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Merit twist: AP students enter Gandhi

Local students deprived of chance to join top-ranked institutes

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

Several students from Andhra Pradesh have secured admission in government medical colleges in Telangana state, including the prestigious Gandhi and Osmania, allegedly in violation of rules, thereby depriving local students of an opportunity to join these top-ranked institutions.

The allotment process

● **THE ALLOTMENT** process adopted by the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences (KNRUHS) in Phase 2 counselling resulted in at least 40 students from AP, a majority of whom are otherwise ineligible, making it to the government colleges in Telangana state and locals losing an equal number of seats.

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

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

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All the students in Gandhi and Osmania medical colleges who got admission in the unreserved category in the Phase 2 counselling belong to either Andhra University or Sri Venkateswara University regions and same is the case with many other government colleges in Telangana state.

■ **Page 2: 'Both universities cannot be right'**

International cyber-crime gang busted for loans through apps

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, DEC 27

The cybercrime unit of the Warangal Commissionerate and the Jangaon Police jointly busted a five-member international gang luring people with easy loans via instant loan apps. Three of them were arrested while a search is on for two main accused.

Commissioner of Police P Promod Kumar said Erick Penglu of China who came on a business visa to India last year created four instant financing apps in association with Padra Bindu Ray of Odisha.

The gang opened an office in Bengaluru in the name of Shine Bay Technologies India Pvt Ltd and started financing gullible people through their apps with help from accomplices Debashis Das, Sanjay BR and Santhosh Kumar Naik, all residents of Bengaluru. The accused used to fleece their customers by charging exorbitant interest rates.

"If the customers failed



Debashis Das



Sanjay B.R.



Santhosh Kumar Naik

● **Mobile phones and laptops seized from the culprits.**

● **Accused Debashis Das, Sanjay BR and Santhosh Kumar Naik arrested**

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

to pay, the gang would threaten them via its tele-callers. The gang used to send abusive messages to

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

The gang secured the contact list of the customers through their app.

The police started a probe after one Bandaru Srinivas of Jangaon lodged a complaint on December 18. Srinivas secured a loan of Rs45,000 through the app. The organisers harassed him after he failed to repay the loan amount.

The CP formed a special team with the Cybercrime and Jangaon police under

the supervision of West Zone DCP Srinivas Reddy.

Three of the gang-members were taken into custody in Bengaluru and brought to Jangaon. Two laptops, three cell phones and SIM cards were seized from them. A manhunt has been launched for arrest of Erick Penglu and Padra Bindu Ray. The commissioner praised the team of Jangaon Inspector Malleshwar, cybercrime inspector Janardhan Reddy, cyber SI Ravi Kumar, Sathish, assistant analytical officer Prashanth etc for cracking the case.

Coronavirus no bar in Mumbai



People, not adhering to social distancing norms, visit Juhu Chowpatty amid the coronavirus pandemic, in Mumbai, Sunday.

— PTI

ELECTION | MODE

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC 27

The Union home ministry could approach the Election Commission as early as January for a discussion regarding the security arrangements and deployment of Central para-military forces for West Bengal Assembly election. The election in the state is likely to be held in April next year.

Sources claim the home ministry feels that there

could be large-scale violence during the Bengal polls this time for which "unprecedented security arrangements are required." With the BJP making aggressive inroads into Bengal before the crucial elections, it is largely believed that there could be intense violence in the run-up to the Assembly polls for which adequate security deployment would have to be done.

Already Bengal has witnessed clashes between the

● **SOURCES CLAIM** the home ministry feels that there could be large-scale violence during the Bengal polls this time for which "unprecedented security arrangements are required."

BJP and the Trinamul Congress workers, with the latest incident of violence being the attack on the convoy of BJP president J.P. Nadda on the outskirts of Kolkata a few days

NITISH GIVES JD(U) CHIEF POST TO AIDE

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, DEC. 27

Amid strains with alliance partner BJP, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar resigned from the post of JD(U) national president on Sunday and handed over charge to one of his closest aides and a member of the Rajya Sabha, R.C.P Singh. The decision was taken during the national executive meeting of the JD(U). Mr Singh's elevation was on expected lines since he was actively involved in most of the party's policy decisions including advising Mr Kumar during Bihar Assembly elections.

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

All motor vehicle papers valid till March 31: Centre

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

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

"The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has extended the validity of vehicular documents like DLs, RCs, permits etc till March 31, 2021 in the light of need to prevent spread of COVID-

19. Ministry has today issued a directory to the states and Union Territory administrations in the regard," a MoRTH statement said. Earlier through various notifications, it was advised that the validity of fitness, permit (all types), licence, registration or any other concerned document(s) may be treated to be valid till December 31, 2020. The latest advisory says, "Taking into consideration the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it is further advised that the validity of all of the above referred documents may be treated to be valid till March 31, 2021. This covers all documents whose validity has expired since 1st February, 2020 or would expire by March 31, 2021."

— PTI

Covid vaccine dry run in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

With the Covid-19 dry run programme scheduled for Monday, Krishna district collector A. Md Imtiaz inspected the arrangements at the government general hospital (GGH) on Sunday. Imtiaz said that the two-day corona vaccination dry run will take-off in five centres in the district, including the GGH, Prakasnagar urban

primary healthcare centre, Poorna Heart Institute (private hospital) at Vijayawada, government school at Tadigadapa and Uppulur PHC.

He said that Krishna district was selected as a pilot project for the dry run because of the official machinery's proven efficiency. He said that three rooms were set up for the purpose at each centre. The registration process will be in the first room,

vaccination in the second and observation in the third room. He mentioned that a ten-bed separate room is kept handy for emergencies and medical professionals are available for emergencies. Imtiaz said that each centre has five vaccination officers and 25 medical staff for whom the required training was completed. He said they will not administer any vaccine during the programme.

WEATHER

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

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

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES (+18,712) DEATHS (+248)

1,02,07,065 1,47,907

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+472) (+2)

TS: 2,84,863 1,531

(+349) (+2)

AP: 8,81,061 7,094

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

8,09,26,235

DEATHS

17,68,844

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana

Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Chaturdasi full day

Star: Rohini till 3.35 pm

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

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

Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 12, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.39 am

Zohar: 12.27 pm

Asar: 4.14 pm

Maghrib: 5.56 pm

Isha: 7.09 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.45 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.50 PM

MOONSET 4.58 AM

MOONRISE 4.24 PM

COUNTER POINT



Shh! They are political infiltrators!

SHORT TAKES

Shimla gets first snowfall of season

Shimla: Shimla received the first snowfall of the season on Sunday, bringing cheer to tourists who come here in large numbers to celebrate Christmas and New Year. Light snowfall started around 9.15 pm at Mall Road, Jakhu, Chhota Shimla and other areas of the city.

