

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
KARIMNAGAR | MONDAY | 21 DECEMBER 2020

## WEATHER

**Max:** 28.8°C  
**Min:** 15.0°C  
**RH:** 40%  
**Rainfall:** Nil  
**Forecast:** Partly cloudy.  
Moderate rains likely.  
Max/Min temp. 29/14 °C

## COVID-19 CUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+22,214)	(+295)
1,00,53,832	1,45,804
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+592)	(+3)
TS: 2,81,414	1,513
(+438)	(+2)
AP: 8,78,723	7,076

### CASES AROUND THE WORLD

7,69,02,835
DEATHS
16,96,433
COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
218
worldometers.info/coronavirus

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Dakshinayana  
**Tithi:** Margasira Shuddha  
Saptami till 4.18 pm  
**Star:** Purvabhadra till 11.05 pm  
**Variyam:** Nil  
**Durmuhurtam:** 12.35 pm to 1.19 pm; 2.47 pm to 3.31 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 7.30 am to 9 am  
**HURI CALENDAR**  
**Jamadi-ul-Awwal 5, 1442 AH**  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.36 am  
**Zohar:** 12.24 pm  
**Asar:** 4.11 pm  
**Maghrib:** 5.53 pm  
**Isha:** 7.06 pm  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.41 AM**  
**SUNSET TODAY 5.47 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 1.23 AM**

## COUNTER POINT



Not religion, it's a political conversion!

## SHORT TAKES

### BJP, JD(S) deny merger rumours

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

## NATION | 4

### Maha makes masks must for six months



### CONGRESS MAY REPLACE BHATTI AS CLP LEADER

**IREDDY SRINIVAS REDDY | DC**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Speculation doing the rounds in the state Congress is that the party high command is likely to change the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader in the coming days. This will be part of the proposed revamp, including appointment of a new state Congress president. Senior leaders opine that Congress president Sonia Gandhi is dissatisfied with the existing set-up after the party nominee lost his deposit in the Dubbak byelection and the party lost a substantial vote share in the (GHMC) Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation elections. Party leaders are speculating that if the high command wishes to replace CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, his brother Mallu Ravi could be a possible choice as the next AICC National SC Cell chairman. AICC is working on finalising names for chairman of the state Congress coordination committee and campaign committee. The front runners are reportedly legislator D. Sridhar Babu and Komatireddy Rajagopal Reddy.



## WORLD | 5

### New curbs in UK to slow infectious strain

## SPORTS | 8

### Messi equals Pele's goal record



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# CAA on hold for now, says Shah

Cites absence of rules, ongoing pandemic

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

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday dismissed any prospect of the immediate implementation of the Citizenship Amend-ment Act (CAA), a key promise made by the BJP to refugees, citing the absence of its rules and the ongoing nationwide Covid-19 pandemic. Mr Shah told the media at Bolpur in West Bengal's Birbhum district, at the end of his two-day West Bengal tour: "The CAA rules are yet to be made. Such a big exercise cannot be undertaken now because of the corona. When the vaccine drive will get underway and the Corona cycle will also end, we will definitely give it a thought then. You will be informed when it will be done."

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

### SHAH TO EXTEND STAY FROM JAN. AFTER DEFECTIONS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

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

■ Full report on Page 4

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

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



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

# Farmers' unions to stage 24-hr relay hunger strike

**SANJAY KAW | DC**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

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

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

decided to write to the NDA allies, urging them to oppose the Centre's stance and request a rollback of the three farm laws. "If the government's allies refuse to do so, protests would be held against them as well," Mr Tikait said. As Delhi recorded its coldest morning this season on Sunday, with the mercury dipping to 3.4 degrees Celsius, thousands of farmers protesting at the national capital's borders continued with their agitation and were firm on their demand to get the three farm laws repealed.

### DEVOTEES STAGE PROTEST OVER TIRUMALA TOKENS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, DEC. 20

Tirumala-bound devotees staged a protest for a brief while at the ticket issuing counters in Vishnu Nivasam complex here on Sunday, denouncing issuance of darshan tokens by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in advance for darshan on December 22, 23 and 24. A group of devotees, who had queued up at the ticket issuing counter, expressed unhappiness when they received darshan tickets for 24th of this month.

They questioned TTD staff why they had not been given darshan tickets for at least Monday or Tuesday. The staff told devotees that sarva darshan tickets quota for the next three days were exhausted. Because of this, they could issue free darshan tickets only for December 24. Unhappy with the TTD reply, devotees entered into heated arguments with devasthanams' staff and later staged a protest, raising slogans against TTD. Following this, TTD vigilance and security wing personnel, apart from police, rushed to the spot and pacified devotees.

# HC slams TS for claiming lands in Hafeezpet area

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC**  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

The Telangana High Court has pulled up the state government for its "vexatious conduct" of repeatedly attempting to claim ownership of land parcels in Survey No. 80 of Hafeezpet in the city, and categorically declared that it has no right, title or interest on them.

In series of judgments on these lands in the recent past, the division bench comprising Justices M.S. Ramachandra Rao and T. Amarnath Goud directed the authorities concerned to mutate lands in favour of individuals or companies, grant building permission, allow registration or conduct surveys in Survey No. 80. All these were being rejected by the authorities who claimed that it was government land.

The landmark judgments will provide relief to thousands of property owners in residential colonies of Hafeezpet and surrounding areas who accused the authorities of making a killing by permitting a few con-

● THE LANDMARK prior analysis, the most common side effects for Moderna vaccine included injection site

structions and denying permission to many others. "When we sought justice in the High Court, the government did not even bother to file counter affidavits for years, causing obstruction of justice," alleged a resident.

In a case involving Greater Golkonda Estates Pvt Ltd, the High Court referred to a delay of 38 years by the government in challenging the preliminary decree passed in CS No 14 of 1958 and the courts including the SC, dismissing its claims. "Thus, the state's claim to the lands covered by the preliminary decree in CS 14 of 1958 including Hafeezpet village has failed and at this point of time it is not open to the state of Telangana to set up any claim to the land in Hafeezpet village," said the High Court.

■ Page 2: Settle border row with Kondapur: HC

## SURPRISE | MOVE First phase of elections scheduled for April-May

# Oli dissolves Nepal Parliament

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

dation and announced mid-term general election in April-May, a decision termed "unconstitutional, impulsive and autocratic" by the Opposition and dissidents in the Nepal Communist Party (NCP). Earlier in the day, an emergency meeting of the Cabinet chaired by Oli decided to recommend the president for the dissolution of Parliament, a senior Standing Committee member of the NCP said. The first phase of the mid-term

election will be held on April 30 and May 10 for the second phase, the Rashtrapati Bhawan said. The 275-member House of Representatives, which is the lower House of Parliament, was elected in 2017 for a five-year term. The upper House is the National Assembly. The move comes as the intra-party feud reached climax in the ruling NCP which has been witnessing months long tussle between two factions, one led by 68-

year-old Oli and Party's chairman and another led by 66-year-old "Prachanda", also the executive chair of the party and former premier. Expressing dissatisfaction over Oli's move, seven ministers from his Cabinet resigned. The seven ministers, belonging to the Prachanda faction, announced their resignation in a joint statement issued during a press conference here.

