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Mamata will be isolated in Bengal: Shah

Says BJP will win 200 seats

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 19

Tearing into the "dynastic politics" of West Bengal's ruling Trinamul Congress, Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday claimed Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who he claimed was planning to make her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee the next CM, will soon find herself "isolated" ahead of next year's Assembly elections. He also claimed that the BJP would win 200 out of the state's total 294 seats in the election.

Mr Shah, who is on a two-day visit to the state, made the forecast in Midnapore after former TMC heavyweight Shubhendu Adhikari joined the BJP in his presence with a long list of loyalists, including nine MLAs, an MP and at least

six dozen key district TMC office-bearers in what turned out to be a mega defection fair on the coldest day of the season in the state.

Among the prominent were six TMC MLAs -- Banasri Maity of Kanthi North; Biswajit Kundu of Kalna; Saikat Panja of Burdwan East; Shilbadra Dutta of Barrackpore; Dipali Biswas of Gajol and Sukra Munda of Nagerkata. There were also one MLA each from several other parties -- Sudip Mukherjee of the Congress from Purulia, Tapasi Mondal of the CPM from Haldia and Ashoke Dinda of CPI from Tamlik -- apart from two-time TMC MP of Burdwan East Sunil Mondal, ex-Alipurduar MP Dasharath Tirkey and former textiles minister Shyamapada Mukherjee.

TS STUDENTS DENIED CHANCE TO TAKE PART IN MBBS COUNSELLING

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 19

Scores of students belonging to Telangana were denied an opportunity to participate in the second phase of counselling for admission into the first year MBBS by the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences (KNRHS). These students were

allotted seats under the convener quota in the first phase but were barred from the second phase as they had joined Siddhartha Medical College, Vijayawada, a 'statewide institution' in which students from the three regions of erstwhile AP were allotted seats as per the quota fixed in the Presidential Order.

■ Reports on Page 2

APSRTC PLANNING TO OPERATE 3,607 SPECIAL BUSES DURING SANKRANTI FESTIVAL SEASON

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

APSRTC, which suffered huge losses due to Corona pandemic, is now planning to operate 3,607 special buses during Sankranti festival season to make good use of the festival demand. The special buses will be

plying from January 8 to January 14 between AP, Hyderabad and other areas of Telangana, Bangalore and Chennai.

Further, the APSRTC will also run special buses between various destinations within the AP state.

As per information, 1,251 buses will operate from

Hyderabad and other places in Telangana. 433 buses will run between Bangalore and various destinations in AP. 133 special bus services will be from Chennai and while an equal number will be run from various districts of the state to Vijayawada.

About 551 special bus ser-

vices will operate from other districts to Visakhapatnam while 1,038 buses will operate along the inter-district routes during the week-long pre-Sankranti period. Last year, during the same period, APSRTC had operated 4,200 buses.

The corporation is yet to

decide on fares it will charge for the special bus services. Last year, it was one-and-a-half times the actual fare. APSRTC executive director (Operations) K.S. Brahmananda Reddy said additional services may be pressed into service as per the need and rush of passengers.



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SHORT TAKES
WATER RESOURCES OFFICIALS SEEK VIEWS ON PROJECTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

The water resources authorities posted details of works of Papayapalem Lift project of package-1 and Babu Jagjevan Ram Uttarandhra Sujala Sravanti project phase-II of package-2 proposed to be taken up at internal bench mark value of ₹3,080 crore and ₹2,054.50 respectively on the official website of Judicial Preview Commission for scrutiny.

The authorities are taking up detailed investigation, formation of gravity canal and construction of Papayapalem lift scheme with all allied components works, branch canals and distributors network including cross masonry and cross drainage works.

Similarly, they are also taking up Jagjevan Ram Uttarandhra Sujala Sravanti project including formation of main canal, branch canals and distributary network including cross masonry and cross drainage works.

They say that those interested can visit the website and post their views up to 5 pm on December 22, 2020, and maintain that once the JPC gives its approval, tenders will be invited to finalise the agencies for taking up the execution of both the projects.

Meanwhile, Polavaram Project Authority chief executive officer J. Chandra Sekhar Iyer is scheduled to inspect the progress of Polavaram irrigation project and other works from December 20 to 23.

ALL SET FOR APSET TODAY, EXAM TO BE HELD IN 76 CENTRES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 19

All is set for conducting the Andhra Pradesh State Eligibility Test-2020 at 76 exam centres in the state on Sunday.

In a release issued here on Saturday, APSET member secretary Prof K. Srinivasa Rao stated that 35,862 candidates applied to appear for the test. He said that no candidate would be allowed into the exam centre even if he or she arrived late by a minute.

The APSET is being held in 30 subjects and the exam will be held from 9.30 am to 10.30 am for Paper-1 and from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm for Paper-2. Exam centres are set up in Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry, Guntur, Nellore, Anantapur, Tirupati, Kadapa and Kurnool in the state.

The candidates will be allowed into the exam centre one hour before the scheduled time for commencement of the exam, and mobile phones and calculators will not be allowed into the exam centre. The candidates are advised to wear face masks and use sanitiser as per the Covid-19 protocol.

NTR VARSITY TO CONDUCT WEB COUNSELLING

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

NTR university of health sciences issued notification for exercising web options for the first phase of web-based counselling for admission into management quota seats for the academic year 2020-21, here on Saturday.

All the eligible candidates whose names are present in the provisional final merit list for admission into management quota seats can exercise their web options from 6 am on December 20 to 1 pm on December 21 in the university website:

<https://appvtmedadm.apnruhs.in>.

The NRI category seats in Sri Padmavathi Medical College for Women (Under SVIMS) will be filled after receipt of merit lists of eligible candidates under NRI category and NRI sponsored category, based on NEET rank, from the principal of the college concerned after scrutiny and verification of uploaded NRI documents of the candidates claiming such category seats as per the rules.

Only Muslim minority candidates are eligible to exercise web options for management quota seats in unaided private minority medical colleges.

All the eligible candidates can exercise web options as per their eligibility for the seats available under management quota for both MBBS and BDS courses. Both category B and category C, seats available in private unaided non-minority/minority medical and dental colleges will appear to the candidates who are found eligible for both category seats and such candidates have to exercise web options carefully as per seat category/college.

Awareness programme



Additional DCP Srinivasa Rao and ACP Varma interact with students at an awareness programme on Anti Drugs at a college in Vijayawada on Saturday. — DC

Mobile vendors raided, stale food destroyed

50 vehicles seized, a fine of ₹500 slapped on each vendor

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

- Officials inspected chicken and mutton shops too for ensuring whether they are maintaining hygiene.

- Major findings of officials during the raids are that street vendors sell food by encroaching upon drains and other public places.

To check sale of stale and adulterated food and its impact on health of people, food safety and municipal corporation authorities carried out raids against street food vendors in several parts of the state on Friday from morning till late in the night.

The raids are in the aftermath of "mystery illness" affecting nearly 600 persons and claiming one life at Eluru recently. Deputy Chief Minister in-charge of health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas directed food safety and municipal authorities to conduct surprise checks on street food vendors. Accordingly, food safety officials from West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts, apart

from those of Eluru Municipal Corporation, carried out raids, focusing on mobile street food vendors, including those who sell tiffins, fast food, curries and the locally popular chicken pakora.

Officials destroyed tonnes of stale and adulterated food. 50 vehicles have been seized and a fine of ₹500 slapped against each vendor. Subsequently, all vehicles were released with a warning to vendors not to resume sale of stale or adulterated food.

Food safety authorities also inspected three hotels and collected sam-

plets of chicken biryani, chicken fry and vegetable curry and sent them for analysis to the State Food Lab in Hyderabad.

Eluru food safety officer M. Srinivasa Rao said, "Based on directions from the deputy CM, we carried out raids against street food vendors, apart from hotels. We have also collected samples of food following suspicions that they are using banned food colours and mono sodium glutamate. We will continue to inspect all food-selling establishments to safeguard the health of people," he underlined.

Major findings of officials during the raids are that street vendors sell food by encroaching upon drains and other public places. They prepare and sell food items in unhygienic conditions. The waste being generated by them is carelessly dumped either in drains or in public places.

