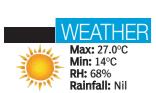
THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | TUESDAY | 22 DECEMBER 2020



Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 27/14 QC



DEATHS (+330)(+21,247)1,00,75,079 1,46,134

covid19india.org STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+316)(+2)TS: 2,81,730 1,515 (+214)(+2)7,078 AP: 8,78,937

CASES AROUND THE WORLD



worldometers.info/ coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Ashtami Star: Uttarabhadra till 1.38 am Varjyam: 9.42 am to 11.28 am **Durmuhurtam:** 8.57 am to 9.41 am; 10.56 pm to 11.48 pm **Rahukalam:** 3 pm to 4.30 pm Jamadi-ul-Awwal 6, 1442 AH **PRAYERS** Fajar: 5.08 am

Zohar: 12.05 pm **Asar:** 4.11 pm Maghrib: 5.47 pm Isha: 7.02 pm **SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM**

SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM MOONSET 11.41 PM MOONRISE 01.22 PM



Everything is ready for our minister's surprise and unexpected visit!

SHORT TAKES

Cong leader Vora dies due to Covid

New Delhi: Veteran Congress leader Motilal Vora, a staunch Gandhi family lovalist who had a political career spanning almost five decades, died at a hospital here on Monday following post-COVID-19 complications, his family said. He was 93. Vora was admitted to the **Escorts Hospital in Okhla** here a few days ago with a urinary infection. He devel-

oped a severe lung infection and was put on ventilator support, his family said. He completed 93 years on Sunday. He will be cremated in Chhattisgarh where he stayed most of his life. Vora, a two-time former chief minister of undivided Madhya Pradesh and also a former governor of Uttar Pradesh, had served as a Rajya Sabha member four times and as a

Lok Sabha member once. He started his political innings as an MLA in 1972 and remained a member of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly till 1992.



Motilal Vora





WORLD 5

Don spiritual adviser tests Covid positive

SPORTS 8

India bank on Jadeja **fitness for 2nd Test**



Vol. 22 No. 121 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES | ₹6.00

CM launches land survey to help property owners

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

DC CORRESPONDENT

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched YSR Jagananna Shaswata Bhu Hakku mariyu Bhu Raksha Pathakam' by laying the boundary stone as a pilot project in Thakkellapadu village of Jaggayyapeta mandal in district Monday.

Later, addressing a public meeting at SGS College grounds in Jaggayyapeta, the Chief Minister said that till now no state had dared to launch a pro-gramme of this magni-tude. He stated that in order to benefit the people, they had recruited 16,000 surveyors at ward/village levels and trained them on using ultra-modern tech-nology and drone technology, under the auspices of Survey of India.

Recalling his padayatra, he said that he had seen how the people rued when their plot, house, farm, and other lands fell into litigation after they had purchased them with their hard-earned money. He said that the new

scheme would help them find their property with proper boundaries, measurements, shape, appro-

STAFF CRUNCH

AFFECTS APPCB

DC CORRESPONDENT

A less than adequate work-force and absence

of ultra-modern regional labs have hit the func-

tioning of AP Pollution

engineers and scientists.

iunior officers, chemists

analysts, and environ-

mental engineers in dis-

tricts. However, every

Authorities state that they hired technically

qualified persons as out-

sourcing employees to

Though APPCB was

bifurcated in 2014, the

Telangana government

filled up all vacant posts,

created new posts, and filled them up while the

Andhra Pradesh govern-

ment failed to do so

Several senior posts are lying vacant as there

were no recruitments to

replace those who had

refired. The last recruit

ment in the combined

Even as the PCB's man-

date is to monitor ambi-

ent air quality, including

noise and water pollu-

tion and also the local environment, lack of manpower is affecting

According to an estimate, out of nearly 290

staff members, only 120 employees are working as regulars. Despite regional labs at Visakh-

apatnam, Kurnool and

Vijayawada, it is not hav-ing regional labs in all

districts except in Kakinada, Tirupati, and

in other places in the state. Following the recent outbreak of the

mystery illness in Eluru, the role of APPCB has

come in for close scruti-

ny by the scientific com-

opined that if the Board

regional labs, it could

have monitored air and

water quality on a regu-

Page 2: No abnormal

findings at Eluru: APPCB

manpower and

from

institutions

PCB was in 2007.

it's functioning.

districts

Scientists

research

overcome the shortage.

other post is vacant.

VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 21

FUNCTIONING



Tirupati temple priests bless Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on his birthday at Tadepalli in Guntur.

Record blood donated on Jagan's birthday

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 21

YSR Congress party has set a world record on Monday by collecting 34,723 units of blood on Monday to mark Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's birthday. Blood donation camps were organised in all 175

priate records and documents and assured them that such a facility would ensure that they do not fall

assembly segments in the state, apart from the neighbouring states of Karnataka and Tamil

As a result, the blood donation found a place in the Wonder Book of Records International.

Page 2: AP blood banks running short of blood

prey to land grabbers.

■ Page 2: No coordination

Phase-II MBBS counselling in AP, TS cancelled

DC CORRESPONDENT

Control Board (APPCB). The phase-2 counselling Ironically, all the top posts are filled and the for admission into firstoard has a chairman rough weather in both member secretary, chief engineer, senior and Telangana state and junior environmental

Andhra Pradesh. The NTR University of Health Sciences cancelled the phase-2 citing technical glitches. The Telangana High Court on Monday directed the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences (KNR-UHS) to allow a candidate for the second phase of counselling notwithstanding its completion on December 19 and 20.

The Kaloji University also sent messages to students that phase-2 allotments that were released

are cancelled.

Deccan Chronicle had published a report titled State students given a raw deal in MBBS admissions in these columns on Sunday highlighting the Kaloji University debarring students who joined Siddhartha Medical College, Vijaywada, from taking part in the phase-2 counselling in Telangana. A student approached

sity to consider her name for phase-2 counselling.

A division bench comprising Justices M.S. Ramachandra Rao and T. Amarnath Goud granted "interim order as prayed for". Student's counsel Vedula Srinivas argued that the decision of the university declaring that the student did not join the college and debarring her from counselling as illegal as she already took admission in a city medical college. He also brought to the notice of the court that Siddhartha Medical College, which is a state-wide institute has quota for Telangana state and students who took admission under it should be treated on par with any other students from the state. Sources told this correspondent that the NTR University cancelled the phase-2 after it was noticed that the Supreme Court directions were flouted in implementing the rule of reservation at the time of sliding of candidates in the phase-2.

Page 2: VC takes serious note, cancels counselling

India halts UK flights as **Covid mutations surface**

No flights till Dec. 31; states to quarantine travellers

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

India on Monday announced it would suspend all flights to and from the United Kingdom in view of the new, fast-spreading mutated strain of the Sars-CoV-2 (Coronavirus) in that country. The suspension of flights will be effective from midnight December 22 (Wednesday, 23.59 hours) till December 31 (23.59 hours), the civil aviation ministry said, fol-lowing a high-level meeting in the government on

Monday.

"Considering the prevailing situation in the UK, Govt of India has decided that all flights originating from the UK to India to be suspended. Consequently, flights from India to the UK shall stand temporarily suspended during the above said period," civil aviation officials said. After the order, Air India announced that it was suspending all its flights to the UK.

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said as a measure of abundant caution, all passengers coming from the UK on all

Markets fear superspreader, investors lose ₹6.7 lakh-crore market commenced around 12 noon and peaked as resurgent fears over a

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 21

Mirroring the global markets, the Sensex on Monday plunged 1,400 points, wiping out ₹6.7 lakh crore investor wealth, following a global second from a post of the control of the second from a post of the control of t scare from a new strain of coronavirus found in the United Kingdom. Soon after the UK made

an announcement about a new strain of virus which is far more infectious than one that the world is already fighting, global markets began to fall. European markets opened in the red following travel to the UK by several mainland European countries. The fall in the Indian

(including flights in transit) should be subjected to mandatory RT-PCR tests at airports upon their arrival. Those found positive will be sent to instituby partial recovery. The Sensex finally closed 1,406.73 points or three per cent down at 45,553.9 with all Sensex and Nifty-50 stocks in the red. The Nifty-50 closed 432 points or 3.14 per cent down at 13,328.40. Broader market fall was steeper with BSE Mid-cap index down 4.14 and BSE Small-cap index fell 4.57 per cent. BSE's market capitalisation fell over ₹6.70 lakh crore from all time high of over ₹185.38 lakh crore on Friday to over ₹178.67 lakh crore. "India's equity benchmark indices fell the

seven days, when they will

around 2.30 pm with the

Sensex and the Nifty hit-

ting the day's low followed

market volatility in the tional quarantine centres set up by states and Union territories, while those testing negative have to be under home isolation for

be monitored by government health agencies. States have been asked to create separate desks at airports to facilitate the entire process

new strain of Covid-19

virus found in the UK

spread panic across the

globe. Basket selling by FPIs likely triggered the sharp fall in Indian mar-

head of retail research,

"The advance decline ratio on the NSE on December 21 was the

worst since March 23, 2020

when the Covid fears were

at the peak. This suggests

across the board panic selling/profit booking," Jasani said. NSE's volatil-

ity index India VIX shot

up 24.54 per cent to 23.19

per cent indicating higher

HDFC Securities.

kets,

said Deepak Jasani,

Farmers to decide on further talks today



Farmers raise slogans during their protest against the farm laws at Singhu Border, in New Delhi on Monday. They are expected to decide on their future course of action on Tuesday over the Centre's latest letter to them seeking a date for the next round of talks to end their 26-day-long agitation.

MAMATA SNAPS AT SHAH FOR SPREADING 'LIES'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI I DC KOLKATA, DEC. 21

Calling the BJP a "party of cheats", West Bengal chief minister Mamata Baneriee on Monday squarely accused Union minister Amit Shah of spreading "lies' about her government's performance during his two-day visit to the state. Asking Mr Shah to "cross check" his statements, the Trinamul Congress supremo also cautioned him against lying as a home minister for his political mileage and urged him to tell the "truth" about the state.

Full report on Page 4

Army alert as Pak beefs up LoC

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

The security forces along the India-Pakistan border and the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir have been put on high alert "massive buildup" by the Pakistan Army in the region. New Delhi's

security establishment is

baffled over this sudden mobilisation while additional Indian reinforcements were rushed to the border.

Top security sources said the major movement of Pakistani troops was seen close to the border over the past two weeks. Specific intelligence gathered by the security forces

revealed that the Pakistan Army had substantially increased its presence, having deployed more men and heavy artillery close to the Indian border. It was clear, the senior security officials claimed, that the Pakistanis had pulled out their troops from some other sectors to

deployed along the LoC

specifically position them close to the border and the

While the Indian security agencies took immediate corrective steps, hav-ing rushed in additional reinforcements, what has baffled New Delhi's security establishment is the timing for this sudden buildup by Pakistan.

WEATHER | WARNING | Normal life hit in agency areas TELANGANA IN **GRIP OF WINTER, HYDERABAD 11.1 ºC**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

After giving the city a miss last year, winter has finally chilled Telangana on Monday. A minimum temperature of 11.1 degrees Celsius was recorded in Hyderabad, which is a good three degrees below normal.

Consequently, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) office here has issued a cold wave warning for the next 24 hours.

"Cold wave conditions may prevail at isolated places in Telangana,' the IMD stated.

Lambasingi mercury drops to 5 degrees C

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 21

Minimum temperatures have dropped across Andhra Pradesh on According to Regional Agriculture Research Station (RARS), a minimum temperature of 5 degrees Celsius has recorded Lambasingi. Chintapalle, where RARS is located, witnessed a low temperature of 6.5°C

Since there is no weather

Department (IMD) at Chintapalle, the Weather

Automatic Station at RARS makes available temperatures in the area. RARS associate director G. Rama Rao said 6.5 degrees Celsius recorded at Chintapalle is the lowest this season. chill is

caused by north-easterly winds," pointed out IMD director of AP, Stella S. Normal life has been severely affected in the

fog enveloped the entire region till 10 a.m. There was zero visibility and all means of transport came to a halt in the area till then. Elderly and children could be seen around campfires at all the hamlets in interiors of the agency area. This adverse weather has affected tourist inflows coinciding with Christmas and New Year season. Thin crowds could be seen only at Borra Caves, Araku Valley and Ananthagiri.

Hyderabad man shot at in US, critical was critically injured and

ATHER MOIN | DC HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

A 43-year-old man from the city, Mohammed Mujeebuddin, is battling for life after being shot by unidentified assa-ilants at Michigan Avenue in Chicago at around 4.30 pm on Sunday. He was shifted to the University of Chicago Hospital, where his condition is described as 'serious'.

According to his family members, Mujeeb was returning home at around 4.30 pm when his car was stopped by two gun-wielding black assailants. One of them fired a shot striking him in the head and left with the vehicle. He

shifted to the nearby University of Chicago Hospital. Mujeebuddin, a native of Santosh Nagar in Hyderabad is a private employee there. He left India five years ago. Afroz Kausar, the wife of Mujeebuddin, said his

condition is very serious and there was no one from the family to look after him. Kausar said she and her mother-inlaw are ready to fly and attend to him. Majlis Bachao Tahreek

spokesperson Amjad-ullah Khan met the family and consoled them. He appealed to the US Consulate to arrange visas for the family.

SHORT TAKES

MAOIST BANDH PARTIAL IN VIZAG AGENCY

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 21

The bandh called by the banned CPI (Maoist) in Visakha Agency, especially in the Andhra Odisha Border region was partial as most of the areas opened business and shops. There was no untoward incident reported till late in the evening.

The bandh was called by the Maoist in protest against the death of two Maoists at Singavaram forest area in an alleged fake encounter on December 12.

The Maoists claimed that the encounters were staged and as a protest called for the bandh. Except in Maoist strongholds in some interior parts of Pedabayalu, Munchingput, GK Veedhi and Chintapalli, business was as usual in almost all parts of AOB. Shops and establishments remained open and even APSRTC buses were also seen plying.

