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CHENNAI | SUNDAY 27 | DECEMBER 2020

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WEATHER



Max: 30°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Margazhi 12
Tithi: Thrayodashi
Star: Krithigai/ Rohini
Rahukalam:
4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.11 am
Zohar: 12.13 pm
Asar: 3.23 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 7.04 pm

COUNTER POINT



No need to panic, It's safe!
DDC polls in J&K 'moment of pride' for India: Modi

New Delhi, Dec. 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Saturday that free and transparent DDC polls in Jammu and Kashmir coupled with voters' keen participation are a "moment of pride" for India, while hitting back at his rivals for giving him "lessons in democracy".

In a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, who alleged recently that there is no democracy in India, Modi said while his government has completed three-tier panchayat polls in Jammu and Kashmir in over a year of the region becoming a union territory, the Congress dispensation in Puducherry has not carried out local body elections despite a Supreme Court order.

Launching the Ayushman Bharat scheme via a video-conference to extend health insurance benefits to all residents of Jammu and Kashmir, he said the three-tier panchayat system has fully taken shape here, describing it as a realisation of Mahatma Gandhi's dream of 'gram swaraj' (village self-rule). — *PTI*

Only BJP can throw out infiltrators in Assam, says Shah

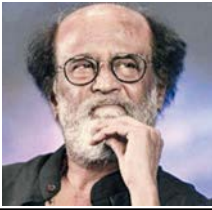
MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, DEC. 26

Union home minister Amit Shah sounded the poll bugle in Assam on Saturday by saying that the state's two biggest problems — infiltration and floods — could be resolved only by the BJP government. Asserting that only the BJP government can stop infiltration, which affects our culture and snatches away opportunities from youth, Mr Shah, who is on a three-day visit to Assam and Manipur to oversee poll strategies of BJP in the 2021 elections, accused the Congress of doing nothing to protect the rich culture of the state. ■ **P4**

Oxford vaccine front-runner for clearance in India

New Delhi, Dec. 26: With preparations underway for a possible vaccine-rollout by January, the Indian drug regulator is looking at the United Kingdom, which sources believe may give its nod to the Oxford Covid-19 vaccine next week, before deciding on giving emergency use authorisation to the Serum Institute that is manufacturing the shots here.

Once the UK drug regulator gives its approval to the Oxford vaccine, the expert committee on Covid-19 at the



CITY | 2
Actor Rajinikanth progressing well



SPORT | 6
Bumrah, Ashwin skittle Aussies out for 195

Farmer unions agree to talk to Centre on Dec. 29

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 26

As the protests demanding the repeal of three new farm laws entered the 31st day, the protesting farmer unions on Saturday decided to resume talks with the government. They have proposed December 29 as the date for the next round of negotiations with the government and sent the draft of the issues to be discussed. These include repeal of the three farm laws, making minimum Support Price a legal guarantee and changes in the draft Electricity Amendment Bill to safeguard the interests of the farmers.

The decision to resume talks was taken at a meeting of Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of 40 farmer unions protesting at various Delhi border points against three farm laws. Rakesh Tikait, a senior leader of Bharatiya Kisan Union, however, said the modalities for the repeal of three farm laws and guarantee for MSP should be part of the agenda for talks with the government. "We have decided to hold talks with the government on December 29," he said.

The announcement for fresh discussions between farmers' representatives and the government comes

● **The decision to resume talks was taken at a meeting of Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of 40 farmer unions protesting at various Delhi border points against three farm laws**

a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi lashed out at the Opposition for the first time since the beginning of the protests. On Friday he stressed that farmers' lands won't be taken away, adding that "some people are spreading lies". The Prime Minister also released a financial aid of ₹18,000 crore under the PM-Kisan cash transfer scheme. Five rounds of talks between the government and farmers have failed in the last couple of weeks.

Carrying ration and other essential items with them, several batches of farmers from Punjab headed towards Delhi borders to join the peasants protesting against the Centre's new agriculture-related laws. According to farmer union leaders, peasants from various places including Sangrur, Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Gurdaspur and Bathinda districts were headed towards Singhu and Tikri borders. ■ **P4**

Cong to launch 'save farmer, save cow' campaign in UP

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 26

All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary Priyanka Gandhi is likely to put in an appearance at the march the party is organising in Uttar Pradesh in an attempt to corner the state government on the twin issues of farmer agitation and cow protection, the latter being one of the state government's flagship schemes. Ms Gandhi had in a letter to chief minister Yogi Adityanath on December

22 said she was extremely pained after seeing images of cow carcasses from Saujana cowshed. She said there are no details yet regarding the cause of the death of so many cows but the images suggested that the deaths occurred due to lack of fodder and water. She further added that the Congress government in Chhattisgarh has handled this issue much better by implementing the 'Godhan Nyaya Yojana', and the UP government should take a cue from the scheme.

BJP's ally in Rajasthan quits NDA over new farm laws

Jaipur, Dec. 26: Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) convenor and Nagaur MP Hanuman Beniwal on Saturday announced a split from the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) over the Centre's new farm laws. "I am not stuck with Fevicol with the NDA. Today,

I separate myself from the NDA," Mr Beniwal said while addressing a farmers' rally in Shahjahanpur in Alwar district. On Friday, Mr Beniwal had announced a march to Delhi in support of farmers organisations holding a protest against the contentious laws. — *PTI*

THE PARTY REMAINS WITH NDA, SAYS JAYAKUMAR

Accept EPS as CM for truck with us: AIADMK

A. ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 26

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami is the chief minister candidate of the AIADMK and the party will have an alliance only with parties which accept this, fisheries minister D. Jayakumar said here on Saturday.

The minister's assertion comes a day after Union information minister and senior BJP leader Prakash Javadekar refused to comment on AIADMK's chief minister candidate and evaded questions on AIADMK naming Mr Palaniswami as the leader and whether BJP endorsed it.

Mr Jayakumar said the



AIADMK remains with NDA and that the alliance is intact.

"AIADMK's alliance with the BJP will continue," Mr Jayakumar said and recalled that another Union minister had made it clear that the BJP will stay with an alliance led by ADIADMK in the state. "The status quo remains," he said. "It was with the NDA yesterday, today and will be tomorrow."

AIADMK will kick start

the campaign in a conference on Sunday.

The meeting will be addressed by Mr Palaniswami, his deputy O. Pannerselvam, ministers and party leaders at the YMCA ground in Royapettah.

Political pundits say the rift in the alliance has already started showing as alliance partners PMK, DMDK and BJP seek the ruling party to allot more seats for them to contest in the forthcoming elections.

Besides, state BJP president L. Muguran maintained that the party's national leadership would decide who will lead the Tamil Nadu assembly elections and who will be the chief minister candidate.

MP also clears anti-conversion law

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, DEC. 26

Madhya Pradesh Cabinet on Saturday cleared the Dharma Swatantra (Religious Freedom) Bill, 2020, known in political parlance as "love jihad" Bill.

The draft bill, which may go through in the Assembly during its three-day winter session commencing on

December 28, provides a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and Rs 1 lakh fine to the perpetrators of forced religious conversion of a girl for marriage. The new bill has the provision of declaring such a marriage null and void.

The bill puts onus on the accused and those associated with the accused, including organisations and institutions, to prove their inno-

cence.

Home minister Narottam Mishra said the Bill provides for imprisonment of 1-5 years and fine of Rs 25,000 for forced conversion and if the victim of forced religious conversion belonged to scheduled caste or scheduled tribe or is a under aged, the offence would attract a minimum jail term of 2-10 years with a maximum penalty of ₹1 lakh.

Controller-General of India (DCGI), the sources said.

Amid fears about the mutated variant of SARS-CoV-2 detected in the UK, government officials recently said that it will have no impact on the potential of emerging vaccines that are being developed in India and other countries.

Bharat Biotech, SII and Pfizer had applied to the DCGI seeking emergency use authorisation for their Covid-19 vaccines earlier this month.

the vaccine here, official sources said.

The process of granting emergency use approval for Bharat Biotech's Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin may take time as its phase 3 trials are still underway, while Pfizer is yet to make a presentation.

"Going by this, Oxford vaccine Covishield is likely to be the first to be rolled out in India," a source said.

Serum Institute of India (SII) last week also had submitted some additional data required by the Drug

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SHORT TAKES

Citizen group demands DBT transfer of Pongal cash

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 26

A citizen group is demanding that the distribution of Pongal cash be done through direct benefit transfer (DBT) route instead of selected points in order to avoid stampedes.

Pointing out a stampede was reported in Madurai while beneficiaries were collecting tokens, People's Awareness Forum in the City said in a statement that Tamil Nadu has high banking penetration with nearly 90 per cent holding bank accounts. There are also Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana account holders and DBT was successfully carried out in 2015 when the Jayalalitha government distributed relief for flood victims. It also recalled the incident of a deadly stampede on Dec. 18, 2005 at a school at MGR Nagar in Chennai while relief supplies were being distributed by the Government for flood victims, killing 42 people and injuring 37.

Firm to use advanced tech, AI for water treatment

Chennai, Dec 26: The water technology multinational VA Tech Wabag is focusing on providing sustainable technology led innovations that are helping in treating and extending the life span of usage of the most important resource - water.

Post Covid, the heightened sense of hygiene has resulted in an increase in water consumption. Water joined gold, oil and other commodities traded on Wall Street, highlighting the fact that the life-sustaining natural resource may become scarcer.

The company's state-of-the-art R&D centres have developed advanced technologies to treat wastewater which can directly be used as water of potable grade. Mr. Rajiv Mittal, MD & CEO, VA Tech Wabag, said "To tackle the water related challenges, Wabag has been successful in pioneering removal of micro pollutants and has also licensed and worked upon its technology which will play a significant role in wastewater treatment in the future."

The 100% resource recovery and utilisation out of waste water treatment with byproducts being utilised to render the facilities self-sustainable and eco-friendly makes Wabag a leader in water treatment.

Actor Rajinikanth progressing well

Hyderabad/Chennai, Dec. 26: Actor-politician Rajinikanth, who was admitted to the Apollo Hospitals in Hyderabad for severe blood pressure fluctuations, is progressing well, the hospital said on Saturday.

The actor's blood pressure was, however, still on the higher side and any decision on his discharge could be made only on Sunday morning, according to the hospital.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami spoke to Rajinikanth over phone and enquired about his health, an official release said, adding that the CM prayed for the star's speedy recovery.

Investigations have not revealed anything 'alarming' so far about his



health, the hospital said in a bulletin. "Mr Rajinikanth who was admitted in the hospital yesterday is progressing well. He has had an uneventful night and his blood pressure is still on the higher side although under better control than yesterday," the bulletin revealed.

