

SHORT TAKES

EC team comes to Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

A member of the high-level Election Commission delegation arrived in Chennai on Sunday evening. The team led by Election Commission secretary-general Umesh Sinha will assess on Dec. 21 and 22 the State's preparedness for the general election to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly.

Bihar Chief Electoral officer H.R. Srinivasa arrived at Chennai Airport around 4: 50 pm on Sunday from Bengaluru. Official sources said the other team members, Deputy Election Commissioner Ashish Kundra, Director Pankaj Srivatsava and Malay Malick will arrive in Chennai by 11 am, while Deputy Election Commissioners Sudeep Jain will reach Chennai from Delhi.

The delegation will be meeting with representatives of recognised political parties and Income-Tax Department nodal officers. Besides, a virtual meeting is to be held with all the district collectors and police officers.

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Margazhi 6

Tithi: Saphami

Star: Puratathi

Rahukalam:

7.30 am to 9 am

Yamagandam:

10.30 am to 12 noon

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.07 am

Zohar: 12.09 pm

Asar: 3.19 pm

Maghrib: 5.45 pm

Isha: 7.01 pm

COUNTER POINT



Not religion, it's a political conversion!

DMK launches 'Mission 200' for 2021 elections

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

The party's campaign launched on Sunday is titled "werejectadmk" and the DMK released a video, flagging issues in sectors like agriculture and education as it urged people to defeat the AIADMK in the elections, likely in coming April-May.

In the video, released during a meeting of DMK's key office-bearers, including district secretaries, party chief M K Stalin said senior party functionaries will visit over 16,000 villages and wards to conduct "gram sabhas" where resolutions will be adopted against the AIADMK government as part of the campaign.

At the meeting, Stalin set a target of winning 200 seats for his party office-bearers and claimed DMK was facing attacks from many fronts, including "some being forced" to start their own political ventures as part of a "conspiracy."

The DMK, out of power since 2011, is making a full throttled bid to storm back and dethrone the AIADMK. Incidentally, the DMK initiative came a day after Chief Minister K Palaniswami launched his poll campaign from his native Edapadi in Salem district, urging the people to ensure a resounding win for his party and facilitate continuity of its "good service" to them.

Stalin in his video message claimed: "Entire Tamil Nadu has been affected due to the lack of governance of the AIADMK government. From towns to rural areas, there is a complete collapse."

"To remove this government that is working against all Tamils, about 1,600 DMK leaders will visit over 16,000 villages and wards with the charge sheet of "werejectadmk",

Many welcome CM's Pongal gift, Stalin says give more

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami's announcement of Pongal gift of ₹2,500 cash to all 'rice' ration card holders, besides a package of condiments to make the festival sweeter, has evoked critics of two types – one saying don't pay and the other telling him to pay more.

Soon after Palaniswami let his plans for the Pongal bonanza be known at the campaign meeting on Saturday, his arch political rival and DMK President M K Stalin said that Rs 2,500 was too little an amount for the people and urged him to pay Rs 5,000 cash.

Stalin was addressing an election meeting organised for Thiruvallur district when he said that the government that had refused to pay people

hold gram sabha meetings and adopt resolutions," he added. The gram sabha meetings are scheduled from December 23 to January 10, the party said.

Stalin said an exclusive website has been created for this purpose and invited members of public to "adopt the resolution online" as well. The opposition party will highlight issues such as the National-Entrance-cum-Eligibility Test related suicides of S Anitha of Ariyalur, which triggered an outrage against the exam, and some other medical aspirants, allegations of corruption against the AIADMK, issues faced by farmers and unemployed youth and the law and order situation.

DMK leaders, including Udhayanidhi Stalin and Kanimozhi, have already hit the campaign trail while Stalin has been addressing virtual meetings ahead of the state polls, the first after the



money during the coronavirus lockdown could at least consider paying Rs 5,000 now after the people had been further battered by rains and floods.

On the other hand, the announcement of Rs 2,500 for ration card holders now drawing rice from the shops opened a Pandora's Box with many people slamming him on Twitter for the largesse. Comments like 'election stunt,' 'gift is to cover up the mistakes made while serving as a servant to the BJP' were tweeted by some of his critics.

demise of the party patriarch M Karunanidhi and AIADMK supremo and late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa.

Jayalalithaa died on December 5, 2016 and Karunanidhi on August 7, 2018 after helming their respective parties and holding sway over masses for decades. Jayalalithaa had led the AIADMK to back-to-back victories in the assembly elections in 2011 and 2016, dealing a blow to the DMK. The DMK-led alliance, however, swept the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in the state.

Later, in his address at the gathering at the party headquarters here, Stalin exhorted the functionaries to work with a zeal to achieve "mission 200," implying DMK should return at least 200 MLAs in the 234-member state assembly.

The party was facing attacks from several fronts, he said and urged his supporters to face

Others were more critical. "This appears to be just a bribe for votes. Let AIADMK by all means give it from their party funds. Public money should be spent in better ways. Hope Courts step in and stop this," read another tweet.

But there were many others who supported the gift offer and thanked the Chief Minister for his gesture. 'Hits a Sixer Announcement in his Day 1 campaign,' said a supporter tweeting with the hashtag with Palaniswami's name that trended for some time.

Another one said Rs 2,500 was definitely going to help the poor people and that it should be continued every year. The package of condiments that will come along with the Rs 2,500 cash comprises one sugarcane branch, one kilo sugar, raisins and cashew nuts.

every one of them successfully. He alleged that with BJP's "muscle" and AIADMK's "money", the media was supportive of the two ruling parties, but added "such things are not new to us."

"Such weapons are used against us in every election which we have been facing. Unable to take on us, they are creating new entities. They are forcing some people to launch their own parties and are doing all kinds of conspiracies," he said without naming anyone, but obviously hinting at Rajinikanth who is to launch his party later this month.

DMK workers should not be cowed down by these but work harder to ensure the party returned to the ruling saddle, the Leader of Opposition in state assembly said, while also calling for unity among the ranks. Stalin also said he might launch his poll campaign from the first week of January. — PTI



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Dy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam celebrate Christmas at Chennai Trade Centre on Sunday. — DC

More netizens shop for groceries online: Study

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

After food delivery apps became popular, people are now hooked to online grocery delivery apps. There has been tremendous growth of online trade of grocery items in the country since the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown with netizens preferring to buy almost everything online.

Online grocery trade has grown in the past few months with customers depending on apps for buying rice, dhall, edible oils, sugar and pulses. Amazon, Flipkart and Big Basket apps are some of the leading ones among people now.

Tamil Nadu will become number one state in relying on the grocery delivery apps in the next few years. According to a study, about 60 per cent of total population depend on grocery delivery app, 59 per cent in Bengaluru, 47 per cent in Vijayawada, 54 per cent in Ahmedabad, 58 per cent in New Delhi, 47 per cent in Kolkatta, 54 per cent in Chennai, 33 per cent in Combatores and 11 per cent in Madurai.