The Meteorological Department has predicted rain and snowfall in isolated places of HP on Monday. Several places in the state, including Keylong, Kalpa and Manali, shivered at sub-zero temperatures. Lahaul-Spiti's administrative centre Keylong remained the coldest place in the state.

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

New Delhi: Small businesses and dealers will not be impacted by the new government rule of paying at least one per cent of GST liability in cash as only entities with annual turnover of ₹6 crore and above are required to follow the new rule, sources in the finance ministry said. After unearthing use of fake invoices to evade GST, the CBIC had last week amended rules to make it mandatory for businesses with monthly turn-over of over ₹50 lakh to pay at least one per cent of their GST liability in cash.

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HYDERABAD TO GOA, VISAKHAPATNAM, DARBHANGA, NASHIK, SHIRDI AND JHARSUGUDA.

FLIGHTS*	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY	EFFECTIVE DATES
Hyderabad – Goa	20:20	21:40	Daily	Operational
Hyderabad – Visakhapatnam	10:50	12:30	Daily	Operational
Hyderabad – Darbhanga	07:35	09:40	Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri & Sun	18 th Jan, 2021
Hyderabad – Nashik	09:20	11:00	Mon, Sat & Sun	Operational
Hyderabad – Shirdi	14:40	16:20	Daily	Operational
Hyderabad – Jharsuguda	15:25	17:10	Daily	Operational

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OTHER STORIES

YOUTH SHOULD
KEEP AWAY FROM
VICES: ASPDC CORRESPONDENT
BHADRACHALAM, DEC. 27

Bhadrachalam ASP Vineeth said that the youth of the villages should get good fame to their native villages by showing their talent in any field.

He said that the youth should keep away to the vices and play sports for physical fitness. He said that the governments have been implementing various programs for the welfare of the people and the youth should use them for their upliftment. ASP inaugurated three-day volleyball tournament in Reguballi Residential School in Dummugudem mandal. He said that the youth showed immense interest in involving the tournament and it is a good sign of increasing interest in sports in rural areas.

About 13 teams will be participate in the tournament and the police department made all arrangements for it. Circle inspector N Venkateswarlu, sub-inspector Ravikumar and CRPF G/39 battalion circle inspector M Polinaidu were among those who attended the program.

WOMAN COMMITS
SUICIDE AT SAKHI
CENTREANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC
WARANGAL, DEC 27

A women who was placed in the Sakhi centre in Jangaon for counselling committed suicide on Sunday.

According to the police, the deceased Srilekha and her husband Manohar, natives of Kodunuthula village in Edakandla mandal of the district, got married on the 15th of this month against the wishes of their parents.

On the 20th of this month, the police shifted Srilekha to the Sakhi Center for counseling at Jangaon Mother and Child Health Center, after Manohar requested security for Srilekha against his family.

While undergoing counselling by the Sakhi Center administrators, the young woman excused herself to attend nature's call and committed suicide by the bathroom entrance wall.

On receiving information about the incident, Jangaon police reached the Sakhi Center and shifted the body to the mortuary at the Jangaon district hospital and are investigating the case, police said.

AP EAMCET
OPTION ENTRY
FROM TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 27

The long-awaited option entry for admissions into engineering courses through AP Eamcet 2020 will be conducted from Monday, December 28, to Wednesday, December 30. Aspirants can change their option on January 1 and allotments of colleges will be announced on January 3. As many as 25 helpline centres have been started to help Eamcet qualifiers resolve the difficulties they may face during option registration. Eamcet convener has said eligible candidates, who have participated in web counselling process, comprising payment of processing fee and certificate verification from October 23 to November 3.

PUVVADA AJAY
RECOVERS FROM
COVID-19DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, DEC. 27

Minister for Transport Puvvada Ajay Kumar said that he will resume his duties from December 28. He said that he was tested to RTPCR test and it showed negative. He said that he is normal now and he will attend the regular programs from Monday.

He said that thousands of TRS activists, leaders and people expressed their concern over my health after they knew of Covid-19 positive. Some of them came to Hyderabad house where I was in self-quarantine and many of them called me and enquired about my health. There are people that offer prayers in various temples, masjids and churches.

"I am thankful to all that wished to recover from Covid-19. I came to normal because of the love and affection shown by them", he said.

20 govt schools begin classes

Our doubts are not being cleared through online classes, says students

A. RAVINDRA SESHU | DC
KHAMMAM, DEC. 27

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

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

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



yielding to the pressure from students are going forward.

N. Suresh, parent of a tenth standard student here, said "My kid is encountering audio problems in online classes and

he is unable to understand what the teacher is saying. The other problems are signal and network connections".

There are 32,292 tenth standard students and nearly 50 percent of them

are suffering because their doubts on various subjects remain unanswered.

Informed sources said that headmasters of schools like Chintakani, Bonakal, Konigerla, Wyr

and Kallur are conducting direct classes for the sake of students.

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

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

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

BJP STRONGER
BECAUSE OF TRS
MLAs: MIMDC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, DEC. 27

Since the TRS party and its Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are not focusing on the development of the streets and divisions resided by the minorities and dalit communities, the religious Bharatiya Janata Party is becoming strong day-by-day in the erstwhile Karimnagar district, alleged the incharge of the united Karimnagar district of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) party, Gulam Ahmed Hussain.

A meeting held with the district leaders, corporators and councilors of AIMIM party of united Karimnagar district to discuss about the strengthening of the party here at MIM party office in Karimnagar on Sunday.

Addressing the gathering, Ahmed Hussain alleged that the people who belonged to Muslim and dalit communities believe that TRS is a secular party voted for it and gave power twice to it, but some of the TRS MLAs of Jagtial, Korutla and Peddapalli district are showing discrimination against them. They are not showing any interest in the development of the colonies and divisions resided by the people of Muslim minorities and dalith communities and are also not implementing the welfare schemes introduced by the state government, he added.

The Shaadi Mubarak and Kalyana Lakshmi cheques are not distributed for the past one and half years to the Muslims and dalits. Because of such difference in behaviour of the TRS MLAs, the BJP party is becoming strong day-by-day in the united Karimnagar district, he pointed out. Ahmed Hussain appealed to the party men to be prepared for fighting on issues.

Vote for change
is BJP campaignDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, DEC. 27

As part of the upcoming Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda graduates' constituency MLC election campaign, BJP candidate and state general secretary Gujjula Premender Reddy and district BJP leaders under the leadership of BJP Warangal Urban District president Padma Rao campaigned with walkers at the Hanmakonda Arts & Science College Grounds on Sunday.

Reddy asked the people to vote for change and to teach a lesson to the arrogant KCR family rule in the Telangana state.

Speaking on the occasion, Premender said Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is acting like a joker in the state by doing gimmicks and hoodwinking people.