Except for some night halt buses that go to the interior parts, all buses of APSRTC plied as usual, said ASP of Vidya Sagar Chintapalli

MAOISTS KIDNAP 14-YEAR-OLD TRIBAL BOY

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, DEC. 21

Maoists kidnapped a 14-yearold tribal boy from Gollaguppa village of Vissapuram panchayat of Yetapaka mandal of East Godavari. Though the incident took place in November when the parents of the boy lodged a complaint with the Yetapaka police on Monday. According to the Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi, the boy was studying Class IX in Bheemavaram High School near Nellipaka of Yetapaka mandal. They took him by threatening his parents and villagers as well. After being threatened, they were scared to report the matter to police. He said that special teams are searching for the boy, and combing operations are being expedited in the area. Mr Asmi said that the local people stated that providing food, essen-

NO ABNORMAL FINDINGS AT ELURU: APPCB

The APPCB could have served as a deterrent to those discharging untreated effluents into water bodies.

It ruled out any abnormal findings in the air and water in and around Eluru during the outbreaks of a mystery ill ness. Board sources say that although National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued directions to fill up all vacant posts in it and ordered the State government not to impose any ban on filling up of vacant posts, the government has not taken up any recruitment

A top Board official said, "As have staff shortage, we have hired several chemists and analysts on an outsourcing basis to keep the show running. We will take up recruitment shortly. We approached AP Public Service Commission and they have accepted to take it up.'

ORBIT RAISING COMPLETED FOR CMS-01

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 21

All the orbit raising manoeuvers have been completed successfully for Communication Satellite CMS-01 on Monday. It may be recalled that the satellite was launched through PSLV-C50 from Satish Dhawan Centre,

Sriharikota on December 17. After the injection of CMS-01 communication satellite into elliptical Transfer Geosynchronous

Orbit, Isro scientists have carried out orbit raising manoeuvers during the last four days and placed the satellite in the designated orbit.

The satellite reflector has been deployed. All the intended launch and early phase operations are completed suc-

The satellite will be handed over to the users for communication services after completion of the payload in-orbit testing in the first week of January 2021, Isro said in a release on Monday.

Mechanisation saved farmers from cyclone

Farmers who opted for machine transplantation saved

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 21

While paddy nurseries raised in thousands of acres got damaged during the recent cyclones in the SPSR Nellore district, a new method of growing saplings in trays for machine transplantation by few progressive farmers saved them from the

nature's fury. According to a report submitted to the government, paddy crop got damaged in 17,648 hectares in the district resulting in a loss of ₹4.12 crore to the farming community.

Two innovative farmers Dodla Bharat Kumar Reddy and Atthivarapu Venkatram Reddy Nellore who opted for machine plantation strongly recommended the system to overcome severe shortage of labour and better yields.

"Our families have agriculture background for the last 10 decades. But days of less pollution, fewer pest and labour problems and regular days are now. The unseasonal rains are playing hide and seek and causing night-mares to farmers now," they said.

The grim situation made us look for better farming

options. 'One of the new methods we adopted is growing saplings in trays in a limited area and planting them all over through a device hooked on to a tractor." Bharat Reddy said. According to him, travs

AP CLARIFIES ON

RECUSAL PETITION

AGAINST JUSTICE

RAMESH KUMAR

DC CORRESPONDENT

The additional Advocate

General P. Sudhakar Reddy informed the

High Court that they had filed the recusal

petition on Justice Rakesh Kumar to with-

draw from hearing in the petition pertaining

to the sale of assets

under AP Build Mission

with great pain as the

A division bench, com-

prising Justice Rakesh

Kumar and Justice J.

Uma Devi resumed the

Mr Reddy opined that

courts should have the

responsibility not only

to provide justice but

also to feel it. He said that the judge did not allow the elected govern-

ment to discharge its

duties and had even sti-

In response, Justice

Rakesh Kumar said that

in the course of the

hearing, they would be

asking questions to elic-

it more information, and

if the respondents could

give appropriate answers, the issue would

be over at that point

He said that as the

state government filed a recusal petition asking

him to withdraw from

hearing alleging objec-

tionable remarks made

by him, he would take up

hearing on the petition

along with Justice D. Ramesh. He said that

based on directions from the Chief Justice,

his bench would decide

to take up hearing. Later, the division

bench asked them to file

counter petitions on the

regular petition by Wednesday if it wanted

and posted the next

hearing to December 28.

Petitioner's counsel B

Nalin Kumar argued

that it was up to Justice

Rakesh Kumar whether

to be part of the bench to

hear the arguments on

the petition or not as the

judge himself had to

take a decision accord-

Justice Rakesh Kumar

said that he never expected petitions like

this while he was about

to retire from judicial

service and vowed to

safeguard the sanctity of

the judiciary.

fled its voice.

hearing on Monday.

himself had brought about such a sit-

VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 21



Paddy nurseries raised in trays at farmers fields



Machine transplantation in progress at a farm in Muthukuru mandal of Nellore district

are filled with fertile soil and seeds are planted on top through a feeder to get saplings in the right order. They are covered with plastic sheets to escape pest menace and maintain certain temperature lev-

After three days the covers are removed and saplings are sprinkled with water on a daily basis. This goes on for 15-20 days and then the trays are shifted to a farming land and planted through a device hooked on to a tractor. On an average 80-90 trays are required per

The cost of the process is cheaper than the tradi-tional method of flinging seeds in a limited area and replanting them all over manually.

The accuracy of planting and growth makes a huge difference in the new method. But the process is quick and labour issues come down to a large extent.

One should see the beauty of this as the saplings grow.

there for quite a few years, but to our area, it's new and found to be very effec-

NEW SYSTEM OFFERS MORE YIELDS AND LESS DISEASES

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 21

Vineetha, Scientist in the Rice Research Station said they have been advising farmers to go in for machine transplantation since traditional methods are labour intensive and

they are very scarce now. She said pests and diseases will be very minimal if this system is taken up because of the gap between rows unlike in manual planting. Venkatram Reddy said

that the new method has helped them to go ahead with machine transplantation in their lands at Muthukuru mandal of SPSR Nellore district without depending on the labour during the current crop season and also during early kharif season this year.

He said the quality of the grain is good and output is 10 per cent more than traditional method because of space between rows allowing good air circulation.

Another advantage in raising nurseries in trays is that they can be shifted to safer places during cyclones or floods, he



Poets, writers and intellectuals conducting a signature campaign in support farmers against farm laws at Dharna Chowk in Vijayawada on Monday. - C. NARAYANA RAO

Vizag cops bust hawala racket, seize ₹1 crore

VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 21

In a joint operation with city taskforce personnel, the Special Enforcement Bureau officials raided a lodge near Vizag Railway Station and busted a hawala racket and seized ₹1 crore from two persons hailing from Hyderabad on Monday. They were identified as Raj Purohit Bharat Kumar, 30, a resident of Abids in Hyderabad and Chota Ram of the same area in Hvderabad.

Giving details of the case, ACP Prem Kajal said Bharat Kumar and Chota Ram were doing electrical works for a builder Pralabh Bhai, a construc-

Hyderabad. On instructions from Pralabh, both came to Visakhapatam to collect money and accordingly they came to Visakhapatnam and met one Raju in Duvvada. They collected the amount of ₹1 crore. After collecting the money Bharat Kumar and Chota Ram came to a lodge near the railway station and waiting to board a train to Hyderabad. On tip-off the city taskforce personnel and the Two Town police raided the lodge and after they failed to provide sufficient proof for the source of the money they were taken into custody for further investigation. Two mobile phones were

in also seized from them. In another incident in the same area, both the police and SEB staff raided a lodge and caught two

persons who had the silver ornaments weighing about 29.5 kg. They were taken into custody and produced before mandal executive magistrate for further investigation. They were identified as Suhan Singh and Himmat Singh of Rajasthan and working as delivery boys for one C.S. Rathod, a jew-

eller in Vijayawada. The SEB and CTF combine also arrested one J. Gaurav and seized 100 kg of ganja under Duvvada police station. The car in which the contraband was hidden was also seized.



VC takes serious note, cancels counselling

FROM PAGE 1

Vice-Chancellor P. Syama Prasad is said to have taken a serious note about the lapse and ordered an immediate cancellation of the counselling. Several BC organisa-

tions and Congress MP Komatireddy Venkata Reddy raised objections over similar violation of rules by Kaloji University as a result of which they said more than 300 BC students would get a raw deal.

university the authorities bungled the admission process in

Several BC organisations and Congress MP Komatireddy Venkata Reddy raised objections over similar violation of rules by Kaloji University as a result of which they said more than 300 BC students would get a raw

Telangana state, several students approached the High Court. In one case the court gave a clear direction that the candidate's case should be considered for the second phase despite the completion of the phase-2.

Washed ashore



ashore at Ramakrishna beach in Visakhapatnam on K. MURALIKRISHNA Monday.

BLOOD BANKS RUNNING SHORT OF BLOOD IN AP

FROM PAGE 1

Due to shortage of blood prevailing in the state because of Covid-19, blood banks in AP had been running short of blood for road accident victims and patients in need of blood.

This prompted YSR Congress party to come up with the idea of organising mass blood donation camps in compliance with Covid-19 protocol on occasion of their party chief and Chief Minister's birth-

day on Monday. In all, blood donation camps were organised at 278 centres. Indian Red Cross Society, apart from government and private blood banks. were involved in collecon of total 12,153 litres of blood, against the previous record of 10,500

litres. Representatives Wonder Book of Records International certified that collection of 34,723 units of blood was a record. It presented a citation and medal to government (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy at a programme held at YSRC party office on

Monday. Speaking on the occasion, representatives belonging to Wonder Book of Records International said they had hoped to collect 17,000 units of blood.

But given the massive response from people, they ended up collecting a record 34,723 units of blood.

Municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayana, endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas and representatives of World Book of Records

International Narendra Goud, Vijaya Lakshmi and others were present at the cita-

MISSION | CLEAN-UP | Jagan reiterated that the new scheme would serve as a role-model in land records

No coordination among 4 departments: C

FROM PAGE 1

Referring to Thakkellapadu, Mr Reddy said in the intervening years from 1927-28, when a survey was

last undertaken, to the present times, a lot has happened like the country independence, new Constitution was adopted and new laws gave rights to the people. He opined that it could be anyone's guess as to

how many irregularities

inordinate delay in the

politicians and rowdies, who were managing the system and changing records to someone else's name and in the process make a killing by ill-gotten means. Criticising the existing system of property regis-

conduct of land survey

and slammed a section of

trations that had no coordination among the four departments of revenue, survey settlement, registration and local bodies, the Chief Minister reiterhad occurred because of ated that the new scheme would serve as a role-

model in the maintenance of land records without any scope for irregulari-

the Detailing scheme, he said that it would help the property owner to get a document comprising all details of

up at a cost of ₹1,000 cr the property with a government assurance and a

The survey would be

completed and title deeds

handed over to the prop-

erty owners by the end of

2023. Mr Reddy asserted

that they were taking it

unique identification number on the lines of Aadhaar number.

This will help find out the exact location of the property with all requisite details. He said that the

On the three-phased land survey, Mr Reddy asserted that they were taking it up at a cost of ₹1,000 crore. They have set up 4,500 sur-

vey teams.
The survey would be completed and title deeds

details of the properties would be subject to social

audit. Only when objec-

tions are not raised from

any quarters, would the

landowners be issued title

handed over to the property owners by the end of

Mr Reddy advised people

having

stones with government seal were being laid to demarcate properties free of cost. He assured that the new scheme will ensure that all the owners would get security and protection for their prop-

to share the benefits of the

land survey with their

neighbours and assured

that the whole exercise

would be taken up in a

transparent manner and all records of property

He said that boundary

would be streamlined.

irregularities

OTHER STORIES

2 held, 25 kgs of dry ganja seized

Visakhapatnam: The Vizag city police seized over 25 kgs of dry ganja and arrested two persons when they were transporting the weed in a private bus near Gajuwaka in Vizag city. The police are suspecting that the duo procured the weed from Pedabayalu of Vizag Agency to transport it to Hyderabad. A case has been registered and investigation is on to nab other people involved in the case.

Woman, child found dead

Visakhapatnam: A woman and a girl were found dead in Yeluru canal near Addam village under Anakapalle rural police station limits in Vizag district. The police with the help of locals retrieved the bodies from the canal. However, they are yet to ascertain the identity of the deceased persons. The police are suspecting that the deceased may belong to canal bank villages and are verifying

4 HELD, COPPER WIRE WORTH ₹10.5L SEIZED

the missing people's data to

establish the identity of the

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 21

The Jammalamadugu police busted a gang of thieves who robbed copper wire from electric transformers in the district. They have arrested four accused and seized copper wire and rods worth ₹10.5

District superintendent of police Karur Karunapathi Nagendra Kumar Anburajan held a press conference at the district police office on Monday and explained the

There were complaints from farmers regarding transformer thefts. The thieves broke the transformers in farmlands and stole the copper wire inside it.

Given these cases, he entrusted Nallamari Nagaraju, the sub-divisional police officer, Jammalamadugu for an inquiry. Following the instructions of SP, he deployed a special team with Jammalamadugu urban and rural inspectors to investigate this matter.

For the past few days they were in the job, and on Monday morning they found four accused Vonteru Ankalu (28), Mallika Nagaraju (35), Mallika Chinna Vayassu (27), and Yakasırı Nagesh (25) irom village Rampathadu Pendlimarri Mandal.

All are involved in 50 cases and they robbed copper wire from 91 transformers. They melted the copper and made rods and kept them near a farm. The police seized all the material and filed a case against them.
Ankalu is the leader of this

gang and himself involved in 44 cases in the district.

The SP said the police were proposing to make a PD Act against him.

He congratulated the police officers who were involved in the racket and busting announced a reward.

TASK FORCE ARRESTS 10 WOODCUTTERS

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, DEC. 21

The red sanders anti-smuggling task force arrested 10 woodcutters when they were entering into the Seshachalam forests near Aravind eye hospital on SV Zoo Park Road in

Tirupati late on Sunday night. In a statement, task force SP G. Anjaneyulu said, a task-force team, led by RSI Vasu and Lingadhar, was returning from the forest after completing their combing operation late on Sunday night when they encountered a group of woodcutters carrying essentials, tools and venturing into the forest area on the SV Zoo

'The task force team stopped the woodcutters and enquired on their identity. On suspicion, the team moved the woodcutter to the taskforce station for further enquiry. During the interrogation, the accused confessed that they were here to cut down the red sanders

trees," he added. All the woodcutters were hailing from Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu, and a local smuggler had engaged them to smuggle out the red sanders logs from Seshachalam forests. DSP Venkataiah, RI Bhaskar, CI Venkata Rao and others were present.