Online grocery trade has grown in the past few months with customers depending on apps for buying rice, dhall, edible oils, sugar and pulses. Amazon, Flipkart and Big Basket apps are some of the leading ones among people now

These numbers keep increasing every month.

Lockdown blues saw many supermarkets shutting their doors, but the sales of tiny shops have picked up. Tamil Nadu, especially Chennai, is emerging as an important centre in the online grocery trade.

Chennai based start-up VTS Enterprises India has floated the CY Sathyan app to deliver organic grocery items at an affordable price and deliveries across the country. The company has a farming, food processing unit, R&D facility on 60 acres of land in Thaiyur village near Chennai. It is planning to tie up with more farmers and traders to sell their agro products.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, CY Sathyan, CEO of the company, said since March the use of internet has increased manifold and people buy

almost everything online. He said "CY Sathyan App" simplifies the distribution value chain by consolidating and aggregating stockists, multi-distributors for multi-channel distribution in a metro city or State into a single point operation under one roof.

"We have developed a B2C model through the app and established its presence in 2,100 outlets in Chennai, Bengaluru, New Delhi, Kolkata and other cities. With the app we sell organic rice, dhal, sugar, jiggery, wheat flour, oil and South Indian masala. In the past few months the brands recorded a growth of 100 per cent," Sathyan said.

Considering the steady growth since September, the online trade is set to increase by 40 times in the next few years and Tamil Nadu will become a major player in the market, he concluded.

Academy rejects Tamil film 'Funny Boy' as Canada's Oscar entry

Los Angeles, Dec 20: Acclaimed filmmaker Deepa Mehta's "Funny Boy", which was Canada's submission for best international film at the 93rd Academy Awards, has been rejected by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science (AMPAS) on the grounds that it contains too much English dialogue.

Set in Sri Lanka during the 1970s and 1980s, "Funny Boy" explores the sexual awakening of its young protagonist Arjie (played by Arush Nand/Brandon Ingram) from a young boy, deemed "funny" by disapproving family, to a teenager enamoured by a male classmate. As political tensions escalate to a boiling point between the minority Tamils and the majority Sinhalese, the young boy comes of age in a society and family that doesn't embrace difference outside of societal norms. The film, an adaptation of Shyam Selvadurai's 1994 novel of the same, is in Tamil and Sinhalese but also contains English dialogue, reported Deadline.

According to the Academy, a feature cannot contain more than 50 per cent English to be eligible in the best international film category. A representative of Telefilm Canada, which chairs the pan-Canadian selection committee deciding the country's entry for the Oscars, said they will now push the film forward for general entry categories, including best picture. "Although we were disappointed when informed by the Academy, we are excited to extend our ongoing support for 'Funny Boy' as the journey to the Oscars continue," said Christa Dickenson, executive director of Telefilm Canada. Mehta said though the team was surprised by the Academy's decision, they were "more than thrilled"



— Funny Boy movie still.



Deepa Mehta

that Telefilm was pitching the film in general Oscar categories.

"We were surprised that the film was not able to compete in the Academy's International Feature category, but then were equally surprised and more than thrilled that Telefilm decided to support the submission of the film for Best Picture and other categories at the Academy Awards," the New

"We were surprised that the film was not able to compete in the Academy's International Feature category, but then were equally surprised and more than thrilled that Telefilm decided to support the submission of the film for Best Picture and other categories at the Academy Awards"

Delhi-raised, Toronto-based director said. "My hope is for 'Funny Boy' to continue to transcend expectations with its story of love, courage and compassion," she added.

Mehta's film "Water", the third feature in her Elements trilogy, was Oscar-nominated in the international feature film category in 2007. The first film in the trilogy was "Earth" and the director followed it up with "Fire". — PTI

Customs nets big cats' teeth from aircraft

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

In the latest seizure made by Chennai Customs officials, Canine teeth belonging to genus Panthera smuggled from Dubai were recovered from an aircraft on Sunday morning.

In an official press release, Chennai Air Customs said that, based on intelligence, gold, wildlife and animal parts were likely to be smuggled into the city, an Emirates flight arriving from Dubai on Sunday

morning was rummaged.

Two crumpled up tissue papers were found concealed inside the hollow pipe of one of the seats. The release said that the first tissue ball contained two animal teeth and the second one contained just a single tooth but along with some ash-like powder. An officer from Wildlife Crime Control Bureau in Besant Nagar, who conducted a morphological examination of the animal teeth, identified the same as Canine Teeth of the genus "Panthera".

R. MOHAN | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 21

India's rise as an economic power began with the liberalisation reforms of the 1990s. The country's standing in the world order has risen proportionately with its rise in terms of GDP and several other economic factors.

One of those who saw the dramatic changes of transformational policies come about from close quarters was N.K. Singh, now chairman of the 15th Finance Commission. His life story gives many glimpses into the workings of government and how he may have contributed in his own way to policies that changed the country into the "New India" everyone is talking about the author quotes Laurence J Peter to make fun of economists – "An economist is an expert who will know tomorrow why the things he predicted yesterday didn't happen today." And yet the economists were the ones who foresaw what India could become if policies were to change and the

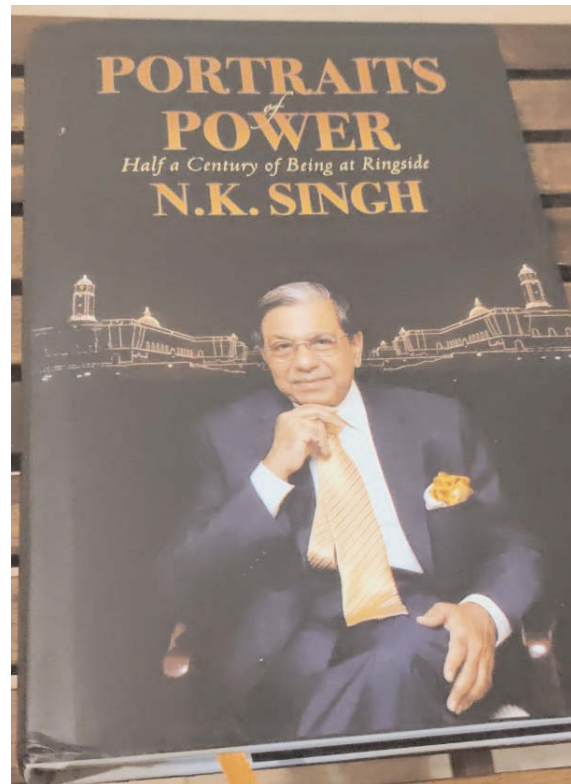
Anyone reading the book might benefit from Mr Singh's account of his stay in Japan and the imprint the Japanese way of thinking left in him

Hindu rate of growth was to be left behind.