— PTI

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## SHORT TAKES

## CCI NOT BUYING COTTON, SAY FARMERS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Cotton farmers said they were facing hardships as the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) was not purchasing it. With this, they were forced to sell their produce to private traders at rates much below the minimum support price (MSP) of ₹5,300 to ₹5,600. Small and marginal farmers were selling cotton to private traders as they pay immediately, but those who cultivate cotton in large fields are worried as selling at lower rates would cause them a huge loss.

According to the farmers, private traders were offering ₹3,000 to ₹4,600 per quintal based on quality of cotton as against ₹5,000 to ₹6,000 last year. Farmers said that the CCI is not giving any relaxation with regard to the percentage of moisture in the cotton.

Asked about this, an official of the agriculture department suggested that farmers dry the cotton before bringing it to the CCI and other purchase centres so that the moisture content was below 12 per cent. That would help them get MSP of ₹5,550 per quintal.

The official also said that cotton was cultivated in nearly 50 lakh acres in the state this season.

## NO DECISION ON DEMANDS OF TRSMA: GOVT

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

An official from the education department has said that no decision has been taken on the demands of the Telangana Schools Management Association (TRSMA), which works for the welfare of private schools in the state.

Associations representatives who met with department officials on December 15 have said that they will go on with their planned agitation from Tuesday if they do not receive a response from the education department.

On whether a decision will be taken on the demands for releasing a comprehensive academic calendar with the exam schedule and the notification for the SSC public exam fees, the education department official said that even though no call had been taken, it will be acted upon sooner rather than later. The education department was aware of and concerned about the situation in private budget schools in the state, he said.

The TRSMA had postponed the protests earlier by three days, after education department officials assured them that their demands would be met, during an interaction with education minister Sabitha Indra Reddy and Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar.

The action plan of the TRSMA includes presenting a charter of demands to MPs, MLAs and other public representatives, organising press meets in the districts and at the state level, holding a round-table meeting to sensitise the stakeholders.

The association also plans to observe a 'black day' by wearing black ribbons and sitting on hunger strikes in front of the district education offices at Khammam, Adilabad, Karimnagar, Medak, Nalgonda, Mahbubnagar and Nizamabad districts as well as starting a 'Twitter storm'.

● **THE ACTION** plan of the TRSMA includes presenting a charter of demands to MPs, MLAs and other public representatives, organising press meets in the districts.

## HC: TS refusal to follow land order is contempt

Bench calls absurd, state's bid to blame petitioner for delay

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

The Telangana High Court described the state government's efforts to continue to claim ownership of land parcels covered under CS No. 14 of 1958, including those in Survey No. 80/A of Hafeezpet, as contempt of court.

"We are of the opinion that the respondent's (government) refusal to recognise the fact that the state has no title to the land in Sy No 80/A of Hafeezpet in spite of several orders passed by the High Court and Supreme Court practically amounts to contempt of court and cannot be countenanced," said the HC.

A division bench comprising Justice M.S. Ramachandra Rao and Justice T. Amarnath Goud in a recent order directed the revenue authorities to implement its earlier mutation proceedings that were kept on hold for more

## Settle border row with Kondapur: HC

From page 1

The Telangana High Court directed the government to carry out a survey to settle a border dispute with neighbouring Kondapur.

The Supreme Court in an order last Wednesday said it saw no reason to interfere in the High Court order and directed the government to conduct a survey within four weeks.

In another case, the High Court dismissed the claims of the Wakf Board

than a decade.

The Bench called "absurd" the claims of revenue authorities that the petitioners filed an application for incorporating his name after a lapse

over the ownership of 50 acres in the same survey number. In Sai Pawan Estates vs State Wakf Board, the division bench said that as per rules the Wakf created before the commencement of Wakf Act 1995 should be registered within three months after the Act came into force.

However, the Wakf was claimed to have taken place in 1955 for part of Hafeezpet land, but it was registered under the Act in 2013, the court pointed out.

of 16 years. The court said the revenue authorities issued proceedings way back in 2009 and is only seeking implementation of these orders in the revenue record such as

● **A DIVISION** bench comprising Justice M.S. Ramachandra Rao and Justice T. Amarnath Goud in a recent order directed the revenue authorities to implement its earlier mutation proceedings that were kept on hold for more than a decade.

pahani patriks, it said. "In our opinion the authorities have no choice in the matter but to implement these mutation orders, take note of the petitioner's subsequent purchase and mutate his name as owner and pattadar for these lands," the Bench said.

The court also dismissed ownership claims of Sahebzadi Hameedunnisa Begum as it belonged to defendant 156 and 157 who were Nizam of Hyderabad and Nawab Khasim Nawaz Jung respectively who subsequently sold their shares to Cyrus Investments Pvt Ltd.



Members of the Hope Unlimited Church celebrate 'Light in darkness, the essence of Christmas' by lighting candles as part of the carol service, ahead of Christmas in Secunderabad on Sunday.

— S. SURENDER REDDY

## Unique events mark last Sunday before Christmas

SANJAY SAMUEL  
PAUL | DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

A festive spirit pervaded the last Sunday before every Christmas. Many churches in the twin cities have been celebrating pre-Christmas events, albeit on a cautious note because of the Coronavirus.

Given the backdrop, some churches have come up with innovative events to the delight of the devout.

A church has drawn up a unique celebration especially aimed at spreading the festive spirit among the senior citizens, who are restricted from attending church services.

As part of the celebrations, volunteers from the church door-delivered dinner so that the elderly could feel as being a part of the festivities. Another church staged a play 'Not So Silent Night'.

Capt. Alwyn Menezes, a member of St Anthony's Church, Gandhinagar, Ramakrishnapuram, said "As it is last Sunday of Advent, the church had

more carols and special songs. Because of Covid-19, most season events have been shelved. However, we had a feel of Christmas during the regular service."

St Francis Xavier's Church in Yarpal celebrated semi-Christmas on Sunday wherein families got together and enjoyed nativity play, carols and the Christmas message. The event was organised in the adjacent school's open premises with thrust on social distancing, said parish priest Fr M.M. Kennedy.

John Wesley Methodist Church at Gouthamnagar in Malkajgiri celebrated candlelight service on Sunday. Ramya Pranuthi from the church said, "As those over 60 years of age have been barred from entering the church, we made them attend online service. We also had our volunteers deliver dinner in their houses. While having dinner, they interacted with us, thanks to Zoom."

Shobha Rani Yerrola, from the same church, said, "Youth, women and

children wings of the church organised the event, which had an overwhelming number of musical themes. During the service we collected gifts from each member, which will be later sent to under-privileged and deprived sections."

B. Josline Paul said "Since the pandemic is still prevalent, the programme was held on two floors of the building, to ensure that all Covid-19 precautions are in place."

Pastor Sumanth Perumalla of Hope Unlimited Church said, "This Sunday, the church conducted carol service at St Mary's College in Secunderabad. In spite of it being only one event, we converted it into two services so that people could maintain ample distance from one another."

A church member of this congregation, David Enoch, added, "We have come up with a theatrical play this year 'Not So Silent Night'. It portrays a young girl's perspective of how Christmas has changed because of the pandemic."

## Poachers caught with meat of hare

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Five persons were arrested for poaching a hare, following a raid by forest department officials at a rice mill at Jokora village near Varni in Nizamabad district.

The gang was headed by one Luqman Affendi. Apart from the carcass of a black naped hare, which was hunted and skinned, the officials found two rifles with telescope and silencers, searchlights, binoculars, knives, torch lights, among others. All these, together with a SUV (AP29 AN 0001), were seized.

