


# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
KARIMNAGAR | FRIDAY | 25 DECEMBER 2020


## WEATHER

 **Max:** 28.2°C  
**Min:** 14.2°C  
**RH:** 32%  
**Rainfall:** Nil  
**Forecast:** Mist or haze.  
Max/Min temp.  
29/14

## COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+23,942)	(+324)
1,00,99,021	1,46,458
<small>covid19india.org</small>	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+617)	(+3)
TS: 2,82,347	1,518
(+402)	(+4)
AP: 8,79,339	7,082

### CASES AROUND THE WORLD

 **7,80,61,507**  
**DEATHS**  
17,16,170  
**COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES**  
**218**  
worldometers.info/coronavirus

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Dakshinayana  
**Tithi:** Margasira Shuddha Ekadasi till 1.53 am (Saturday)  
**Star:** Ashwini till 7.35 am  
**Varjyam:** 6.22 pm to 8.10 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 8.59 am to 9.42 am; 12.38 pm to 1.22 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to 12 noon  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
**Jamadi-ul-Awwal 7, 1442 AH**  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.08 am  
**Zohar:** 12.05 pm  
**Asar:** 4.11 pm  
**Maghrib:** 5.47 pm  
**Isha:** 7.02 pm  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM**  
**SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM**  
**MOONSET 12.22 PM**  
**MOONRISE 02.08 PM**

## COUNTER POINT



Psst! Corona vaccine...

## SHORT TAKES

### AP to hand over 30L house sites

**Vijayawada:** After almost seven postponements, the much-awaited flagship welfare scheme of YSR Congress government 'Navaratnalu-Pedalandariki Illu' is all set for its launch on Friday marking this year's Christmas. Spread over 15 days, house pattas would be distributed to 30 lakh women across all districts barring those having court cases. This is in keeping with the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's padayatra promise of providing pucca houses to the poor.

### Drunk cops harass girls at UoH

**Hyderabad:** Two police personnel in civil dress allegedly misbehaved with some girl students in the campus of the University of Hyderabad (UoH) here on Thursday under the influence of liquor, police said. The incident occurred in the evening and students and the university security personnel caught the reserve sub-inspector and the head constable and handed them over to the police. UoH's security officer filed a complaint stating that the two policemen entered the varsity campus on a patrol bike and allegedly misbehaved and harassed a few girl students under the influence of liquor. Breathalyser tests conducted on them showed positive for liquor consumption.

## NATION | 4



**Modi to credit funds to farmers**

deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle



## WORLD | 5

**UK, EU clinch post-Brexit deal**

## SPORTS | 8

**Australia all charged up**



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## Merry Christmas



Devotees attend the Midnight Mass at St Mary's Basilica in Secunderabad to ring in Christmas. *Deccan Chronicle* wishes all its readers a Merry Christmas, joy and peace for all.

— R. PAVAN

## IPL 2022 to have 10 teams: BCCI

**Ahmedabad, Dec. 24:** The Indian Premier League will be a 10-team affair from 2022 as the BCCI gave its stamp of approval to add two franchises, at its 89th Annual General Meeting here on Thursday.

The time constraints prevented BCCI from adding teams for the 2021 edition which would remain an eight-team tournament. The board has also decided to set a cap of one franchise per state. It's learnt

that Ahmedabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Lucknow, Visakhapatnam and Guwahati are on the BCCI's radar. The renovated Motera Stadium in Ahmedabad is considered the world's largest cricket stadium with a seating capacity of 110,000. Board members are keen to have a franchise based in Ahmedabad. Meanwhile, former India pacer Chetan Sharma was appointed chairman of the senior national selection panel

by the BCCI's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC), which also picked Abbey Kuruvilla and Debashis Mohanty in the five-member team.

The selection panel also has former India players Sunil Joshi and Harvinder Singh. Sharma is a former player who represented India in 23 Tests and 65 ODIs during an 11-year-old international career.

— Agencies

■ Full coverage on Page 8

## KARNATAKA WITHDRAWS NIGHT CURFEW

**Bengaluru, Dec. 24:** In a U-turn, the Karnataka government on Thursday withdrew its night curfew order, hours before it was to commence into effect. The decision to impose night curfew for nine days from 11 pm to 5 am starting from Thursday was taken on Wednesday in line with the Centre's advice, amid concerns over a new Covid-19 variant spreading in the UK.

In a statement, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said, "In view of the public opinion that there was no need for night curfew, the decision was reviewed and after consulting with cabinet colleagues and senior officials it has been decided to withdraw the night curfew."

Yediyurappa had initially announced yesterday that the night curfew will be imposed from December 23 till January 2 between 10 pm and 6 am.

Changes in night curfew dates and timing were announced later with Yediyurappa tweeting, it will be from December 24 till January 1, 2021, between 11 pm to 5 am (January 2, 5am).

■ Report on 4

## J&K dist voting over, Centre for Assembly polls

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

Having successfully concluded the District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir - the first major electoral process since the revocation of Article 370 in August last year - the Union home ministry is now preparing for Assembly elections in the Union Territory of J&K next year.

Sources said that the Centre is keen that an elected government should take charge of the newly created Union Territory and polls are likely to be held between September and November next year. The home ministry has already started working on a detailed plan to ensure that most of the development projects in the UT are completed before the onset of winter next year in addition to creating a conducive security environment so that elections can be conducted.

The Centre will also closely monitor the impact of the DDC elections on the ground to

● **THE HOME** ministry has started working on a plan to ensure that most of the development projects in the UT are completed before the onset of winter next year

assess how people in J&K respond to restoration of the democratic process, especially in the Valley.

"The Modi government is keen that the democratic process is restored in J&K again. The UT cannot be under Governor's rule endlessly. Now that things are gradually getting back to normal and the important DDC elections have been conducted without much violence the next logical step is the Assembly elections. So we have started preparing for the same," a senior home ministry official said.

Elections for the 278 DDCs were held recently and the results declared on Monday in which the Farooq Abdullah-led Gupkar Alliance managed to win 110 seats but the BJP emerged the single largest party by getting 75 seats while also securing the largest vote share.

## COUNT VOTES, HOLD RESULTS, COURT TELLS MAHESH BANK

**VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA I DC**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

Asking how a returning officer could abruptly suspend the counting of votes, Justice P. Naveen Rao of the Telangana High Court on Thursday ordered completion of the process for elections to the board of directors at the Mahesh Cooperative Bank Ltd.

In an order issued to the returning officer, Justice Rao said the counting should be completed soonest.

The results should not be announced but the returning officer should instead send a report to the High Court by Monday, December 28. It must carry details of the votes secured by each candidate.

Disciplinary action is likely against the returning officer who stopped the counting at the last stage of the elections on Monday without stating the reasons.

The court was dealing with three petitions filed by the contestants on Wednesday.

■ **Page 2: RO decision to stop vote count 'unilateral'**

## Tagore vision essence of Atmanirbhar: PM

**ANIMESH SINGH & RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, DEC. 24

With the upcoming West Bengal Assembly Election on his mind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday attributed the essence of the BJP-led NDA government's Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) initiative to Bengal icon Rabindranath Tagore at the centenary

celebrations of Visva-Bharati University, founded by the Nobel laureate in Santiniketan.

The speech was made in the absence of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee who later claimed that she was not invited to the event though Visva-Bharati vice-chancellor Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty's letter on December 4 inviting her as a "special guest" went

viral. Presiding as the Chancellor of the Central university, Modi, in his virtual address, said, "Guided by Gurudev, Visva-Bharati presented a strong image of Indian nationalist sentiment during the Independence. Gurudev wanted the entire humanity to benefit from India's spiritual awakening. Atmanirbhar Bharat vision is also a derivative of this senti-

ment." Invoking Tagore's famous poem, *Chitto jetha bhoi shunyo, uchcho jetha shir* (Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high) in Bengali accent, he also pitched for the National Education Policy, adding, "Today the entire country is trying to fulfil this purpose through the national education policy. Visva-Bharati has a great role to play to put it in place."

## 7 from UK test positive, test on for mutant virus

**KANIZA GARARI I DC**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

Seven among those who have returned to Telangana state from the United Kingdom have tested positive for Covid-19. Their samples have been sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) for genome sequencing to ascertain whether they have contracted the new strain.

A total of 1,200 persons have returned to the state from the UK in recent times. Of them, 846 persons have been identified.

According to sources, as many as 300 of these returnees are in Hyderabad city, more than 50 in Karimnagar district and about 25 in Warangal and Nizamabad districts. Fear is that these

● **GANDHI HOSPITAL** has about 150 beds with oxygen points and 300 in the ICU. The other centres designated for Covid-19 treatment have to start services soon and they need be equipped.

can emerge as the new clusters. The returnees have been urged to contact government officials and quarantine themselves for 14 days. Due to the festive season, a fear is that those who test negative would not want to be isolated.

Health officials are urging them to remain in isolation at their homes and not step out.

With a large number of asymptomatic carriers being around, it is not clear whether or not they are carriers of the new strain. Officials are tracing

ing them and keeping track of their whereabouts. Those who came in contact with the returnees are also being tracked.

Health minister Etala Rajendar has said surveillance teams in all districts are on high alert. The Christmas, New Year and Sankranti celebrations are risky situations this time. In a review meeting on Thursday, the minister agreed to a proposal that the facilities at government hospitals need be strengthened on an urgent basis.

Gandhi Hospital has about 150 beds with oxygen points and 300 intensive care unit beds. The other centres designated for Covid-19 treatment have to start services soon and they need be equipped.

## DENIED LOANS, STAFF DUMP GARBAGE IN FRONT OF BANKS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VUJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

Sanitary staff angry over denial of loans by banks dumped garbage in front of banks at Vuyyuru in Krishna district. The loan applicants lamented that commercial banks were reluctant to give small loans, which was objectionable. Meanwhile, the bank employees condemned the act of sanitary staff.

According to reports, several nationalised banks refused to give loans under Jaganna Thodu and Chethutha schemes infuriating applicants, who have taken the issue to the notice of ruling party leaders and officials. The angry people reportedly dumped garbage in front of three bank branches in Vuyyuru town on Thursday and employees of the banks who came to duties were shocked to see the garbage piles. They immediately informed their higher officials and municipal authorities. Later, the garbage was removed. Leaders of All India Bank Employees Association condemned the unhygienic act and suspected involvement of municipal officials.

Krishna collector A. Md Imtiaz expressed sorrow over the dumping of garbage. He asked the bankers to cooperate with the government towards sanctioning loans to poor through welfare schemes and assured banks to take measures to avoid such incidents in the future.



## SHORT TAKES

**'RO DECISION TO STOP VOTE COUNT UNILATERAL'**

From Page 1

They sought directions to complete counting of the remaining 637 votes and for declaration of the results at the earliest.

The court asked the central and state governments whether any action against the returning officer has been initiated.

Counsel for the petitioners submitted that the RO unilaterally took the decision to stop the counting. He flouted the rules. The authority has no power to stop the counting even on the ground that there were bogus voters.

Such aspects would come up only at the time of publication of the voters list, counsels argued.

The court directed the RO to submit the results to it in a sealed cover. The cases have been adjourned to Monday.

**SECRETARIAT NOT ON WETLAND: TS**

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

In a response to arguments from TPCC working president A Revanth Reddy on demolition of the state Secretariat, the Telangana Pollution Control Board has explained to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) that the Hussainsagar lake in the vicinity is not categorised as a wetland.

The main issue raised by Reddy in the petition he filed before the southern bench of the NGT was that the location of the demolition was just 80 metres away from the lake. Any such activity in the area, he argued, can be undertaken only after permission is obtained from the authority overseeing the Wetland Rules, 2017.

In its counter, the board clarified that this lake was a man-made water body and does not fall into the category of a wetland.

The board also made it clear that the waste generated via the demolition of the old secretariat complex was being "appropriately" taken care of by the Hyderabad Construction and Demolition Waste Pvt Ltd in Jeedimetla. The total waste generated was of 1,14,447 tonnes. This involved 4,578 tonnes of iron, wood and other materials. These were segregated for recycling. Till date, 33,590 tonnes of waste was processed and the rest would be done by January, 2021. The PCB said it would inspect the process and verify the quantity of waste processed every month. The facility will submit a monthly progress reports to the board," the PCB stated.

The PCB said the facility in Jeedimetla would be manufacturing products like paver blocks using the recycled aggregates and sand of 1,500 units per day.

**KCR, GOVERNOR CONVEY X-MAS WISHES**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao conveyed their Christmas greetings to people of the state.

In a message, the Governor said, "Christmas is a joyous occasion to celebrate the birth of Jesus and cherish His ideals. His life symbolises love, forgiveness, truth, compassion, brotherhood, and sacrifice."

Dr Tamilisai said, "I wish this Christmas brings boundless joy, love, peace and prosperity to all. In the true spirit of Christmas, let us resolve to make this world more prosperous, peaceful and compassionate."

The Chief Minister in his message said, "If everybody follows the teachings of Jesus Christ of love, peace and compassion, we can lead a peaceful life." He said teachings of Jesus Christ have influenced the world.

Governor Dr Tamilisai and the Chief Minister urged the people to celebrate Christmas duly following Covid-19 precautions.

● **IN A MESSAGE**, Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan said, "Christmas is a joyous occasion to celebrate the birth of Jesus and cherish His ideals. His life symbolises love, forgiveness, truth, compassion, brotherhood, and sacrifice."