Eluru municipal health officer (in-charge) K. A. Kondala Rao said, "Even as several people were affected by the mystery illness and national institutions are trying to find out the source of this illness, people are continuing to visit street food vendors with no concern for their health. We have instructed vendors to stop sale of food for the time being."

ROLLBACK OF HIKE TAX DEMANDED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

Andhra Pradesh Urban Citizens Forum (APUCF) demanded rollback of the property tax hike decision and announced state-wide protests on January 6. The APUCF launched state-wide awareness and protests programme against the hike of taxes in AP state under which burning of copies of tax hike orders protest was held at Sattenapalli in Guntur district on Saturday.

APUCF convener and CPM state leader Ch. Babu Rao deplored that while the Telangana state has cut down the taxes by 50 per cent for the convenience of the people, the AP government increased the taxes which is forcing the public into financial difficulties when they are already facing financial crises due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Babu Rao lamented that as much as ₹10,000 crore of extra financial burden would be added because of increased taxes on 1.60 lakh people living in the cities and towns in AP.

AMARAVATI POETIC PRISM COMMENCES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

Amaravati Poetic Prism - 2020, the Sixth International Multilingual Poets meet, started on Saturday with 75 national and international poets reciting their poems on the first day.

The poems' festival got inaugurated by famous poet K. Siva Reddy through a virtual mode. As many as 162 poets from 32 countries representing 40 languages are participating in the international meeting.

BJP demands White Paper on development of Seema

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, DEC. 19

BJP state president Somu Veeraju demanded a White Paper on Rayalaseema development and alleged that both the YSRC and TD are in cahoots with each other.

Veeraju questioned Chief Minister for not instituting an inquiry into the alleged irregularities of N. Chandrababu Naidu despite accusing him of looting thousands of crores. "We believe there is a tacit understanding between them", Veeraju said.

Addressing the media on Saturday along with Rajya Sabha MP T.G. Venkatesh, Veeraju said that Rayalaseema region was endowed with river waters and natural resources but political will is lacking in realising the dreams of Rayalaseema.

He added that the state government was putting up stickers of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's schemes and claiming them as their own.

It was challenged both of them to conduct a referendum in all 51 constituencies of Rayalaseema.

He added that the state

government was releasing funds for the projects that are in operation, Veeraju said.

On red sanders smuggling, he said why Jagan and Naidu and his MLAs and ministers could not control the smuggling activity. "Our party is for industrialisation of all regions but the lack of will to plug smuggling activity in red sanders is quaint," he said.

The BJP president said Kurnool would be made Winter Capital of AP and Assembly Sessions would be held here.

On repeated demands for referendum by TD leaders, the BJP state president asked Naidu to declare where he spent ₹7,200 crore on Amaravati.

He challenged both of them to conduct a referendum in all 51 constituencies of Rayalaseema.

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Andhra Pradesh were allotted seats as per the quota fixed in the Presidential Order.

The KNRUHS hurriedly gave notification for the second phase and scheduled it on Saturday and Sunday, preventing the students from questioning the decision in the Telangana High Court.

These students were allotted seats under the convener quota in the first phase but were barred from the second phase as they had joined Siddhartha College in Telangana. But students from Andhra and Rayalaseema who also took admission in the same college are extended the privilege by their

health university. This is creating a class within class, which is illegal," said a student.

SMC and the Hyderabad-based Government Dental College were declared as "statewide institutes" in undivided Andhra Pradesh and the status is being continued after bifurcation. Students from Telangana state get admission in SMC by virtue of their Osmania University local status.

After the first phase of counselling in Telangana state which ended on December 10, the NTR University of Health Sciences (NTRUHS) of Andhra Pradesh held the first-phase counselling for

colleges in AP along with SMC.

"We had submitted our original certificates in the colleges allotted to us in the first phase in Telangana state. When we got allotment in Siddhartha, the NTRUHS insisted that we produce the original certificates.

The KNRUHS and the respective colleges in Telangana state forced us to give an undertaking that we are surrendering the seat to give certificates. This is clear injustice," a parent pointed out.

Normally, when sliding takes place, the students need not submit certificates in the second college which directly obtains cer-

TD ASKS JAGAN NOT TO GIVE NOD TO CHEMICAL UNITS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

Telugu Desam MLC Yamala Ramakrishnudu wrote a letter to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, seeking denial of permission to chemical and bulk drug industries.

Leader of Opposition in AP Legislative Council and senior Telugu Desam leader, Ramakrishnudu, on Saturday expressed concern over the setting up of chemical and bulk drug industries which were posing a serious threat to the livelihoods of farmers, fishermen and the local people in the Konaseema area.

He urged Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to deny permission to any chemical industry from Arthurpetta to Uppada and adequate compensation should be paid to the farmers and fishers who had suffered losses till now.

In a letter addressed to the Chief Minister here, Ramakrishnudu stressed the need for relocating the Divis industry from Kona region in the overall interests of the local people.

He sought that the false and illegal cases filed against the fishermen and women should be lifted.

He blamed the government's negligence for tense situations in Tondangi mandal and the rapid spread of unrest in the otherwise peaceful Godavari districts.

He claimed that the twin threats were being posed to the environment on the one side and democracy on the other.

FARMER CUTS PADDY IN 'JAI JAGAN' SHAPE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

A farmer and YSRC leader wished Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on his birthday in an innovative way by cutting the paddy yield in the shape of "Jai Jagan" in Karumuravipalem village of Chunduru mandal in Guntur district on Saturday. The photos of the creative paddy cutting and videos went viral in various social media platforms and attracted people.

While harvesting his paddy, YSRC state joint secretary Venkata Reddy of Vemuru village cut it to get in "Jai Jagan" shape to express his admiration and wished Jagan on his birthday in a creative way.

With the help of drone, Venkata Reddy captured photos and video of the paddy field. He said that Jagan was promoting agriculture in all aspects to turn farming into a profitable profession and all farmers of the state benefitted with the Rythu Bharosa and other welfare schemes.

He said that he thought of extending greetings to Jagan in an innovative way hence cut the paddy yield in Jai Jagan formation.

Vemuru MLA Merugu Nagarjuna was also at the paddy fields to mark Jagan's birthday.

Cops say Naidu claim on assault is wrong

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 19

Naidu's tweet, AP police clarified on it by saying that the man being seen holding the policeman in the image was in fact helping him by doing some massage as he suffered injury on his head when he fell down on the road. The AP police made it clear that Naidu's post was not correct.

Meanwhile, the Visakhapatnam police denounced the social media post by Naidu and explained that when the circle inspector Emmanuel Raju suffered some injury while on bandobust duty, the YSRC activist was helping him by rubbing the head to provide some relief.

Dwarka ACP Murthy released the entire footage of the incident and said that the photograph posted on social media was distorted as if it was an assault on the policeman and made it clear that the police in Visakhapatnam (East) Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu, was being assaulted.

In a sharp reaction to

Lokesh says policeman injured in YSRC attack

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

mortgage the self-respect of the police department to Jagan Mohan Reddy. He stated that their party stuck to its stand that the YSRC goondas attacked and pushed the police officer who later fell on a moving autorickshaw and sustained injuries. He accused the YSRC leaders of resorting to illegal activities and then taking up cover-up operations to mislead the public.

Former minister Ch. Ayyanna Patrudu said that YSRC Rajya Sabha member Vijaya Sai Reddy was making shameless statements to twist the facts concerning the attack on the policeman.

Lokesh recalled that the policeman suffered injuries after the ruling party goondas attacked him outside the office of Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna. He made a strong plea not to

Naidu sponsored fake movement in Amaravati: Botsa

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 19

of those communities. He claimed that Jagan established corporations for the development of BCs and further appointed women to half of the posts which shows the dedication of the YSRC government towards BC welfare. He alleged that the TD was obstructing the welfare schemes like housing scheme by knocking the doors of the courts against the distribution of house sites to all needy people.

Narasaraopeta MLA Dr Gopireddy Srinivas Reddy recalled that Naidu neglected agriculture sector and telling farming is a wasted effort but Jagan following the path of his father Y.S. Rajsekhar Reddy turning farming as a profitable profession through various agriculture schemes.

Sattenapalli MLA Ambati Rambabu stated that Naidu backstabbed TD founder NTR and

IN BRIEF

Modi to interact with farmer in UP

Lucknow: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with farmers on the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee on December 25, the BJP said, adding that the party will hold kisan samvad at over 2,500 places in Uttar Pradesh.