His blood pressure medications were being titrated carefully and he would

continue to be under close monitoring. He has been advised complete rest in view of his labile blood pressure and visitors were not being allowed to meet him.

Rajinikanth was on Friday admitted to Apollo Hospitals in Hyderabad for severe blood pressure fluctuations. He was in the Telangana capital since December 13 to shoot for Tamil flick, Annathe, a Sun Pictures production and he isolated himself after four of the crew members tested COVID-19 positive. The superstar, however, tested negative.

The actor is set to launch his own political party next month ahead of the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. —PTI

Govt to remove bull bars, crash guards from VIP vehicles

T.SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 26

Setting new norms to ensure the safety of passengers as well as pedestrians the government has decided to remove bull bars, crash guards and protruding bumpers, particularly in official vehicles of VIPs as they are a naked violation of the Motor Vehicles (MV) Act.

Issuing a letter to all official department heads in the State on Saturday, Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam said the fitment of crash guards or bull bars and other unauthorised fitments or accessories poses serious safety concerns to pedestrians as well as occupants of the vehicle. All officials are to ensure the vehicles comply with the MV Act 1988 and unauthorised fitments in government vehicles are removed immediately.

The letter also mentions an interim order by Madras high court asking the gov-



ernment to take action against this menace. Further, Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways had issued an order on December 7, 2019 that the fitments of crash guards or bull bars in vehicles is a violation of section 52 of the MV Act and attracts a penalty under section 190 and section 191 of the MV Act 1988. It called for strict action against unauthorised fitments.

The letter comes at a time when a high court division bench comprising Justice M

Sathyanarayanan and Justice R Hemalatha in November directed the Tamil Nadu chief secretary to file his response by January 20, 2021.

Pointing out that many violations, including affixing stickers in the windshield and rear view mirrors in auto rickshaws and number plate violations are not acted upon by the authorities, the court had said that the authorities concerned would face consequences for such continuous infarctions of the law.

‘Higher education can stop child marriages’

Chennai, Dec. 26: Justice VBhavani Subbarayan, Judge, Madras high court appreciated the pioneering efforts taken by VIT, Chennai to complete courses in online mode without any disruption and conducting the convocation ceremony virtually in all its grandeur. Presiding over the convocation, she called upon students to keep upskilling and contributing towards productivity and efficiency. "Innovate and learn to relearn for sustenance; solve complex problems of the contemporary, real world," she said while recalling Swami Vivekananda's inspiring call to youth - "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."

As many as 2,039 students who completed their courses were eligible for their degrees. Dr. G. Viswanathan, Founder and Chancellor, requested Central and State governments to spend more on higher education. "Development of a country depends on the development of higher education and higher education is not for academic qualification alone; it increases employment opportunities, economic productivity and growth," he significantly added that "Higher education can stop child marriages", he said. Vice Presidents Mr.Sankar Viswanathan, Dr.Sekar Viswanathan, Mr. G.V.Selvam and Asst. Vice president Ms.Kadhambari S. Viswanathan were present.

ISRO developing green propulsion: Sivan

HUMAN SPACE MISSION

Chennai, Dec 26 (PTI) Indian Space Research Organisation Chairman K Sivan on Saturday said the space agency was developing 'green propulsion' for its ambitious human space flight mission, 'Gaganyaan'. It may be adopted for use in every stage of a rocket.

ISRO has made space grade lithium-ion batteries and this technology is useful for mass adoption of electric vehicle", he noted. On the green pro-

pellant, Sivan said, "Even in the rocket propulsion, ISRO is developing green propulsion for its human space flight mission. In future, all the propulsion stages may adopt green propulsion," he added.

According to ISRO, polar satellite launch vehicle (PSLV), a trusted workhorse of space scientists, is a four stage rocket filled with fuel which pushes

the rocket to ensure that the satellite it carries is placed in the intended orbit. GSLV or a geo-stationary launch vehicle (GSLV) is a three stage rocket with a cryogenic upper stage.

The Bengaluru-headquartered space agency had planned to launch its maiden human space flight mission 'Gaganyaan' by December 2021. But

early this month, ISRO indicated that it is likely to be delayed by one year due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing students in Chennai through virtual platform, the ISRO chief encouraged them to take up calculated risk as it would safeguard them from 'absolute failure'.

"You may fail, but each failure would provide a valuable lesson. I can say with great confidence that India's space programme

has been built on spectacular failures and each failure has resulted in improvements in our system", he said.

Referring to the space sector reforms announced by the Centre in June, he said, "the government has already announced space sector reforms for greater participation of non-governmental entities in space activity".

"Our next PSLV (polar satellite launch vehicle) launch will have satellite

from start-up agencies which will be the first product of this reform," he said.

The Digital India initiative by the Centre was a key area to leverage and ISRO has already initiated reforms to make digital assets available easily to industry as well as for startups for making innovative applications in navigation, earth observation as well as disaster management, he said. —PTI

Northern section of Chennai metro to open in January



Saturday's trial run between Washermanpet Metro Station and Thiruvottriyur/Wimco Nagar Metro Station. —DC

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 26

Chennai Metro made a successful trial run between Washermanpet and Wimco Nagar Metro Stations on Saturday with a diesel locomotive, covering 9.05 kms each way. This is considered a leap in CMRL footsteps. The installation of systems including, ballast-less track, overhead electrification, signalling, tunnel Ventilation, HVAC, platform screen doors and ticket

gates are underway in this stretch to achieve early commissioning.

This trial will pave way to complete the Phase I extension works from Washermanpet to Thiruvottriyur (Wimco Nagar) covering 9.051 kms with 8 Metro stations (2 Underground and 6 elevated) will connect the northern part of the city to the CBD area. The target date for opening the section to commuter traffic is end January 2021.

DOCS LOOK AT LONGEVITY IN DIABETIC FOOT PATIENTS

Chennai, Dec 26: The main topic of discussion at a three-day virtual international conference of the Diabetic Foot Society of India (DFTSI) and Diabetic Foot Association" was on how to achieve longevity in diabetic foot patients. A number of technological and surgical innovations which help in preventing and healing diabetic foot infections and amputa-

tions were showcased.

Other issues discussed during the three-day virtual interactive sessions including the diabetic foot in time of Covid, Telemedicine in Diabetic foot management, managing diabetic during surgery, facilitation of diabetic care and a structured approach to educate and increase awareness among the non-specialist, general,

family and nurses to battle against diabetes related complications.

The conference was organised by Dr. Rajesh Kesavan and Dr. V B Narayananmurthy. Dr. Arun Bal, President of the society, said, "The economic cost of diabetic foot is pretty high and we should look at ways to prevent these complications from happening in the future".

Bribe: Village panchayat chief arrested

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
SALEM, DEC 26

Sleuths of the DVAC wing here on Saturday arrested a former panchayat president for accepting a bribe of ₹2.35 lakh from a registrar.

A DVAC team had raided the registration office at Suramangalam here in October and had seized an amount of ₹2.53 lakh

unaccounted cash there. A case was also registered against Suramangalam registrar, Kanagaraj, and investigations were underway.

In the midst of this, a former panchayat president of the Omalur Kongupatti panchayat, Ammasi, has approached the DVAC pleading them to recommend depart-

ment disciplinary action against Kanagaraj, without prosecuting him. He had also approached Kanagaraj and sought ₹2.35 lakh from him for recommending departmental disciplinary

action to the DVAC officials, instead of a court case. Ammasi had told Kanagaraj that some of the DVAC officials were known to him, and that he could get small favours worked out through them.

But Kanagaraj lodged a complaint with the DVAC about Ammasi. Following this, DVAC sleuths arrested Ammasi as he was receiving Rs 2.35 lakh as bribe from registrar Kanagaraj in Alagapuram area.

Movie review

A quirky film worth a watch

CHIYANGAL

CAST: Karikalan, Risha, Nalinikanth

Direction: Vaigarai Balan

RATING: ★★★

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

Vaigarai Balan, who made his debut with the critically acclaimed *Kadigara Manithargal*, has come out with *Chiyangal*, which has a quirky subject and is set in a rural area. It addresses the problems faced by aged people, their dreams and joys and how society looks at them.

Set against the backdrop of Megamalai in Theni, where 'Chiyangal' is a word to denote senior citizens, it is a tale of seven close friends who are always together and who indulge in funny activities.

They enjoy each other's company and try to live life to the fullest, although each one has their own problems at home.

Sadayan (Nalinikanth) is one of them and he nurtures the dream of flying in an airplane. A YouTube enthusiast who watches by chance the culinary skills



of the gang gets them a chance to go to Chennai. Meanwhile, two of the Chiyangs perish due to maltreatment from family members, which leaves the others shattered. The rest set off on their journey to Chennai to realise their dreams, but fate has something else in store.

Nalinikanth and Pasupathyraj are the only two known faces in the film

and they prove their versatility. The rest — Eashwar Thiyagarajan, Samuthiraseeni, Durai Sundaram, Sakthivel and Narayanasamy — are all debutants and the credit goes to Balan for extracting natural performances from them. Producer Karikalan who essays a crucial role and Nisha as his love interest play effective foils. Two actresses who play Nalinikanth's wife and daughter, put up a good show.

The film works mainly due to the director's realistic depiction of village life, people's emotions and their joy without taking too many cinematic liberties. Cinematography by Babukumar complements the proceedings. Minor glitches notwithstanding, this film is worth a watch for its honest attempt.

OPK travels in uncharted territory

ORU PAKKA KATHAI
CAST: Kalidas Jayaram, Megha Akash

Direction: Balaji Dharaneetharan

RATING: ★★★

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

Director Balaji Dharaneetharan of *Naduvula Konjam Pakkaththa Kanom* had asserted that his long-delayed film *Oru Pakka Kathai* (which has hit OTT finally) is a fresh script and has not been touched upon even now by any filmmaker. True to his word, *OPK* has an interesting premise and travels in uncharted territories.

The film begins with a religious discourse at heroine Meera's (Megha Akash) middle class home, which actually lays the foundation for the unusual proceedings. Meera is in college and is in love with her classmate Saravanan aka Sara (Kalidas Jayaram), also middle class. The parents of both know about their relationship and have given their nod for the marriage, but with the condition that the wedding would take place once Sara clears his arrears and gets



a decent job.

Things seem to be going well enough when a twist in the tale turns the couple's life upside down. Meera is pregnant, and Sara is informed of it. The families are shocked, but the young pair is confused as their relationship wasn't physical! The doctors who test Meera also confirm that she is still a 'virgin'.