## Festive mood on



The Venkateswara Swamy temple being decorated in view of Vaikuntha Ekadashi celebrations at Sitaphalmandi on Thursday in Hyderabad. — DEEPAK DESHPANDE

**Bandi plans a bus tour, padayatra in New Year**

TS BJP chief says will hit back if TRS poaches corporators

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Thursday alleged that TRS leaders were trying to lure BJP corporators GHMC by offering huge money. "If the TRS leaders touch any BJP corporator, we will poach the TRS MLAs," he said.

He was speaking at the state party office after prominent leaders from Khammam district joined the BJP. Sanjay said that the party would start a bus yatra in the New Year and then a padayatra.

Reiterating his charge that Rohingya and Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationals were staying illegally in the Old City, Sanjay said, "If the police is given 10 minutes, they will throw out all of them from the city."

Stating that several youths from the Old City were calling him to complain about the lack of development for the last several years, Sanjay asked, "Why is the MIM ignoring the development of the Old City?"

Sanjay alleged that the police were booking false cases against BJP activists who were trying to protect cows. He said the BJP was not against the police but the attitude of a few retired police officials was affecting the image of the department. "It is the responsibility of the Hindu community to protect cows. We won't interfere when the police render their duty without any bias," Sanjay said.



Union minister of state G. Kishan Reddy distributes masks at Fever Hospital in Nallakunta, in Hyderabad, on Thursday. — BY ARRANGEMENT

**Kishan starts 'wear a mask' drive**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

G. Kishan Reddy, the Union minister of state, on Thursday launched "Wear A Mask" awareness campaign at Fever Hospital crossroads of the city. The minister distributed masks to pedestrians.

Kishan Reddy appealed to the people to wear masks as it was hard to determine the timeline of

Covid-19 vaccine. Everyone has to protect themselves and their loved ones, he said.

Kishan Reddy said that in view of the Covid-19 second wave in Europe, the people have to continue to take precautions of maintaining physical distance, wearing masks and washing their hands.

The minister said that the campaign was launched in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for #MaskHaiJaruri# and this campaign was aimed at reminding all that everyone has to wear a mask to protect ourselves from Covid-19.

He said, "we will keep continuing the campaign for we can't be complacent as the world continues to fight the Covid-19 pandemic."

**112 kg marijuana seized, 7 drug peddlers nabbed**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

The Uppal police seized a 100-kg marijuana consignment from three peddlers and placed them under arrest on Thursday.

The accused were identified as Shaik Ismail, Mankari Satish, and Mankari Prakash, said the police, adding that their associate, Arun Singh, is reportedly absconding.

Ismail, a bike mechanic by profession, began procuring the drugs from one Raju of Chintapalli hills and sold it to Satish and other customers.

Police said he used to procure ganja for ₹1,000 per kg and sold it for ₹10,000 per kg."

Elsewhere, the Madhapur Special Operation Team apprehended three men, including two students, with 8 kg marijuana and 900 grams of liquid ganja on Thursday night.

The accused, K. Jaya Krishna Reddy, 24, Janavath Balaram Naik, 23, and Segu Venkata Srikanth, 23, were caught by the SOT officials following at Western hills in Addagutta of KPHB, police said.

Police said they admitted that Krishna Reddy

procured dry ganja from Vizag agency and was selling the same in Hyderabad.

The West Zone Task Force caught two persons who were smuggling marijuana and seized four kg of the contraband from them on Thursday. The accused, P. Anil, 22, and S. Srikanth, 27, are residents of Karwan and good friends. "They had kept the drug in a bag and were waiting for customers while sitting in an autorickshaw when they were caught at Langer Houz," said Gattu Mallu, West Zone Task Force inspector.

**NEW MUTANT MAY REPLACE OLD STRAIN**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

The new more infective Coronavirus strain from the United Kingdom may replace the I/A31 clade, which entered the countries from south-east Asia.

Over time, the weaker A31 clade was replaced by the A2a clade which is the prevalent global strain.

Dr Rakesh Mishra, director of CCMB, said, "With infectivity rate as high as 71 per cent the existing strain will be replaced by the new one. The parallel strain in South Africa suggests that it affects younger people more but more research is required."

What health complications the new strain will lead to is not known. Dr Mishra said, "The virus mutation was slow but it has developed a new strain which is more virulent. We cannot let our guard down."

Dr Mishra met Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu in the city and briefed him about the new strain.

The CCMB director stated that the disaster management techniques that have worked for SARS-CoV-2 in 2020 will have to continue.

The biggest worry is the status of the vaccines due to the emerging new strains.

**TS to give vaccine to 80L in 1st phase**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

Up to 80 lakh people have to be vaccinated in the first phase, and the state government is gearing up for it.

The government is creating transportation, cold chain, storage and distribution facilities and training of health workers for the vaccination process is being taken up.

The idea is that if one public health centre can vaccinate 100 people every day, 10 lakh people can be covered per day.

In a review meeting with health secretary Syed Ali Murtuza Rizvi, family welfare commissioner Wakati Karuna, medical education director Dr Ramesh Reddy, public health director Dr Srinivasa Rao and others, it was decided that the only way forward was to vaccinate and that the state was going to opt for the maximum vaccination programme.

Health, police, municipal and fire personnel are first on the list to be vaccinated. Then follow the elderly.

The second dose is given after 28 days and the logistics are being worked out to ensure that all of those who get the first dose are covered by the second dose too.

In districts and rural areas, there is a need to have a proper cold chain

**STATE RECORDS 574 NEW COVID-19 CASES**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

Telangana state reported 574 fresh Covid-19 cases on Wednesday, taking the tally to 2,83,556, as per the health department's medical bulletin issued on Thursday. The toll rose to 1,524 with two new fatalities. The bulletin said the state has 6,815 active cases.

The GHMC area recorded 109 cases in the last 24 hours, followed by Ranga Reddy district with 48 and Medchal Malkajgiri 42. The bulletin said 384 people had recovered, taking the recoveries to 2,75,217.

facility and identifying the nearest public health centres where vaccines can be given properly. After vaccination a waiting time of 30 minutes to an hour has to be followed. This is to ensure that in case of adverse reactions it is immediately attended to.

Vaccination has to be carried out at centres where emergency facilities in ambulances too can be provided so that the adverse reactions are attended on time.

**Big revamp in TRS likely in 2021**

From Page 1

Sources in the party said that Chandrashekar Rao is of the firm view that allowing the BJP to widen its base in the state would work to the serious disadvantage of the TRS. Strong responses are called for.

This, he feels, would require a lot of legwork, big build-up at mass levels and a simultaneous toning up of the state administration.

The need for TRS functionaries and ministers to maintain close contact with the people at the grassroots level was stressed.

Frequent interactions between party cadres and people's representatives at multiple levels are a must, the Chief Minister felt. For this, the energetic leader must be placed at the top of the party as also the government, he said.

Thus, a massive revamp in the party and the government in 2021 is anticipated in TRS circles.

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

Minister K.T. Rama Rao has requested Union textile minister Smriti Irani to grant funds from the Union Budget 2021-22 for the development of Kakatiya Mega Textile Park (KMTP), sanction the mega powerloom cluster at Sircilla and sanction certain proposals for the development of handlooms and textiles.

In a letter to the Union minister, Rama Rao said that the KMTP at Warangal would take off in the 2021-22. It is being developed at ₹1,552 crore of which the core infrastructure works would cost approximately ₹1,094

crore. "We understand that a total of ₹500 crore capital support is available for a mega textile park. We request that approximately ₹300 crore of this amount be released at the earliest," to start major external infrastructure works, he said.

He said the government had geo-tagged powerlooms of which the state had 35,588; 25,495 of these were in Sircilla district.

That made Sircilla the most suitable to establish the mega powerloom cluster, he said. He also requested for sanctioning of the Indian Institute of Handloom Technology in Telangana.

**Inspector sustains burns trying to stop woman from attacking**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

P. Bikshapathy Rao, the Jawaharnagar police station house officer, sustained severe burns when he tried to stop a woman who was wielding a burning torch and threatening municipal officials who came to demolish her house in Balajinagar on Thursday evening.

The official sustained 45 per cent burns and is undergoing treatment in an ICU at a private hospi-

tal. According to sources, the incident occurred when mandal revenue officer Gautam Kumar and Jawaharnagar municipal commissioner N. Mangamma went to Balajinagar following complaints of illegal constructions. Poonam, a resident of Balajinagar, refused to open the door when the officials knocked.

"She set an end of a stick on fire with kerosene and threatened the officials. When Bikshapathy Rao

tried to open the door, his hands caught fire," police sources said. The fire soon spread to his arms and legs.

The locals and the police doused the flames and rushed him to a private hospital in Dammaiguda and he was later brought to a corporate hospital.

DGP M. Mahendar Reddy and Rachakonda police commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat met the official's family in the hospital on Thursday night.



Joseph cathedral church illuminated on Christmas Eve to mark their 200 years celebrations on Thursday in Hyderabad. — DEEPAK DESHPANDE

the Indian Army for 20 years. Even when I kept moving places on transfers, I made sure I visited the closest churches for the midnight mass," he said.

Large numbers of Non-Resident Indians have made up their mind to celebrate Christmas 2020 in the midst of their loved ones. Rahul Pranay Kumar, a permanent resident (PR) of Canada, was here celebrating and he's having great time with his family.

Stated he, "I missed my mother and sister for the past four Christmases.

Without your near and dear ones around, it will be a blue Christmas even if you are at the best of places.

This season is filled with so much of fun and celebrations, as we all went for the carol rounds."

Paul Mithra, a US resident, was in the city to celebrate Christmas along with his parents. "Yes, after two decades", he beamed.

"This Christmas brings all my memories back. The church is beautifully lit up. Any celebration in my own Hyderabad is always the

best for me."

Gopa Daniel, member of the Pastorate committee, said, "The Wesley Church, Ramkote, is all set to dedicate its new church constructed in the same premises by the Most Rt Rev A Dharamaraj Rasalam, moderator for the Churches of South India, on Christmas Day."

Celine Lazarus of the St Sebastian Church, Defiance Colony, hailing from the Anglo Indian Community, said: "Since the pandemic is all around, the family is making sure we attend the virtual service."



## OTHER STORIES

### MP Arvind effigies burnt

**Nizamabad:** Widespread protest continued in Nizamabad district on Thursday and effigies of MP D. Arvind were burnt for his alleged comments against TRS MLC Kalkavuntla Kavitha. The TRS leaders staged protests in Nizamabad, Dichpally, Indalwai, Nandipet, Balkonda and other mandals. Women activists in large numbers took part in the protest. The protestors warned Arvind to withdraw his comments against the woman elected representative. Reportedly, MP Arvind pointed out the visit of Nizamabad MLC Kavitha in Jagtial district recently and his comments went viral on social media.

## TWO MINISTERS TO VISIT KAMAREDDY TODAY

**NARENDER PULLOOR | DC KAMAREDDY, DEC. 24**

Minister for agriculture and marketing S. Niranjan Reddy, Minister for roads and buildings V. Prashanth Reddy will visit Kamareddy district today. They will inaugurate Rythu Vedikas in Bhiknoor, Rajampet, Kamareddy mandals and will participate in other developmental programmes.

Kamareddy MLA, Government whip Gampa Govardhan asked the TRS elected representatives to ensure that the programmes are successful. Kamareddy district administration made arrangements for the programmes.

## CHIEF WHIP CELEBRATES X-MAS WITH INMATES

**ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, DEC. 24**

Chief Whip of the Telangana government Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar participated in the Christmas celebrations at the Warangal Central Jail here on Thursday.

“The achievement and growth of Telangana state reflects in these celebrations. I am celebrating every festival with you as a family member to boost your self-confidence. I also come to the Central Jail to celebrate Dussehra, Ramadan and Christmas. None of the prisoners should lose their self-confidence and be tempted towards vice,” he said.

On the eve of Christmas, a cake was cut with the Christian inmates in the Central Jail.

## FOUR KILLED AS CAR HITS WATER TANKER IN HYD

**DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24**

Four students were killed and two sustained serious injuries when their car rammed into a water tanker while they were trying to overtake another car on Thursday evening on the Hyderabad-Warangal National Highway at Bhongir.

The deceased were identified as C. Venkatesh, from Kushaiguda, who was at the wheel, P. Kalyan Reddy, from Nizamabad, V. Karthik, from Ghatkesar and E. Ravikiran, from Malkajgiri.

K. Akhil Reddy, from Annojiguda, Medipally, G. Harshvardhan of Kushaiguda, and G. Saicharan, from Malkajgiri were injured.

They were all B.Tech second year engineering students of Holy Mary College in Ghatkesar. Everyone was 19 years old, except Kalyan Reddy who was 18.

“They were heading back to the city in the car (AP28 DM 9989) after attending a wedding when they met with the accident at around 5.15 pm,” the police said, adding that the water tanker was parked on the roadside for watering of saplings of Telangana Ku Haritha Haram.

Upon getting the information, Bhongir police rushed to the spot and shifted the bodies to the area hospital of Bhongir for post-mortem examination. The injured persons were brought to a hospital in the city.

According to the Hyderabad traffic police website, the car they were driving was registered to one Manda Aravid and had five unpaid challans amounting to ₹3,975 since September 2017, including three for speeding and dangerous driving.

■ **THEY WERE** all B.Tech second year engineering students of Holy Mary College in Ghatkesar.

