

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SUNDAY 13 | DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 31°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Karthigai 28
Tithi: Chaturtashi
Star: Anusham
Rahukalam:
4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.03 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 3.16 pm
Maghrib: 5.42 pm
Isha: 6.57 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.45 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.23 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 4.42 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 4.33 PM

Pondy CM calls on Stalin

Chennai: Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy called on DMK President M K Stalin at Anna Arivalayam on Saturday, triggering speculations on the Congress-DMK alliance in the Union Territory. ■ P3

COUNTER

POINT



...this time he wants the Indian government to hold talks with Pakistan farmers!

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Rajini's entry into politics will not have any impact: Minister



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Harris added to Australia squad



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Agri laws: PM Modi assures farmers

New Delhi, Dec. 12: As farmers vowed to expand their protests over new farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday assured them that his government was committed to their welfare and that the legislations were aimed at giving them alternate markets to boost income.

Without directly referring to the farmers' agitation, which entered the 17th day on Saturday, Modi said agriculture reforms as part of government efforts are aimed at removing road-blocks, and the new laws will also bring in technology and investment in the sector. The government, he said, is committed to protecting the interest and welfare of farmers through its policies and actions.

"Reforms will help draw investment in the agriculture sector and benefit farmers," he said at the annual meeting of industry body Ficci here.

"The aim of all government reforms is to make farmers prosperous. The new legislations, which were approved in the previous Parliament session, give farmers an additional option outside of the designated mandis to buy or sell their crops, he said.

"Farmers have now

● "After reforms, farmers will get new markets, options and more benefits of technology. The country's cold storage infrastructure will be modern. By doing this, there will be more investments in agriculture that will benefit farmers," Prime Minister Modi said



Stir may intensify as striking agriculturists dig in around Delhi; road & rail roko may be on

New Delhi/Chandigarh, Dec. 12: Agitating farmers picketed highway toll plazas in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan on Saturday and claimed thousands more will soon arrive on Delhi's borders to intensify their stir against the Centre's new agri laws, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi again asserted that these reforms will help increase the income of cultivators.

Hundreds of security personnel were deployed at border points on highways linking Delhi following an

options to sell their crops in mandis as well as to outside parties," the Prime Minister said.

"While mandis are being modernised, digital plat-

form is also available to farmers to buy and sell their produce." These efforts are aimed at raising incomes of farmers, he said.

announcement by the farmer unions to block the Jaipur-Delhi and the Delhi-Agra Expressways on Saturday.

Farmers' leaders had announced that they would block railway tracks across the country if their demands were not met by the government. Farmer leaders said major highways linking the national capital will be blocked from Sunday and they will sit on a hunger strike on December 14, when they have called for a nationwide protest. —PTI

form is also available to farmers to buy and sell their produce." These efforts are aimed at raising incomes of farmers, he said. —PTI

AS SUPERSTAR TURNS 70



A parade of 'Rajinis' were at hand around Poes Garden near actor-politician Rajinikanth's residence on Saturday to entertain the crowd celebrating the 70th birthday of their 'Thalaivar'. — N. SAMPATH

Many 'Rajinis' converge upon Poes Garden

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

The 70th birthday of actor Rajinikanth was celebrated by his fans and admirers with verve and enthusiasm outside his house in Poes Garden by cutting cake and raising slogans in praise of him despite the superstar being away in Bengaluru on Saturday.

His impending political entry seemed to up the enthusiasm this year on the famous 12/12. The number of politicians who greeted the superstar this year was con-

siderably more than in the previous years, when the birthday would be celebrated predominantly by his fans. His fans also organised special prayers at various temples for Rajini's welfare, blood donation camps and poor feeding across the state. Wall posters were put up all over the State by his fans hailing him as a 'future Chief Minister.'

Many political leaders, starting from the Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed their birthday greetings. Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami wished the

actor a long life and Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam, in a tweet, hailed him as a man of hard work and extraordinary talent.

DMK President MK Stalin called him over phone and conveyed his good wishes, while among the other leaders who greeted him were MDMK leader Vaiko, BJP State President L Murugan, TMC's G K Vasan, Union Minister Dayanidhi Maran, the producer of his next film Kalanidhi Maran and lyricist Vairamuthu. Besides former Union Minister M K Alagiri, several State

Ministers like S P Velumani and D Jayakumar also greeted him.

The fans who gathered at Poes Garden turned rumbustious on the streets, forcing the policemen posted there to intervene and tell them to disperse as the Superstar was not at home.

With Rajinikanth's shooting for the film 'Anathee' scheduled to begin on December 15, he is expected to reach Hyderabad by a private plane. He is expected to return by December 29 and unveil his political plans by December 31.

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SHORT TAKES

Flight services delayed due to bad weather in B'luDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

A Bengaluru-bound Indigo Airlines flight was diverted to Chennai due to bad weather at Chennai airport. Similarly, six flights between Chennai-Bengaluru were delayed on Saturday.

According to the Airport sources, an Indigo airlines flight from Delhi with 92 passengers that was scheduled to land at Bengaluru airport on early Thursday morning, was diverted to Chennai and made a landing at the Chennai Airport at 5:15 am. The passengers were made to wait in the aircraft for more than two hours and the flight went back to Bengaluru and made a landing there by 8 am.

Three flights, from Chennai to Bengaluru and three flights from Bengaluru-Chennai were delayed for at least two hours.

Highway robbers scoot with 2.4 kg of goldDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

In a daring incident of highway robbery, two men waylaid two employees of wholesale jewellers in Mambakkam near Sriperumbudur and escaped with 2.4 kg of gold jewels.

According to the police, the complainant Mahendran of Tiruvallur runs a wholesale jewellery shop in the district. His son, Akash (25) and one of the employees of the shop, Rajkumar (55) were on the way to deliver gold jewels to jewellery shops in Sunguvachattam and Sriperumbudur areas in Kanchipuram when the incident happened. On Thursday evening, when Akash and Rajkumar were travelling in an auto on the Bengaluru-Chennai National Highway, two men on a two-wheeler with deadly weapons overtook the auto and intercepted them.

Besides taking away the jewel box from the duo, the gang also attacked Rajkumar before fleeing the spot. It is said that the duo went to Tiruvallur after the incident and informed Mahendran about it. However, a written complaint was given by the owner only on Saturday. Mahendran lodged a complaint with the Sriperumbudur police that unidentified persons robbed their men of 300 sovereigns gold, weighing 2.4 kilograms valued at 1.2 crores. Police registered a case and began an investigation. The duo was being questioned by a team of officials, the police said. Police are also getting the CCTV footage from the highways checked.

On Thursday evening, when Akash and Rajkumar were travelling in an auto on the Bengaluru-Chennai National Highway, two men on a two-wheeler with deadly weapons overtook the auto and intercepted them



Large numbers of Ayyappa devotees climbing *pathinnetam padi* (sacred 18 steps) at Sri Ayyappan temple at Kallikuppam near Ambattur. — N. Sampath

Heavy rush at Ayyappa temples due to curbs in SabarimalaDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the Travancore Devaswom Board and the Kerala government have imposed strict restrictions on the admission of devotees for Makara Jyothi festival in Sabarimala Ayyappa temple. Only limited number of

devotees are allowed and they should register names for virtual queue online and bring a corona negative certificate. People aged over 65 and children below 10 are not allowed. In Chennai, steps are being taken to complete the mandalam period and thousands of devotees can be seen at the Ayyappan temples in the vicinity of

the city. Devotees have welcomed the decision of allowing only prebooked devotees, which will help reduce the risk of infection. People who visit Sabarimala every year with the elderly and children are going to Ayyappan temples in Chennai this year keeping in mind the Covid situation.

Women can travel in all suburban trains from Monday

Chennai: Southern Railway will permit all women passengers to travel in Chennai suburban trains without any time restrictions on all the days of the week, from December 14 (Monday). Similarly children, up to the age of 12 years, accompanying women passengers would also be permitted to travel, according to a press release. This move will help women passengers as they

would be able to travel in the Chennai suburban services throughout the day.

Southern Railway will also resume suburban services in the section Chennai Beach-Chengalpattu-Kanchipuram/Tirumalpur from Monday. This will benefit a large number of office goers and other commuters travelling from the vicinity of Kanchipuram and Arakkonam.



Ammakulam at Keezhravanthavadi village in Tiruvannamalai.

Ammakulam, jumbo statue declared protected sitesDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Ammakulam at Keezhravanthavadi village in Tiruvannamalai district and an elephant statue at Azhagarmalai village in Ariyalur district become important places in the archeological map of the country as the state government declared them as protected sites.

The department of Tamil culture and archaeology, in a release, stated that the origin of

Ammakulam might date back to the 16th century during the reign of the Nayakkar kings. The practice of inscribing symbols around ponds was prevalent in that period.

Many of these symbols around the pond have references to the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, scenes from Periyapuranam and ancient war scenes and Nandi statues are engraved on the four corners of the pond.

A similar pond is found at Chinnampettai in Ch-



Elephant statue at Azhagarmalai village in Ariyalur.

engam circle, Thiruvannamalai. Chinnamanyakkar, who constructed the pond, might have set up the Ammakulam pond.

The elephant statue at Azhagarmalai, with a height of 81 ft, length of 41 ft and width of 12 ft dates back to 16th-7th century. Azhagarmalai was a part of the first Rajendra Chola empire, when Gangaikonda Cholapuram was its capital. The place was an important centre for the subsequent empires of the Vijayana-

Marina vendors at sea over smart cart schemeT. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Though the government has decided to open up the beaches in the state, the pandemic-hit vendors, who earned a livelihood from the Marina beach in the city over the years, are still looking at a bleak future.

As per an unofficial survey, over 3,000 families are dependent on the beach for their livelihood. But for the last 10 months, these vendors are living in absolute misery as there is no social security.

Now, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has invited vendors of Marina Beach to apply for procuring smart carts. But the vendors don't know how to apply and who are eligible for the carts.

According to GCC, 900

smart carts will be given to vendors. Out of which at least 60 per cent will be provided to existing street vendors and the remaining will be given to new vendors.

The GCC officials said the vendors can receive the application form directly from the revenue officer, Rippon building, Chennai Corporation from December 21 till December 26. The forms will be validated between December 29-31 and the final list will be decided on January 6.

Muthu, who ran a juice stall at the beach for the last two decades, says they were not even aware of the cart scheme announced by the GCC. As per the survey in 2014, there were 1,400 vendors which has now increased to 3,000. But how many vendors will be provided

the pushcarts and what is the process? No vendor at the beach has been informed about it', he said.

Muthu, who lost livelihood, is now forced to do domestic works for a living. He added that the government had distributed Rs 1,000 each to 500 vendors but still over 3,000 vendors are struggling to cope with the situation in the last 10 months. "Still we don't have a clue when we could open our shops. Though the government decided to open the beach, the vendors have not been given assent to resume business," he added.

According to an order issued by the Madras high court on January 22, the GCC should provide pushing carts for 900 hawkers on the Marina. Venessa Peter, a policy researcher with the Information and

Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC), said the authorities should not reduce the number of shops considering the havoc unleashed by the pandemic on their life.

As per the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood) Act, it is the duty of the authorities to find out the vendors and improve their life standards by offering them better job opportunities. Most of the vendors on the Marina Beach belong to vulnerable communities. Where would they go if they are deprived of their livelihood in this tough times? Regulations are good, but they should not be brought in at the cost of vendors' daily bread. It is time proper vendors committees were formed as mandated by the Act and empower it, she said.

CBI assures action against its officials on missing goldDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

The CBI on Saturday assured that strict action will be taken against its officials if they have any role in the disappearance of over 100 kg of gold from their custody. In a major embarrassment to the CBI, the Madras high court on Friday ordered the State CB-CID police to probe the disappearance of 103 kg gold (worth more than Rs 43 crore). The gold, amounting to 400.47 kg, and in the form of bars

and ornaments, was seized by the CBI from the office building of Surana in Chennai, and locked and sealed in the firm's vaults.

In a release, the CBI stated that in response to the media report on the missing of 100 kg of gold in Tamil Nadu on Friday, it is clarified that CBI in RC.24/2012, searched the building of Surana Corporation limited, NSC Bose Road, Chennai and prepared a search list. The search list mentioned that 400.47 kg gold had been inventorised and kept in

the safe and vaults of Surana, sealed in presence of independent witnesses and the MD of Surana Corporation and its officials.

As per the directions of the Madras high court, the vaults were opened in the presence of the official liquidator, officials belonging to six banks and independent witnesses and inspected from February 27 to 29, 2020 to hand over the gold to the lender banks of Surana Corporation. The seals affixed on the vaults were

found intact. However, gold weighed only 296.66 kg.

As the discrepancy between the quantity mentioned in the search memo and as per the weight came to notice, the CBI had ordered an internal inquiry by a senior officer to look into the role of its officials, if any.

The release stated that it is clarified that the inventorised gold was not kept in the Malkhana of CBI. Rather it was in the premises of Surana under the seal.

Under 7.5% quota**HC: Create one or two addl seats in govt medical colleges to accommodate students**J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

The Madras high court has suggested creation of one or two additional seats in 24 government medical colleges as a one-time measure, to accommodate those students (falling under the 7.5 per cent quota), who are not able to be accommodated in the regular vacancy.

Justice N. Anand Venkatesh made the suggestion while passing interim orders on the petitions from R. Chithra and A. Rajalakshmi, which sought a direction to the authorities to grant admission to their daughters for MBBS course in medical educational institution of their choice as per their rank communal reservation horizontal reservation and other eligibility.