UP BJP chief Swatantra Dev Singh and party leader Radha Mohan Singh held a virtual meeting in this regard with party office-bearers.

Unesco award for Delhi nursery

New Delhi: Delhi's iconic Sunder Nursery, a 90-acre garden which was transformed into a horticultural paradise after a decade-long conservation work, is among the winners in the Unesco Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. Also, Koothambalam at Guruvayoor temple in Kerala's Thrissur has been chosen in the Award of Distinction category.

Missing woman found after 3 yrs

Mumbai: A 38-year-old woman who had gone missing in Shirdi three years ago has been found at Indore in Madhya Pradesh, her home town. Her husband filed a missing complaint at Shirdi and moved the High Court, filing a habeas corpus petition. The woman was found by a team of Ahmednagar district police near her sister's house. She not in a condition to explain where she was in the last three years.

KHATTAR SEES END SOON TO FARMERS' STIR

New Delhi, Dec. 19: There can be a way out for the next round of talks between the government and farmer unions protesting against the Centre's new farm laws in a day or two, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said after meeting Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Saturday.

This is the second time the Haryana Chief Minister met Tomar at his residence since the protests broke out over three weeks ago, a state government official said.

"In a day or two, there can be a way out for talks. The government is ready for discussion if farmer union leaders come forward beyond yes or no," Khattar was quoted as saying in a Haryana government statement.

"There can't be any solution within the boundary of 'yes or no'. Solutions can be found only after discussion on specific issues. We are hopeful of positive outcome," he added.

Khattar said he discussed with Tomar about the ongoing farmer protests. "Effort is to find solutions through dialogue," he said. — PTI

60% VOTING IN FIRST DDC POLLS IN J&K

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 19

The authorities in Jammu and Kashmir heaved a sigh of relief after the eight-phased polling for the Union Territory's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections passed off peacefully.

Even as the vast majority of Kashmir Valley's southern districts stayed away from the democratic exercise, the official statistics suggest that an overall 60 per cent voting has been recorded in these elections. This, as per the officials, is "more than satisfactory". The BJP has termed the voter response as an "endorsement" of the abrogation of Article 370.

The polling in the eighth and final phase of the elections was held on Saturday during which 50.98 per cent votes were cast across 28 constituencies including 15 in Jammu region and remaining 13 in Kashmir Valley.

J&K's State Election Commissioner K K Sharma, while addressing a press conference said the polling was peaceful at all 1,703 polling stations. He said the Jammu region recorded an average voter turnout of 72.71 per cent with Poonch district reporting the highest percentage of 83.58. The Kashmir Valley recorded just 29.91 per cent average voter turnout.



Flying Officers of the Indian Air Force celebrate after their graduation parade at the Air Force Academy at Dindigul in Hyderabad on Saturday. — S. SURENDER REDDY

India not weak, will answer border aggression: Rajnath

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD DEC. 19

Defence minister Rajnath Singh said that India had shown it was not weak and could answer any aggression. "This is the new India, we are no longer weak. ... we are capable of answering any transgression, aggression and unilateral action at the border," he said.

"Though we support peace, we will not tolerate any harm to the country's self-respect," said while addressing the combined graduation parade of Flying Officers at the Air Force Academy at Dindigul near here.

Singh referred to the India-China standoff in

eastern Ladakh and said that even during the difficult times of the Covid-19 pandemic, China's behaviour reflected the country's intentions. "We showed them that India is not a weak nation. It's a new India which will not tolerate any conflict or aggression. India is well equipped to give them a befitting reply. We have been receiving a lot of praise from different countries for the same during the stand-off," he said.

He said the two countries had held several rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military levels.

"As of now, both the nations are amid bilateral

and diplomatic talks. I am repeating again, we do not want conflict but only peace. But we will not tolerate any harm to the nation's sovereignty and if it happens we are well equipped for giving a strong reply," Singh added.

The minister spoke about Pakistan and said that even after losing four wars, the country was still fighting proxy wars with India through terrorism. "The armed forces and police are effectively dealing with terrorism," Singh said.

"The country is not only handling terrorism effectively within, but even taking action beyond the borders."

Referring to the Balakot air strikes in Pakistan, he said that India had demonstrated India's military strength to the world and the country's intentions against terrorism.

Stressing the need to change the strategies of war according to evolving times, Singh said the country may face challenges not only across the borders and the seas, but also in space and cyber domains, for which it needs to be prepared.

"So it is necessary that you need to update yourself constantly," Singh told the newly commissioned officers, adding, "our cadets should also be tech savvy along with being good soldiers."

VILLAGERS HOLD LAST RITES FOR DEAD PYTHON

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

After a four-month wait, Congress president Sonia Gandhi will meet a core group of the 23 leaders who had written to her in August seeking drastic changes in the party's functioning at her 10 Janpath residence here on Saturday.

Some of them decided to give it a decent burial. They garlanded the snake, draped it in a white cloth, carried it in a procession and "laid it to rest." — PTI

Congress plans 'chintan shivir' to address woes

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

After a four-month wait, Congress president Sonia Gandhi will meet a core group of the 23 leaders who had written to her in August seeking drastic changes in the party's functioning at her 10 Janpath residence here on Saturday.

Besides five or six among the 23 letter-writers, AICC general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal, Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot and senior leader Kamal

Nath, who had played the role of mediator between the leadership and this group after the passing of Ahmed Patel, are likely to be present.

It is learnt that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will also be at the meeting.

As the party's internal elections are approaching the demand to make Mr Rahul Gandhi president again has gained momentum.

AICC general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala said: "The party will soon start the procedure to elect a

new president, and 99.9 per cent, including me, want Rahul Gandhi to be elected party president."

The Congress is trying to downplay the entire exercise and calling it just a meeting with senior leaders Saturday, as there will also be those who aren't letter signatories.

The demand for an active and visible leadership is likely to be raised, given the party's recent electoral debacles, not only in Assembly elections and by-elections but also in local body polls.

India to inoculate 30 crore, says health min

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 19

Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on Saturday chaired a meeting of the Group of Ministers on Covid-19 to discuss vaccination development, and its roll out process. Apart from catering to its own huge population, India has got requests from about 12 countries for its

vaccines as and when they are ready.

With all focus now on vaccination, the government is working out a strategy for its roll out from January 2021.

"India's Covid-19 Pandemic Growth has dropped to 2 per cent and Case Fatality Rate is amongst lowest in the world at 1.45 per cent. India's Recovery Rate has peaked to 95.46%

while the strategy of testing 1 million samples has decreased the Cumulative Positivity Rate to 6.25%," said Dr Harsh Vardhan.

Observing the fact that despite festivals in the month of October November, no new surge of cases were observed in this period due to comprehensive testing, tracking and treatment policy implemented on the

ground, the Union Health Minister reiterated his concern and appeal to maintain Covid-19 appropriate behaviour even at a time when the country is at the cusp of authorising the first set of vaccines.

He also expressed the need for an expeditious vaccination drive to cover all the target populations estimated to be around 30 crores.

GOOD NEWS New wave, if it comes, will be smaller; India among three nations where numbers haven't spiked

Experts agree India may not see second Covid wave

New Delhi, Dec. 19: Healthcare experts have said that there may not be a second peak of Covid-19 in the country, and even if it occurs, it is unlikely to be as strong as the first one.

The comments come as the country's Covid-19 caseload surpassed the one crore mark, though the number of daily cases and daily fatalities have been continuously coming down.

Noted virologist Dr Shahid Jameel said India's curve for daily cases is on a downward slope since a peak in mid-September.

"At this time, we are getting about 25,500 cases daily compared to over 93,000 cases per day in mid-September. I believe

the worst is over. But there will be small peaks in the future just as we witnessed in late November," he said.

"I don't think there would be a second peak as we have gone through the festive season (Dasara to Diwali) and a state election without a significant jump. What is the reason for this? If we go by the second national serosurvey, likely cases were 16 times confirmed cases. By that factor, India would have 160 million cases now," he said.

It is possible that by now there are over 300-400 million infections in the country, Jameel said.

"By that token, we are seeing large parts of the population getting protected

and breaking transmission of the virus," he said.