KCR government cheated teachers and government employees without giving PRC, he alleged.

"Telangana youth were left stranded without jobs because of the negligence of CM KCR. When KCR said there will not be any contract employees in the state, everyone thought they will be made as regular employees, but no one expected that even these posts would be removed,"

he said.

Reddy noted that the Universities in the state are completely neglected and even the lands belonging to universities are being occupied.

He held CM KCR responsible for deceiving pensioners by promising incentives. The health cards given to the employees were rendered useless, he stated.

"The Modi government is working for the development of people from all walks of life across the country under the slogan 'Saab Ka Saat Saab Ka Vikas'. Hence the educated people must support the BJP in fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Telangana," he said.

BJP Warangal Rural district president Kondeti Sridhar, BJP Warangal Urban district vice presidents Mandati Vinod, D. Amarnath

Reddy, Kandagatla Satyanarayana, Western constituency convener Pashikanti Rajendra Prasad, Dharmasagar Mandal president Gankidi Srinivas Reddy, 31st division president Kolagani Niranjan, State leaders Malothu Nanu Nayak, Chiluka Vijaya Rao, Gankidi Venkat Reddy, Rural district leaders Gadipally Rajeshwara Rao and others.



Nizamabad MLC, K. Kavitha offering prayers to Sri Aadi Varaha Swamy in the temple in Kamanpur mandal of Peddapalli district on Sunday. -DC

Kavitha offers
special prayersDC CORRESPONDENT
PEDDAPALLI, DEC. 27

Nizamabad MLC, K.Kavitha paid a visit to historic Sri Aadi Varaha Swamy temple situated in Kamanpur mandal of Peddapalli district on Sunday and offered prayers to the presiding deity. Peddapalli MP, Borlakuntla Venkatesh Netha, Zilla Parishad Chairperson Putta Madhukar, Ramagundam MLA, Korukanti Chander Patel and Manthini Municipal chairperson Putta Shai-laja gave her a warm welcome and

accompanied her to the ancient temple.

Sri Aadi Varaha Swamy, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu is presided in the form of wild boar in the temple. Huge number of devotees from surrounding villages will worship the god in this region seeking the blessing of prosperity and good health.

Ms Kavitha inquired of the temple priests about the history of the temple and its importance. Later, she visited the house of Peddapalli MLA, Dasari Manohar Reddy, who is bereaved.

TRS GEARS UP
FOR ZPTC
ELECTIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, DEC. 27

Telangana Rashtra Samiti leader have intensified campaign in the villages for Adilabad Rural zilla parishad territorial constituencies (ZPTC) after declaring its candidate Naresh Kumar, son of late Are Rajanna. Naresh Kumar is visiting the deep villages and interacting with the villagers following the news that the notification may come anytime for the election for Adilabad Rural ZPTC seat.

The Adilabad Rural ZPTC seat fell vacant with the demise of Are Raja-nna who was the vice-chairman of Adilabad Zilla Parishad.

Adilabad MLA Jogu Ramanna, has decided the name of Are Naresh Kumar after consultations with the party senior leaders and announced in the recent meeting convened with the party MPTC, Sarpanches and ZPTCs

CHILL | WEATHER

Chilly weather also brings migratory birds to Adilabad

Foggy weather attracts many to Adilabad

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, DEC.27

Chilling weather and foggy conditions are attracting many people to erstwhile Adilabad district from outside.

The temperatures are being recorded between 4 to 7 degree celsius. Elderly persons were seen warming themselves with the bonfire in chilling weather conditions.

The temperatures has fallen too low in the areas close to the forest and water bodies. The temperatures are recorded low in the Kerameri mandal and Thalamadugu mandal in erstwhile Adilabad district. Nature lovers are thronging Kerameri ghats in Komaram Bheem Asifabad district and Mahaboob ghats in Nirmal district and



Fog covers Palsi village of Talamadugu mandal of Adilabad district early on Sunday morning. — By arrangement

Khandala and Palsi (K) ghats in Adilabad district. Many young nature lovers are visiting these places to enjoy the beauty of nature.

People are trying to cap-

ture the beauty of the foggy weather conditions early in the morning.

The lowest temperatures are being recorded in Palsi (B) and Palsi (K) and Kosai villages in

Thalamadugu mandal and Arli (T) in Bheempur mandal located on the river Penganga in the Adilabad district.

Movement of vehicles are being affected by the

fogg in forest areas early in the morning. The foggy conditions are cleared by sunrise. Chilling weather conditions and water bodies are also attracting the migratory birds in the erstwhile Adilabad district.

However, the temperatures are fallen to low in the rural and tribal areas in the forest is when compared to urban areas. The temperatures is normal due to pollution and population density in the urban areas.

Rajender resident of Adilabad said middle and young age persons can come out of their houses for walking or jogging even in the chilling weather conditions. He opined that young and, middle-aged persons should visit here and enjoy the weather conditions here.

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SHORT TAKES

PVT COLLEGE
TEACHERS
DEMAND SALARYDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

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

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

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

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

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

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

REMAINS OF
NEOLITHIC
PERIOD FOUNDDC CORRESPONDENT
MAHABUBNAGAR, DEC. 27

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— R. PAVAN

Task force to monitor
Covid situation: Kishan

Centre funding Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers: Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

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

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

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

ing production facilities for vaccines in the country. He said that the Centre

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO MORE UK
RETURNEES TEST
COVID POSITIVEDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

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

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

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

Of the returnees, officials said that they weren't able to trace 154 people due to problems with their contact data.

BACK | HOME

The megastar flew back to Chennai on Sunday

Rajini discharged from hosp

DC CORRESPONDENTS
HYDERABAD / CHENNAI
DEC. 27

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

"In view of his improved

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

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

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

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

Rajinikanth's party were at an advanced stage and that an announcement

could be expected in mid January 2021. Rajini might still be resting at home but can interact by videoconferences with his supporters and party people, Mr Manian said.

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



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

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

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

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

Telangana finally gets a
Women's CommissionDC CORRESPONDENTS
HYDERABAD, ADILABAD,
DEC. 27

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

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

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

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



Vakiti Sunitha Lakshma Reddy

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

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



Kumra Eshwari Bai.

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

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

Crop purchase centres
not needed: Babus to CMDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

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

They were speaking during the review meeting that the Chief Minister chaired on the distribution of Rythu Bandhu Samitis, marketing committees and agriculture extension officers.

It was decided at the meeting that the agriculture department oversee all the farm-related activities including monitor-

FARM PRODUCE PURCHASE TO BE
STREAMLINED, SUGGEST OFFICERS

From Page 1

The officers suggested that sale and purchase of farm produce be streamlined via the agriculture markets with close coordination of Rythu Bandhu Samitis, marketing committees and agriculture extension officers.