Rajya Sabha member V. Vijay Sai Reddy, tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao and agriculture minister, Kurasala Kannababu hold the torch baton and take part in a march past during the inauguration of YSR Cup Cricket Tournament at Port Stadium in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

YSRC workers take out rally on Jagan's B'day

Blood donation and food distribution camps organised

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, DEC. 21

An impressive rally on the temple city roads and blood donation camps at all the 14 Assembly con-stituencies in Chittoor district marked AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's birthday celebrations on Monday.
The mammoth rally

involving 20,000 party workers and sympathis-ers was held in Tirupati under the aegis of MLA B. Karunakar Reddy, while the government whip and MLA C. Bhaskar Reddy organised mega blood donation camps in Tirupati rural, Chandragiri and Pakala.

The rally has become a talk of the town as political experts saw it as a clear demonstration of YSRC's strength ahead of the Tirupati Lok Sabha

constituency by-polls.

According to the party, over 20,000 party workers and supporters took part in the rally, which com-menced at Krishnapuram Thana and culminated at the Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy's statue near TUDA office.

The party workers displayed placards written with information about the flagship programmes and welfare schemes under Navaratnalu Jagananna Vidya Deevena, Ammavodi, Cheyu-

1 CR WORKERS

SAND POLICY: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT

TD state spokesperson

Anam Venkataramana

Reddy has rebuked the

Chief Minister for his

failure to devise a sound

policy for sand while alleging that his callous

attitude and inefficiency

has hit the livelihood of

Speaking to media persons at the TD office on

Monday, he questioned the leaders to explain

the reason for celebrat-

ing Jagan Mohan Red-

dy's birthday when peo-

ple are in dire straits.

"After a change in policies the price of sand has

increased to almost

₹6,500 per unit as agains-

t ₹1,000 during TD regime," he said.

1 crore workers.

HIT DUE TO

NELLORE, DEC. 21

Modi, Venkaiah, Naidu greet Jagan on his B'day

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 21

Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed his greetings to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on the latter's birthday in a tweet on Monday and said that he would pray to the Almighty to bless him with a

healthy and long life. The Chief Minister retweeted expressing his gratitude for the warm wishes extended by the Prime Minister.

Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu also conveyed his greetings to Jagan Mohan Reddy. AP Governor Biswa-

Arogyasri, YSR Sampoorna Poshana. MLA Bhumana's son Abhinay Reddy, mobilised the party workers

and supporters to join Similarly, Srikalahasti MLA Biyyapu Madhusudhan Reddy also organised blood donation and food distribution camps

in his constituency. His

video of extending birth-

bhusan Harichandan extended his "heartiest felicitations and warm greetings" and wished that "may Lord Jagannath and Lord Balaji shower their choicest blessings" on him for his "happiness and good health to lead AP on the path of development and

prosperity with his dynamic leadership". Telugu Desam presi-dent and leader of the Opposition in the AP Assembly N. Chandra-babu Naidu too conveyed greetings saying that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy may be blessed with a long and healthy life.

day wishes to AP CM in which he was seen donating food and blankets to homeless poor, released at midnight on Monday, went viral on social media. His daughter B. Pavitra Reddy also donated sarees and food materials ınmates Amma' nursing home in Thottambedu mandal Thottambedu and patients at Srikalahasti area Hospital.

ANILKUMAR, KAKANI **DONATE BLOOD**

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 21

PROGRAMMES YSR Congress cadres and leaders including minister Anilkumar Yadav and Sarvepalli **DC CORRESPONDENT** NELLORE, DEC. 21 legislator Govardhan Reddy donated blood at a blood camp organised as part of the birthday celebrations of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on

Meanwhile, C. Bhaskar Reddy has organised simultaneous blood donation camps at various places under Tirupati rural and Chandragiri constituency. In G.D. Nellore and Punganur constituencies, Dy. CM K. Narayana Swamy minister Ramachandra Reddy and followers

TD plans stir if Nivar-hit farmers not given relief

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 21

Telugu Desam politburo member Reddeppagari Srinivasareddy warned the government that if the farmers affected by the Nivar storm are not helped by the end of this month, the TD will make a huge protest along with the

affected farmers. He said farmers had suffered severe crop losses due to the cyclone and demanded compensation of at least ₹40,000 per hectare. He spoke to reporters on Monday at his office in Kadapa. He criticised the government for not providing a single penny of assistance to farmers affected

by Cyclone Nivar. He alleged that the progress made by the government in the last 18 months was not visible and that even though implementing a few welfare schemes, huge cuts were being made in the lists of beneficiaries.

He advised the government to distribute the TIDCO houses to the eligible beneficiaries along with the house sites distribution in the state. The then government has spent almost ₹10,000 crore on TIDCO houses, and almost 90 per cent construction has been completed all over the state, he said.

He said the government was playing drama in the name of the three

capitals, adding that it is impossible for anyone to move Amaravati, the capital which already developed by spending thousands of crores of rupees and that all wanted Amaravati as the capital.

Mr Srinivasa Reddy said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy had ignored all the promises made during the walk before elections. SC, ST and BC in the state are said to be panicking. He alleged that anyone who spoke against the government was being prosecuted and intimidated. He criticised the government for sinking into debt of ₹1.4 lakh crore but not seeing any development anywhere.

Villagers protest mine expansion by UCIL

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, DEC. 21

Officials of the Uranium Corporation of India Limited are preparing for the second phase of the mine expansion amid ongoing controversy that people are struggling with the effluent from the uranium plant. Although the people opposed the establishment of the factory 13 years ago, the work was completed with the help of the then leaders.

Cases have also been registered against several people in connection with the stoning during the referendum. UCIL is preparing for another mine expansion long after the incident. The issuance of the notification by the state pollution control board for holding a referendum on 6 January 2021 has once again led to

Meanwhile, the uranium-affected Mabbuchintala palle villagers are protesting against the mine expansion proposal at the Vemula Mandal revenue office. They are all concerned that UCIL has been delaying the implementation of its promises in the past. They are demanding to come to a referendum on mine expansion again only after their demands are met.

Narayana Swamy of Rachakuntapalle said the farmers were ready to give land for the expansion of the ur-anium mine. UCIL also wants to buy homes, including land, at a reasonable price. If they do, they will migrate to another area, he said.

Ramakrishna, another farmer from Rachakunta-

MP TAKES PART

IN DEVELOPMENT

A study team from JNTU-Anantapur stated that the soil contains the increased levels of barium, arsenic; cobalt, chromium, copper, molybdenum, lead, vanadium and yttrium are major concern for suitability of agricultural and other land crops.

palle, said that in the past if a borehole was dug less than a hundred feet, would get sufficient water, but now a thousand feet borehole also will not get water. He said if UCIL buys land as well as houses, all the villagers have to go elsewhere. He said cases had been filed against some who opposed in the past, so now no one opposed. Javashree, a member of the District Human Rights Forum, said that while people and environmentalists have been worried for the past 13 years that there are many disasters with the uranium plant, it would not make sense to propose a fresh mine expansion now. She said she had written a letter to the state pollution con-trol board on the matter and was ready to take legal action if the authorities did not resolve the issues.

Work on setting up a uranium plant at Tummala-palli in the Vemula mandal began in 2006. The uranium corporation was started amid protests by villagers in Tummalapalli, KK Kottala, Mabbuchintalapalle, Rachakuntapalle and vil-

lages. The survey was conducted for the acquisition of 2,240 acres and 1820 acres were acquired. Of this, 1,050 acres is government land and the rest is farmers land. The uranium plant was started at a cost of ₹1,106 crore. Mining excavations and plant work began on November 20, 2007. Uranium production officially began on April 20, 2013. A tailing pond was built to store the waste released from the uranium

plant. There were allegations that the tailing pond had a pipeline leaking waste and that the groundwater was contaminated due to improper construction of the tail pond. Over the past ten years, environmentalists, villagers and communities have expressed con-cern that UCIL officials have not taken any action.

A study team from Jawaharlal Technological University, Anantapur stated that the soil contains the increased levels of barium, arsenic: cobalt, chromium, copper, molybdenum, lead, vanadium and yttrium are major concern for suitability of agricultural and other land crops. Heavy metals if consumed in large quantities may lead to severe health issues, including cancers, respiratory disorders and

kidney complications.
Since last 7 years all the sufferers are agitating in many forms, but the Central government has not responding properly. Now again the villagers concern about the proposal

214 new Covid cases

After keeping away from crowds for over eight months because of the Covid-19 pandemic, 70-year-old Nellore MP Adala Prabhakar Reddy took part in various development program-mes in Nellore on last 24 hours.

Monday.

His close follower and chairman of Vijaya Dairy Kondreddi Ranga Reddy was addressing the needs of constituency during the absence of the MP who was confined to his home in Hyderabad.

ABVP MEN HALT MINISTER ANIL'S CONVOY

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, DEC. 21

ABVP activists obstructed the convoy of minister P. Anilkumar Yaadv while demanding solution to the problems in the education sector at Nellore on Monday.

Police escorting the minister were caught unawares as the ABVP men suddenly jumped before the convoy of the minister at Annamayya circle raising slogans against the government.

The minister, who came out of his car and expressed his ire against the protestors for the demonstration on the road instead of meeting him directly.

Reacting to their clarification that they came two times to his camp office, he pulled them for coming when he was not in the office.

registered in state

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 21

Andhra Pradesh registered steep decline in new Covid-19 cases with 214 against the average daily cases of 400 in the last few days and two deaths with one each at Guntur and Krishna in the

The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin here on Monday reporting that out of 40,295 samples tested, 214 persons were found infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of

1,13, 01,105 samples tested so far, 8,78,937 persons were found infected with Covid-19 so far while 8,67,867 infected patients were recovered and 3,992 infected patients are still active with the virus. Among daily cases of

Coronavirus, Chittoor recorded 46 followed by 23 in Krishna, 21 in Guntur, 20 in Visakhapatnam, 19 in Prakasam, 18 in East Godavari, 17 in Anantapur, 11 in Kadapa, 10 in Srikakulam, nine in Nellore, eight each in

Kurnool and West Godavari, four in Vizianagaram.

Krishna topped the state with regard to cumulative active cases of Covid-19 with 699 followed by 571 in Guntur, 569 in Nellore, 419 in East Godavari, 382 in Chittoor, 275 in West Godavari, 250 in Visakhapatnam, 177 in Prakasam, 170 in Srikak-ulam, 152 in Anantapur, 129 in Kadapa, 122 in Kurnool and 77 in Vizianagaram.

Among the daily Covid-19 deaths, two were reported taking the toll in the state to

Chittoor continued to be the worst hit by recording the highest number of cumulative deaths at 838 followed by 661 in Guntur, 658 in Krishna, 636 in East Godavari, 595 in Anantapur, 578 in Prakasam, 549 in Visakhapatnam, 532 in West Godavari, 505 in Nellore, 487 in Kurnool, 455 in Kadapa, 346 in Srikakulam and 238 in Vizianagaram.

The state health authorities discharged 422 Covid-19 infected patients after recovery in the last 24

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UNSACRED | AFFAIR 24-year-old accused attempts suicide after the incident Youth's bid to tie knot to student foiled

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, DEC. 21

A 24-year-old youth made a vain bid to tie the mangalsutra to a 15-year-old girl studying Class X at the Zilla Parishad High School in Rayavaram mandal of East Godavari on Monday.

However, the girl and her brother fought off the youth and raised a hue and cry. The youth managed to flee and later went to his house and consumed pesticides. He was admitted to a private

hospital at Rayavaram . Police said that the girl and her brother are studying Class X at Rayavaram, 40 km from Kakinada, the district headquarters.

On Monday, the father of the children dropped them on his motorcycle at the school at 8.30 am from Mahendravada village of Anaparthi Mandal. Both the brother and sister were about to enter the classroom, when a youth Sathi Siva Reddy of Koppavaram in Anaparthi mandal entered and

Siva Reddy has been harassing the girl for the past a few months tried to tie the sacred

thread to the girl. Both the brother and the girl fought off the youth making the youth flee the scene even as they starting shouting. A teacher and some of the Class IV staff reached

spot but the accused Later the youth went to his house and attempted

suming pesticides. He was admitted to a private hospital in Rayavaram and his condition is said to be stable.

to commit suicide by con-

It is said that Siva Reddy has been harass-ing the girl for the past a few months whenever she went to her grandmother's house at Koppavaram. The elders in the village apparently reprimanded him. Anaparthi assistant sub-inspector K. Venkateswara Rāo registered a case on the basis of a complaint lodged by

Anaparthi circle inspector M.V. Bhaskara Rao said that the accused and the girl's family members

Srinivasa Reddy.

the school headmaster P.

are known to each other. District education officer S. Abraham confirmed the incident and said that action is being initiated. The incident comes close on the heels of a similar incident when a

minor student and a minor girl got married as a prank in the Government Junior College at Rajamahendravaram.

SHORT TAKES

ARJUN RAMPAL APPEARS BEFORE **NCB FOR 2nd TIME**

SAURABH JOSHI | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 21

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) questioned actor Arjun Rampal second time in con-nection with the ongoing probe Bollywood, which began following the suicide of actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Rampal (47) was grilled earlier in November along with his girlfriend Gabriella, a South African national, whose broth-

by NCB over his links with international drug cartels.
The officials said that Rampal arrived at the NCB office before noon after having sought time to appear till December 22. He was issued summons last week. The agency grilled Rampal in the backdrop of the data retrieved from the electronics that were seized from his residence fol-

lowing a raid in November. The NCB officials had seized 11 gadgets, including laptop, mobile phones and pen drives from Rampals following which he was grilled by the officials days later.

"The questioning went all through the day and if needed he or his partner may be summoned for questioning again, said an officer.

CRPF CONSTABLE **RENEGES ON RAPE CLAIM**

New Delhi, Dec. 21: The 30-year-old CRPF constable, who had accused the paramilitary's Chief Sports Officer and Arjuna Awardee Khajan Singh and coach Surjit Singh of sexual harassment, rape and intimidation, has retracted her allegations, official sources said on Monday. Police said Khajan Singh was

questioned and his statement has also been recorded by the investigation team but refused to divulge further details, saying the investigation is still

underway. Earlier this week, the victim recorded her statement before the magistrate under CrPC section 164 where she retracted her allegations mentioned in her complaint filed before the Delhi Police earlier this

month, they said. She retracted her allegations levelled against both the accused and is reluctant to pursue the case further," sources said. Khajan Singh has also recorded his statement before the investigation team and refuted all allegations levelled against him.

registered her statement before the magistrate, a police officer said.