"Unexposed and susceptible people will continue to get infected. If immunity lasts a year or less, then

we may have small peaks at regular intervals for the next few years. Good vaccine coverage will control this effectively," he said.

When asked about a pos-

'Why not India' is new tune: PM

Reforms for six years have changed image: PM

New Delhi, Dec. 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sold reforms spanning from manufacturing to taxation to labour, saying they have changed the world perception about the country from 'why India' to 'why not India' and went on to quote record foreign investment (FDI) during the Covid-19 pandemic as a testimony to that.

Speaking at industry association Assocham's Foundation Week event, Modi also said agriculture reforms brought by his government six months back have started benefiting farmers. The reforms in the last six years have influenced in changing the sentiment of the industry from 'why India' to 'why not India' in investing.

"There was a situation in the past when investors would question 'why India' (for investing in the country). With reforms (of past six years) and their effects, its proposition has changed to 'why not India,'" he said.

He cited scrapping of 1,500 obsolete laws and farming new ones that are in tune with the changing investment order as an example of his govern-

ment's outlook.

"Earlier investors cited high tax rates to say 'Why India' but today (corporate) tax rates are so competitive that they say 'why not India,'" he said.

Previously, a web of regulations and rules were cited by investors to ask why to invest in India but easing compliance burden in the new labour laws have made them say 'why not India', he said.

Red tape previously made investors say 'why India' but a red carpet is

now making them say 'why not India', he said.

"From a non-existent culture for innovation to a new ecosystem promoting and nurturing startups has given the world confidence to say 'why India'. Today the faith reposed by the government in the private sector and encouragement of foreign investors have made the same people say 'why not India,'" he said.

Red tape previously made investors say 'why India' but a red carpet is

ED attaches ₹12cr Farooq's assets in J&K cricket scam

Farooq stands firm; NC cries political vendetta

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, DEC. 19

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached former chief minister and National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah's six properties worth ₹11.86 crore including his residential houses in twin capitals of Srinagar and Jammu in connection with a probe into alleged scam in Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA).

Mr Abdullah termed the move as an attempt to "make me now". He, however, pledged, "But I won't let them do what they want to. I will do what I have to do."

The NC said that the ED's attaching its president's properties is "political vendetta, meant to settle political score". In a joint statement, the party's general secretary Ali Muhammad Sagar, MPs Mohammad Akbar Lone and Hasnain Masoodi and ten other senior functionaries and leaders said "such acts are nothing but unwarranted and unjustified as there is no evidence worth the name on record to justify the order of attachment of the property".

The ED sources here said that it has received an order from its headquarters in Delhi listing six properties of Mr Abdullah including three residential buildings and four plots of land. The sources added that the properties have been attached under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The move has been necessitated by the "laundering of funds" of JKCA under the PMLA, an ED statement confirmed. It reads "The attached properties include three residential houses, one at Gupkar Road, Srinagar, one at Tehsil Katipora, Tangmarg, and one at Bhatinda, village Sunjwan, (Jammu), commercial buildings at posh Residency Road area of Srinagar. The lands at four different places in JK have been attached."

The 83-year-old Abdullah, JKCA's three-time chief minister, was recently interrogated by the ED and

earlier also by a team of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the alleged scam. The CBI had filed a charge-sheet against him and three others in the alleged ₹11.66 crore scam in Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Court in Srinagar in July 2018.

The alleged scam surfaced in March 2012 and Mr. Abdullah, the then JKCA president, along with several others, was named accused in it. Mr. Abdullah had not denied there had been a scam in the association.

The move has been necessitated by the "laundering of funds" of JKCA under the PMLA. The CBI had filed a charge-sheet against him and three others in the alleged ₹11.66 crore scam in Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Court in Srinagar in July 2018.

However, if there is a second wave, he said, then it would be a new variant of the virus which will mean more cases but lesser mortality and the second peak will help in building herd immunity.

Asked if the worst was over for India, Dr Samiran Panda, the Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases at the Indian Council of Medical Research, said the epidemiological curve has come down for some states, while there is a fluctuation for others.

If you don't get that strain, then there will not be a second peak. If India starts its vaccination pro-



A health worker collects swab samples from a woman for Covid-19 testing, in Jammu on Saturday. — PTI

in the West," Kang said.

Dr K.K. Agarwal, an eminent cardiologist, said

there is still 30-40 percent population in India which has not been infected.

He said India, Argentina and Poland are the three countries among the 15 nations having the highest number of cases that are not showing a second peak.

"By all probability, India may not have a second peak, and if the second peak comes, it will only come due to the 501 new variant. Two of them have been described, one in south of England and one in South Africa," he said.

DECCAN Chronicle

20 DECEMBER 2020



Geeta Chandran

Off the beaten track

Of dancers, artists and the new normal

While the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been food for analysis across all sectors of the economy, one glaring omission is the artist! What has the lockdown and the slowdown done to all of us and our work? This is a silence that is deafening in our public discourse.

As a performing artist, I of course — like all others in my fraternity — lost out on all my scheduled performances and stage shows, both group and solo, and all the travels associated with that. This had two impacts — first, of course, was the loss of income; but also then, my creative graph was ruptured since my interaction with musicians was forced into a hiatus. However, this seemed inconsequential when one realised what was happening to the wider artistes' community at various levels. We are a large sector, very unorganised, scattered and diverse. From folk performers to dancers who are part of group shows, to classical artistes — just the "dance" category within the performing arts group is incredibly large. The folk performers who largely depended on weddings and tourist groups were suddenly completely out of their jobs and many had to seek to alternate ways to survive. Nobody in the media or in the government is even talking about this sector, and that is appalling.

SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING

There were silver linings, of course. In the performing arts' community, we saw that there was lot of sharing that hadn't happened before. Artistes were talking about their lives, the way they learnt their art forms, the way they practised, and the problems that they had had and continue to face at various points in their career. One also saw a lot of discussion and engagement on various subjects relating to the arts, that was a welcome development. Of course, these were the first few months when one could engage with a lot of things happening online. But with the passing of time these, too, have given way to the predictable; and too much of the good thing is now leading to "art reflux".

As far as performances online go, it has been a mixed bag. Everybody seems to be performing, and that may be a good thing in terms of short-term self-gratification. But sharing everything for free, and placing valuable professional skills acquired over a period of time in the public domain without any thought of monetising them, has become an extremely worrying trend. Economic models of sharing work have not been deliberated upon, and hence there is a danger of the arts being further marginalised.

Let's face it: Even before the pandemic, artistes were not really in a great place in terms of economic viability. Buying a ticket to watch a show was getting more and more difficult. Now with so much happening for free at the click of a button, one worries even more about how artistes will manage to survive in the future. Would people ever again buy tickets at all to watch performances?

I agree that artistes are anxious and worried about their uncertain future and hence want to be a part of the social media, lest they be left out of some imaginary race. We are all in an introspective mode. But this mood cannot last for too long. We realise that as well.

Artistes need to perform, and they need to be watched. Their self-esteem and self-confidence takes a huge beating if performances do not happen. The government hasn't spoken a word about artistes and their concerns. Even existing skeletal schemes for artists are not being honoured. The sector as a whole has taken a huge beating, even though everybody acknowledges the fact that during the lockdown all the arts — dance, music, theatre and the visual arts — have kept the morale of everybody high and helped them to stay sane.

In India, the problem is even more daunting as the arts and performers in general are not an organised sector. The diversity in art forms and the geography of this country has not helped in creating a roster — be it folk or classical. Hence organising the artistes' community and helping them has become a huge challenge. A nadaswaram player who earned his bread and butter by playing in temples during festivals or played at weddings is today at his tether's end, with both tourism and temple gatherings in moratorium. How does, for example, can one reach support and help to artistes located in a remote village in Tamil Nadu?

Could this time be used by all of us to put our heads together and think of ways to reimagine culture for the "new normal" times to come? And what about our future? What happens when things open up once again? What place will the arts then have in our lives? Will the economy be resilient enough to support the arts? And will audiences return to auditoriums to watch live performances? We need to start thinking of the role of artistes in our society, what they mean to us and what we must do for them. But (alas!) will it happen?