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

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

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

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

Both universities cannot
be right, says petitioner

From Page 1

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

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

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

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

As per the admission rules, 15 per cent seats in each college are declared "unreserved" and the remaining 85 per cent are reserved exclusively for local students. The Phase 1 counselling was held strictly by this procedure in both states.

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

How TS students
lost MBBS seatsDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 27

As per the admission procedure adopted by the NTR University of Health Sciences (NTRUHS), the student with Rank 6784 got admission in Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam, in the 85 per cent "local" quota in Phase 1 counselling.

During Phase 2 counselling, his status got changed to the 15 per cent "unreserved" quota because of which another AP student got admission in the "local" quota.

As per admission procedure adopted by the Kaloji University of Health Sciences, the student with Rank 1445 got admission in Gandhi Medical College, Secunderabad, in the local quota in phase one.

In Phase 2 counselling,

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

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

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

As a result, not only could ineligible non-local students secure admission in the "unreserved" quota but also local students were deprived of

there were eight vacancies in the "unreserved" quota. The status of the first eight students who got admission in the "local" quota remained the same. However, as they had got better ranks than the students from AU and SVU regions, they should have been pushed to the "unreserved" quota as a result of which there would have been eight vacancies in the "local" quota.

But, the vacancies in the "unreserved" quota were filled by the students from AU and SVU who would not otherwise have any chance of competing with Telangana state students because of their lower ranks. As a result, eight local students of Telangana state lost the opportunity of studying in Gandhi Medical College.

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

SHOPIAN FAKE ENCOUNTER: CASE ON ARMY OFFICER

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

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

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

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

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

FALL IN LINE OR LEAVE, AIADMK TELLS BJP, ALLIES

A. ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 27

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

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

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

Yadav accuses govt of hurting democracy

Lucknow, Dec 27: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday accused the BJP-led state government of hurting the foundation of democracy by dissolving village panchayats without conducting elections for them.

Yadav’s allegation prompted a rebuttal from UP BJP vice-president and party’s in-charge of panchayat elections Vijay Bahadur Pathak who said Yadav had been the state’s chief minister and should know that the panchayat elections could not have been held amid the Covid-19. Pathak also expressed the UP government’s commitment to holding the panchayat elections within six months.

“The BJP government in UP has dissolved the village panchayats without conducting the fresh elections for them. Major elections are being conducted, but the government has been finding itself unable to hold elections of the smallest units of public representation. How will this government run Uttar Pradesh?” Yadav said in a tweet in Hindi on Sunday.

“The BJP must not hurt the foundation of democracy,” the former UP chief minister added in his tweet. Rebutting Yadav’s claims, Pathak told PTI, Akhilesh Yadav had been the chief minister of UP. He should know that elections should have been conducted at the stipulated time.

—PTI



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

— PTI

Pick ‘Made in India’ goods, urges PM

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

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

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

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

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

The “thali bajaao (clang plates)” protest was decided upon by the farmers’ last week.

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

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

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

Nadda shares Rahul video to slam Cong on farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

Sharing an old video of Rahul Gandhi’s speech in Lok Sabha in which he seems to be advocating the need for farmers to get rid of middlemen and sell their produce directly to industry, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday accused the Congress leader of playing politics over the ongoing farmers’ protest.

“What is this magic happening, Rahulji? You are opposing now what you had advocated earlier. You have nothing to do with the country’s or farmers’ interests. You have to play politics only. But this is your bad luck that your hypocrisy will not work. People of the country and farmers have recognised your double standards,” the BJP president tweeted in Hindi along with the video clip.

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

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

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

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

farm sector which has been vehemently denied by the Centre.

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

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

Attempt to mislead farmers will not succeed: Rajnath

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

Addressing a state-level function to mark the third anniversary of the Jai Ram Thakur-led BJP government in Himachal Pradesh, he said the new laws will raise the income of farmers, but the Congress was misleading them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Lawyer from Punjab commits suicide

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

Amarjit Singh from Jalalabad in Punjab’s Fazilka district was taken to the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (PGIMS) in Rohtak where doctors declared him dead on arrival, police said.

In a purported suicide note, Singh said he was sacrificing his life in support of the farmers’ agitation against the Centre’s new farm laws so that the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

protest site near the Delhi border.

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

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

the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

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

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

— PTI

BIG | HURDLES

Disparity in income limits for open category, tribal category biggest hurdle

Tribal girl struggles to get overseas scholarship

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 27

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

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

al category is the biggest hurdle for getting the benefit of the scheme for tribal community. State agriculture minister Dada Bhuse has recommended her name to the tribal minister for the scheme in October 2020, but even that has not helped her.

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

department, the income limit for open category is ₹20 lakh (₹ 20 Lakh). The disparity between the income limits for open category and tribal community caused a hurdle for the tribal girl in pursuing of higher education in abroad. The girl’s family hails from Gadchiroli district and earns more than ₹6 lakh per year.

Ms Atram wrote a letter to K.C. Padavi, minister of tribal development department urging him to treat her case as a special case her family can’t afford the expense of her education abroad.

Deccan Chronicle is in possession of her letter in which she has stated, “I have fulfilled the main criteria of the said GR but the income criteria is the hurdle in my overseas education. My family is native from Gadchiroli district which is a remote and naxal affected area. I have completed my BTech (four years of Bachelor of Technology) in Textile. I have applied to North Carolina State University (NCTU) for Master of Science in Textile. This university is a public school, has QS world ranking of 295, and is well known for Master

of Science in Textile, and this field comes under Engineering (STEM-Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The University has approved my admission for fall 2021 (August 2021) in Master of Science in Textile.”

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

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

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

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

DECCAN Chronicle

28 DECEMBER 2020

Challenge to Vodafone ill-advised, withdraw it

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

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

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

In 2018, Arun Jaitley, the finance minister of the day, categorised the retrospective taxation as an erroneous decision

The result of the amendment was that Vodafone had overnight become of one of the biggest tax defaulters in the country. The legislation attracted harsh criticism inside and outside the country. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the prime Opposition of the day, was the harshest critic of the retrospective taxation, though it did not vote against the amendment in Parliament.

In 2018, Arun Jaitley, the finance minister of the day, categorised the retrospective taxation as an erroneous decision.

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

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

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

A step forward, two back

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

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

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

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Subhani



Kashmir looks ahead at a winter of discontent

A.S. Dulat



James Baldwin once wrote: "It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not in its whole system of reality evolved any place for you."

Such is the plight the Kashmiri considers himself in.

Kashmir has been frozen for some time and desperately needs thawing. Chillai Kalan, the harshest part of winter, has just begun, but Kashmir has been freezing since late November. An old friend who called from Srinagar a month ago said Kashmir was frozen not only on the ground but emotionally as well. Kashmiris, he said, were in deep contemplation but no one knew, or no one could tell, what they were thinking. Sounding defeated, he said Kashmir may now remain in perpetual winter bereft of its seasons.