In his order, the judge said advocate general Vijay Narayan submitted that till now nearly 160 seats have reverted back to the state government quota.

He further submitted that a clearer picture will evolve in a couple of days and by the next date of hearing, the total number of seats that can be accommodated with students falling under the 7.5 per cent quota, can be almost freed, the judge added.

The judge said one important issue that came up for consideration at that time of hearing was that as to how the state was going to deal with those students who were not able to be accommodated within the vacant seats that reverts back to the state government. A suggestion was made by this court to the effect that there were 24 government colleges and those students, who were not able to be accommodated in the regular vacancy, can be accommodated by creating one or two seats in each government college. By taking this positive step, it will not put any extra burden on the government college in terms of infrastructure and manpower. Creation of additional seats was not something new and such additional seats have always been created whenever the situation demands. The judge said V.P.Raman, standing counsel appearing on behalf of

High Court: Over qualification is disqualification to lower postsDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

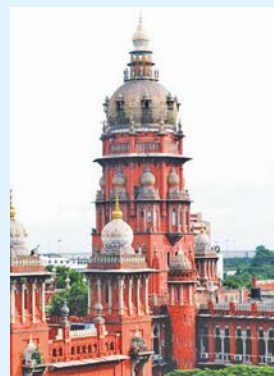
Emphasising that 'over qualification is a disqualification' to the lower posts, and pointing out that the higher qualified and lower qualified cannot be construed as equals, the Madras high court has said the government is bound to apply its mind seriously so as to ensure the suitability and eligibility criteria are strictly adopted at the time of recruitment and also to uphold the Constitutional principles of equality amongst equals.

Justice S.M.Subramaniam made the observations while dismissing the petition filed by M.Vijayalakshmi, challenging an order of the Chennai Metro Rail Limited, rejecting her claim to select and appoint her as Junior Engineer (Civil) in CMRL.

According to petitioner, she completed diploma in civil engineering during the year 2010. Thereafter, she joined B.E (civil) engineering in a private college. Meanwhile, pursuant to a notification for recruitment to post of junior engineer (civil), to which she was fully qualified, she applied for the same and was successful in the exams.

However, her candidature was rejected. She contended that at the time of submitting her application in 2013, she had completed her diploma in civil engineering and had not completed her B.E. Therefore, her candidature cannot be rejected, she added.

Dismissing her plea, the judge said the fact



remains that the instructions issued to the candidates with reference to the educational qualification clearly states that candidates possessing higher qualification were not eligible for appointment and their candidature will summarily be cancelled at any time of recruitment or even after appointment in CMRL. Undoubtedly, the petitioner has completed the course of B.E. degree and she was awaiting for the results.

Therefore, one cannot say that she has not completed the B.E. degree course. Prescribing the eligibility criteria and requisite educational qualifications that a graduate shall not be eligible to apply to a particular post was a conscious decision taken by the CMRL in the present case.

The said intention was very much reduced in the form of a condition in the recruitment notification.

"This court is of the considered opinion that there is no perversity as such in the matter of prescribing the qualifications and imposing a condition that higher qualification is disqualification," the judge added.

the National Medical Commission was requested to instruct the Commission about this proposal that has been mooted by this court. This court expects that the National Medical Commission will take into consideration the special circumstances

that prevails in this particular case and as a one-time measure, allows the students to be accommodated by creating one or two additional seats in the existing 24 government medical colleges, the judge added and posted to December 17, further hearing of the case.

Full house aspirations and coalition hassles

G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

The de facto head honcho of Desiya Murpokku Dravidar Kazhagam (DMDK), Premalatha Vijayananth, send shivers down the spine of many party functionaries by expressing a desire to go it alone in the 2021 Assembly elections, fielding candidates in all the 234 constituencies. Most functionaries dread the idea of contesting the polls without the support of other parties though the leader at the helm of affairs has different plans.

Of course, in its heydays the DMDK did contest alone and also fared decently well, though they did not win seats as such. Now with the founder not in a position for a full-fledge campaign, they need to be part of an alliance to make even a feeble mark. But the AIADMK leader of the present alliance in which the party is a part, might not accede to Premalatha's demands for seat allocation as it has too many partners to please and has to contest a sizeable

number of seats on its own. Anticipating that, she talks about taking the adventurous alternative route of going it alone.

Tamil Nadu's political razzmatazz might throw up many such acts of daredevilry and some incredible tie-ups in the run up to Elections 2021. For the arena seems to be too crowded with too many aspirants for the Chief Minister's job. With the battle lines yet to be distinctly drawn, it is not clear as to who will go with whom. This is more so among the medley of parties that remain outside the present DMK-led alliance.

The only clear indication that has now emerged is from the yet to be launched party of actor Rajinikanth. Earlier itself the actor had said that he would field candidates from all the 234 constituencies and now the latest proclamation made through posters and otherwise is that the party is being launched only to put

an end to Dravidian politics. That means the party cannot be part of the present two major alliances led by the DMK and AIADMK.

So, will the new party play a pivotal role by aligning with others with whom it shares the dream to finish the two Dravidian majors? The answer would be known only after the party is actually launched when dramatic play-offs could form part of the political game. If we take into account the 'eliminate Dravidian parties' slogan, it is shared by a plethora of parties like actor Seeman's Naam Tamizhar Katchi (NTK), Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), the BJP and actor Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiyam (MNM), besides of course Rajinikanth.

Among these, the PMK, despite its deep-seated hatred for Dravidian parties, does not mind having pacts with them. Even now it is part of the AIADMK alliance. But the speculation is that it might run into a discord over seat sharing, the same problem that the DMDK is now envisaging, and could even gravitate towards the DMK if it offers them a big slice of the seats cake. But then, the PMK could also see an alternative road to power in the anti-Dravidian political plank.

So will all those opposed to Dravidian majors come together? No, not all of them. There is no scope of the NTK joining the league as it always wants the full house, meaning fielding candidates in all 234 seats. It does not matter that they may not win a single seat, they would love to plough a lonely furrow, espousing the cause of Tamil nationalism and Tamil exclusivism.

That leaves us with a possibility of Rajinikanth's new party joining hands with MNM and PMK. Going by Kamal Haasan's deep sense of hurt and anger over the AIADMK government ordering an enquiry against Anna University Vice-Chancellor M. K. Surappa, it is evident that he is on the same page with Rajinikanth and two old co-stars of Tamil cinema may pair together again to play their parts in politics.

It might not be difficult to sort out the roles, too, for Rajinikanth does not seem to be particular about becoming Chief Minister, though Haasan is. Considering the importance of their common plank of eliminating Dravidian parties, they could come to an electoral understanding and may even rope in the PMK. It is rumoured that PMK had shown an interest in the deputy Chief Minister's post

during their negotiations with the AIADMK. May be they could bargain for it with the two film actors.

The only hitch will be the avowed aspiration of both Rajinikanth and Haasan for a full house contest. Perhaps they could shelve that idea in the larger interest of wresting power from Dravidian parties. Then, what will happen to the BJP? Both Rajinikanth and Haasan may not like to be seen cavorting with the BJP. It is a different matter that Rajinikanth has inducted BJP's Intellectual wing head, R Arjunamurthy, as his party coordinator and Kamal Haasan has made Sneha Mohandoss, who 'handled India's PM Twitter Handle on World Women's Day' as MNM's Women's wing head.

The actors may not want themselves to be identified with the BJP as they have expressed themselves in various occasions. Haasan was even angry that trolls called him a Sanghi.

Does that mean the BJP will have to continue with the AIADMK, contesting in a few seats given by the coalition leader, and watch from afar the two actors taking forward its own original crusade? Only the dawn of the new party can throw light on that.

SHORT TAKES

Sastra students get 2,300 job offers

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, DEC. 2

The Sastra deemed university on Saturday announced the placement data for its 2021 batch. A total of 2,300 job offers were given to the students by 70 campus recruiters who virtually visited the campus and conducted recruitment in the last two months.

The highest salary package offered is ₹27 lakh per annum and over 1,500 students walked away with unique placements. Leading recruiters like Amazon, PayPal, CISCO, Oracle, Morgan Stanley, Deloitte, IBM, TCS, Infosys, CTS, WIPRO, HP, Mindtree, Capgemini, Accenture, GE, Ford amongst others were Sastra's campus recruiters. Over 500 students received multiple offers up to four. To prepare the students for successful campus recruitment, a 14-day pre-placement training was organised free of cost.

DVAC raids: Official suffers fits

DC CORRESPONDENT
KRISHNAGIRI, DEC. 12

A government official was on Saturday admitted to hospital after he showed symptoms of seizure following the visit of DVAC sleuths to his office.

On Saturday, two teams of officials of the department of vigilance and anti-corruption (DVAC) conducted a search in the regional transport office check-posts in a place called Nallur and Zuzuvadi, both in Hosur taluk of Krishnagiri.

The team that visited the Zuzuvadi checkpoint was headed by DSP GV Krishnagiri and another team that conducted the raid at Nallur was led by inspector S Murugan.

Both the teams entered the checkpoint office simultaneously around 4:30 am and the search continued for four hours till 8 am that day. Rs 1.84 lakh was recovered as unaccountable cash from Zuzuvadi and Rs 25,920 was recovered from Nallur checkpoint.

The search was delayed due to the regional transport office inspector Gokula Krishnan, who was taken to hospital after he showed symptoms of seizure after the DVAC sleuths entered his office. The DVAC personnel waited till Gokula Krishnan returned from hospital and questioned him for the unaccountable cash found in his custody.

Perambalur, Ariyalur record zero cases

Chennai, Dec. 12: Tamil Nadu recorded 1,218 new Covid-19 cases aggregating to 7,97,693 infections in the state, while 13 people succumbed to the virus pushing the death toll to 11,883, the Health department said on Saturday. As many as 1,296 people have been cured of the contagion totaling to 7,75,602 so far, a bulletin said. Active cases in Tamil Nadu stood at 10,208.

Two districts, including the state capital and Coimbatore logged new cases in triple digits with Chennai adding 345 new cases and Coimbatore registered 120 while remaining spread across other districts. Chennai continued to top the list of cases with 2,19,526 infections out of more than 7.97

lakh in the state. The metro also topped in the number of fatalities, accounting for 3,910 of the total 11,883 till date. Seven districts have added new infections in single digit, while 30 of them have reported 'zero' fatalities. Ariyalur became the second district after Perambalur to record zero fresh cases. Perambalur has been recording single digit or zero fresh cases in the recent past. A total of 72,122 samples were tested on Saturday taking the cumulative total to 1,28,87,037 specimens examined so far. Tamil Nadu does not use Rapid Antigen Diagnostic Tests (RADT) and all tests are RT-PCR (Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction based).

Pondy CM calls on Stalin

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy called on DMK president M. K. Stalin at Anna Arivalayam on Saturday, triggering speculations on the Congress-DMK alliance in the Union Territory.

Though Narayanasamy spoke to the media after the meeting and described it as a 'courtesy call,' it was rumoured that he had come down to seek the DMK top leaders' help in sorting out some differences between a few DMK leaders and Congress functionaries in Puducherry.

While the DMK was in a coalition with the Congress, which leads the government in the Union Territory, local skirmishes between leaders of the two alliance partners had reportedly gone out of control for the Chief Minister to handle.

Narayanasamy, however,



Pondy Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy meets DMK president M.K. Stalin and other senior party leaders at Anna Arivalayam on Saturday.

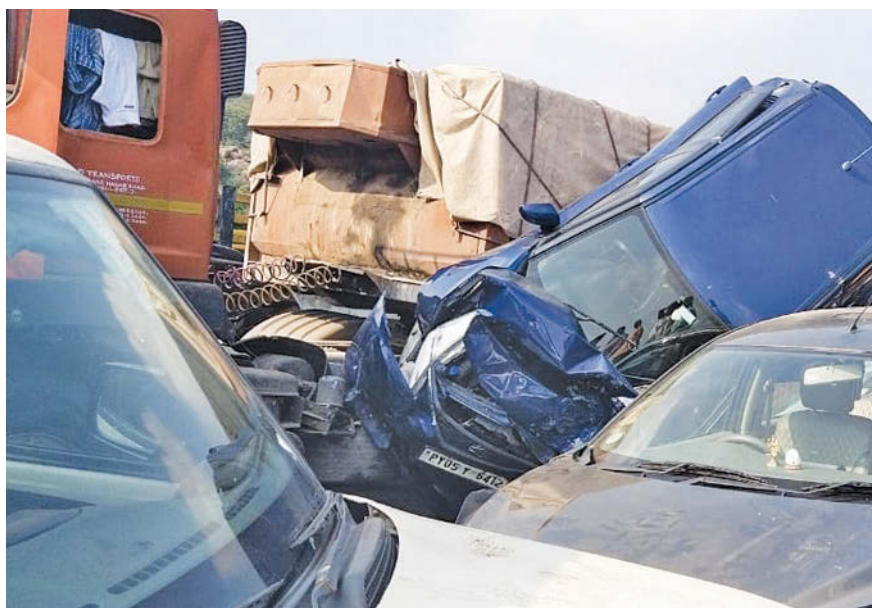
—DC

affirmed the alliance and vowed to abide by Stalin's decisions. He assured to strive hard to make Stalin the next Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

To a question from the

media on the reported differences between functionaries of the two parties, he said they were administrative issues and had been sorted out amicably. Making a reference to

the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry Kiran Bedi, Narayanasamy said that she had tried in vain to dislodge his government with the help of the Centre.