During questioning, Affendi confessed that he had gone hunting for blackbucks but could not find any, and landed up with the hare. The raid was conducted by the vigilance and anti-poaching wing of the forest department based on a tip-off.

The forest officials also raided Affendi's house at Gudimalkapur, Mehad-



The hunting weapons carried by a gang of poachers is displayed by forest officials on Sunday. The gang was arrested during a raid at a rice mill in Jokora village near Varni, Nizamabad district early on Sunday.

— By arrangement

ipatnam and found meat in the freezer packed in plastic bags. They also found two rifle butts which were seized.

The meat was sent to the

Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology for identification of the animal from which it came.

An investigation into the case is underway and the

five offenders involved in the hunt will be produced before the court for remand, officials said. Affendi was said to be a habitual hunter.

## Subrahmanya Swami Shashti



A large number of devotees thronged the Skandagiri temple, Padmaraonagar, Hyderabad, on the occasion of the Subrahmanya Swami Shashti on Sunday.

— S. SURENDER REDDY

## STATE RECORDS 592 NEW COVID INFECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

A total of 592 new cases of Covid-19 were reported in the state on Saturday, taking the tally to 2,81,414 as per the medical bulletin released by the Telangana state health department on Sunday. The toll due to the disease rose to 1,513 with three more fatalities on Saturday.

The highest number of Covid-19 cases were from the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) area at 119, followed by Medchal Malkajgiri (70), Ranga Reddy (57), Warangal Urban (40), Karimnagar (26), Khammam and Siddipet with 20 each.

As many as 643 people recovered from Covid-19 across the state, between Friday and Saturday, taking the total number of recoveries to 2,73,013 in the state, while the number of active Coronavirus cases in the state stood at 6,888 as per the bulletin.

## Fraud case filed against loan app

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

The Hyderabad police booked a case against an instant loan app on Sunday for harassing and threatening a borrower by allegedly morphing his photographs and sharing them with those in his mobile phone contact list.

The victim, Sai Aravind Dauluri, a resident of Singareni Colony in Saidabad, said he had borrowed ₹3,500 in November and the finance company had disbursed ₹2,600. "After repaying the amount, they gave me a credit hike and informed me that I can borrow ₹30,000. I availed the same as I was going through a financial crunch but later I was asked to repay ₹56,000 along with the interest," he said in the complaint. When Aravind delayed repaying the money, customer care executives began to threaten him and started calling up all his contacts over the phone and informing them about it, said P.

● **WHEN ARAVIND** delayed repaying the money, customer care executives began to threaten him and started calling up all his contacts over the phone and informing them about it, said P. Madhava Rao, Saidabad sub-inspector, quoting from the complaint. They also shared his morphed photographs and his relative's pictures on WhatsApp group to pressurise him.

Madhava Rao, Saidabad sub-inspector, quoting from the complaint. They also shared his morphed photographs and his relative's pictures on WhatsApp group to pressurise him.

Based on a complaint, the police booked a case under Sections the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the AP Telangana Money Lending Act and started an investigation.

The city police officials provided a helpline number 155260 to complain against such harassments.

## Errabelli tells Centre, clear MNREGA dues

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao has requested the Centre for release ₹1,024.59 crore, which is pending component share of the Centre for materials and administration for works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS). In a letter to Narendra Singh Tomar, Union rural development and panchayat raj minister on Sunday, Dayakar Rao stated that under the MNREGS, the outstanding material liability

pertaining to the financial year 2019-20 was ₹526 crore. Out of this, the Centre's share was ₹394.50 crore.

He said that an amount of ₹1,503.66 crore was the material component entitlement to be received for 2020-21 so far, based on the wage expenditure of ₹2,255.50 crore.

Out of this, an amount of ₹1,127.75 crore is the Centre's share.

Dayakar Rao, the state panchayat raj and rural development minister, pointed out that the total outstanding was ₹1,719.25 crores, but the Centre had released only ₹694 crore.

## RARE | SIGHT

Last time the celestial bodies had such a close encounter was on July 16, 1623

## Jupiter, Saturn in 'great conjunction' today

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

After four centuries, Jupiter and Saturn will be in a 'great conjunction', as seen from the Earth on Monday. Both the planets are bright, and can be easily spotted with the naked eye.

During a great conjunction, celestial bodies appear to be very close to each other to an observer from Earth, though they may actually crores of kilometres apart in space.

Jupiter and Saturn will appear separated by the

distance of a coin held at arm's length, after sunset on December 21 which is also winter solstice — the shortest day and longest night of the year in the northern hemisphere.

Conjunctions between Saturn and Jupiter occur every 20 years or so but the distance between them as seen from Earth varies. Given their different orbits round the sun, the one on Monday will appear to be the closest the planets have come in about 400 years. The last time there was such a close encounter was on

● **JUPITER AND** Saturn will appear separated by a very small distance, as seen from the Earth. In reality, however, the two planets will be about 73 crore km apart. The two planets will be visible in the western sky for an hour after sunset.

● **MONDAY** is also winter solstice — the shortest day and longest night of the year.

July 16, 1623. The next great conjunction will occur on March 15, 2080.

N. Raghunandan Kumar of the Planetary Society of India said the close encounter can be seen for an hour in the western sky after sunset, between 6.15 pm and 7.30 pm. Both of these planets will set by 8.02 pm.

"They will appear like non-twinkling star-like objects to the naked eye. To find them, one has to look westwards, half an hour after sunset, at around 6.20 pm. The brighter planet is Jupiter and the other one is Saturn," said Raghunandan.

While they will appear to be very close to each other, in reality they will be very far apart: 73.31,37,000 km (73.31 crore kilometres) or 4.9 Angstrom Units (AU) to be exact.

One AU is roughly the distance between the Earth and the Sun or about 15 crore kilometres.

"Though these planets appear to be near each other, they are separated by enormous distances among themselves and from Earth," Raghunandan stressed. On Monday, the distance between Earth and Jupiter

is 5.9 AU (88,41,23,415 or 88.41 crore km) and the distance between Earth and Saturn 10.82 AU (161,86,48,961 or 161.86 crore km).

An added bonus this time would be that the celestial event can be viewed from the Birla Observatory in the city. "During the lockdown, we weren't allowed to have viewings in a confined space. This time we can see it in the Birla Observatory," Dr B.G. Sidharth, director, B.M. Birla Science Centre, told Deccan Chronicle.



## IN BRIEF

**Adilabad BJP leader for DRUCC rly post**

**Adilabad:** BJP leader K.C. Bhargava has been nominated for the post of member of Divisional Railway Users' Consultative Committee (DRUCC), Secunderabad Railway Division, South Central Railways, here on Sunday.

**VAIKUNTA EKADASI PUJA TO BE HELD ON DEC. 24, 25**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
BHADRACHALAM, DEC. 20

Like Sriramanavami, the Vaikunta Ekadasi will be held in a simple manner. Devotees will not be allowed to the Teppostavam and Utharadwara Darshanam which will be held on December 24 and 25.

The two rituals will be performed with the Vedic pundits, Veda Parayanulu (Vedic chanters) and temple working staff.

Executive officer B. Sivaji said that the two rituals will be aired on SVBC channel and the devotees can view them. "The decision was taken by the endowment department and the government in view of Covid-19 pandemic", he said.