# Nizamabad, Kamareddy put on alert to curb virus spread

24 in Nizamabad, 3 in Kamareddy identified as recent returnees from UK

**DC CORRESPONDENT NIZAMABAD/KAMAREDDY, DEC. 24**

The administrations on Thursday sounded a high alert over the possible spread of the mutant strain in the Coronavirus as a few persons have arrived in Nizamabad and Kamareddy districts from the UK recently. Medical and health officials identified 24 persons in Nizamabad district and three persons in Kamareddy district as having returned from the UK. Returnees from the UK between December 9 to 21 will be checked.

Kamareddy district medical and health officer Dr P. Chandrasekhar said, “We conducted the RT-PCR tests for UK returnees and all tested negative. They were advised to undergo a further 14 days of home quarantine as a precautionary measure, he said.

The UK returnees had already completed their quarantine period but had been asked to isolate themselves in view of the spread in Britain of the mutant Coronavirus.

In Nizamabad district, 24 persons including children returned from the UK. They are residents of Nizamabad city, Mopal, Nandipet and Makloor mandals. The samples of the returnees were collected for Coronavirus tests. Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Nizamabad district medical and health officer Dr M. Sudarshanam said that they are waiting for the results.

Police also verified the details of UK returnees. The movement, health tests and quarantine details of the returnees were collected. Around 352 persons reached Telangana from UK recently and their details are being verifying by different agencies, sources said.

## Officials send 15 samples for tests in Karimnagar

**PULI SHARATH KUMAR | DC KARIMNAGAR, DEC. 24**

Health officials have traced 15 persons who have arrived from the UK, where cases of mutant Coronavirus are being reported. Out of these 15, 10 are from Karimnagar, four from Peddapalli and one from Rajanna Sircilla district. Health officials have sent the samples of the 15 persons for RT-PCR tests.

News about the arrival of persons from Britain to Karimnagar district went viral on various social media platforms. The district is especially shaky as it had hit the

headlines in March when 10 Indonesians tested positive for Covid-19.

Collector K. Shashanka, district medical and health officer Dr G. Sujatha, municipal commissioner V. Kranthi and city mayor Y. Sunil Rao and police commissioner V.B. Kamalasan Reddy had controlled the spread of the virus then by adopting the formula of 3Ts — tracing, testing and treating. The officials have decided to adopt the same success formula in the district to prevent the spread of mutant strain if it has reached the district. They instructed UK returnees to remain in quarantine at their

respective houses and started tracing of primary contacts.

Dr Sujatha speaking to the *Deccan Chronicle* said that she was surprised to see the social media posts claiming that the second wave of Coronavirus.

She said that upon receiving information from the health department about the UK returnees, they were traced immediately and their samples sent for testing. The results on Thursday confirmed they were negative. “There is no need to panic. But people should not forget to take precautionary steps and follow Covid-19 norms,” she said.

## Teppostavam fete



The Teppostavam of Lord Sita Ramachandra Swamy performed in an artificial pond on Thursday instead of Godavari river due to Covid-19. The temple officials set up a pond in front of Chitrakuta Mandapam and performed the ritual. The ritual was held amidst priests, vedic pundits, temple staff and police. — DC

## Spl consumer courts in every district mooted

**DC ORRESPONDENT KARIMNAGAR, DEC. 24**

Members of Karimnagar Consumer Council held a meeting to discuss the legislations enacted for protection of the interests of consumers and to create awareness among the people about consumer rights on the occasion of National Consumer Day here on Thursday. They resolved to establish special consumer courts in every district to clear pending cases.

Speaking on the occasion, president of the State Council, N. Srinivas said that according to the new Consumer Act, there is a possibility of more cases as now consumers can complain against issues ranging up to Rs.1 crore in value as against

■ **They resolved to establish special consumer courts in every district to clear pending cases.**

the earlier limit of Rs.20 lakh. As of now, around 4,000 cases are pending in the state. In Karimnagar alone, about 1,236 cases are pending for the past several years. For pursuing all the cases and resolving the issues, there is a need for establishment of either additional benches or special consumer courts in every district, he opined.

A lecturer at Marri Chenna Reddy Human Resource Centre, M. Jagadishwar alleged that the consumer information centres in many districts were not working properly and the gov-

ernment was silent on the issue.

The government should increase its vigil on shops as many consumers are being cheated either with adulterated food items or weighing with fake weights. Apart from that the government must insist managements of colleges to establish Consumer Clubs for creating awareness about consumer rights among the students, he suggested. Members of the district unit Consumer Council, K. Ramachandra Reddy, V. Laxman Kumar, R. Chandra Prabhakar, Syed Muzaffar, R. Venkateswara Rao, M. Gangadhar, Prakash Halla, Mahendar Reddy, Mohan and Ganga Rao were present at the meeting.

**DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 24**

Cyberabad police commissioner V.C. Sajinar met K. Nikhila, regional director of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), on Thursday and discussed the misuse of online applications by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and other entities in the name of instant personal loans.

Rohini Priyadarshini, DCP Crimes, explained how these loan apps functioned, and said that they were developed by companies that have agreements with NBFCs and others.

“These entities run call centres to call the borrower in case of default. They categorise the defaulters into different buckets based on the number of days they are due and make threatening and abusive calls and send messages not only to the borrowers but also to the relatives and his/her con-

tacts. They are also resorting to sending fake legal notices as if they were sent from the CBI,” said the official.

RBI officials briefed the police officials on the central bank’s regulations on digital lending platforms / mobile apps.

They also said that the names of the digital lending platforms engaged as agents shall be disclosed on the websites of banks/NBFCs. Further, the digital lending platforms engaged as agents are also required to disclose upfront to the customer the name of the bank/NBFC on whose behalf they are transacting.

The RBI officials highlighted a recent release wherein people were cautioned not to fall prey to the activities of unscrupulous elements but to verify the antecedents of the company/firm offering loans online or through mobile apps.

## JAC wants probe into SCCL exam scam

**DC CORRESPONDENT KOTHAGUDEM, DEC. 24**

Telangana Unemployed JAC chairman K. Manavatha Roy demanded the Centre to order a CBI enquiry into the scam surrounding the conduct of the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) exams for filling up mechanical and electrical engineer posts.

He said that people from Bihar and Haryana were involved in the scam and some from the two states were caught while writing the exam in place of the actual candidates.

“About 32 persons are involved in the scam and the state police arrested 12

■ **PEOPLE FROM Bihar and Haryana were involved in the scam and some were caught while writing the exam in place of the actual candidates.**

persons and remanded them. The police have given permission to SCCL management to announce results without completing the investigation”, he said.

Roy said this exposes the negligence and failure of the vigilance department of SCCL.

There is no proper check, no biometric, no fingerprint, no CCTV footage and mainly no seal on the question paper bunch.

Roy said that they would meet Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, G. Kishan Reddy, demanding a CBI enquiry into the scam.

**Punjab State Power Corporation Limited**

Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001  
**CIN: U40109PB2010SGC033813, Telefax: 0175-2201258**  
 E-mail: cao-revenue@pspcl.in Website: pspcl.in  
 Office of The CAO Revenue  
**EOI Press Notice**

Punjab State Power Corporation Limited intends to get a System Audit conducted regarding flawless functioning of its digital transactions' system.

Service Providers having technical and financial exposure in this field may submit EOI, covering all activities to be performed under "Digital Transactions' System Audit" to the office of CAO/ Revenue, Room Number 507, 5th Floor, PSPCL Head Office, Patiala or through email to cao-revenue@pspcl.in by 25th January, 2021.

Details of existing flow of activities and tentative scope of the proposed job is available on PSPCL website.  
 (www.pspcl.in, Information Centre, Office Orders & Circulars, CAO Revenue, Digital Transactions' System Audit)  
 Date: 23.12.2020  
 C-386/2020  
 RO: 76155/12/8/2021/108

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**POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property)**  
 Appendix IV of the Act - rule -8(1)

Whereas, the undersigned, as the Authorized Officer of the A.P. State Financial Corporation under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 03.12.2019 calling upon the borrower M/s. Fruity borewells, Represented by its proprietor Sri Manthiwar Gangadhar, H.No.2-54/1, Ruvvi (V) Mudhole (M), Nirmal District and also owner of the property/sureties to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 19.24 lakhs (Rupees Nineteen Lakhs Twenty Four Thousand only) as on 31.10.2019 within 60days from the date of receipt of the said said notice.

The borrowers/ surety having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers/owners of property and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Sec.13 (4) of the said Act read with rule-8 of the said rules on this 19th day of December 2020.

The borrowers/surety of the property in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charge of Andhra Pradesh State Financial Corporation, Mancherial Branch for an amount of Rs. 19.24 lakhs and interest thereon, costs etc.

**Description of the Immoveable Property**

1) Residential House with GF (126.50 sq.mts plinth area) bearing D.No. 1-4-176/20/1A, Plot No.3 constructed on land measuring 266.66 Sq. yards in Sy.No.1532 situated at Adarsha Nagar, within limits of Nirmal municipality, Nirmal Town & District (formerly Adilabad District) belongs to Sri Doddolla Kranthi Kiran, S/o. Bhojanna, R/o H.No. 1-4-176/20/1A, Plot No.3, Adarsha Nagar, Nirmal Town & District and bounded by: East: Plot No.4, West: Plot No.2, North: 30' Road, South: Plot No.7.2) Residential Plot land measuring 188.88 Sq. Yards covered by Plot No.21 in Sy.No. 173 (Part) & 179A (Part) situated at nearest D.No. 4-176, manjapur (V&GP), within limits of Nirmal Municipality, nirmal Town & District (formerly Adilabad District) belongs to Sri Doddolla Kranthi Kiran, S/o. Bhojanna, R/o. H.No. 1-4-176/20/1A, Plot No.3, Adarsha Nagar, Nirmal, Nirmal Town & District and bounded by: East Road, West Plot of Mayor babu, North: Road, South: Plot of Sri G.Devidas. 3) Residential Open Plot land measuring 144.83 Sq. yards covered by plot no.16 in Sy.No. 378, situated at Siddapur Shivar, Municipal limits of Nirmal, Nirmal Town & District (formerly Adilabad District) belongs to Sri Doddolla Kranthi Kiran, S/o. Bhojanna, R/o. H.No. 1-4-176/20/1A, Plot No.3, Adarsha Nagar, Nirmal Town & District and bounded by: East: Plot No.18, West: house of Sri Raghuram (House number not allotted), North: 20' Road, nearest D.No. 1-4-176/20/1A, South: Plot No.21. 5) Residential building with GF (142.19 Sq.mts plinth area) bearing D.No. 1-4-176/20/26, Plot No.3 in Sy.No. 1528, constructed on land measuring 266.66 Sq yards situated at Adarsha Nagar, within limits of Nirmal Municipality, Nirmal Town & District (formerly Adilabad District) belongs to Smt. Doddolla hemalatha, W/o Late Bhojanna, R/o. H.No. 1-4-176/20/26, Plot No.3, Adarsha Nagar, Nirmal Town & District and bounded by: East: Land belongs to Shishu Mandir School, West: 20' Road (Proposed 30'), North: house belongs to Sri Pandit (New house H.No. not allotted), South: Open plot belongs to Sri Sai Ram.

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## IN BRIEFS

**ED attaches ₹1.8 cr FDs in Kerala case**

**New Delhi:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth ₹1.85 crore, including those of former Kerala principal secretary M. Sivasankar, in connection with its money laundering probe in the alleged Kerala gold smuggling case, the agency said on Thursday. "Fixed deposits along with seized cash recovered from the bank lockers totalling to ₹1.85 crore have been attached. Among the attached assets, ₹1 crore belongs to M. Sivasankar, IAS and former principal secretary to the Chief Minister of Kerala," the agency said in a statement.

**India's first elderly Covid survivor dies**

**Pathanamthitta (Kerala):** The country's first oldest Covid-19 survivor Thomas Abraham died of age-related ailments on Thursday, his family said here. The 93-year-old died in Ranni village in the district and the funeral would be held at a church at Aithala on Friday.

He is survived by his wife and three children. The recovery of the 93-year-old Abraham and his 88-year-old wife after a battle against Coronavirus in March this year was dubbed by the medical community as a miracle cure.

**'TOY TRAIN' RESUMES IN DARJEELING**

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 24**

Nearly nine months after its shutdown due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, Toy Train, an integral part of Darjeeling and also a world heritage known for its "Joy Ride", will be back on its track in the hills from Christmas on Friday with three daily services.

North East Frontier Railway chief public relations officer Shubhanan Chanda said, "Consequent upon the permission received from the Government of West Bengal to resume the 'Joy Ride' train services; NFR authorities decided to re-start some of the services which had to be suspended due to outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic since last week of March."

He added, "Three daily services of the 'Joy Ride' train will presently run w.e.f. 25th December 2020 between Darjeeling to Ghum & back to Darjeeling with stoppage for passengers at Batasia loop for 10 minutes to visit Batasia Eco Garden & Gorkha War Memorial and 20 minutes stoppage at Ghum to visit Ghum Museum."

The first service of the day, from 9.25 am to 11.20 am, will be run by a steam engine while the second, from 12 pm to 13.40 pm, will be on a diesel one followed by the last, from 1.50 pm to 3.45 pm, a steam engine again.

**SIT SAYS BONES OF RAPE VICTIM NOT MISSING**

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 24**

Even as people question the veracity of the SIT version in the 'rape and murder' of the five-year-old girl of Jadupur in Odisha's Nayagarh district, senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Arun Bothra, the head of the Special Investigation Team investigating the case, on Thursday clarified on the missing-bones claims and the doubts raised over the minor's body decomposing in just a few days.