Mangled remains of the vehicles involved in multiple collision on Saturday evening near Thoppur on the Dharmapuri-Salem border.

—DC

Cement truck hits several cars moving ahead of it
Four killed in Dharmapuri multiple vehicle collisionSANJEEVI ANANDAN | DC
DHARMAPURI, DEC. 12

Three persons died on the spot and another died at the government medical college and hospital here as their car met with a mishap on Saturday evening near Thoppur on the Dharmapuri - Salem border.

"Four men died in the mishap. Three died on the spot and another at the government hospital. Two of the injured were taken care by the government health facility," collector SP Karthikaa, told Deccan Chronicle.

The collector said the mishap was caused by a heavy truck transporting cement bags from Andhra Pradesh to Salem. The truck driver lost control of the vehicle and rammed it on several vehicles moving ahead of it, at Thoppur.

The collector said the mishap was caused by a heavy truck transporting cement bags from Andhra Pradesh to Salem. The truck driver lost control of the vehicle and rammed it on several vehicles moving ahead of it, at Thoppur

Four men travelling in different cars died in the mishap. They were identified as Rajamanikam, Karthik, Nithyanandan and Kannan. The first two victims are occupants of a single car and belong to Omalur in Salem district. Nithyanandan is a native of Coimbatore and Kannan belongs to Perumpalai village in Dharmapuri district. They were all travelling in two separate vehicles.

Collector Karthikaa said, "Investigation is underway to determine the cause of the accident. First, the driver should be arrested and only after

that can we determine the cause of the accident."

The district administration has marked an eight-kilometre stretch between Thoppur and the toll plaza on the Coimbatore - Bengaluru national highway via Dharmapuri, as an 'accident zone'. Steps have been taken to control accidents at the specified place, and drivers have been asked not to speed up beyond the permitted speed of 20 kms per hour at the stretch. They have also been instructed to move their vehicles only in the second gear at this stretch, to avoid mishaps, added the collector.

Social distancing norms violated during agitations, says LG Bedi

Puducherry, Dec. 12: Puducherry Lt Governor Kiran Bedi on Saturday voiced concern over the 'violation' of social distancing norms during recent agitations in the union territory.

"The result of the violations would be known in course of time," she said in her weekly video message to the people of Puducherry on Covid-19. She said while the Puducherry, Karaikal and Yanam regions "are going safe on the Covid-19 front" as of now, Mahe, an enclave of Puducherry in Kerala, however, had "witnessed a spike in the number of cases..." The former IPS officer said that the reasons for the spike were



being investigated.

The ICMR had also stepped in with its guidelines and already a nodal officer had been appointed in Mahe to take stock of the situation. Bedi appealed to the residents of Mahe region "to submit themselves for testing whenever mobile vans visited their areas for random surveys to check the

disease from spreading any further in Mahe..." She alleged that recent agitations in Puducherry (organised by various outfits to protest against the new farm laws during a bandh on December 8) witnessed violation of safety norms like social distancing. She said steps for vaccination for prevention of Covid 19 were gathering momentum. "We have received guidelines and other terms of adoption of vaccination from the Centre. A nodal officer has also been appointed. All the details of implementation of vaccination would be known soon. Vaccination is the ultimate solution to battle pandemic," she added. —PTI

2 held for abducting realtor

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Chennai police arrested two men in connection with the abduction of a realtor in Chromepet on Friday. Police are searching for other members of the kidnap gang.

According to police, they initiated an inquiry after they received a complaint from Saravanan (43), a realtor, of Chromepet, who was abducted on the night of November 11 by a gang in his car.

The gang kidnapped Saravanan from his house by a gang led by a businessman and rowdy, Ceiling Raja (45) of Ramakrishnapuram in Chitlapakkam. They threatened the realtor at gunpoint and demanded a ransom of Rs 20 lakh. However, Saravanan was only able to give them Rs 10 lakh and promised to pay the rest in a few days.

After receiving the amount, the gang allegedly dropped off Saravanan in a forest area in Sriperumbudur and warned him not to lodge a police complaint.

Police said that Ceiling Raja recently contacted Saravanan and allegedly demanded him ₹10 lakh. Following this, Saravanan lodged a complaint with the Chitlapakkam police station.

Police on Friday morning arrested one of the gang members Jayram (38). Based on his inputs, Ceiling Raja was nabbed by police from a hideout in Tambaram.

Police seized three cars, a gun and seven pattachathi from the gang. Chitlapakkam police said the gang has 40 pending cases including six murder cases against them.



Prahlad Damodar Das Modi, brother of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on a visit to Salem on Saturday.

Govt prompt in carrying out Centre's plans: Central team

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
SALEM, DEC. 12

The Tamil Nadu government has been implementing the plans of the Central government well, said Prahlad Damodar Das Modi, brother of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is on a visit here along with a team on Saturday to inspect whether the Centre's plans and projects were being implemented properly in the state.

Since the BJP began to delve deeper into Tamil Nadu politics, the Centre's focus has now shifted more to the state with more schemes for the poor in the state. The Centre wants to ensure that all of these programmes reach the grass-roots, and hence, a committee 'Janakalyan Yojna - Prayas Abhiyan', (PM's Public Welfare Programmes Awareness Committee), has been formed to monitor this, and create awareness among the public about these projects. This committee, set up on the instructions of Prime Minister Modi is headed by Prahlad Damodar Das Modi.

Speaking to reporters here, Prahlad Modi said, "In Salem, I was able to learn about the history of Tamil Nadu culture. I learned that various families of the Saurashtra community had migrated

from Gujarat to various parts of Tamil Nadu about 700 years back. It looks to me that Tamil Nadu has become another Gujarat. Today is the birthday of filmstar Rajinikanth. I wish him a very happy birthday from Tamil soil. The people of Tamil Nadu also have greatly struggled for the country's independence. The government of Tamil Nadu, its people and all the people of Saurashtra in Gujarat, are cooperating with the Centre for the development of the country. The Tamil Nadu government is working with our team to make the PM's development projects reach every poor in the state. As said by the Prime Minister, our goal is that by 2022 no family will be homeless. We have come to Tamil Nadu to implement this work through campaigns."

"In this, I am very happy to have the cooperation of all of you. With this, I salute and say goodbye with the hope that the Prime Minister's plans will be fully implemented," he added.

Prahlad Modi's team also includes non-political retired civil servants. Retired additional commissioner of commerce, Dr Rajaraman (IRS) and Mohan Kumar Reddy of the agri-commerce department, are also members.

NMR charter train row: 100 held for bid to block train

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, DEC.12

Running of weekend charter train services in the Nilgiri Mountain Railway (NMR) has turned into a law and order problem now, as the resumption of such a trip on Saturday morning saw protests by various organizations in Mettupalayam and Ooty railway stations. Over 100 people were arrested for

trying to block the train. On Saturday morning, the weekend charter train service resumed at Mettupalayam. Soon, people from various political parties and other organizations marched into the railway station in Mettupalayam to block the train. But cops there averted their entry and arrested them. Ooty MLA R Ganesh (Congress), warned of intensive protests if the SR continued to disrespect the interests of the public.

Potential plot marred by mediocre narration

KOMBU -REVIEW

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: Jeeva, Disha Pandey, Pandiarajan

DIRECTION: Ibrahim

RATING: 1 and ¾



Karthik (Jeeva) is an aspiring filmmaker and he meets Diya (Disha Pandey) a research student in paranormal activities through the latter's uncle (Pandiarajan). Diya comes across a news article about a haunted house in a village where two girls are murdered under mysterious circumstances. Diya along with Karthik and friends (Puvisha and Yogeswaran) reach the village to study whether ghosts really exist. The villagers believe that whoever touches the cow horns (kombu), which are used to suppress spirits, will perish. Some eerie occurrences take place for the quartet. The rest is about how an unfazed Janani unravels the truth behind the murders.

Jeeva, more so known as Lollu Sabha Jeeva turns lead hero with Kombu. He does a decent job in a role that is infused with comedy. Disha Pandey has an important role and she pulls it off to some extent. Supporting actors like Pandiarajan, Ganja Karuppu and Swaminathan fail to evoke laughter. The plot had all the potential for a horror thriller, but the director errs with his lackluster presentation. There's a twist in the climax suggesting a possible second part to it. Overall, more misses than hits.

FILM

REVIEW

Murders haunt 'smart' village

KARUPPANKATTU VALASU -REVIEW

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: Neelima Esai, Ebenezer Devaraj, George Vijay

DIRECTION: Selvendran

RATING: **



There's no hero or heroine in this village based crime thriller. Gandhimathi (Neelima Esai) returns from abroad to her native place Karuppankaattu Valasu and is shocked to see the plight of the village. Being the daughter of the village chieftain, she wants to reform the place using the 'smart village' concept. Initially there is significant push back but Gandhimathi's determination wins some minds over and she gives the village an image makeover by installing CCTV cameras, introducing garbage disposable system, revamping the government school by providing laptops to students and building toilets. In a bid to celebrate the achievement, the villagers arrange for a temple festival. However, unex-

pectedly, the same night a few murders take place. Now enters the cop (George Vijay), whose investigation leads to several twists and turns. Neelima who returns after a gap has given a measured performance. Ebenezer Devaraj who plays a folk artiste is equally impressive. Comedian George Vijay for a change has essayed a serious cop and he scores with his modest portrayal. The director has touched upon many issues including honor killing. However, the screenplay somewhat meanders, as a result it slackens the pace and tension. Shraavan Saravanan's cinematography is adequate.

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SHORT TAKES

ACTRESS ARYA BANERJEE FOUND DEAD AT HER HOME

Kolkata, Dec. 12: Actress Arya Banerjee who starred in several Bollywood films, including *'The Dirty Picture'*, was found dead at her south Kolkata residence, police said.

The police broke open the door of her third-floor apartment on Friday and found that the body of the 33-year-old woman was lying in the bedroom.

The daughter of late sitarist Nikhil Banerjee, Arya had also starred in *'LSD: Love Sex Aur Dhoka'* (2010) among other films. She had also done some modelling assignments in Mumbai. Her domestic help got suspicious as she did not respond to doorbells and phone calls in the morning and informed the neighbours who called the police.

Arya lived alone and kept to herself mostly, the domestic help said. Police said that the body was sent for post-mortem examination and a forensic team collected samples from her room.

K'TAKA: WORKERS GO ON RAMPAGE AT IPHONE PLANT

Bengaluru, Dec. 12: Violence broke out on Saturday at the Taiwan-headquartered Wistron Corporation's plant near here where iPhones and other IT products are manufactured as large number of workers went on a rampage over issues related to payment of salary, police said.

The Karnataka government condemned the violence at the manufacturing facility in Narasapura Industrial Area in Kolar district, about 50 kilometers from here.

Police said 132 people have been detained in connection with the violence that erupted around 6 AM during the morning shift.

"The information we received is that the employees had problems related to their salary payment," Inspector General of Police Seemant Kumar Singh told reporters after visiting the Wistron facility, adding investigations were on.

The workers in the morning shift hurled stones, smashed glass windows, damaged vehicles, furniture, computers and laptops, another police officer said.

Video footages showed a violent group overturning vehicles, setting them on fire, breaking glass windows in the office leaving a trail of destruction. Condemning the violence, Deputy Chief Minister C. N. Ashwath Narayan said stringent action would be taken against the perpetrators.

INDO-SINO TALKS ENTER 8TH MONTH WITH NO DEAL

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The military stand-off between India and China in Eastern Ladakh has entered in its eighth month with no agreement on disengagement in sight.

The winter season and snow in upper reaches has for time being reduced the possibility of an armed confrontation between the two sides in the region. However, soldiers deployed in front bases in Ladakh are now fighting the elements with temperatures dipping way below sub-zero temperatures.

The altitudes in Ladakh range from high to super high altitude and the area experiences heavy snow fall, after the month of November. This coupled with the wind chill factor, temperatures dips down to minus 37-40 degrees.

The eighth round of Corps Commanders meeting held on November 6 had given rise to hope that the two sides could reach an agreement on a disengagement plan.

It had seemed that China has agreed to move back from the Finger 4 and take its troops beyond Finger 8 in the Northern bank of Pangong Tso. Even army chief General M.M. Naravane had said that he was hopeful that the Indian and Chinese militaries will be able to reach an agreement on disengagement and de-escalation of tension in eastern Ladakh.

However, since then things have got struck with no forward progress. There has also been no further meeting of the Corps Commanders since then. India's position has been that it was China which had first moved its troops at the LAC and China will have to be first to withdraw from these positions.



Social activist Medha Patkar addresses farmers during their protest against the new farm laws, at Ghazipur border in New Delhi, Saturday. — PTI

Farmers: Repeal agri laws first, then talk

Sticking to demands, farmers to intensify their agitation

New Delhi, Dec. 12: Sticking to their demands, farmer leaders Saturday said they are ready to hold talks with the government, but will first discuss repealing the three new farm laws, and announced further intensification of their ongoing protest against the legislations.

Addressing a press conference at Singhu Border here, farmer leader Kanwalpreet Singh Pannu said that thousands of farmers will start their 'Delhi Chalo' march from Rajasthan's Shahjahanpur through the Jaipur-Delhi Highway at 11 am on Sunday.