A senior police officer said after the FIR was registered, the case was transferred from a sub-inspector level officer to an inspector attached with the Crime Against Women Cell of Dwarka district, which is investigating the case investigating presently.

J&K'S DDC POLLS VOTE COUNTING BEGINS TODAY

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, DEC. 21

The counting of votes across all 280 District Development Council (DDC) constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir will begin at 9 am on Tuesday. The ballots will decide the fate of nearly 4,200 candidates who joined the fray in the first-ever such elections in the Union

State election commissioner (SEC), K.K. Sharma, said, "We've made elaborate arrangements for counting of ballots polled for DDC elections and Panchayat by-polls. Necessary Covid-19 protocols have been put in place and directions have already been issued to concerned deputy commissioners to adhere to coronavirus standard operating procedures (SOPs) during the counting process'

He said that the entire count ing exercise will be monitored and recorded "to achieve full transparency." Elaborating on the counting guidelines, the SEC said that the counting of ballot papers will be taken on a round-wise basis after proper mixing of the ballot papers of different polling stations as per prescribed procedure and counting guidelines.

He said that his office has issued detailed guidelines under the Panchayati Raj Rules 1996 and prescribed elaborate procedure on the counting of ballot papers. "The handbook of returning officers also contains the relevant instructions on counting of votes," he added.

Didi asks Shah to check facts on Bengal growth

Shah lying to gain political mileage in WB, says Mamata

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 21

Calling the BJP a "party of cheats", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday squarely accused Union home minister Amit Shah of spreading "lies" about her government's performance during his twoday visit to the state.
Asking Shah to "cross

check" his statements, the CM also cautioned him against lying as a home minister for his political mileage and urged him to tell the "truth" about the

Inaugurating Christmas Festival at Allen Park in Park Street, Banerjee, in an oblique reference to Shah, said, "Bengal is No. 1 in so many sectors. Some people, I am sorry to say, are coming here from Delhi. If I do anything wrong, I will apologise to them. But please tell me why you are telling a garbage of lies to the people. Tell the truth.'

Meanwhile, election strategist Prashant Kishor. who has been in the eye of brigade within the ruling TMC over his role in party affairs, leading many to defect to the BJP, on Monday made a startling prediction that the saffron party would "struggle to cross double digits" in the next year's Assembly elections. He also promised he would quit Twitter if proved wrong.

CONG LEADERS

SONIA'S LETTER

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC

Indicating that the Congress is not happy with the Shiv Sena-led

Maharashtra govern-

Chavan on Monday said

the state government must implement the

common minimum pro-

a manifesto of any par-

Congress delegation led

by state party chief Balasaheb Thorat met CM Uddhav Thackeray

and gave him a letter

written by Congress

president Sonia Gandhi

seeking implementation

of common minimum

programme (CMP) and

welfare measures for Dalits and tribals.

CMP was that there

should not be anything

done that is contrary to Congress's fundamental

minimum programme

was not any party's man-

ifesto. If any decision is

taken is not in accordance with our funda-

mental principles, then

we will have our objec-

tions to it," Chavan said.

However, the Congress

leader also reiterated

that there are no serious

references among the

is only a communication

in the form of a letter

The MVA government is

strong and working together," he said.

December 14, Sonia

Thackeray of the CMP

of the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress government and sought implementa-

tion of certain measures for the welfare of Dalits

She demanded reserva-

tion in government con-

tracts for SC/ST profes-

sionals to promote entre-

them, among other

CONGRESS LEADERS

reiterate that there are

no serious references

among the MVA part-

ners and Sonia Gandhi's

In the letter, dated

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"Sonia Gandhi's letter

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senior party Prithviraj

Maharashtra

HAND OVER

TO UDDHAV

MUMBAI, DEC. 21

BJP MP gets ready to divorce his wife for joining the TMC of 10 years. But I did not

The ongoing race between the ruling Trinamul Congress and the BJP in breaking each other's "home" through the politics of defection ahead of next year's Assembly election escalated to marital dis-cord on Monday as Chief Minister Mamata Banerj ee's party virtually struck Bishnupur BJP MP Saumitra Khan's heart and roped his wife Sujata Mondal Khan into its fold to avenge the switchover of Shubhendu Adhikari to the BJP two days ago.

Heartbroken to see his wife in the rival party, Khan, who was earlier in the TMC, served her a

In a blistering attack on

the BJP over communal politics, the CM said, "We

love our Constitution. It is

our pillar. But can you tell

me if it is thoroughly nur-

tured, and accepted in real

sense, secularism in India? No. It is typical pol-itics of hatred that is

Earlier, at Nabanna, the

state secretariat, Banerjee

boasted of WB's achieve-

ments in all sectors with

facts and figures, and attacked Shah and his party.

going on. I condemn it.'

found working actively for the BJP to ensure her husband's victory in the last Lok Sabha polls, walked into the TMC office.

Senior TMC MP Sougata Roy handed over the party flag to her. Hailing Banerjee and her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee, Khan said, "I want honour. I wish to work in my favourite party and its leader. I worked tirelessly for my husband's victory. But the BJP did not value my contribution. It gives place to incompetent by poaching them from other parties. When good sense will prevail upon Khan, he will return to TMC also. With tearful eyes Khan,

anything. Hope Shah knows what is gold or not.

Speaking for a political party and furnishing false

information does not suit

a home minister. Amitji,

yeh aapko shobha nehi deti

hai. (It is not right for you

to talk of false and wrong

information which were

prepared by your party workers.) You do not have

an idea of it. Please cross

check what you say. I have

anything.

She alleged, "The BJP is a party of cheats. For politics, they can do and say the evidence against whatever you claimed.

should remain separate.

know that politics could

end it. I am not stopping her. Love is above politics.

I quit the TMC for the

development of Bengal. I knew the TMC steals cat-

tle and coal. But I never thought the TMC would

Getting the legal notice

from her husband, Sujata

Khan broke down and said, "Ours was a love marriage. I loved my hus-band a lot and braved

many odds for him. If

joining a different party

(leads to) divorce, then it's

purely his personal deci-

sion because I know poli

tics and family issues

steal someone's wife.

Reaffirming her fierce opposition to the CAA, the NRC and the NPR, she added: "When the CAA was passed, I started oppo-sing it. They (BJP) cannot decide the fate of citizens. Let them decide their own fate. We are against the CAA, NRC and NPR. Nothing has been withdrawn. They exist. We will fight a battle against them. We will not allow anyone to go out of the country.'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

an atmosphere of cooperation and enhanced dialogue between the two Asian giants, top Russian diplomats said on Monday, adding that "non-inclusive" Indo-Pacific concepts like the fournation Quad can be "detrimental" to regional stability and inclusive coopera-

tion in the region.

However, in what is being seen as a balancing act, Russia said it supports both the "growing Indian profile" globally as well as "Indian sentiments" and that it also "supports the Indian vision for the Indo-Pacific". Moscow also said the sale of the S-400 missile systems to India is 'advancing well". At an annual year-end

media briefing in the national capital on Monday in the Virtual format, Russian Ambassador to India Nikolay R. while com-Kudashev menting on the recent Sino-Indian military tensions in the Ladakh sector, said, "It is vital to ensure an atmosphere of cooperation between the two Asian giants. As a friend to both India and China, we would encourage enhanced dialogue between both the govern-Between New Delhi and Beijing, we believe this is the key for the future progress in ties and to the regional security and stability." Pointing out that the sale of the S-400 missile systems to India is "advancing well", the Russian Ambassador also said that if the K-226

in India, China tiff: Envoy Boeing pitches its Russia will "not take sides" in the Sino-Indian border dispute but wants an atmosphere of sopror

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Russia will not take sides

American aerospace giant Boeing said Monday its fighter aircraft F/A-18 Super Hornet has shown compatibility with India's aircraft carriers, pitching its jet for the Indian Navy. Takeoff and landing on an aircraft carrier is a complex process as ships have limited space. The system which Indian aircraft carriers use for aircraft operation is "Short Takeoff but Arrested Recovery' (STOBAR), which is different from the system used by the US Navy.

Boeing said the company and the US Navy recently concluded "ski jump" trials for F/A-18 Hornets, though it was designed for catapult launched systems used by the US.

"The first successful and safe launch of the F/A-18 Super Hornet from a ski jump begins the validation process to operate effectively from Indian Navy aircraft carriers, said Ankur Kanaglekar, Head India Fighters Sales of Boeing Defence, Space and Security.

The Indian Navy, which is now operating MiG-

 BOEING SAYS its fighter aircraft F/A-18 Super Hornet has shown compatibility with India's aircraft carriers.

IT RECENTLY concluded 'ski jump' trials for F/A-18 Super Hornets.

29Ks, is seeking jets for its Vikramaditya and for the coming Vikrant. France's Rafale, that was pur-chased by the Indian Air Force, will offer tough competition for any order given by Indian Navy.

"The Super Hornet can act as a lynchpin of naval aviation collaboration between the the US Navy and Indian Navy. This will improve inter-operability and commonality between the two navies and boost opportunities for collaboration in variety of areas related to naval aviation,' said Mr Kanaglekar.

Boeing said the F/A-18 Super Hornet can interface with P-8I aircraft and other assets of US origin to act as a force multiplier for the Indian Navy. It said the Super Hornet

will offer the Indian Navy value in the form of advanced technologies at low acquisition cost.

helicopter and AK-47 203 rifle deal processes are expedited, "we will see good progress' On the Sino-Indian bor-

der dispute, Russian deputy chief of mission (DCM) Roman N.

Babushkin said, "Russia is not taking sides. It maintains close ties with both nations."

But it was on the Indo-Pacific issue, that Russia clearly expressed its discomfort once again.

NIGHT CURFEW

All for a glimpse



People gather to watch the shooting of upcoming film *Atrangi Re* starring actors Akshay Kumar and Sara Ali Khan, at the historic Taj Mahal in Agra on Monday. - PTI

Farmers to take a call on talks with Centre today

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

The farmers protesting at Delhi's borders are expected to decide upon their future course of the Centre's latest letter to them seeking a date for the next round of talks to end their 26-day-long agitation. The leaders of the farmers' unions claimed they were always ready for a dialogue with the Centre if they were offered a concrete solution to end the stalemate over the three new agriculture laws.

In a letter to 39 union leaders, agriculture minjoint secretary Aggarwal on Sunday asked them to specify their concerns over the Centre's earlier offer of amendments in the laws and pick a convenient date for the next round of talks so that the agitation could end soon.

Krantikari Kisan Union leader Gurmeet Singh "We have already sent them our proposals. They need to respond to what we have already told them. Tomorrow, there will be a Sanyukt Morcha meeting to decide how and when to respond to the government. We will evaluate the govern-ment's letter and then Five round of talks

between the union leaders and the government have remained inconclusive. The sixth round of talks due on December 9 farmers said they would call off their agitation only after the three laws were repealed. The farmers intensified

their protest with a day-long relay hungerstrike on Monday at all protest sites against the new laws. They plan to halt all toll collections on the highways in Haryana for three days from Friday. The union leaders have urged people to skip a meal on "Kisan Diwas" on Wednesday.

They have also urged people to beat "thalis" during the relay of Prime Minister Modi's "Mann ki Baat" on Sunday.

Meanwhile, a farmer from Tarn Taran district of Punjab allegedly tried kill himself at the Singhu border Monday. The 65-year-old farmer

was first admitted to Sonipat's civil hospital but was later referred to Rohtak's Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences. He also wrote a note in support of the protesting farmers.

IN MUMBAI TILL JANUARY 5

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAL DEC. 21

Amidst the reports of

new Coronavirus variant spreading rapidly in Britain. Maharashtra government, as a precautionary measure, announced night curfew metropolis areas of the to January 5. We need to

remain more alert dur-

ing the fortnight, said

Chief Minister Uddhav

According to the meas-

Thackeray.

ures announced by the state government, a night curfew will be imposed in municipal corporation areas between 11 and 6 am from December 22 to January 5 as a precautionary measure. In addition to this, all passengers arriving at the state airports from European and Middle-East Asian countries will be put under institutional quarantine. Those coming from other countries will be home quarantines.

The decision to impose night curfew was taken in a meeting held by Thackeray on the backdrop of alarming situa-tion in the UK. "The new Coronavirus variant is spreading rapidly in Britain and its lethality will be known in coming days. Hence, we need to exercise restraint," the Chief Minister said.

SPECIAL | SESSION | Cabinet to recommend Governor Khan convene session on December 23

Kerala to pass resolution against farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,

Kerala Cabinet on Monday decided to convene a spe-cial session of Assembly on December 23 to discuss Centre's farm bills in

The Cabinet meeting here decided to recommend to Governor Arif Mohammad Khan to convene the special session of Assembly on per 23. Various December 23. political parties both from the ruling LDF and the opposition UDF will express their views on the

farm bills against which farmers across the country are currently agitat-

Barring BJP which has a lone member in the 140 member Assembly, the remaining parties are expected to register their strong opposition to the farm laws which the CPM and Congress led coalitions in the state have dubbed as "anti" farmers.

The Assembly is likely to pass a resolution against the bills. Barring BJP, all principal opposition parties in the state have expressed solidarity with the agitating farmers in Delhi.



Farmers block a road at Ghazipur border during their ongoing agitation in New Delhi on Monday.

Earlier the Kerala government had shot off a let-Singh Tomar pointing out that it would not implement the new farm laws in ter to the Union agriculture minister Narendra the state.