Delhi-based classical dancer Geeta Chandran is a force multiplier in the world of the arts, and is the founder-president of Natya Vriksha

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

James Forsyth

How to fight 'wolf warrior diplomacy' of Xi's China

The most significant and lasting change brought about by Covid-19 is that it has woken the West up to the threat posed by Communist China. The fact that the pandemic's initial severity was covered up by the Communist Party of China authorities didn't surprise Western governments. It was Beijing's "wolf warrior diplomacy" as the virus raged worldwide that made them grasp the true nature of President Xi's China.

In March, Britain was taken aback by the extreme misinformation by the CPC as it tried to suggest that the American military was somehow to blame for the virus' emergence. The shortages of personal protective equipment reminded Western governments how reliant they had become on Chinese manufacturing and also exposed the difference between dealing with China and dealing with companies in democratic countries: ministers hesitated to criticise the CPC for fear that the next plane loaded with PPE wouldn't take off. This was a valid concern. When Australia suggested there should be an independent inquiry into the virus' origins,

Beijing aggressively slapped tariffs on its goods. The CPC's behaviour shows that if you develop a close economic relationship with China, it will be used to "bully you politically".

All this has led to a shift in UK government policy. At the start of the 2010s, David Cameron and George Osborne wanted the UK to be China's best friend in the West. This approach was inherited by Theresa May and, at first, Boris Johnson. In early 2020, Britain was still on track to have Huawei, a Chinese firm with close links to the PLA, play a key role in the building of its 5G network. This is changing, thanks to pressure from both the United States and Tory back-benchers.

A new national security and investment bill, now in Parliament, is meant to stop Chinese firms from buying up British companies in strategically important fields. This is overdue, given how vital technology will be to the coming rivalry between China and the West. To allow Chinese firms, which are not independent of the state, to purchase technology start-ups is extremely shortsighted. There is a strong case for far stricter rules

regarding universities' research deals with Chinese companies too.

During his presidency, Donald Trump reversed Barack Obama's overly passive approach to China's rise. But Mr Trump was ill-suited to galvanise the West to respond to this threat. First, his fondness for autocrats made him wholly unfit for the role of moral leader in this struggle. Second, pushing back on China requires building of alliances and working through multilateral institutions — which Mr Trump was atrocious at. He withdrew the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, that was to act as an economic counter to China, and his decision to pull America out of the World Health Organisation only increased China's influence within it.

Joe Biden's incoming administration in many ways represents a return to the Obama era, but US ties with China will be an important exception; Mr Biden will take a much more hardline approach. There is now a bipartisan consensus in the US that China is a strategic threat. In his recent memoir Mr Obama suggests he would have taken a stiffer line if he hadn't also had to deal with the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

As the host of next year's G-7, the UK has a major role to play in this Western pushback and intends to use the meeting to launch the D-10, an alliance of democracies to counter China, Australia, South Korea and India — all countries vital to any strategy to contain China — will be invited.

Boris Johnson's government believes it has a vital role to play in bringing India into this alliance, given that relations between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Biden will not be easy.

In Whitehall there is also interest in the idea of a T-12: a grouping of democracies with a particular interest in technology. Any attempt to contain China must produce an alternative to its technological solutions. But the West is hampered by the split between the US and EU over data and privacy rules. This divide has led to two separate tech ecosystems and held back the effort to respond to China. The West must overcome these internal divisions if it is to prevent Beijing from taking a decisive lead in the industries of the future. This is just as important as coordinating investment in 6G technology to prevent a repeat of the current situation, where

Huawei offers a dramatically cheaper solution than any company from a democratic nation.

China's technological edge is one of the reasons it is in so many ways a more formidable competitor than the Soviet Union was. Another is its position in the world economy. It is no coincidence that no leading Hollywood studio has made a movie critical of China since Seven Years in Tibet in 1997.

China's integration into the global economy also means there are many in the business world who don't want anything to change. One influential Tory pushing for a tougher line on Beijing laments: "You didn't have UK corporations calling to express disappointment if you criticised the Soviet Union."

2020 has been an awful year for the world. Nearly every Western country has handled the pandemic badly. The IMF estimates China will be the only major economy to grow in 2020. But the rapid development of vaccines should restore some of the democratic world's intellectual self-confidence. It will need that in the coming generational struggle with Xi's China.

By arrangement with the Spectator

Subhani



LETTERS

MATURE JUDICIARY

The apex court terming as 'disturbing' and staying the AP High Court's order on examining 'Constitutional breakdown' is a corrective step for judicial overreach. That the HC used the term 'Constitutional breakdown' is rather harsh and not proportionate. Anyway, self check, matured judiciary is the boon for Indian democracy.

Dr D.V.G.Sankararao
Vizianagaram

Not only the CJI, but the entire country finds the AP HC's order disturbing. Almost all decisions have gone against the state government and interests of the people of the state ever since YSRC got elected. Perhaps it (APHC) was out to prove that there was indeed a constitutional break down and therefore the government could be dismissed. It is now upto APHC to rethink on the issue. Otherwise, we would be witnessing a real Constitutional breakdown.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

CINEMA SOPS

It is shocking that the state government has shown zero interest on Telugu film industry as their sops are so poor (*Cabinet showers soaps on theatres, DC, Dec. 19*). The government should not forget about the importance of cinema industry as it provides employment to thousands of people, entertaining many more and bringing so much revenue through taxes.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

PUNISHING A STATE

The summary transfer on deputation of 3 officials from West Bengal cadre to the Centre seems nothing short of high handed and coercive stance as they were the officers who were supervising the BJP rally led by its president J.P. Nadda in Diamond Harbour. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has a formidable adversary in BJP to tackle the 2021 elections.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

17 killed as relief plane crashes near Panagarh

CALCUTTA, Dec. 19. A Russian relief aircraft, on a flight from Dacca to Palam, crashed in flames near Panagarh airport about 120 kms from here in Burdwan district at four this evening killing all 17 people aboard.

The 'A N 22' plane which left Dacca at 2-26 pm was approaching the airport when one of its engines burst into flames. Attempting a crash landing, the plane touched the runway, veered off and streaked along for about a mile before crashing.

As the plane crashed through the runway fencing it set alight several trees and bushes, besides destroying some huts. But no ground casualties have been extricated from the wreckage. Deputy Officer Panagarh airport M. R. Dutta told UNI that the airport staff heard a loud bang in the air and saw the plane descending with its tail ablaze. All the airport emergency and fire services were alerted.

— UNI

With the farmers' agitation now entering the 25th day jamming the borders of the national capital at the time has come to ask a fundamental question, Are the farm bills aimed at addressing a problem that the government is even terrified of acknowledging?

The NDA/BJP government inherited a robust economy from its predecessor the United Progressive alliance despite protestations to the contrary. Between 2004 and 2014 the India economy grew at 7.8 per cent year on year for 10 long years with 2004-05 as the GDP base year. At the revised base year 2011-12 the growth figure is 8.13 per cent. Despite strong global headwinds in the form of the economic meltdown of 2008 and the Eurozone crisis of 2011 this robust rate of economic growth not only increased the size of the economy, created jobs and employment opportunities but, most importantly, it helped create a robust social security infrastructure in the form of Right to Information, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment programme (MNREGA), Right to free and compulsory education, Education (RTE) and the National Food Security Act, to name but a few of the initiatives in this direction. As many as 27.1 crore people were lifted out of poverty between 2004 and 2014. The flipside of this high growth paradigm was high inflation but then again there is no free lunch in life. On balance, ordinary people benefited as growth with equity brought all around prosperity.

What does this economic havoc have to do with farm bills? Quite a lot, in fact. For it has everything to do with the food subsidy component of the Union Budget.

The Food Corporation of India is the state instrumentality that oversees the purchase and supply of food grains. Founded in 1965 under the Food Corporations Act it is

mandated to procure food grains at Minimum Support prices (MSP) stow them, create buffer stocks including a strategic reserve of food grains in addition to disseminating them through the Public Distribution System (PDS) to identified beneficiaries.

The Union government determines the MSP for purchasing food grains as well as their distribution price also called issue price. This is the rate at which food grains are supplied to the states. Variance in these two rates along with supply costs are compensated by the government to FCI in the form of food subsidy. The FCI, therefore, is totally reliant on the central government and does not have any other source of revenue.

