

As per the ministry of housing and urban affairs, 29 states and Union Territories have already signed the MoA (Memorandum of Agreement) for implementation of ARHC. The Centre has also identified 1,32,988 housing units for ARHC in 21 states.

The highest number of units identified for the scheme falls in Delhi. Though Delhi has 39 per cent share or 51,594 identified units, it has not signed the MoA for the scheme yet, as per the data available on the website of ministry of housing and urban affairs.

Though the government has identified units in Jammu and Kashmir, the Union Territory also has not signed the MoA. Among those already signed MoA, Maharashtra has the highest number of units- 32,202.

As per the ministry data, 3,363 identified units - 1703 in Chandigarh, 830 each in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand - have been allocated. "We are not sure whether these units have been allocated to concessionaires who will



convert them for the scheme or migrants have started occupying the units," said Anuj Puri, chairman of Anarock Property Consultants.

As per the first model of ARHC, concessionaires selected through a bidding process, will repair or retrofit, develop, operate and transfer (RDOT) by converting existing government-funded vacant houses into Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) for a period of 25 years.

"Several units built under previous housing schemes of the Central government are lying vacant in different cities. The first model aims at utilizing them for the scheme," said Puri.

As per the second model, public or private entities can construct, operate and maintain AHRCs on their own vacant land. Under this model, the Ministry had issued an Expression of Interest on October 14. The last date of submission of EOI is January 11, 2021.

HOME LOAN TICKET SIZE UP TO OVER ₹26 LAKH IN 2020 ON INCENTIVES



New Delhi, Dec. 20: The average home loan ticket size increased to over ₹26 lakh in 2020 despite the pandemic as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, fall in interest rates as well as lower registration costs in some circles evinced customers' interest in buying properties, according to a study by BankBazaar.com.

Due to the pandemic, people's priorities have changed and they are evaluating their spends and investments very closely, the fintech player said.

The online marketplace for financial products, which also provides free credit scores, said even as 2020 had very lean months during the lockdown, gradual economic revival and safe access to credit through digital KYC pushed credit uptake to about 80 per cent of pre-Covid levels.

Change in social and work structure due to the pandemic also convinced investors to look at bigger properties and loans.

"Consequently, the average home loans ticket size saw a strong increase from ₹23.82 lakh in 2019 to ₹26.41 lakh in 2020. The average ticket size for women went up from ₹25.66 lakh to ₹31.20 lakh compared with an increase from ₹23.64 lakh to ₹26.04 lakh for men," the report said. However, the traction was the lowest in high-value segment.

Share of home loans below ₹30 lakh decreased to 68 per cent from 72 per cent a year ago. Demand from non-metros is the biggest driver for recovery, it said. During the year, the biggest home loan of ₹1.46 crore was from Bengaluru, while among non-metros, the highest was ₹64.50 lakh from Lucknow.



## SHORT TAKES

## Gold for Simranjit, Manisha at WC

**New Delhi:** Indian women boxers Simranjit Kaur (60kg) and Manisha Moun (57kg) notched up gold medals with contrasting final wins in the Cologne World Cup in Germany. Manisha defeated compatriot Saskhi Choudhary 3-2, while Simranjit got the better of German Maya Klienhaus 4-1 to finish on top in their respective categories. India finished the competition at the second spot overall after claiming three gold, two silver and four bronze medals. On Saturday, Asian Games champion Amit Panghal (52kg) had claimed the sole gold among men. Veteran Satish Kumar (+91kg) had to settle for a silver after an injury forced him to withdraw from the finals. — Agencies

## BDL cruise to an easy victory

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Riding on Yeshwanth Reddy's brilliant spell, BDL continued their dominance against R. Dayanand on the final day of their A-1 Division three-day league match. Team Dayanand looked pale in the second innings before Yeshwanth's three wickets restricted them to a measly 165 for 9, continuing their poor run in the first innings. Sandeep Goud's superb unbeaten 70 and Hima Teja's 56 ensured the win for BDL. **A-1 DIVISION (THREE-DAY)** ■ BDL 292/9 in 90 overs & 213/2 in 40 overs (Sandeep Goud 70 n.o., K. Hima Teja 56 n.o.) bt R. Dayanand 160 in 46.5 overs & 165/9 in 40 overs (K. Bhagath Varma 47, R. Yeshwanth Reddy 3/18, P. Shv Anurag 2/9). **Points:** BDL 6, R. Dayanand 0.