The government told the Union minister that it was opposed to the Central government's position on the farm laws. The Centre was trying to coerce the states to be part of a system that would pave the way for exploitation of farmers by corporate and multinational corpora-

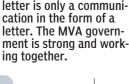
government had described some of the provisions in the new law impractical hence there was no question of accepting such diktats.
The opposition UDF has

also slammed the Centre for bringing the farm laws

haste. Minister and Union ministers have been repeatedly saying that the new farm laws are in the interest of farmers. In that case why have they failed to convince the farmers who are agitating in Delhi under freezing temperatures for the past many days, said a section of UDF leaders. The UDF leaders said

that the Centre was unnecessarily provoking the farmers by resorting to provocative Instead of adopting such a

stand, the Centre should be ready for a climb down,



TRUMP ADVISER

TESTS POSITIVE

Gainesville, Dec. 21: The

leader of a north Georgia

megachurch who has been

a spiritual adviser to President Donald Trump

has tested positive for

Jentezen Franklin, the

senior pastor of Free Chapel in Gainesville was absent from Sunday serv-

ices, news outlets report ed. Pastor Javon Ruff announced the diagnosis

during Free Chapels Sunday service, held both in-person and streamed

live. "We want to make you

aware that Pastor Fra-

nklin has come in contact

with Covid, but he is doing perfectly fine. He actually is doing great,"

'He went and got tested

and his test came back

positive so he is doing the right thing to do and staying quarantined and con-

tinuing to be distanced.'

The diagnosis came with

in days of Franklin atten-

ding a Christmas party at the White House. -AP

Ruff said.

FOR COVID-19

SHORT TAKES

ARMY TO RUN MAYA TRAIN: MEXICAN PREZ

City, Dec. 21: Mexico Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Sunday the army will run the Maya train project and several airports, and use any profits to

finance military pensions.

The army is already overseeing construction on some parts of the controversial project, while private firms build the rest. Obrador said Sunday that "so there won't be the temptation to privatize" the \$6.8 billion project, the army will operate it once built.

The proceeds from that and several airports, some of which the army is constructing — will be used to provide pensions for soldiers and

López Obrador has already given the army more tasks than any other recent Mexican

RARE SALES OF CHRISTMAS ITEMS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Riyadh, Dec. 20: Christmas trees and glittery ornaments are for sale at a Saudi gift shop, a once unthinkable sight in the cradle of Islam where all public non-Muslim worship

is banned. In recent years, festive sales have gradually crept into the capital Riyadh, a sign of loos-ening social restrictions after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledged to steer the conservative Gulf kingdom towards an "open, moderate Islam". "I didn't ever imagine I'd see this" in Saudi Arabia, a Riyadh resident said at the shop selling trees, Santa Claus outfits as well as tinsel,

baubles and other ornaments. "I am surprised," said the resident, declining to be identified. Until barely three years ago, it was almost impossible to sell such items openly in Saudi Arabia, but authorities have been clipping the powers of the clerical establishment long notorious for enforcing

ISRAELI PARL TO VOTE ON BILL TO DELAY POLL CALL

Jerusalem, Dec. 21: Israel's parliament was set to vote Monday on a proposal from its fraught coalition that would temporarily put off the call for a fourth election in less than two years in the country

Israel's coalition government - a broken marriage between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his political rival, Defence Minister Benny Gantz — has been inching towards collapse for weeks.

Under the current arrange ment between Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and Gantz's centre-left Blue and White, the coalition has until one minute past midnight on Wednesday to agree a budget for the cur-

If a 2020 budget is not passed, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, would dissolve, with new elections held as early as

The three-year coalition deal stipulates that Netanyahu serves as premier for 18 months, with Gantz, currently the alternate prime minister, taking over in November 2021

RWANDAN TROOPS DEPLOYED IN C. AFRICAN REP.

Kigali, Dec. 21: Rwanda has deployed troops to the Central African Republic, where its soldiers serving in the UN peacekeeping force have been targeted by rebels, the defence

ministry in Kigali said. The Government of Rwanda has deployed force protection troops to the Central African Republic, under an existing bilateral agreement on defence," said a statement issued late Sunday.

"The deployment is in response to the targeting of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) contingent under the UN Peacekeeping force by rebels supported by (former president) Francois Bozize." On Saturday, the Central African Republic's government accused Bozize of leading an attempted coup as tensions mount ahead of key presidential and legisla-

tive elections on Sunday. A spokesman for the UN's MINÚSCA peacekeeping force in CAR said Sunday that armed rebels that had been advancing on the capital

Bangui had been pushed back. No details were given but the defence ministry said they would "also ensure a peaceful and secure general elections scheduled on Sunday"

Countries begin to seal off UK

Growing concerns of an 'out of control' new Coronavirus variant force nations to suspend flights

became the latest European country to close all its borders with the UK after Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, the Irish Republic, Turkey and Canada suspended flights amid growing concerns of an "out of control" new variant of Coronavirus spreading at a much faster pace in parts of England. India, so far, remains in the travel bubble with the UK, with strict testing and self-isolation rules in place. But with most of Britain now in the strictest Tier 4 lockdown, all non-essential travel remains banned for the majority. Other countries and terr-

itories to announce restrictions on UK travel include Hong Kong, Israel, Iran, Croatia, Argentina, Chile, Morocco and Kuwait. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will chair a meeting of the government's emergency committee on Monday to take stock of the situation as a huge backlog build up on the border with France after even trucks and ferries were blocked entry at the ports. European Union (EU)

member states are also due for a meeting in Brussels to discuss a more coordinated response as the number of Coronavirus infections in the UK jumped to 35,928 on Sunday, down to the much faster spreading new mutation of the novel Coronavirus, with the country's death toll rising by 326 to hit 67,401. "Everybody, particularly people in Tier 4 areas, needs to behave as if they might well have the virus — that is the only way we are going to get it under control," UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock said, adding that the situa-tion is "deadly serious" as the government tries to contain the rapid strain of an "out of control" virus.

"This is a deadly disease, we need to keep it under control, and it has been made more difficult by this new variant," he said. The new variant is said to be 70 per cent more transmissible, though health experts say there is no evidence that it is more deadly or would react differently to vaccines. "It is really too early to tell... but from what we see so far it is growing very quickly, it is growing faster than [a previous variant] ever grew, but it is important to keep an eye on this," said Dr Erik Volz from Imperial College London.

'The amount of evidence in the public domain is woefully inadequate to draw strong or firm opinions on whether the virus has truly increased transmission," added Professor Jonathan Ball, a virologist at the University of Nottingham. It is thought the variant either emerged in a patient in the UK or has been imported from a country with a lower ability to monitor Coronavirus mutations. The variant can be found across the UK, except Northern Ireland, but it is heavily concentrated in London, the South East and eastern England. Cases elsewhere in the country do not seem to have shot up in a similar

infection — by between 0.4 and 0.9. The R number is way so far. how many other people The government's New one person will infect on and Emerging Respiratory average and an epidemic Virus Threats Advisory is in effect if it rises above Group (Nervtag) estimates one. Fears of the new variant meant that over 21 milthe variant could increase the R number — or rate of lion people in England and



A sign on the M56 motorway informs drivers that all routes into France are closed at the junction with the M6 at Lower Stretton near Warrington, northwest England, on Monday. Crucial transit country France moved to block people and goods crossing the Channel, while the Netherlands said passengers arriving by ferry would be denied entry.

EU regulator approves vaccine

Amsterdam, Dec. 21: The European Medicines Agency recommended conditional approval for a Coronavirus vaccine developed by BioNTech and Pfizer to be used across the European Union, weeks after the shot was first granted permission under emergency provisions in Britain and the United

Following a closed-doors expert meeting Monday, the EU drug regulator said it was recommending the

it had detected cases of

the new fast-spreading

ied in the United Kingd-

om, while Hong Kong and

India said they would sus-

pend flights from Britain.

United Kingdom to Austr-

alia's New South Wales

state were found carrying

the mutated variant of the

virus that Britain has said could be up to 70% more

infectious. Both are in

hotel quarantine, and the

recent spike in infections

in Sydney is not linked to

The new strain has pr-

ompted Britain's Europe-

an neighbours and several

others including Canada

and Iran to close their

the country.

doors to travellers from

Much is unknown about

this, authorities said.

Two travellers from the

 FOLLOWING A closeddoors expert meeting Monday, the EU drug regulator said it was recommending the shot be licensed for use in people over 16 years of age, with some exceptions.

shot be licensed for use in people over 16 years of age, with some exceptions. The pharmaceutical companies will need to submit follow-up data on their EMA's approval was "a

Oz detects new UK strain;

HK cancels Britain flights

still be effective against it.

Asian nations, including

said they were monitoring

the new strain even as

they battle a rise in infec-

Hong Kong banned fligh-

ts from Britain in a bid to

curb already rising case

numbers in the dense fina-

ncial hub. The Chinese

special administrative re-

gion said on Monday that

people arriving from Brit-

ain before Dec. 22 would

have to quarantine for th-

India announced a sus-

pension of all flights from

the UK until the end of the

year and said all passen-

before then will be tested

14-day quarantine, said on

Wales who entered new re-

strictions at midnight are

being told to stay at home,

while non-essential shops

and businesses have to

close. Those living under

the newly-created Tier 4

restrictions in England

will now be unable to mix

on arrival at airports.

gers arriving from the UK

Taiwan, which also has a

ree weeks instead of two.

tions at home.

Singapore, Dec. 21: the strain, but experts said Australia said on Monday current vaccines should

coronavirus strain identif- Japan and South Korea,

vaccine for the next year.
"This is really a historic scientific achievement,' said Emer Cooke, the head of the agency. "It is a significant step forward in our fight against the pan-demic." The approval needs to be rubber-stamped by the EU's executive branch on Monday evening. a move its chief said is like-ly to happen Monday evening. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted that the

plans at present to stop

Britain is one of 23 coun-

tries that India shares an

"air bubble" with. India's

health minister said the

country was prepared to

deal with the new strain

and that there was no need

Japan, where entry from

Britain is already banned in principle, said it would

keep in close touch with

other countries as well as

the World Health Organis-

ation to see how the new

type of virus was spread-

ing. The new strain in Britain comes as cases

have surged recently in

several Asian countries

that successfully con-

tained the pandemic earli-

er. The spikes have

prompted localised lock-

downs in some countries.

flights from Britain.

decisive moment in our efforts to deliver safe & effective vaccines to Europeans!" "Now we will act fast. I expect a @EU_Commission decision by this evening," she said.

The EU's executive arm

had been expected to require two or three days to approve the EMA's decision. Authorities in Germany and several other European countries have said they hope to begin vaccinating people on Dec. 27.

PUBLIC MEETINGS BEING CURBED IN S. KOREAN CAPITAL

Seoul, Dec. 21: Gatherings of more than five people will be banned in South Korea's capital region as an elevated step to suppress what authorities call an "explosive" surge in Coronavirus infections.

The Seoul region is home to half of South Korea's 51 million people and has been at the centre of a recent viral resurgence. The country averaged about 960 new virus cases each day in the past week, more than 70 per cent of them in the Seoul metropolitan area. Acting Seoul mayor Seo Junghyup said Monday the ban will apply to any type of meetings, including year-end parties, office dinners, birthday parties and picnics. Only weddings and funerals can follow the current rule of not more than 50 people.

gise for his handling of the with other households indoors at Christmas, unless pandemic. He said the they are part of their British people were paying existing support bubble. Opposition Labour lead-"incompetence", "indecision" and "weak leadership" that was "costing lives and er Sir Keir Starmer acc-used Prime Minister Johnson of "gross negligence" and said he should apolo-

costing jobs".

Biden to receive Coronavirus shot

Washington, Dec. 21: President-elect Joe Biden will receive his first dose of the Coronavirus vac-cine on live television as part of a growing effort to convince the American public the inoculations are safe. Monday's event will come the same day that a second vaccine, produced by Moderna, will start arriving in states, joining Pfizer's in the nation's arsenal against the Covid-19 pandemic, which has now killed more than 317,000 people in the United States and upended life around the globe. "I don't want to get ahead of the line, but I want to make sure we demonstrate to the American people that it is safe to take," Biden has said of ly among Republicans.

Biden and his wife, Jill, will also thank health care workers at the facility where they receive the shots his incoming press secretary has said. Top government officials last week joined the first Americans to be inoculated against Covid-19 as part of the largest largest vaccination campaign in the nation's history. Vice President Mike Pence, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and other lawmakers were given doses Friday.

They chose to publicise their injections as part of a campaign to convince Americans that the vaccines are safe and effective amid skepticism, especial

Congress deal on Covid-19 reprieve

Washington, Dec. 21: Top Capitol Hill negotiators sealed a deal Sunday on an almost \$1 trillion Covid-19 economic relief package, finally delivering long-overdue help to businesses and individuals and providing money to deliver vaccines to a nation eager for them. The agreement, announced by Senate leaders, would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans, along with a new round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools health care providers and

renters facing eviction. The House was expected to vote on the legislation very late Sunday or Monday and Senate action would follow. Lawmakers are THE AGREEMENT, announced by Senate leaders, would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans, along with a new round of subsidies for hardhit businesses and money for schools, health care providers and renters fac-

eager to leave Washington and close out a tumultuous year. A breakthrough came late Saturday in a fight over Federal Reserve emergency powers that was resolved by the Senate's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York, and conservative Republican Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

ing eviction.

HK court upholds protest mask ban

Hong Kong, Dec. 2 1: The Hong Kong government's decision to use a colonial-era emergency law to ban masks at protests last year was both proportionate and legal, the city's top court ruled Monday.

The ruling is a blow for democracy supporters who had been hoping the Court of Final Appeal would side with a lower court and overturn the order. It also confirms that Hong Kong's chief executive — a pro-Beijing appointee — has the power to enact any law in a time of public emergency without needing the approval of the city's partially elected legislature.

But its practical conse-

quences were unclear. given that the government has made masks compulsory in public areas to combat the Covid pandemic. Hong Kong was convulsed by seven straight months of huge and often vi-

ests last year. They were eventually quashed by mass arrests, a virus-related ban on public gatherings and Beijing imposing a new national security law on the

olent pro-democracy prot-

city in June. Masks became ubiquitous to reduce the risk of identification and prosecution for those taking part in peaceful marches, or violent clashes with

MAJOR | OUTBREAK | More than 1,100 prisoners were infected while seven have died

Virus spikes after jail inmate transfers

Dec. Families of men incarcerated at Michigan's Kinross Correctional believed its remote location would spare it from a deadly Covid-19 outbreak. For a while, they seemed to be right.

