

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | FRIDAY | 25 DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 30.0°C
Min: 14.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
30/16 °C

NATION | 4

Modi to credit funds to farmers



WORLD | 5

UK, EU clinch post-Brexit deal



SPORTS | 8

Oz look to pile misery on India in Test



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

Vol. 25 No. 235 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+23,942)	(+324)
1,00,99,021	1,46,458
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+617)	(+3)
TS: 2,82,347	1,518
(+402)	(+4)
AP: 8,79,339	7,082

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

	7,80,61,507
DEATHS	
17,16,170	
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES	218
worldometers.info/coronavirus	

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Ekadasi till 1.53 am (Saturday)
Star: Ashwini till 7.35 am
Variyam: 6.22 pm to 8.10 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.59 am to 9.42 am; 12.38 pm to 1.22 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
HJIRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 9, 1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5:30 am
Zohar: 1:30 pm
Asar: 4:15 pm
Maghrib: 5:38 pm
Isha: 8:30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.29 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.36 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 1.33 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 2.14 PM

COUNTER POINT



Psst! Corona vaccine...

SHORT TAKES

HC strikes down judge's order

Vijayawada: The AP High Court on Thursday struck down a single judge order that directed the Registrar (judicial) to resolve problems being faced by advocates in listing cases. Earlier, reacting to complaints of advocates, Justice M. Venkata Ramana directed Alapati Giridhar, the Registrar, to list cases on dates as dictated by judges and take steps to avoid trouble to advocates in getting their cases listed.

■ Full report inside

UNSOCIAL | MEDIA

Pedda Reddy suspects JC's men of nasty posts

MLA's men ransack JC house

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, DEC. 24

Tension prevailed in Tadipathri town after followers of YSRC legislator K. Pedda Reddy ransacked the residence of his rival and TD leader J.C. Diwakar Reddy and attacked Dasari Kiran, close aide of Prabhakar Reddy, for allegedly having posting against the MLA's wife on social media.

Prabhakar Reddy and his family members were not in the house at the time of the attack. However, the situation turned violent when he rushed home and

● **MLA PEDDA REDDY** stopped his convoy in front of Diwakar Reddy's house and rushed into it, accompanied by more than 30 close aides along with armed gunmen and the local sub inspector, according to the police.

both groups began pelting stones at each other.

Two vehicles, including that of Pedda Reddy, were damaged while some party workers from both sides suffered injuries.

Sources said a post against Pedda Reddy's wife

about collection of money from sand reaches went viral. In fact, they have been viral for the past one month. Pedda Reddy's rented party office is in the same colony where Diwakar Reddy's house is located.

Pedda Reddy stopped his convoy in front of Diwakar Reddy's house and rushed into it, accompanied by more than 30 close aides along with armed gunmen and the local sub inspector.

None of the family members was around. Aides of the MLA attacked Dasari Kiran and beat him severely for the social media post.

The MLA sat on a chair and came out after issuing a stringent warning to Kiran to quit Tadipatri.

On being informed, Prabhakar Reddy rushed to the house. Meanwhile, many followers of JC and TD party cadre gathered at his residence.

In the subsequent pelting of stones, the MLA's car was damaged while the police rescued his son Harshanvardhan Reddy.

SP Satya Esubabu rushed to Tadipathri and monitored the situation.

■ Page 2: Prabhakar Reddy not to file complaint

Merry Christmas



A child and his mother take a look at the nativity scene on Lord Jesus which was set up on the eve of Christmas celebrations at St Anthony Church in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. *Deccan Chronicle* wishes all its readers a Merry Christmas, joy and peace for all.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

PM praises Tagore's vision

ANIMESH SINGH & RAJIB CHOWDHURI
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, DEC. 24

With the upcoming West Bengal Assembly election on his mind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attributed the essence of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative to Bengal icon Rabindranath Tagore at the centenary celebrations of Visva-Bharati University at

Santiniketan.

The speech was made in the absence of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who later claimed that she was not invited though Visva-Bharati vice chancellor Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty's letter on December 4 inviting her went viral.

Modi said, "Guided by Gurudev, Visva-Bharati presented a strong image of Indian nationalist sen-

timent during the Independence. Gurudev wanted the entire humanity to benefit from India's spiritual awakening. Atmanirbhar Bharat vision is also a derivative of this sentiment."

He invoked the famous poem, *Chitto jetha bhoj shumyo, uchcho jetha shir* (Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high), he also pitched for the National Education Policy.

DENIED LOANS, STAFF DUMP GARBAGE IN FRONT OF BANKS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

Sanitary staff angry over denial of loans dumped garbage in front of banks at Vuyyuru in Krishna district. The applicants lamented that the banks were reluctant to give small loans.

According to reports, several nationalised banks refused to give loans under Jaganna Thodu and Cheyutha schemes infuriating applicants, who took the issue to the notice of ruling party leaders and officials. The angry people reportedly dumped garbage in front of three bank branches in Vuyyuru on Thursday. They informed their higher officials and municipal authorities. Later, the garbage was removed. Leaders of All India Bank Employees Association condemned the act.

Krishna collector A. Md Intiaz expressed sorrow and asked the bankers to cooperate with the government towards sanctioning loans to poor through various government welfare schemes.

Row over curbs at Tirumala turns political

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 24:

The row over restricting the Vaikunta Dwara Darshan free tokens to locals and stopping non-local devotees without tickets at Alipiri turned a political fight.

The Opposition is charging the government and the TTD with failure to ensure free darshan to devotees from far-off places. Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu slammed the YSRC for "not taking steps" to ensure darshan for non-local devotees and alleged that the police at the behest of the ruling party resorted to a lathi-charge on the devotees.

In a statement, Naidu said, "Everyone has a right to have darshan at the Tirumala temple. The government and the TTD are responsible for ensuring hassle-free darshan to all. The YSRC has been tarnishing the image of Tirumala ever since it came to power."

BJP leaders also joined Naidu to target the TTD.