Anyone reading the book might benefit from Mr Singh's account of his stay in Japan and the imprint the Japanese way of thinking left in him. "Friendships and gratitude acquired new meanings. Kindness and compassion for the elderly, congruent with Indian values, is embedded in their psyche, which is admirable for a society where the work culture and the high percentage of working women lead to difficult choices between the pursuit of a career and the obligations to the family, particularly its older members," he recounts even as he paints an engaging picture of the Japanese way of life.

Revealed in his absorbing account of his career are interaction with Prime Ministers and the highest policymakers and his journey into politics and Parliament through the JD(U) from Bihar, the state he served first as a young IAS officer. In his stint as Revenue Secretary from 1996 to 1998, he oversaw the Dream Budget's ambitious tax reforms when tax rates were substantially reduced and corporate as well as personal Income tax rates were brought down considerably and import tariffs slashed from their Himalayan heights.

The story of politics-ridden decision making of India cannot but be fascinating. Mr Singh's 50 years at the ringside gave him a vantage seat as well as an opportunity to be in the fight at times. One may agree or disagree with his political leanings and whether self-reliance is the only way to go post-pandemic. How difficult even an able administrator's life becomes with the play of politics makes for interesting reading.



Portraits of Power
Half a century of being at ringside – N.K. Singh.
By Rupa Publications

SHORT TAKES

Farmers carry candles, pay homage

DC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUKKOTTAI, DEC. 20

Members of the Pudukkottai district unit of the All-India Coordination Committee of Farmers, likeminded farmers associations and left parties led by district coordination committee president Sankar carried candles in their hands and paid homage to the farmers who lost their lives in the ongoing nationwide farmers' agitation in Delhi, at Pudukkottai on Sunday. In a similar event, a group of farmers led by Tiruchy district co-ordinator Ayilai Sivasuriyan paid homage at the CPI's district office here.

Similar events also took place at Karur, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Tiruvabarur and Nagapattinam districts.

4-yr-old falls off tractor, dies

DC CORRESPONDENT
Chennai, Dec. 20

A child died in a freak accident near Chennai after falling off a ploughing tractor on Sunday morning. Police identified the deceased as 4-year-old Sakthi Mehanathan who was riding the machine with a farmer when he fell off and suffered injuries.

Sakthi's parents Mehanathan and Megala, of Pulikoradu Village near Melmaruvathur in Chengalpatt district, are daily wagers. The freak accident happened on Sunday when Megala was taking her son Sakthi to their farmland. Police said village resident Loganathan (38) was ploughing his field upon seeing which Sakthi got on the tractor.

While Loganathan was operating the machine, it bounced up, causing the boy to fall forward out of his seat and into the tractor's path. The plough hit his head and he suffered grievous injuries.

Megala, Loganathan and the people nearby immediately rushed him to a private hospital nearby. However, doctors determined the boy's injuries were too severe and he was pronounced dead moments after the accident.

The local police were alerted and the body of the boy was sent to Madurantakam government hospital for post-mortem. Melmaruvathur police registered a case and arrested Loganathan.

New laws will protect farmers: Union minister

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, DEC. 20

Claiming that the three new farm laws enacted by the central government will give protection to farmers, Union minister of state for highways V.K. Singh on Sunday said that there is lot of misconception about the laws and opposition parties like the Congress, AAP and Communists are misleading the farmers through their campaign. "Actual farmers are very happy with what has been done in the last six months", he said.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ensured that the benefit goes to the farmers and maintained that the present agitation by farmers is more political than about farmers. He stressed that agricultural produce marketing committees (APMCs) will continue to function for which there is provision in the laws.

The aim of the laws is to give free hand to farmers to sell their produce at any place in the country doing away with intermediaries. The minimum support price also will continue and the Centre is planning to implement the recommendation of the national commission



on agriculture headed by Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, the minister said. (The commission recommended fixing the price at the cost of production plus 50 per cent of the cost of production for agriculture produce.)

With respect to contract farming, the law provides for farmers getting the increase in price in the market when it happens instead of the price entered into in the agreement. "Land is free from this contract and is provided protection. The farmer is provided protection from any exploitation by a contractor," he said. Farmers will get the increased price in the market and their income will go up. The minister maintained that corporate companies will not get an upper hand as alleged by the opposition parties.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has the highest regard for the

farm sector and assured that the government was with the farmer. He said the crop insurance scheme - Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana - provides due compensation to farmers directly.

Later Mr Singh interacted with farmers under the banner 'Vivasayigalin nanban Modi', organised by the BJP. He said that Thanjavur is the granary of Tamil Nadu. A solution for getting Cauvery river water came after a BJP government was formed at the Centre, he said.

S. Ranganathan, secretary, Cauvery Delta Farmers Welfare Association, L.Murugan, state president of BJP, Karuppu Muruganandam, state vice-president of BJP, M.S. Ramalingam, national executive committee member of BJP and M.Lango, Thanjavur south district BJP secretary participated in the meeting.

After the meeting, Mr Singh tweeted - "Having interacted with people here, one can feel that farmers are excited about the #Farm Bills 2020 brought by @narendramodi government and feel these historic reforms were long due." Generally saying" he said in the tweet.



Marina Beach draws huge crowds on Sunday after being opened to the public. — DC

Staking claim to MGR legacy, Kamal woos fishermen

DC CORRESPONDENT.
TIRUNELVELI, DEC. 20

Kamal Haasan, who has been accused of attempting to steal the MGR legacy by AIADMK, seems to have hit upon the strategy of making inroads into the coastal community as a vote bank.

Considered loyal voters, the fishermen in the southern coastal districts are a much coveted vote bank for all major and smaller political parties, including BJP. Not even the national party can be foolish enough to ignore the votes of fishermen in Kanyakumari despite the community having a strong leaning towards Roman Catholicism in Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi dis-



tricts. Even DMK, which is a party that enjoys greater support among religious minority voters, could not succeed in winning the votes of the coastal community that still remains loyal to the MGR legacy. MNM seems to have formulated its strategy to make inroads into that

vote bank, for which Kamal Haasan made a bid to invoke MGR's name during his campaign last week in the southern districts. The party's founder leader, in his campaign, promised to field candidates from fishermen community in the 2021 assembly elections in coastal constituencies.

Kamal Haasan's claim about his closeness to the late matinee idol, however not only irritated AIADMK and the fishermen community too does not seem to appreciate Kamal projecting himself as 'Meenava Nanban' (fishermen friend).