Even before Covid-19 knocked the bottom out of India's economic paradigm the Indian economy was in serious trouble. In H-1 (April-September) of 2019-20, the total flow of funds from banks and non-banks that include public issues, commercial papers (CPs), external commercial borrowings (ECBs) and foreign direct investments (FDIs) crashed by 87.63 per cent to ₹90,995 crores. It was ₹7.36 lakh crore for the corresponding period of 2018-19 as per to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) monetary policy report.

On the 23rd of March, 2020, the day before the country went into the harshest lockdown on planet earth, Parliament passed the Union Budget of 2020-21 of ₹30.42 lakh crores. The projected revenue receipts were 22.45 lakh crores leaving a fiscal deficit of 7.96 lakh crores. With the Indian economy now officially in recession and expected to contract by over 10 per cent the country is up the proverbial creek without a paddle, with all budgetary projections up in the air.

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The Food Corporation of India is the state instrumentality that oversees the purchase and supply of food grains. Founded in 1965 under the Food Corporations Act it is

nothing short of suicidal. The government must grow the economy so that it has enough revenue to meet its commitments. It cannot roll up the social safety nets of farmers and the poor, namely MSP and the NFSA. It must, therefore, repeal these ill-conceived farm bills and give an unequivocal statutory guarantee that it would continue open-ended public procurement at MSP and would fulfil its obligations under NFSA.

First, it would bring the food subsidy deficits under control and since the government would not procure it also then would not have to distribute food grains thereby ending its obligation under the NFSA

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishewari.

— UNI

SHORT TAKES
**SOMALIA SUICIDE
BOMBING KILLS
15, MISSES PM**

Mogadishu, Dec. 19: A suicide bomber attacked a stadium in Somalia's central city of Galkayo Friday, killing 15 people shortly before the arrival of the country's new prime minister, according to police.

Ali Hassan, a police officer in Galkayo, said others were injured in the blast, which occurred at the entrance to the sports stadium. Some high-ranking members of the Somali army were among those killed in the explosion, according to local reports.

The bombing has been claimed by Somalia's al-Shabab jihadist rebels, according to the group's Andalus radio station.

Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble, who took office in September, was visiting the city as part of a tour of the central state of Galmudug.

**RAPE CHARGE ON
EPSTEIN-LINKED
MODELLING AGENT**

Paris, Dec. 19: A modeling agent associated with disgraced US financier Jeffrey Epstein has been charged in France with sexual harassment and the rape of minors over 15 years old.

Jean-Luc Brunel was arrested as part of an ongoing investigation on Wednesday at Charles de Gaulle airport as he was preparing to take a flight to Senegal.

The Paris prosecutor announced in a statement Saturday that the charges were handed out Friday by a magistrate at the end of Brunel's custody period. It said Brunel was not handed any human trafficking charges, which was one of the main lines of inquiry.

The magistrate decided that there was not currently enough evidence to rule on that count, but he was not acquitted and could be charged in the future if anything new emerges. Brunel was remanded in custody.

**'LAST ATTEMPT'
TO GET BREXIT
TRADE DEAL: EU**

Brussels, Dec. 19: The European Union and the United Kingdom are heading into the weekend on a "last attempt" to clinch a post-Brexit trade deal, with EU fishing rights in British waters the most notable remaining obstacle to avoid a chaotic and costly changeover in the new year.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday that the only way to get a deal is for the 27-nation bloc to compromise since "the UK has done a lot to try and help, and we hope that our EU friends will see sense and come to the table with something themselves." "That's really where we are," Johnson said, adding "no sensible government" could agree to the EU demands as they stand.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier told the EU parliament both sides were in the "home straight of the negotiations", which have already come a long way in nine months of talks but are still short of a final compromise. Barnier called it "a very serious and sombre situation".

**IMRAN: PAK
ARMY WORKS
UNDER ME**

Islamabad, Dec. 19: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has asserted that the Army is a state institution which works under him, amidst Opposition's allegations of the powerful military establishment's interference in the country's politics and elections.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a 11-party opposition alliance, has been holding massive rallies since its inception in September to seek Khan's ouster and press the military to stop interfering in politics. The PDM has been accusing the Pakistan Army of installing "puppet" Prime Minister Khan through a manipulated election in 2018.

The Army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 70 plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in the matters of security and foreign policy. However, the military has denied meddling in the country's politics. Khan also denies that the army helped him win the election in 2018.

According to the 'Lahore Declaration' signed by the Opposition parties on Monday, the military establishment had stolen the people's mandate in the 2018 election.

As new Covid strain spreads faster, UK discusses action

New higher set of curbs, govt to cut back relaxation rules over Christmas

London, Dec. 19: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson discussed with his senior ministers on Saturday what urgent action to take after it was confirmed that a new strain of the Covid-19 virus could spread more quickly and lead to a surge in cases.

The BBC reported that London and southeast England would be placed in a new higher tier of restrictions and the government would cut back on a planned relaxation of the rules over Christmas, but gave no further details.

Johnson will hold a news conference at about 1600 GMT during which he will discuss what his plans are in light of a rise in infections across London and southeast England linked to a new, more transmissible variant of the virus.

England's Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty said that while there was no current evidence the variant of the novel Coronavirus caused a higher mortality rate or impacted vaccines, urgent work was underway to confirm this.

"We have alerted the World Health Organisation and are continuing to analyse the available data to improve our understanding," Whitty said in a statement.

Britain reported 28,507 new Covid-19 cases on Friday and 489 deaths, with the reproduction "R" number estimated to be between 1.1 and 1.2, meaning the number of cases is rapidly increasing. Johnson said on Friday he hoped England would not need a third lockdown after Christmas and has so far resisted calls to change plans to ease restrictions for five days over the festive period, allowing three separate households to meet indoors.

UK to bring in new higher tier of Covid restrictions for London, southeast England -BBC

Much of the country, including London, is currently in the highest of a three-tier system of restrictions to curb the pandemic's spread. The Daily Telegraph newspaper said ministers could now announce curbs on travel between southeast England, including the capital, and the rest of the country.

The BBC said these areas would now be placed in a new "Tier 4", with a tightening of rules for Christmas.

"Failing to act decisively now, will mean further suffering," Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust and a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, said on Twitter. "It has been apparent for some days that the virus is again out of control in parts of the country," said Jonathan Ashworth, Labour's health spokesman. —Reuters

Meanwhile, at least nine Coronavirus patients died on Saturday after an oxygen tank explosion triggered a fire at a hospital in southeastern Turkey.

The blaze in an intensive care ward of the hospital in Gaziantep broke out when a tank on an artificial respirator exploded. "We are saddened by this tragedy," Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said before a planned visit to the hospital. —AP



Protesters march up Whitehall after gathering in Parliament Square at an anti-lockdown demonstration, "Unite in the Fight" in central London on Saturday. British PM Boris Johnson resisted calls to tighten Covid restrictions over Christmas, as London faced stricter measures and concern grew about rising case numbers. The government has been under mounting pressure to toughen proposals allowing up to three households to meet indoors during the festive window from December 23, as European neighbours curb their easing plans amid surging infections. — AFP



**BIDENS TO GET
1ST VACCINE DOSE
TOMORROW**

Washington, Dec. 19: President-elect Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, will be getting their first dose of the Coronavirus vaccine on Monday.

That's according to Biden's incoming press secretary, Jen Psaki. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, will receive their doses the week after next.

The announcement was made Friday, hours after Vice President Mike Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi became the highest-ranking government officials to receive their first doses of a vaccine. Psaki told reporters that Biden would be receiving the shot in public, as Pence did Friday. —AP

The two work "better than we almost dared to hope," NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins said. "Science is working here, science has done something amazing." Early results of large, still unfinished studies show both vaccines appear safe and strongly protective although Moderna's is easier to handle since it doesn't need to be stored at ultra-frozen temperatures.

The vaccine is very similar to one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech that's now being dispensed to millions of health care workers and nursing home residents as the biggest vaccination drive in US history starts to ramp up.

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A second vaccine represents a ray of hope amid despair as the virus continues to spread unabated

WHO: Expert team off to China in Jan.

Geneva, Dec. 19: The head of emergencies at the World Health Organisation says a team of international experts looking into the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic will travel to China the first week of January.