Party spokesperson G. Bhanuprakash Reddy criticised the TTD's decision to allow former Rajampeta MLA Akepati Amarnath Reddy to reach Tirumala via 'Annamayya Bata' on Tuesday along with over 3,000 devotees without security checks.

"TTD has been preventing entry for devotees who don't have tickets at Alipiri. At the same time, they allowed over 3,000 YSRC devotees to reach Tirumala and extended darshan to them. Is Tirumala a dharmic place or a ruling party office," Bhanuprakash asked.

Naidu and Reddy alleged that the YSRC leader and his followers held a procession and flew drone cameras on the Papavinasanam road, violating the security norms at Tirumala.

TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy rejected Naidu's allegation of the police resorting to a lathi-charge.

■ Page 2: TTD chief hits back at Naidu

AUROBINDO GETS 41.1% OF KAKINADA DEEP WATER PORT

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS I DC
HYDERABAD, DEC 24.

Aurobindo Realty and Infrastructure Holdings Pvt Ltd on Thursday became the major shareholder in the Kakinada deep water port by acquiring 41.12 per cent stake in the company which is currently operating the port.

The pharma giant already bought GMR group's stake in the proposed Kakinada SEZ and proposed green field port connected to the SEZ. *Deccan Chronicle* reported on September 26 about Aurobindo setting its eyes on the Kakinada deep water port.

The government built the port with its funds and privatised it in 1999 and it has become a tradition that people or companies close to the party in power enjoy a major stake in the operator company.

Aurobindo bought the entire share of Kakinada Infrastructure Holdings Pvt Ltd in Kakinada Sea Ports Limited, the operator company, while the remaining shares are held by other companies.

■ Page 2: Aurobindo takeover may kill probe

Repeal laws



President Ram Nath Kovind receives a memo seeking repeal of the three farm laws from a delegation from the Congress comprising Ghulam Nabi Azad, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and Rahul Gandhi, in New Delhi.

— PTI

Expert fears UK strain may replace Coronavirus in India

KANIZA GARARI I DC
HYDERABAD, DEC. 24

The new more infective Coronavirus strain from the UK may replace the I/A31 clade, which entered the country from southeast Asia. Over time, the weaker A31 clade was replaced by the A2a clade, the global strain.

Dr Rakesh Mishra, director of CCMB, said, "With infectivity rate as high as 71 per cent the existing strain will be replaced by the new one. The parallel strain in South Africa suggests that it affects younger people more but more research is required."

What health complications the new strain will lead to is not known. Dr Mishra said, "The mutation was slow but it has developed a new strain which is more virulent. We cannot let our guard down."

The CCMB director stated that the disaster management techniques meant for

● **THE DIRECTOR** of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) stated that the disaster management techniques meant for SARS-CoV-2 for this year will have to continue for next year.

SARS-Cov-2 in 2020 will have to continue.

The biggest worry is the status of the vaccines due to the emerging new strains. While scientists are confident that vaccines will work, it is not known for how long their efficacy will last. With many people preferring not to get vaccinated immediately, it is important that they stick to safety protocols.

CCMB researchers have received samples collected from people who came from the UK. These will be checked for the new strain, said Dr Mishra. Genome sequencing will indicate not only the presence of

new strain but the other mutations which may have occurred in India.

The strain in the UK and South Africa is an indication that virus mutation in the region means that there could be different strains in the Southeast Asia too.

Meanwhile, seven among those who have returned to Telangana state from the UK have tested positive for Covid-19.

Their samples have been sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) for genome sequencing to ascertain whether they have contracted the new strain.

A total of 1,200 persons have returned to the state from the UK in recent times. Of them, 846 persons have been identified.

According to sources, as many as 300 of these returnees are in Hyderabad city, more than 50 in Karimnagar district and about 25 in Warangal and Nizamabad districts.

BIGGER IPL TO FEATURE 10 TEAMS: BCCI

Ahmedabad, Dec. 24: The Indian Premier League will be a 10-team affair from 2022 as the BCCI gave its stamp of approval to add two franchises, at its 89th Annual General Meeting here on Thursday.

The time constraints prevented BCCI from adding teams for the 2021 edition which would remain an eight-team tournament. The board has also decided to set a cap of one franchise per state. It's learnt that Ahmedabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Lucknow, Visa-khapatnam and Guwa-hati are on the BCCI's radar.

The renovated Motera Stadium in Ahmedabad is considered the world's largest with a seating capacity of 110,000. Board members are keen to have a franchise based in Ahmedabad.

■ Full report on Page 8

SHORT TAKES

AUROBINDO
TAKEOVER MAY
KILL PROBE

FROM PAGE 1

These companies include V.R. Investments Pvt Ltd which retained its 30.4 per cent. A non-descript company with non-descript directors, South India Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, holds 11 per cent.

The takeover by Aurobindo is expected to give a silent burial to the present government's initiative to unearth financial irregularities and alleged short payments to the government in the 22 per cent revenue share.

Soon after Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy took over, the infrastructure and investment department ordered forensic audit and engaged two companies to find out if there are any discrepancies in the amounts originally charged by the operator and those shown to the government. While the findings of the audit were not known, the initiative culminated into Aurobindo becoming major shareholder.

The acquisition by Aurobindo is also expected to put an end to the decade-and-a-half control of port by K.V. Rao, once a small-time businessman who went on to make it big thanks to the patronage extended by the Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy regime. K.V. Rao managed to effect drastic changes in the original concession agreement including the scrapping of Minimum Guarantee Amount in 2008 that put the state exchequer to severe loss.

Ironically, then Opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu never uttered a word against gross irregularities committed by KSPL, and the favours doled out by then government.

PRABHAKAR
REDDY NOT TO
FILE COMPLAINT

FROM PAGE 1

Additional forces have been deputed and Section 144 has been imposed.

Expressing anger over the MLA's behaviour and the failure of police, Prabhakar Reddy threw out the sofa chair on which the MLA sat and set it on fire.