Another Kashmiri friend, a liberal businessman who spends more time out of the Valley than in Srinagar, said in frustration the Kashmiris could not easily get over the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution.

The recently concluded District Development Council elections may provide a silver lining. Kashmir can always change overnight. Election results rarely, if ever, satisfy everybody in J&K; such is its arithmetic, but the recent results have been almost, perfect providing an opportunity for peace, reconciliation, and resolution. Predictably, the BJP dominated Jammu, and the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration

(PAGD) the Kashmir Valley. The BJP's three seats in the Valley are significant, but the PAGD's 35 in Jammu even more so. The National Conference again demonstrated that it was the only party with a significant following in both the Jammu and Kashmir divisions of the erstwhile state. The polarisation of Jammu and Kashmir on a religious basis was dangerous as the scholarly Balraj Puri had warned in his relentless pleading for regional autonomy.

Democracy has, in a sense, as Union home minister Amit Shah said, "been revived in J&K", but democracy can only flourish, as Mufti Mohammed Sayeed was wont to say, with a level playing field, without buying and selling, bullying and locking up. The leprechaun cannot easily replace the towering Sher-e-Kashmir in the Kashmiri psyche. New Delhi must demonstrate accommodation, grab the opportunity, and break the lockjam in Kashmir.

Notwithstanding the political rhetoric across the board, Article 370 is not the issue, done and dusted on August 5, 2019, and left only for the Supreme Court to sanctify its burial. It was, in any event, a hollow provision at best, a fig leaf to assuage Kashmiri pride whose erosion had begun as far back as August 9, 1953 with the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah. Sheikh Sahib, who had steadfastly stood for peace and reconciliation, had himself endorsed the mainstreaming of Kashmir with the 1975 Accord. When the Hurriyat Conference leaders agreed for talks with then deputy prime min-

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

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

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

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

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

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

or two are already visible. However, it is in New Delhi's interest that they do to further the political and democratic process.

Togetherness would have virtually been impossible without the initiative and resoluteness of the "Big Man". Sadly, New Delhi has never tried to understand Dr Farooq Abdullah, nor does he make it easy for anyone to do so. Earlier, it was his openness which puzzled Delhi, now it is his determination. As a senior colleague in the PAGD said: "Doctor Sahib in his new avatar is like a man possessed, in whose sincerity no one can doubt." Recently, when the Enforcement Directorate threatened to attach his properties, Dr Abdullah, echoing James Baldwin, said, "I will not bow; I will do what I have to." Yet, when he was released from detention on March 14, people who spoke to him would vouch that Farooq bore no ill will and was gracious enough to admit that his meeting with the Prime Minister a couple of days before August 5, 2019 went unbelievably well. Dr Farooq Abdullah has always stood by India, dedicating himself as a bridge between Srinagar and New Delhi but during his last visit to Delhi, somewhat disillusioned, Farooq said: "What is there to talk now, they call me a thief?"

Yet Dr Farooq Abdullah remains the key to peace in Kashmir. The Sphinx must solve his own riddle. There is no one half his stature in the political spectrum in J&K. Statehood assured to the people in Parliament needs to be restored, rather than a carrot kept dangling. And then, hopefully, as in 1996, Assembly elections in October-November next year may pave the way for peace.

Amarjit Singh Dulat is a former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing, India's external intelligence agency

LETTERS

FARMERS STRIKE

I do not think there is any point in farmers holding further discussions with the government which is in no mood to repeal the farm laws (*Farmers send draft for talks on December 29, DC, Dec. 27*). The farmers need to be flexible as the PM had indicated he would consider their just demands. Further, the Opposition ruled governments have passed their own laws. The government should give permission to the agitating farmers to opt for Central or state government rule.

Manik Sathe
Hyderabad

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

Zakaria Sultan
Hyderabad

CHINA MUST PAY

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

P.J. David
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

LS dissolved, polls in Lower House

NEW DELHI, DEC. 27.

The fourth Lok Sabha has been dissolved. The nation will elect a new House early in March in all probability.

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

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

Faizan Mustafa



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

TURKEY HIT BY 5.5 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE

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

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

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

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

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

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

EIGHT KILLED IN AVALANCHES NORTH OF TEHRAN

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

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

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

State TV reported seven climbers were missing.

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

THREE KILLED, 3 WOUNDED IN ILLINOIS SHOOTING

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

A suspect in his 30s was in police custody.

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

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

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

He did not specify whether the shooter had a motive.

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

2 WOMEN, 3 GIRLS FOUND DEAD IN ARKANSAS HOME

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

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

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

EU nations roll out vaccine campaign

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

Paris, Dec. 27: EU countries on Sunday embarked on a vaccination campaign to defeat the "nightmare" of Covid-19, as the growing spread of a new Coronavirus variant intensified fears the pandemic could wreak further devastation.

The jab is a glimmer of hope for a continent yearning for a return to normal from a pandemic that has killed 1.76 million people worldwide since emerging in China late last year and caused at least 80 million confirmed cases, according to an AFP tally.

But polls have shown many Europeans are unwilling to take the vaccine, which could impede its effectiveness in beating the virus, while it will take months for large chunks of the population to be immunised.

"It is with deep pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I got the vaccine today. A small gesture but a fundamental gesture for all of us," said Claudia Alivernini, 29, an Italian nurse who was the first in her country to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech jab Sunday morning.

EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen hailed the campaign start as a "touching moment of unity and a European success story", even if some European states started a day early on Saturday.

Countries are also showing different strategies in their vaccination targeting, with Italy focusing on health workers, France the elderly and in the Czech Republic the prime minister himself at the front of the queue.

In a sign of impatience, some EU countries began vaccinating on Saturday, a day before the official start, with a 101-year-old woman in a care home becoming the first person in Germany to be inoculated and Hungary and Slovakia also handing out their first shots.

Araceli Rosario Hidalgo Sanchez, a 96-year-old living in a care home in central Spain became the first person in the country to be vaccinated on Sunday, in an event broadcast by national television. She said smilingly she felt "nothing" from the shot.

France began its campaign in care homes for the elderly in the Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, a low-income area hard hit by Covid-19, with a 78-year-old woman named Mauricette the first to receive the jab to applause from staff.

LEBANON SEIZES 8 FOR BURNING REFUGEE CAMP

Beirut, Dec. 27: Lebanon's army said Sunday it had arrested eight people after a dispute led a group of Lebanese nationals to set fire to an informal refugee settlement in the country's north.