## Hyderabad suffer first loss of season

**Vasco:** Vignesh Dakshinamurthy pulled off a stunning goal to set up Mumbai City FC's 2-0 win over Hyderabad FC in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday. In a match where both sides struggle to create clear-cut chances, Vignesh's acrobatic 38th-minute strike stood out as a genuine quality moment. Adam Le Fondre put Sergio Lobera's men further ahead in the 59th minute as Hyderabad tasted their first defeat of the season. The eagerness that marked much of the game was evident from the fact that Vignesh's goal was the only shot on target in the first half. With Hugo Boumous missing yet again, Mumbai City's creative struggles that plagued them in their last match against Jamshedpur, continued on Sunday as well. — PTI

## NZ hammer Pak in second T20

**Hamilton:** Opener Tim Seifert carried his bat for 84 in an unbroken 129-run partnership with Kane Williamson to steer New Zealand to a nine-wicket win over Pakistan in the second Twenty20 international Sunday and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. Williamson finished 57 not out in his return to the short format as New Zealand overtook Pakistan's total of 163-6 with four balls to spare. Seifert took his runs from only 63 balls with eight fours and three sixes, unleashing a wide variety of shots on a flat wicket against a Pakistan attack that struggled to find consistently challenging lengths. Williamson was scratchy at first, then became unstoppable, reaching his 12th T20 international half century from 37 balls. — AP **Brief scores: Pakistan 163/6** (Hafeez 99\*, Southee 4/21) lost to **New Zealand 164/1** (Seifert 84\*, Williamson 57\*).

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Chelsea vs West Ham from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

## WWE

**Table, Ladders & Chairs:** Bouts from 8 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

## UFC

**UFC Fight Night:** Edwards vs Chimaev from 7 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

Printed and published from Anantapur by **K.Sudhakar** on behalf of **Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited** at Deccan Chronicle Press, Bye-Pass Road, Tapovanam, Anantapur - 515004 RNI Registration No. APENG/1999/401 Editorial : 276068 Phones : 276904, 276905 Editor: **Kaushik Mitter**

## THE FALL GUYS

Saha, Shaw to be benched; Gill, Rahul, Pant in mix for Boxing Day

**New Delhi, Dec. 20:** Veteran wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha and young opener Prithvi Shaw are unlikely to be picked for the remaining Tests in Australia as India look to ring in wholesale changes after the batting debacle in Adelaide.

It is understood that young Shubman Gill, after a couple of impressive knocks in the warm-up games, is seen as a replacement of Shaw as senior star Rohit Sharma will not be available until the third Test match in Sydney.

With Saha's batting not giving any confidence to the dressing room, the team management will certainly look at Rishabh Pant, who had scored a hundred Down Under during his previous tour, as keeping might not be a factor on pitches with firm and even bounce.

K.L. Rahul and Mohammed Siraj are the two others in fray to enter the playing XI and those would be forced changes due to the absence of skipper Virat Kohli and senior pacer, Mohammed Shami, who is out with a fractured wrist.

The 36-year-old Saha could well be running the last lap of his international career as young and feisty Pant is set to be preferred by the team management over the next three Test matches and if he does well, against England, too.

As far as Saha is concerned, his inept batting in SENA countries hasn't gone unnoticed (he doesn't have a half-century there), but former chairman of selectors M.S.K. Prasad said that during his regime, certain plans were chalked out on the Saha-Pant conundrum.

"Look, our committee was clear that Rishabh Pant will be our first choice keeper in places like England and Australia. Only when we are looking at matches in India where you don't need batting after number six most times, you can have a specialist keeper," Prasad said on Sunday.

"I believe Rishabh has worked on his fitness issues during the past month and looked in good touch during the pink ball practice game. So I would agree with the team management if they give Rishabh a go for the next three Tests," Prasad said.