The fishermen questioned Kamal's sincerity towards fishermen as he had not voiced before on any other problems faced

by the coastal community. "Even during his campaign last week he did not say a word about the National fisheries policy 2020 against which the fishermen are fighting," said Fr Churchill, General secretary of South Asian Fishermen Fraternity (SAFF).

Fr Churchill added that in the two years since MNM was launched, Kamal Haasan had not disclosed his opinion about the proposed Inayam container terminal project or the Koodankulam nuclear power project, Sethusamudram or ISRO planning a rocket launch pad project that they fear may destroy the livelihood of the fishermen in the southern districts.

Attractive schemes to woo TN voters in offing

DC CORRESPONDENT
THOOTHUKUDI, DEC. 20

More attractive schemes like the Pongal bonanza of ₹2,500 in cash recently announced by the chief minister, are in the offing to woo the voters.

As assembly election fever picks up, political parties in Tamil Nadu, according to their capacity, have started trying all techniques to woo voters. Being the ruling party, AIADMK has an edge over all the others and has begun announcing freebie schemes. Chief minister Edappadi K Palanisamy's announcement of Rs 2,500 as Pongal bonanza is just

Hoping for a third consecutive victory for AIADMK in the 2021 assembly elections, the minister said the DMK has been frightened about new players coming to politics, which according to Kadambur Raju was a precursor to DMK's defeat

the beginning, according to Tamil Nadu information and publicity minister, Kadambur C Raju. At a meeting of party functionaries at Thoothukudi on Sunday, he said, "More such schemes are to be announced by our government between January

and March for the people." Hoping for a third consecutive victory for AIADMK in the 2021 assembly elections, the minister said the DMK has been frightened about new players coming to politics, which according to Kadambur Raju was a precursor to DMK's defeat.

He denied the allegation that AIADMK is behind Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth's politics as a strategy against the DMK. "Everybody has the right to enter politics or launch parties and AIADMK is least bothered about them as we know that we have people's support and hence invincible."

Pathbreakers carve a niche in Nilgiris

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, DEC. 20

In spite of the pandemic crisis in 2020 fortune smiled on native tribes and other ethnic communities and enterprising locals in Nilgiris in various ways.

The panchayat polls in early 2020 brought good tidings for the tribal communities in Nilgiris as for the first time a tribesman became the chairman of the district panchayat in Nilgiris. K.M. Ponthus (DMK), a Toda tribal, assumed charge as the chairman of the district panchayat in Nilgiris - a new beginning for tribals in politics.

In October, Badagas, the largest indigenous social group and single-largest ethnic community in the Nilgiris, were included in the database of World's Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations Mountain Partnership. It was a recognition for the

The panchayat polls in early 2020 brought good tidings for the tribal communities in Nilgiris as for the first time a tribesman became the chairman of the district panchayat in Nilgiris. K.M. Ponthus (DMK), a Toda tribal, assumed charge as the chairman of the district panchayat in Nilgiris — a new beginning for tribals in politics

Badagas.

For the transgenders in Nilgiris, 2020 allowed them to try their luck in entrepreneurship as Nilgiri Tirunangaigal, a trans-women self-help group in the hills, opened an Aavin parlour here in early March. It was the first such initiative by a transgender self-help group in the state itself.

In early April, Deccan Chronicle carried a report of Nilgiris-based noted homoeopath

Dr. Kannikaraj King on the need to try homoeo medicine for immunity boosting to manage Covid-19. His continued efforts saw

the intervention of the high court in this issue that led to the government giving its nod for homoeo medicine Arsenicum Album to be used for immunity enhancement.

Using Nilgiris Eucalyptus oil to make sanitisers and mask spray making by Ooty siblings Rohit and Saket Jain of RS Fragrances and marketing nutrition rich Ooty homemade dark chocolates using the hill grown cocoa to boost immunity by M&N Chocolate museum here paved way for innovation in entrepreneurship amidst the Corona crisis.

Getting death certificate tough task for families

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

At a time when people continue to struggle to cope with the raging Covid19 pandemic, getting a certificate of Covid19-realised death cases continues to be a tough task for grieving families.

A family from Maduravoyal has been knocking on the door for certificates for the last 21 days after they lost their man.

It was on November 30 that T.L. Loganathan (78) died after he was infected with Covid 19 virus at Covid Care Centre, Guindy (King

Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research).

The family members were left in the lurch by authorities as his 41 year-old-son is also battling for life at a private hospital in the city after getting Covid-infected.

They allege that the attitude of authorities, who had to issue certificates online within 21 days, was not encouraging.

Loganathan's son-in-law Bala Dinesh, says they had provided all details from their end to the officials at Kings Institute. "But they did not intimate details to

the Adyar Zonal office of the corporation which has to upload the certificate online. When we contacted King Institute officials, they did not respond to our query. When we reached out to officials at their Adyar office, they told us that they could not provide the certificate as they were told by Kings Institute that there had been no death since November 16. We don't know what to do now," he said.

This comes at a time when the Corporation has already set up a facility for users to verify and print the birth or death certificates online.

Users can provide certain personal details such as name, gender, hospital name, etc. to check the certificates.

Meanwhile, the cremation certificate issued by Saidapet burial ground says the cremation took place at the ground on December 1. Mr. Dinesh said, "My father-in-law was admitted to the Kings Institute 15 days before he died after he had tested positive for Covid19. Later he tested negative. However, the respiratory problem developed after he tested negative led to his death," he said.

‘Empty apology’ won’t do, HC tells Labour Commissioner

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

Expressing dissatisfaction over the explanation offered by the Commissioner of Labour in a contempt of court proceedings initiated against him and taking serious view of the 'empty apology' tendered by the Officer, the Madras high court has given him with another opportunity to put forth his explanation, other than what is already stated by him.

Directing the Officer to submit his explanation on or before December 22, 2020 Justice V.Parthiban said on such explanation being received by the court, further orders would be passed. The matter relates to the services of K. Yogaraj of Coimbatore district, whose transfer was stayed by the Madras high court in March 11, 2019. Subsequently the stay was extended until further orders on April 9, 2019 and since the officer allegedly failed to comply with the order, Yogaraj has filed the present petition.



The judge said this court has gone through the undated affidavit filed by the Commissioner of Labour in response to the action initiated by the court by December 10 proceedings against him for the act of committing contempt of court and directed the official to offer his explanation.

The affidavit filed by the Commissioner contains clichéd, trite and common place expressions of 'apology' accompanied by usual mundane deferential verbalisms not intended to convey true sense of regret for his crafty transgression. Such apologies were usually not deeper than skin deep and have been always used as a well protected shield from being taken to task in contempt proceedings. "The

Courts have also been very fairly gracious in accepting such empty apologies in overlooking contemptuous actions of the officials. But this time and in this case, this court has to take its contempt jurisdiction seriously for the reasons stated under", the judge added.