Meanwhile, the presiding deity Lord Rama is adorned in Parasuramavatharam on Sunday as part of Mukkoti Ustavulu.

**WOMAN REFUSED TREATMENT, DIES AT BUS STAND**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
BHADRACHALAM, DEC. 20

N. Rama, 60 years, who was denied admission by the staff of Tuberculosis Centre in Bhadrachalam, died while boarding a bus in Bhadrachalam Bus Stand on Sunday.

Rama, resident of Kothagudem came to Bhadrachalam to undergo treatment for tuberculosis disease. She came to the centre on Saturday evening and the staff denied her admission by saying working hours were closed.

She was asked to come on Monday as there will be less staff on Sunday. She went to Bus Stand and tried to board a bus proceeding to Kothagudem, where she succumbed.

The RTC conductor and driver rejected her husband Sammaiah to board the bus. Sammaiah kept her body till 5 pm on Sunday. Later, her son and relatives came and shifted her body to Kothagudem.

**CONGRESS TO PROTEST AGAINST FARMERS' ACTS**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
ADILABAD, DEC. 20

The Congress Party is organising a massive dharna in front of the collectorate in protest against the three farm acts and demanding their repeal on December 21.

In a statement issued, TPCC state secretary Gandhrath Sujatha informed that, MULugu MLA Seethakka and MLC Jeevan Reddy will participate in the dharna and address the gathering.

On the other hand, BJP is planning to organise the farmers' meeting in the Adilabad town to create awareness among the farmers about how the three acts brought in by the BJP government will benefit them on December 22.

# Rise in C-secs by private hosps, Consumers' Council for action

Some private hospitals engage unani, homeopathy practitioners to handle ops

**PULI SHARATH KUMAR | DC**  
KARIMNAGAR, DEC. 20

Driven by greed for money, many private hospitals in the district are performing C-Secs (Caesarean sections) illegally and going about the unethical practice even though there is no need for it, alleged district unit president of Karimnagar Consumer's Council, K. Rama Chandra Reddy.

A general body meeting of the Consumers Council's Karimnagar unit was held here on Sunday during which a resolution was passed urging the Health and Medical department and Health Minister Etala Rajender to take immediate action against private hospitals indulging in such blatant illegal operations. They sought a full-fledged inquiry into the entire sordid happenings.

Speaking on the occasion, Rama Chandra Reddy said that it was clearly mentioned in the National Family Health Survey-2019-20 that about 81.5 per cent C-sections were performed by private hospitals in Telangana, which was second only to Bengal (82.7 %). In the recently conducted survey by UNICEF, private hospitals of Karimnagar had the dubious distinction with about 92.8 percent.



The members of the Consumer's Council releasing the pamphlets to create awareness among the consumer to mark the occasion of Consumer Day observed on December 24 here in Karimnagar on Sunday.

Many private hospitals in the district are looting innocent people by collecting huge amounts in the name of medical tests and conducting C-secs even though it was not necessary. Even more

tragic is that some hospitals are engaging unani, homeopathy and ayurveda practitioners to handle allopathy treatment, he alleged.

He demanded the state government to take

immediate action against the inhuman acts of private hospitals of Karimnagar district as they were playing with the lives of innocent people.

Council members O. P. Raghu Ram, V. Laks-

hman Kumar, N. Srinivas, Chandra Prabhakar, Syed Muzafar, Ranga Rao, Damodar, Narayana, Ilaiah, Manohar, Mahendar, Ashwa Rao and Shankar were present on the occasion.

## 3 GET STUCK IN PULIGUNDALA TANK MUD, DROWN

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
KHAMMAM, DEC. 20

Three young farmers drowned at Puligundala tank in Brahmakunta Grama Panchayat of Penuballi mandal on Sunday.

The farmers were identified as Janga Guna (24), Seelam Chalapathi (25), and Vemireddy Sai (18). The three of them along with five others went to Puligundala tank to spend some time after completing their farm works.

Later, they decided to take a bath in the tank as they all could swim.

Firstly, Guna jumped into the tank but did not come up, following which Seelam Chalapathi and Sai also jumped into the tank and did not come to the surface of the water.

The others suspected danger and stopped jumping into it. They waited for some time for the trio to surface and tried to find them but to no vain.

They informed the locals of Brahmakunta and the government officials.

The officials commenced search operations and fished out the three bodies.

It was revealed that due to lot of mud in the tank, the trio got stuck and could not swim to the top.

## Young politicians from Adilabad make a scramble for BJP

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
ADILABAD, DEC. 20

Junior political leaders keen on contesting the next Assembly elections and who are hoping to have a head-start over the seniors with a similar plan of action are in a hurry to join BJP in erstwhile Adilabad district.

There is a huge competition among the leaders to join BJP and get recognised. They are following the principle of 'first come first served'. Some leaders wanted to join BJP before their seniors

could join the same party. Congress leader and former Nirmal municipal chairman Appala Ganesh had recently joined the BJP before anyone else from Nirmal could do. Same is the case with Ajmeera Hari Naik of BSP, who joined the BJP, from Khanapur.

News is making the rounds that former Nirmal MLA and DCC president Aleti Maheshwar Reddy and former MP Rathod Ramesh are also eyeing a BJP crossover. It is believed that a section of BJP leaders is opposed

to the entry of both of them.

Appala Ganesh belongs to Munnurkapu community, which has a considerable population in Nirmal constituency. Ganesh, who was in the TRS, had joined the Congress under the leadership of Maheshwar Reddy before the last Assembly elections and is now in the BJP.

Surprisingly, Pemi ZPTC Bhukya Janaki, who was elected as an independent and later joined TRS, recently jumped over to BJP from Khanapur hoping to get a

party ticket. She had tried for a Congress ticket in the previous Assembly elections with the help of Maheshwar Reddy.

Rumours are rife that two or three senior political leaders will join the BJP from the erstwhile Adilabad district. A senior BJP leader said that they would welcome any leader into the party fold but it will be the high command's prerogative to decide on allotting a ticket, which would be based on political and caste equations before elections.

## Congress continues to fight for people's issues, says MLA Sridhar

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
PEDDAPALLI, DEC. 20

The Congress strove hard for the welfare of all sections of people including farmers during its reign and will always fight on public issues until they are resolved, said the Congress senior leader and Manthani MLA Duddila Sridhar Babu.

He distributed Kalyana Lakshmi and Chief Minister Relief Fund (CMRF) cheques to the beneficiaries here at his camp office in Manthani of Peddapalli district

on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Sridhar Babu alleged that both TRS and BJP are adopting the anti-people and anti-farmers policies in the state and in the country and trying to divert the attention of the people by blaming each other. The TRS party also supported the BJP in electing the President and Vice-president candidates, he reminded.

It is the Chief Minister K.Chandrashekar Rao who passed the resolutions in support of GST and demonetisation bills

in the assembly and pleased the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Now, instead of asking the centre to allot GST and tax funds, the share which should be given to the state, by taking the loans he is driving the state into debts, he criticised.

For strengthening the Congress party from grass root level in the country, the leadership of Rahul Gandhi is highly needed in the present situations. Every party worker including the people across the country want Rahul Gandhi to

lead the party. His kind nature and good heart to serve the poor irrespective of politics will help the Congress party to regain the past glory and will rejuvenate all party workers, he added.