Kinross, built on the grounds of a former Air Force base in the Upper Peninsula, is closer to Canada than it is to Detroit. Unlike most prisons in Michigan, Kinross remained almost unscathed by the novel coronavirus with only one case between March and October. But on Oct. 28, corrections officials transferred nine prisoners to Kinross from Marquette

Branch Prison, several

hours west, where Covid-19 was running rampant. There were 837 confirmed cases by late October, 350 of which were still active when the men were transferred. Roughly three weeks later, Kinross had its first major outbreak, corrections department

data showed. Though agency officials say it's not because of the transfers, more than 1,100 prisoners have now been infected, at least seven have died and more than 100 guards have fallen ill. The prisoners who came to Kinross had been transferred twice, sent first to Marquette after a riot where they were held, and then had tested positive for Covid-19 there before • KINROSS, BUILT on the grounds of a former Air Force base in the Upper Peninsula, is closer to Canada than it is to Detroit.

• UNLIKE MOST prisons in Michigan, Kinross had remained almost unscathed by the novel coronavirus with only one case between March and October.

 BUT ON Oct. 28, corrections officials transferred nine prisoners to Kinross from Marquette Branch Prison, several hours west, where Covid-19 was running rampant.

leaving for Kinross, officials said. In prisons around the country, Covid-19 outbreaks have followed transfers of prisoners or prison workers.

Nearly all of the 25 state prison systems and the federal Bureau of Prisons that responded to a survey conducted by The Marsha-

ll Project and The Associated Press said they had reduced or limited the number of prisoners they moved due to the pandemic. Eight states halted the practice except in special circumstances.

The reductions were keeping in line with medical attacks on vaccine ship-guidelines. But most of ments." -AFPguidelines. But most of ments.'

those states lifted their restrictions by September and few prison systems heeded the earlier lessons as the pandemic worsened this winter, worrying families of prisoners and correctional officers who work in the prisons.

Meanwhile, Interpol chief Juergen Stock predicted Monday a sharp rise in crimes with robbers seeking to get their hands on precious vaccines aimed at stopping the Coronavir-us pandemic. "With vaccines rolling out, crime will increase dramatical-' Stock told business weekly WirtschaftsWoche. We will see thefts and warehouse break-ins and

Chronicle

22 DECEMBER 2020

Battleground Bengal: Didi faces a huge test

amata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress are facing an epic batthe for political survival as Union home minister Amit Shah virtually launched the BJP's campaign for the April-May elections during his two-day visit that ended Sunday. While it can't be denied that the departure of Suvendu Adhikari, a key aide and onetime Nandigram pointperson, who joined the saffron party along with several MLAs on Settunday is a major blow to the TMC supremo; if she takes it as a wake up call. Saturday, is a major blow to the TMC supremo, if she takes it as a wake-up call and tries rectification measures, changing the way her government and party function, all may still not be lost.

The BJP as a challenger has many advantages — the virtually limitless funds it has access to, which neither the TMC nor any other party in India can match. Add to this is the dominance due to its control of the Central government and of several states, most of which made possible by the election

machine Mr Shah and his boss Narendra Modi have devised since 2014. However, West Bengal isn't quite the fertile ground the Modi-Shah duo are familiar with in northern India. Mr Shah had to acknowledge, during his just-completed visit, that here the Bengali identity transcends all the different ways the BJP slices

challenger has many advantages — the to, which neither the TMC nor any other

The BJP as a and splices Hindutva-related issues elsewhere to produce electoral victories with remarkable regularity. The cries of "Jai Shri Ram" at Mr Shah's impressive roadshow at Bolpur did elicit virtually limitless roars of approval, but it later transpired the funds it has access crowd was brought in from a neighbouring Hindi-speaking state. If the BJP is wise, it won't repeat that exercise in a hurry.

The BJP's posters in Bolpur and Santiniketan, party in India can home to Rabindranath Tagore's Visvabharati, in which the home minister's photo was placed above Gurudev's, which set off widespread

protests, was yet another ill-advised move by a party whose local leadership seems singularly clueless about how it would hurt Bengali sentiments Likewise, to speak of the homogenisation and standardisation of Indian culture, there couldn't be a more inappropriate spot than Gurudev's campus celebrating diversity, where "narrow domestic walls" have no place.

The "outsider" tag Ms Banerjee sought to paint Mr Shah with seems to have rankled, with the minister declaring no one could be an "outsider" as everyone was an Indian, with references to Indira Gandhi and others, but contradicted himself by virtually anointing Mr Adhikari as a "bhoomi putra" and possible CM face. It remains to be seen, though, if Bengalis are ready to accept the somewhat rustic and rough-spoken Mr Adhikari in that role, once filled by the likes of Bidhan Chandra Roy, Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Even Ms Banerjee, before becoming CM, had served multiple terms as a Union minister. It is undeniable that there is widespread disenchantment with Mamata Banerjee and her government on several counts. Her mismanagement on several fronts, the rising corruption and extortion that her partymen are accused of and the minority appeasement that has cost her significant support. Bringing in Prashant Kishor to firefight isn't enough — in fact he is blamed for some of the recent exodus from the party. But what does the BJP promise? How will it end corruption by inducting TMC leaders accused of multiple offences into its fold? Given the Centre's mismanagement of the nation's economy, how will it end Bengal's mess? And with what magic wand will Mr Shah create the "Sonar Bangla" that he has promised?

Is China behind Oli's move?

epalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari's consent to Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's recommendation, after a Cabinet meeting, to dissolve Parliament on Sunday and call elections in April, two years ahead of time, came after 91 ruling party MPs in a House of 275 moved a no-confidence motion against the PM. This has raised a Constitutional question in Kathmandu, and the matter is before the Supreme Court.

Whatever the court's verdict, it is evident the Himalayan nation is in the

throes of a political crisis. The dissonance within the ruling establishment had been brewing for eight months. Mr Oli was PM and co-chairman of the Nepal Communist Party along with Pushpa Kumar Dahal Prachanda, a former PM.

He was not willing to let go of either post. The tussle at the top has riven the ruling NCP down the middle. Seven Cabinet ministers resigned when the PM recommended dissolution prior to fresh polls. It's not clear if the turbulence will spill over on to the streets. There can be no guarantee of orderly elections

This is a situation that is tailor-made for sub-rosa intervention by Beijing, which had invested considerable political capital in Mr Oli, shoring up his govwith financial support and political guidance at a time w China relations have plummeted with the Chinese Army pushing inside India's frontier region in Ladakh. New Delhi needs to be watchful.

Nepal is of strategic value to India. From New Delhi's perspective, it is important that Kathmandu at least remain neutral even as Beijing has been on a heavy wooing spree, with Chinese President Xi Jinping paying a high-profile visit to Kathmandu not long ago. The Oli government had even begun the "study" of Xi Jinping "thought" in Nepal. The best that India can do is to attempt to play a stabilising role. This had been started with the recent visit to Kathmandu of the foreign secretary and the Army Chief. The process can be sought to be bolstered.

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Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemmudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

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Congress drifts as real issues are left ignored



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

den, intrigues-infested Congress Party, in its decrepit state, remains more interesting for political observer than the regimented Bharatiya Janata Party, with the monotonous hectoring of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the few chosen leaders who are licensed to speak. There are more inside Congress despite the dominance of the Nehru-Gandhis, with its camp followers in tow. The meeting convened by party president Sonia Gandhi, which included Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and the 23 "dissenters" who dared to raise doubts about the party's leadership held on Saturday seems to have been a

faction-rid-

cloak and dagger affair. The Gandhis seem to have said that the party was "like a family" and that they should all work loyalists intoned that Rahul Gandhi was the right man to become president once again because he enjoys enormous support in the

organisation. The dissidents wanted a decision on the issue of who will lead the party and how, and Rahul Gandhi deflected the question, saying that the meeting was not convened to discuss who will be president but to strengthen the party. He had also clarified that he had nothing against the seniors in the party as it was made out. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said there was a real need to take to the streets and that just submitting memorandums would not suffice. There was an assurance from the Gandhis that the process of organisational

elections was on.
The dissidents said that there would be another

It looks like procrastination is the chosen path of the Congress even now. It might have been the secret of the party's success in the past, but it does not look like it is effective any longer.

meeting soon like the one on Saturday — for brain-storming on the lines of meetings Pachmarhi (held in 1998) and Shimla (2003) in the first decade of Sonia Gandhi as president. But there was no official announcement that there would be such a meeting. At the end of the day, there was no clarity on whether peace was made with the dissidents who wrote the letter or whether they have been left high and dry with vague assurances that the Gandhis recognise their

This has always been

the way of the Congress, in the party as well as in the days when it was in power, not to face up to problems or to solve them. The issues are left unaddressed. At the most, consultations outcomes are held. It looks like procrastination is the chosen path of the Congress even now. It might have been the secret of the party's success in the past, but it does not look like it is effective any longer. An aggressive BJP is not marginalising Congress as much as the Congress is busy making itself irrelevant.

Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy. Rahul

Gandhi has instinctively

and discredited secular-ism, and socialism, which was what was abandoned by Rajiv Gandhi in the 1988 Congress session at the Kamaraj Nagar venue in Chennai. Rahul Gandhi may have his own logic behind his socialist stance. He might say that it was necessary in 1988 to abandon Nehru's socialism of the 1950s, but it is necessary to go back to some kind of socialism in 2020, with globalisation at the end of its tether. And in a certain sense, Rahul Gandhi might be right that the only way to fight the BJP's Hindu majoritarianism is to stick to one's secularism stance with conviction. But the critics of Congress, including religious minorities, are not convinced that the Congress

The challenge before the Congress is to sense the political winds as well, which is what it tries to do half-heartedly, and becomes an easy target of both the majority communalists as well as the minority communalists. There is no one in the Congress and in the liberal intelligentsia outside to forge a plank which will Hindus who are religious, tell them Hindutva is anti-Hindu,

is standing up for secular-

ism with enough convic-

which it is. The new rationale of secularism should be formulated as defending the rights of religious minorities along with the majority's religious rights. The party is indeed moving in this direction, but there is no one really of any standing to articulate this calibrated stance.

The real crisis in the

Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy.

embraced old-fashioned Congress is that of the party's second- and third-rung leaders depending on the Gandhis to win elections for them in the way they used to, and to sing praises of the Gandhis as their sav-

> The Gandhis are now unable to deliver electoral victories, and this is no fault of Rahul Gandhi. The country has changed, and people are not looking up to charismatic leaders.

> Of course, the BJP leaders are acting like the Congress when they praise Narendra Modi as the talisman of their party, and that Mr Modi is winning the elections for them. It is of course an illusion, not much different from the Congress' that the Gandhis are the mascots.

The dissidents are critical of the monopoly of the Gandhis' followers in the party, who are blocking everyone's way. But the dissidents also do not have any bright ideas to fashion a political vision for the party and the country. But there is something common that unites the Congress establishment (the Gandhis' camp holding party positions) and the dissidents. They are not perturbed by have played the game of power much longer than anyone else, and they believe that electoral setbacks are seasonal and that it is not necessary to lose sleep over it.

The many people who do not like Congress and its wily ways but who feel that it is a necessary evil to fight the BJP, which is more dangerous because of its authoritarian and totalitarian regime, are agonising over the pre-sent dilapidated state of the grand old party.

They are forever suggesting solutions to the Congress' problems, which are given short shrift by the party itself. The Congress isn't going its mend its ways anytime feel that they do not have to do so.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

STOP DEFECTIONS

There has been a mass defection from the TMC to the ruling BJP in the runup to elections in Bengal (Shah to extend stay from Jan. after defections, DC, Dec. 21). It is a mockery of democracy. Parliament needs to enact a law to prevent elected members from switching parties before their tenure is over.

Dr C. Ghanshyam Visakhapatnam

MONOPOLY LOST

In AP, private English medium schools have built empires with spacious buildings and fleet of buses. Now ,with the introduction of English in government schools and Amma Vodi enrolment scheme, students are migrating to government schools in droves, leaving behind almost empty private schools and the managements are in for a shock of their lives.

Parthasarathy Mandadi

VIRUS STRAIN IN UK

It is unfortunate that London is reeling under enhanced threat from new variant of Coronavirus. The mutated version is said to be a superspreader. The UK government has alerted its citizen about it and tier 4 restrictions are put in place to restrict the disease. It should be a wake-up call for the entire world, especially India. A bit of laxity is seen in the public. **Dr D.V.G. Sankararao**

Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN • ⊿nronicle

Sex deviations in **Britain** LONDON, Dec. 21 Sex change operations at 300

sterling (Rs. 5,400) at a time, paid for by the tax-payer, are on the increase in Britain, according to an expert in the treatment of sexual deviants. The expert's statement followed

a disclosure in a Sunday newspaper here that already this year in Britain seven men had been changed into women. The reason, according to a spe-

cial list in the field of trans-sexualism was the mental distress caused by trans-sexual problems.

A senior official of the Alabama Trust — a charity organisation helping deviants said: "There are a growing number of people with trans-sexual problems seeking medical advice." At least 45 men and a number of women had already had treatment in Britain.

Aakar Patel



'Time bombs' ticking in the Constitution are a worry

here are some time bombs ticking in our Constitution that worry me. These are in Part 4 of the document, about we are assured by the Constitution's writers that "the provisions contained in this Part shall not be enforceable by any court, but the principles therein laid down are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws

So, these are only principles then. But our experience has been that these are akin to gospel. How many literate Indians will assume that the government is obliged to constitutionally bring about the prohibition of cow slaughter (Part 4's Article 48)? I would say the vast majority would think that.

The insistence with which the ban is pushed might lead one to forget that there is a distinction between a principle not meant to be enforceable and an obligation which must be legislated forthwith ("it's in the Constitution!").

Fewer Indians are likely know about Article 47, which nudges the

State towards making its citizens teetotallers ("the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health").

The insistence, seen most recently in Bihar, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, on creating better, more moral Indians through sobriety is also underpinned by what is seen as the same constitu tional obligation on legislators.

The time bombs that worry me are a little further down, in Article 51A, which specifies fundamental duties. It is instructive to read them in full because, and I fear this is already happening, we are moving in the direction of turning these things into laws. The list reads:

"Fundamental duties. It shall be the duty of every citizen of India:
(a) to abide by the Constitution and

respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National (b) to cherish and follow the noble

ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom; (c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India; (d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to

(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, tran-scending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture; (g) to protect and improve the nat-

ural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures; (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry

and reform; (i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;

(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.

Almost everything here fills me with a sense of dread. Example: the bit in (c) saying it is our duty to uphold and protect India's sovereign-

ty, unity and integrity. Are those who raise their voice against, say, the use of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Kashmir and the Northeast violating this duty? If so, should they be punished? One might say, no, it is only a general principle offset by other rights. But then, so is a ban on cow slaughter and a ban on alcohol.