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

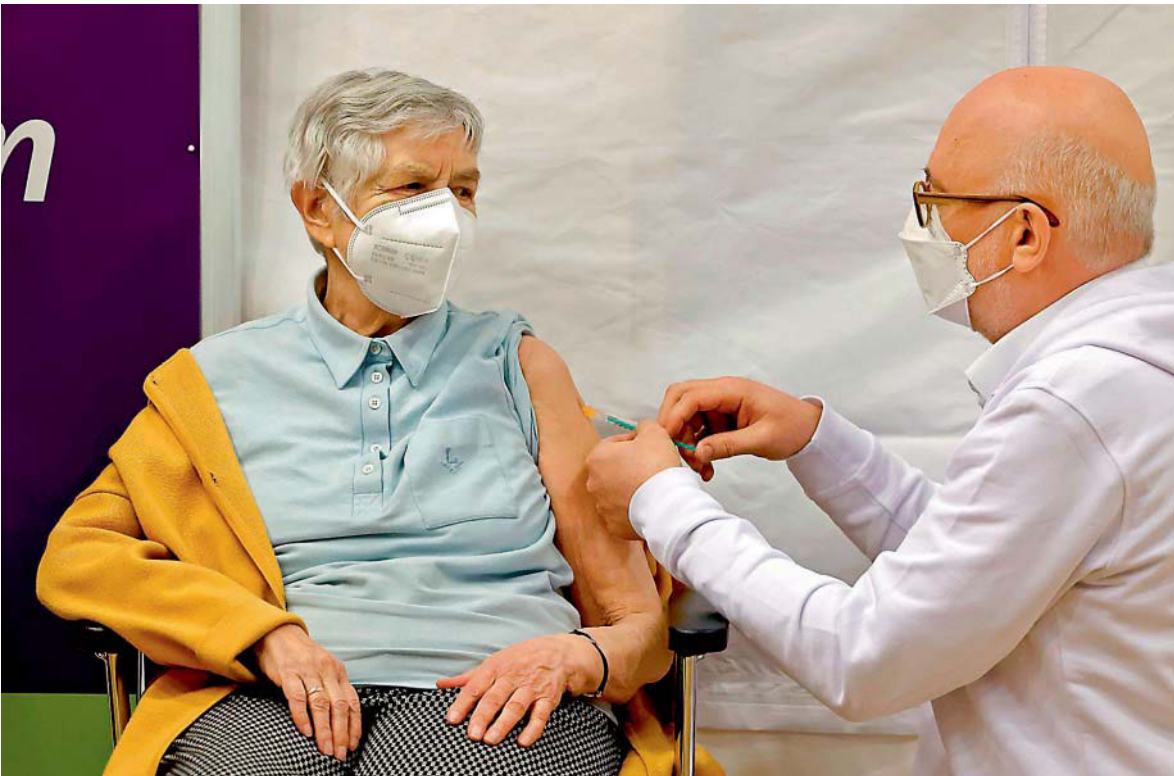
"The Lebanese men fired bullets in the air and torched the tents of Syrian refugees," it added, without elaborating on the cause of the altercation.

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

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

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

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



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

CANADA DETECTS FIRST COVID-19 VARIANT CASES

Montreal, Dec. 27: The first two cases of a particularly infectious Coronavirus variant that recently emerged in Britain have been confirmed in Canada, health authorities said on Saturday. "The cases are a couple from Durham with no known travel history, exposure or high-risk contacts," Barbara Yaffe, acting chief medical officer for Ontario, said in a statement.

The couple have been placed in isolation, according to the statement, the same day that Ontario reimposed a lockdown for several weeks due to a spike in Covid-19 cases in the province since early December. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Wednesday his country would prolong its suspension of passenger flights from the UK until January 6 in light of the Coronavirus strain sweeping Britain.

The discovery of two cases in Ontario "further reinforces the need for Ontarians to stay home as much as possible and continue to follow all public health advice, including the province-wide shutdown measures beginning today," said Yaffe. — AFP

Investigators search home in Nashville bomb probe

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

The operation in Antioch came as US media reports said a 63-year-old "person of interest" had been identified in connection with the explosion, which came from a parked motorhome that blared a warning minutes before it blew up.

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

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

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

Police say the blast was

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

2,000-year-old fast food shop unearthed

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

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

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

Archaeologists continue to make discoveries there. The thermopolium —

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the latest stage of their work, archaeologists uncovered a number of still life scenes. — AFP



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

Biden warns over 'devastating' delay in aid package

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

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

"This abdication of responsibility has devastating consequences. Today, about 10 million Americans will lose unemployment insurance benefits," Biden said in a statement.

The stimulus measure is wrapped up with a \$1.4 trillion funding bill, without which the government will be forced to shut down at midnight Monday.

"In just a few days, government funding will expire, putting vital serv-

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

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

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

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

Israel braces for 3rd virus lockdown

Jerusalem, Dec 27: Israel was set on Sunday to begin its third Coronavirus lockdown, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voiced optimism that a "world record" vaccination drive will restore a degree of normality within weeks.

After a sharp rebound in detected infections, Netanyahu's government announced three days ago that it would re-impose the strict measures that had previously helped limit transmission.

From 5:00pm (1500 GMT) on Sunday, most people will be forced to stay within 1,000 metres of their home. There are a range of exceptions, including seeking medical care, attending legal proceedings or exercising. A key difference in

Israel's third lockdown compared to previous versions relates to schools, with more students able to attend classes.

Instead of near total closures, Israel is keeping schools open for children under six, as well as grades one to four and teenagers finishing secondary school in grades 11 and 12.

Israel's National Council for the Child criticised the decision to close grades five through 10.

"The decision to ignore this age bracket means the abandonment of hundreds of thousands of children, only because in theory they can be left at home alone while (their parents) go to work," NCC head Vered Windman was quoted as saying by the Ma'ariv newspaper. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

GM Harikrishna holds Carlsen

Chennai: Indian Grandmaster P. Harikrishna held world number one and world champion Magnus Carlsen in the fourth round of the preliminary stage of the Champions Chess Tour Airthings Masters online chess championship. Both Harikrishna and Carlsen drew all their four games on the opening day of the tournament as matches ended late on Saturday. The game between Harikrishna and the Norwegian ended in 24 moves after the players repeated the moves. India number two and former world champion Viswanathan Anand had earlier drawn his games with Maxim Vachier-Lagrave, Daniil Dubov and Spaniard David Anton Guijjaró. He is in eighth place with two points. Harikrishna will take on Dutch GM Anish Giri in the fifth round followed by games against Alexander Grischuk, Hikaru Nakamura, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Lev Aronian, Wesley So and Teimour Radjabov subsequently. — PTI

SA batsmen fight back on Day Two

Centurion, South Africa: South Africa's batsmen scored freely against a depleted Sri Lankan bowling attack as the host nation fought back on the second day of the first Test on Sunday. South Africa were 317 for four at the close in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings total of 396. Dean Elgar (95) and Aiden Markram (68) put on 141 for the first wicket, while former captain Faf du Plessis (55 not out) and Temba Bavuma (41 not out) added an unbeaten 97 for the fifth wicket as the hosts scored at better than four runs an over. Sri Lanka went into the match without leading fast bowler Suranga Lakmal because of a hamstring strain and suffered a major blow when opening bowler Kasun Rajitha limped off the field with what appeared to be a groin injury after bowling one ball in his third over. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 396 (Chandimal 85, Shanaka 66*, Sipamla 4-76) vs South Africa 317/4 (Elgar 95, Markram 68, du Plessis 55 batting).