The State Kisan Cell Coordinator Shashi Bhushan Kache, Congress party leaders S. Rajesh, P. Shiva, Azam Khan, J. Shekar, P. Rama, Suresh Reddy, Ch. Hanumanthu, D. Balaji, D.Geetha Rani, P. Lingaiah, Satyam, M.Rajaiah and A.Kiran were among those who were present along with others.

## Bhatti: Interests of farmers heavily hit by farm Acts

**RAVINDRA SESHU | DC**  
KHAMMAM, DEC. 20

Congress legislative party leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Sunday said that the three new farm Acts brought by NDA government will harm the interests of the farmers. "The affects of the Acts will be known after some time of its implementation. The farmers cannot come out from the clutches of corporate forces at one stage", he said.

The Central government passed the three Acts in the Parliament without discussing them. The government had not allowed the MPs of the Opposition parties to take part in the discussion.

The government had not invited the farm experts, scientists and leaders of farmers' organisations before placing the three bills in the Parliament. The people and farmers are coming to know the lacunae in the Acts one by one, he said.

Bhatti participated in the dharna organised by All Party Committee in Khammam to express soli-

arity with the farmers who were staging dharna opposing the three farm Acts. He said that the farmers are not caring about cold waves and continuing their agitation demanding that the government repeal the Acts. "It is time for every individual in Telangana to extend their support to agitating farmers in Delhi."

"The Congress party is demanding that the NDA government take back the three Acts immediately and honour the farmers. It is not correct to show adamant attitude against the interests of farmers", he said. The government should increase the MSP every year and it should be enacted to protect the farmers.

Referring to the TRS government, he said that the Chief Minister failed to solve the problems of sannarakalu from the farmers in the state. "KCR encouraged the farmers to raise sannarakalu and not to lift them from the farmers. The farmers of Khammam district are expressing concern over the slow lifting of paddy", he said.

## Arvind slams KCR over new agri laws

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
WARANGAL, DEC. 20

After 72-years of independence also justice is not being done to the farmers. Right from the hamali workers to the Chief Minister, the farmers are being cheated at every step, said Nizamabad MP Dharmapuri Aravind.

Addressing the media after taking part in the Warangal Rural District BJP leaders meeting at Haritha Kakatiya Hotel in Hanamkonda on Sunday, he asked what is Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao losing, due to the introduction of the new agriculture Acts. He pointed out that during the TRS rule, the cotton farmers in Warangal and Turmeric farmers in Nizamabad did not develop.

"The new laws are blocking the brokerage system, and corporate companies directly purchasing the produce from the crops grown by the farmers will also halt the commissions being received by KCR from his agents who infiltrated the market yards. That is why he is campaigning against the laws," he alleged, saying that KCR is not eligible to be the CM. Aravind stated that the BJP government would continue the market system and the procurement system according to the new agricultural laws. Along with them, we will promote the private system.

"We have already made it

clear that if farmers have any issues with the new laws, MSPs etc, we will solve them and make amends to the laws. It is not right to criticise without completely reading the farm laws introduced by the Central Government," he said.

Aravind said what was observed recently was not a Bharat Bandh but a police bandh. Farmers were not seen during that bandh. Even those protesting in Delhi are not farmers.

They don't come to the talks but only want the laws repealed.

"We will pressurise Prime Minister Narendra Modi to implement the laws in their current form without any amendments," he threatened.

He also noted that grain purchases have increased by 250 per cent since PM Modi came to power. Minimum support prices have also doubled for all crops. "Modi has budgeted ₹1 lakh crore for infrastructure under the Agriculture Act. With this, warehouses and cold storages will come to every mandal," he said.

## REVIEW | MEET

**Importance of doctors on duty 24X7, ensuring infrastructure in hospital, stressed**

## Ensure online classes for all students: Chandraiah

**ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC**  
WARANGAL, DEC. 20

It is the responsibility of the revenue and panchayat staff to visit villages and enquire with students about online education, State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) chairman Justice G. Chandraiah said here on Sunday.

During a review meeting, he told the officials to ensure online classes to all the students, especially those living in remote areas of the district.

The chairman along with other members — Nadipally Ananda Rao and Md Irfan Moinuddin — inspected several wards in the MGM Hospital on Sunday and spoke to the duty doctors and officials.

Justice Chandraiah enquired about the basic amenities being provided in the hospital. Later, he elicited information about the healthcare facilities and Covid-19 tests etc.

He stressed the importance of doctors on duty 24X7 and ensuring infrastructure in the hospital. The Chairman who interacted with the patients took their feedback on amenities and healthcare facilities.

Conducting a review meeting with the officials, he directed the Revenue offi-

● **THE CHAIRMAN** along with other members — Nadipally Ananda Rao and Md Irfan Moinuddin inspected several wards in the MGM Hospital on Sunday and spoke to the duty doctors and officials.

● **CONDUCTING A** review meeting with the officials, he directed the Revenue officials to sensitise the people about the importance of pattadar passbooks.

cial to sensitise the people about the importance of pattadar passbooks. He said that onus is on officials to ensure proper distribution of essentials. Responding to the chairman's query about the issues faced by the farmers such as Rythu Bima etc, the RDO Vasu Chandra said that there were no problems.

Later, DM&HO Dr K. Lalitha explained about the measures being taken by

them to provide best healthcare to the people.

The Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) Secretary Vijayalaxmi informed the Commission that due to the staff crunch the city was facing sanitation problems.

Later, Justice Chandraiah inspected Warangal Central Prison and observed the various employment opportunities provided to inmates.



State Human Rights Commission Chairman Justice G. Chandraiah inspects the weaving works by the inmates of Warangal Central Prison on Sunday.

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SHORT TAKES

DMK LAUNCHES ‘WEREJECTADMK’ CAMPAIGN IN TN

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

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

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

The DMK, out of power since 2011, is making a full throttled bid to storm back and dethrone the AIADMK.

AT 3.4°C, DELHI RECORDS COLDEST MORNING SO FAR

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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



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

Shah to extend Bengal visit duration from Jan.

Home minister overwhelmed by large-scale Oppn defections

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

MEDICAL DRUG TABLETS WORTH ₹33L SEIZED

SAURABH JOSHI | DC  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

The Anti-Narcotics Cell (ANC) of Mumbai police seized medical drug tablets worth ₹33 lakh that were being peddled as narcotics substance and arrested two persons from Shivaji Nagar on Sunday. The seized tablets were identified as hypnotic drug Nitrazepam and officials said the source of the huge quantity of the seized items are accomplices of the arrested accused.

The officials arrested Shahrulk Shaikh (27) and Abdulla (29) who were in possession of 66,000 Nitrazepam tablets. A team of the Ghatkopar unit of the ANC raided the place where the said tablets were being stored illegally. “The contraband is worth ₹33 lakh and can be consumed only when prescribed by a doctor and are used to treat sleep disorders and anxiety,” said an officer.

METRO | PROJECT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, DEC. 20

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday urged the Opposition BJP to help resolve the dead-lock over the slat 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Uddhav seeks Centre’s help to settle car shed row

the project to salt pan land at Kanjurmarg area.

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

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

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

gance” then he acceded to his fault.