The judge said the official said to have committed the act of contempt belongs to All India Service and was supposed to foresee the consequences of his action, particularly, when he deals with court orders and its compliance. In the earlier petition filed by the petitioner, the impugned transfer order was stayed by this court and subsequently the interim stay was extended until further orders. In the present impugned memorandum dated Nov. 4 the official records this fact. Therefore, he cannot claim that he was not aware of the extension of stay until further orders and has been in force, as on date, the judge added.

The judge said the reference to the Supreme court decision in Asian

Resurfacing of Road Agency Private Limited case "rendered in context of criminal investigation/trial and pitch forking the same in the present context relating to service jurisprudence amounts to clever misreading, nay convenient "misunderstanding" of the import and the context of the Supreme court ruling. Even assuming in favour of the officials that the principle laid down by the Supreme Court was to be applied across the board, the official ought to have formulated his opinion on the basis of comprehensive understanding of the judgment, before acting against the subsisting stay order passed by a Constitution court," the judge added.

The judge said the official, before venturing into his impertinent act of indiscretion, ought to have consulted Law Officers of the government. The files produced do not disclose any such consultation proceeding. His explanation that he was under the bona fide impression about the applicability of the ratio laid down by the Supreme

Court in the decision appears to be far-fetched and does not carry conviction.

The act of the official even assuming it was unwittingly done, the larger issue was whether it was open to the officials of the government to defy the subsisting interim order of the Constitution court on the pretext of following the principle laid down by the Supreme Court relating to a different set of facts and circumstances of the lis prompting the Apex Court to laying down general judicial directives which guidelines though indisputably, were the declared law of the land under Article 141 of the Constitution of India.

"This issue assumes paramount importance as the officials of the government ought not to be allowed to undermine the Constitutional jurisdiction of this court under Article 226 of the Constitution of India in derogation of the powers of judicial review and due compliance to the judicial orders", the judge added.

Saturn-Jupiter conjunction tonight

Chennai, Dec. 20: The Jupiter and Saturn appear to pass each other nearly once every 20 years but what is so extraordinary about tomorrow's celestial extravaganza?

The NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) says, "It's been nearly 400 years since the planets passed this close to each other in the sky, and nearly 800 years since the alignment of Saturn and Jupiter occurred at night, as it will for 2020, allowing nearly everyone around the world to witness this 'Great conjunction'."

The Jupiter and Saturn will be separated by just "0.1 degrees or about one-fifth the apparent width of the Moon". The conjunction will be visible over India best between 6.30 and 7.30 pm.



Members of Mahila Congress party stage a protest against the continuous gas price hike at KK Nagar on Sunday. — DC

SHORT TAKES

NIRAV MODI'S BROTHER HELD FOR CHEATING

New York, Dec. 20: Nehal Modi, the younger brother of fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi, has been indicted here for fraudulently obtaining diamonds worth over 4.2.6 million from one of the world's biggest diamond companies in Manhattan.

Nehal, 41, is charged in a New York Supreme Court indictment with Grand Larceny in the First Degree, Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance, Jr. said.

"While diamonds maybe forever, this flawed scheme was not, and now Modi will face the clarity of a New York Supreme Court indictment. My office will not allow individuals who have the privilege of soliciting business in Manhattan's iconic diamond industry to defraud our businesses or consumers," Mr Vance said in a statement on Friday. According to the indictment, court filings, and statements made on the record in court, between March 2015 and August 2015, Nehal, a former member of Noble Titan Holdings, made false representations to obtain over \$2.6 million worth of diamonds from LLD Diamonds USA on favourable credit terms and consignment, and then liquidated the diamonds for his own ends. *PTI*

JUPITER, SATURN TO MERGE TODAY IN RARE SHOW

New York: Jupiter and Saturn will merge in the night sky on Monday, appearing closer to one another than they have since Galileo's time in the 17th century.

Astronomers say so-called conjunctions between the two largest planets in our solar system are not particularly rare. Jupiter passes its neighbour Saturn in their respective laps around the sun every 20 years.

But the one coming up is especially close: Jupiter and Saturn will be just one-tenth of a degree apart from our perspective or about one-fifth the width of a full moon.

They should be easily visible around the world a little after sunset, weather permitting.

Toss in the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere, the longest night of the year — and the summer solstice in the Southern Hemisphere — and this just-in-time-for-Christmas spectacle promises to be one of the greatest of Great Conjunctions. "What is most rare is a close conjunction that occurs in our nighttime sky," said Vanderbilt University's David Weintraub, an astronomy professor: "I think it's fair to say that such an event typically may occur just once in any one person's lifetime, and I think 'once in my lifetime' is a pretty good test of whether something merits being labeled as rare or special."

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

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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

Magnificent mosque



Blueprint of Ayodhya mosque to replace Babri Masjid, released by Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation (IICF). Its foundation will be laid on Republic Day. — PTI

Shah to extend Bengal visit duration from Jan.

Home minister overwhelmed by large-scale Oppn defections

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

is expected during Shah's January visit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maha, Kerala account for 40 p.c. active Covid cases

'DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20:

Kerala and Maharashtra together account for 40 per cent of the India's active Covid-19 caseload, the Union ministry of Health said on Sunday the day when India added 26,624 new cases taking the total Covid-19 tally to 1,00,31,223. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 95.80 lakh pushing the national recovery rate to 95.51 per cent, while the Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

At present, there are 3,05,344 active coronavirus infections in the country.

The other states with a high number of active coronavirus cases are

● **KERALA AND Maharashtra** together account for 40 per cent of total Covid-19 active cases, the Union health ministry tweeted. At present, there are 3,05,344 active coronavirus infections in the country.

● **THE NUMBER** of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 95,80,402 pushing the national recovery rate to 95.51 per cent, while the Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

West Bengal (19,065), Uttar Pradesh (17,955), and Chhattisgarh (17,488).

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 95,80,402 pushing the national recovery rate to 95.51 per cent, while the Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The Covid-19 active caseload remained below 4

lakh for the 14th consecutive day. There are 3,05,344 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 3.04 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 16,11,98,195 samples have been tested up to December 19 with 11,07,681 samples being tested on Saturday.

The 341 new fatalities include 74 from Maharashtra and 43 from West Bengal. A total of 1,45,477 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 48,648 from Maharashtra.

India wary of new PLA's Western Command head

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Modi, Vietnam PM to hold talks today

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

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

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

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will co-

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

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

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

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

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

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

MP university's new course for 'quacks' stirs row

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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

Madhya Pradesh Dr Bhubaneswar Garg told this newspaper.

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

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

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

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

HP: FORCED CONVERSION ACT COMES INTO FORCE

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

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

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

MAN FLEES AFTER MARRYING 2 WOMEN IN 5 DAYS

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

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

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

METRO | PROJECT

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

Uddhav seeks Centre's help to settle car shed row

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

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

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

the project to salt pan land at Kanjurmarg area.