"How did the MLA dare enter my house when we were not there? The sub inspector instead of preventing the attack actually aided the attackers. The sub inspector and armed gunmen of MLA acted against the law."

However, Prabhakar Reddy said he would not lodge any complaint. Meanwhile, Pedda Reddy said he went to Diwakar Reddy's residence to question about the posts against his wife.

PROTEST OVER
COPS FAILURE AS
GIRL MURDEREDDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, DEC. 24

Protests erupted across the state on Thursday over the brutal killing of a Dalit girl and the police failure to initiate necessary action. Activists demanded suspension of a town circle inspector for his failure to adequately respond to a complaint by the girl's mother when the girl went missing.

The girl Snehalatha was allegedly killed by a youth, Rajesh from Anantapur, after she spurned his attempts to court her. Rajesh and his friend Karthik have been arrested, police said.

SC/ST associations, student organisations and political parties staged protests in various parts of Anantapur, demanding justice to the family. Collector Gandham Chandrudu, MP T. Rangaiah and urban MLA Ananta Venkatrami Reddy were among those who paid homage to Snehalatha's mortal remains at Ashok Nagar in Anantapur. The collector promised a job for a member of the deceased girl's family and directed the Anantapur RDO to supply groceries to the home for three months at government expense.

MRPS leader M.S. Raju demanded action against the accused. SC-ST associations demanded that inspector Prathap Reddy be suspended over his harsh response to the parents when they went to the station to lodge a "missing" complaint.

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy announced an ex gratia for the family. Leader of Opposition Nara Chandrababu Naidu said the party would support the bereaved family.

TD alleges graft
in house sitesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

There has been a war of words between the opposition and ruling party leaders over alleged corruption in the mega housing programme. Opposition parties, including main opposition Telugu Desam, allege huge corruption by ruling party MLAs and leaders in land acquisition, levelling and allotment process of the mega housing scheme. TD leaders alleged that YSRC legislators and leaders have looted ₹6,500 crore worth public money in the name of the housing scheme but the ruling party refuting the same claimed that unable to digest the good name of YSRC, the opposition parties are trying to defame the government with baseless allegations.

Meanwhile, the TD conducted a photo exhibition in the party State office on Thursday showing photos of low-lying areas, hilly places, graveyards and alluvial soils, which were unfit to construct houses and which are selected for house site distribution programme. Former minister Deveneni Umamaheswara Rao said that the Chief Minister had got many palaces in different metro cities but his regime was giving just one and half-cent in rural areas and one cent in urban areas. He stated

● The TD conducted a photo exhibition in the party State office on Thursday showing photos of low-lying areas, hilly places, graveyards and alluvial soils, which were unfit to construct houses

that if the State was spared from the ₹6,500 crore looting of public funds, then over 13 lakh families could have got one additional cent. He alleged that the ruling party legislators and leaders had committed corruption in 40 Assembly segments and looted ₹4,000 crore in land acquisitions, ₹2,000 crore in levelling of lands and another ₹750 crore in the form of collections from the allottees.

Minister Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao, Perni Venkataramaiah and other leaders of ruling party refuted the allegations of TD. They claimed that the TD government committed corruption in the house construction and failed to provide houses to beneficiaries. The YSRC government is offering house sites free of cost and in a transparent manner.

BENEFICIARIES
TO BE GIVEN 1.5
CENTS EACH IN
RURAL AREAS

FROM PAGE 1

About 4,86,820 people who are already living in unauthorized sites, will be legalised and the remaining 2,51,868 will be allocated TIDCO houses. For the first time in the country, a house site patta is being given for just one rupee and it will be registered in the name of a woman member of the household. The beneficiaries will be given 1.5 cents in rural areas or one cent in urban areas.

The state government had acquired 68,361 acres of land worth ₹23,535 crore. Of this 25,120.33 acres belongs to the government, which is valued at about ₹8,000 crore and 25,359.31 acres were purchased at a cost of Rs 10,150 crore. Also, 4,457.05 acres was acquired under land pooling scheme in Visakhapatnam, 1,074.18 acres owned by AMRDA in Amaravati, 2,550.96 acres was acquired for TIDCO housing, and another 9,800 acres for those living in occupied lands have also been acquired.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy prays at samadhi of Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy at Idupulapaya on Thursday.

CM extends Christmas greetings

Vijayawada: Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy extended Christmas greetings to the people. Mr Jagan in his Christmas

message said that love for fellow human beings, compassion for the helpless, limitless patience, boundless sacrifice, peaceful

coexistence, forgiveness even for the enemies were the extraordinary messages that Christ had given to the world.

No Coronavirus strain cases
in AP, says health ministerDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

Health minister Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas said that there is no report of the Coronavirus second wave in AP, and the government is taking precautionary measures following guidelines of the Centre to prevent spread of Covid-19. He said that recently a woman arrived in the state from Britain and her samples were sent for tests. Results of the test are awaited, on whether she was carrying the new mutant strain of the virus.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, Mr Srinivas said that people should not be worried as no new Coronavirus strain cases have been found in the state. He said that mother and son had landed in Delhi from the United Kingdom on the night of December 21. They were tested for Covid-19 at the IGI International Airport and the mother was found to be positive. He said that she was kept in the isolation

ward in the government hospital at Rajamahendravaram and her condition is normal.

He stated that her samples were sent to the National Institute of Virology laboratory in Pune for tests to confirm if she was carrying the new strain. The results would come in two days, Srinivas said.

In New Delhi, the Union health and family welfare ministry on Thursday denied reports that a woman from Vijayawada who had returned from the United Kingdom was found to have been detected with the new mutated strain of Covid-19 virus circulating in the UK. The MoHFW said that all such news reports about her being positive to the mutated virus are "false" and "genome sequencing of the lady's samples are yet to be done."

Mr Srinivas said that all basic amenities would be developed in the government hospitals in the state to provide good services to the people. The minister conducted a review meet-

ing on Nadu-Nedu works in GGH Srikakulam, Victoria Government Hospital at Visakhapatnam, and the government hospitals at Guntur, Kadapa and Kurnool.