Apparently trying to clear the air, Bothra told reporters, "No bones of the deceased girl are missing. The post mortem report has no mention of any missing bone, and the doctors too have corroborated the same." After the skeletal remains were traced on July 23, Bothra said, bones were sent to the lab for DNA testing to identify the body of the deceased. On being asked why the police sniffer dogs failed to trace the decomposed body by following the trail of the stench, the senior official said, "The SIT hasn't used a dog squad. So I cannot comment on the dog squad."

The SIT on Thursday took prime accused Saroj Sethi to Jadupur village for reconstruction of the crime scene, ascertainment of the modus operandi and subsequent destruction of evidence by the accused.

**Chilly morning**

People sit around a bonfire to warm themselves during a cold and foggy morning in Gurugram on Thursday. Bitter cold conditions persisted in most parts of north India as the minimum temperatures hovered well below the normal limits at several places in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

**India, UK discuss vaccine****Oxford, AstraZeneca seek permission to roll out shots**

**VINEETA PANDEY | DC WITH agency inputs NEW DELHI, DEC. 24**

Union health and family welfare minister Dr Harsh Vardhan held discussions with his British counterpart Matt Hancock on the issue of new mutated SARS-CoV-2 virus in the United Kingdom. The issue of vaccines was also discussed in the meeting held on Wednesday evening.

"Held an insightful virtual interaction with Secretary of State for Health and Social Care of UK, Rt Matt Hancock, yesterday. We discussed strengthening India-UK ties

in health sector, India's preparedness for rolling out Covid-19 vaccine and new variant of SARS-CoV-2 in UK. I said that while Covid-19 vaccine development has been expedited, protocols ensuring its safety & efficacy have not been compromised, India has vast experience in producing vaccines, we are committed to making the Covid vaccine affordable & accessible to people across the world," Dr Harsh Vardhan said in a series of tweets.

The University of Oxford and AstraZeneca, that is making the Covid-19 vaccine, have submitted a full data package to

the UK health regulator and sought permission to roll out their vaccines. "I'm delighted that the @UniofOxford/@AstraZeneca vaccine, developed in the UK, has submitted its full data package to the @MHRAgovuk for approval. This is the next step towards a decision on the deployment of the #coronavirus vaccine," UK Health Minister Matt Hancock said in a tweet.

The Covid-19 vaccine by Pfizer-BioNTech was the first to be authorised for use by the UK and has already been given to over five lakh people since last month.

Even as India is ready to

procure international vaccines, it is keen to join the global teams that have their vaccines and is looking at the international market to push its indigenous vaccines that are still under development.

The New Delhi based AIIMS on Thursday invited volunteers for the Phase III clinical trial of the indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine candidate 'Covaxin' for one of the sites.

"This is a whole-virion inactivated vaccine co-sponsored by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Bharat Biotech," AIIMS said in an advertisement.

**51 LAKH TO GET VACCINE IN 1ST PHASE: KEJRIWAL**

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24**

The Delhi government is fully prepared to receive, store and administer Covid-19 vaccine to 51 lakh priority category persons in the city in the first phase of vaccination, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Thursday.

He said his government is all set to start the vaccination drive as soon as it gets the vaccine from the Centre, and registration is underway for people in three priority categories who will receive it first.

Asked about the charges for the vaccine, and if it will be free of cost, a senior official in the Chief Minister's Office said the government has not taken any decision in this regard so far.

"There are a total of 51 lakh priority category persons in Delhi — three lakh health workers, six lakh frontline workers, and 42 lakh of those aged above 50 and those below 50 but having co-morbidities," the Chief Minister said at a virtual press briefing.

Each person will be given two doses, and a total of 1.02 crore doses will be required in the first phase of vaccination in Delhi, he said.

**Kerala Cabinet to request Gov. again for spl session**

**Thiruvananthapuram, Dec. 24:** Days after Governor Arif Mohammed Khan declined nod for a special Assembly session, the Kerala cabinet on Thursday again decided to recommend to him to convene a one-day session to discuss and pass a resolution against the three central agricultural laws, against which farmers have been protesting near Delhi.

Instead of the special session earlier, the cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief

Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, decided to recommend to the Governor to convene the 21st session of the 14th Kerala Legislative Assembly on December 31 to discuss the farmers' issue.

The Governor had turned down an earlier plea of the Left government to convene a special session on December 23 citing that there was no urgency as a normal Assembly session was scheduled on January 8, 2021. Vijayan told reporters here the government decided to

recommend again as the concerns and problems faced by the agriculture sector and farming community continued to be serious.

Explaining the circumstances that forced the cabinet to come up with the recommendation again, he said at the national level, the agricultural sector and the farming community were facing serious issues. The situation was that the southern state was largely dependent on other states for foodgrains, he said. — PTI

**MUMBAI LOCAL TRAIN SERVICE LIKELY TO RESUME IN JANUARY**

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

The Maharashtra government is planning to resume the local train services for commuters in the first week of January. Almost nine months after the local trains would be resumed for Mumbaikars. However, the officers said that if a new variant of coronavirus is found in Mumbai, the resumption of suburban services would be further postponed.

The suburban services carry more than 70 lakh passengers on all four lines of the Central Railways (CR) and Western Railways (WR).

Maharashtra's relief and rehabilitation minister Vijay Wadettiwar said that the decision regarding resumption of local train services for all people would be taken. The government has already allowed water sports and boating (naukavihar).

"We will take the decision soon regarding the resumption of local services for commuters. I think by the first week of January, the local services would resume. The chief minister is also trying for it," Wadettiwar added.

In October 2020, the Maharashtra government had suggested to Central Railways (CRs) and Western Railways (WRs) to resume the suburban services for the common commuters, but both the railways had asked the state government to decide the technological solution to stagger the rush in the trains.

**OWAISI'S AIMIM TO CONTEST MP CIVIC BODY ELECTIONS**

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, DEC. 24**

Asaduddin Owaisi's All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin (AIMIM) is planning to make electoral debut in Madhya Pradesh by fielding its candidates in the upcoming civic body polls in the state, expected to be held in January-February, 2021. This was indicated by acting president of the MP unit of AIMIM Naeem Ansari here on Wednesday. "AIMIM is seriously considering contesting the upcoming Madhya Pradesh civic body polls. We have set in motion the process of fielding candidates in at least a dozen municipal bodies including in Bhopal and Indore in the ensuing civic polls", he told reporters.

This was the first time Owaisi's party is testing electoral waters in a bipolar state like MP after its success in the recent Assembly elections in Bihar where AIMIM secured five seats, taking poll pundits by surprise.

Muslims have sizable populations in municipal areas of Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain, Khandwa, Sagar, Burhanpur, Khargone, Ratlam, Jaora, Jabalpur, Balaghat, and Mandsaur.

The party is mulling to field candidates in these municipal bodies in the upcoming polls. Syed Minhajuddin, state in-charge of AIMIM and a 3-time councillor of GHMC has been assigned the task of conducting an internal survey for the purpose, Ansari said.

**Karnataka withdraws night curfew order within 24-hrs**

**Bengaluru, Dec. 24:** In a

U-turn, the Karnataka government on Thursday withdrew its night curfew order, hours before it was to commence into effect. The decision to impose night curfew for nine days from 11 pm to 5 am starting from Thursday was taken on Wednesday in line with the Centre's advice, amid concerns over a new Covid-19 variant spreading in the UK.

In a statement, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said, "In view of the public opinion that there was no need for night curfew, the decision was reviewed and after consulting with cabinet colleagues and senior officials it has been decided to withdraw the night curfew."

Yediyurappa had initially announced yesterday that the night curfew will be imposed from December 23 till January 2 between 10 pm and 6 am.

Changes in night curfew dates and timing were announced later with Yediyurappa tweeting, it will be from December 24 till January 1, 2021, between 11 pm to 5 am (January 2, 5am).

The Chief Minister today

appealed to the people to exercise self-restraint by wearing facemasks, hand hygiene and social distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The decision to impose night curfew had drawn flak from the ruling as well as the opposition parties. Terming the night curfew as a measure to 'cover up' wrongdoings of the BJP government by diverting public attention, Congress state chief D.K. Shivakumar said, "This is a government which is not accountable. It tries to divert public attention through various means. How does the night curfew help containing the Coronavirus?"

BJP MLC A.H. Vishwanath, who is aspiring to become a minister, criticised the government's decision to impose night curfew.

"I request the government to reconsider its decision to impose night curfew. Some of the decisions should be taken after much deliberation because it's a government for the people," Vishwanath told media in Mysuru.

Another senior BJP leader and Vijayapura

MLA, Basanagouda Patil Yatnal too urged the government to reconsider its decision on the restrictions. Earlier in the day, Karnataka health minister Dr K. Sudhakar defended the government's move to impose night curfew saying it was done on the advice of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for Covid-19.

Speaking to reporters in the city, he said, "TAC had recommended imposing night curfews from 8 pm onwards as a precautionary measure. However, after much deliberation we decided to restrict movement of individuals from 11 pm to 5 am." Reacting to criticism of the government's move, Sudhakar sought to know what important economic activities take place at night.

"When all the essential services, healthcare facilities and transport are well in place, I would like to know whom the night curfew is going to affect?" he asked.

As the festival season started from December 24, the minister opined that thousands of youth may step out in the night for celebrations. — PTI

**RANAUT TO MOVE HC AGAINST DEMOLITION ORDER**

**SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

Kangana Ranaut is likely to approach the Bombay High Court against the order of a Mumbai local court that dismissed her suit to protect her house from demolition.

Her lawyer Rizwan Siddique said, "Yes, it is true that the Dindoshi Court dismissed an application for interim protection which was filed by my client Ms Ranaut together with all other residents of DB Breeze building. The said matter will now be filed before the Bombay High Court."

The BMC had sent a notice to Kangana Ranaut in 2018 over alleged illegal construction undertaken at her fifth-floor residential apartment at Khair.

**Sena-led civic body rejects land for bullet train station**

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

A day after the Shiv Sena-led Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) rejected a proposal for handing over land for a bullet train station in the district, the BJP on Wednesday slammed the Shiv Sena calling it a narrow-minded and irresponsible party. TMC's decision comes amid a dispute between the Sena-led Maharashtra government and the Union government over allotment of salt pan land for Mumbai Metro car shed in Mumbai.

Maharashtra BJP's media department chief Vishwas Pathak told this newspaper that the Sena is acting just to satisfy Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's ego.

"Bullet train project should not be seen as project of Prime Minister Narendra

● **THE CIVIC** body's decision comes amid a dispute between the Sena-led Maharashtra government and the Union government over allotment of salt pan land for Metro car shed in Mumbai.

● **BJP SLAMS** the Shiv Sena and calls it a narrow-minded and irresponsible party.

Modi. It is a national project, which had been initiated by UPA-2 under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh. Because of delay in the bullet train as well as metro projects, the public of Mumbai are going to face great difficulty and hardship," Pathak said.

The TMC has rejected a proposal to accept compensation from the National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd, which is a

nodal agency of the bullet train project, for the transfer of nearly 2000 hectare land.

Nareish Mhaske, Mayor of TMC said that the proposal was brought in the general body meeting and it was unanimously rejected by all parties. She has also taken the rejection on record.

By bringing the proposal on record the TMC Mayor had ensured that the same cannot be brought up in the house for at least three months.

Even after three months, it can only be brought in by a member who was not present for Wednesday's meeting.

It is apparent that the Sena is trying to create hurdles for the Centre's bullet train project in Thane by not approving the land transfer.

**PM to credit funds to 9-cr kisans today**

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24**

As the protests against recently-passed three farm laws grow louder, the BJP will dedicate the birth anniversary of its patriarch and former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Friday to the farmers with Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing them and transferring ₹18,000 crores to the accounts of 9 crore farmers under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana.

To make the event grand, the BJP leadership has instructed its leaders, MPs, MLAs and office-bearers in its

state units to invite farmers to all the districts and state offices to listen to the Prime Minister's address and it should be widely publicised.

The party has also asked its leaders to make arrangements at all Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) and cooperative centres to ensure mass participation.

The party has asked its leaders to put up big screens for listening to the Prime Minister's address at every block development centre, ensuring participation of the maximum number of farmers.



## SHORT TAKES

## 15-YRS' JAIL TO HAFIZ SAEED IN ONE MORE CASE

**Lahore, Dec. 24:** Mumbai terror attack mastermind and Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed was on Thursday sentenced to 15 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan in one more terror financing case. The court also imposed 200,000 Pakistani rupees fine on him.

Saeed, 70, has already been convicted for 21 years imprisonment in four terror financing cases of late. Now, Saeed will have to undergo collective imprisonment of over 36 years in five terror financing cases at the Kot Lakhpat Jail Lahore. His punishment will run concurrently in these cases.

## BODIES OF 20 MIGRANTS RETRIEVED

**Tunis, Dec. 24:** Tunisia's coastguard on Thursday retrieved the bodies of 20 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa after their boat capsized at sea, a spokesman for the defence ministry said. Five other migrants who were on board were rescued, ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri said, adding that a search operation was underway. Zekri did not give further details, but said the rescue operation took place off the port of Sfax in central Tunisia. Khaled Hayouni, a spokesman for the interior ministry, said the boat was heading to Italy from the Sidi Mansour district of Sfax when it sank.

More than 40 people were on board the makeshift boat, Mourad Turki, a spokesman for the Sfax court, said.