He said that farmers from other parts of the country are also on their way to join the protesters here and they will take the agitation to the next level in the coming days. "If the government wants to hold talks, we are ready, but our main demand will remain the scrapping of the three laws. We will move onto our other demands only after that," the farmer leader said.

Farmer union leaders will also sit on a hunger strike between 8 am and 5 pm On December 14

How many more farmers will have to die, asks Congress

SREEPARNA CHAKRABARTY | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Claiming that 11 farmers have lost their lives while protesting against the new farm laws over the last 17 days, the Congress on Saturday questioned how many agriculturalists would have to lose their lives to get the legislations repealed.

"How many more sacrifices will the farmers have to make to get the agri laws repealed?" former Congress president Rahul Gandhi tweeted. He tagged a media report which claimed that 11 protesting farmers had lost their lives in the last 17 days due to various reasons such as ill

health or a mishap.

Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala claimed that despite the death of 11 farmer brothers in the last 17 days, the Modi government was not relenting.

"They (government) are still standing with their 'money providers' not with 'annadaatas' (food providers)," Mr Surjewala tweeted. "The country wants to know — 'Is Rajdharm (constitutional responsibility) bigger or Rajhat (stubbornness)?" he asked.

Farmers, especially from the three food bowl states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are protesting the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement

of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020.

While the government has projected the three laws as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of Minimum Support Price and do away with the mandis, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

leader vowed to keep the protest peaceful.

The government on Friday asked the protesting farmers to be vigilant against their platform being misused, saying

some "antisocial" as well as "Leftist and Maoist" elements were conspiring to spoil the atmosphere of the agitation which has been going on for over two weeks now. — PTI

Centre, Bengal clash over 3 IPS

New Delhi/Kolkata, Dec. 12: The West Bengal government will have the "last word" on releasing three of its IPS officers for central deputation, the state's ruling TMC declared on Saturday, dubbing as "intimidatory" the Union Home Ministry's order for shifting them out following the mob attack on BJP chief J. P. Nadda's convoy.

Days after Nadda's cavalcade came under attack by alleged Trinamool Congress supporters when he was on way to address a public meeting at Diamond Harbour near Kolkata, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) summoned the IPS officers to serve under it for alleged dereliction of duty.

The three officers — Bholanath Pandey (SP, Diamond Harbour), Praveen Tripathi (DIG, Presidency Range) and Rajeev Mishra (ADG, South Bengal) — were responsible for the security of the BJP chief during his December 9-10

visit to the politically volatile state that will likely have assembly elections in April-May next year.

The MHA's move came a day after the Mamata Banerjee government defiantly rejected summonses to state chief secretary and police chief to appear before Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla to tender explanation for the attack on Nadda's motorcade that left several BJP leaders and workers injured and their vehicles damaged. — PTI

India, Iran, Uzbekistan to hold trilateral meeting on Chabahar

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

In a major boost to Indian strategic interests, India on Saturday announced that the "first Trilateral Working Group Meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on joint use of Chabahar Port will be held virtually on December 14", adding that "besides Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using the port".

The Iranian port of Chabahar provides sea-land connectivity between India and Central Asia through Iran, bypassing Pakistan.

It may be recalled that at the India-Uzbekistan Virtual Summit on Friday, India had cited the successful functioning of the

Chabahar port in Iran — being developed with Indian assistance — that could be a "fulcrum of connectivity to Central Asia" following which New Delhi had "welcomed the Uzbek proposal to hold trilateral dialogue among India, Iran and Uzbekistan to promote connectivity through the Chabahar port".

In a statement, the MEA said, "The first Trilateral Working Group Meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on joint use of Chabahar Port will be held virtually on December 14, 2020. ...India welcomes the interest of Uzbekistan to use the Chabahar port as a transit port. This would open up economic opportunities for the traders and business community of the region. Besides

Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using the port. India seeks to cooperate closely with regional countries on this issue."The MEA added, "The Meeting would be jointly chaired at Deputy Minister level by Republic of Uzbekistan and Islamic Republic of Iran and Secretary Level from Republic of India."

Uzbekistan had also agreed "in-principle" on Friday to India's request to join the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), an important initiative taken by India, Russia and Iran to promote transportation cooperation and to enhance connectivity with central Asian countries, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

Puri Jagannath temple likely to reopen on Dec 23

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 12

Devotees waiting to have darshan of Lord Jagannath and divine siblings — Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra — will soon have the opportunity as the Jagannath Temple administration on Saturday announced that the temple will reopen ahead of the New Year.

Speaking to media persons in Puri, Sri Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) chief administrator Krishan Kumar said that they were planning to reopen the temple for devotees soon with strict adherence to Covid restrictions.

"The recommendation in this regard will be sent to the state government to open the Jagannath Temple on December 23. We will urge them to allow us reopen for residents of Puri till December 31 evening," Kumar said after chairing a meeting of temple priests. However, the temple will

remain closed on January 1 and 2 in view of possibility of a huge flow of devotees to the pilgrim town. On January 3 onwards, the temple will be kept open for all devotees.

"We have decided to close the temple on January 1 and 2. An advisory will be issued after getting a nod from the state government," he said.

Initially, as many as 5,000 devotees will be allowed to enter into the temple in phases after January 3.

TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS

Expenditure limit for party candidates was last revised in 2014

EC tells parties to fix limit on poll expenditure

New Delhi, Dec. 12: The Election Commission has sought views of recognised national and state parties on what should be the limit of expenditure for candidates contesting Lok Sabha and assembly polls.

In a letter sent out on December 7, the commission asked parties to send their "views and suggestions" on as to what should be the ceiling limit of election expenditure for candidates for Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the future. The parties

have been asked to send their views to the nodal officer of the committee that was set up in October to revise the expenditure limit.

While there is a limit on candidates to spend on their election campaign, there is no such cap on political parties.

The committee was tasked to examine the issue of revising the expenditure limit for candidates for Lok Sabha and assembly polls in view of the increase in number of electors and rise in the

Cost Inflation Index. Expenditure limit for candidates was last revised in 2014.

For Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the limit was mandated to assess the change in Cost Inflation Index and its bearing on expenditure. It has also been mandated to assess the change in Cost Inflation Index and its bearing on the pattern of expenditure incurred by candidates in recent elections.

The committee is likely to submit its report early next year to the poll panel. Considering the difficulties candidates could face in campaigning amid Covid-19. — PTI

ELECTION COMMISSION TOYS WITH IDEA OF DIGITAL VOTER ID CARD

New Delhi, Dec. 12: The Election Commission (EC) is toying with the idea of providing voters with election photo identity card in a digital format for easy accessibility, a senior official said.

He, however, made it clear that no decision has been taken by the EC yet in this regard. "We keep getting suggestions and ideas from officers on fields,

through working groups of (state) chief electoral officers and public. This is one such idea we are working on," the functionary said.

Asked whether the digital voter identity card would mean that a voter can carry it on his or her mobile phone using an application, the official said once the EC takes a decision, such details will be settled. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

RUSSIA PROBES
MYSTERY DEATH
OF 300 SEALS

Moscow, Dec. 12: Russian authorities said on Friday they were investigating the mysterious death of nearly 300 endangered seals that had been discovered washed up on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Between Sunday and Thursday, 272 dead Caspian seals had been found at a number of locations in the southern region of Dagestan including its regional capital Makhachkala and Derbent, another major city, said the state fisheries agency Rosrybolovstvo.

Some of the seals were pregnant. An agency spokeswoman said that more dead seals could yet be discovered. A team of experts arrived from Moscow to help conduct an investigation.

REVERSE TRUMP'S
IMMIGRATION
RULES, BIDEN TOLD

Washington, Dec. 12: Influential American lawmakers, including Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, have urged President-elect Joe Biden to reverse the immigration policies of Donald Trump, as they introduced a resolution, seeking reform of the immigration system that is just, empathetic and fair.

Jayapal and several of her Congressional colleagues on Friday in a resolution urged Congress to create humane, community-based alternatives to detention, and revamp the current deportation system to include, among other things, guaranteed access to legal representation.

Jayapal along with congressmen Jesús "Chuy" García, Veronica Escobar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Judy Chu and Yvette Clarke unveiled a Roadmap to Freedom Resolution as a progressive vision to transform the immigration system to one that is focused on dignity and rooted in the needs and lives of impacted people.

The Roadmap to Freedom Resolution will be introduced at the beginning of the 117th Congress.

US EXECUTES
DRIVER WHO
KILLED HIS CHILD

Terre Haute (US), Dec. 12: The Trump administration continued its unprecedented series of post-election federal executions by putting to death a Louisiana truck driver who severely abused his 2-year-old daughter for weeks in 2002, then killed her by slamming her head against a truck's windows and dashboard. Alfred Bourgeois, 56, was pronounced dead at 8.21 pm. Eastern time on Friday after receiving a lethal injection at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana.

His lawyers argued Bourgeois had an IQ that puts him in the intellectually disabled category, saying that should have made him ineligible for the death penalty under federal law. Victor J. Abreu, said it was "shameful" to execute his client "without fair consideration of his intellectual disability." In his last words, Bourgeois offered no apology and instead struck a deeply defiant tone, insisting that he neither killed nor sexually abused his baby girl.

LETTER FROM
'ZODIAC KILLER'
DECODED

Los Angeles, Dec. 12: A team of cryptography enthusiasts announced on Friday they had successfully cracked one of the coded messages sent over 50 years ago by the "Zodiac Killer," who terrorised northern California in the late 1960s and remains unidentified.

The message was sent in November 1969 to the *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper by the alleged serial killer, its code consisting of a series of cryptic letters and symbols. Sleuths hoped the coded message contained the identity of the killer, who committed at least five murders in 1968 and 1969 but claimed 37 in total and inspired other serial killers.

According to the trio said to have broken the code, the message includes boasts and defiance of authorities without any real clues on motive or identity.

It includes to message: "I hope you are having lots of fun in trying to catch me... I am not afraid of the gas chamber because it will send me to paradise (sic) all the sooner because I now have enough slaves to work for me."

Trump forces US regulator to
approve Pfizer vaccine faster

FDA chief told to quit if drug regulator does not clear vaccine by end of day

Washington, Dec. 12: US President Donald Trump on Friday piled pressure on the US drug regulator to quickly approve the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine as America readied to roll out mass immunisations.

The Washington Post reported that the White House told the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) chief Stephen Hahn to submit his resignation if the agency does not clear the vaccine by the end of the day.

Hahn later disputed the characterization of the call, but the alleged threat came as Trump tweeted that the agency was a "big, old, slow turtle" and told Hahn to get the "dam" vaccines out immediately.

An expert committee had already voted to grant an emergency use authorisation, which was expected within days, as the FDA worked to iron out last-minute details with Pfizer.

These included a fact sheet for doctors. The FDA has said it wants to warn people with severe allergies to avoid the shots for now. Trump's intervention reinserts politics into the scientific process, which could undermine vaccine confidence in the world's hardest-hit country, where the death toll is nearing 3,00,000.

It was also not clear whether having an EUA a day or two earlier than expected would change when the first Americans — nursing home residents and health care workers — would get their injections, which is expected Monday or Tuesday. The country hopes to have 20 million people inoculated this month.

The government also

Congress averts shutdown,
buys time for more talks

Washington, Dec. 12: Congress sent a temporary government-wide funding bill to President Donald Trump on Friday that would avert a federal Shutdown at midnight and buy time for on-again, off-again talks on Covid-19 aid.

The bill sets a new deadline of midnight next Friday. The short-term measure passed the Senate by a unanimous voice vote without much drama and sent senators home for the weekend without a clear picture of what awaits next week. The House passed the bill Wednesday.

Trump was expected to sign it before midnight. The talks are stalled but there is universal agree-

said on Friday that it is buying 100 million more doses of the Moderna vaccine candidate, amid reports the government passed on the opportunity to secure more supply of the Pfizer jab.

The purchase brings its total supply of Moderna doses to 200 million, enough to immunize 100 million people with the two-shot regimen, which is yet to be green-lighted by authorities. Two other vaccine candidates stumbled on Friday.

France's Sanofi and Britain's GSK said on Friday their vaccine would not be ready until the end of 2021. — *AFP*

● **THE BILL** sets a new deadline of midnight next Friday. The short-term measure passed the Senate by a unanimous voice vote without much drama and sent senators home for the weekend without a clear picture of what awaits next week. The House passed the bill Wednesday.

ment that Congress won't adjourn for the year without passing a long-delayed round of pandemic relief. An emerging \$900 billion aid package from a bipartisan group of lawmakers hit a rough patch after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky,

swung against the effort. Still, negotiations are ongoing and pressure remains intense.

The House has recessed for a few days, with leaders warning members to be prepared to return to Washington to vote on the year-end deals. Negotiators on a separate \$1.4 trillion omnibus spending bill appeared to be moving in a positive direction, said the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala. This bill would serve as a vehicle to carry any year-end virus assistance. "I'm hopeful we're going to get there on both the omni and the Covid package," McConnell said. — *AP*

Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine,
Sputnik to be mixed for trial

London, Dec. 12: The Oxford University and AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, currently awaiting regulatory approvals, is set to be used for a "mix and match" trial with Russia's Sputnik vaccine against the coronavirus, according to UK media reports.

The two sets of experts are to join forces to explore if a combination of the two jabs, both using a benign virus

called adenovirus, could prove effective in offering people long-term protection against Covid-19.