One can now connect with the earlier discourse where God takes avatars to perform miracles. The remainder of the film is about how Meera became pregnant and what happens to her child, with the story taking a detour to take in God men, faith, and supersti-

tion. There's also a parallel small episode where a school kid Sethu considers himself to be an avatar of god.

Kalidas and Megha look fresh and cute and deliver a credible performance and the actors who play their parents are equally impressive. For a change, Balaji has written lovable characters that are caring and gentle even if they meet up with untoward incidents.

Like his earlier film *NKPK*, Balaji's brilliant narration laced with humour even in tense moments works well in this film too. The director is able to communicate effectively without dialogues

with only Govind Vasantha's BGM playing in the backdrop. And Vasantha's music is a big plus which takes forward the story as envisioned by the director.

The one problem with the film is that it starts off well as an interesting family drama but deviates into bigger topics like science (parthenogenesis) and religious faith, which reduces its sheen. There's a message though that's conveyed towards the end.

There is originality in his writing and good intention to narrate a story in an enjoyable manner which makes it, perhaps, worth the time and money.

SHORT TAKES

Techie's car catches fire

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 26

A software engineer had a narrow escape when the car he was driving caught fire near St. Thomas Mount on Saturday morning. He immediately stopped by the roadside and both he and his aunt exited the car.

According to the St. Thomas Mount police, Praveen Kumar (28), who is a software engineer in Chennai with a private company, was travelling with his aunt towards Pallikaranai in a car from Koyambedu. When the car was at the M.K.N road-GST road junction, Praveen noticed a smoke in the car, stopped it and the duo got down from the vehicle.

The car caught fire within minutes. Fire fighters from the Guindy station rushed to the spot and doused the blaze but not before the car was gutted. Officials said the fire was due to short circuit. St. Thomas Mount Police registered a case.

Two farmers die in road mishap

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 26

Two farmers died after the tractor plough they were travelling slipped and fell into a roadside ditch near Neelamangalam in Madurantakam. The deceased have been identified as Mahavishnu (20) and Naveen (20), residents of Neelamangalam in Chengalpet district. Two other farmers from the same village sustained injuries and they have been hospitalised.

Police said that as per their preliminary investigation, the accident took place on Saturday morning when the four men were travelling towards Neelamangalam after ploughing a farm land. When they were near Erikarai, the driver lost control of the tractor and the vehicle fell into a ditch.

While Mahavishnu and Naveen died on the spot, the other farmers were rushed to the Chengalpet Government hospital for treatment. Police said the bodies were sent for post-mortem to the Madurantakam government hospital. Anaicut police registered a case.

AIADMK alliance intact: Vaithilingam

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR DEC. 26

The AIADMK alliance formed during the last LS election is intact, and it still continues, said R Vaithilingam, AIADMK deputy coordinator and RSP MP here, on Tuesday. He told presspersons that people welcomed the good works and welfare measures done by the AIADMK government under the chief ministership of Edappadi K Palaniswami. Some of the schemes welcomed by the people are 7.5 percent reservation for government school students in medical courses, Amma mini-clinics, pongal parisu and the kudimaramathu works. The AIADMK will win the coming election and form the government again. "Unable to digest this, the DMK is organising grama sabha meetings with slogans to reject AIADMK in the coming election. But that will not work out, as people are with us," he added.

Lt Guv-CM slugfest continued unabated

Covid, cyclones dealt blows to Pondy in 2020

Puducherry, Dec. 26: The Covid-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to this largely tourism-dependent union territory while it faced nature's fury in the form of back to back cyclones in 2020 that further strained its purse.

The UT's top two heads - Lt Governor Kiran Bedi and Chief Minister V Narayanasamy - continued to spar on administrative matters, including supply of rice and allowing public to take part in the New Year eve bash.

As the contagion spread quick and fast, health authorities in Puducherry took every possible step to ramp up infrastructure. But a few well-known names from the political circles were among those who fell victim to the virus.

The outbreak of the pandemic severely impacted the fiscal position of Puducherry, as the lockdown brought to a halt largely tourism-dependent activities, with little inflow of visitors. This prompted the territorial administration to make repeated pleas to the Centre to come to its rescue by allowing grants, as almost all activities came to a halt because of the lockdown.

To make matters worse, cyclones Nivar and Burevi contributed their bit of damage to the small UT, forcing the Congress government to once again knock at the doors of the Centre for a relief package.

The differences between Bedi and Narayanasamy were only too apparent and the Lt Governor even skipped her customary address to the MLAs to mark the start of the budget session. The House, however, went ahead with its business and adopted the budget for the fiscal 2020-21 on July 20, envisaging allocation of Rs 9,000 crore.

Bedi addressed the session on July 24 a few days after the budget was adopted. She had initially insisted that unless she was sent a copy of the budget and also demands for grants, it would not be possible to address the session on its opening day.

Incidentally, in a telling sign of the pandemic, the House met under the shade of a neem tree as the Assembly hall was out of bounds after an opposition AINRC legislator got infected with the virus.

The MLA, S J Jayabal later recovered. Former MLAs V Balane (AINRC), M A S Subramanian (Makkal Needhi Maiyam) and A Elumalai (Congress) fell prey to the deadly virus. As on Friday, the overall toll from the virus was 629, while the cumulative number of infected was 37,914. The UT had 349 active cases.

If the contagion wreaked havoc on the state's economic health, two



Puducherry CM and speaker visit the garden area of assembly premises to convene its session as the hall was being disinfected in the view of Corona pandemic. — PTI

Puducherry logs 33 new virus 19 cases, one fatality

Puducherry, Dec. 26: Puducherry reported 33 new coronavirus cases while a 77-year man succumbed to the infection taking the toll to 630, a top Health department official said on Saturday. Of the 33 new cases, the Puducherryregion reported 18, followed by Mahe (9), Karaikal(4) and Yanam (2), Director of Health and Family Welfare S Mohan Kumar said in a release.

The fresh infections were reported at the end of the examination of 3,391 samples pushing the overall tally to 37,947. The patient who succumbed was a 77-year old resident of neighbourhood village, Mohan Kumar said, adding that the toll rose to 630 in the union territory. He said that the fatality and recovery rates were 1.66 per cent and 97.40 per cent respectively.

The Department of Health has so far tested 4.70 lakh samples of which 4.27 lakh samples turned out to be negative. As many as 26 patients recovered and were discharged during the last 24 hours ending 10 am Saturday.

Of the overall 37,947 Covid cases, 355 were active while 36,962 patients had recovered and were discharged so far. — PTI

cyclones by the end of the year added to the challenges. The Nivar and Burevi cyclones in November-December caused extensive losses in the farm sector, with the government pegging the damage at Rs 400 crore. Narayanasamy has sought an interim Central relief of Rs 100 crore.

On the administration front, the year was no different to the previous ones as the tussle between Bedi and Narayanasamy continued over a number of issues. Most decisions of the local government, including that of supply of rice, turned out to be contentious ones, with Bedi referring them to the Centre for approval. She also locked horns over the administration's nod for New Year bash in the open as well as in hotels amid the pandemic threat.

Narayanasamy, while allowing celebrations with Covid precautions, turned down her plea for banning revelries. The free rice scheme was sought to be implemented by the elected government by distributing rice through fair rice shops, instead of paying cash through banks to card holders, but Bedi seemed to have a divergent view.

The Lt Governor insisted on cash equivalent for quantum of rice in bank accounts of beneficiaries and referred the matter to the Centre, which approved her stand.

The ruling Congress' attempt to provide 10 per cent quota for government school students in medical education too ran into rough weather when Bedi once again sent it for the Centre's consideration, saying it was a policy matter.

The Narayanasamy-led cabinet had earlier adopted a resolution, seeking to introduce the quota for students from government schools in medical colleges. Neighbouring Tamil Nadu had earlier provided 7.5 per cent reservation for such students.

The appointment of a State Election Commissioner by the government also saw a clash as the Lt Governor was not in favour of the candidate. She turned down the appointment and wanted the post to be filled-in by an application process involving eligible candidates.

The Centre once again endorsed Bedi and a retired IFS officer was appointed as SEC and started doing preparatory

works to hold the civic polls due for the last nearly 10 years.

Further, when the government wanted to scrap the special excise duty imposed on liquor earlier this year, Bedi insisted it would continue till January 31, 2021 for larger public health safety.

Ahead of the 2021 Assembly elections here, the Congress government launched a free breakfast scheme for school students and named it after the late DMK President and former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi. The two parties are allies both in Puducherry and Tamil Nadu.

A Congress legislator N Dhanavelu, elected from Bahoor, was disqualified by the Speaker V P Sivakolundhu in July after a representation was made to the Speaker by the Government Whip R K R Anandaraman that the MLA had indulged in anti-party activities. The disqualification brought down the strength of the Congress from 15 to 14 in the 30-member House. The Congress government, however, banks on the support of three DMK MLAs. — PTI

On 16th anniv, tsunami victims remembered

Chennai, Dec. 26: Victims of the tsunami, that wreaked havoc in 2004, were remembered by people in coastal Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Puducherry on Saturday on the 16th anniversary of the disaster.

Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar and Chief Minister V Narayanasamy led the events to pay homage to those killed in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry respectively.

Jayakumar lit candles at Kasimedu fishing harbour area here and took a boat to the sea and showered flowers over seawater. Narayanasamy visited the beachfront and poured milk in front of a sand statue that symbolised the victims and scattered flowers at that spot.

Across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, fishermen associations and families of victims paid tributes to those who lost their lives by pouring milk and tossing flowers at beaches.

On December 26, 2004, tsunami, a series of giant waves hit Tamil Nadu and Puducherry's Karaikal in which at least 7,000 people were killed. — PTI

Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar and Chief Minister V Narayanasamy led the events to pay homage to those killed in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry respectively



Women pay floral tribute to 2004 tsunami victims on 16th anniversary at Marina Beach. — DC

Special mass in coastal hamlets

DC CORRESPONDENT
KANYAKUMARI, DEC. 26

Special mass were organised in Churches in the coastal hamlets in the district as a mark of remembering the tsunami victims on the 16th anniversary of the tragedy.

In Kanyakumari district, where around 250 people were killed 16 years ago on December 26, 2004, people took out a peace march towards the sea at Manakudi, Kottipadu, Kanyakumari and in all the coastal villages from Arockiyapuram to Neerodi, and poured milk in the sea and paid floral tributes to the tsunami victims. Special prayers were held in all churches along the coastal areas in

the district, in memory of the lost lives.