## ETHIOPIA GUNMEN KILL MORE THAN 100

**Addis Ababa, Dec. 24:** Gunmen killed more than 100 people in an attack on Wednesday in western Ethiopia, the national human rights body said, the latest in a series of deadly assaults in the area.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a government-affiliated but independent body, said in a statement late on Wednesday that "more than 100 people have been killed in fires and shooting perpetrated by armed men" in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

The commission said survivors had "disturbing photo evidence of the attack" which started in the pre-dawn hours "on sleeping residents" in the region's Metekel zone and continued until Wednesday.

## KANSAS COP FATALLY SHOT SUSPECT

**Kansas, Dec. 24:** Wichita police say a police officer fatally shot a bank robbery suspect after the man rammed a stolen pickup truck into the officer's police cruiser.

Paul Peraza, 50, was fatally shot Monday afternoon after allegedly robbing a credit union and leading police on a chase that ended in a crash. Police said Tuesday that after striking an SUV, Peraza put the truck in reverse and struck a police cruiser. "The officer, concerned about his safety and the public's safety, fired shots and struck Peraza," Deputy Police Chief Jose Salcido said in a written statement. The truck then struck a Honda Accord before coming to a stop. Peraza was pronounced dead at the scene.

## TURKEY HANDS EXILED JOURNO 27-YR JAIL TERM

**Istanbul, Dec. 24:** A Turkish court on Wednesday sentenced the exiled former editor-in-chief of the Cumhuriyet daily to more than 27 years in jail on espionage and terror charges for one of the reputable paper's stories.

The court found Can Dundar — who fled to Germany in 2016 — guilty in connection with an article about an alleged Turkish arms shipment to Islamist Syrian rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad.

He was sentenced to 18 years and nine months for "securing confidential information for espionage" and eight years and nine months for "aiding a terrorist group" led by US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen.

The Turkish government blames the cleric for orchestrating a 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

## UK, EU clinch post-Brexit free trade agreement

Details to emerge in next few days with final ratification by both Parliaments

**London, Dec. 24:** The deal is done. Downing Street in London and European Union (EU) officials in Brussels confirmed on Thursday as both sides managed to thrash out a post-Brexit free trade agreement (FTA) just days before the December 31 deadline. Thousands of pages of legal text accompanies the deal, with details of the agreement set to emerge in the course of the next few days, including the final ratification of the FTA by Parliaments on both sides. "We have got Brexit done and we can now take full advantage of the fantastic opportunities available to us as an independent trading nation, striking trade deals with other partners around the world," Downing Street said in a statement. "We have signed the first free trade agreement based on zero tariffs and zero quotas that has ever been achieved with the EU. The deal is the biggest bilateral trade deal signed

by either side, covering trade worth GBP 668 billion in 2019," it said, adding that the UK has taken back control of its "money, borders, laws, trade and our fishing waters".

"The deal also guarantees that we are no longer in the lunar pull of the EU, we are not bound by EU rules, there is no role for the European Court of Justice and all of our key red lines about returning sovereignty have been achieved. It means that we will have full political and economic independence on 1st January 2021," Downing Street declared.

On the other side, the EU said it has a good deal to show for the "long and winding road". "We have finally got a deal, a fair and responsible deal," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said at a press conference from Brussels.

"The EU rules and standards will be respected... the United Kingdom is a long-standing partner,"

● **THE LAST** few months and weeks have proved particularly tense on the path to such an agreement, with the UK concerned about the EU's insistence to close alignment to its rules even after Brexit and the EU accusing the UK of expecting unfair advantages.

she said, adding that while "parting was such sweet sorrow" it was time to look to the future as the UK is now classified as a "third country" in relation to the economic bloc.

Earlier, it had emerged that crunch talks overnight meant UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson summoned his Cabinet for a late Wednesday night conference call to indicate that a post-Brexit trade agreement is ready to be signed off soon. Johnson and Von Der Leyen have been in close contact over the past few days as the December 31 transition period cut-off

loomed over the negotiations, which have missed repeated deadlines as they failed to agree on key areas of fishing rights in each other's waters and competition rules that would apply to the UK as a non-member of the 27-member economic bloc.

According to early reports, both sides have come to a base agreement which would ensure most of the current tariff-free, quota-free arrangement but unlikely to mean entirely frictionless trade as businesses had hoped. The UK Parliament needs to ratify the deal and as it has already risen for Christmas break, the likelihood is that MPs will be recalled to the House of Commons next week for urgent business. Johnson's comfortable majority in the Commons means the deal is likely to be signed off in time. On the EU side, the European Parliament would then ratify the agreement, which is expected in the New Year and with all

the member-countries briefed on it, they are unlikely to exercise their veto powers. It has now been four and half years since Britain voted to exit the EU in a referendum in June 2016.

It officially left at the end of January this year and entered into an 11-month transition period, or a phase of status quo, to hammer out a new free trade agreement.

However, the last few months and weeks have proved particularly tense on the path to such an agreement, with the UK concerned about the EU's insistence to close alignment to its rules even after Brexit and the EU accusing the UK of expecting unfair advantages.

The main sticking points were fishing rights and the so-called "level playing field" — measures to prevent what is seen as unfair competition through the lowering of standards or the use of state subsidies. — PTI

## UK-France border to stay open

**Dover, Dec. 24:** Rail and sea links between the UK and France will remain open over Christmas to clear the backlog of thousands of trucks stranded by border closures due to the discovery of a new strain of Coronavirus, Britain said Thursday.

Thousands of European truckers on Wednesday spent a fourth night sleeping in the cabs of their vehicles, which are stuck close to the major cross-Channel port of Dover while the drivers wait to pass a Covid test, as required by France for travel.

Around 6,000 trucks were waiting early Wednesday evening to cross the border according to Britain's Department of Transport, including 3,750 vehicles parked at the old Manston airport, which is also a Covid testing site.

The others are stuck on the nearby roads in the southeastern county of Kent. "As testing in Kent continues... I've spoken to my French counterpart (Jean-Baptiste Djebbari) and we've agreed the UK/-



Police speak with a driver as freight lorries remain queued up on the M20 motorway, leading to the Port of Dover in England on Thursday, as rail and sea links between the UK and France are to remain open over Christmas to clear the backlog of trucks stranded by a new strain of Coronavirus. — AFP

French border at Eurotunnel, Dover & Calais WILL remain open throughout Xmas in order to help hauliers & citizens return

home as soon as possible," UK transport minister Grant Shapps wrote on Twitter. The massive testing operation, which is

being bolstered by the military, began late Wednesday under an agreement between London and Paris. — AFP

## JEWISH CENTRE BOMBING: MAN CLEARED

**Buenos Aires, Dec. 24:** A court has said it has cleared the only Argentine still facing charges in the 1994 bombing that killed 85 people at a Jewish cultural center in the nation's capital.

The federal court ruling came on Wednesday after former auto dealer Carlos Telleldin again denied knowing that the truck he sold would be used as a bomb in the attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, which caused the organization's main building to collapse. He proclaimed his "total and absolute innocence." — AP

## Release men charged in Pearl murder: Pak court

**Karachi, Dec. 24:** In a surprise move, a Pakistani court on Thursday ordered the release of British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, who were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of US journalist Daniel Pearl.

A two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court, presided over by Justice K K Agha, directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under "any sort of detention" and declared all notifications of the Sindh government related to their

● **THE COURT** observed that the four men's detention was "illegal". In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment.

detention "null and void". The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal".

In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment.

The court also acquitted

## Don vetoes def bill; cites certain provisions as risk

**Washington, Dec. 24:** US President Donald Trump vetoed a broad defense funding bill sent to him by Congress Wednesday, complaining that it helps Russia and China and objecting to provisions to rename military bases.

The bipartisan bill was passed by high enough margins in both chambers of Congress for lawmakers to — in theory — override the president's rejection. The veto of the \$740 billion measure to fund the military for fiscal 2021 came a day after the US leader, with less than one month left in office, threw a separate \$900 billion Covid-19 relief bill and overall funding for the government into question.

Trump criticised the annual National Defense Authorization Act for not responding to his demand to end liability protections for social media companies, known as Section 230 — an issue with no relationship to the US Defense Department.

He also objected to a provision in the NDAA to rename military bases bearing the names of generals from the secessionist, slavery-supporting South in the 19th century US civil war.

And he objected to a provision which could impede his decision to sharply cut US troop levels in Germany, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The NDAA "fails to

## TRUMP PARDONS MORE, INCLUDING KUSHNER DAD: WH

**Washington, Dec. 24:** US President Donald Trump issued a new raft of pardons on Wednesday for allies including the father of his son-in-law Jared Kushner, adding to a long list he has granted in his waning days in office.

In addition to the pardon for Charles Kushner, Trump also pardoned his 2016 campaign chairman Paul Manafort and longtime ally Roger Stone, the White House said in a statement.

They were among 26 people pardoned and three who had all or part of their sentences commuted on Wednesday by Trump.

— AFP

include critical national security measures, includes provisions that fail to respect our veterans and our military's history, and contradicts efforts by my administration to put America first in our national security and foreign policy actions," Trump said in a statement.

Without the changes to Section 230, Trump said, the NDAA "is a gift" to China and Russia. — AFP

## Rocket hit: Trump warning to Iran

**Washington, Dec. 24:** US President Donald Trump warned Wednesday he would hold "Iran responsible" in the event of a fatal attack on Americans in Iraq, as the first anniversary of the killing of a top Iranian general in a US air strike approaches.

"Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets," Trump said on Twitter, referring to an attack that caused damage but no deaths.

"Guess where they came from: IRAN," he added.

"Now we hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq," he

added, before offering "some friendly health advice to Iran: if one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over," he said.

Responding to Trump, the Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted on Thursday: "Putting your own citizens at risk abroad won't divert attention from catastrophic failures at home." He also attached an image of years-old Trump tweets that claimed ex-president Barack Obama would have started a war with Iran to win re-election. — AFP

## NEPAL: CHINESE ENVOY MEETS PRACHANDA

**Kathmandu, Dec. 24:** Chinese ambassador Hou Yanqi on Thursday met Nepal Communist Party's executive chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who claims control over the ruling party after removing Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli from the posts of the party's parliamentary leader and chair. The meeting at Prachanda's residence in Khumaltar — which lasted for about 30 minutes — dwelt on the contemporary political situation after the NCP split. "They discussed the issues of bilateral concern," according to sources close to Prachanda. Bishnu Rijal, a leader close to the Prachanda faction, tweeted that "Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Hou Yanqi met Chairman of the Nepal Communist Party Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' this morning. They discussed the issues of bilateral concerns."

Hou's meeting with Prachanda comes two days after she called on President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Tuesday at the latter's office in Sheela Niwas.

Hou is said to have discussed the latest political development following the president's move to dissolve the House of Representatives and announce mid-term elections. *My Republica* reported. This is not the first time that the Chinese ambassador has intervened in Nepal's internal affairs at a time of crisis.

— PTI

## CHRISTMAS | CHAOS Since poll loss, Prez has almost vanished from public engagements

## No Christmas vacation for angry Trump

**Washington, Dec. 24:** An enraged Donald Trump helicoptered off the White House lawn for one of the last times in his presidency Wednesday, leaving Americans chaos as a Christmas present.

The Republican was bound with his wife Melania for a vacation at his lavish Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

From Marine One, the first couple must have got a magnificent view on a clear, wintry day of the White House, decorated in chocolate box fashion with Christmas wreaths and red ribbons at every window.

But with the clock ticking to Joe Biden's January 20 inauguration, there

won't be too many more occasions to enjoy the experience.

And Trump, consumed by election conspiracy theories, abandoned by allies and determined to take opponents down with him, is not exactly in a merry mood.

Crises engulf the man supporters call "disrupter in chief" ("chaos president") to his critics.)

What's more, most of them are of his own making.

Trying to overturn the result of the election.

— Unexpectedly refusing to sign a massive economic relief bill for Americans struggling from coronavirus fallout, insisting at the last moment that it be

● **YET FOR** all his bluster, the larger than life showman who for four years held the media, his party and the entire country in thrall now cuts a diminished figure.

rewritten.

— Choosing to say nothing, other than to play it down, about what senior officials and members of Congress describe as a devastating Russian cyberattack.

— Vetoing just before he left for Florida the bill funding the US military.

— Declaring war on top members of his own party who dare concede that Biden won.





# DECCAN Chronicle

25 DECEMBER 2020

## PM's platitudes at AMU play up contrast to reality

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University the other day offered Indians a reassurance that this nation belongs to all of its citizens, that India is on the path of progress and that no citizen would be left behind because of their religion. "Everyone would get equal opportunities so that everyone can fulfill their dream," the Prime Minister told the young people, and through them, to the nation, rekindling the spirit of the speech the first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru delivered on January 24, 1948, months after India's Independence and days before the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. "The basic objective," Pandit Nehru had said, "is to build up a free India of high ideals and noble endeavour where there is equality of opportunity for all and where many variegated streams of thought and culture meet together to form a mighty river of progress and advancement for her people." Mr Modi went on to say, quoting the university's founder Sir Syed, that "for the body to remain healthy, every body part should be healthy." Mr Modi also urged people not to look at everything from a political lens.