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

Addressing the people of state via social media for 34 minutes, Thackeray said that he was called "arrogant", but if wanting the best for Mumbai and Maharashtra was "arrogance" then he acceded to his fault.

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

gance" then he acceded to his fault.

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

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

Justifying the choice of land at Kanjurmarg for the Metro car shed, Thackeray said the state government gave "costliest" land in the Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) for the central government's bullet train project, despite opposition.

"We did not create

obstruction. If you create problems in Kanjurmarg and we do in the BKC, creating problems in each others projects will serve no purpose," he said.

However, Fadnavis dismissed Maharashtra CM's contention that relocating the metro car shed project to Kanjurmarg would serve future needs, including availability of land that might be needed for expansion of the infrastructure for metro lines. He asked the Chief Minister to make report of the high-powered committee public, "as it mentions financial losses the state

will incur if the project is shifted to Kanjurmarg, besides delaying the project by four years".

"Why are you hiding the fact that the construction work at Aarey cannot be stopped even if the car shed is shifted to Kanjurmarg? The (construction of) underground tunnels is being carried out keeping in mind the Aarey land... The work is 80 per cent complete," Fadnavis said.

The BJP leader reiterated that relocating the car shed project from Aarey will "result into waste of time and money".

SHORT TAKES

NOV. 2 VIENNA
ATTACK: TWO
MORE NABBED

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

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

She declined to reveal the nationality of the other suspect.

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

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

JIHADISTS KILL 5
SOLDIERS, KIDNAP
35 IN NIGERIA

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

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

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

BIDEN, MEXICO
PREZ DISCUSS
MIGRATION

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

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

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

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

'ICE MAN' SETS
NEW RECORD IN
FREEZING CABIN

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

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

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

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

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

England, Italy get ready for curbs

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

Belgians, Dutch
halt UK flights
over virus variant

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

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

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

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

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

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

Germany has not yet

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

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

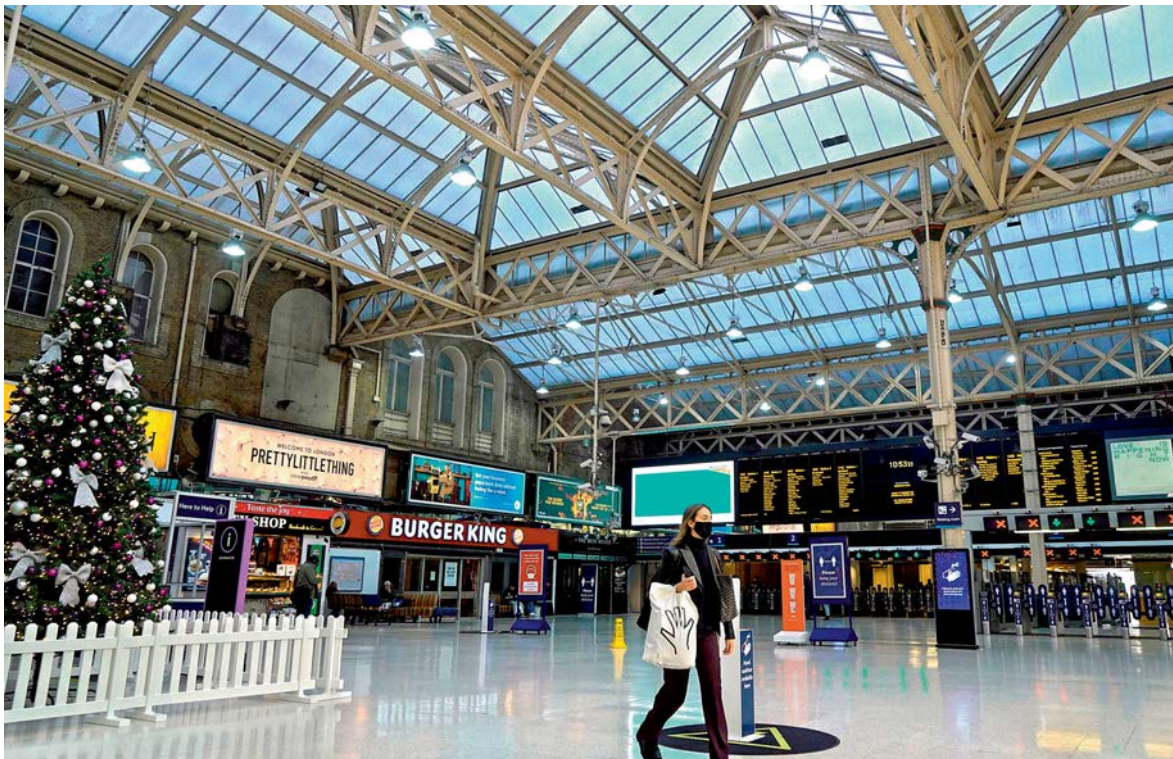
● "Across Europe, where transmission is intense and widespread, countries need to redouble their control and prevention approaches," a WHO Europe spokeswoman said.

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

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

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

— AP



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

— AFP

Bibi gets Covid vaccine
jab, Israel rollout starts

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

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

Each recipient must receive

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

HIGHEST DAILY
SPIKE OF 548
IN THAILAND

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

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

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

— AP

'Be transparent in
rollout of vaccine'

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

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

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

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

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

uncertainty and outright opposition to vaccination worldwide.

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

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

Atheists to save historic German church plank by plank

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

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

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

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

roof, built in the Nordic style in 1905.

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

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

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

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



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

— AFP

its structure.

"From the village, we saw the black plumes of smoke and thought 'oh no, there goes the church'," said Regina Nowolski, 69,

a member of the Stiege Stave Church Association, co-founded by Powalla.

But as it turned out, the church was undamaged. "And there came the idea

that something must be done now or the church will one day collapse," said Regina Bierwisch, spokeswoman for the association. "The only solution to save the church was to take it away." While the idea was clear-cut, it was far easier said than done.

The challenges were plentiful: getting permission to move the structure, finding a new home, and working out how to get it there. At one point, lifting the whole building with a Bundeswehr military helicopter was ruled out.

Linked to all those issues is the million-euro question of how to finance the project. Undeterred, members of the association took the matter to the

mayor, wrote to federal authorities on conservation and made public appeals to fundraise.

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

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

With backing and funding secured, the 1.1 million euro project (\$1.3 million) to move the

church is now in its last lap. A plot of land has been secured in Stiege town, offered by the regional authorities to the association at a symbolic price of one euro. — AFP

 Coal India Limited (A Maharatna Company)
<p>"All the tenders issued by CIL and its Subsidiaries for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of Coal India Ltd www.coalindia.in/ respective Subsidiary Company, CIL e-procurement portal https://coalindiatictenders.nic.in and Central Public Procurement Portal https://eprocure.gov.in. In addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal https://gem.gov.in/."</p>

DECCAN Chronicle

21 DECEMBER 2020

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

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

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

Brian Lara named his first daughter Sydney after his favourite city with an attractive cricket ground but it is unlikely that Kohli would name his daughter after Adelaide, a British queen.