Sydney Test is a 50-50 bet

Melbourne: The possibility of Sydney hosting the third Test against India has now come down to 50 per cent in the wake of fresh outbreak of Covid-19 cases there and a final decision will be arrived at in two days. Melbourne Cricket Club's chief executive officer Stuart Fox on Sunday said though he wants Sydney to retain the hosting rights of the third Test, the situation is "extremely complicated". "He (Hockley) is working feverishly with the Department of Health in NSW and I believe it is extremely complicated. Everything he is telling me is it's really a 50-50 situation," Fox was quoted as saying by *Sydney Morning Herald*. — PTI

Kerala grab first win of season

Goa: Kerala Blasters dished out a complete performance as they edged Hyderabad 2-0 to secure their first win of the Indian Super League season here on Sunday. Abdul Hakku's header (29*) put Kerala ahead in the first half before Jordan Murray (88*) sealed three points for Kibru Vicuna's side. Vicuna rang in five changes to the side that drew against SC East Bengal while Hyderabad made two changes with Liston Colacco returning to the starting eleven. Both sides created chances in the first half but it was Kerala who headed into the break with a lead.

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

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

FOOTBALL

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

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

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JINKLE BELLS!

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

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Ajinkya Rahane played a captain's knock, a workmanlike century that steered India into a dominant position and took the sting out of Australia's potent bowling attack in the second Test here on Sunday. Trailing 0-1 in the four-match series, India ended the second day at 277 for five for a handy 82-run lead after bowling out Australia for 195. At stumps, which was brought early owing to rain, Rahane was going strong on 104 and giving him company was Ravindra Jadeja on 40, the two having added what might prove to be a game-changing 104-run partnership for the sixth wicket. This was Rahane's 12th Test hundred and his second at the iconic venue, after a fine 147 during the 2014 tour. A day after earning rich praise for his tactical acumen while marshalling the bowlers, Rahane shone bright with the bat and was spot on with his reading of match situations during his stay in the middle. Rahane got a life when Steve Smith dropped him on 73 at second slip in Australia's first over with the second new ball, the unlucky bowler being Mitchell Starc, who was taken off the attack after just two overs with the shining red cherry. That particular phase was crucial from both the team's point of view and by not losing a wicket to the second new ball, India ensured they finished the day ahead of Australia, in terms of runs as well as psychologically. Rahane got another reprieve when substitute fielder Travis Head put one down after diving forward from gully, but that was after he had got to the three-figure mark. To start with, Rahane was more watchful than he had ever been but as the day progressed, he went on to play some sumptuous shots and one of his day's best was the classic off-drive against Pat Cummins. Earlier, Rishabh Pant (29) and Hanuma Vihari (21) frittered away promising starts after doing all the hard work, but Jadeja was determined not to do anything of that sort. — PTI

SCORECARD

Australia 1st innings: 195
India 1st innings (Overnight 36/1): Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc 0, Shubman Gill c Paine b Cummins 45, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 17, Ajinkya Rahane (batting) 104, Hanuma Vihari c Smith b Lyon 21, Rishabh Pant c Paine b Starc 29, Ravindra Jadeja (batting) 40, Extras (b-12, lb-6, nb-2, wd-1) 21. **Total (for 5 wickets in 91.3 overs) 277.**
FOW: 1-0, 2-61, 3-64, 4-116, 5-173.
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 18.3-3-61-2, Pat Cummins 22-7-71-2, Josh Hazlewood 21-6-44-0, Nathan Lyon 18-2-52-1, Cameron Green 12-1-31-0.



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

Starc rues missed chances for Oz

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Australian speedster Mitchell Starc rued the chances his team squandered on the second day of the Boxing Day Test but also praised rival skipper Ajinkya Rahane for his pressure-absorbing century. A dogged unbeaten 104 by Rahane put India in the driver's seat after the second day as they were comfortably poised at 277 for five. The fielders spilled a few chances offered by Rahane as India took a 82-run lead by the day end. "It (the knock by Rahane) was pretty good. He absorbed some pressure there and sort of steadied the ship for them, at (a time) when they were still behind our score," Starc said at the virtual press conference. "He (Rahane) has batted

WARNER NOT SURE OF PLAYING THIRD TEST

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Star Australian opener David Warner is still struggling with his groin injury, coach Justin Langer said on Sunday, rendering him doubtful for the third Test against India starting January 7. He had missed the last ODI, three T20Is and the first two Tests against India due to the injury that he sustained during the second ODI. Warner, whose absence was felt by Australia as they folded for 195 on the opening day of the ongoing Boxing Day Test, will hit the MCG nets on Sunday. "We saw him bat the day before the game, he's batting again this afternoon at the MCG, so in terms of his batting he's flying, it's just trying to ... he's still having some trouble with his groin and we know how dynamic he is," Langer told Ricky Ponting during an interview on *Seven*. — PTI

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

GILL CREDITS RAHANE FOR HIS INNINGS

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Young India batsman Shubman Gill says watching Ajinkya Rahane's "magnificent" hundred from the sidelines was immensely educative for him and he learnt how not to get into a shell while facing a lethal bowling attack. Stand-in skipper Rahane scored an unbeaten 104 in tough conditions to steer India to 277 for five against Australia on the second day of the second Test here. "This knock was all about patience, more importantly when you are playing such a high quality pace attack, sometimes you get into shell and not able to score runs, and the way Ajinkya *bhai* played, it was such a magnificent knock to watch from outside," Gill said during a virtual press conference. "How to see off those tough periods, he made it sure that he put the loose balls away." With Rahane going strong, India took a lead of 82 runs and Gill said the team will look to capitalise on it as batting will get more challenging from day three. "On the first day, there was a bit turn for (Ravichandran Ashwin) Ash *bhai* and (Ravindra Jadeja) Jaddu *bhai* and even today we saw there was turn for Nathan (Lyon) and as the time goes on there will be more cracks and it will be more challenging for the batsmen." Opening the innings, Gill scored a 65-ball 45 on debut before he nicked an outswinger from Pat Cummins. "When I came into bat, there was something in the pitch, it was lively but the only thing I told myself was that no matter what was in pitch, I should be able to play my game." — PTI