One may have points of difference with the Prime Minister when he compartmentalises politics and development but none would quarrel with him when he says nobody would be left behind because of their religion as the nation makes progress. All that one would doubt is whether the Prime Minister is reflecting the realities his fellow citizens experience in their daily lives. Uttar Pradesh, where the AMU stands, has a different story to tell. The recently introduced, patently discriminatory, anti-conversion law that militates against the basic tenets of our Constitution has been used indiscriminately against interfaith couples. It's nothing less than horrendous to learn that the Uttar Pradesh police have arrested 17 persons under the provisions of the law when the Allahabad high court, and several other high courts, have made it abundantly clear that the state has no business intervening in the decision of two adults on how they would live their lives. The fundamental rights to equality, life and religious freedom are violated by the state even as the Prime Minister wants to remind us that we have a shared future.

The Central Bureau of Investigation recently chargesheeted four persons for the gangrape and murder of a teenage dalit girl in Hathras in the state. It may be recalled only with trepidation that a very senior police official of the state had stated that there was no rape in the case as no semen was found in the body of the victim, displaying extreme insensitivity and complete ignorance of the law. The same state police had burnt the body in the dead of the night against the wishes of her family, sending all right thinking people to doubt whether Indian laws are in force in the state or not when it comes to minorities and dalits.

When the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy speaks of equality, then everyone has a duty to listen to him and work towards fulfilling that ideal. It must be a national endeavour, and not a national pastime.

## Curtains for Netanyahu?

Will it be curtains for the artful survivor Benjamin Netanyahu who will soon be facing an even greater existential crisis? His former allies Naftali Bennett of the Yamina party and Gideon Saar, who broke away from the Likud party to set up his "New Hope" party, are setting their sights on March 23, 2021, the day of reckoning in the fourth election in two years, as an ideal opportunity for them to dethrone the longest serving Israeli Prime Minister.

Endearingly called "Bibi", the master political strategist has been brought down this time as an unorthodox coalition between his right wing Likud and Benny Gantz heading the centrist Blue and White party gave way under the weight of near impossible contradictions. The two rivals had been brought together in May 2020 to resolve a 17-month political stalemate after Israel's top court had ruled that Mr Netanyahu could head a government while under indictment for corruption charges.

Glowing in the benign warmth of his friend Donald Trump at the White House, Mr Netanyahu had prospered in the eyes of the world as his country wiped away years of solemn history to gain the diplomatic recognition of four Arab states. A prominent face in Bibi's last election campaign had been Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi whose friendship the Israeli had flaunted to win votes and remain in power amid the political minefield that Israel has become in its Left and Centrists versus the Right politics that has been dragging the country into bitter electoral battles, which are known not to yield clear mandates.

Indicted for fraud, breach of trust and graft in a series of scandals involving quid pro quo with wealthy media moguls, Bibi has displayed phenomenal dexterity. The court ominously said its legal ruling did "not diminish the severity of pending charges for violations of moral integrity". Blame it on the times we live in but leaders with conflicts against the highest moral and ethical standards seem to constitute the "New Normal" on the world's stage. It is in standing up to the coronavirus sweeping nations across the globe that they seem to be failing.

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Subhani



## Christmas, like Diwali, is a special day in India



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Something I have always been proud of is the fact that India celebrates Diwali, Christmas as well as Id. Regardless of our faith, we keenly anticipate each occasion and participate with enthusiasm. There aren't many countries that can make a similar boast.

The Gymkhana, Rotary and Lions Clubs across the country hold special Christmas tea parties for their members' children. There is always a Santa Claus, dressed in red, with a straggly white beard and a discordant ho-ho-ho! Most of us can sing *Jingle bells* and many can hum *Silent Night*. And no matter how many they make, our bakeries always run out of Christmas cake. The truth is that Christmas in India may be different but it's also special. Christmas is as much our festival as it is that of the majority Christian world. Unfortunately, however, the Narendra Modi government neither understands this nor respects it.

If a report put out by the ANI news agency and published by a number of leading newspapers turns out to be correct, "the Bharatiya Janata Party is planning to dedicate December 25, the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee, to farmers". The report suggests that the Prime Minister will make this announcement on Christmas Day itself when he will also speak on the controversial issue of the new farm laws.

Frankly, this would be terrible. It would be reprehensible and deplorable. It amounts to a blatant and unforgivable

breach of India's valued tradition of respecting every religion. Worst of all, it ignores the fact that Christmas is as important a festival in India as it is for the countries of Europe and America.

Unfortunately, this will not be the first time that the Modi government has denigrated Christmas Day by trying to convert it into something else. Narendra Modi had barely been in power for six months when in December 2014 he decided to designate Christmas as Good Governance Day. That, too, was done in memory of Atal Behari Vajpayee. Because December 25 is Vajpayee's birthday the Modi government feels it can designate the day in any way it wants. The fact that it is Christmas Day is either secondary or irrelevant.

This logic is not just bizarre, it's offensive. December 25 is Christmas Day, first and foremost. Vajpayee's birth on that date was a coincidence. It cannot take priority or prominence over the birth of Jesus Christ. Nor can India's farmers, who are the purported excuse for the new dedication this year.

If you disagree with me, just ask yourself a simple question — would Narendra Modi dare to designate Diwali or Holi as Good Governance Day or dedicate it to India's protesting farmers? Even the thought of it would not occur to him. Why? Because, as a Hindu, he knows too well that this would deeply upset his co-religionists.

Why then as the Prime Minister of a secular country does he feel free to proclaim Christmas as Good Governance Day? Or, as ANI sug-

gests, dedicate December the 25 to India's farmers? Nothing could hurt our Christian brothers and sisters more. Our Prime Minister should be protecting and defending their emotions and sentiments, not wilfully and repeatedly disregarding them.

In 2014 the Archbishop of Bengaluru publicly questioned why Christmas had been chosen as Good Governance Day. The government's response was that it happens to be Atal Behari Vajpayee's birthday. What the government did not address was the obvious next question — is that a sufficient reason for redesignating the holiest day in the calendar for Christians? The same question will occur again if today is dedicated to India's farmers. And I'm pretty sure we'll probably get the same hurtfully dismissive reply.

The irony is that were he alive Atal Behari Vajpayee would be as upset as I am. He would not applaud the government. Instead, he would lacerate it with his stinging criticism. He was, after all, a secular man with great respect for Christians. He would hate to be the excuse for this affront to them. And although I have not checked with her, I do not believe this would please Vajpayee's daughter Namita either.

Let me make one further point. This year the attempt to redesignate Christmas is likely to be more hurtful to India's Christians than the 2014 redesignation as Good Governance Day. This is because fear of the virus

**This year the attempt to redesignate Christmas as Atal Behari Vajpayee's birthday is likely to be more hurtful to India's Christians than the 2014 redesignation as Good Governance Day**

has already changed the character of this special day. We may not be locked indoors as the British are, but we are equally fearful of congregating in churches or celebrating in large family gatherings. For many Christmas is likely to be spent "home alone". Redesignating Christmas Day will only increase the sense of loss.

Again, this is something that Mr Modi's government should readily understand. Diwali was no different for India's Hindus. The virus ruined it for tens, if not hundreds of millions. But on that occasion the government was only too aware of the need to lift spirits. Why is that not the case now?

I know mine is not a lone lament. Millions — indeed the vast majority — of my countrymen are likely to echo my concern. For them, the sanctity of a day of God is beyond questioning. Then why are our politicians silent? If I recall correctly, in 2014 I did not hear a clear protest or even criticism from the Congress Party. I suspect this year too its voice will be silent. But why? I really want to know.

If there is a politician in India who understands the importance of Christmas and what it means to Christians, it has to be Sonia Gandhi, who was born a Catholic. Yet she said nothing in 2014 and I fear that could be the case again.

Today, I wait to see if the India I am so proud of is changing for the worse. I so much want to be proven wrong. In fact, I would really like the day to end with readers of this column proclaiming that I was terribly mistaken. This is one occasion when I sincerely want to be totally incorrect... well, we'll soon know.

Finally, and if it's not too late, Merry Christmas.

*The writer is a television commentator and anchor*

### LETTERS

#### DIVORCE POLITICS

A BJP MP going for a divorce because his wife joined the Trinamul is the abysmal levels to which our politics have fallen (*BJP MP gets ready to divorce his wife for joining TMC, DC, Dec. 22*). Is it not a wise step to quit politics than getting rid of the wife on political grounds? Or, alternately, the wife should refuse divorce on such grounds. It remains to be seen how the court would respond to such a case.

D. Nagarjuna  
Hyderabad

#### PV'S REFORMS

As an economist also feel that because of the economic reforms initiated by then prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, the Indian economy is better (*KCR: India enjoys PV's reforms now, DC, Dec. 24*). Before the pandemic, India's GDP and per capita income were much impressive, employment opportunities were created after the reforms.

Dr Shankar Chatterjee  
Hyderabad

### 50 YEARS AGO IN

## DECCAN Chronicle

#### NGRI devises cheap aerial survey for minerals

By a staff reporter  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 24.

The National Geophysical Research Institute here has developed instrumentation and methodology for air-borne magnetic surveys for mineral reconnaissance, this saving for the country considerable foreign exchange.

Dr. Hari Narain, Director of the Institute, told a news conference today that highly sensitive and sophisticated instruments developed and perfected in the Institute were now having good demand, both among the sister research institutes in the country and the Universities.

The Director also claimed that the Institute was now in a position to undertake aerial survey for mineral location at a cost which would be one-fifth of what the American Survey Team had charged or what had been quoted by the French Party which was due to undertake an air-borne survey early next month.

Matt Ridley



## Why the mRNA vaccines could revolutionise medicine soon

Almost 60 years ago, in February 1961, two teams of scientists stumbled on a discovery at the same time. Sydney Brenner at Cambridge University and Jim Watson at Harvard independently spotted that genes send shortlived RNA copies of themselves to little machines called ribosomes where they are translated into proteins. "Sydney got most of the credit, but I don't mind," Watson sighed last week when I asked him about it. They had solved a puzzle that had held up genetics for almost a decade. The shortlived copies came to be called messenger RNAs — mRNAs — and suddenly they now promise a spectacular revolution in medicine.

The first Covid-19 vaccine given to the British people earlier this month is not just a welcome breakthrough against a grim little enemy that has defied every other weapon we have tried, from handwashing to remedial and lockdowns. It is also the harbinger of a new approach to medicine altogether. Synthetic messengers that reprogramme our cells to mount an immune response to almost any invader, including per-

haps cancer, can now be rapidly and cheaply made.

Katalin Karikó, the Hungarian-born scientist who doggedly pursued the idea behind this kind of medication for decades at the University of Pennsylvania before joining BioNTech, and her collaborator Drew Weissman may be the Watson and Brenner of this story. They figured out 15 years ago how to send a message in a bubble into a cell and have it read. For years they had tried putting in normal RNA and found it did not work; the body spotted it was an alien and destroyed it.

But by subtly modifying one of the four letters in the message (replacing uridine with pseudouridine, a chemical found in some RNAs in the body anyway), they made a version that escaped the attention of the cell's M15 agents. Further refinements five years ago produced a recipe that worked reliably when delivered to cells inside a tiny oily bubble. The pandemic is the first time the technique has been tried in anger, and it worked: the first two Covid vaccines, BioNTech's and Moderna's, rely on these messengers.

The message tells the cell to make

part of one of the virus's proteins which then alerts the body's immune system. Once invented, the thing is like a general-purpose vaccine. You simply rewrite the message between the same opening and closing sequences, put it in the same kind of bubble, and fire it off — almost as easy for genetic engineers these days as writing a text is for teenagers. It is faster, cheaper, safer and simpler than the old ways of making vaccines.

More conventional vaccine designs may still make a vital contribution to defeating the pandemic, Oxford's included. And the messenger method has its drawbacks, such as the need for extreme cold storage. But in the long run, messengers probably represent the future of vaccines. Now the principle has been approved by regulators, there may be no need to go through the same laborious and expensive three-phase clinical trials every time.

What if 2020 went down in history as the year synthetic biology dealt a mortal blow to future viruses?

What is more, at the cost of a few billion dollars, the world may now be able to build a library of messenger

vaccines for every plausible coronavirus and influenza virus with pandemic potential we can find, test them in animals and store the recipes on a hard disk, ready to go at a moment's notice. Moderna's vaccine was first synthesised in mid-January, before we even knew the coronavirus was coming out of China.

There are already improved variations on the messenger theme too: self-replicating messengers, for example. Vaccine development has long been the Cinderella of pharmaceuticals, and this would not have happened without the pandemic. But nor would it have happened without the 30-year scientific slog Dr Karikó undertook.

A fast, adaptable vaccine platform has long been the dream. Let's try it against hepatitis, Zika and several kinds of common cold. We may begin to do to viruses what we have already done to most intestinal worms, many blood parasites and not a few bacteria: abolish them from the human experience. If the message is the recipe for a protein characteristic of particular tumours, the immune system may learn to mount a devastat-

ing attack on a cancer. How about Alzheimer's?

There will be setbacks, side effects and unintended consequences. There always are with innovation. There will be scares based on false fears spread by unscrupulous cranks. Already some worry that these vaccines might cause infertility. It's nonsense, but with just enough plausibility to alarm some people.

One problem we will probably face if this RNA dream comes true is a rise in allergies, asthmas and autoimmune problems. These are caused by the loss of parasites which used to suppress our immune systems. The more infections we get rid of, the more likely we are to get intolerant reactions to things like pollen and gluten. But then messenger vaccines may also be a way to tackle these and teach the immune system to behave.

What if 2020 went down in history as the year synthetic biology dealt a mortal blow to future viruses and illnesses in general, rather than the year a virus ruined our health, well-being and livelihoods?