Fishermen from Theresapuram in Thoothukudi district also paid floral tributes to the tsunami victims and offered prayers to the sea, seeking divine blessings and protection on the coastal community, against all kinds of natural calamities. People at Idinthakarai village near Kudankulam in Tirunelveli district, after attending a special mass at Our Lady of Lourdes church on Saturday, in memory of the tsunami victims, went on a procession to the shore and paid floral tributes and poured milk as a mark of respect of the hundreds of lives lost in the tsunami.

Cross-border fishing: Fishers to lose boat licence in cases

ARULOLI M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, DEC. 26

Fishermen here have been warned of cancellation of boat licenses in cases of indulging in cross-border fishing.

Issuing an official statement on cross-border fishing and fishermen being arrested by the Sri Lankan navy, Collector Senthil Raj on Saturday advised fishermen to stick to the marine fisheries regulations, and not cross into Sri Lankan waters for fishing.

The collector added that fishermen indulging in cross-border fishing would be fined ₹1,000, ₹2,500 and ₹5,000 respectively, for the first three violations, and would be subsequently banned from fishing for a week, with maximum fine for the fourth time violation.

"If involvement in cross-border fishing is repeated for the sixth time, such fishermen will have to perma-

nently forgo their fishing boat licences," added the collector, adding that stringent action against repeated violations would be initiated without any hesitation.

The collector's statement has been viewed by the fishermen in line with the threatening recent statement of the Sri Lankan fisheries minister, Douglas Devananda, that Indian fishermen would be arrested and their boats confiscated

without mercy for crossing the maritime boundary line into Sri Lankan waters, for fishing.

Douglas, in his reaction to the Indian government seeking the safe release of the 36 Rameswaram and Thoothukudi fishermen arrested two weeks ago, had added that the Indian government should be responsible to check their fishermen from repeatedly indulging in cross-border fishing.

Industrial sector in southern dists badly hit

ARULOLI | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, DEC. 26

An emerging industrial hub of southern Tamil Nadu, Thoothukudi, is optimistic of resolving some of its major industrial disputes faced by the labour intensive industries like the beach mineral mining and Sterlite copper.

Once considered to be conducive investment destinations, the districts of Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari and Virudhunagar lost their prominence in industrial projects for the past 10 years, due to continuous protests on many public sector projects like the Kudankulam nuclear power plant project, the Inayam port project, the Sethusamudram project or even other private projects like the rare earth mining processing and export industry or the Sterlite copper industry.

The state government also could not withstand the protests for political reasons, and hence, abruptly imposed a blanket ban on labour intensive industries like the beach mineral min-

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ing, processing and export, affecting around 23 different companies that rendered around 50,000 workers jobless overnight in the three districts of Kanyakumari, Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli in 2012. The protesting groups, however, were not satisfied and targeted the copper major, and got it closed two years ago in 2018, sacrificing 13 lives in a police firing. Many of the thriving ancillary industries of large and small sized industries including the popular fertiliser unit, the SPIC and one of the four key players in the titanium dioxide industry in the country, the VVTI pigments limited, depended on the phosphoric acid and sulphuric acid supplied from Sterlite, also

had to drastically reduce their operations.

Off late, activists have started their preparatory works of campaigning against the Rs 42,000 crore oil refinery and petrochemical product facility proposed to be set up in Thoothukudi by Kuwait-based company, Al-Kharafi, and the ISRO proposed second spaceport facility, Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) pad at Kulasekarapattinam, in Thoothukudi.

The industrial fraternity's expectations of the government to protect the industries against these activist groups, have been not fulfilled. Instead, the government for pure political reasons drifted to the side of the anti-developme-

nt groups," rued a salt manufacturer, who pleading anonymity added that it was because of this lethargy of the government that not even a single investor who participated in the 2019 Global Investors Meet (GIM-2019), showed their intent to invest in the southern districts, though MoUs for the investment to the tune of around Rs 60,000 crore were signed at the meet in 2015.

Added to this, Corona too played spoilsport in 2020, when the Thoothukudi VOC port registered a 11.97 per cent de-growth in its overall business volume between April and November in 2020, in comparison to the same period last year (2019). The fall of capital goods like machineries imported through Thoothukudi port went down by 14.30 per cent against the previous year's machinery import of 7107, and increased import of fertiliser by 74.51 per cent till November this year; is an indication of lower growth of the manufacturing industries," said a port user, Ragavan, who added that Thoothukudi port being the major importer of

coal in the state, handled 34,93,519 tons of industrial coal between April to November in 2020 against 40,29,259 tons during the same period in 2019.

"The drastic reduction of handling industrial coal by 13.29 percent is a message that coal fired industrial activities not only in the southern districts but in the entire state has been affected this year," inferred a port user, who added that unless the government changes its attitude, setting aside its political agenda in favour of industrial growth, the state will not reset its foot in the path of progress even in 2021.

It is to be noted that the performance of the other two major ports, the Chennai port and the Kamaraj port, between April and November 2020 was much worse than the Thoothukudi VOC port, according to performance data of the Indian port association, Chennai port lost its business volume by 20 percent and Kamaraj port by 30 percent till November this year, compared to their performance in 2019.

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WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY
E-tendering Tender Notice No.
DYCE-C1-BPL-03-2020
Dated: 19.12.2020

E-Tender on behalf of the President of India acting through Deputy Chief Engineer (Construction)-I, West Central Railway, Bhopal for the following work (Single Packet system)-Tender No.: Dy.CE(C)-I/BPL/04/2020. Brief Description: Protection works on important bridge Tawa (Dn) by Gabion/stone pitching and other miscellaneous works in connection with SQL-BGTA patch doubling project. Approx. tender value: ₹ 195.38 lakh, Earnest Money: ₹ 2.47, 700/-, Completion period: 06 (Six) months including harvest & monsoon period. Due date of Closing of tender: 11.01.2021 at 15.00 hrs. The complete information of above E-Tender is available on <http://www.irps.gov.in> and also placed on the Notice Board of office of the Dy.CE(C)-I/West Central Railway/Bhopal. Tenders other than in the form of e-bids shall not be accepted against above tender. Corrigendum, if any issued in connection with tender, will be available on above mentioned website only. Dy.Chief Engineer (Constn.-I) West Central Railway, Bhopal

रेल खाता के दौरान शिकायत हेतु 138 पर एवं सुरक्षा हेतु 182 पर संपर्क करें।

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited
Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001
CIN: U40109PB2010SGC033813, Telefax: 0175-2201258
E-mail: cao-revenue@pspcl.in Website: pspcl.in
Office of The CAO Revenue
EOI Press Notice
Punjab State Power Corporation Limited intends to get a System Audit conducted regarding flawless functioning of its digital transactions' system.
Service Providers having technical and financial exposure in this field may submit EOI, covering all activities to be performed under "Digital Transactions' System Audit" to the office of CAO/Revenue, Room Number 507, 5th Floor, PSPCL Head Office, Patiala or through email to cao-revenue@pspcl.in by 25th January, 2021.
Details of existing flow of activities and tentative scope of the proposed job is available on PSPCL website.
(www.pspcl.in, Information Centre, Office Orders & Circulars, CAO Revenue, Digital Transactions' System Audit)
Date: 23.12.2020
C-386/2020
RO: 76155/12/8/2021/108
CAO/Revenue, PSPCL, Patiala

RAMAGUNDAM FERTILIZERS AND CHEMICALS LIMITED
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Advertisement No.: 02 (RFCL)/2020 Date: 23.12.2020

ITI HOLDERS REQUIRED
Applications are invited from interested candidates for recruitment to various posts for ITI Holders (Non-Executive category) in Ramagundam Fertilizers & Chemicals Limited (RFCL), a Joint Venture of NFL, EIL and FCIL as detailed below:

Post Code	Post	Discipline	Pay Scale	Number of Vacancies
(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)
01	Attendant Gr.I (Mechanical)	Fitter	21500-52000	8
		Diesel Mechanic		2
		Mechanic Repair & Maintenance of Heavy Vehicle		1
02	Attendant Gr.I (Electrical)	Electrician		12
03	Attendant Gr.I (Instrumentation)	Electronics Mechanic		4
		Instrumentation Mechanic		4

Detailed advertisement shall be available "on NFL website: www.nationalfertilizers.com > Careers > Recruitment in RFCL > Recruitment for ITI Holders - 2020 from 23.12.2020. Last date to apply online is 12.01.2021. Any corrigendum/addendum/error for this recruitment shall be published only on the NFL's website.
GM (HR), RFCL

SHORT TAKES

CONGMEN HELD FOR PROTECT COW, FARMERS STIR

Lalitpur/Jhansi (UP), Dec. 26: Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Kumar Lallu and over 50 party workers were arrested in Lalitpur on Saturday after they tried to take out the 'Gai Bachao, Kisan Bachao' march without permission, but were released hours later, police said.

However, district Congress president Balwant Singh Rajput, who was among those arrested, claimed around 200 party workers were held. He also alleged that about two dozen party workers were injured as the police used force against them.

"About 50 to 60 workers, including state Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu and district unit chief Balwant Singh Rajput, were arrested from Dailwara township while trying to take out the march without permission. They have all been taken to police lines," Additional Superintendent of Police Brijesh Kumar Singh said. Later in the evening, the Congress leaders, including Lallu, were released from police lines on furnishing personal bonds and the UPCC president was allowed to leave for Lucknow, the ASP said.

The Congress had announced that it will take out the 'Gai Bachao, Kisan Bachao' march in different districts of Bundelkhand to highlight the alleged mismanagement in cow shelters under the state government.

PM TO INAUGURATE INDIA'S FIRST-EVER DRIVERLESS TRAIN

New Delhi, Dec. 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate India's first-ever driverless train operations on Delhi Metro's Magenta Line along with the fully operational National Common Mobility Card service on the Airport Express Line on December 28 via video conferencing.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said on Saturday that these innovations will herald a new era of travelling comfort and enhanced mobility. The driverless trains will be fully automated, which will eliminate the possibility of human error, it said, adding that after the start of driverless services on the Magenta Line (Janakpuri West-Botanical Garden), the Pink Line (Majlis Park-Shiv Vihar) of Delhi Metro is expected to have driverless operations by mid-2021.

The National Common Mobility Card, which will be fully operationalised on the Airport Express Line, will enable anyone carrying a RuPay-Debit Card issued from any part of the country to travel on the route using it. This facility will become available on the entire Delhi Metro network by 2022, the PMO said.