He directed the officials to start the tender process for civil works for the modernisation of government hospitals under Nadu-Nedu. Srinivas said that he will inspect government hospitals and medical colleges in Tirupati, Guntur, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam in the first week of January.

Mr Srinivas stressed on the need to provide facilities to medical students according to the number of seats in the institutions. He directed that facilities for patients be improved on par with state hospitals. Medical and health department chief secretary Anil Kumar Singh, principals of government medical colleges, superintendents of government hospitals and other officials participated in the review meeting.

15.60 lakh houses to be
constructed in first phaseDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

The government has proposed to construct 28.30 lakh houses at an estimated cost of ₹50,944 crore. Out of these, 15.60 lakh houses will be taken up in the first phase at a cost of ₹28,084 crore and the remaining 12.70 lakh houses will be taken up in the second phase at a cost of ₹22,860 crore.

The first phase works will commence on Friday, where 15.60 lakh houses will be constructed in 8,929 layouts in 175 constituencies, while in the second phase, 12.70 lakh houses will be constructed in 7,141 layouts in all constituencies.

The government has decided to have the quality of houses inspected by

● The first phase works will commence on Friday, where 15.60 lakh houses will be constructed

experts from IITs and NIT.

Each house will consist of one bedroom, living room, kitchen, toilet and verandah, with a total plinth area of 340 sq.ft. and will be provided with basic facilities like lights, fans, overhead tank and water connection. AP TIDCO has already undertaken the construction of 2,62,216 houses across the state. The houses are being constructed on three floors with an area of 300, 365, 430 sq. ft.

In an innovative act, the State government is only charging ₹1 for a 300 sq ft

house. The sale agreement would be issued on the occasion. Similarly, the beneficiary of a 365 sq ft house has to pay ₹50,000 as his share and the beneficiary of a 430 sq ft house has to pay ₹1 lakh but the government has also announced a 50 per cent subsidy for them. To that extent, the beneficiary of a 365 sq ft house will have to pay only ₹25,000 and the beneficiary of a 430 sq ft house will have to pay only ₹50,000.

The subsidy will be borne by the government. For TIDCO houses, 1,43,600 beneficiaries have been identified for 300 sq ft houses, 44,304 for 365 sq ft houses and 74,312 beneficiaries for 430 sq ft houses. They will also be given sale agreements from Friday.

Vijay Sai takes on TD MLA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 24

Rajya Sabha member V. Vijay Sai Reddy made serious comments on Visakhapatnam TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu after he said that he did not encroach any land or in general committed any crime. The RS member said people are saying that he began grabbing land and attacked people instilling fear in them after settling down in Visakhapatnam. "How can a man who is accused in the murder of Vangaveeti Ranga and ran away from Vijayawada to settle in Vizag swear on God?" He will swear on his wife and children because he has no belief in the God," Mr Vijay Sai said on Thursday. The RS member said



people are saying that he began grabbing land and attacked people instilling fear in them after settling down in Visakhapatnam.

Mr Vijay Sai Reddy challenged the MLA to swear on God that he never encroached any government land in Visakhapatnam. If he had not grabbed the land, why was he shocked and reacted as if he lost crores worth property, the Rajya Sabha member asked. "I do not know what people call him in Vizag. A dharmatma or demon?" he asked.

INTERNAL | BICKERINGS

MLA Hafeez Khan is challenged almost daily by his bete noire Mohan Reddy

Virtual war of rallies between YSRC leaders

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, DEC. 24

The YSRC is a divided house in Kurnool constituency: Party MLA Hafeez Khan is challenged almost daily by his bete noire S.V. Mohan Reddy. This has left the cadre confused.

Every party programme is duplicated with both factions trying to take advantage. There was a virtual 'war of rallies' on Thursday as both the MLA group and the Mohan

Reddy went around taking credit for the house pattas being distributed on Friday by the Jagan Mohan Reddy government.

Both the factions had tried to outdo each other in celebrating the birthday of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy recently and tried to prove their dominance by trying to mobilise more blood donors that the other side for donation.

When contacted, Kurnool MLA Hafeez

Khan said, "I am the elected representative of Kurnool. What can I do with people who changed parties for the sake of power? I don't want to take names but everyone here realises the desperate politics played by the other faction."

Mohan Reddy was elected on a YSRC ticket from Kurnool in 2014 but shifted to the TD soon after. Incidentally, in 2017, TD leader Nara Lokesh announced Subba Reddy as the party candidate in

2019 as well. However, Subba Reddy could not secure a ticket from the TD and joined the YSRC.

Reddy continues to project himself as the party leader and takes out his own programmes without any association with Hafeez Khan, said a party senior. This has caused consternation among the YSRC top brass and Sajjala Rama Krishna Reddy was deputed by the party president to sort out the issue. That did not work out.

Rama Krishna Reddy is in-charge of Rayalaseema but he hardly shows any interest, said another leader. Kurnool Parliamentary constituency president B.Y. Ramaiah has no control over the party affairs in the district.

YSRC activists led by Hafeez Khan held a massive rally on Thursday to thank the chief minister for allocating house site pattas to the poor. The rally started from Kondareddy fort to

Rajvihar circle covered with YSR circle. Activists garlanded the statue of the late chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy.

The MLA said that over 2.07 lakh families benefit from the scheme. He explained that 1,61,237 shelterless people in Kurnool district will get house site pattas and 29,066 people will get houses under TIDCO and 17,174 people who are already enjoying in the sites will get position certificates, he added.

VIZAG: VIJAY SAI
EXPOSES TD MLA'S
ENCROACHMENTSDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 24

Rajya Sabha member V. Vijay Sai Reddy listed out the land encroachments made by TD Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and reiterated that the government would be the custodian of state-owned lands.