*By arrangement with the Spectator*



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,973.54	1.14
Nifty 50	13,749.25	1.09
S&P 500*	3,700.86	0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.54	0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.01	-1.04
Euro (₹)	89.66	0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,030	119 0.24
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	51.10	-0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.929	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.936	-0.019

\* As of 9:30 PM IST

## ESIC adds 11.75L new members in October

Around 11.75 lakh new members joined the ESIC-run social security scheme in October against 11.49 lakh in the previous month, official data showed on Thursday, giving a perspective on formal sector employment in the country. Gross new enrolments with ESIC were 8.27 lakh in June, 4.87 lakh in May and 2.62 lakh in April, showing an increase in enrolments after easing of the lockdown, the data showed.

## India challenges Voda arbitration in Singapore



India has challenged in a Singapore court a verdict of an international arbitration tribunal that overturned its demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes from Vodafone Group Plc, sources said on Thursday. An arbitration court had on September 25 rejected tax authorities' demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes and penalties relating to the British telecom giant's 2007 acquisition of an Indian operator.

## SpiceJet ties up with GMR cargo for Covid vax

Low cost carrier SpiceJet on Thursday announced that it has signed an MoU with GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo, a GMR group company, for providing a seamless service to all vaccine manufacturers in the region. As part of this association, SpiceXpress the cargo arm of SpiceJet envisions to provide efficient, speedy and reliable solutions for vaccine delivery, while also creating a sustainable cold chain network.

## Auro signs deal with Covaxx for Covid vaccine

Aurobindo Pharma Ltd and Covaxx, a United States-based company, have entered into an exclusive license agreement to develop, commercialise and manufacture UB-612, the first Multitope Peptide-based vaccine to fight COVID-19, for India and UNICEF. According to a release issued by the city-based drug maker, Covaxx is currently conducting a Phase 1 clinical trial for the vaccine candidate.



# Smartphone sales to see 2-digit growth

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** When the pandemic forced people to stay indoors, smartphones became their window to the world, helping them stay connected with friends, work from home (WFH) and even learn new recipes.

And 2021 promises to bring back double-digit growth for the smartphone industry as people embrace hybrid work models, binge on web series and continue the pursuit for the perfect selfie on their six-inch screens.

This year has been challenging for the industry right from the beginning as supply chains for components were disrupted amid rising Covid-19 cases in China. Given the heavy reliance of Indian phone and electronics industry on imports from the neighbouring nation, there were apprehensions that stocks would run out, hitting local assembly.

By March, there were bigger worries. Rising number of coronavirus cases in India forced the government to impose a nationwide lockdown that barred movement of everything but essential items like food and medicine.

However, after the lockdown was eased, the industry saw a never-seen-before level of demand. Shipment in the September quarter is estimated to have touched an all-time high of over 50 million units. Pent up demand, coupled with people rushing in to buy devices to ensure continuity of work and studies, saw tech brands literally struggling to keep up.

Counterpoint Research senior analyst Prachir Singh said that despite losing almost one-and-a-half months to lockdown, there is just a six per cent year-on-year fall in shipment at 148 million units in 2020, reflecting the "resilient nature" of the



## Laptops, desktop sales continue to rise in 2021

**Oakland, California, Dec. 24:** The world stocked up on laptop and desktop computers in 2020 at a level not seen since the iPhone debuted in 2007, and manufacturers still are months away from fulfilling outstanding orders, hardware industry executives and analysts said.

Remote learning and working has upturned the computer market during the coronavirus pandemic, zapping sales of smartphones while boosting interest in bigger devices, which had become afterthoughts to iPhones and Androids over the last decade.

Annual global shipments of personal com-

puters, the industry's collective term for laptops and desktops, topped out at about 300 million in 2008 and recently were sinking toward 250 million. Few expected a resurgence.

But some analysts now expect 2020 will close at about 300 million shipments, up roughly 15 per cent from a year ago. Tablets are experiencing even faster growth.

By the end of 2021, installed PCs and tablets will reach 1.77 billion, up from 1.64 billion in 2019, according to research company Canalsy.

They added 2021 sales forecasts would be higher if not for the supply issues.

— Reuters

Indian smartphone market.

"In 2021, the Indian smartphone market is estimated to grow at 20 per cent year-on-year. Major reasons for such a high growth will be increased consumer spending as economic activities grow, and aggressive product

strategies from top brands," he said, adding that Jio's anticipated launch of low-cost 4G smartphone with Google could add further momentum.

Domestic players like Micromax could also make a strong comeback next year.

— PTI

# Taxmen train guns on GST input tax credit fraudsters

**SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 24**

Detection of input tax credit-related frauds has witnessed a rising trend of late. Of the total number of fraudsters arrested by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, almost half have been held in the past six weeks.

The CBIC has booked 12,000 cases of Input Tax Credit fraud and arrested 365 persons in such cases so far. In the past six weeks alone more than 165 persons were arrested. These are people who avail and pass on ineligible ITC credits through fake or fly-by-night firms.

According to industry experts, the government

has been focusing on identifying such fraudsters in the past two months. They have been analysing backend data to find out fraudulent cases.

"Data driven targeting of the fraudsters is the need of the hour. The data is being collected from Income Tax and Customs departments and banks and necessary matching is being done to identify fraudsters... Precise targeting of fraudsters is being done only in specific cases after doing a comprehensive analysis using advanced data analytics tools," said CBIC.

CBIC also has issued a few notifications to deal with the menace. It has introduced mandatory

authentication of Aadhar number, wherever applicable or physical verification of business premises for the purposes of obtaining GST registration.

It has now restricted filing of outward supply details in GSTR 1 return for businesses who have not paid tax for the past periods by filing GSTR 3B. Till now, non-filing of GSTR 3B resulted in blockage e-waybill but will now result in GSTR 1 blockage as well.

"The government's idea here seems to be to curb input tax credit passing by businesses which have otherwise not paid their GST liability," said Abhishek Jain, Tax Partner, EY.

# 2020 turns out best for IPOs, debutants trade at twice price

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 24**

The year 2020 has been a good year for the primary market initial public offerings (IPOs) with several of the initial public offerings trading at double their public issue price or at a hefty premium.

In December, after Burger King's grand listing, another IPO by Mrs Bectors Food Specialities on Thursday provided investors more than 100 per cent return on debut.

Compared to the public issue price of ₹288 per share, Mrs Bectors Food listed at ₹500 on NSE and ₹501 on BSE and touched a high of Rs 601.20 on BSE and stock settled 106.79 per cent up at ₹595.55 on the BSE.

Mrs Bectors Food's market capitalisation at market close on BSE stood at ₹3,498.65 crore.

Happiest Mind, Route

## 2020 IPOs That Trades At Over 50% Premium To Public Issue Price

Company	Public Issue	Current Market
Mrs Bectors Food Specialities	288	592.50
Burger King India	60	180.95
Gland Pharma	1,500	2425
Computer Age Management Services	1,240	1,685.90
Route Mobile	350	1,119
Happiest Minds Technologies	166	346.90
Rossari Biotech	425	939

Figures price in Rs Source: NSE



Mobile, Rossari Biotech, Gland Pharma, CAMS, Burger King, Mrs Bectors Food have given handsome returns to investors, to name a few.

All 14 IPOs listed in 2020 so far traded above their public issue price, the year saw few large IPOs. Gland Pharma raised ₹6,479.55 crore and shot up to be among the top ten

Indian pharma companies after successful listing.

SBI Card also raised ₹10,354.77 crore but the shares got hit after listing due to Covid led market meltdown and touched a low of ₹495.25 against public issue price of ₹755 per share before a sharp recovery as the broader market recovered.

Computer Age Manage-

● All 14 IPOs listed in 2020 so far traded above their public issue price, the year saw few large IPOs.

● Smaller size IPOs like Happiest Minds, Burger King, Route Mobile, Rossari Biotech, Mrs Bectors Food made higher listing gains and continue to trade at a hefty premium to the issue price.

ment Services also raised ₹2,244.33 crore and made a successful debut and has slowly risen higher from the public issue price of ₹1,230. Smaller size IPOs like Happiest Minds, Burger King, Route Mobile, Rossari Biotech, Mrs Bectors Food made higher listing gains and continue to trade at a hefty premium to the issue price.

## Top 3 cities recruit 53% of e-retail employees

**Mumbai, Dec. 24:** Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai have emerged as the demand hot spots for recruiting talent in the e-commerce segment, a report said.

The report is based on a survey of 5,000 employees from e-commerce and traditional industries working in over 100 roles. It also took input from over 25 e-commerce players.

Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai emerge as the demand hot spots, accounting for 53 per cent of the total demand on an average, when it comes to generating demand for top talent in e-commerce, as per Catenon India's

*Decoding Talent in E-commerce Report 2021*.

Indore, Kochi and Coimbatore are also coming up as the new recruitment frontiers.

The report revealed that the most in-demand jobs are product management roles, which are the highest paid ones and also see the steepest hike in annual compensation for higher years of experience.

— PTI

**Mumbai, Dec. 24:** The economy is coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic's deep abyss faster than most of the predictions, and the growth will enter positive zone in the third quarter of the current fiscal, said an article on the 'state of economy' in the RBI Bulletin.

"More evidence has been turned in to show that the Indian economy is pulling out of Covid-19's deep abyss and is breaking out amidst winter's lengthening shadows towards a place in the sunlight... it is refracting at a pace that beats most prediction," said the article written by the officials of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, the

Indian economy dipped by a historic 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of the current financial year. The contraction narrowed down to 7.5 per cent in the second quarter.

Quoting reports, the article said, "Real GDP growth is expected to break out into positive territory in Q3 — albeit, to a slender 0.1 per cent."

Two important forces are conspiring to bless this turning of the page on the virus, the article said. "First, India is bending the Covid infection curve: since mid-September, barring localised surges, infections are slanting fashion to support investment and consumption demand," it said, "The fiscal measures

have been sequenced in a designed shift in focus from consumption expenditure in Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package to investment expenditure in Aatma Nirbhar 2.0 and 3.0," the article added.

Abstracting from the inherent flux in high frequency indicators, the underlying trend would reveal that the pick-up in momentum of economic activity that commenced with the onset of the second half of 2020-21 is sustained, it noted. "The absence of the dreaded 'second wave' of pandemic in India so far has imparted elevation to this momentum in an environment of supportive macroeconomic policies," it added.

— PTI

## Tata Motors launches its most advanced LCV

**MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 24**

Tata Motors, India's biggest commercial vehicle maker, has introduced the new Ultra T.7 light commercial vehicle or LCV that has been specially designed for urban transportation. The Mumbai-based automaker claims that it is the most advanced LCV that it has

ever developed. With the new Ultra T.7, Tata Motors is targeting applications such as transportation of e-commerce products, FMCG, industrial produce, consumer durables, electronics, essential goods and LPG cylinders.

The reefer variants of T.7 are best suited for transportation of vaccine, pharmaceuticals, perishable goods, food items

such as eggs and milk, along with farm produce.

The Ultra T.7 range comes with a modular platform with variants of various deck lengths and in 4-tyre and 6-tyre combinations to suit a wide range of applications.

The model's 1900mm-wide cabin has been engineered to offer the best-in-class comfort to reduce the turnaround time.

# L&T 3D prints India's 1st building

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** Larsen & Toubro Construction on Thursday said it has successfully 3D printed a ground plus one building, claiming it to be the first in India.

The company has 3D printed the building of a 700 square feet built-up area at its Kanchipuram facility with an in-house developed concrete mix, using indigenously available regular construction

● Except for the horizontal slab members, the entire building structure was 3D printed 'Cast in Situ' at the job site in an 'open to sky' environment within in 106 printing hours.

materials. "L&T Construction announced having successfully 3D printed a G+1 (ground plus one)

Building with reinforcement for the first time in India," the company said in a statement.

With the country aggressively pursuing the objective of creating 60 million houses under the Housing for All by 2022 programme, this achievement will certainly give a huge fillip for the mass housing segment, it added.

The building was printed with both vertical rein-

forcement bar and horizontal distributors, using a welded mesh that satisfies provisions in the Indian codes and optimises the cost of construction.

Except for the horizontal slab members, the entire building structure was 3D printed 'Cast in Situ' at the job site in an 'open to sky' environment within 106 printing hours, using a fully automated 3D printer.

## DEAL | BOOK

More than \$1.3 trillion worth deals were clinched in Q4 alone

# M&A deals come roaring back

**New York, Dec. 24:** Global merger and acquisition activity clawed its way back from near-decade lows in 2020, facing down the Covid-19 pandemic with a string of large transactions in the second half of the year that dealmakers hope will continue.

Deal volumes are now down about six per cent for the year to \$3.5 trillion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Still, the fact that about two-thirds of those were inked since the start of July has advisers talking about a dramatic comeback, after the first half of 2020 froze M&A and sent North American deal activity down more than



50 per cent.

How transactions got done also changed, as bidders flew drones to conduct due diligence and the head of a UK pharmaceutical giant inked his biggest-ever deal while quarantined in a hotel room in Australia. Globetrotting bankers transitioned to days of nonstop video calls, either from

home or nearly empty offices. "We saw a sharp decline in M&A activity after the outbreak of the pandemic but then a very strong recovery in the second half of the year," said Berthold Fuerst, co-head of investment banking coverage and advisory for Europe, the Middle East and Africa at Deutsche Bank AG.

As the pandemic shut down cities in the first quarter, companies around the world scrambled to move their businesses online and organise newly remote workforces while plugging holes in their supply chains. The chaos left chief executive officers too busy to make acquisitions, and deal-making got off to the slowest start since 2013.