I-T DEPT DETECTS BLACK INCOME OF ₹100 CR IN ASSAM

New Delhi, Dec. 26: Unaccounted income of ₹100 crore has been detected after the income tax department raided three "leading" contractors of Northeast India based in Assam early this week, the CBDT said on Saturday.

The search and survey action was initiated on December 22 at fourteen locations in Guwahati, Silapathar and Pathalsala in Assam and in Delhi. "Cash of ₹2.95 crore has been seized. Overall, undisclosed income to the tune of approximately ₹100 crore has been unearthed so far during the search and survey operation," the Board said in a statement without sharing the identities of those raided.

FARMERS AGREE TO FRESH TALKS

From Page 1
They began their journey despite fog and biting cold wave conditions in many parts of Punjab. Tractor trollies, cars and other vehicles carrying farmers, including elderly and women, were seen on the Amritsar-Delhi national highway. The road from Delhi to Ghaziabad near the Ghaziabad border was also closed as the farmer protest split over to the other carriageway.

Kisan Union leader Dr Darshanpal said on Saturday that the farmers will celebrate the martyrdom of Guru Govind Singh's son on December 27 and December 28. The protesters will then meet the Centre for the next round of talks on December 29.

J&K residents get free treatment



Jammu and Kashmir Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha hands over the golden cards to beneficiaries of the Ayushman Bharat PM-Jay Sehat scheme, after it was rolled out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually, in Jammu, on Saturday. — PTI

India, Vietnam begin SCS drills

Sea exercises to be closely watched by an already furious China

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 26

The Indian and Vietnamese navies on Saturday started an exercise in the South China Sea, something which will be closely watched by China. The exercise comes when China is becoming increasingly assertive in the South China Sea and has been conducting aggressive military manoeuvres in the region to warn other nations.

"Indian Navy conducted Passage Exercise today with the Vietnam People's Navy in the South China Sea," said a senior official. The relations between India and China has deteriorated this year after the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) violated the Line of Actual Control in Eastern Ladakh and the military stand-off between two armies in the sector has continued for the last eight months. India is now putting

pressure on China at many fronts.

China was already furious over India-Vietnam virtual summit this week, where India had stressed that negotiations for a Code of Conduct (CoC) in the disputed South China Sea (SCS) waters should not undermine the interests of other countries or third parties in the region. Reacting to the summit, China's state mouthpiece *Global Times* had said, "This is not the first time

(nor will it be the last) that India has poked its nose in the South China Sea."

Earlier this week defence minister Rajnath Singh and his Japanese counterpart Nobuo Kishi had also discussed regional situation in the South China Sea. Both had asserted to oppose any activities that escalate tension.

The US Navy has started patrolling in the South China Sea to challenge China. In past few months US aircraft carriers USS

Ronald Reagan and USS Nimitz along with their escorting cruisers and destroyers have conducted exercises in South China Sea.

After clash between Indian Army and the PLA in Galwan Valley in June, India had sent its frontline warship to the South China Sea much to the displeasure of the Chinese who raised objections over the move during diplomatic talks between the two countries.

Amit Shah begins Assam campaign

From Page 1

"The Congress did nothing for the birthplace of Acharya Sankardev whose contributions gave recognition to Assam's history, drama writing, arts and poetry. But BJP believes in strengthening of language, culture, arts of the states," he said.

In an obvious reference to the Congress government, Mr Shah said that there was a period of movements in Assam when many agitations were launched over different issues in which hundreds of youths were killed. The peace of Assam was disturbed and the development was halted, he added.

Asserting that the state's two biggest problems are infiltration and floods, Mr Shah said that neither Congress nor any other party cannot stop infiltration. "Infiltration affects our culture, arts and snatches away opportunities from our youth," Mr Shah said while addressing a public rally at Amingaon.

He said, "All separatist groups have slowly left the path of violence and joined the mainstream. Bodo youth who used to carry guns are now joining the mainstream. Recently conducted polls saw 80 per cent voting without a single incident of violence. This pair of BJP leader - chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and minister Himanta Biswa Sharma has crossed several hurdles in the story of Assam's progress. People of

● **ASSERTING THAT the state's two biggest problems are infiltration and floods, Mr Shah said that neither Congress nor any other party cannot stop infiltration. "Infiltration affects our culture, arts and snatches away opportunities from our youth," Mr Shah said addressing a public rally at Amingaon.**

Assam will give the mandate to BJP in 2021." "The Bodoland election... was only a semi-final. Now the final is ahead. In the Assam polls, we will have a full majority. The Sonowal-Himanta combination has worked wonders for Assam," he said.

He sought to evoke 16th-century Assamese cultural icon Srimanta Sankaradeva to recall the richness of the state's culture and history, which, he said, will give it a new beginning.

Lauding the initiative of BJP government to support and develop the state's traditional Vaishnavite monasteries, Mr Shah said that it would lead to social transformation in Assam's villages that would also stop young people from taking up arms.

He said that the government was extending a financial assistance of Rs 2.5 lakh each to 8,000 "Namghars", the state's traditional Vaishnavite monasteries, that are over 50 years old.

FATHER-IN-LAW, UNCLE HELD FOR KERALA YOUTH'S HONOUR KILLING

Palakkad, Dec. 26: Two people, including the father-in-law of a 27-year old man, who was hacked to death in Palakkad district on Friday, have been taken into custody in connection with the incident, which is suspected to be a case of honour killing.

Aneesh, a painter, had married Haritha (21) some three months ago. Due to the differences in their caste and financial status, the woman's father Prabhukumar and uncle Suresh Kumar used to threaten them often, Aneesh's relatives told the media.

Aneesh, along with his younger brother Arun, was riding a motorcycle and had stopped to get some soft drinks when they were waylaid and attacked near Thenkurissi on Friday evening. — PTI

Arun, who witnessed the murder, and is yet to recover from the shock, said Haritha's father, who came on a two-wheeler with her uncle, allegedly hacked Aneesh using a sharp weapon.

Aneesh's father said the accused used to threaten the couple often and despite filing a police complaint last month, no action was taken, he alleged.

Palakkad district police chief S. Sujithdas said Prabhukumar was taken into custody from Coimbatore early on Saturday while Suresh was picked up last night itself. — PTI

CPM for Guv to budge on session

Kochi, Dec. 26: Kerala's ruling CPM on Saturday expressed hope that Governor Arif Mohammed Khan will give his assent to the state government's proposal to convene a special assembly session on December 31 to discuss and pass a resolution against the three contentious central agricultural laws.

"We hope that the Governor would give his official assent, granting his permission for convening the special session of the state assembly," CPM politburo member M A Baby said.

The senior party leader said following the cabinet decision to convene a brief assembly session, two ministers had met Mr Khan at Rajbhavan.

"The ministers have explained to the governor under what circumstances the special session of the state Assembly is being requested," Mr Baby said.

His statement comes a day after law minister A.K. Balan and agriculture minister V.S. Sunil Kumar held discussions with Mr Khan on the government's fresh proposal to convene the special session of the Assembly on December 31.

Mr Baby, however, slammed the governor for turning down the LDF government's earlier proposal for a brief assembly session on December 23, alleging that he was acting on the directive of the Centre.

"The earlier decision of

the governor was against the norms of the Constitution. It is naturally suspected that the governor might not have taken this decision on his own," he said.

Mr Baby said he sees the influence of "some extraneous factors" including a directive from the Centre and the RSS in "creating a crisis in the Left-ruled state."

The CPM leader alleged that "directives from the RSS headquarters in Nagpur" influenced the decisions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is an RSS pracharak. The governor had declined nod on ground that the government did not address the question raised by him on the nature of emergency warranting the very brief session and pointing to the regular session slated to commence from January 8.

The state cabinet which met on Thursday again decided to recommend to Mr Khan seeking approval for a special session on December 31 over the farm laws with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan saying his government was "hopeful" that the governor would accord sanction.

Mr Sunil Kumar said Mr Khan was "convinced" about the state government's decision on convening the assembly on December 31. "It was just a communication between the government and the governor. He is convinced about the views expressed by the government," he said. — PTI

New strain needs no new protocol, says Task Force

SHASHI BHUSHAN | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 26

The National Task Force (NTF) on Covid-19 has concluded that there is no need to change the existing treatment protocol in view of SARS-CoV-2 mutations emerging in the United Kingdom and spreading to some countries. The NTF on Saturday discussed evidence-based modifications in testing, treatment and surveillance strategies for Covid-19 in view of the new virus strain.

The NTF deliberated on aspects related to the treatment protocol, testing strategy and surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 vis-a-vis the UK variant. It emphasised that since the UK strain is implicated to cause increased transmissibility of the virus, it is critical to identify individuals infected with this strain and adequately contain them to prevent its transmission in India.

The NTF recommended that in addition to the existing surveillance strategies, it is critical to conduct enhanced genomic surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 specially in incoming passengers from the UK. Besides, it will also be critical to conduct genome sequencing in samples where there is dropout of the S gene in lab diagnosis, proven cases of re-infections etc. Routine genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 from repre-

sentative samples all across the samples needs to be a continuous and well planned activity.

According to the Union health ministry, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) informed that the Centre has taken cognizance of the reports of mutant variants of SARS-CoV-2 reported from the UK and the response of other countries to these reports. The situation is being monitored proactively. A strategy has been put under place to detect and contain the mutant variant.

"The NTF concluded that there is no need to change the existing treatment protocol in view of mutations emerging in the strain. Further, since ICMR has always advocated use of two or more gene assays for testing SARS-CoV-2, it is unlikely to miss infected cases using the current testing strategy," said the Union health ministry.

A total of 251 new deaths and 22,273 infections of Covid-19 were, meanwhile, reported in the country. The number of people who have recovered from the disease climbed to 97,40,108, pushing the national recovery rate to 95.78 per cent, while the fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent. The active caseload remained below three lakh for the fifth consecutive day. There are 2,81,667 active cases of Covid-19 now.

8 UK returnees to Kerala test +ve

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec. 26: Eight people who recently returned from the UK to Kerala, have tested positive for Coronavirus and their samples have been sent to the National Institute of Virology, Pune for genomic analysis.

Health Minister K. K. Shailaja said on Saturday that samples of eight returnees were found positive for Covid-19 and their samples have been sent to NIV for further tests. Following this development, it has been

decided to subject the returnees to more tests, she added.

Surveillance at the four international airports in the state have been further strengthened. After the recently held local body polls, it was feared that there would be a massive surge in cases. However, that did not occur.