He said the TD leaders, led by Ramakrishna Babu, resorted to largescale encroachment of government lands under survey number 26 and 27 in Zone -2 of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC). The corporation has about 837 acres of land of which 136.36 acres are in legal disputes. Around 213.13 acres were given on lease to various government departments. TD leaders grabbed 73.01 acres.

Political leaders of the previous regime built sheds and thatched houses in 40 acres of land. The GVMC officials demolished 50 thatched houses and 13 sheds in the recent drive.

Listing out the MLA's encroachments, Vijay Sai Reddy said the MLA built poultry farms in Kommati in an extent of four acres of land in the name of his benami Sona Prasad. In another acre of land in Ramakrishnapuram, he has been running a pig-gery farm in the name of another benami. His aide Duveni Tata Rao developed layouts in two acres of land in the same area and has been selling plots.

The MLA tried to construct a building in MVP Colony in the land encroached but the GVMC officials stopped it on time. His followers sold sheds in front of Central Jail each for ₹10 lakh.

In Lord's service



The Chief Justice of India, Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde was given warm reception by the TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy and additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy on his arrival at Sri Padmavathi Rest House in Tirumala on Thursday.

TTD chief Reddy hits back at Naidu

FROM PAGE 1

TTD chairman Subba Reddy said there was no lathi-charge and said Vaikunta Ekadasi will fall only on Friday and the dwara darshan will com-

mence from that day.

The TTD chairman said "As Naidu is residing in another state, he has assumed that Vaikunta Dwara darshan had already started. He should

note that the TTD has made arrangements to provide comfortable Vaikunta Dwara darshan for 10 days starting from December 25 till January 3 to devotees this year."

The temple administration also clarified that it had initiated action against those who flew drone cameras at Tirumala and that the vigilance officials have seized the drone.

SHORT TAKES

NEW CS OFFERS PRAYERS AT TIRUCHANOOR

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 24

After being appointed as Chief Secretary to the Government of Andhra Pradesh, senior IAS officer Aditya Nath Das arrived on his maiden visit to the Chittoor district to offer prayers at the Sri Padmavathi Ammavari temple and Kanipakam Vinayaka Temple.

The Chief Secretary visited the Sri Varasiddhi Vinayaka Swamy temple in Kanipakam along with senior IAS officer S.S. Rawat, IRS officer Satya Narayana and Ravi Subhash, IAS, Secretary CMO, was accorded a warm welcome by the district officials led by Collector Narayan Bharat Gupta.

After being led into the sanctum sanctorum by Kanipakam devasthanam EO Venkateshu and others, the CS and others offered prayers to Lord Vinayaka for a brief while. Later, the CS had presented silk robes to Lord Venkateswara in Varadaraja Swamy temple of Kanipakam devasthanam.

Further, they visited the Sri Padmavathi Ammavari Temple in Tiruchanoor: TTD JEO P. Basant Kumar and TMC P.S. Girisha welcomed the officials, before being led into the temple. After having darshan of Goddess Padmavathi, TTD presented theertha prasadam to the officials.

AUDISESHAIAH TAKES CHARGE AS S.E. APSDCL

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, DEC. 24

Mr K. Audiseshaiah took charge as Superintendent Engineer of Andhra Pradesh Southern Power Distribution Company (APSPDCL) at Nellore division on Thursday.

The post was vacant after the Anti-Corruption Bureau booked the former SE Vijayakumar Reddy in a disproportionate assets case recently.

Mr Audiseshaiah belongs to Chennur village near Gudur in SPSR Nellore district.

S.V.A. COLLEGE PRINCIPAL TAKES CHARGE

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 24

Dr P. Murali Krishna, professor and head of the department of Panchakarma has been appointed as regular principal of S.V. Ayurvedic college in Tirupati. On Thursday, the professor took charge as the new principal of the college.

FLEXIES REMOVED AS PART OF CIVIC BODY POLICY: ANIL

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, DEC. 24

Water resources minister P. Anilkumar Yadav said that the Nellore Civic body has been removing all flex banners arranged by political parties including YSR Congress, to keep the city free from such banners.

He responded to a question of media persons here on Thursday on the outcry over the removal of flex boards of former PM P.V. Narasimha Rao and former legislator late Anam Vivekananda Reddy Nellore on Wednesday.

Reminding that they have not arranged any flex banners on the occasion of the recent birthday celebrations of CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, he said those interested in publicity can install hoardings after paying the stipulated fee to the Corporation.

Indirectly referring to the comments against him over the removal of flex banners of PV and Vivekananda Reddy, the minister said he is not bothered about such comments, and his answer on the subject is meant for the public.

Replying to another question over Venkatagiri legislator Anam Ramanarayana Reddy plans to tour in the Nellore City segment represented by Dr Anil, he said anyone can tour in any segment as long as it helps for strengthening YSR Congress.

“Nellore is not my empire, and I have no qualms on such tours if they don't affect YSRC or Jagan Mohan Reddy,” the minister asserted.

Steps on to strengthen rural economy: Jagan

Stone set for the Institute of Rural Management Anand

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, DEC. 24

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said the government was taking steps to further strengthen the rural economy. The Chief Minister on Thursday laid the foundation stone for setting up the prestigious Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) at APCARL.

Poonam Malakondayya, Special Chief Secretary on behalf of the state government, and N. Biswas, Director, Irma, signed the MoU on the formation of Irma in the presence of the Chief Minister at a function held at the APCARL Conference Hall near the town of Pulivendula.

Speaking on the occasion, the CM said, “We have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with GCMF (AMUL) on 21-07-2020 with a view to further strengthening the rural economy.”

He said the AP Amul scheme was formally launched on December 2 in 400 villages in three districts by the AP Dairy Development Coopera-



Vijayawada Bishop T. Joseph Rajarao offers prayers at the replica of Bala Yesu at St. Paul's cathedral on the eve of Christmas celebrations in Vijayawada on Thursday. —DC

tive Federation. Thus rural women milk producers' cooperatives were formed and laid the foundation for their economic progress.