According to *The Times*, the idea is that by using different vaccines, each shot may prompt a stronger immune response. AstraZeneca, the pharmaceutical major which produces the Oxford University's vaccine, has agreed to collaborate with Sputnik in a

deal apparently sealed after an offer was made on Twitter, the newspaper said.

Early results from the final-stage trial of the Sputnik vaccine showed it was 90 per cent effective and findings that involved more cases with the Oxford vaccine indicated it was 62 per cent effective in one regimen and 90 per cent in another. — *AP*

Britain promises
to stop funding
fossil fuel projects

London, Dec. 12: Britain is to end government funding for fossil fuel projects overseas, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday, on the eve of an international climate change summit.

Johnson announced a halt to funding of new crude oil, gas and coal projects before opening the Climate Ambition Summit co-hosted by Britain, the United Nations and France on Saturday.

"I'm pleased to say today that the UK will end taxpayer support for fossil fuel projects overseas as soon as possible," Johnson said in a statement released by his office.

Britain has been criticised for sending billions of pounds abroad to help extract and refine fossil fuels and build power stations.

It has promised to end this soon, while saying there will be "very limited exceptions".

"Calling time on financing overseas fossil fuel projects really is a welcome move," said the policy director at Greenpeace UK, Doug Parr.

Christian Aid's head of campaigns and UK advocacy Pete Moorey said to tackle the climate crisis, 80 percent of known fossil fuels needed to be left in the ground.

"The UK government is right to heed this warning and end support for fossil fuels overseas," he added.

"Developing countries need investment to leapfrog the dirty energy that has led us into this crisis and access the clean renewable that can both accelerate their development and tackle the climate emergency." — *AP*

UN CHIEF URGES
'CLIMATE CRISIS'
DECLARATION

London, Dec. 12: UN chief Antonio Guterres on Saturday urged world leaders to declare a "state of climate emergency" and shape greener growth after the Coronavirus pandemic, as he opened a summit marking five years since the landmark Paris Agreement.

The Climate Ambition Summit, being held online, comes as the United Nations warns current commitments to tackle rises in global temperatures are inadequate.

The commitments made in Paris in 2015 were "far from enough" to limit temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the UN secretary-general said in his opening address to the summit, which is co-hosted by Britain and France. — *AFP*

Downing Street said it intends to implement the policy by November next year, when Britain will host the UN summit on climate change COP26, in Glasgow.

Over the last four years, the British government "supported 21 billion (\$28 billion, 23 billion euros) of UK oil and gas exports through trade promotion and export finance", it added.

Britain has been criticised by watchdogs and activists including Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg for financing dirty energy projects abroad. — *AP*

French police protest



French police officers gather on the Trocadero square in front of the Eiffel Tower to protest President Emmanuel Macron saying it is "unbearable" that people of color are more likely to be stopped by law enforcement than white people. Two unions threatened to stop carrying out identity checks after Macron's remarks a week ago in an interview with the online outlet Brut, meant to capture the youth audience. "We just want to say to the president and politicians that we are neither racist nor violent," one officer said. — *AP*

SCOTUS dismisses
Texas election suit

Washington, Dec. 12: The US Supreme Court has rejected a lawsuit filed by Texas, along with 17 other States, and backed by President Donald Trump seeking to overturn the results of the presidential elections in several key battleground States won by Democratic candidate Joe Biden who now is the president-elect.

"Texas has not demonstrated a judicially cognisable interest in the manner in which another State conducts its elections. All other pending motions are dismissed as moot," the Supreme Court said in a brief unsigned order on Thursday, delivering a devastating blow to the efforts of Trump to challenge and overturn the election results decisively won by Biden.

Supreme Court Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas said they believed the court was required to hear the case but expressed no position on Texas' claim. — *AP*

CUOMO AMONG
CONTENDERS
FOR ATTORNEY
GENERAL PICK

Washington, Dec. 12: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is one of several contenders under consideration by President-elect Joe Biden for the role of attorney general, a person with knowledge of the search process said on Friday.

The other three contenders at the moment include former Alabama Sen. Doug Jones, federal appeals court judge Merrick Garland and former Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates, said the person, who cautioned that no decision had been reached and no announcement was expected imminently.

The person was not authorised to discuss the search process by name and spoke on condition of anonymity. — *AP*

Iran executes ex-opppn figure
Ruhollah Zam

Tehran, Dec. 12: Iran authorities on Saturday executed Ruhollah Zam, a former opposition figure who had lived in exile in France and was implicated in anti-government protests, days after his sentence was upheld.

State television said the "counter-revolutionary" Zam was hanged in the morning after the supreme court upheld his sentence due to "the severity of the crimes" committed against the Islamic

republic. Judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili had on Tuesday said Zam's sentence was upheld by the supreme court "more than a month ago".

London-based human rights group Amnesty International, in a statement after his verdict was confirmed, described Zam as a "journalist and dissident". It said the confirmation marked "a shocking escalation in the use of the death penalty as a

weapon of repression". Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced the arrest of Zam in October 2019, claiming he had been "directed by France's intelligence service". State television said he was "under the protection of several countries' intelligence services".

The official IRNA news agency said he was also convicted of espionage for France and an unnamed coun-

try in the region, cooperating with the "hostile government of America", acting against "the country's

security", insulting the "sanctity of Islam" and instigating violence during protests in 2017. — *AFP*

ICEBREAKER LEAVES OZ AFTER 150 TRIPS

Hobart, Dec. 12: The giant orange icebreaker *Aurora Australis* left Australia for the final time on Saturday after more than 150 trips to Antarctica. Next stop: a shipyard in Dubai, where it will be refurbished and either leased or sold.

The Australian Antarctic Division announced earlier this year that after 30 years of sailing to the frozen continent for research and to support Australian bases in Antarctica, the *Aurora Australis* would be replaced by a larger ship.

FERRY | FAREWELL



The 95-metre (312-foot) *Aurora Australis* was built in Newcastle north of Sydney and launched in September 1989. It undertook its maiden voyage to Heard Island, an external Australian territory in Antarctica, in 1990. It has since ferried researchers, crucial food and fuel supplies and

been involved in several rescues. Sean Lawrence, a seaman for 14 years on the vessel, planned to toast the icebreaker with a beer as he watched it leave the River Derwent. "You form a bond when you're isolated and working in extreme conditions," he said.

"To suddenly have that leaving your life, it leaves a bit of a hole." Lawrence was aboard the *Aurora Australis* when it ran aground near Mawson Station in Antarctica during a blizzard in 2016. — *AP*

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY

KOTA DIVISION

TENDER NOTICE CIVIL ENGINEERING

No: W/623/15

Divisional Engineer (Coordination), West Central Railway, Kota for and on behalf of President of Union of India invites following open E-Tenders. **Tender No. - 201/2020 R, Description of work -** Bharatpur, Sawaimadhopur, Bundi & Jhalawar City - Installation of 100 feet tall national flag in circulating area of railway stations, **Approx. Cost-** 3855311.80/-, **Earnest Money -** 77100.00/-, **Last date & Time of submission of tender -** 15.30 Hrs. on date 08.01.2021, **Tender No. - 202/2020, Description of work -** FATEHSINH PURA - Mathura section:- Fabrication, supplying & fixing H- Beam sleeper in place of damaged/corroded channel sleeper on various bridges under DEN/N (2034 Nos), **Approx. Cost-** 50386505.15/-, **Earnest Money -** 401900.00/-, **Last date & Time of submission of tender -** 15.30 Hrs. on date 08.01.2021, **Tender No. - 203/2020, Description of work -** GGC- 1. Ancillary work for operating of recycling plant at Gangapur city, 2. Providing 20,000 liter capacity sewage treatment plant for Railway station & colony area with pipeline network. 3.Provision of water recycling plant and associated pipe line work of capacity 2.0 lakh liter per day by MBBR technology at Mathura end east side, **Approx. Cost-** 11464475.04/-, **Earnest Money -** 207300.00/-, **Last date & Time of submission of tender -** 15.30 Hrs. on date 08.01.2021, **Tender No. - 204/2020 R, Description of work -** Gangapur City-Mathura Section: Provision of cover shed & improvement to drainage date Arrangement at various limited height subway to avoid water accumulation under ADENBTE., **Approx. Cost-** 22289955.06/-, **Earnest Money -** 261500.00/-, **Last date & Time of submission of tender -** 15.30 Hrs. on date 08.01.2021. Complete details are available in the E- tender notice uploaded on the railway web site <https://www.reps.gov.in> and also placed on the notice board of the Sr. Divisional Engineer (Coordination), DRM Office, West Central Railway Kota's office. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids up to closing date and time only.

Date: 11.12.2020

Sr. Divisional Engineer (Coordination) WCR, Kota

रेल यात्रा के दौरान शिकायत हेतु 138 पर एवं सुरक्षा हेतु 182 पर सम्पर्क करें

DECCAN Chronicle

13 DECEMBER 2020



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

Confessions of an old feminist

It was when I hit 40 that it started to bother me. Now this is true: born in the 1960s, my sister and I were sure that we would never live to see the change of the century, the fin de siècle. We would be so old! Almost 40. Life would surely be over. In our youth, we did the usual thing: asked our parents what life was like in the “olden days”.

Well, karma. It's now my turn. And the millennium happened, I turned 40. Getting my reading glasses almost on the date was exciting. I had always wanted to wear glasses and decided that I had “lost” my eyesight at 7 I wanted them so bad but that's another story. Anyway. With my new reading glasses, I was instantly outraged by such newspaper headlines: “Elderly woman of 45 run over”.

The lifestyle pages might have been full of rubbish about 60 being the new 40 and 70 the new 30 or whatever. But as far as the general public was concerned, 45 was elderly. Yes, my joints had started creaking. My hair was greying. And all the rest of the accoutrements of ageing but you know, big deal. I didn't feel “elderly”. And at best, I had moved up a notch from being “Didi” to “Bhabhi” or “Madam” as far as the general public were concerned. Respect at last! What respect? Ephemeral, as you will discover soon.

That 40 bridge was crossed almost two decades ago. I'm looking forward to some senior citizen benefits in a couple of years, if Modi government hasn't done away with them by then of course: 1/4 per cent interest rate increase on FDs and such. But before I even get there, I have to get around the fact that I have in less than 20 years progressed from “elderly” to my death bed.

All day I get advice from the yooofs of India. Do not say this. Do not think like that. When you eat, lift your hand to your mouth. You don't know this, but the Earth rotates on its axis. Why did you say this when you meant that? Did you know that the tomato is not indigenous to India? Or even better, how dare you say the tomato is not indigenous to India you traitorous old coot. Go home Auntie and all the rest of it. Not that I mind being called Auntie. I've been an Auntie since I was in my 20s.

And then, there are the men. Earlier they explained menstruation to me. Now they explain menopause. In between they explain everything else. To be fair, it's not my age so much that forces them to be so generous with their little knowledge. It's my femaleness. The thing is, it doesn't stop.

I'm not unsympathetic to ageists, don't get me wrong. I understand. Between the ages of 12 to 39, I also thought I knew everything and this self-delusional omniscience peaked in my 30s. I do think my Mother conked me on the head a few times and I still didn't get it. Thick and a know-it-all. Imagine how annoying that was.

As is the manner of all things, I learnt. That I am elderly, aged, stupid, ignorant, in dire need of schooling, that my own words need to be explained back to me and especially all my jokes (they may be terrible but they're mine!), maybe I even need cancelling. Because as I have learnt (I can still pick up one or two things) that it's mainly older people who get “cancelled”.

I genuinely thought I would be philosophical about the whole thing. End on the last resort poetry like TS Eliot: “I grow old, I grow old...”

Or WB Yeats and “arise and go now”.

But then I thought, what the what. There's still some life in the old dog. So here are the last two verses of Lewis Carroll's satirical version of Robert Southey's poem. Hah! I beat you to your “did you know”. And don't worry about the last line. I'm not that violent. Yet.

“You are old,” said the youth, “one would hardly suppose

That your eye was as steady as ever;

Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose—

What made you so awfully clever?”

“I have answered three questions, and that is enough,”

Said his father; “don't give yourself airs!

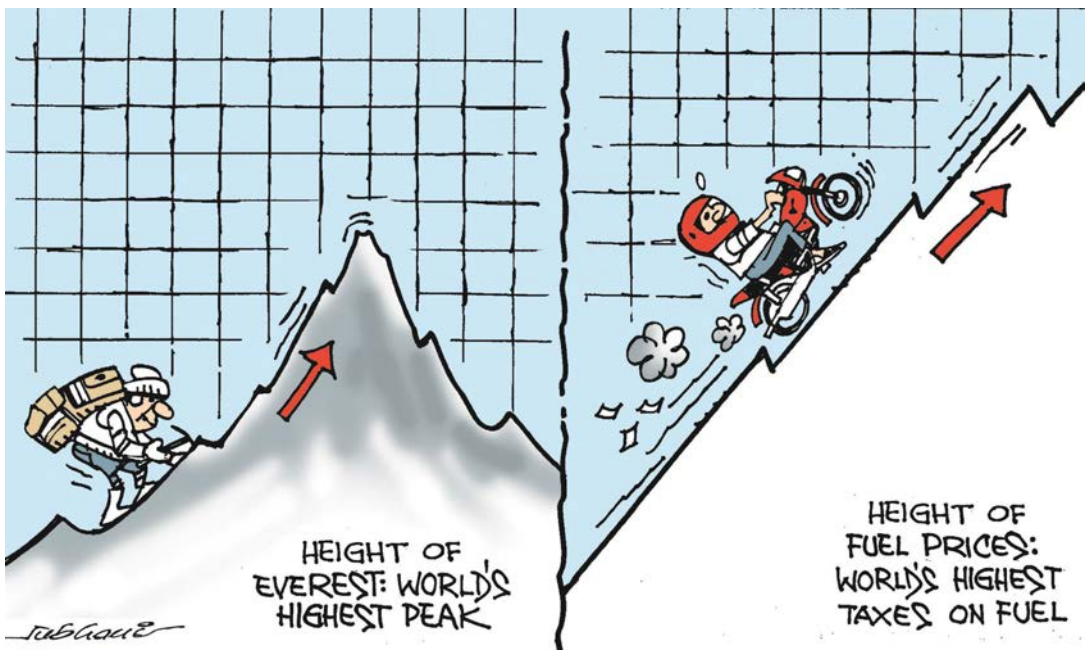
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?

Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs!”

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com, Else, send to Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110002.

Subhani



Ground reality darkens PM ‘vista’ of democracy



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

At the *bhoomipoojan* of the proposed new Parliament building it was heartening to hear Prime Minister Narendra Modi speak about the ancient democratic traditions in India, and modern India's belief in the theory and practice of democracy. It is, indeed, a matter of pride that defying the Cassandras who predicted the early demise of democracy in independent India, our Republic continues to be the world's largest democracy.

However, the PM's espousal of democracy sits in rather strong contrast to the actual practice of the government he heads, where more and more decisions appear to be in the nature of *farmans*. Demonetisation, which caused immense economic dislocation, and from which the country has still not fully recovered, was announced by the PM himself like a bolt from the blue one evening. Similarly, the decision to impose the lockdown at the onset of the Covid pandemic was done at four hours' notice without adequate advance preparation causing unprecedented suffering for millions of migrant labour.

The categorical statements by home minister Amit Shah that the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAA) will be explicitly linked to the patently discriminatory NRC exercise, was unprecedented by consultation and deliberation, thereby leading to nationwide protests. Most recently, the three farmer's bills were rammed through Parliament through a voice vote, without sufficient discussion, and without referring them to

a select committee of Parliament for wide-spread consultations with legitimate stakeholders. Consequently, the farmer's agitation is there for all to see.

In a democracy there is a tangible dialectic between intent and process. In dictatorships the process can be overlooked, and the ruling dispensation can proceed unchallenged in implementing its intent. That is why, undemocratic polities may give the illusion of taking decisions faster, but their foundations are brittle and their decisions, precisely because of the lack of democratic debate, questionable and unsustainable. When the intent, even if laudable, is unaccompanied by democratic processes, the result causes unease, apprehension, and social instability.

At the *bhoomipoojan*, the PM's eloquence on India's democratic credentials, and the importance of civilised discourse, could not hide the fact that the plan for the massive restructuring of New Delhi has suffered from an overwhelming opacity and lack of transparency. Once again, it is evidence of the current government deciding unilaterally what is good for the people, and then proceeding to imple-

Why was an open design competition not held? This was the methodology followed for rebuilding the World Trading Centre in New York, the Notre Dame revamp in Paris, and the Indira Gandhi Centre for the National Arts in New Delhi.

Lutyens, who built New Delhi along with Herbert Baker, was a racist, and what he left us with is not sacrosanct. But, in terms of the process for change, the government has been opaque to the point of being undemocratic.

ment that decision without fully consulting the people.

The facts speak for themselves. The building of a new Parliament is only one piece of a larger decision to almost rebuild the key heritage areas of New Delhi. As per the plan, the existing Parliament will be junked and made into a museum; the North and South Blocks of the central secretariat will also be junked and made into museums; the iconic Central Vista will be jettisoned, and make way for a new residence for the PM and the Vice President. A new Central Secretariat to house all the babus of the government will be constructed. Several key buildings in these areas will be demolished. In other words, the existing Master Plan for New Delhi will be more or less thrown into the dustbin.

Cities cannot be fossilised and should change with changing times and needs. We can, therefore, give the government the benefit of doubt in terms of its intent. Lutyens, who built New Delhi along with Herbert Baker, was an incorrigible racist, and what he left us with is not sacrosanct. But, in terms of the process for change, the government has been opaque to the point of being undemocratic.

The original brief for a project of this magnitude simply said that New Delhi must represent “the values of a new India” and be “rooted in the Indian culture and social milieu”. Should not what this should entail be a matter of democratic discussion,

among experts and in Parliament? Then, why was an open design competition not held? This was the methodology followed for the rebuilding of the World Trading Centre in New York, the renovation of the Notre Dame in Paris, and the Indira Gandhi Centre for the National Arts in New Delhi. Again, the selection was based on tenders for which 80 per cent was allocated for quality, and 20 per cent for price. But who decided what constituted the best quality? The government itself. The result was that a Gujarat based company got the contract even when its price bid was reportedly the highest.

Nor were the technical scores for the winning company disclosed. No convincing study was presented to show that the existing Parliament building is falling apart, and cannot be repurposed for future needs. No public jury of eminent architects, environmentalists, landscapers and town planners was appointed to judge the proposals. Why was the meeting of the Central Vista Committee held without the presence of non-government members? Why were environmental clearances sought to be obtained piecemeal, rather than for the project as a whole? Why has the approval of the Heritage Conservation Committee not yet been obtained? The only thing we see is a tearing hurry to complete this architectural megalomania by March 2022, and to start construction even when petitions against it are pending before the Supreme Court.

In a democracy, the democratic bona fides of a government depend on its willingness to follow the democratic process of discussion and debate. In the absence of this, eloquence with regard to our democratic past appears less than convincing.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

VACCINE RACE

Apropos the article (*V is for valour, victory...But V is also for vaccine!*, Dec. 12). It is not only timely but it throws light on the repercussions post-invention of the vaccine for the dreaded and invisible Covid-19, thanks to the barrage of pharma companies vying with each other in taking credit for the panacea, leave alone the genuine effect of the vaccine and its accessibility to the hoi polloi.

Come what may, the pharma companies should not make us all guinea pigs. As the swansong of the write-up opined rhetorically, the powerful mandate of the policy managers and the government in particular should make a beeline for a permanent solution differentiating the fake and the original vaccines lest the hapless citizens should be taken for a ride.

E.S.Chandrasekaran, Chennai

CENTRE-WB SPAT

THE BJP is known for its well-oiled electioneering machine, while TMC leader Mamata Banerjee is also a strong campaigner. However, with the convoy attack, the heated campaign has spilled over to becoming a Centre-State spat. Thus Mamata played into the hands of BJP in a prestigious Bengal polls. The recent stone attack had injured several senior State BJP leaders. The head-to-head fight between the BJP and the TMC has been ongoing ever since the former picked up 18 of the State's 42 Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 general elections. Having shown itself to be a credible political force in the State, the BJP went into election mode early with a “Now, Bengal” slogan announced right after the NDA win in Bihar. The BJP campaign is focusing on the CAA that grants citizenship to Hindu refugees from other countries, a considerable population in the State. Having found a firm base in Bengal, BJP does not want to lose the grip and TMC supremo does not want to lose power.

C.K. Subramaniam, Chennai

MAMATA'S SISTERLY ACT

PERENNIALY ANGRY lady, Mamata has dramatically dissed BJP President Nadda's name in bad taste on the dais and asserted that stone throwing was planned by BJP to tarnish the great reputation of TMC. She asserted BJP is a party of Gujarat and Delhi and they are outsiders to Bengal and hence unwelcome. Feeling insecure about future with many of her colleagues switching to BJP, she is lambasting central leaders, governor and central forces in WB. Even during Marxist rule WB witnessed lawlessness and political murders and now only the players have changed. BJP's recent victories in Bihar, byelections and municipal elections in Rajasthan are warning signals for Mamata to mend her wayward and flippant management of state policies. She should know that stalwarts like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalithaa, Maya and Sheila also lost elections and intelligent and silent voters will decide what is good for them. Her Odisha neighbour, Naveen is an example for decent and courteous behaviour and in his fifth term with none to disturb him. Might is not right and meekness is no weakness..

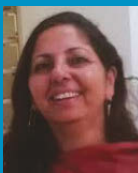
Parthasarathy Mandadi, Tirupati

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup

Madhav image irks BJP top brass, he may be repatriated



Once a favourite of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the BJP and the media, Ram Madhav is clearly in the wilderness today. When he was dropped as BJP general secretary some months ago, it was expected that the high-profile leader would be rewarded with a Rajya Sabha seat as a precursor to his induction as a minister in the Narendra Modi government. His cheerleaders, especially those in the media, were convinced that it was only a matter of time before Mr Madhav was rehabilitated. But, so far, there is nothing on the horizon. A Rajya Sabha seat that did fall vacant recently was awarded to Sushil Modi, former deputy chief minister of Bihar. Apparently, the BJP leadership is not happy with the larger-than-life image Mr Madhav has cultivated for himself. It feels he is far too individualistic to be contained by a system. It is now up to the RSS to take a call on Mr Madhav's future as he was loaned to the party by the Sangh. It is speculated that he will go back to the RSS

but there are many in the Sangh who are not happy about his return.

Finding itself on the back foot when the farmers began their agitation against the farm bills, the Modi government was busy defending itself and hard selling the agriculture reforms. The media, too, kept the focus on the protesters and pushed the government to respond to their demands. However, this narrative underwent a dramatic change when Opposition parties extended their support to the December 8 Bharat bandh called by the farmers. The government cleverly shifted the spotlight to what it described as the Opposition's “hypocritical” stand on the farm bills. The government first fielded Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad to attack the Congress which, he said, had proposed the introduction of similar reforms in its election manifesto. On the day of the bandh, the BJP unleashed a galaxy of senior ministers and chief ministers to repeat the same accusations. Television news channels promptly

fell into the trap. As a result, most news bulletins were replete with interviews of BJP ministers with an occasional concession being made to an Opposition leader. The bandh and the farmers were last on the priority list.

For three years, the West Bengal police was on the hunt for Bimal Gurung, the founder of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, who had been charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for his role in the 104-day shutdown in Darjeeling. Mr Gurung suddenly emerged from hiding in October and declared he was snapping ties with the BJP and pledged support to West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. As a result, fortune is now smiling on Mr Gurung. From being a hunted man and constantly on the run, he has now been provided security by the same police that was on the lookout for him. Not just that but the grapevine says Mr Gurung has also been given sufficient funds to enable him to campaign for the Trinamul

Congress as Ms Banerjee faces a tough Assembly election next year. In this process, the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland has been put on the backburner as the Trinamul chief has said a firm no to a division of the state.

The Capital is rife with speculation that it was not Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh who had sought a meeting with home minister Amit Shah. Instead, it is said, Mr Singh was summoned to Delhi by Mr Shah for a discussion on the farmers' stir. The home minister is not happy with Mr Singh's open support to the protesters and his laxity in dealing with them. Mr Shah wants the chief minister to initiate moves to end the blockade of the highways. Apparently, Mr Singh's attention was also drawn to the pending cases of financial impropriety against his son Raninder Singh. The Punjab chief minister, however, stuck to his guns and has instead put the onus of ending the agitation on the Centre.

The 23 Congress leaders, popularly known as the G-23, who had written to party president Sonia Gandhi in August seeking organisational reforms and a more visible leadership, have not given up. Though they were snubbed at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee called some months ago to discuss their letter, the G-23 has once again approached Sonia Gandhi for a meeting. They are keen that this should not be a virtual meeting as they would like to meet her personally to discuss the issues they raised in their letter. A reply is still awaited. Sonia Gandhi was earlier away to Goa for a winter break but now that she is back, the G-23 is hoping it will get an early response. But it may well prove to be a long wait. Now that Sonia Gandhi's political secretary Ahmed Patel is not there to placate the critics, it is anybody's guess when this meeting would be scheduled.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

Everton blame Covid for loss

London: Everton have announced club record losses of £140 million after the implications of the coronavirus pandemic significantly impacted revenues. The Toffees said the impact of Covid-19 amounted to an unforeseen loss of £67.3 million due to a cut in match-day revenue and television rebates. However, the figures show Everton would still have made a huge loss without the disruption of the pandemic after also posting a then-record loss of £111.8 million last year. The club spent £113 million on new players for the 2019/20 season and have splashed another £70 million in the most recent transfer window as well as recruiting Carlo Ancelotti as manager on a lucrative four-and-a-half year deal in December 2019. The sacking of former manager Marco Silva and his coaching staff a year ago amounted to £6.6 million in compensation costs, while another £20 million was spent on preparation for a new stadium. Everton chief executive Denise Barrett-Baxendale said: "The impact of Covid-19 having a profound, wide-reaching and material impact on our figures." — AFP



Patrick Reed

Reed opens up two-shot lead

Dubai: Former Masters champion Patrick Reed opened up a two-shot lead at the halfway stage of the DP World Tour Championship on Friday as he attempts to become the first American to top The Race to Dubai Rankings. The 30-year-old followed his opening 70 with an eight-under 64 to go to 10 under for the tournament. "Anytime you shoot eight under par you're always happy," Reed, who heads into the weekend two clear of England's Matthew Fitzpatrick, told *europentour.com*. "I feel like today I got off to a little better start than I did yesterday and the putter was working a little bit. "I was able to warm up a little bit last night on the range after the round and tighten things up, and today I gave myself a lot of chances." A birdie at the second was followed by further gains at the third, fifth and seventh as Reed turned in 31. After another birdie on the tenth, Reed dropped his first shot of the week at the 12th and was in danger of running up another bogey after a poor tee shot on the 13th. However, he produced a remarkable up and down before converting from 20 feet on the 15th, six feet at the next and closing out his round with a gain from five feet at the last. — AFP

Harden sits out of Rockets opener

Los Angeles: James Harden has ended his training camp hold-out, but that hasn't put a lid on the controversy surrounding the disgruntled Houston Rockets star. The 31-year-old American appears likely to begin the season with the Rockets despite a trade demand from the team he has spent the last eight years with. Harden showed up late for the Rockets training camp and must have six straight negative Covid-19 tests before the league will clear him to practice or play with the team. He was not in the lineup when the Rockets opened the preseason with a 125-104 win over the Chicago Bulls on Friday. It was one of five contests to begin the preseason following the shortest offseason in NBA history. Just two months have passed since the Los Angeles Lakers won their 17th NBA title by beating the Miami Heat in six games. Harden has reportedly requested to be traded to a contender. Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Miami and Milwaukee are among the teams that he could end up with if the Rockets grant his wish. — AFP

Vallejo saves Valencia

Manu's late goal salvages a point for VCF in La Liga

Valencia, Dec. 12: Manu Vallejo's 83rd minute strike helped Valencia eke out a 2-2 draw against Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish La Liga on Saturday.