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

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

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

India wary of new PLA’s Western Command head

PAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Modi, Vietnam PM to hold talks today

SRIDHAR KUMARSWAMI | 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

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

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

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

HP: FORCED CONVERSION ACT COMES INTO FORCE

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

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

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

MAN FLEES AFTER MARRYING 2 WOMEN IN 5 DAYS

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

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

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



## SHORT TAKES

NOV. 2 VIENNA  
ATTACK: TWO  
MORE NABBED

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

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

She declined to reveal the nationality of the other suspect.

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

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

JIHADISTS KILL 5  
SOLDIERS, KIDNAP  
35 IN NIGERIA

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

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

Nigeria's Boko Haram and a splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province, have killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million as part of a decade-long conflict. Saturday's attack on the military convoy took place outside of Mafa, 41 kilometres north of the regional capital Maiduguri. "The terrorists fired an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) on the convoy which hit one of the vehicles with five soldiers in it," one security source said.

BIDEN, MEXICO  
PREZ DISCUSS  
MIGRATION

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

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

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

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

'ICE MAN' SETS  
NEW RECORD IN  
FREEZING CABIN

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

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

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

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

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

## England, Italy get ready for curbs

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

Belgians, Dutch  
halt UK flights  
over virus variant

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

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

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

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

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

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

Germany has not yet

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AP



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

— AFP

Bibi gets Covid vaccine  
jab, Israel rollout starts

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

SYDNEY REPORTS  
30 COVID CASES  
IN LAST 24 HOURS

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

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

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

— AP

HIGHEST DAILY  
SPIKE OF 548  
IN THAILAND

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

The 548 new cases, most of them connected with an outbreak at a wholesale seafood market on the outskirts of Bangkok, 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

This German factory races to  
churn out Covid-19 syringes

Bad Arolsen, Germany, Dec. 20: The battle against Covid-19 has delivered not just a vaccine at record speed but also a spike in demand for the billions of syringes needed to administer it.

One German factory is already busily churning out the little plastic tubes and is confident global needs can be met.

"There won't be a shortage of syringes, even if we are facing a big challenge," said Otto-Philipp Braun, co-director of Almo, Germany's leading syringe manufacturer.

At the company's production site in the central German town of Bad Arolsen, the loud hum of machinery fills the hall.

Employees man the assembly lines, wearing mas-

ks, hair nets and occasionally ear plugs. They churn out disposable syringes 24 hours a day, seven days a week, destined for use in Germany and more than 140 other countries around the world.

One machine moulds high-quality plastic granules into thin, one-millilitre syringes, while another spits out the pistons that fit snugly inside the cylinder and are needed to push out the vaccine.

The plastic piston is green, matching the logo of German parent company B.Braun, a giant in the medical devices industry and still owned by the Braun family. A total of 64 syringes with pistons are assembled every 13 seconds. Every year, Almo churns out more than two billion

syringes of various kinds.

The needles that can be added to the injection devices are produced by a B.Braun subsidiary in Malaysia. The company intends to spend 30 million euros on an additional assembly line, partly to cope with increased demand for the Covid-19 jabs.

The first orders have already rolled in from Germany's BioNTech, whose vaccine developed with US giant Pfizer is already being administered in some countries, and from CureVac, another German company whose vaccine candidate is in final stage trials.

"We can produce 270 million syringes of one millilitre next year, and if needed an extra 200 million from 2022," Braun said.

— AFP

## HERCULEAN | TASK

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

## Atheists to save historic German church plank by plank

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

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

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

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

roof, built in the Nordic style in 1905.

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

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

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

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

its structure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Buoyed by the wave of

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

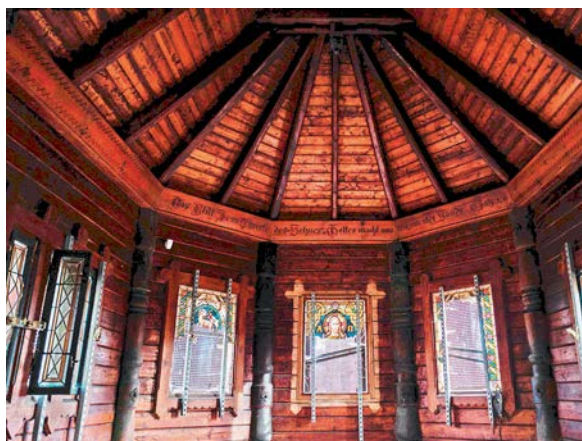
With backing and funding secured, the 1.1 million euro project (\$1.3 million) to move the church is now in its last lap.

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

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

Groundbreaking at the new site began in November.

— AFP



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

— AFP



## DECCAN Chronicle

21 DECEMBER 2020

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

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

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

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

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

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

### High-stakes game in J&K

The Enforcement Directorate, a financial fraud investigation agency of the Centre, on Saturday attached residential and commercial properties of Farooq Abdullah, 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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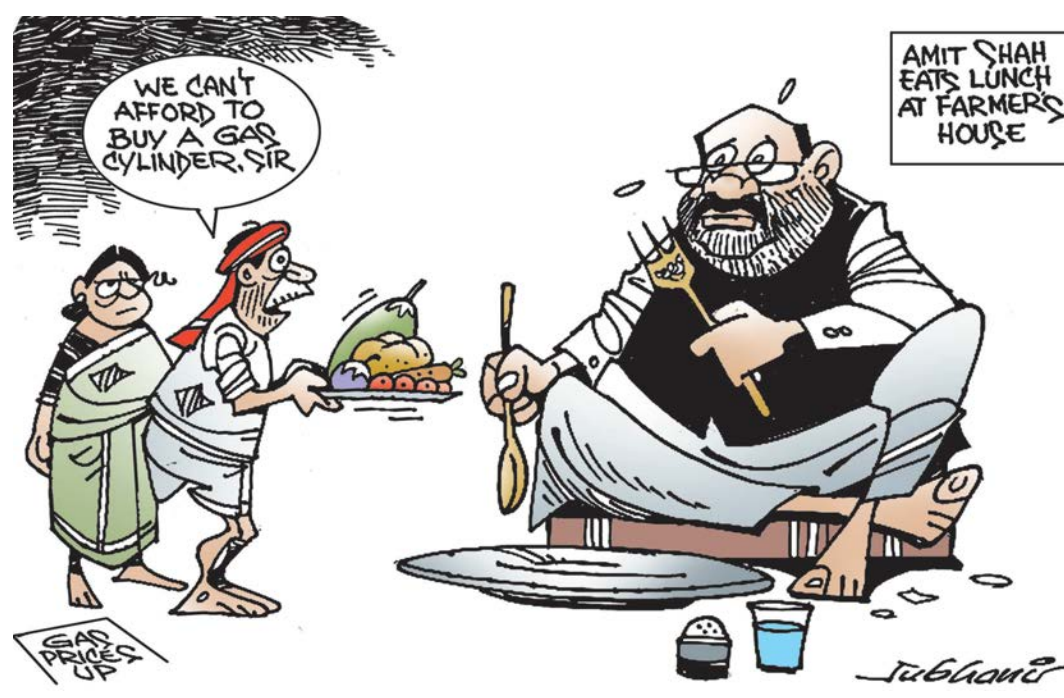
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Subhani



## 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

#### FARMERS’ STRIKE

Bhagyanagar Gas must be squarely blamed for the pipeline burst (*Pipeline bursts, creates havoc, DC, Dec. 20*). The HMWS&SB must also partially share the blame for not following ‘Standard Excavation Procedures’. The excavation required the firm to seek permission from the HMWS&SB in writing with a proper ‘work permit’. It would have ensured both parties understood the nature of work and what precautions were to be taken before the work.