The situation started to stabilise as companies realised they could operate in the new environment, said Scott Barshay, chair of the corporate department at law firm Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison.

"All of a sudden, you could see a real shift in

thinking to what will the world look like post-pandemic, and how do we put ourselves in the best position to succeed post-pandemic?" Barshay said. "It seemed to be coming from companies in all sectors all at once."

More than \$1.3 trillion of deals have been announced in the fourth quarter alone. S&P Global Inc.'s all-stock \$39 billion acquisition of IHS Markit Ltd. came on the heels of technology megadeals including chipmaker Advanced Micro Devices Inc.'s \$35 billion purchase of Xilinx Inc. and Salesforce.com Inc.'s agreement to buy Slack Technologies Inc. for \$27.7 billion including debt.

— Bloomberg

# Key products to have separate warehouses

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** The government on Thursday said that it will set up product-specific warehouses at ports and national waterways.

The purpose of development of this infrastructure is to reduce the storage losses, minimise logistic costs and facilitate distribution of cargo in the hinterland, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) said in a statement.

"The (MoPSW) intends to create product-specific warehouses or silos at various ports (including both major and non-major ports), Multi Modal Logistics Parks located near port area and alongside the national waterways," the statement said. The ministry is target-

ing to develop the product-specific warehouses at ports for cement silos, liquid tanks, chemicals tanks, cold storage, electronics product storage, and pharmaceutical storage, among others.

"While the big players have their own warehouses and storage spaces, the smaller players find it difficult to get their product-specific storage silos at various locations," the ministry of port said in the statement.

The development of these world-class warehousing spaces will give a big push, especially to such small logistics players for their ease of doing business with better planning and inventory management, the ministry added.

— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Tatum leaves Bucks in tatters

**Los Angeles:** Boston Forward Jayson Tatum banked in a game-winning three pointer over Giannis Antetokounmpo with 1.5 seconds left to give the Celtics an 122-121 NBA season-opening victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday.

Antetokounmpo, the two-time defending NBA Most Valuable Player, had a chance to tie it from the free-throw line with four-tenths of a second left, but the Greek superstar missed his second free throw after being fouled at the rim and the Celtics came away with the win on their home floor. "Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be in that position," Tatum said.

Tatum, who said he "played terrible" after making only 12 of 28 shots from the floor, still finished with 30 points with seven rebounds and two assists. Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 33 points, five rebounds and four assists. Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee with 35 points, 13 rebounds, two assists and two blocked shots. — *AFP*

## Oly-bound athletes get vaccine priority

**New Delhi:** A parliamentary panel on Thursday recommended putting athletes, coaches and support staff going for the 2021 Japan Olympics in the priority group for the Covid-19 vaccination process. The committee also voiced concern over large number of vacancies of coaches, saying they should be filled up in a time-bound manner so that Olympic preparations do not suffer. The Japan Olympics are slated to be held from July next year. The panel has also recommended identifying training facilities, stadia and sports centres for Olympic qualified athletes which have not opened yet. It said the closed centres should be reopened "at the earliest" or the athletes should be relocated to alternate centres which have opened. — *PTI*

## Odisha to have new hockey stadium

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced that a new world-class hockey stadium would be constructed at Rourkela in Sundargarh district as part of preparations for the 2023 Hockey World Cup which will be hosted by the state. The proposed stadium would be the largest hockey stadium in India with a sitting capacity of 20,000 people. This is going to redefine the sports landscape in the region, the chief minister said. The stadium along with the allied facilities will be developed as a benchmark for other hockey stadiums around the world, he said, adding that it would be constructed over 15 acres of land in the Biju Patnaik University of Technology campus in Rourkela. — *PTI*

## BCCI AGM approves 10 teams for 2022 IPL

**Ahmedabad, Dec. 24:** The BCCI's governing body on Thursday ratified the entry of two new franchises in the IPL to make it a 10-team affair from 2022 and also decided to back the ICC's push for cricket's inclusion in the 2028 Olympics, during its Annual General Meeting (AGM) here.

"Two new teams will be introduced in the 2022 IPL," a Board source said. It is learnt that time at hand is too short for even a nine-team IPL next year as an elaborate tender-floating process, increase of matches and ensuring that all foreign player's international calendars are adjusted, would be prove to be a Herculean task.

## T20 CRICKET IN OLYMPICS

In another major development, the Board, in principle, decided to back the ICC's bid for inclusion of cricket, in the T20 format, in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics "after getting some clarifications from the International Olympic Committee".

"Look, the BCCI is an autonomous body and it would like to maintain its autonomy. Our legal team

is looking to get a few clarifications. Obviously, cricket in Olympics is great for the game. Let's hope we can move in the right direction," the member, who attended the AGM, said.

The Board, however, did not reveal the nature of its queries with regards to the matter.

## BCCI LIKELY TO LOSE \$123 MILLION

The BCCI has decided that if its does not get full tax exemption from the government of India to host the World T20 next year, as sought by the ICC, then it would agree to deduction from its annual revenue of \$390 million from the global body.

"We have told the ICC that we will approach our government for tax rebate but if we don't get that exemption, the amount, which is around \$123 million, will be deducted from our annual revenue, so we will get around \$267 million. But India is hosting the 2021 T20 WC," the source said.

## COMPENSATION FOR DOMESTIC PLAYERS

Also, it was decided that all first-class players, both



(from left) BCCI treasurer Arun Dhumal, president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah pose after the 89th Annual General Meeting in Ahmedabad on Thursday. — *PTI*

men and women, will be suitably compensated for the curtailed domestic season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The BCCI plans to get the domestic season underway, after several months' delay, in January with the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 championship.

Asked about the money to be set aside for this, the Board source said: "The BCCI will give a lump-sum compensation amount to the state units. Now they will draw up their own list

and accordingly compensate their male and female players."

## JUNIOR AND WOMEN'S CRICKET DURING IPL

The BCCI has decided that women's tournaments (senior and junior) along with age-group tournaments (U-23, U-19, U-16) will be held simultaneously at the time of IPL-14 which, in all likelihood, will be held in India despite the raging Coronavirus pandemic-related concerns.

## SHUKLA BECOMES NEW VP

In other decisions, veteran Congress leader Rajiv Shukla was officially anointed the Board's vice president in place of his protégé Mahim Verma from Uttarakhand.

Brijesh Patel will continue as the chairman of the IPL Governing Council.

## GANGULY-SHAH, INDIA'S FACE AT ICC

It was also learnt that the general body decided in favour of BCCI President

## CHETAN SHARMA IS NEW CHAIRMAN OF SELECTORS

**Ahmedabad, Dec. 24:** Former India pacer Chetan Sharma was on Thursday appointed chairman of the senior national selection panel by the BCCI's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC), which also picked Abbey Kuruvilla and Debashis Mohanty in the five-member team.

The selection panel also has former India players Sunil Joshi and Harvinder Singh.

As per the BCCI constitution, the candidate with the most Test caps becomes the chief selector. — *PTI*

Sourav Ganguly continuing as a director in the ICC Board. Secretary Jay Shah will be the alternate director as well as India's representative at the Chief Executive Committee meets of the global body.

## WOMEN'S TEST MATCHES

The house deliberated on having women's Test matches and there could be a two-Test series in the offing next year but a final call in this regard will be taken by the BCCI Apex Council.

## GM SACKED

The BCCI has sacked GM (Game Development) KVP Rao, who was asked to

resign. While Rao termed leaving BCCI as his "happiest day", it is learnt that in general, his lack of proper action plan amid the Covid-19 pandemic was one of the big reasons for his ouster.

## RETIREMENT AGE OF UMPIRES INCREASED

The BCCI's affiliated scorers and umpires will now retire at 60 instead of 55 years after the governing body ratified the move.

"We believe that both umpires and scorers are physically fit enough like any other profession to continue till the age of 60 years," source said. — *PTI*

## Aussies charged up

## Hosts look to pile misery on Kohli-less India in Melbourne

**Melbourne, Dec. 24:** Coach Justin Langer said the mark of a great team was to keep winning as he threw down a challenge to Australia Thursday against a depleted India desperate to restore pride in the second Test this week.

Australia head into the Boxing Day clash at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on a high after crushing the visitors by eight wickets inside three days in the opening Test at Adelaide.

The dramatic victory was built on the back of devastating spells from pace spearheads Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, who skittled India in the second innings for their lowest Test score of 36.

Langer said it was an incredible effort, and he wants to see it repeated. "I've said that to become a great team we have got to get better at winning after we win. Really good teams keep winning and winning ... it's an area that we have addressed," he said.

With star opener David Warner again ruled out with a groin injury, Langer said Australia would stick with the same XI, barring last-minute



Australian players take a break during a training session ahead of the second Test against India, in Melbourne on Thursday. — *AFP*

issues. That means the under-pressure Joe Burns retains his spot as opener after a handy 51 not out in Adelaide, with Matthew Wade again moving up the order to accompany him, while all-rounder Cameron Green earns his second cap.

India have far more selection dilemmas, with captain Virat Kohli missing the final three Tests for the birth of his first child. Either the experienced KL Rahul or the uncapped Shubman Gill are tipped to take his place at number four,

while Ajinkya Rahane assumes the captaincy. Although India haven't officially confirmed it, Mohammed Shami is also expected to be absent after reportedly fracturing his wrist after being hit by a Cummins thunderbolt in Adelaide. — *AFP*

## INDIA SWEAT IT OUT AHEAD OF BOXING DAY TEST

**Melbourne, Dec. 24:** The Indian cricket team on Thursday tried a hitherto unseen training drill that vaguely resembled a wrestling bout, with a pair of two players each seemingly striving to outdo each other.

New Zealander Nick Webb, India's strength and conditioning coach, had introduced a few drills in the past and among them is a wrestling-like strength training activity. But the players haven't really been seen performing this particular drill in the past.

One of the purposes of this activity is to help players get ready for high-intensity duels. There was also a bit of touch rugby-like session happening.

Ravindra Jadeja was the first to arrive at the nets for the training session and he was put through a fitness test as he ran between the wickets with a bat on his hand. — *PTI*

## Warne serves a warning to India

**Melbourne, Dec. 24:** Spin legend Shane Warne believes Australia will "blow away" India in the Boxing Day Test as the visitors are still a "bit shocked" by the Adelaide humiliation.

"I think Australia is probably going to blow them away," Warne, who claimed a record 708 Test wickets for Australia, told *Fox Cricket*.

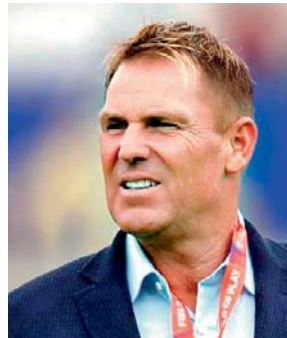
"Having said that, they have some class players to come in like KL Rahul. Young Gill will come in. (Ajinkya) Rahane is a class act. We know what (Cheteshwar) Pujara can do," he said.

"(Mohammed) Shami is a huge loss as well. He's such a quality bowler. And if you look at bowlers for the Melbourne conditions drop in pitches. Shami hits the seam and stands it up and bowls a good length and straight," he added.

Indian batsmen drew a lot of flak after the Australian bowling unit, including Pat Cummins (4-21) and Josh Hazlewood (5-8), bamboozled the visitors in the opening Test.

However, Warne believes the Australian pace battery deserves more credit for the win in the series-opener than the criticism faced by the Indian batsmen.

"Yeah, you can have a go at the Indians but I think you would rather give cred-



Shane Warne

it to the Australians and how well they bowled," the 51-year-old former leg-spinner said.

"They were outstanding, that bowling attack. The four bowlers plus Green, they have been good bowlers for a long time. They are turning themselves into great bowlers now. To watch them go to work in Adelaide was fantastic."

Warne believes the current quartet of Cummins, Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon is already on track to become Australia's greatest bowling unit.

"They are definitely in the conversation (to compare them to my era). They are outstanding those four bowlers and they have been for a while," Warne further said. — *PTI*

## Man Utd, Spurs cruise into semis

**London, Dec. 24:** Manchester United left it late to book their place in the League Cup semi-finals with a dramatic 2-0 win at Everton, while Tottenham joined them in the last four after beating Stoke 3-1 on Wednesday.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side dominated for long periods of their quarter-final at Goodison Park, but it took until the 88th minute before Edinson Cavani broke the deadlock.

The former Paris Saint-Germain striker's fourth goal for United since joining on a free transfer in October came at the same venue where he opened his account for the club last month.

Anthony Martial bagged United's second goal in stoppage time.

After a rocky period that raised questions about Solskjaer's future following their exit from the Champions League, United have recovered their equilibrium.

They are third in the Premier League and have

won their last three matches in all competitions.

United joined holders Manchester City, Tottenham and second-tier Brentford in the League Cup semi-finals.

Meanwhile, Jose Mourinho accused Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli of creating "problems" for his own team during their win against Stoke.

Wales forward Gareth Bale made the most of a rare start to put Mourinho's team ahead at the Bet365 Stadium.

But Alli was at fault when his flamboyant flick was intercepted in the build-up to Jordan Thompson's equaliser for Stoke. Alli's latest mistake drew an angry response on the touchline from Mourinho, who rebuked the star before substituting him minutes later.

Ben Davies put Tottenham back in front with his first goal since 2017 before Harry Kane sealed Spurs' place in the semifinals. — *AFP*

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