Dr Michael Ryan says there will be quarantine arrangements for the team, which will visit the suspected site of the outbreak in the city of Wuhan. "The purpose of the mission is to go to the original point at which

human cases were detected and that we fully expect to do that," he said. He says the team of international experts will work "with our Chinese colleagues," and he adds they "will not be ... supervised by Chinese officials."

Ryan says the world should celebrate the arrival of vaccines, but the "next three to six months are going to be tough." He seemed to allude the Americas, which is home to roughly three-fourths of the global cases. — AP

broke out. "Even today, nearly a year after the world first learned of the outbreak, the Chinese Communist Party is still spreading disinformation regarding the virus and obstructing a World Health Organisation (WHO) investigation into its origin and spread," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday. — PTI

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A second vaccine represents a ray of hope amid despair as the virus continues to spread unabated

even before holiday gatherings that are certain to further fuel the outbreak.

The scourge has claimed more than 3,12,000 US lives and killed 1.7 million people worldwide. New cases in the US are running at over 2,16,000 per day on average. Deaths per day have hit all-time highs, eclipsing 3,600 on Wednesday.

California has emerged as a lethal hot spot, with hospitals running out of intensive care beds and ambulances lining up outside emergency rooms in scenes reminiscent of the calamity around New York City last spring. California on Friday reported over 41,000 new cases and 300 more deaths. — AP

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The vaccine is very similar to one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech that's now being dispensed to millions of health

OXFORD VACCINE TO BE CLEARED BY YEAR-END

London, Dec. 19: The Oxford University vaccine against Covid-19 being produced by AstraZeneca is likely to get regulatory approval from the UK's independent regulator by the end of this year for a rollout to begin in early 2021, according to a UK media report.

The Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency is expected to authorise the vaccine by December 28 or 29 after the final data is provided on Monday. — PTI

2ND REPORTED SEVERE REACTION TO COVID VACCINE

Fairbanks, Dec. 19: A second healthcare worker has experienced a severe reaction after receiving the Covid-19 vaccine, officials said Friday.

Both cases were in Alaska. A worker, identified only as a female clinician, began experiencing probable anaphylactic symptoms about 10 minutes after receiving the shot Thursday in Fairbanks. Symptoms included tongue swelling, hoarse voice and difficulty breathing. — AP

broke out. "Even today, nearly a year after the world first learned of the outbreak, the Chinese Communist Party is still spreading disinformation regarding the virus and obstructing a World Health Organisation (WHO) investigation into its origin and spread," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday. — PTI

The two work "better than we almost dared to hope," NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins said. "Science is working here, science has done something amazing." Early results of large, still unfinished studies show both vaccines appear safe and strongly protective although Moderna's is easier to handle since it doesn't need to be stored at ultra-frozen temperatures.

The vaccine is very similar to one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech that's now being dispensed to millions of health

Nod to Moderna vaccine in US, 2nd shot in arsenal

Washington, Dec. 19: The US added a second Covid-19 vaccine to its arsenal on Friday, boosting efforts to beat back an outbreak so dire that the nation is regularly recording more than 3,000 deaths a day.

The much-needed doses are set to arrive on Monday after the Food and Drug Administration authorised an emergency rollout of the vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health.

The move marks the world's first authorisation of Moderna's shots.

The vaccine is very similar to one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech that's now being dispensed to millions of health

care workers and nursing home residents as the biggest vaccination drive in US history starts to ramp up.

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China to 1st inoculate frontline workers

Beijing, Dec. 19: China will begin its Covid-19 inoculation programme by first vaccinating some key priority groups, including those involved in medical treatment and disease control, within the winter-spring period, before starting a mass roll out, the National Health Commission (NHC) said on Saturday. The vaccination programme will also cover those who plan to work or study in counties and reg-

ions with medium or high risks of exposure to the virus, Cui Gang, an official with NHC's disease control department, told reporters. This will help relieve the pressure on China in preventing and controlling imported Covid-19 cases, and lower the risks of domestic outbreaks of the epidemic, the official said.

In a two-step vaccination drive, the vaccines will be first given to the priority groups, including those engaged in handling imported cold-chain products, and people working in sectors such as port inspection and quarantine, aviation, public transport, fresh market, medical treatment and disease control, said Cui.

There is no word yet on the mass roll out of the vaccine programme and no announcement has been made about the government's approval of various va-

cines under trial. China has roped in more than a dozen countries, including Brazil, to conduct the final phase trials of its Covid-19 vaccines. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain have approved a vaccine developed by Chinese state-owned Sinopharm.

Chinese officials say the Coronavirus has been largely controlled in the country and herd immunity can be built with gradual roll out of the vaccination programme covering most of its population. The health officials said over a million people had been given vaccines under emergency use. The officials, who took part in Saturday's press briefing, said no major side effects were reported during the trials.

Rana is a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, the Pakistani-American LeT terrorist who was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. Headley, 60, was made an approver in the case, and is currently serving a 35-year prison term in the US for his role in the attack.

SHORT TAKES

Panghal clinches gold at World Cup

New Delhi: World silver-medalist Amit Panghal (52kg) notched up a gold medal without having to fight his final bout, while veteran Satish Kumar (+91kg) settled for silver after an injury prevented him from competing in his summit clash at the Cologne World Cup in Germany on Saturday.

Panghal was given a walkover by Germany's Argishti Terteryan.

Satish, who made the final after beating France's Djamil Dini Moindze in the semifinal on Friday night, had to withdraw against Germany's Nellye Tiafack owing to an injury. Also making the final were Saksi and Manisha in the women's 57kg category.

Asian Games bronze winner Pooja Rai, Mohammed Hussamuddin and Gaurav Solanki settled for bronze medals. — PTI

Chennaiyin snap winless streak

Goa: Chennaiyin FC finally managed to register a win after five games, with 2-1 victory over FC Goa in the Indian Super League here on Saturday.

In a game that saw 39 shots at goal, Rahim Ali (53') scored the match-winner after Jorge Ortiz (9') cancelled out Rafael Crivellaro's (5') Olympic-goal opener. It was an easy win for the visitors who should have finished with a bigger goal margin, had it not for their poor finishing. Goa coach Juan Ferrando named three changes to the line-up that lost against ATK Mohun Bagan with Albin Dohling and George Ortiz being the other two. — PTI

Real Kashmir lift maiden IFA Shield

Kolkata: Real Kashmir FC clinched their maiden major trophy by lifting the IFA Shield after beating George Telegraph 2-1 in the summit clash here on Saturday, though the 127-year-old tournament was held without some of the country's top sides. This year, four I-League teams and eight Calcutta Premier League sides took part. Besides RKFC, Mohammmedan Sporting, Gokulam Kerala and Indian Arrows were the other I-

League sides. Fresh from a hat-trick against Mohammmedan Sporting in the semifinals, Nigerian forward Lukman Adefemi broke the deadlock (38th minute) from a penalty but the Georgians restored parity in the second half with a terrific solo run by substitute Gautam Das (50th).

But 10 minutes later, skipper Mason Robertson snatched the lead for the Snow Leopards with a towering header. — PTI

BDL bats show no mercy to Dayanand

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, DEC. 19

Sandeep Goud and K. Hima Teja shone with the bat for BDL on Saturday, the second day of their A-1 Division three-day league match against R. Dayanand. Sandeep hit 58 while Teja is one run short of his half century. Prateek Pawar also struck a decent 49 for BDL. Sandeep and Teja are at the crease as BDL made 193 for 2 to ramp up pressure on the Dayanand side which were all out for a paltry 160 in their first innings. Tejodhar and Akash Sana were pick of bowlers for BDL, scalping three wickets each. Earlier, BDL posted 292 in their first innings.

A-1 DIVISION (THREE-DAY)

Day-2:
■ BDL 292/9 in 90 overs & 193/2 in 36.3 overs (Prateek Pawar 49, Sandeep Goud 58 batting, K. Hima Teja 49 batting) vs R Dayanand 160 in 46.5 overs (K. Bhagath Varma 41, B. Tejodhar 3/37, Akash Sana 3/43).