He said the project, which has now started in 400 villages in three districts, is running successfully and the state government is taking steps to expand it to other districts as well. A total of 4.69 lakh women beneficiaries in the state are interested in purchasing cattle through the ‘Jagannanna Cheyuta’

and ‘Asara’ schemes.

As part of the AP Amul project, the government has set up 9,899 dairy co-operative societies and is working to uplift the economic potential of rural women by using the infrastructure related to the dairy industry.

The AP Animal Husbandry Advanced Research Institute in Pulivendula set up in 2009 under the auspices of the then CM Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy at a cost of ₹250 crore on about 650 acres.

He said it was a great honour to have IRMA (Gujarat), one of the most prestigious educational institutions in India, set up at APCARL in Pulivendula as a continuation of the AP Amul project launched as part of its plans to make the rural economy self-sufficient.

Mr Biswas, director, Irma, said, “We are able to set up the IRMA in AP at APCARL for the first time in South India in line with the CM's aspirations.”

CM apologises to people hit by Gandikota

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, DEC. 24

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has apologised to people living in villages that have been inundated by Gandikota Reservoir. Seeking their pardon at a public meeting in Pulivendula on Thursday, he said it was because of their sacrifices that the government was able to fill the

reservoir with water.

Stating that as one who knew the value of water in drought-hit areas, Reddy said they would take all required steps to fill the reservoirs in 40 days. In Pulivendula as part of his three-day Kadapa visit, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for development works worth Rs 5,000 crore and later addressed a public meet-

ing in the afternoon.

The Chief Minister said that steps are being taken to completely fill Gandikota, Chitravati Balancing Reservoirs and Paidipalem Reservoir with Krishna River water.

“There is no water supply to our reservoirs unless there is 881 feet of water in Srisaillam Reservoir. We have studied for years that this condition should not

exceed 25 days in a year. That is why we have proposed expansion of Potireddepadu head regulator and expansion of canals to fill our reservoirs in 40 days,” he said.

For the first time, 26.85 TMC of water has been fully filled in the Gandikota Reservoir and compensation to the overall tune of ₹665 crore has been paid to displaced families.

Woman gives birth to baby in ambulance

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 24

A woman gave birth to a baby girl in an ambulance (108) on Thursday while being taken to the Tirupati government maternity hospital.

According to officials, Subhashree (25) from Yerramarajupalle village of Karvetinagaram mandal in Chittoor district developed labour pain on Thursday morning and was brought to Karvetinagaram primary health centre by her relatives.

Considering her health condition, the doctors referred her to the government mater-

nity hospital in Tirupati, which is over 45 km from Karvetinagaram. The 108-ambulance, with emergency medical technician Hareesh Reddy and driver Harish, started from the PHC to Tirupati. However, in the mid-way, the woman started experiencing severe labour pains.

The EMT and the ambulance driver acted swiftly and stopped the vehicle and made arrangements for delivery inside the vehicle. EMT Hareesh Reddy followed the delivery procedures, and the woman delivered the baby girl.

OFFICIALS REBUKED FOR LAYING NEW ROAD ON TOP OF GOOD ROAD

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, DEC. 24

Former NUDA chairman Kotamreddy Srinivasulu Reddy lambasted the authorities concerned for laying new road before the railway

station in Nellore even when the existing road is in good condition. Chiding the officials for wasting public money, he alleged that the contractor is a benami to the Irrigation minister Anilkumar Yadav.

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 24

The spree of the decrease in Corona positive cases continued in AP by registering 357 new Covid-19 positive cases in the past 24 hours on Thursday. Only four deaths, one each reported in Anantapur, Kadapa, Krishna and WG districts registered, and the total deaths increased to 7,089 in AP.

Total Covid-19 cases increased to 8,80,075 and 355 patients were recovered from the disease on Thursday, which increased the total number of recoveries to 86,9124. As many as 59,551 samples were tested in past 24 hours and total samples reached 1,14,74,797 in the state.

The East Godavari reported the highest single-day tally of infections among districts with 58 new infections. It was followed by 54 each new Covid-19 positive cases in Chittoor and Krishna districts, Guntur registered 42, Visakhapatnam and Nellore 28 each,

357 new Covid-19 cases, 4 deaths registered in AP 38 UK RETURNEES IDENTIFIED IN KURNOOL DISTRICT, ISOLATED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, DEC. 24

Kurnool government general hospital, he said. None of the returnees had any symptoms of Covid-19.

Ramasundar Reddy said that collector G. Veera Pandian has directed surveillance teams and volunteers to visit every house and inquire about the health conditions of the UK returnees.

Special teams have been formed and they would strictly implement Covid norms in view of the situation as per instructions, he added. Mr Ramasundar appealed to the people who have visited foreign countries particularly the UK recently to report at their nearest hospitals.

Anantapur 27, Srikakulam 16, 14 each in West Godavari and Kadapa districts, nine each in Kurnool and Prakasam districts and least of four new positive

MYSTERY BEHIND BLOODSTAINS ON TEMPLE WALLS SOLVED

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, DEC. 24

The Darsi police cracked the mystery behind blood-stained hand prints found on the Lord Krishna temples compound wall in the West Bazaar of Darsi Town in Prakasam district on December 22, 2020.

Some political parties and religious groups had raised a hue and cry over the incident terming it an attack on Hindu temples, hurting devotees' sentiments.

Taking a serious view over the incident, Prakasam district SP Siddharth Kaushal directed Darsi DSP K. Prakash Rao and CI Md. Moin to set up three special teams to investigate the case.

The teams were startled when they realised that it is the job of a bad-tempered and ill-mannered Pemma Veera Bala Prasanna @ Prasanna of Kundhulu village, who has been missing since December 22, 2020. The police launched a search and arrested him on Thursday.

He confessed that he killed a dog screaming at him around 1 am on December 21 and threw its flesh lumps in the premises of Sri Krishna temple and smeared the blood on his hand on a roadside plaque and walls of the temple compound. The accused also confessed that he killed cats and turtles in the past. The accused was arrested and produced in the court in Darsi on Thursday.