— PTI



India players are in huddle before their first Test against Australia at the Adelaide Oval.

— AP

## Burns fit for MCG Test, Pucovski out

**Melbourne, Dec. 20:** Hit on the elbow during the pink-ball series opener, Australia's Joe Burns was on Sunday cleared to play the second Test against India, but young Will Pucovski was ruled out as he continues to recover from concussion.

Burns suffered a nasty blow on his elbow off a Jasprit Bumrah delivery during the first Test at Adelaide which Australia won by eight wickets.

"Joe Burns has been cleared of serious dam-

● **With Australia grappling with injuries in the run-up to the series, there were doubts that Joe Burns too might join the list but scans cleared all fears of any major injury to his arm.**

age to his arm, while concussed young gun Will Pucovski has been ruled out of a Boxing Day Test debut," a report in *'The West Australian'* said.

With Australia grappling with injuries in the run-up to the series, there were doubts that Burns

too might join the list but scans cleared all fears of any major injury to his arm.

Pucovski was set to make his debut in the first Test after David Warner was ruled out due to a groin injury. But he was hit on the helmet

during the first warm-up, ruling him out of the opening day-night Test.

According to the report, "Australia are adopting an understandably conservative approach as the Victorian (Pucovski) recovers from his ninth concussion."

Warner, who was flown out to Melbourne on Saturday due to the sudden outbreak in Sydney, is also racing against time to get fit for the Boxing day Test.

— PTI

## Ponting backs Oz to go for clean sweep

**Melbourne, Dec. 20:** The humiliation in Adelaide has opened up "serious wounds" for India and Australia now have a "good chance" of inflicting on the visitors a whitewash in the four-Test series, reckons former captain Ricky Ponting.

India were bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the Border-Gavaskar trophy.

"Now there's some serious wounds opened up. There could be a good chance (of a sweep)," Ponting told *cricket.com.au*.

"Let's hope we do get a result in Melbourne and

## CA STICKS WITH SYDNEY TEST PLAN DESPITE COVID SURGE

**Sydney, Dec. 20:** Cricket Australia on Sunday said they were pressing ahead with plans to hold the third Test against India in Sydney despite a growing coronavirus outbreak in the city.

A Covid-19 cluster has risen to 68 cases since it emerged on Thursday.

The Test is due to be held from January 7 and CA

interim chief Nick Hockley said they were watching the situation closely, with contingency plans in place.

"We have made no changes to our schedule and our preference remains to play the match at the Sydney Cricket Ground," he said as speculation mounted that it would be moved.

— AFP

if we do, I think India's going to find it really hard to bounce back and win a game."

India will miss skipper

Virat Kohli in the remaining three Tests as he returns home for the birth of his child and Ponting said it will be a

real test for the visitors as they look to pick up the pieces under the captaincy of Ajinkya Rahane.

"We'll learn a lot about them, won't we? With Kohli not being there as well there's almost no one to pick them back up after a loss like that," Ponting said.

India will need to find their best playing XI for the Boxing Day Test, especially after the below-par performances of young opener Prithvi Shaw, who made 0 and 4, and wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha.

Ponting is in favour of giving a chance to dashing wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant and young batter Shubman Gill in Melbourne.

— PTI

## Spurs' title hopes suffer huge blow

**London, Dec. 20:** Leicester put a major dent in Tottenham's Premier League title challenge on Sunday, climbing to second in the table on Sunday.

Spurs were top of the table before their mid-week clash with Liverpool but now find themselves six points adrift of the champions after a damaging 2-0 defeat at home.

Vardy put away-day specialists Leicester ahead with the final kick of the first half after Brendan Rodgers's side were awarded a penalty.

Spurs had a huge escape early in the second half as James Maddison had a goal ruled out for the

most marginal of off-sides. But Leicester doubled their lead just before the hour mark via an own goal.

## LIVERPOOL RUN RIOT

Just five points separate the 2016 champions from Chelsea in eighth spot but Liverpool looked ominous in a 7-0 demolition of Crystal Palace on Saturday.