Both Valencia and Athletic Bilbao were looking to return to winning ways and the match turned out to be an entertainer.

Carlos Soler scored the opening goal for Valencia by converting a penalty, while Asier Villalibre produced an equaliser in the 55th minute.

Earlier, Center forward Shon Weissman's first goals for Real Valladolid made a difference as they came from behind to beat Osasuna 3-2.

Weissman was signed in the summer and the Israeli went scoreless for his first 11 games until Friday when he scored the first and last goals, both headers into the bottom right corner.

A third header was saved, and moments later he was substituted after receiving a yellow card.

Valladolid moved two points above the drop zone, while Osasuna dropped one place to 19th in the 20-team standings led by Atletico Madrid.

Weissman's opener in the seventh minute was matched within 20 minutes by Ante Budimir's own header for Osasuna. Pressure continued to build and Roberto Torres put them ahead two minutes before half-time, the score reflecting Osasuna's dominance. But Valladolid's comeback was sustained, as Fabian Orellana blasted in a penalty for Sergio Herrera's foul on Joaquín Fernández, and Weissman put them back in front in the 76th.

— Agencies



Valencia's Manu Vallejo (third from left) scores against Athletic Bilbao in their La Liga match in Valencia on Saturday. — valenciacf.com

Conte says he needs time to build 'skyscraper'

Milan, Dec. 12: Antonio Conte told Inter Milan fans on Saturday he needed time to turn Inter Milan into "a skyscraper" in European football.

Inter's season in Europe is over after finishing bottom of their Champions League group, a third consecutive financially-damaging exit in the first round.

"The fact that the league and Coppa Italia are all that remain for us is painful for me," Conte said before Sunday's Serie A game against Cagliari.

"Our elimination from the Champions League burns and those who know me know how I'm feeling about it.

"I want to send a message to Inter fans, we're

not giving in to those who hope to destroy what we are trying to create after a year and a half of work.

"There is too much negativity, even if I understand that there is impatience after ten years without trophies.

"But we started from the ground up, we need time. Once the base has been built, one can think of the skyscraper, the

kind Inter fans deserve."

Inter are second in Serie A, five points behind leaders AC Milan.

The 18-time champions have not won the league since 2010, having finished runners-up last season.

But Conte said he had not shirked from the difficulties he knew existed when he took over in 2019. — AFP

Verstappen snatches pole

Yas Marina (UAE), Dec. 12: Red Bull's Max Verstappen clinched his maiden pole position of the campaign on Saturday for the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

The Dutch driver edged Valtteri Bottas in second and the Finn's Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton, who is racing for the first time since winning the championship after contracting coronavirus, in third for Sunday's Grand Prix.

It was Verstappen's first pole since the 2019 Brazilian Grand Prix

and the third of his career after clocking his best lap in one minute and 35.246 seconds to beat Bottas by 0.025 seconds.

The top three were separated by only 0.086sec, but it was a disappointment for Mercedes who missed out on pole for only the second time this year. Lance Stroll of the Mercedes-powered Racing Point team claimed the other.

Lando Norris, equalling his previous best, was fourth for McLaren ahead of Alex Albon in the second Red

Bull and Carlos Sainz in the second McLaren.

Having said on Thursday he expected to claim 'his seat' for third place again, Verstappen was delighted.

"I am very happy with that. Luckily, for me, everything came together in that final lap. It seems like we have a decent top speed this weekend so, hopefully, this will work out for tomorrow," he said.

"It's a long season for everyone with a lot of races in a row so this was good for the whole team." — AFP



Red Bull's Max Verstappen in action during the final qualifying session for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at the Yas Marina circuit on Saturday. — AP

MARY KOM A BIG SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR BALA

New Delhi, Dec. 12: Star Indian woman footballer Bala Devi says she took inspiration from boxing legend Mary Kom, who achieved unprecedented success as a sports person despite having humble roots.

Bala, the first Indian woman to play professional football in a top-flight league in Europe, talked about an interaction with six-time world champion and Olympic bronze medalist Mary Kom during the 2014 Asian Games.

"Mary Kom is a big source of inspiration for me. She came from such humble beginnings and through her hard work, she broke so many records. Even after becoming a mother, she continues to break records and win laurels for the country," Bala said.

"We interacted at the Asian Games in 2014 and watched her train. She is a very friendly person and also supported us during our games," Bala told AIFF TV.

Bala recently scored her first goal for the Rangers FC in the Scottish Women's Premier League in a 9-0 decimation of Motherwell



Bala Devi

FC. She signed an 18-month contract with Rangers in January.

"After the goal, a lot of people wished me and many were talking and writing about it, which made me feel very proud. After that, I was nominated for the AFC Player of the Week and seeing my name on the list alongside such icons made me happy," she said.

"I just want everyone to continue supporting us so we can keep achieving bigger things for the country in the future," the 30-year-old said. — PTI

SEXUAL ABUSE | CASE

FIFA sends new officials to Haiti

Zurich, Dec. 12: FIFA will send an emergency management team to run soccer in Haiti, saying it believed the top official it banned for life for sexually abusing players is still running the sport and intimidating witnesses.

Yves Jean-Bart was expelled from soccer last month after a FIFA ethics committee investigation confirmed claims by female national team players of systematic sexual abuse since 2014.

The 73-year-old Jean-Bart has been president of the Haiti Football Federation (FHF) for 20 years.

"There are strong indications that (Jean-Bart) is still exerting his influence within the FHF by being involved in the running of its daily affairs," FIFA said in a statement on Friday. Multiple sources have asserted that there has been continuous interference from the suspended FHF president and his associates that seeks to prevent and/or discourage victims and witnesses from giving testimony in the ongoing investigations. FIFA said.

Soccer's world body said it gave interim management a two-year mandate and will help ensure that the ongoing ethics investi-

● **Yves Jean-Bart was expelled from soccer last month after a FIFA ethics committee investigation confirmed claims by female national team players of systematic sexual abuse since 2014.**

● **The 73-year-old Jean-Bart has been president of the Haiti Football Federation (FHF) for 20 years.**

gations may continue unimpeded.

New leadership will be appointed by FIFA and the Miami-based North American soccer body Concacaf. Jean-Bart has denied the allegations and pledged to appeal his FIFA ban to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland. The Haitian judicial system has declined to file charges.

The abuse is said to have happened at the country's national training center at Croix-des-Bouquets, known as The Ranch, which FIFA helped fund. — AP

NATIONAL | FOOTBALL

U-17 girls get AIFF support

New Delhi, Dec. 12: India senior men's and women's team members, including the head coaches, lauded All India Football Federation (AIFF) for sharing with the U-17 women's national team members a roadmap for them.

They were given assurances that they still have a lot to look forward to despite the postponement of next year's FIFA U-17 World Cup to 2022.

Arjuna awardee custodian Gurpreet Singh Sandhu has always been vocal about his support for women's football in India.

The seasoned Blue Tigers goalkeeper termed this as a "great step" for Indian football to move forward. "A great step towards the right direction," Sandhu tweeted.

With the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India being shifted to 2022, AIFF president Praful Patel stated that the players will receive many opportunities to represent the country in the future and highlighted that the AIFF is committed to developing women's football on a long-term basis.

He mentioned that Indian Arrows team for girls will be formed that will take part in the Hero Indian Women's League.

"We want to give them the opportunity to play at the Asian Games and like we formed the Indian Arrows boys' team, we will form an Indian Arrows team for girls that will take part in the Hero Indian Women's League," Patel said. — PTI

"We are committed to women's football and want to keep moving forward. As women's football continues to progress, we hope to see the Indian team participating in the FIFA Women's World Cup and I am hopeful that by the 2027 edition, with the continuous support, this team can represent the nation very well."

India senior men's team coach Igor Stimac tweeted, "Our U-17 girls are the future of @IndianFootball Women's team and it's great to see their future is so meticulously planned. @praful_patel & @KirenRijju have always promoted women's football and it shows how Indian Football is moving forward."

His female counterpart Maymol Rocky also tweeted in the same line, saying "It's always great to see Shri @praful_patel Sir and Shri @KirenRijju Sir sharing the long-term plan with our U-17 girls who'll be the backbone of our Senior National Team in near future. Best of luck, girls!"

Indian women's team captain Ashalata Devi also took to Twitter to thank the sports administrators.

"Girls, there is a long way to go and we wish you all the best for your next endeavour. Thank you @praful_patel Sir and @KirenRijju Sir for taking time out from your busy schedule and discussing the long-term plan with our U-17 girls," Ashalata wrote. — PTI

Women's hockey coach happy with fitness level of team

Bengaluru, Dec. 12: Indian women's hockey head coach Sjoerd Marijne on Saturday said that the team has achieved their primary target of improving fitness level of the players as they were left with practically no competition this season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The team did not play any competition since February when it had travelled to New Zealand. Since then it has been camping at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre here. The camp ends on Saturday.

"One of our goals was improving fitness and that worked out very well. In the past few weeks, we also worked with the junior men's team in a few sessions to test our speed and handling skills and I am happy with the progress

We have done well so far in utilising this time and our primary focus is the Olympics. We are hopeful of playing good matches early next year that will show where we stand and we can plan the months leading up to the Games keeping in mind the areas that require improvement basis our performance in these tours

— SJOERD MARIJNE
Indian women's hockey coach

we have made as a group," Marijne said.

He believes the core group had worked hard towards a good build-up to the Olympic Games next year.

"We have done well so far in utilising this time and our primary focus is the Olympics.

"We are hopeful of playing good matches early next year that will show where we stand and we can plan the months leading up to the Games keeping in mind the areas that

require improvement basis our performance in these tours," the head coach explained.

Marijne said the break the players are getting will help them recover from the mental fatigue.

"The players have worked hard these past four and half months and they have done it without complaining about anything — be it living in a bio bubble with zero outside interaction or living away from their families for so long.

"I am extremely happy with the attitude they have showed these past four months and I understand that the training camp was physically and mentally quite challenging. This break will be especially good to recover from the mental fatigue."

The players are given certain team-related assignments when they are on a break.

"I would want the players to enjoy time with their family and follow the Hockey India SOP when they meet people and socialise because the pandemic is still not over," the coach said.

"They have all been given some homework to do as well because this break is part of our training schedule except, they won't be using the stick and the ball." — PTI



Indian women's hockey head coach Sjoerd Marijne (centre) in a file pic.

SHORT TAKES

Harris added to Australia squad

Sydney: Victoria's Marcus Harris was on Saturday added to an injury-plagued Australia squad for next week's first Test against India after Will Pucovski was ruled out of the series opener alongside David Warner. The four-match series begins with the day-night Test at Adelaide from December 17. Harris was drafted into the squad for the seasoned Warner, who suffered a groin injury during the second one-day international against India, while Pucovski sustained a concussion while batting for Australia A in a tour match against the visitors at Drummoyne Oval in Sydney. Cricket Australia (CA) said both batsmen will target a return ahead of the Boxing Day Test, scheduled to be held in Melbourne from December 26-30. — PTI

Windies struggle against Kiwis

Wellington: Kyle Jamieson has made a reputation in his short Test cricket career for New Zealand as a man who makes things happen. He enhanced that reputation on the second day of the second test, taking 5-34 as New Zealand had the West Indies 124-8 at stumps in reply to its first innings of 460. The tourists need 136 to avoid the follow on. It was Jamieson's second five wicket bag in only five tests in which he has increased his claim to the designation allrounder with a half a century and two innings of 40 or more. — AP

Angulo on target as Goa post win

Goa: A second successive win helped FC Goa climb to fourth on the ISL Season 7 table as they beat a gritty Odisha FC 1-0 at the GMC Stadium on Saturday. Igor Angulo (45+1') netted the winner to help Juan Ferrando's side register another victory. Arshdeep Singh shone for Odisha between the sticks but their inefficiency upfront meant Stuart Baxter's side remained winless in the competition. Vinit Rai was handed his first start of the season as Odisha made four changes to their line-up. Ferrando rang in just one change as Alberto Nogueira replaced Edu Bedia. Goa outplayed their opponents in the first half and headed into the break with a one-goal lead. — Agencies

Ashwin, Amir steal the show

Coimbatore: The season's opening round of the 23rd JK Tyre - FMSCI National Racing Championship witnessed lots of excitement, with Ashwin Datta and Amir Sayed stealing the show on Day 2 here on Saturday. The 16-year-old Sayed from Kottayam proved his class winning every other race, four in all, with ease in the Novice Cup.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia 'A' vs India: Day 3 from 9 am on Sony Six, HD

Big Bash League: Sydney Sixers vs Melbourne Renegades from 1.45 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

Lanka Premier League: Semifinal-1 from 7.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Southampton vs Sheffield United from 5.30 pm; Crystal Palace vs Tottenham Hotspur from 7.45 pm; Fulham vs Liverpool from 10 pm; Arsenal vs Burnley from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, Leicester vs Brighton from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 2

Indian Super League: NorthEast United vs Chennaiyin from 4.50 pm; Bengaluru vs Kerala Blasters from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Cagliari vs Inter Milan from 5 pm; Napoli vs Sampdoria from 7.30 pm; Genoa vs Juventus from 10.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

FORMULA ONE

Abu Dhabi Grand Prix: Main race from 6.35 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

UFC

Fight Night: Junior Dos Santos vs Ciryil Gane and other bouts from 8.30 am on Sony Ten 2, HD

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ROHIT OR MISS?