Mr Kaushal IPS appreciated and rewarded Darsi DSP K. Prakash Rao, Darsi CI Md. Moin, Darsi SI Ramakotayya and their team for nabbing the accused thus putting an end to the baseless allegations against the government.

Isro releases 1st set of data related to Chandrayaan-2

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, DEC. 24

The Indian Space Research Organisation released the first set of data pertaining to Chandrayaan-2 Moon mission for users on Thursday. Additional details are provided at the Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) portal <https://www.issdc.gov.in> and data may be downloaded Qusing <https://pradan.issdc.gov.in>.

The public release of the data archived at the ISSDC in Bylalu, near Bengaluru is prepared in the standard, globally followed Planetary Data System 4 (PDS4) format.

According to Isro, its Science Data Archive (ISDA) holds data sets acquired by seven instruments on board Chandrayaan-2 payloads from September 2019 to February 2020. Data sets from IIRS payload will be added to this shortly.

India's second mission to the Moon was launched on July 22 last year from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Shariharikota. An orbiter which was

● ISRO SAID that all experiments were going well, and the data received suggests excellent capability to deliver on the pre-launch promises.

injected into the lunar orbit on September 2, 2019, carrying eight experiments to address many questions on lunar science.

Isro said that all experiments were going well, and the data received suggests excellent capability to deliver on the pre-launch promises. Chandrayaan-2 data are required to be in Planetary Data System-4 (PDS4) standard and required to be peer reviewed scientifically and technically before acceptance as PDS archives and declared ready for sharing with the global scientific community and general public.

This activity has been completed and hence the first set of data from the Chandrayaan-2 mission are now being released for wider public use through the Pradan portal hosted by the ISSDC.

25 more vehicles to collect garbage

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, DEC. 24

Tirupati MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy inaugurated 25 auto rickshaws intended for door-to-door collection of garbage, along with Municipal Commissioner P.S. Girisha at a programme organised by the Municipal Corporation of Tirupati here on Thursday.

Speaking to media persons after flagging off the vehicles, the MLA said that the civic body induced 25 new auto rickshaws to the existing fleet in order to ensure that the segregated waste from each and every house-

hold in the city should be collected properly.

Mr Bhumana appealed to the public to note that the civic body is putting in all efforts to maintain proper sanitation and making the city cleaner every day and asked them to support it in grabbing a top spot in the Swachh Survekshan survey-2021.

Commissioner Mr Girisha said that the civic body has procured the auto rickshaws at a cost of ₹2 crore with Smart City funds and continuous efforts are on to collect segregated waste from each and every household in the city.

AP told to cancel Divis permissions

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC. 24

AP state Vyavasaya Karmika Sangham state president Dadala Subba Rao demanded the state government cancel all Divis Labs' all permissions permanently for not establishing a seashore area in Thondangi mandal of East Godavari district.

He told the media here on Thursday that there was massive agitation in the year 2018. The TD government gave the company permission to set up the unit in the area. The Left parties, in particular CPM, rendered its support to the agitation against Divis. He said that in 2019 elections, the then opposition leader Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy promised the people of the area to cancel the unit in the area if he

assumes power. However, Mr Jagan did not fulfil his promise and gave permissions to the same company again and also the police booked false cases against the agitators.

He questioned Tunni MLA Dadisetty Raja who pledged for two years back to merge the Divis unit into the Bay of Bengal, why he keeps silent when the police arrested and booked cases against agitators. He said that many of the cases relating to TD have been lifted during Mr Chandrababu Naidu's regime and many of the cases regarding the Kapunadu movement, including Mudragada Padmanabham and Dadisetty Raja have been lifted by Jagan government. But, the government has not responded in lifting cases against the agitators of Divis.

2 HURT IN BLAST IN ILLEGAL GAS FILLING UNIT

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC. 24

A blast at an illegal gas filling centre in Ramakrishna Colony in Tunni left two persons injured on Thursday. According to Tunni Circle

Inspector G. Ramesh Babu, the explosion took place in a tiled house and K. Abhishek (18) and Sk Rafi (9) were injured. The two were admitted in the Government Hospital at Visakhapatnam.

28 VILLAGES PROVIDED SATELLITE PHONES

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, DEC. 24

ITDA Project Officer of Rampachodavaram in East Godavari District Praveen Adhithya, said that to improve medical and health and panchayat services in tribal villages, 28 satellite phones have been sanctioned. The satellite phone can be used by ASHA workers, panchayat secretaries and volunteers. He said that already training had been given to the personnel on the utilisation of satellite phones. He said that the personnel should maintain a register when they call through the phones. He said that the villages like Boduluru, Bandapativedhi, Yellivada, Chavadikota, Pamul-

amamidi, Bodlanka, GM Valasa, Tadepalli, D. Velam-akota and Kundada in Mare-dumilli mandal, Pirikivilasa, Boddaganuri, Pulova, Daragadda, Valusurimetta, Senaganuru, Pathakota, Kanivada under Gurthudu PHC, Boddumamidi, Marripudem, Bachaluru, Mangampadu under Mangampadu PHC, Kota, Chidipakalu, Yerrareddypalem under Chavitidibalu PHC, Ammirakula under Rajavom-mangi PHC, Lododdi, Maredubaka under Zaddangi PHC, Cheedipalem under Lagarayi PHC have been provided Satellite phones.

The assistant project officer of ITDA P.V.S. Nayudu distributed the phones to the officials on Thursday.

IN BRIEFS

ED attaches ₹1.8 cr FDs in Kerala case

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth ₹1.85 crore, including those of former Kerala principal secretary M. Sivasankar, in connection with its money laundering probe in the alleged Kerala gold smuggling case, the agency said on Thursday. "Fixed deposits along with seized cash recovered from the bank lockers totalling to ₹1.85 crore have been attached. Among the attached assets, ₹1 crore belongs to M. Sivasankar, IAS and former principal secretary to the Chief Minister of Kerala," the agency said in a statement.