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

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

Kohli is coming back home on paternity leave, which is an empathetic

High-stakes game in J&K

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

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

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

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Subhani



Parl dysfunctional due to competitive politics



Mohan Guruswamy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives is an active and partisan leadership position, and the incumbent actively works to set the majority party’s legislative agenda.

The office of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha is modelled after the British Speaker. But in India, with its rather lesser regard for convention, the Speaker continues to be a

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

Then there is the Anti-Defection Act that seriously limits free discussion by muzzling inner-party discussion and expression of dissent. This law disrespects the essential reality that Members of Parliament or the state legislatures are representatives of the people. That they are members of a political party is only incidental. The elected members are intended to represent and protect the interests of the people who elect them, and not that of a handful of leaders. It makes them subservient to the whip on the pain of expulsion.

This tyranny of the whip has turned MPs virtually into marionettes who are forced to act according to the wishes of the party leadership. Most party leaderships are now vested within families and clans, and leadership is usually hereditary or extra-institutional.

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

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

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

LETTERS

PONGAL BONANZA

The Pongal gift announced by the CM should be welcomed. In fact in the lock-down period, many of the downtrodden had suffered untold misery due to lack of earnings. As the DMK heir Mr Stalin has suggested, it could be raised to Rs 5,000. The criticism that AIADMK should give the same from its party fund is ridiculous. No party which doled out freebies in cash or in-kind had paid from its party fund and any party by giving such Pongal gifts naturally aims at gaining political mileage. Even Mr Stalin’s suggestion to give Rs 5,000 is to upstage the CM to gain name and fame keeping an eye on the ensuing elections. From public money a paltry sum is invested as Pongal gift to the immediate beneficiary which is the public but thalaivars are the long-term beneficiaries. After all, Dravidian politics are dramatic, its politicians diabolical and hence such a bonanza for people.

A. Seshagiri Rao,
Chennai

UNENVIABLE MAMATA

Prominent Trinamool Congress leaders including Mr Adhikari joining the BJP in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah only suggests that politics is more uncertain than life per se. Poor Mamata Banerjee would not have expected such a sad political development in her state. There were times when regional parties and political leaders hesitated to strike an alliance with the BJP. But now things have turned topsy turvy, thanks to the party’s splendid performance in the recent elections/by-elections across the country. The BJP, which wants to cash in on the trend, is trying all tricks in the book to bring all the States and Union Territories under its fold and strengthen its political hegemony.

S. Ramakrishnasayee,
Chennai

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is a sort of push me plus pull you. We hear one day that the deal is done and the next that we will “Brexite” with no-deal. Either way the uncertainty will be over in the first week of January. But, meanwhile, we may run out fresh fruit and medicines, which come daily from the continent! Our export lorries will also be held up in long queues. The deadline is midnight on December 31. At least, they are promising that Big Ben (which is still under repair) will chime the arrival of the New Year.

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Gold for Simranjit, Manisha at WC

New Delhi: Indian women boxers Simranjit Kaur (60kg) and Manisha Moun (57kg) notched up gold medals with contrasting final wins in the Cologne World Cup in Germany. Manisha defeated compatriot Sashki Choudhary 3-2, while Simranjit got the better of German Maja Klienahans 4-1 to finish on top in their respective categories.

India finished the competition at the second spot overall after claiming three gold, two silver and four bronze medals.

On Saturday, Asian Games champion Amit Panghal (52kg) had claimed the sole gold among men. Veteran Satish Kumar (+91kg) had to settle for a silver after an injury forced him to withdraw from the finals. Sonia Lather (57kg), Pooja Rani (75kg) Gaurav Solanki (57kg) and Mohamed Hussamudin (57kg) claimed the bronze medal in their respective categories. — *Agencies*

Hyderabad suffer first loss of season

Vasco: Vignesh Dakshinamurthy pulled off a stunning goal to set up Mumbai City FC's 2-0 win over Hyderabad FC in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

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

NZ hammer Pak in second T20

Hamilton: Opener Tim Seifert carried his bat for 84 in an unbroken 129-run partnership with Kane Williamson to steer New Zealand to a nine-wicket win over Pakistan in the second Twenty20 international Sunday and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. Williamson finished 57 not out in his return to the short format as New Zealand overtook Pakistan's total of 163-6 with four balls to spare. Seifert took his runs from only 63 balls with eight fours and three sixes, unleashing a wide variety of shots on a flat wicket against a Pakistan attack that struggled to find consistently challenging lengths. Williamson was scratchy at first, then became unstoppable, reaching his 12th T20 international half century from 37 balls on the same ground where he scored a test-best 251 in his last innings. — *AP*

Brief scores: Pakistan 163/6 (Hafeez 99*, Southee 4/21) lost to **New Zealand 164/1** (Seifert 84*, Williamson 57*).

Ex-hockey player Sampath no more

Chennai: Former state hockey player Sampathkumar passed away due to cardiac arrest on Sunday. He was 65 and is survived by his wife, daughter and son. He played for Income Tax and Chennai Port Trust. He was also coach of the Port Trust team.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Burnley vs Wolves from 11 pm; Chelsea vs West Ham from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Indian Super League: Mohun Bagan vs Bengaluru from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

IWWE
Table, Ladders & Chairs: Boutts from 8 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

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

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THE FALL GUYS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jagan wins Pro-Stock 165cc title

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

Jagan Kumar swept to title triumph in the Pro-Stock 165cc Open category while Chennai youngster Mohan Babu topped the Novice (Stock 165cc) class as the second and final round of the MRF MMSC fmsci Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship 2020 concluded at the MMRT, here on Sunday. Jagan, 31, picked up his ninth National title including the 125cc in 2009 and eight in the 165cc Open class. For Babu, a 21-year old Purchase Executive in a Chennai firm, it was his maiden National title. Another Chennai racer,



The 2020 National Champions (from left): Ann Jennifer (Girls), Jagan Kumar (Pro-Stock 165cc Open) and Mohan Babu (Novice).

Ann Jennifer had won the Girls title on Saturday.

The championship results in the Pro-Stock 301-400cc category is withheld following a technical protest which was subsequently thrown out. However, the decision has been appealed and a final verdict is awaited.