Sayed Nooruddin  
Hyderabad

#### PM vs FARMERS

Both the PM and the farmers seem to be in no mood to settle the issue for two weeks. They should call for a meeting to sort out the issue soon. I hope wisdom dawns on both the parties.

Dr G.V. Kumar  
Hyderabad

#### CRICKET TEAM

Team India players must return at least 25 per cent of their match earnings for such a shameful performance. Though cricket is an unpredictable game, players should always collectively get a decent score. Scoring 36 runs is something not acceptable to a cricket loving nation like India.

Suriseti Pankaj Kumar  
Secunderabad

#### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

#### Satellite to crash trunk rates

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

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

— UNI

Kishwar Desai  
London Diary



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



quick BITES

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

\* As of 9:30 PM IST

India, US mutual fund sectors get thumbs up

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

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



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

BoB completes integration of Dena, Vijaya

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

Power usage in India grows in first half of Dec

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



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

New Delhi, Dec. 20: Reliance Industries and its partner BP will get only \$4.06 a unit for the new gas they have started to produce from the eastern offshore KG-D6 field even though they have discovered a higher rate in an open market auction, sources said. Reliance-BP in November 2019 auctioned initial gas from the R-Series field at a biddable percentage of Brent crude oil price. If Brent crude oil stays in the current range of \$50 to \$51 a barrel, the price comes to \$4.2 to 4.4 per million British thermal unit, two sources at the buyers of R-Series gas said.

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



Essar Steel, Adani Group and state-owned GAIL in November 2019 bought the majority of the initial 5 million standard cubic meters per day of gas planned to be produced from R-Series in the KG-D6 block by bidding between 8.5 and 8.6 per cent of dated Brent price. Emails sent to Reliance and BP for comments remained unanswered. The rate discovered in the November 2019 auction at the lower end of the Brent price band is the same as the one that Reliance got in the first

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

such as the US and Russia. The rates came to \$5.05 in 2014 and are currently at \$1.79 per mmbtu. Sources said the government in 2016 allowed a higher price for any new gas to be produced from a difficult project such as the deep sea field. R-Cluster field fell in that definition and gas from it was free to be sold but subject to the price cap. The price cap for October 2020 to March 2021 is \$4.06 per mmbtu, down from \$5.61 in the previous six month. Reliance and BP had on November 18 stated that they have the commencement of natural gas production from Asia's deepest gas project, R-Cluster or R-Series. The two firms are investing USD 5 billion in bringing to production three deepwater gas projects in block KG D6 R-Cluster, Satellites Cluster, and MJ which together are expected to meet about 15 per cent of India's gas demand by 2023. — PTI

Network restructure increases cyber attacks

New Delhi, Dec 20: The sudden rush to provide remote access to employees by restructuring network and security systems during the lockdown made India vulnerable to ransomware attacks in the third quarter of 2020, according to cyber security firm Check Point Software Technologies. Due to the immediate push, several IT companies were unable to scale up their cloud security

postures which led to increased opportunity for cyber criminals to carry out attacks, Check Point Software Technologies India and Saarc managing director Sundar N. Balasubramanian said. According to the company's research, India was ranked second after the US among the top 5 countries most affected by ransomware attacks in the third quarter. Sri Lanka, Russia and

Turkey were at third, fourth and fifth position, respectively, in the list of most affected countries by ransomware attacks. In a survey by Check Point, 71 per cent of respondents globally, including in India, reported an increase in cyberattacks during February-March 2020, and 95 per cent said they faced added IT security challenges with provision of large-scale remote access for

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

GOLD DEALERS OFFER DISCOUNTS FOR FIRST TIME IN SIX WEEKS



Bengaluru/Mumbai, Dec. 20: Physical gold in India was sold at a discount for the first time in six weeks as a rebound in local prices to a one-month peak squeezed demand, while purchases slowed in other Asian hubs ahead of the year-end holidays. India's local gold futures jumped to ₹50,642 per 10 grams on Thursday, the highest level since November 18. "Demand is very subdued. Retail buyers are postponing purchases because of a price rise," said Ashok Jain, proprietor of Mumbai-based gold wholesaler Chenaji Narsinghi. Dealers were offering a discount of up to \$1 an ounce over official domestic prices this week, inclusive of a 10 per cent import tax and three per cent sales tax, down from last week's premium of \$2.5.

In China, discounts of \$16-\$20 an ounce were being offered compared with last week's range of \$19-\$24, while gold was being sold at a premium of around \$0.50 cents in Hong Kong. "It's the year-end and jewellers are trying to finish the inventories and they have adequate, so they are not making any new purchases," said Dick Poon, general manager at Heraeus Metals Hong Kong Ltd. China, traditionally the world's biggest consumer of gold, saw a sharp drop in gold consumption due to the coronavirus pandemic, forcing bullion sellers to offer steep discounts in the past few months. "China is still fighting the aftermath of the virus... People are too cautious to spend their savings right now," said Ronald Leung, chief dealer for Lee Cheong Gold Dealers. — Reuters

Auto firms drive ahead with hope

New Delhi, Dec. 20: Having endured and managed to recover from the disruptions induced by a once-in-a-century event, the Indian auto sector is cautiously looking forward to 2021 with hopes of putting up a better show in the post-Covid-19 world, although a lot will hinge on how the economy grows. Already battered by an unprecedented slowdown before the coronavirus pandemic, the resilience of the Indian auto industry was tested severely when the nationwide lockdown was announced towards March-end. Passenger vehicle sales in India, the barometer of the automobile industry's performance, plunged 78.43 per cent in the April-June period this year hit by the pandemic, declining for the ninth straight quarter and making it the longest slowdown in 20 years. It is estimated that during the prolonged lockdown, the auto industry suffered losses of more

than ₹2,300 crore in turnover for every single day of closure. In order to overcome the unprecedented challenge, the auto industry players embraced digitisation to adapt to the new normal to serve customers while learning to be nimble footed to keep factories running under Covid-19 SOPs and concentrating on financial health by reducing costs and generating free cash flows. The pandemic-induced lockdown also had an impact on the country's transition to BS-VI emission norm from April 1. Reflecting on the impact of the global health crisis on the sector, Society of Indian Automobile Association director-general Rajesh Menon said that the growing preference for personal mobility and the gradual opening of economic activities have lent some momentum and the industry is now seeing signs of recovery in some of the industry segments. — PTI

Stainless steel firms seek zero duty on input metals

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

(BCD) of 2.5 per cent. In its recommendations to the finance ministry for the upcoming Budget for financial year 2021-22, ISSDA has also sought removal of import duty on graphite electrodes. ISSDA said "it has appealed to exempt the 2.5 per cent BCD levied while

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

try. The Ministry of Steel has also at times batted for zero duty on these items. Stainless steel industry meets the bulk of its nickel requirements through ferro-nickel and stainless steel scrap route. ISSDA has also sought removal of existing 7.5 per cent import duty on

graphite electrodes, a critical component in stainless steel manufacturing which constitutes a major share of input cost. Besides, it has sought an increase in import duty on stainless steel flat products to 12.5 per cent to bring it at par with carbon steel products. — PTI