The death rate did not go up in the state as the government had taken precautionary steps in this regard, she said. — PTI

Oxford vaccine is front-runner

From Page 1

The subject expert committee (SEC) on Covid-19 of the CDSCO on December 9 had sought additional safety and efficacy data for Covid-19 vaccines of SII and Bharat Biotech after deliberating upon their applications.

The application by the Indian arm of US pharmaceutical firm Pfizer was not taken up for deliberation as the company had sought more time for making a presentation before the committee.

The Pfizer vaccine has already been approved by several countries including the UK, the US, and Bahrain.

While considering SII's application, the SEC had recommended that the firm should submit an updated safety data of phase 2 and 3 clinical tri-

als in the country, immunogenicity data from the clinical trial in the UK and India, along with the outcome of the assessment of the UK Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) for grant of EUA.

As for Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, "after detailed deliberation, the committee recommended that the firm should present the safety and efficacy data from the ongoing phase 3 clinical trial in the country for further consideration," the SEC had said.

The Pune-based SII, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, has made a collaboration with the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca to manufacture the vaccine. The SII has already manufactured 40 million doses of the vaccine. — PTI

MEDICAL | RECORD

Hemant had developed Lukoskin for leucoderma; several other herbal medicines

DRDO man bags Scientist of the Year Award

New Delhi, Dec. 26: Senior scientist Hemant Kumar Pandey has been honoured with DRDO's 'Scientist of the Year Award' for his contribution in developing several herbal medicines, including the popular drug Lukoskin meant for treatment of leucoderma.

A recipient of several prestigious awards for his contribution in the field of herbal medicine, Pandey has been undertaking

research at the Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) lab Defence Institute of Bio-Energy Research (DIBER) at Pithoragarh in Uttarakhnad for the past 25 years.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had recently facilitated the scientist at an event here with the prestigious award that comprises a certificate and cash prize of ₹2 lakh.

● **DEFENCE MINISTER** Rajnath Singh had recently facilitated the scientist at an event here with the prestigious award that comprises a certificate and cash prize of ₹2 lakh.

● **APART FROM** Lukoskin, Pandey has developed drugs for treatment of eczema and toothache as well as an anti-radiation cream.

"Dr Hemant Kumar Pandey, Scientist 'E', Defence Institute of Bio-Energy Research (DIBER), Haldwani has significantly contributed

in the development of five herbal products and filed seven patents.

ToT of three products has been done with Aimal Pharmaceuticals, New

Delhi, which has launched anti-leucoderma product into the market by trade name Lukoskin.

"In recognition of his invaluable contribution, the Scientist of the Year Award-2018 is conferred on Dr Hemant Kumar Pandey," the citation accompanying the award stated.

Though the scientist has developed six herbal drugs so far, Lukoskin used for treating leucoder-

ma or Vitiligo, a condition in which white patches get developed on the skin, has been most widely appreciated and found huge acceptance in the market.

A formulation of around eight herbs found in Himalayan region, Lukoskin helps in treating white patches and is marketed by Delhi-based Aimal Pharmaceuticals.

Leucoderma is an autoimmune disorder and

over 5 crore people are under its grip in India. It is neither contagious nor life-threatening.

The incidence of leucoderma is 1-2 per cent of the population worldwide. Apart from Lukoskin, Pandey has developed drugs for treatment of eczema and toothache as well as an anti-radiation cream, most of which are already being sold in the market following transfer of technology (ToT). — PTI

SHORT TAKES

MOROCCAN KING GETS BIBI INVITE TO VISIT ISRAEL

Jerusalem, Dec. 26: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Morocco's King Mohammed VI held a telephone conversation during which the Israeli premier invited the king for a visit, Netanyahu's office said Friday.

The phone call comes three days after an Israeli delegation signed a US-sponsored normalisation agreement with Morocco in Rabat.

"The leaders congratulated each other over the renewal of ties between the countries, the signing of the joint statement with the US, and the agreements between the two countries," a statement from Netanyahu's office said.

"In addition, the processes and mechanisms to implement the agreements were determined," it added.

MALI: FRENCH SOLDIER SHOOT TWO OTHERS

Paris, Dec. 26: A French soldier deployed to Mali as part of the Barkhane force fighting jihadist insurgents has wounded two comrades with a pistol while drunk, the army headquarters said Saturday.

The confrontation under the influence happened overnight from December 24 to 25 at a base in Gao in eastern Mali.

"Two soldiers from the same unit were getting on each other's nerves. One soldier wounded two of his comrades with his service weapon," an automatic pistol, army spokesman Frederic Barbry said.

One of the two men was wounded very lightly, while the other's injury was more serious although not life-threatening. Both were flown out following the shooting and brought to hospital in France.

Military police are probing the incident and "once the probe is over, (the shooter) will be flown home," Barbry said.

ATTACK KILLED 207 IN ETHIOPIA: HR COMMISSION

Addis Ababa, Dec. 26: A total of 207 people were killed in a Wednesday attack by gunmen in western Ethiopia, the country's Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said, more than doubling a previous count.

The independent government body had on Wednesday said 100 people were killed in their sleep and crops burned in a pre-dawn assault in the Metekel area of the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

"133 of the victims were adult men and 35 were adult women. Seventeen children, one of whom a six-month-old baby, and 20 elderly persons were killed," the EHRC said in a statement posted to Twitter late Friday.

Mostly inhabited by ethnic Shinasha, Oromo and Amhara people — the last two making up Ethiopia's most numerous groups — the Metekel area has suffered a string of deadly attacks in recent months.

Local leaders blame ethnic Gumuz people for the violence.

Following Wednesday's attack, "effort is underway to identify the victims with the help of survivors and identity cards," the EHRC said.

3 PEACEKEEPERS OF UN KILLED IN C. AFRICA

Bangui, Dec. 26: Three United Nations peacekeepers have been killed by unidentified combatants in the Central African Republic, the United Nations said, as the country prepares for a general election and fighting continues between rebels and government forces.

The news came after a rebel coalition called off a ceasefire and said it would resume its march on the capital, as well as the arrival of troops from Russia and Rwanda to shore up the government of the resource-rich country.

"Three peacekeepers from Burundi were killed and two others were wounded" following attacks on UN troops and Central African national defence and security forces, the UN said in a statement Friday. The assaults took place in Dekoa, central Kemo Prefecture, and in Bakouma, in the southern Mbomou Prefecture, it said, without providing further details.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, strongly condemned the latest incident, and called on the CAR authorities to investigate the "heinous" assaults.

Beijing rushes senior CPC leader to Nepal

To assess the ground situation, avert a vertical split in NCP

Oli Govt for Jan 1 winter session

Kathmandu, Dec. 26: A wary China is rushing a high-level delegation led by a vice minister of the Chinese Communist Party here to assess the ground situation and avert a vertical split in the ruling Nepal Communist Party, according to media reports on Saturday, nearly a week after embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli got the House of Representatives dissolved.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis last Sunday after Oli, known for his pro-Beijing leanings, in a surprise move, recommended dissolving the 275-member House, amidst a tussle for power with former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'.

Acting on Prime Minister Oli's recommendation, President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House the same day and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10, sparking protests from a large section of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) led by Prachanda, also a co-chair of the ruling party. China is sending a high-level delegation led by Vice Minister of the International Department of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) Guo Yezhou to Kathmandu, *The Kathmandu Post* reported.

"Leading a four-member team, Guo is scheduled to land in Kathmandu on Sunday morning on a regular China Southern Airlines flight," the paper reported, citing sources in both factions of the NCP. Bishnu Rijal, Deputy Head of Department of Foreign Affairs of the NCP's Prachanda-led faction, said that the Chinese side has communicated about Gou's visit to Kathmandu. "I don't have much detail to share with you at this point of time," Rijal was

'Prachanda' in May 2018. A Cabinet meeting held on Friday evening decided to recommend that the president summon the winter session of the National Assembly on January 1, Hridayesh Tripathi, who was made minister for health earlier on Friday, told *Kathmandu Post*. The meeting was held after Prime Minister Oli reshuffled the Cabinet to induct eight ministers, five of them former Maoist leaders, and change the portfolio of five of his ministers.

On Sunday, after the dissolution of the House of Representatives, seven ministers close to Prachanda-led faction had resigned from their posts. The budget session of Parliament was pro-rogued on July 2 by the president on the recommendation of the government.

— PTI

During her meeting with Madhav Nepal on Friday, Ambassador Hou, who was concerned about the split in the NCP, inquired about the future political course of the ruling party, the paper quoted Rijal as saying.

RUSSIA DETAINS TOP ASSOCIATE OF NAVALNY

Moscow, Dec. 26: A top associate of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was detained after doorstepping an alleged security operative who has inadvertently revealed details of Navalny's supposed poisoning with a Soviet-era nerve agent.

Lyubov Sobol, a key figure in Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, was detained on Friday for 48 hours after a day of interrogation on charges of violent trespassing. The move followed Sobol's attempt on Monday to enter the Moscow apartment of the alleged operative, whom Navalny had previously duped into describing details of the alleged poisoning. Sobol has denied the accusations and insisted that she violated no law by ringing the doorbell to the apartment.

While Sobol was being questioned, the state Investigative Committee issued a statement accusing her of trespassing — charges her colleagues have rejected. Earlier this week, Navalny released the recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he identified as Konstantin Kudryavtsev and described as an alleged member of a group of officers of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poisoned him with the Soviet-era Novichok agent in August and then tried to cover it up.

Navalny said he phoned the man hours before the group Bellingcat released a report. — AP

2 cops killed as explosions strike Kabul

Kabul, Dec. 26: A series of explosions hit the Afghan capital on Saturday morning, killing at least two police officers and wounding another two plus a civilian, officials said.

The officers died and a civilian was hurt when a magnetic bomb attached to a police vehicle detonated in western Kabul, said police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz. Two other police were wounded when a bomb attached to their car exploded earlier Saturday in southern Kabul, Faramarz said.

A third magnetic bomb detonated in eastern Kabul but caused no casualties, he said. There were reports of at least two other blasts elsewhere in the city but police had no immediate details.

The latest attacks came as Taliban and Afghan government negotiators held talks in Qatar, trying to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war.

No one has immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks in Kabul. The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in the capital in recent months, including on educational institutions that killed 50 people, most of them students.

The talks in Doha have been suspended until early January and there is speculation they could be further delayed.

At the same time, Taliban militants have waged bitter battles against IS fighters, particularly in eastern Afghanistan,



Afghan security personnel inspect the site of a bomb attack in Kabul, on Saturday.

— AP

while continuing their insurgency against government forces and keeping their promise not to attack US and NATO troops.