Furious Bedi attacks DDCA

■ Demands removal of his name from Kotla stand

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Spin legend Bishan Singh Bedi has threatened to take legal action against the DDCA if his name is not removed from a spectators' stand at the Feroz Shah Kotla ground with immediate effect. On Wednesday, Bedi had shot a letter to the Delhi and District Cricket Association, lambasting it for installing a statue of its late former president Arun Jaitley at the Kotla. In the absence of any response from DDCA, Bedi wrote another letter to the cricket body on Saturday. "It's been a few days since I wrote to you ... While within minutes of my letter going public I had an overwhelming support of the cricket fraternity across the globe. But I'm sad there's been no reaction from you," Bedi wrote in his letter addressed to DDCA President Rohan Jaitley. "... I hope in our country people still have a right to decide as individuals what they wish to be associated with & where their name plates can hang with dignity. Please don't push me to take a legal recourse." Bedi had also decided to renounce his membership of the DDCA. In his scathing letter, Bedi questioned the DDCA president's "ill advised" and "inexplicable" silence. "Your seemingly ill advised silence to my letter that has triggered a public debate about perpetuating politicians at sporting venues exposes your naivety," he wrote. "Finally, I hope you will have the basic courtesy to reply to a former cricketer who is not asking for a favour, but wants his cricketing integrity not to be bartered away." The statue of Jaitley will be unveiled by BCCI president Sourav Ganguly at Kotla on Monday in the presence of union home minister Amit Shah and former BCCI chief Anurag Thakur, among others. Bedi said he did not wish to be associated with the cricket stadium which has a statue of the late politician, who was a minister in the BJP-led NDA government and died last year owing to multiple health issues. "I've been around long to know DDCA has a tradition of ignoring cricketers' voice, hence this reminder. There's a reason for my urgent request," the 74-year-old said. — PTI

MSD is ODI team of decade captain

Dubai, Dec. 27: The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Sunday named captain of ICC's ODI and T20 International teams of the decade while Virat Kohli stamped his pre-eminence in world cricket after being voted the skipper of the Test team. Indians dominated the limited-over teams by having three and four players in the ODI and T20I respectively while England have maximum number of players — four — in the Test side. The 39-year-old Dhoni, who retired from international cricket earlier this year, was one of the three Indians in the ODI team of the decade, the others being Rohit Sharma and skipper Virat Kohli. Dhoni has three other compatriots in the T20I team — Rohit, Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah. Besides being named captain of Test team, Kohli is the only player in the world to have been voted in the teams of the decade in all formats. The teams of the decades were announced by the ICC ahead of the Awards of the Decade ceremony, to be held in virtual mode on Monday. The top awards, includ-



Mahendra Singh Dhoni

ing ICC male cricketer as well as female cricketer of the decade, men's Test, ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, women's ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, will also be announced on Monday. Kohli is also in the running for four awards — ICC male cricketer of the decade, men's Test cricketer, men's ODI cricketer and men's T20I cricketer of the decade. In the Test team of the decade, senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is the other Indian while the four Englishmen are Alastair Cook, Ben Stokes, Stuart Broad and James Anderson. Australia are represented by Steve Smith and David Warner. — PTI

Rahane has regained his mojo after a century at MCG



Hemant Kenkre Silly Point

When Ajinkya Rahane dabbled a ball from Mitchell Starc for a boundary through the slips, in the 66th over of their first innings, he made a statement. On a day that was peppered with dodgy weather, not too many Indian fans had expected their team to go past the Australian total. And they did thanks to a gritty performance by their batsmen who defied the relentless Australian bowling and the 'four seasons in a day' kind of climes that Melbourne is known for.

Notwithstanding the efforts by debutant Shubman Gill and Cheteshwar Pujara who weathered the Aussie attack in tough conditions with a 61 run partnership, the lead coming off skipper Rahane's blade was apt for the situation. Coming in after a bad loss at Adelaide wasn't going to be easy. With two senior players out (including captain, and batting warlord, Virat Kohli) and two debutants (Mohammed Siraj being the second) not too many fans could put a punt on the Indians to stand up and

take the game to the hosts. Rahane's effort of marshalling his resources to skittle out the Australians under the 200 run mark drew praises from senior cricketers who were impressed by his acumen. The smart usage leg-side attacking fielding positions — leg slip, gully and forward short leg — a rarity in modern day cricket saw the demise of the three main thorns in the Indian flesh. Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith and skipper Tim Paine perished to a strategy used predominantly in the pre-80s era of the game. There have been many thoughts and opinions about Rahane's calmness as a cricketer. Comparisons with Kohli, in terms of their individual approaches towards the game, are trending on social media with fans of

both players putting forth their points of view with the kind of passion usually exhibited by armchair experts. Legend Sunil Gavaskar, after day one, said Rahane has got a great sense of where the fielders should be kept and preferred to praise India's performance as a team effort rather than only Rahane's captaincy. Effectively he took the focus back to the DNA of Mumbai, India's premier cricket city of the recent past, where coaches and seniors always gave importance to team efforts rather than individual performances. Having watched Rahane break through to the top from his Under-19 days, one has always wondered why his classical approach hasn't given him the dividends he deserved. His average of 42.45 has belied

his ability for reasons that don't really have an explanation. When he cut Pat Cummins past point to record his 12th Test century, the first of the series by either teams, Rahane took us back to 2014 when he had notched three tons at Wellington, Lord's and Melbourne. No matter what the expert's say, to me this ton was very special for it singled a certain intent that Rahane (and team India) have put the bad 36-run episode behind them as they slowly try and climb their way into the Border-Gavaskar series. More importantly, Rahane has regained his mojo, which augurs well for India as they go ahead in this series without Kohli. Ending the second day with a lead of 82 runs with five wickets in hand, India

have given their fans two days of good cricket and plenty of hope of squaring the series. The team, with cameos coming from Hanuma Vihari and Rishab Pant and a brave unbeaten knock by Ravindra Jadeja, are looking at putting a good distance between them and the hosts as they go into the third day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). Adding valuable runs is going to be India's main task as they will look at chasing as less runs as possible considering they will be batting last. There will be many opinions and arguments about Rahane's captaincy (irrespective of the result of the ongoing Test) after this game and comparisons with the leadership style of Kohli will be expected. Debates about 'calmness

vs aggression' will continue to happen as fans play their fantasy games pitting one captain against the other. For now, team India has gained brownie points in two days of play at the MCG. The bowlers are bang on target, the team is combining very well, looks balanced irrespective of the absence of key players. As far as the question of captaincy in the immediate future of Indian Test cricket is concerned, Indian fans could do well to refrain from daydreaming and accept the reality. No matter what India does in the series going forward, Rahane is a 'stand-in' captain who will happily hand over the baton to main leader, Kohli. The best thing fans could do would be to accept this fact and leave all theories in the realm of fantasy.