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Brighton vs Sheffield from 5.30 pm; Tottenham vs Leicester from 7.45 pm; Manchester United vs Leeds United from 10 pm; West Brom vs Aston Villa from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Torino vs Bologna from 5 pm on Sony Ten 2; Sassuolo vs AC Milan from 7.30 pm; Atalanta vs Roma from 10.30 pm; Lazio vs Napoli from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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NEW LOW

India slump to their lowest score as Australia clinch first Test

Adelaide, Dec. 19: The Indian cricket team under Virat Kohli faced their worst hour of embarrassment while collapsing to their lowest Test score of 36 as a rampaging Australia cruised to an emphatic eight-wicket victory inside two and half days in the opening Day/Night Test here on Saturday.

There were no demons in the pitch but Josh Hazlewood (5-3-8-5) and Patrick Cummins (10.2-4-21-4) displayed fast bowling of highest quality to dismantle the visitors.

The sequence of 4, 9, 2, 0, 4, 0, 8, 4, 0, 4, and 1 on the scorecard will rattle the fans but more so this team, for a very long time.

India's earlier lowest score was 42 at the Lord's in 1974 against England, known in Indian cricket parlance as the "Summer of 42". Saturday's total was also the lowest score in the brief history of D/N Tests and the joint fifth lowest overall.

The easy target of 90 runs was achieved by the home side in only 21 overs without much fuss.

They only lost Matthew Wade (33) and Marnus Labuschagne (6) in pursuit of the easy goal.

The home team collected 30 World Test Championship points from the win, while its skipper Tim Paine was adjudged player of the match for his gritty first innings knock of 73.

India have now lost three successive Tests well inside three days with two being in New Zealand earlier this year.

To make matters worse for the visitors, star pacer Mohammed Shami's series could well be over due to a wrist injury. — PTI



India captain Virat Kohli (right) leads his players off the field after their loss to Australia on the third day of their first Test in Adelaide on Saturday. — AFP

SCORECARD

India 1st Innings: 244 all out

Australia 1st Innings: 191 all out

India second Innings (overnight 9/1):

Priti Shaw b Cummins 4, Mayank Agarwal c Paine b Hazlewood 9, Jasprit Bumrah c and b Cummins 2, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 0, Virat Kohli c Green b Cummins 4, Ajinkya Rahane c Paine b Hazlewood 0, Hanuma Vihari c Paine b Hazlewood 8, Wriddhiman Saha c Labuschagne b Hazlewood 4, Ravichandran Ashwin c Paine b Hazlewood 0, Umesh Yadav not out 4, Mohammed Shami retd hurt 1. Extras 0. Total (for 9 wkt, in 21.2 overs) 36.

FoW: 7-1, 15-2, 15-3, 15-4, 15-5, 19-6, 26-7, 26-8, 31-9.

Bowling: Mitchell Starc 6-3-7-0, Pat Cummins 10.2-4-21-4, Josh Hazlewood 5-3-8-5.

Australia 2nd Innings: Matthew Wade run out 33, Joe Burns (not out) 51, Marnus Labuschagne c Agarwal b Ashwin 6, Steven Smith (not out) 1. Total (For 2 wkt, in 21 overs) 93.

FoW: 70-1, 82-2.

Bowling: Umesh Yadav 8-1-49-0, Jasprit Bumrah 7-1-27-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 6-1-16-1.

TALK

The OTP to forget this is 49204084041.

— VIRENDER SEHWAG
Ex-India opener

Wait what happened? I just went to play 9 holes came back game over. What a spell by The Australians. Pace matters.

— WASIM AKRAM
Pakistan cricketer

With the way India batted & bowled in the 1st innings, they were in the driver's seat, but the Aussies came back really hard this morning.

That is the beauty of Test cricket. It's NEVER till it's over. India was out-classed in the 2nd half. Congratulations to Australia!

— SACHIN TENDULKAR
India great

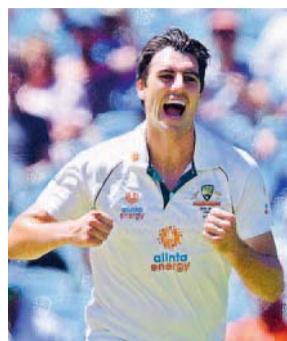
Gavaskar hails Aussie bowlers

Adelaide, Dec. 19: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Saturday sympathised with the Indian team after it slumped to its lowest Test score, saying it would be a bit unfair to be critical given that the Australian pace bowlers were simply "superb".

The trio of Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc produced a sensational performance as the visitors collapsed to their lowest Test score of 36. India's earlier lowest score was 42 against England at the Lord's in 1974 and Gavaskar was a part of that team.

"I mean, any team that is all-out for its lowest Test score since the time it started playing Test cricket, that's never good to see," Gavaskar told Channel 7 after India's eight-wicket loss here.

"But having said that, if any other team had been facing that kind of bowling, they would also got out, maybe not all-out for 36, maybe 72 or 80-90 but the way Hazlewood (5/8) and Cummins (4/21) terrorised the tourists into submission. — PTI



Australia's Pat Cummins celebrates the wicket of India's Cheteshwar Pujara on Saturday. — AP

of questions," he explained. "So it's not fair to blame the Indian batsmen for the way they got out because it was just simply superb bowling by the Australian bowlers," he added.

After ending the second day with a handy 62-run first innings lead, India faced a batting collapse in the first session of day three. None of their batsmen reached double-digit scores as Hazlewood (5/8) and Cummins (4/21) terrorised the tourists into submission. — PTI

ZERO FOR FOUR WAS MORE SHAMEFUL, SAYS GAEKWAD

BY BIPIN DANI

1-0 (Pankaj Roy), 2-0 (Datta Gaekwad), 3-0 (M.K. Mantri) and 4-0 (Vijay Manjrekar). India losing four wickets without a run on the scoreboard against England at Leeds in 1952 was more shameful than Virat Kohli & Co.'s second innings debacle at Adelaide, according to former India opener Dattaji Gaekwad.

"Team India's 36 all out at Adelaide is not as shameful as our debacle," Gaekwad, one of the two surviving members of India's 1952 team, said.

"There have been other international teams who have scored lesser than 36 runs but losing four wickets without a run on the board was very hard to digest. Even today, I am ashamed of this (zero for four) debacle".

Hazlewood warns India of aftershock

Adelaide, Dec. 19: India will feel the aftershocks of crashing to their lowest Test total of 36 heading into the remainder of the four-match series against Australia, Adelaide Oval's wrecker-in-chief Josh Hazlewood said Saturday.

Virat Kohli leaving for paternity leave from the second Test will also add to the visitors' woes, according to Hazlewood.

"Getting bowled out for 36 is going to leave a few headaches here and there and their best batter (Virat) is leaving as well, it is going to leave a bit of whole," Hazlewood said at

Our worst batting show: Virat

Adelaide, Dec. 19: India captain Virat Kohli can't remember a "worse batting performance" by his team than the lowest ever Test score of 36 against Australia here but at the same time, he has urged people not to "make mountain out of a molehill".

He did speak about batsmen "lacking intent" to take forward and although he

didn't take names, Mayank Agarwal's approach (9 off 40 balls) in the morning was hard to explain when the team had a 62-run overnight advantage.

"I don't think we have ever had a worse batting performance than this. So we can only go upwards from here and you will see guys stepping up and realising their true characters,"

Kohli said. The Indian captain desperately tried but looked at pains to defend the indefensible — another inept overseas batting show with six successive scores of less than 250 just this year.

"It's a strange one to be honest in my opinion. The ball didn't do much but we didn't have too much intent of going out there and taking the game forward," he lamented.

"Everything happened so quickly that no one could make any sense of it," Kohli was unable to fathom what hit his team. "I don't think it's alarming and we can very well sit here and make a mountain out of a molehill, it's basically looking at things in the right perspective," he reasoned. — PTI

NEWBIES SHINE IN HONDA CUP

Chennai, Dec. 19: As the penultimate day of the finale round of the MMSC Indian National Motor cycle Racing Championship 2020 came to a close on Saturday, younger riders shined through on track.

The IDEMIT-SU Honda India Talent Cup 2020 focuses on providing accelerated racing platform to groom young riders in their journey to become India's star riders.

The highlight of 2020 have been the 10 young guns in the NSR 250R Honda India Talent cup — the first ever racing platform in the history of Indian motor-sports where the next gen riders ride on the Moto3 race machine platform. — NSR250R.

SAI TEJ

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