Sharma 'clinically fit', to be reassessed in Oz

New Delhi, Dec. 12: The BCCI on Saturday declared senior batsman Rohit Sharma "clinically fit" to join the Indian team in Australia but said a call on his participation in the last two matches of the Test series there will be taken after a reassessment by the squad's medical team.

Rohit had sustained a hamstring injury during the IPL, which led to him missing the white-ball leg of the ongoing Australia tour. He is out of reckoning for the first two Tests of the four-match series. The opening Test starts at Adelaide on December 17.

"He has been given a detailed programme to follow for the duration of the two weeks he will be quarantined for. He will be reassessed by the Team India medical team post his quarantine to establish his fitness status and a call on his participation in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy will be taken accordingly," the BCCI said in a statement.

Rohit on Friday cleared an eagerly-watched fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru and will leave for Australia on December 14, three days before the start of the marquee Test series against the world's number one team.

"... Rohit Sharma has completed his rehabilitation process at the NCA in Bengaluru and is now clinically fit. He has been rehabilitating and training at NCA since 19th November following a high-grade left hamstring injury suffered during the Indian Premier League (IPL)," the statement said.

The BCCI said the NCA medical team is satisfied with Rohit's fitness but added that he will need to work on his endurance. Rohit's fitness test took place under the supervision of NCA director Rahul Dravid, who was entrusted with the responsibility of giving him his fitness certificate. — PTI



Rohit Sharma



Hanuma Vihari (left) and Rishabh Pant during their unbeaten century stand in a tour match at Sydney. — BCCI

PANT, VIHARI STAKE CLAIM AS INDIA DOMINATE

Sydney, Dec. 12: Rishabh Pant and Hanuma Vihari put themselves in the reckoning for next week's first Test with contrasting hundreds as India thoroughly dominated Australia A in the pink ball warm-up match here on Saturday.

Needing 19 runs to reach his century when Jack Wildermuth commenced the second evening's final over, Pant clobbered him for 4, 4, 6, 4, 6, 4, to remain unbeaten on a blistering 103 off only 73 balls.

Overall, he hit nine fours and six sixes.

At the other end, Vihari laboured his way to a fine 104-run knock off 194 balls.

Also staking a claim for selection is young Shubman Gill, with an elegant 65 off 78 balls and 10 sweetly-timed boundaries.

In the final session of play, Pant's aggressive approach paid dividends as he smashed the Australia A bowlers to all corners of the Sydney Cricket Ground, the

southpaw making a strong case for himself for the wicketkeeper's job in Adelaide ahead of Test specialist Wriddhiman Saha.

To cite an example of his power-hitting, Pant swept one over the cow corner for a six, leaving Nic Maddinson to search for the ball among the rows of chairs at the SCG.

At the close of play, India were strongly placed at 386 for four for an overall lead by 472 runs, having bundled out the home team out for a

paltry 108 in their first innings on Friday.

In their first innings, India were all out for 194, which would have been far less if not for pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's maiden first-class fifty, but the visitors staged a strong comeback with both bat and ball. — PTI

BRIEF SCORES

India 194 and 386/4 in 90 overs (Hanuma Vihari 104*, Rishabh Pant 103*, Shubman Gill 65; Steketee 2/54) vs Australia 'A' 108.

Siraj earns praise for sporting gesture

Sydney, Dec. 12: India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj's fine gesture of rushing in and attending to rival Cameron Green after he was hit on the head during the opening day of the warm-up game here has got praised from the Australian media.

Green attempted a catch off a straight drive from Jasprit Bumrah off his own bowling but the ball flew through his fingers and hit on the right side of his head.

Siraj immediately dropped his bat and rushed to check on Green. Bumrah also did the same following his teammate.

Green, who suffered concussion, was later ruled



Mohammed Siraj (right) rushes to check on Cameron Green, who got hit on the head by a Jasprit Bumrah straight drive. — BCCI

out of the remainder of the three-day pink warm-up game between the Indians and Australia 'A' side. "Indian cricketer Mohd Siraj has been praised for his sportsmanship in helping young all-rounder Cameron Green after he suffered a blow to the head during the match," tweeted *9News Australia*.

"Non-striker Mohammed Siraj and umpire Gerard Abood rushed to check on the star all-rounder, who patted Bumrah on the leg to assure him he was OK," said *abc.net.au*.

"Mohammed Siraj, at the non-striker's end, dropped his bat and im-

mediately rushed to check on the injured bowler," wrote *cricket.com.au*.

Siraj's gesture has also taken the internet by storm with netizens lauding him for his sportsman spirit. "Absolutely brilliant from Mohammed Siraj ... did not care about the run and straightaway dropped his bat and checked on Green. Top spirit by him," wrote a Twitter user.

The Indian Board also shared a picture in which Green can be seen on his knees after the blow on his head and Siraj standing next to him and checking on the Australian bowler. — PTI

Thapa could return: Laszlo

NEHA SURANA | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Chennaiyin FC fans heaved a sigh of relief when a training video of Anirudh Thapa was posted on social media ahead of their ISL match against NorthEast United. The midfielder had suffered an injury to his ankle during CFC's defeat at the hands of Bengaluru FC.

"Thapa was more or less ready for the last game. But he was in pain so we didn't risk him. Now, he is training with the team. It looks good for Thapa. Isma will take 14 days (to return). It's not too serious, according to the medical team. For Sipovic, it's more or less seven days, and he will be back," head coach Csaba Laszlo said.

Thapa's injury was not the only concern for Chennaiyin as the centre-back Enes Sipovic and forward Esmael Goncalves were also injured. With two wins and three draws in five games, NorthEast are currently placed second.

Laszlo said NorthEast are

a dangerous side. "They have had a good start. They have a good set of attacking players. They can score goals against every opponent. We must be prepared," said Laszlo.

Last year finalists, CFC are currently placed eighth on the points table with four points from five matches. And the coach has not pressed the panic button yet as he is confident of his team's comeback.

"Even though we lost the previous two games we played good football. I don't want to talk about what our position will be at the end of the season. Sometimes you have unlucky days and against Mumbai, we were out of luck. I hope in the next game, the odds are in our favour and we can get better results," he said.

Laszlo was disappointed with the referee's decisions after the match against Mumbai as CFC were "denied penalties". When asked if he would like the league to have Video Assistant Referee (VAR), he said, "I'm all in for it".

14-YEAR-OLD SARTHAK SCORCHES THE TRACK

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 12

Anish Damodar Shetty (Race Concepts), a fitness trainer from Bengaluru, pulled off a brilliant tactical win in the premier Pro-Stock 301-400cc class race in the first round of the MRF MMSC fmsci Indian National Racing Championship at the MMRT, here on Saturday.

Pune's Sarthak Chavan, all of 14 years, became the youngest winner of the weekend when he streaked to victory in the Open (NSF 250R) class of the Idemitsu Honda India Talent Cup.

Biding his time, Shetty, starting fifth on the grid, made a strong move in the second half of the six-lap race to finished ahead of a strong TVS Racing combination of multiple champion Jagan Kumar and defending champion Deepak Ravikumar who raced nursing an injured knee following a crash during practice session earlier in the week.

Equally impressive winner was TVS Racing's KY Ahamed who held off Eneoes Honda Erula Racing riders Mathana Kumar and Rajiv Sethu, in the Pro-Stock 165cc category.

ry Sethu, the Race-1 winner yesterday, could not capitalise on a pole-position start. Ahamed's victory somewhat compensated for the absence of teammate and multiple champion Jagan Kumar whose bike stalled on the out-lap before the race.

RESULTS

National Championship: Pro-Stock 301-400cc (Race-2): 1. Anish Damodara Shetty (Race Concepts) (11mins, 51.346); 2. Jagan Kumar (TVS Racing) (11:54.613); 3. Deepak Ravikumar (TVS Racing) (11:54.705).

Pro-Stock 165cc (Race-2): 1. KY Ahamed (TVS Racing) (12:17.204); 2. S Mathana Kumar (Eneoes Honda Erula Racing) (12:17.281); 3. Rajiv Sethu (Eneoes Honda Erula Racing) (12:17.344).

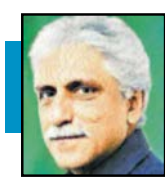
Novice (Stock 165cc, Race-2): 1. Aravind Selvam (Rulxex Rockers Racing) (13:05.564); 2. Mohan Babu P (Pvt, Chennai) (13:05.743); 3. Seshadri S (Sparks Racing) (13:06.196).

Girls (Stock 165cc, Race-2, 3 laps): 1. Ann Jennifer (Sparks Racing) (06:40.064); 2. Lani Zena Fernandez (Gusto Racing) (06:48.619); 3. Rakshit Dave (Gusto Racing) (07:02.282).



Sarthak Chavan

India's batting needs to deliver in Test series



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

By the time you read this, Rohit Sharma will hopefully have joined the Indian team in Australia. A 14-day quarantine period is mandatory Down Under so Rohit will perforce have to miss the first two Tests. Considering his experience and caliber, this is a setback for India.

There has been so much debate on the Rohit issue that I have nothing further to add save that this unsavoury episode need never have been had key

members in the Indian cricket establishment shown better co-ordination and communication. There's a serious lesson to be learnt.

Of immediate importance, however, is how the Indian team in Australia can make the Test rubber, which starts on December 17, rewarding too after having shared honours in the white ball series.

In ODIs, India evaded a whitewash with a fine performance in the third match. Likewise, Australia

prevented a clean sweep by India in the T20s, winning the last match. Both teams missed key players in one or the other series, so there was no advantage for either.

Keen competition in the ODIs and T20s has set the tone for the marquee show on this tour, the Test matches. White ball cricket can't be compared to the longest format, but seeing the intensity of players from both side, my appetite is whetted for a stirring contest.

In 2018, India had created history winning a rubber for the first time ever Down Under. That this had taken 70 years (Independent India's first assignment was against Don Bradman's team in 1947-48) shows what a massive psychological hurdle

beating Australia in Australia had been.

Doubtless the Australians will be revenge hungry this time. Of the two major domos missing in 2018, David Warner has unfortunately injured himself and will not play at Adelaide. But Steve Smith has looked in ominous touch this season, and young Marnus Labuschagne has taken the cricket world by storm since the 2019 Ashes.

The big challenge for India, however, is not so much in keeping the Aussie batsmen quiet, but for their own batsmen to come good on pacy, bouncy pitches and give their bowlers enough runs to defend.

In 2018, Bumrah, Shami and Ishant performed magnificently, but without

the dogged and determined batting of Pujara — ably supported by Kohli — the best efforts of the bowlers would have been in vain. As a ball park figure, India's batting needs to delivery 380-400 runs first up to be competitive.

With Rohit not available for the first two Tests and Kohli returning home after Adelaide, India's batting has a vulnerability about it that the formidable Aussie attack of Cummins, Hazlewood, Pattinson/Starc and Lyons will want to exploit.

In the two warm up games, the team has shown spirit, skill and ambition. Both in batting and bowling there have been some fine performances, though it must be said that most of the front-line Aussie players were

not involved.

The second match at Sydney, which finishes today, was the more important being a day-night affair played with a pink ball, in preparation for the first Test.

Several Indian players (Shaw, Gill, Vihari, Pant, Saha, Saini, Siraj) are on trial, some key ones (Bumrah, Shami, Rahane, Agarwal) were looking to get into rhythm before the first Test. In the two days play as yet, India have been quite impressive.

Bundled out for a paltry 194 on a spicy pitch — largely through a spunky 71-run partnership between Bumrah and Siraj — India's pace bowlers struck back marvelously to bowl out the opponents for 108. The hostility with which Bumrah, Shami,

Saini and Siraj bowled wouldn't have been lost on the Aussies.

In the second innings, with the pitch having eased considerably, India (barring Shaw who threw his wicket away) batted consistently down the order to swell the lead past 325 and put themselves in a potentially winning position.

But this success has also created a vexing situation for the think tank: there are multiple claimants for the second opener's spot, the number 6 slot, the wicket-keeper, the spin all-rounder, and who the 3rd/4th seamer should be.

Skipper Kohli and chief coach Shastri have a head scratching dilemma of getting the right combination for Adelaide over the next few days.