THE RESULTS

Pro-Stock 301-400cc (Race-3): 1. Anish Damodar Shetty (Race Concepts) (11mins, 44.035secs); 2. Rajini Krishnan (RACR Castrol Power Racing) (11:44.322); 3. KY Ahamed (TVS Racing) (11:45.386). **Race-4:** 1. Rajini Krishnan (11:49.668); 2. Deepak

Ravikumar (TVS Racing) (11:50.210); 3. Amarnath Menon (SpeedUp Racing) (11:50.321).

Pro-Stock 165cc (Race-3): 1. Jagan Kumar (TVS Racing) (12:11.699); 2. KY Ahamed (TVS Racing) (12:15.860); 3. S Mathana Kumar (Eneos Honda Erula Racing) (12:15.937). **Race-4** (5 laps due to delayed start): 1. S Mathana Kumar (10:39.908); 2. Sarath Kumar (RACR Castrol Power Racing) (10:44.093); 3. KY Ahamed (10:45.776). **Novice (Stock 165cc, Race-4):** 1. Navaneeth Kumar (Rulexx Rockers Racing) (13:08.467); 2. Mohan Babu P (Pvt, Chennai) (13:08.659); 3. Alwin Sundar (AS Motorsports) (13:09.147).

Adelaide debacle brought back horrors of summer of '74



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

Some incidents trigger memories of past episodes like the first session of the third day of the Adelaide Test did. On a sunny morning, the Australians destroyed the morale of team India in 21.2 overs. Their capitulation for a mere 36 runs in the second innings of the first Test match brought back the horrors of the summer of 1974 when India was bowled out for their (then) lowest Test score of 42 at cricket's Mecca, Lord's. The two sessions that

India played, 46 years apart, have a common thread. Virat Kohli was leading his team to defend the Border-Gavaskar trophy that he had wrested from Australia on India's last tour in 2018-19 just the way Ajit Wadekar did in '74 after beating England in two consecutive away and home series'.

The debacle in the ill-fated series of '74 brought the Indians back to terra firma just the way their last outing has done at Adelaide. With sparse wins abroad after the 3-0 wipe out that India faced

under Wadekar, it took a remarkable victory at Lord's (the same venue where India had touched its nadir) in 1983 when Kapil Dev lifted the World Cup. That win, followed by a 2-0 Test series win in and against England in 1986 gave us a sense of pride that India could no longer be considered as bad tourists.

Before the start of the current Test series, skipper Kohli made a meaningful statement that described his approach as India's premier cricketer. Former Aussie great, Greg Chappell had likened Kohli as the "most Australian non-Australian cricketer of all time."

The Indian skipper, who is known for his plain-speak accepted Chappell's assessment saying his personality and character is a

representation of the new India. One that is ready for and wants to take on challenges and move forward with optimism and positivity.

The one session at Adelaide took Indian cricket back many steps and made it clear that the current team has a long way to go when it came to performing consistently in Test cricket in SENA countries. Yes, the team deserves full credit for the historic series win the last time they visited the Australian shores, but they also need to accept that with three consecutive Test losses — two against New Zealand, earlier this year — there is a steep mountain to be climbed.

In a post-match media face-off, Kohli opined that the situation isn't alarm-

ing, saying, "We can very well sit here and make a mountain out of a molehill." By dismissing the Adelaide debacle as a molehill and asking his fellow batsmen to follow individual plans with stronger intent, Kohli may be addressing a short term issue but is missing the wood for the trees. One accepts that the 36-run surrender can be termed as a molehill considering the Australian bowlers bowled a fabulous line and length that could have caused the best batsmen, across eras, to struggle.

Having bad sessions, trying to survive in difficult conditions with zero support from lady luck is a part of the game called Test cricket. Not a single Indian batsman threw his wicket and each one was done in by deliveries that

Spurs' title hopes suffer huge blow

London, Dec. 20: Leicester put a major dent in Tottenham's Premier League title challenge on Sunday, climbing to second in the table on Sunday. Spurs were top of the table before their midweek clash with Liverpool but now find themselves six points adrift of the champions after a damaging 2-0 defeat at home.

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

Serge Aurier barged Wesley Fofana over and, after referee Craig Pawson watched the incident again on the pitchside monitor, the Foxes striker drilled home his spot-kick.

Spurs had a huge escape early in the second half as James Maddison had a goal ruled out for the most marginal of offside.

But Leicester doubled their lead just before the hour mark via an own goal.

The win — Leicester's sixth in seven away games — lifts them to within four points of Jurgen Klopp's men after 14 matches and will have Foxes fans dreaming again.

SEVEN-STAR LIVERPOOL RUN RIOT

Just five points separate the 2016 champions from Chelsea in eighth spot but Liverpool looked ominous

THE RESULTS

Brighton (Welbeck 87)	1
Sheffield United (Bogle 63)	1
Tottenham Leicester (Vardy 45+4, Alderweireld 59-og)	0 2
Crystal Palace Liverpool (Minamino 3, Mane 35, Firmino 44, 68, Henderson 52, Salah 81, 84)	0 7
Southampton Manchester City (Sterling 16)	0 1
Everton (Holding 22-og, Mina 45)	2
Arsenal (Pepe 35-pen)	1
Newcastle (Wilson 64-pen)	1
Fulham (Ritchie 42-og)	1

in a 7-0 demolition of Crystal Palace on Saturday.

The Reds sent a chilling warning to the rest of the Premier League as Arsenal's crisis deepened following 1-2 defeat at Everton. Jurgen Klopp's champions — despite being dogged by injuries this season — are five points clear of neighbours Everton. It is the first time the Reds have won an away match in the English top flight by a margin of seven goals in their illustrious history. — *AFP*

MESSI EQUALS PELE'S CLUB GOAL RECORD

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

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

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

"That's why he is the No.1. What he's done for this club, it is impressive."

But Messi was eventually left frustrated on Saturday as a dogged Valencia forced a draw to leave Barcelona eight points behind leaders Atletico Madrid, who beat Elche 3-1 earlier in the day.

"There were times tonight with good football, we had total control of the match, especially after leading 2-1 where we tried to get the third, but there were also times when we lost the ball in the danger zones," added Koeman.

"But the race for the title is not yet lost, we are far behind, but it's a very complicated season for everyone. In two months, the situation may be totally different." — *AFP*

Tamil Nadu cricketer Yo Mahesh calls it a day

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 20

V. Yo Mahesh has announced his retirement on the eve of his 33rd birthday. The former Tamil Nadu quick was first signed by the Delhi Daredevils and then represented Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Yo Mahesh's career kicked off as he made it into the India U-19 squad for the 2006 World Cup held in Sri Lanka and he went on to play 50 first-class matches, 61 List A and 46 T20 games for Tamil Nadu.

"At the outset, thanks to BCCI for the opportunity to represent India at the Under-19 level and the India A level. It's been an



Yo Mahesh

honour and with utmost pride I call it the highest point in my career," Yo Mahesh said in his statement, on Twitter.