What about (a), which requires us to respect the national flag and anthem? Violation of this has already been criminalised, and it happened long before Narendra Modi. We are, however, living in times when the flag and nationalism have been conflated. Are you worried something coercive is around the corner that might equate even inaction with insult? I am. There is talk of a ₹100 crore fine for mistakes in maps.

The inability of our courts to often weed out majoritarian sentiment (as witnessed in the matter of cow slaughter) leads me to think that there is no proper safeguard available there either. The Constitution is a terrific document, but it is also one that has suppressed the Hindu majoritarian sentiment. We are living through times when this suppression is being popularly rejected. The path to getting everyone to fall in line is open and it lies through such provisions as we have seen. It is no good to say these are only directive principles or whatever else because our experience shows that this is no defence. If something is "in the Constitution", that is the end of it.

Going through the list, some of the clauses are quite chilling, such as 38(1): "The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the

national life. Chilling, I accept, given the current mood more than anything else, but

chilling nonetheless There are several (equal pay for women — Article 39d) that I suspect will not be taken up with any degree of seriousness. It is the ones that touch our current high-intensity nationalism that worry me, and these are the ones I call time bombs.

> The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

ANANTAPUR | TUESDAY | 22 DECEMBER 2020

0.23

45,553.96 -3.00 13,328.40 -3.14 Nifty 50 S&P 500³ 3,669.42 -1.08 73.79 -0.29 Dollar (₹) Pound Sterling (₹) 1.75 89.84 0.30 Euro (₹)

-2.15 Brent crude (\$/bbl)* 5.957 -0.003 IN 10-Yr bond yield US 10-Yr T-bill yield* 0.930 -0.018

Gold (10gm)* (₹)

* As of 9:30 PM IST

FinMin releases ₹6K cr to states for GST shortfall

The finance ministry on Monday released the eighth weekly instalment of ₹6,000 crore to the states to meet the GST compensation shortfall, taking the total amount released so far under this window to ₹48,000 crore.

The Centre had set up a special borrowing window in October, 2020 to meet the estimated shortfall of ₹1.10 lakh crore in revenue arising on account of implementation of GST.

Booking for new Audi A4 sedan begins in India



German luxury carmaker Audi on Monday announced opening of bookings for its upcoming new version of A4 sedan in India. The fifth-generation Audi A4 powered by a 2.0-litre fourcylinder petrol engine can be booked with a booking amount of ₹2 lakh, either through online mode or at the company's dealerships. "This will be our first product launch for 2021," Audi India head Balbir Singh Dhillon said.

AstraZeneca gets nod to market asthma drug

Drug firm AstraZeneca Pharma on Monday said that it has received marketing authorisation from Drug Controller General of India (DGCI) for Benralizumab solution, indicated as an add-on maintenance treatment for severe asthma. Benralizumab (Fasenra) is indicated as an add-on maintenance treatment for severe asthma with an eosinophilic phenotype in adult patients, the company said.

Vineet Agarwal takes over as Assocham chief



Logistics major Transport Corporation of India Limited managing director Vineet Agarwal has taken over as the new president of The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham). He replaces Niranjan Hiranandani, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Hiranandani Group of Companies. Sumant Sinha, CMD of ReNew Power, is the new senior vice-president of Assocham.

Corporate profits hit an all-time high in Q2

Margins widen on lower input costs, better utilisation

rate profits rose 15 per cent to touch an all-time high in the September quarter as margins widened on softer input costs and better utilisation levels, the research arm of leading rating agency Crisil said on Monday.

From an absolute per spective, the earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) touched an all-time high ₹1.60 lakh crore in the September quarter, as against ₹1.02 lakh crore in the preceding June quarter, it said.

It can be noted that the trend of companies' profits growing even as the economy contracts as a result of the pandemic has led some watchers to express concern claiming this is illustrative of widening inequalities.

Crisil, which analysed a sample of 800 listed entities comprising 85 per cent of NSE's market cap

In a relief to Amazon Inc, the Delhi High Court on

Monday declined to grant

an interim injunction to

Future Group which had sought an order to

restrain the global e-com-

merce company from interfering in the \$3.4-bil-

SANGEETHA G.

FPI inflows touch 12-yr high in Nov.

Mumbai, Dec. 21: Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), which own more than 24 per cent of the domestic market, pumped in a record \$8.1 billion last month, highest in 12 years, and at \$5 billions. lion to date, December also looks to get record inflows, says a foreign brokerage report.
At \$8.1 billion, India
has received the highest

FPI inflows among the emerging markets in in sectors excluding bank-

ing and finance and oil

and gas, said improving

utilisation levels, along

with better management

of power, fuel and raw

material cost by large

Group and RIL. However,

the court found that the

board resolution approv-

ing the Future-RIL deal

was not prima facie void.
"...the present application is disposed off, declin-

ing the grant of interim

injunction as prayed for

by Future Retail, however,

the statutory authorities/regulators are direct-

ed to take the decision on

November, as Brazil got only \$6.2 billion, South Korea (\$5.2 billion), Taiwan (\$4.5 billion) and Thailand at \$1.1 billion. This inflow had the

valuation premium of India to other emerging markets in the MSCI Index shooting up by 5 percentage point to 46 per cent and is five per cent above the long-term average, says Bank of America Securities in a

companies contributed to handsome profit Aggregate

operating profit margins improved by over one per cent despite a rise in raw mate-

applications/objec-

Future Group

tions in accordance with

announced the sale of its

retail and wholesale busi-

ness to Reliance Retail in

August, Amazon had filed

an arbitration petition

with Emergency Arbitra-

tor at Singapore Interna-

tional Arbitration Centre

(SIAC) in October, claim-

the law," the court said.

in its sample showed a contraction of four per cent while the same for ed a moderate growth.

the service sector report-The growth in profits came even as the revenues did not go up, the report said, pointing out that the topline was "stable" in Q2 as compared to the yearago period after falling 29

per cent in the April-June

From an employee costs perspective, which is lead-ing to the concerns, it said

370 manufacturing firms

quarter. The small enterprises have taken a brunt of the hit in revenue impact as compared to the large ones, it said. "Large players saw muted revenue growth. However, small players, which are typically low on bargaining power and cash crunched remained in the red. The smaller the company, the more excruciating the

ing that Future breached

the contract which was

entered while taking an

indirect stake in their

retail business by buying

shares in Future Coupons.

The High Court also

observed that the parties

have expressly chosen the

SIAC rules as the curial

law governing the conduct

of arbitration proceed-

pain," it said.

Nizam College.

DC CORRESPONDENT

In a dramatic turn of

events, results of elec-

tions of a new board of

directors for AP Mahesh

Co-operative Bank have been withheld by the returning officer, follow-

ing allegations of mal-

As many as 32,000 share-

holders cast their votes in

the elections conducted at

LB Stadium on Sunday to

elect 15 directors of the

bank. The counting com-

menced on Monday at

After the completion of six rounds of counting,

Bhagwati Devi Baldewa,

the challenger to the

incumbent chairman Ramesh Bung, objected to

said. "A combination of lockdown fatigue and strong pent-up demand, coupled with positive sentiment due to announcements on the vaccine saw 89 per cent respondents

About 67 per cent

returning officer had stopped the counting and withheld the results without citing any reason. "As their victory of our panel became imminent, the rival panel hurled baseless allegations against us," said Bung.
According to sources,
the panel led by the

incumbent chairman had secured 12 posts, while the Baldewa panel got three

The counting got disrupted for two hours due to power outage. After the power supply resumed, Baldewa raised objections against the votes. During the polling day also the Bhagwati panel alleged that bogus votes were cast which led to tension at LB

89% Indians are keen to resume travel, says survey

Mahesh Bank election

ends up in controversy

After rival candidate Bhagwati Devi alleged

bogus votes, returning

abruptly stopped the

ed in a mild tension

both the panels.

counting and withheld the results. This result-

between supporters of

the counting of votes in the seventh round alleg-

ing that they are bogus

Returning officer S.

Tharani abruptly stopped

the counting and left the

counting centre. The withholding of results trig-

gered a mild tension

between supporters of

Bung alleged that the

both the panels.

officer S. Tharani

Travel services firm Thomas Cook India and its Group Firm SOTC Travel on Monday said that 89 per cent of respondents in a survey conducted by them across tier-1 and 2 cities in India displayed keen interest to resume travel, revealing resurgence of consumer confidence.

Thomas Cook India and its group company surveyed over 2,700 customers to identify emerging consumer behaviours and trends that will drive travel preferences during the COVID-19 era, a joint survey report, enclosed with a regulatory filing,

displaying keen interest to resume travel," the survey added.

respondents are willing to travel in the next 6 months while 33 per cent indicated that they would wait for the launch of the vaccine, according to the sur-

"Respondents continue to display an increasing focus on hygiene and safety — with 93 per cent respondents highlighting factor while deciding a holiday," Thomas Cook India said.

Out of the 2,700 respondents across the tier I and tier II cities, 52 per cent stated that they are likely to take a domestic holiday, while 48 per cent of respondents likely to take an international holiday

With health and safety topping the priority list in travel decisions, 73 per cent respondents said that they are willing to increase spends to ensure higher levels of health and safety on their holi-day, the company said in

lion deal between Future **SUCSEED VC FUND INKS DEALS WITH**

3 STARTUP FIRMS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Hyderabad-based SucSEED Indovation, a Sebi registered Alternative Investment Fund (AIF-1) venture capital fund, on Monday said that it has raised ₹40 crore for its maiden fund. Through this fund, the venture fund plans to support over 50 startups till they become large enterprises.

Making the announcement, Vikrant Varshney, co-founder and managing partner of the venture capital fund, said, "We are excited to state an overwhelming response and oversubscription to our first closing of the maiden ₹100 crore fund. Angel Investors, CXOs in large Domestic and global enterprises, family offices, and few family trusts have participated in the first successful

closing of ₹40 crore." Announcing the details of new early-stage investments, Vikrant said "Indovation Fund has identified three startups — Stargate, Auris, and Freestand — for invest-

ment and has signed term

GMR gets nod for demerger plan

Delhi High Court refuses to restrain Amazon

GMR Infrastructure on Monday said that it has received consent from stock exchanges, with no adverse observations, on its proposed restructuring involving demerger of its non-airport vertical business.

The company said it will file the scheme with the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) within six months.

The company said it had filed an application to "the BSE and National Stock Exchange of India towards the composite scheme of amalgamation and arrangement amongst GMR Power Infra (GPIL), GMR Infrastructure, GMR Power and Urban Infra and their respective shareholders (scheme)". In August this year, GMR Infrastructure unveiled a strategic group restructuring plan involving demerger of non-airport vertical business as part of efforts to simplify the corporate hold-

ing structure. The restructuring is a

step in the right direction towards creating pure plays in different businesses of the group thereby attracting sector-specific investors and unlocking value for the current shareholders of GMR Infrastructure, the company had then said in a

statement. Separate listing of both the airport and non-airport businesses will also help in simplifying the co rporate holding structure, the

statement said. The vertical split demerger will go a long way in facilitating deep-er understanding of the airport business independently as compared to other business verti-cals within the group, the statement added.

Currently, GMR group operates the country's busiest aerodrome, Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, and Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. Also, it operates Cebu airport in the Philippines.

Global pharma may look at India for APIs

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, DEC. 21

Global pharma companies are actively looking at derisking their supply chain from China by adding new suppliers of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and India, which is increasing its production, is in a sweet spot. Global companies, espe-

cially those based in the US and Europe, are actively looking at de-risking their supply chain from China. "They have three options: They can either produce APIs in-house or outsource manufacturing to other US or Europe-based companies. The third option is to choose a supplier from a developing country ex-China. However, the first two options are not viable for their entire portfolio, leaving the third option," finds Emkay Global

Financial Services. Indian companies have an edge, given their long history of supplying for-mulations and APIs globally, better quality and regulatory compliance and better supply reliability. However, the financial impact of the decision of global companies will take time as adding an API sup-plier will take 6-18 months, depending on regulatory pathway.

Production-linked incentive schemes and bulk drug parks will increase production of APIs, especially the 53 APIs included in the PLI scheme. They will also lower the cost differential between India and China to close to zero.

According to Ravi Uday Bhaskar, director general of the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil), the schemes will help the schemes will help increase India's produc-tion of chemicals and intermediates. "We are trying to consolidate our position in generic formulations as well as APIs.

largest supplier of APIs. We need to work on improving our cost effi-ciency as well," he said.

The PLI scheme and bulk drug parks will address most of the key elements needed to improve cost efficiency. Higher volumes, lower

cost of utilities such as electricity, steam, warehousing, lower effluent treatment costs, cost of labour and technology are the key drivers of efficien-

Bulk drug park scheme will address utilities costs and effluent treatment costs, while PLI scheme's 20 per cent incentive on fermentation based APIs and 10 per cent for chemical-based API will further bridge the cost gap.

MOST INDIANS SEEK TO BUY 5G READY SMARTPHONES

New Delhi, Dec. 21: Around 83 per cent people in a survey in India shared that 5G is one of the factors that they consider while buying a new phone and nearly three in every five existing premium smartphone users are looking to upgrade their device to the next generation technology, according to a report released by Cybermedia Research.

According to the survey 81 per cent respondents prefer Oppo for 5G smartphone and 79 per cent opted for Samsung.

The global survey conducted in India, China and West Europe found that 5G users, where the service is available, have experienced better video calls, faster downloads and ability to stream ultra high definition videos and satisfaction level from 5G is around 80 per cent. The technology is pushing growth of video content creation in markets where it is available and the same is expected to follow in India as well, the report said.

US CONGRESS SEALS NEARLY \$1-TRILLION COVID-19 RELIEF

Washington, Dec. 21: Top Capitol Hill negotia-tors sealed a deal on Sunday on an almost \$1 trillion Covid-19 economic relief package, finally delivering long-overdue help to businesses and individuals and providing money to deliver vaccines to a nation eager for them.

The agreement, announced by Senate leaders, would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans, along with a new round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools, health care providers and renters facing eviction.