IS has also claimed responsibility for last week's rocket attacks targeting the major US base in Afghanistan. There were no casualties. — AP

FLIP | SIDE Judges who have him to thank for their position rebuffed his claims

Trump made lasting impact on courts

Washington, Dec. 26: On this, even President Donald Trump's most fervent critics agree: He has left a deep imprint on the federal courts that will outlast his one term in office for decades to come.

He used the promise of conservative judicial appointments to win over Republican skeptics as a candidate. Then as president, he relied on outside conservative legal organizations and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to employ an assembly line-like precision to install more than 230 judges on the federal bench, including the three newest justices of the Supreme Court.

Trump never tired of

boasting about it. Indeed, undeterred by Democratic criticism, the Senate was still confirming judges more than a month after Trump lost his reelection bid to Joe Biden.

"Trump has basically done more than any president has done in a single term since (President Jimmy) Carter to put his stamp on the judiciary," said Jonathan Adler, a law professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Law in Cleveland, Ohio, adding that Congress created around 150 new judgeships during Carter's presidency.

The impact will be enduring. Among the Trump-appointed judges, who hold lifetime positions,

● **AS PRESIDENT**, he relied on outside conservative legal organizations and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to employ an assembly line-like precision to install more than 230 judges on the federal bench, including the three newest justices of the Supreme Court.

several are still in their 30s. The three Supreme Court picks could still be on the court at the 21st century's midpoint, 30 years from now. Beyond the Supreme Court, 30 percent of the judges on the nation's court of appeals,

where all but a handful of cases reach their end, were appointed by Trump. But numbers don't tell the entire story.

The real measure of what Trump has been able to do will be revealed in countless court decisions in the years to come on abortion, guns, religious rights and a host of other culture wars issues. When it came to the president's own legal challenges of the election results, however, judges who have him to thank for their position rebuffed his claims.

But in many other important ways, his success with judicial appointments already is paying dividends for conservatives. When the Supreme Court

blocked New York from enforcing certain limits on attendance at churches and synagogues in areas designated as hard hit by Covid-19, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the newest member of the court, cast the decisive fifth vote.

Previously, the court had allowed restrictions on religious services over the dissent of four justices, including the other two Trump nominees, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. Five Trump appointees were in the majority of the 6-4 decision by the full 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in September that made it harder for felons in Florida to regain the right to vote. — AP

Blast in Nashville: Communications outages affect all

Nashville, Dec. 26: A recreational vehicle parked in the deserted streets of downtown Nashville exploded early Christmas morning, causing widespread communications outages that took down police emergency systems and grounded holiday travel at the city's airport.

Police were responding to a report of shots fired Friday when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes, Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake said.

Police were responding to a report of shots fired Friday when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes, Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake said. Police evacuated nearby buildings and called in the bomb squad.

The RV exploded shortly afterward, Drake said. "This morning's attack on our community was intended to create chaos and fear in this season of peace and hope. But Nashvillians have proven time and time again that the spirit of our city cannot be broken," Mayor John Cooper said at a news conference after issuing a curfew for the area.

Police believe the blast was intentional but don't yet know a motive or target, and Drake noted that officials had not received any threats before the explosion. The chief said investigators at the scene "have found tissue that we believe could be remains, but we'll have that examined and let you know at that time."

Police could not say whether it potentially came from someone inside the RV. Three people taken to area hospitals for treatment were in stable condition Friday evening, Cooper said. Surveillance video published on a Twitter account Friday that appeared to be across the street from the blast captured the warning issuing from the RV, "... if you can hear this message, evacuate now," seconds before the explosion.

The blast sent black smoke and flames billowing from the heart of downtown Nashville's tourist scene, an area packed with honky-tonks, restaurants and shops. Buildings shook and windows shattered streets away from the explosion near a building owned by AT&T that lies one block from the company's office tower, a landmark in downtown.

● **POLICE WERE** responding to a report of shots fired Friday when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes.

● **POLICE EVACUATED** nearby buildings and called in the bomb squad. The RV exploded shortly afterward, Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake said.

● **POLICE BELIEVE** the blast was intentional but don't yet know a motive or target, and Drake noted that officials had not received any threats before the explosion.

● **THE BLAST** sent black smoke and flames billowing from the heart of downtown Nashville's tourist scene, an area packed with honky-tonks, restaurants and shops.

● **BUILDINGS SHOOK** and windows shattered streets away from the explosion near a building owned by AT&T that lies one block from the company's office tower, a landmark in downtown.

"We do not know if that was a coincidence, or if that was the intention," police spokesman Don Aaron said. He said earlier that some people were taken to the department's central precinct for questioning but declined to give details. AT&T said the affected building is the central office of a telephone exchange, with network equipment in it.

The blast interrupted service, but the company declined to say how widespread outages were.

The AT&T outages site showed service issues in middle Tennessee and Kentucky. Several police agencies reported that their 911 systems were down because of the outage, including Knox County, home to Knoxville about 180 miles (290 kilometres) east of Nashville.

AT&T said that it was bringing in portable cell sites and was working with law enforcement to get access to make repairs to its equipment.

— AP

Intercepted attack plot by IS: Russia

TWO ARRESTED FOR CRASH THAT KILLED 2 GOVS

Moscow, Dec. 26: Russia's FSB security service said Saturday it had foiled an attack planned by a cell loyal to the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group in the country's unstable southern republic of Dagestan, arresting four people.

"Members of the group planned to detonate an explosive close to an administrative building belonging to security services, followed by an armed attack against interior ministry employees" in regional capital Makhachkala, the FSB said in a statement.

As well as arresting four "members of the international IS terrorist group", investigators found "firearms and bladed weapons, a large amount of ammunition and an explosive device", it added, along with mobile phones containing "exchanges with organisers located abroad".

On December 17, police killed two attackers targeting security forces in Russia's neighbouring republic of Chechnya.

Six people were also killed during an October "counter-terrorism" operation in Chechnyan capital Grozny, including two members of the security forces.

Russia's territories in the Caucasus were ravaged by two wars between federal troops and Chechen separatists in the 1990s and 2000s.

Increasingly Islamist in character, the insurgency spread to other republics in the region and declared allegiance to IS in 2015.

While the jihadist group's influence remains limited, occasional attacks against the authori-

ties persist in Chechnya, Dagestan and neighbouring Ingushetia. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

Dean remembered during MCG Test

Melbourne: More than three months after his death, Dean Jones was paid another tribute at his home ground here by Indian and Australian players, who were joined by his wife, daughters and the legendary Allan Border in remembering the effervescent former player on Saturday.

Jones' family and former Australia captain Border participated in the farewell during the tea break of the ongoing second Test here. Border, Jones' wife Jane, and daughters — Augusta and Phoebe — took a long walk from the boundary of the Melbourne Cricket Ground to the centre, carrying his baggy green, sunglasses and Kookaburra bat and laid the items to rest on the stumps at the Great Southern Stand end of the ground. Later, 12th men from both sides — K.L. Rahul (India) and James Pattinson (Australia) — collected the items and rested them on a seat by the boundary. — *PTI*

Ex-Eng cricketer Jackman no more

London: Former England cricketer Robin Jackman, who played four Test matches and 15 one-day internationals, has died, the International Cricket Council said. He was 75. Jackman took 1,402 wickets in a 399-game first-class career between 1966 and 1982. Following his retirement he became a commentator in South Africa, where he lived with his wife Yvonne. A statement on Friday from the ICC read: "We are saddened to learn about the death of legendary commentator and former England bowler Robin Jackman, who has passed away aged 75."

Former New Zealand bowler and fellow commentator Danny Morrison tweeted: "Awoken to the sad news of dear buddy & comms colleague Robin Jackman passing... Blessed to have had wonderful times shared 'Jackers'. RIP Rob". — *AP*

De Silva hurt after leading SL revival

Centurion, South Africa: Dhananjaya de Silva and Dinesh Chandimal put Sri Lanka in a strong position on the first day of the first Test against South Africa in Centurion on Saturday. De Silva made 79 before retiring hurt and former captain Chandimal hit 85 as Sri Lanka reached 340 for six at the close.

De Silva suffered what appeared to be a left hip injury while running between wickets and was taken off the field on a motorised stretcher. It was not clear whether he would be able to take any further part in the match.

His injury ended a partnership of 131 with Chandimal. — *AFP*
Brief scores: Sri Lanka 340/6 (D. Chandimal 85 batting, D. De Silva 79 retired hurt, W. Mulder 3-68) vs **South Africa**

Irving, Robinson spark NBA routs

Miami: Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving and Miami's Duncan Robinson each matched an NBA Christmas Day record with seven 3-pointers to ignite lopsided victories Friday, as the Heat stretch their holiday win streak to eight games. Irving scored 37 points, hitting 7-of-10 3-point attempts in his return to Boston, as the Nets ripped his former Celtics teammates 123-95. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs Australia: Second Test — Day 3 from 5 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

Big Bash League: Sydney Thunder vs Melbourne Renegades from 12.40 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Kerala Blasters vs Hyderabad from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Premier League: Leeds City vs Burnley from 5.30 pm; West Ham vs Brighton from 7.45 pm; Liverpool vs West Brom from 10 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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BOWLERS' DAY OUT

Bumrah, Ashwin skittle Aussies out for 195 as India dominate

Melbourne, Dec. 26: Jasprit Bumrah's menace was matched by Ravichandran Ashwin's guile as an inspired India led by Ajinkya Rahane shot out Australia for a sub-par 195 to dominate the opening day of the second Test here on Saturday. India then lost an out-of-form Mayank Agarwal (0) to Mitchell Starc but debutant Shubman Gill (28 batting) survived a hostile spell to hit some delectable boundaries in the day end score of 36 for 1 in 11 overs.

Giving him company was the seasoned Cheteshwar Pujara (7 batting). The line-up would look to exorcise the ghosts of the opening Adelaide game last week when India were shot out for their lowest ever Test score of 36.

"Not being reckless but playing with confidence will be the motive going forward," said Bumrah at the end of day's play, spelling out the team's plan.

As much as the day belonged to the Indian bowling unit for another fired-up show, new captain Rahane deserved equal credit for marshalling his resources to perfection during the 72.3 overs that Australia batted.

Bumrah (4/56 in 16 overs) and Ashwin (3/35 in 24 overs) were the stars but debutant Mohammed Siraj (2/40 in 15 overs) also did his bit repaying the faith shown in him with wickets of Marnus Labuschagne (48) and Cameron Green (12) with the old ball.