The Reds sent a chilling warning to the rest of the Premier League as Arsenal's crisis deepened following 1-2 defeat at Everton. Jurgen Klopp's champions — despite being dogged by injuries this season — are five points clear of neighbours Everton. — AFP

## Messi emulates Pele's record

**Madrid, Dec. 20:** Lionel Messi scored his 643rd goal for Barcelona on Saturday to equal Pele's record of goals for a single club as the Spanish giants were held 2-2 by Valencia.

Messi, 33, headed in from Jordi Alba's cross after his first-half penalty was saved to equal the mark set by the Brazilian great for Santos.

"These figures are impressive, we will never have a player so effective at this club," admitted coach Ronald Koeman.

But Messi was eventually left frustrated on Saturday as a dogged Valencia forced a draw to leave Barcelona eight points behind leaders

Atletico Madrid, who beat Elche 3-1 earlier in the day.

Barcelona started slowly and went a goal behind to Mouctar Diakhaby's unchallenged header from a corner after half an hour.

Antoine Griezmann earned the penalty that led to Messi's record-equalling goal when the France attacker was nudged over by Jose Gaya.

Messi's spot-kick was saved by Jaume Domenech but the ball rebounded and from Alba's dinked cross, the Argentina forward headed the ball into the net to draw level with Pele.

— AFP

## Physical education pioneers honoured

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

The International Federation of Physical Education, Fitness and Sports Science Association, Hyderabad, in collaboration with Indian Federation of Computer Science in sports conducted the IFPEFSSA International Virtual Award Ceremony at Nizam College on Sunday.

Various professors in Physical Education and Sports Science were honoured at the event.

The International webinar on Sprints and IFPEFSSA awards was inaugurated by athletics coach N. Ramesh, a Dronacharya awardee, and Prof. L. B. Laxmikanth Rathod, Principal, Nizam College. Y. Emmanuel S. Kumar — former national level athlete, captain of the state handball team that won the national championship, selector, Amateur Athletics Federation of India official and an administrator — was among the awardees.

He also has a collective

experience of 40 years having worked as physical education director in different schools. The Hyderabad Public School (Begumpet) being the most prominent of them.

**Following are the prominent awardees:** Y. Emmanuel S. Kumar (India — Physical Education and Sports Science), Dr Garry Kaun (Malaysia — Health Science), Dr Lordinio A. Vergera (Philippines — Physical Education and Sports Science), Dr Marisa P. Na Nongkhai (Thailand — Physical Education), Dr Gurdeep Singh (University Sports), Dr Gaganedu Dash (University Sports), E. Chiranjeevi (former national boxing coach), Ashok Kumar (for promotion of korfbal), Dr M. Madhavi (Sports Physiology), Dr Rakesh Malik (University Sports), Prof Bhaskar Salvi (Physical Education), Prof K. Chandrasekharan (Physical Education), Dr M. S. Pasodi (Physical Education), Dr S. S. Shaik (Physical Education), Dr Ghansham K. Dhokrat (Physical Education), Dr S. Jayaram (Research in Sports Science), Dr Nita Bandopadhyay (Research in Physical Education), Dr Nandlal T. (Research in Physical Education), Dr Ashwani Kumar (Young Researcher in Physical Education).



Y. Emmanuel S. Kumar (centre) receives the IFPEFSSA International Sports Leadership Award from Nizam College Principal Prof. L. B. Laxmikanth Rathod (second from left) in Hyderabad on Sunday.

## KOHLI CLOSES GAP WITH SMITH IN TEST RANKINGS

**Dubai, Dec. 20:** India may have suffered an embarrassing defeat in the series-opener against Australia but their skipper Virat Kohli fractionally closed the gap with top-ranked Test batsman Steve Smith, following his 74-run knock in the first innings in Adelaide.

Kohli gained two points for his half-century to get to 888 while Smith (911) lost 10 points in the table after scoring 1 and 1 in his two innings.

Marnus Labuschagne's innings of 47 and 6 in the low-scoring match pushed him to a career-best 839 points in the latest ICC rankings for Test batsmen.

— PTI