US inches closer to \$1-trillion relief

Washington, Dec. 20: Top Washington negotiators, propelled by a late-night agreement on the last major obstacle to a Covid-19 economic relief package, said a Sunday agreement is all but inevitable to deliver long-overdue pandemic aid of almost \$1 trillion. "I am very hopeful that we get this done today," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.,

told Fox News Channel's Sunday Morning Futures. The breakthrough involved a fight over Federal Reserve emergency powers that was resolved by the Senate's top Democrat and a senior conservative Republican. Aides to lawmakers in both parties said the compromise sparked a final round of negotiations on a handful of remaining issues. An aide to a key GOP

lawmaker said it would likely require all of Sunday to finalise and draft the final agreement, which is already guaranteed to be the largest spending measure yet, combining Covid-19 relief with a \$1.4 trillion omnibus spending bill and reams of other unrelated legislation on taxes, health, infrastructure and education. The measure is finally nearing passage amid a

frightening spike in coronavirus cases and deaths and accumulating evidence that the economy is struggling. Lawmakers and aides say it would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans. It would provide a fresh round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools, health

care providers and renters facing eviction. President Donald Trump is supportive, particularly of the push for providing more direct payments. "GET IT DONE," he said in a late-night tweet. It would be the first significant legislative response to the pandemic since the \$1.8 trillion CARES Act passed virtually unanimously in March. — AP

Centre identifies 1.3 lakh housing units for poor

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 20



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

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

The highest number of units identified for the scheme falls in Delhi. Though Delhi has 39 per cent share or 51,594 identified units, it has not signed the MoA for the scheme yet, as per the data available on the website of ministry of housing and urban affairs. Though the government has identified units in Jammu and Kashmir, the Union Territory also has not signed the MoA. Among those already signed MoA, Maharashtra has the highest number of units- 32,202. As per the ministry data, 3,363 identified units – 1703 in Chandigarh, 830 each in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand – have been allocated. "We are not sure whether these units have been allocated to concessionaires who will

convert them for the scheme or migrants have started occupying the units," said Anuj Puri, chairman of Anarock Property Consultants. As per the first model of ARHC, concessionaires selected through a bidding process, will repair or retrofit, develop, operate and transfer (RDOT) by converting existing government-funded vacant houses into Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) for a period of 25 years. "Several units built under previous housing schemes of the Central government are lying vacant in different cities. The first model aims at utilizing them for the scheme," said Puri. As per the second model, public or private entities can construct, operate and maintain AHRCs on their own vacant land. Under this model, the Ministry had issued an Expression of Interest on October 14. The last date of submission of EOI is January 11, 2021.

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



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

Due to the pandemic, people's priorities have changed and they are evaluating their spends and investments very closely, the fintech player said. The online marketplace for financial products, which also provides free credit scores, said even as 2020 had very lean months during the lockdown, gradual economic revival and safe access to credit through digital KYC pushed credit uptake to about 80 per cent of pre-Covid levels. Change in social and work structure due to the pandemic also convinced investors to look at bigger properties and loans. "Consequently, the average home loans ticket size saw a strong increase from ₹23.82 lakh in 2019 to ₹26.41 lakh in 2020. The average ticket size for women went up from ₹25.66 lakh to ₹31.20 lakh compared with an increase from ₹23.64 lakh to ₹26.04 lakh for men," the report said. However, the traction was the lowest in high-value segment. Share of home loans below ₹30 lakh decreased to 68 per cent from 72 per cent a year ago. Demand from non-metros is the biggest driver for recovery, it said. During the year, the biggest home loan of ₹1.46 crore was from Bengaluru, while among non-metros, the highest was ₹64.50 lakh from Lucknow.





SHORT TAKES

Gold for Simranjit, Manisha at WC

**New Delhi:** Indian women boxers Simranjit Kaur (60kg) and Manisha Moun (57kg) notched up gold medals with contrasting final wins in the Cologne World Cup in Germany. Manisha defeated compatriot Saskhi Choudhary 3-2, while Simranjit got the better of German Maya 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. — Agencies

BDL cruise to an easy victory

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

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

Hyderabad suffer first loss of season

**Vasco:** Vignesh Dakshinamurthy pulled off a stunning goal to set up Mumbai City FC's 2-0 win over Hyderabad FC in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday. In a match where both sides struggled 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 cageiness that marked much of the game was evident from the fact that Vignesh's goal was the only shot on target in the first half. With Hugo Boumous missing yet again, Mumbai City's creative struggles that plagued them in their last match against Jamshedpur, continued on Sunday as well. — PTI

NZ hammer Pak in second T20

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

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

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

WWE

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

UFC

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

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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



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

— AP

Burns fit for MCG Test, Pucovski out

**Melbourne, Dec. 20:** Hit on the elbow during the pink-ball series opener, Australia's Joe Burns was on Sunday cleared to play the second Test against India, but young Will Pucovski was ruled out as he continues to recover from concussion. Burns suffered a nasty blow on his elbow off a Jasprit Bumrah delivery during the first Test at Adelaide which Australia won by eight wickets. "Joe Burns has been cleared of serious dam-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ponting backs Oz to go for clean sweep

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

India were bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the Border-Gavaskar trophy. "Now there's some serious wounds opened up. There could be a good chance (of a sweep)," Ponting told *cricket.com.au*.

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

CA STICKS WITH SYDNEY TEST PLAN DESPITE COVID SURGE

**Sydney, Dec. 20:** Cricket Australia on Sunday said they were pressing ahead with plans to hold the third Test against India in Sydney despite a growing coronavirus outbreak in the city. A Covid-19 cluster has risen to 68 cases since it emerged on Thursday. The Test is due be held from January 7 and CA

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

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

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

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

Spurs' title hopes suffer huge blow

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

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

Vardy put away-day specialists Leicester ahead with the final kick of the first half after Brendan Rodgers's side were awarded a penalty. Spurs had a huge escape early in the second half as James Maddison had a goal ruled out for the

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

**LIVERPOOL RUN RIOT** Just five points separate the 2016 champions from Chelsea in eighth spot but Liverpool looked ominous in a 7-0 demolition of Crystal Palace on Saturday. The Reds sent a chilling warning to the rest of the Premier League as Arsenal's crisis deepened following 1-2 defeat at Everton. Jurgen Klopp's champions — despite being dogged by injuries this season — are five points clear of neighbours Everton. — AFP

Messi emulates Pele's record

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Physical education pioneers honoured

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 20

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

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

The International webinar on Sprints and IPPEFSSA awards was inaugurated by athletics coach N. Ramesh, a Dronacharya awardee, and Prof. L. B. Laxmikanth Rathod, Principal, Nizam College.

Y. Emmanuel S. Kumar — former national level athlete, captain of the state handball team that won the national championship, selector, Amateur Athletics Federation of India official and an administrator — was among the awardees.

He also has a collective

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

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



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

KOHLI CLOSES GAP WITH SMITH IN TEST RANKINGS

**Dubai, Dec. 20:** India may have suffered an embarrassing defeat in the series-opener against Australia but their skipper Virat Kohli fractionally closed the gap with top-ranked Test batsman Steve Smith, following his 74-run knock in the first innings in Adelaide. Kohli gained two points for his half-century to get to 888 while Smith (911) lost 10 points in the table after scoring 1 and 1 in his two innings.

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

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