However, the Test series is increasingly looking like Ashwin's paradise as he once again made the opposition's best batsman Steve Smith (0) look ordinary, exploiting the turn and bounce that the first day of the MCG track offered. The Indian team looked way more galvanised despite being without regular skipper Virat Kohli, who is on paternity leave. — *PTI*

SIRAJ FULFILLED HIS LATE FATHER'S DREAM: BROTHER

Mumbai, Dec. 26: Pacer Mohammed Siraj could not perform the last rites of his late father last month as he was in Australia with the national team but he made him proud by making India Test debut in Melbourne, his family said on Saturday.

The 26-year-old Siraj lost his father Mohammed Ghaus, an auto-rickshaw driver in Hyderabad, on November 20, around a week after the Indian team landed in Australia and he could not return home due to Covid-19 restrictions.

His brother Ismail said it was his late father's dream to see Siraj play for the country in Tests and finally the dream was fulfilled on Saturday at the MCG. "It was my (late) father's dream that Siraj should represent India in Tests... He always wanted to see him (Siraj) in blue and white jersey to represent the nation, so our dream got fulfilled today," Ismail said. — *PTI*



India's Ravichandran Ashwin (left) celebrates with captain Ajinkya Rahane after dismissing Australia's Tim Paine on Day One of the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Saturday. — *AP*

SCORECARD

Australia Innings: Joe Burns c Pant b Bumrah 0, Matthew Wade c Jadeja b Ashwin 30, Marnus Labuschagne c Shubman Gill b Mohammed Siraj 48, Steven Smith c Pujara b Ashwin 0, Travis Head c Rahane b Bumrah 38, Cameron Green lbw b Mohammed Siraj 12, Tim Paine c Vihari b Ashwin 13, Pat Cummins c Mohammed Siraj b Jadeja 9, Mitchell Starc c Mohammed Siraj b Bumrah 7, Nathan Lyon lbw b Bumrah 20, Josh Hazlewood not out 4. Extras (b-10, nb-3, w-1) 14. **Total (In 72.3 overs) 195.** **FoW:** 1-10, 2-35, 3-38, 4-124, 5-134, 6-155, 7-

155, 8-164, 9-191, 10-195. **Bowling:** Jasprit Bumrah 16-4-56-4, Umesh Yadav 12-2-39-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 24-7-35-3, Ravindra Jadeja 5.3-1-15-1, Mohammed Siraj 15-4-40-2. **India 1st Innings:** Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc 0, Shubman Gill (batting) 28, Cheteshwar Pujara (batting) 7, Extras (nb-1) 1. **Total (For 1 wkt, in 11 overs) 36.** **FoW:** 1-0. **Bowling:** Mitchell Starc 4-2-14-1, Pat Cummins 4-1-14-0, Josh Hazlewood 2-0-2-0, Nathan Lyon 1-0-6-0.

Gavaskar refrains from praising leader Rahane

Melbourne, Dec. 26: Former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar is impressed by Ajinkya Rahane's field placements but said he will refrain from praising his captaincy as it is still "early days" and he does not want to be accused of backing a fellow Mumbaikar.

Taking charge of the team in the absence of regular skipper Virat Kohli, Rahane marshalled his resources well as India dismissed Australia for a sub-par 195 in 72.3 overs on the opening day of the second Test here.

Asked for his comments on Rahane's leadership, Gavaskar said: "... let's not jump into conclusions too quickly. If I say that his captaincy is outstanding, then again, I will be accused of backing a Mumbai boy and all kinds of things will happen.

FOR THE RECORD

● R. Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are playing together for the second time in away Tests. The first time both Ashwin and Jadeja played together outside Asia and the West Indies was Old Trafford, Manchester, in 2014 as part of a five-man attack. The last time a team played two front line spinners at Melbourne was India in 2007-08.

● Mohammed Siraj and Shubman Gill made their debuts in this match. India have played two debutants overseas only on two occasions since 2001. Virender Sehwag and Deep Dasgupta against South Africa at Bloemfontein in 2001-02 and Virat Kohli, Abhinav Mukund and Praveen Kumar against the West Indies at Kingston in 2010-11.

● Steve Smith slumped to his maiden duck in 23 innings against India. It was his fifth duck 134th innings of 75th Test match.

● It was Mayank Agarwal's maiden duck in 20 innings.

— *S. PERVEZ KAISER*

"So I don't want to get into that because these are early days," the legendary batsman said on *Sony Sports Network*.

Gavaskar was impressed with Rahane's field placements as three Australian batsmen — Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, and Travis

Head — were all caught by fielders deployed at different positions.

"From what I have seen in the last 2 Tests he captained and the one-day matches he captained, he has got a great sense of where the fielders should be kept," Gavaskar said. — *PTI*

Foxes strike late to frustrate Utd

Leicester, Dec. 26: Leicester and Manchester United missed the chance to put pressure on Liverpool at the top of the Premier League as the battle between second and third ended 2-2 at the King Power on Saturday.

Slow starts had been a feature for United on the road this season as they had won their previous six away league games despite conceding first.

However, this time it was the Red Devils who twice failed to hold onto the lead given to them by Marcus Rashford and Bruno Fernandes.

Harvey Barnes's thunderous strike levelled before half-time and Jamie Vardy's predatory instincts kept Leicester one point and one place above United in the table as his shot deflected in off Tuanzebe five minutes from time.

Liverpool's lead at the top now stands at three points and Jurgen Klopp's men can move further clear when they host West Brom at Anfield on Sunday.

"One point is not the worst result but we are disappointed we didn't get away with three," said United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

THE RESULT

Leicester 2
(Barnes 31, Vardy 85)
Manchester United 2
(Rashford 23, Fernandes 79)

"We had loads of big chances and we could've finished it off. They are a very dangerous side, a quality side, and Vardy just shows his quality."

Solskjaer has been keen to put an end to his side's sluggish starts and should have been celebrating inside 90 seconds when Rashford headed over Fernandes's inch-perfect cross with only Kasper Schmeichel to beat.

The England international was not so forgiving to the Foxes when given a second chance midway through the first-half as he swept Fernandes's prodded through ball into the bottom corner for his 13th goal of the season.

However, Barnes hauled his side back into the game with one moment of brilliance as his powerful blast from outside the box had too much power for De Gea on 31 minutes.

— *AFP*



Leicester City's Jamie Vardy (left) celebrates with James Maddison after scoring against Manchester United in their EPL match in Leicester on Saturday. — *AFP*

Steinmann scores as EB hold Chennaiyin

Vasco (Goa), Dec. 26: German striker Matti Steinmann struck twice to help SC East Bengal pull off a 2-2 draw against two-time champions Chennaiyin FC in an Indian Super League match here on Saturday.

It was East Bengal's third draw (to go with four defeats) as victory eluded them again.

Chennaiyin led 1-0 at half-time thanks to a 13th minute strike from Lallianzuala Chhangte before Steinmann equalised for East Bengal in the 59th minute.

CFC went ahead in the 64th minute through Rahim Ali's strike before East Bengal restored parity when Steinmann scored his second of the game.

The scoreline remained 2-

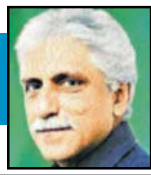
2 at the end of full-time and five minutes of added time despite the best effort of both sides to find the elusive winning goal.

Chennaiyin with two wins, two losses and three draws moved up to seventh spot with nine points while East Bengal remained winless and in 10th place with just three points.

After an action-packed first half during which Chhangte's strike enabled CFC gain a 1-0 lead, Steinmann scored in the 59th minute to level things up. Rahim Ali slotted home for CFC in the 64th minute from close range.

However, an error from CFC goalie Vishal Kaith allowed Steinmann to score five minutes later and bring East Bengal on level terms. — *PTI*

Debutants Siraj and Gill impress with strong showing



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

India have started the Boxing Day Test match in fine style, bowling out Australia for a paltry 195. Apprehensions that the team would still be in trauma after the crushing defeat at Adelaide proved to be unfounded.

The approach of the team was positive, the body language of players assertive and bowlers demonstrated excellent skills to scuttle Tim Paine's hopes of notching up a big score batting first.

Lambasted and lam-pooned after being bundled out for 36, India's lowest ever Test score, at Adelaide, and then losing the services of stalwarts Virat Kohli and Mohamed Shami — for different reasons — the team was under enormous pressure going into this match. In this backdrop, the first day's performance was uplifting.

To shrug off acute gloom after the fiasco of the previous match and make such a robust comeback

was admirable from the players.

Also terribly important in a series where three matches have still to be played. Brooding — in contrast to hard and harsh introspection — could only have made the situation worse.

Ajinkya Rahane led the team marvelously. To introduce spin in the 11th over of the day seems outrageous on the first morning of a match at the MCG. But it turned out to be a masterstroke as Ashwin plucked out two wickets, including that of mainstay Steve Smith.

Ashwin winning this psychological battle was the turning point of the day I thought. Without Warner, and with Smith not making a substantial contribution, the Australia

batting looks vulnerable and flaky. There were no fielding lapses this time by India, and the Aussie innings was throttled by the attacking bowlers.

While Ashwin and Bumrah were exceptional, my picks for the day from the Indian team were debutants Siraj and Gill who didn't look out of place at this level. With the team under so much duress, both showed strong nerves, fine skills and sound temperament.

Siraj was understandably edgy in his first spell. In the second, he worked up hot pace, and probed and tested batsmen with movement in the air and off the wicket, picking up two important wickets which exposed the Australian tail.

In the difficult final hour,

Gill impressed with panache and compact technique.

He got a life, true, but came back with some stunning drives in front of the wicket without being wantonly risky. A sweet timer of the ball and pleasing to the eye, Gill's set sail on his international career. Hopefully it will be long and fruitful.

My reason for dwelling at some length on India's smart display on Saturday is two-fold: one, it stokes optimism about the future course of this series. Even diehard Indian supporters declined fearing a clean sweep for Australia after the first Test debacle. That despondency has been somewhat dissipated.

The second is perhaps even more compelling. It has to do with the World

Test Championship where New Zealand have become a big threat to India to make it to the final in mid-2021.

India and Australia lead the WTC table on points. But under the ICC's revised formula, it is win-percentage that will determine finalists, not volume of points.

By the new methodology, New Zealand have crept ahead of India after beating West Indies 2-0 in the recently concluded series. The Kiwis are now engaged in a two-Test series with injury hit Pakistan (Babar Azam, Shadab Khan missing), and have begun the first Test strongly. If they win both these matches, they become a potent threat to India and Australia.

However, by virtue of the