The House was expected to vote on the legislation on very late Sunday or Monday and Senate action would follow. Lawmakers are eager to leave Washington and close out a tumultuous year. -AF

FOCUS | PROFIT | Government is keen on increasing profitability to realise more value during stake sale

Centre plans tough annual targets for PSUs and a document on the

New Delhi, Dec. 21: India plans to set tough financial targets for stateimprove their valuations ahead of a push by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to privatise some companies, according to a draft government document and sources.

The government, which is trying to rein in its fiscal deficit, wants staterun firms to focus on improving market capitalisation and dividend payouts from the 2021-22 fiscal year, starting April, as well as ramping up the sale of non-core assets, the sources said.

State-run companies have traditionally largely targeted raising output

and increasing revenues, rather than improving efficiency and valuations, contributing to years of share price underperformance versus the broader market.

"The companies need to raise their valuation and profitability in a changing business environment. Then only we will be able to get a better price (from stake sales). Shareholders and investors should be rewarded," said a government source with knowledge of the

After regaining power in 2019, Modi's government prepared a plan to raise as much as ₹3.25 lakh crore over five years by selling down its stakes

 The government wants state-run firms to focus on improving market capitalisation and dividend payouts from the 2021-22 fiscal year, starting April, as well as ramping up the sale of non-core assets, the sources said.

 For unlisted companies an improvement in earnings per share will be a key parameter instead of market capitalisation, the document

in companies including Oil and Natural Gas Corp, Indian Oil Corp, NMDC Ltd, Coal India, Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd and BEML Ltd.

It announced moves to privatise companies in non-strategic parts of the economy and reduce the number of firms in key sectors. The government

has already initiated steps to privatise Bharat Petroleum, Container Corp and Shipping Corp. However, weak investor

sentiment and limited demand have led to delays. So far this fiscal year to end-March 2021, government has raised only a tenth of its targeted ₹1.2 lakh crore

The planned changes in annual targets could be announced in next year's federal budget, due in February, a second government source said. 'The state run compa-

nies will need to deploy funds raised through asset monetisation for issues like debt repayment. They should have capital employed and return on equity quite high on the margin," the source said.

For the first time, India will include annual targets for state-run companies on metrics such as earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA), according to the sources draft guidelines, which is currently before a government committee.

Other targets will include increasing mar-ket capitalisation or share price, as well as measures such as return on net worth and capital employed, they said. For unlisted companies

an improvement in earnings per share will be a key parameter instead of market capitalisation, the document showed. Managers at state-run

companies will have their bonuses and incentives linked to meeting the annual targets. The annual targets. The finance ministry did not respond to emails seeking comments.

SHORT TAKES

Man Utd revel in 6-2 win vs Leeds

Manchester: Manchester United waited 16 years to play old rivals Leeds in the English Premier League, and then made it look distinctly second-class. United charged to a 6-2 victory on Sunday, though both teams could easily have scored more, as they roared back into the

EPL title race in third. The easy win put United ahead of Tottenham, which swept United aside 6-1 in October. Scott McTominay looked like one of the Premier League's top scorers as Man United swept into an early lead over

Defensive midfielder McTominay who hadn't scored in the EPL since March netted in the second and third minutes after he was left plenty of space to run through the Leeds defense. Bruno Fernandes and Victor Lindelof extended United's lead amid more static defending from Leeds, with more goals from Daniel James and Fernandes in the second

Mariners give BFC the blues

Goa: David Williams' 33rdminute strike proved the difference as ATK Mohun Bagan got the better of Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League at the Fatorda Stadium on Monday. The Australian scored his first goal of the campaign with a stunner which was enough to inflict on Bengaluru, their first defeat of the season. The win took the Kolkata side

level to 16 points from seven matches, the same as Mumbai City FC. Bengaluru stayed third with 12 points. ATKMB looked threatening from the start and had good opportunities to convert their

dominance into goals. But Manvir Singh saw both his efforts easily saved by the keeper during the first quarter. ATKMB deservingly took the lead at the half-hour mark.

Benzema leads Madrid to win

Barcelona: Karim Benzema scored one goal and set up another to lead Real Madrid to a 3-1 win at Eibar, keeping the defending champions level on points with Atletico Madrid at the top of the Spanish league. Zinedine Zidane's side is behind Atletico on goal difference. The city rivals are three points ahead of Real Sociedad and eight points ahead of Barcelona, who are in fifth place behind Villarreal. Benzema opened the scoring in the sixth minute on Sunday wnen ne controlled an expert pass from Rodrygo before knocking the ball past goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic. The French striker assisted Luka Modric in the 12th after he found the Croatia midfielder arriving unmarked at the edge of the area. Modric fired a right-footed strike into the net to score what

AC Milan's Leao

proved to be the winning goal.

scores in 6 secs!

Milan: AC Milan forward Rafael the fastest-ever goal in Serie A history on Sunday, netting after just six seconds in a 2-1 win at Sassuolo which kept his side top of the table ahead of city rivals Inter Milan. Milan, chasing a first Serie A title since 2011. launched

straight into attack from kickoff, with Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu setting up Leao to slot home the rapid opener.

The previous fastest goal in the Italian top flight had been Paolo Poggi's for Piacenza against Fiorentina in December 2001 after eight seconds. Milan have a one-point advantage on Antonio Conte's Inter who beat Spezia 2-1, with champions Juventus four points behind the leaders in third after a 4-0 win over Parma on Saturday. — AFP



Big Bash League: Sydney Thunder vs Perth Scorchers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Italian League: Crotone vs Parma from 11 pm, Juventus vs Fiorentina from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on

Sony Ten 2, HD Indian Super League: Odisha vs North East United from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

WWE Raw: Bouts from 6.30 am on Sony Ten 1, HD

All eyes on Jadeja Sindhu, Saina ready for action

Ravindra likely to replace Vihari in playing XI for second Test

agement will be keenly monitoring Ravindra Jadeja's progress leading up to the Boxing Day Test against Australia this weekend as, if fit, the all-rounder could walk into the playing XI in place of Hanuma Vihari.

Jadeja, who suffered a concussion during the first T20 international, also sustained a hamstring injury which ruled him out of the first Test.

However, over the past few days when India were playing the Test match, Jadeja has slowly returned to the

nets. It has been learnt that the senior all-rounder is recovering well but it can't be said with certainty that he will be 100 per cent fit for the second Test in Melbourne starting on December 26.

But if fit, the axe will fall on Andhra Pradesh batsman Vihari, not scores in the Adelaide Test but purely based on the best combina-tion that Ajinkya Rahane and Ravi Shastri can put on the

"If Jadeja gets fit to bowl long spells, then there is no debate at Jadeja replaces Vihari on the basis of his all-round skills. Also it gives us an option to play five bowlers at the MCG," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

With Mohammed Shami already ruled out of the series because of a wrist fracture, India might just be tempted to go in with five specialist bowlers instead of the usual four, which has been their template for

INDIA'S PRACTICE

The Indian team had a scheduled practice session at the Adelaide Oval on Monday but due to steady rain, it had to be cancelled. With skipper Virat



Kohli set to leave for India on Tuesday and the squad travelling to Melbourne, the skipper apparently had a chat with his team on the way forward after the 36 all-out debacle

ROHIT QUARANTINING

Senior batsman Rohit Sharma can start training from January 3 ahead of the Sydney Test. He is currently locked in a hard quarantine in a two-room apartment in Sydney.

The BCCI, at the moment, can't shift Rohit in the middle of quarantine.

BOXING DAY TEST IS CRUCIAL, SAYS BURNS

Adelaide, Dec. 21: If opener Joe Burns' views are any indication, another onerous task awaits an embat-Indian team, Australia are entering the second Test believing that a

favourable result for them in Melbourne could "decide the fate" of the four-match "We have got some scars as well, we just have to pre-pare well, start well and

carry on the momentum from the last game," Burns said during a virtual press conference on Monday.

"We know that Indians are going to bounce back in We know that Indians are going to bounce back in the next Test, which is going to play a crucial role in (deciding the) fate of the series.

- JOE BURNS Australia opener

the next Test, which is going to play a crucial role in (deciding the) fate of the

The absence of Kohli and Mohammed Shami will be "big losses" but Burns is expecting a strong come-

back by the visitors. "I think Shami and Virat

are obviously big losses for India. In saying that the Indian team does have very good depth as well. So, they are still going to be very challenging," Burns said.
"It is always hard to

replace world class players like that, but when we look (at the guys) that they got to prepare well for the next game. We know that Indians are going to bounce back strongly."

Shami was ruled out of the remainder of the Test series after a nasty blow on his hand led to a wrist frac-

New Delhi, Dec. 21: India's top shuttlers P.V. Sindhu and Saina Nehwal will be seen in action for the first time since the coronavirus-forced break when they compete in three upcoming tournaments in Bangkok, including the prestigious BWF World Tour Finals.

With Olympic qualifica-tions in mind, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) on Monday announced a strong eightmember squad to participate in the three upcoming tournaments, scheduled in January.
The team, consisting of

Sindhu, Saina, B. Sai Kidambi Satwiksairaj Srikanth, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Ashwini Ponappa and N. Sikki Reddy, will begin their campaign with Yonex Thailand Open from January 12-17. That will be followed by Toyota Thailand Open (January 19-24) and the prestigious HSBC BWF

prestigious HSBC BWF World Tour Finals which is rescheduled for January

After the Coronavirus outbreak in March disrupted the sporting world, this will be the first time that top Indian players, apart from Srikanth, will feature in any international tournament.

The former World No. 1, Srikanth had made a comeback when he played the Denmark Open in October.

With Olympic qualifications in mind, the Badminton **Association of India** (BAI) on Monday announced a strong eight-member squad to participate in the three upcoming tournaments, scheduled in January.

"We are very happy to see badminton finally getting back on the court. It gives us hope that tournaments can eventually make a steady comeback in near future. Most of our players haven't played tournaments in the last 7-8 months," BAI general sec-retary Ajay Singhania

"However, they have been training to the best of their abilities at the camp. The purpose of sending a fullstrength team in these tournaments so that players can get the much-needed tournament practice

ahead of the Olympic qualifiers," he added.

The team will also be accompanied by singles foreign coaches Agus Dwi Santoso and Park Tae Sang and doubles coach Dwi Kristiawan alongside support staff consisting of Challagundla, Baddam and M. Srikanth.

GOLFER KO CAPS YEAR

Naples, Dec. 21: Jin Young Ko missed most of the LPGA Tour season and still won the yearlong money

That's what a \$1.1 million check does.

Ko, the No. 1 player in the world, put an emphatic capper on her truncated year on Sunday by shooting a final-round 6-under 66 and winning the CME Group Tour Championship by five strokes over Hannah Green and Sei Young Kim. "I still can't believe it, that I'm here, that I won this

tournament," Ko said.
With a birdie on the final hole, the LPGA's final putt

of the season, Ko finished at 18 under for her seventh career LPGA win. Green's final-round 67 — on her 24th birthday — helped push her into the second-place tie. Kim, who took a one-shot lead into the final round, shot 72 and that was good enough for her to clinch Rolex Player of the Year honours. Danielle Kang won the Vare Trophy for the lowest scoring average.

The win wrapped up a wire-to-wire year in the number one spot for Ko, who has held the ranking since July 29, 2019.

I don't think India will recover from loss: Brad

Melbourne, Dec. 21: Former Australia wicketkeeper Brad Haddin reckons the opening day/night Test was India's best shot at winning in the ongoing series as it will be very difficult for the visitors to script a turnaround after demoralizing eight-

wicket loss in Adelaide. India were bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the Border-Gavaskar trophy.

"I don't think they will (recover from the loss),' Haddin told SEN Radio.

The 43-year-old feels the conditions at the Adelaide Oval were conducive to the Indian



Brad Haddin

bowling attack. "I thought their only opportunity to win a Test match was the first Test at Adelaide.

"I thought the conditions suited their bowling and I thought they'd get enough runs. But I don't think they'll be able to turn it around.

"You've got one Test up at Brisbane where no

one beats Australia These next two wickets will be suited to Indian cricket, but I don't think they'll be able to turn it around," Haddin added. India created history

registering their maiden series win Down Under in 2018-19 on the back of a lethal pacebowling attack.
"They had a great bowl-

ing attack the last time they come out here, and now with Shami out with a broken arm they don't have enough depth to cover that," Haddin said. "Yes India were driving

the game and we were talking at the start of day three about how Australia would get back into it, but the collapse they had has to leave

KALLIS NAMED ENG BATTING CONSULTANT

London, Dec. 21: South African legend Jacques Kallis was on Monday appointed as the batting consultant of the England team for next month's two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a statement that the team will depart for Sri Lanka on January 2. "Seven coaches will join

the squad for the two-Test tour," the ECB said.

"Former South Africa all-rounder Jacques Kallis joins the England setup for the first time as batting coaching consultant," it added.

The 45-year-old Kallis worked in a similar role with the Proteas last year in the Test series against

BAPINEEDU.B ZEESTUDIOS **USVCC** SRI VENKATESWARA DEC IN THEATRES **BVSN PRASAD** THAMAN'S VENKAT C DILIF NAVIN NOOLI SATISH BKR AVINASH KOLLA

Ian bats for on-field safety rules

Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has advocated a review of on-field safety measures in cricket, saying it would be a good idea to "strengthen any law" that can protect tailenders when they face

short-pitched bowling. The run-up to the Test series between India and Australia was marked by a series of blows to head and concussion-related substitutes, reviving the debate around the use of bouncers by fast bowlers.

Chappell rejected the idea

of banning the delivery altogether. "Any talk of completely

banning the bouncer should be dismissed as quickly as bowlers removed New Zealand batting bunny Chris Martin," Chappell wrote in ESPNcricinfo.

Instead, the batting great added, "The time is ripe for a worldwide review into on-field safety, including batsmen, bowlers and umpires, with batting technique a top priority. "In cond conducting this

review it would be appropriate to strengthen any law regarding the protec-tion of tailenders in facing short-pitched bowl-

Being one of the finest experts of the game, Chappell is very much mindful of the fact that it is meant for the protection of players, especially the tailenders.

"seems pointless" A concussed Ravindra

He said complaining about a player not being a like-for-like replacement

Jadeja being replaced by

leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal in the T20 series is a case in point. "The heat rose in this argument when Chahal

claimed three wickets

and the player-of-thematch award in India's narrow Complaining about a player not being a likefor-like replacement seems pointless; it's always going to be diffi-cult to please all parties." Chappell also stressed on improving the batsmen's technique to face the bouncer.

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