India's first elderly Covid survivor dies

Pathanamthitta (Kerala): The country's first oldest Covid-19 survivor Thomas Abraham died of age-related ailments on Thursday, his family said here. The 93-year-old died in Ranni village in the district and the funeral would be held at a church at Aithala on Friday. He is survived by his wife and three children. The recovery of the 93-year-old Abraham and his 88-year-old wife after a battle against Coronavirus in March this year was dubbed by the medical community as a miracle cure.

'TOY TRAIN' RESUMES IN DARJEELING

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 24

Nearly nine months after its shutdown due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, Toy Train, an integral part of Darjeeling and also a world heritage known for its "Joy Ride", will be back on its track in the hills from Christmas on Friday with three daily services. North East Frontier Railway chief public relations officer Shubhanan Chanda said, "Consequent upon the permission received from the Government of West Bengal to resume the "Joy Ride" train services; NFR authorities decided to re-start some of the services which had to be suspended due to outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic since last week of March." He added, "Three daily services of the "Joy Ride" train will presently run w.e.f. 25th December 2020 between Darjeeling to Ghum & back to Darjeeling with stoppage for passengers at Batasia loop for 10 minutes to visit Batasia Eco Garden & Gorkha War Memorial and 20 minutes stoppage at Ghum to visit Ghum Museum." The first service of the day, from 9.25 am to 11.20 am, will be run by a steam engine while the second, from 12 pm to 13.40 pm, will be on a diesel one followed by the last, from 1.50 pm to 3.45 pm, a steam engine again.

SIT SAYS BONES OF RAPE VICTIM NOT MISSING

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 24

Even as people question the veracity of the SIT version in the "rape and murder" of the five-year-old girl of Jadupur in Odisha's Nayagarh district, senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Arun Bothra, the head of the Special Investigation Team investigating the case, on Thursday clarified on the missing-bones claims and the doubts raised over the minor's body decomposing in just a few days. Apparently trying to clear the air, Bothra told reporters, "No bones of the deceased girl are missing. The post mortem report has no mention of any missing bone, and the doctors too have corroborated the same." After the skeletal remains were traced on July 23, Bothra said, bones were sent to the lab for DNA testing to identify the body of the deceased. On being asked why the police sniffer dogs failed to trace the decomposed body by following the trail of the stench, the senior official said, "The SIT hasn't used a dog squad. So I cannot comment on the dog squad." The SIT on Thursday took prime accused Saroj Sethi to Jadupur village for reconstruction of the crime scene, ascertainment of the modus operandi and subsequent destruction of evidence by the accused.

Chilly morning



People sit around a bonfire to warm themselves during a cold and foggy morning in Gurugram on Thursday. Bitter cold conditions persisted in most parts of north India as the minimum temperatures hovered well below the normal limits at several places in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. — PTI

India, UK discuss vaccine Oxford, AstraZeneca seek permission to roll out shots

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

Union health and family welfare minister Dr Harsh Vardhan held discussions with his British counterpart Matt Hancock on the issue of new mutated SARS-CoV-2 virus in the United Kingdom. The issue of vaccines was also discussed in the meeting held on Wednesday evening. "Held an insightful virtual interaction with Secretary of State for Health and Social Care of UK, Rt Matt Hancock, yesterday. We discussed strengthening India-UK ties

in health sector, India's preparedness for rolling out Covid-19 vaccine and new variant of SARS-CoV-2 in UK. I said that while Covid-19 vaccine development has been expedited, protocols ensuring its safety & efficacy have not been compromised, India has vast experience in producing vaccines, we are committed to making the Covid vaccine affordable & accessible to people across the world," Dr Harsh Vardhan said in a series of tweets. The University of Oxford and AstraZeneca, that is making the Covid-19 vaccine, have submitted a full data package to

the UK health regulator and sought permission to roll out their vaccines. "I'm delighted that the @UniofOxford/@AstraZeneca vaccine, developed in the UK, has submitted its full data package to the @MHRGovuk for approval. This is the next step towards a decision on the deployment of the #coronavirus vaccine." UK Health Minister Matt Hancock said in a tweet. The Covid-19 vaccine by Pfizer-BioNTech was the first to be authorised for use by the UK and has already been given to over five lakh people since last month. Even as India is ready to

procure international vaccines, it is keen to join the global teams that have their vaccines and is looking at the international market to push its indigenous vaccines that are still under development. The New Delhi based AIIMS on Thursday invited volunteers for the Phase III clinical trial of the indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine candidate 'Covaxin' for one of the sites. "This is a whole-virion inactivated vaccine co-sponsored by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Bharat Biotech," AIIMS said in an advertisement.

Centre extends fresh invite to farmer unions

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

The Centre on Thursday extended a fresh invite to protesting farmer unions for talks, but made it clear that it would not be logical to include any new demand related to minimum support price (MSP) in the agenda, adding that it was out of the purview of three new agriculture laws. The Centre said that the new laws have no connection with the price regime nor would they have any impact on the procurement of farm produce at fixed rates. In a three-page letter addressed to the Sankhyut Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of 40 farm unions, agriculture ministry's joint secretary and CEO PM-Kisan Vivek Aggarwal said, "This has been told to the unions in every discussion and it has also been made clear that the government is ready to give written assurance on MSP. Any new demand related to MSP, which is out of the ambit of farm laws, is not logical to include in the talks. As informed earlier, the government is ready to discuss all the issues raised by farmer unions."

The letter from the Centre comes just a day after the farmer asked the government to stop repeating meaningless amendments and offer a concrete proposal in writing for another round of talks. The government had earlier written to the farmers' unions on Sunday, inviting them for the sixth round of talks as per their convenience. Aggarwal's letter said, "I again request you that the government has been discussing all issues with an open heart and good intention to end the protest, and will continue to do so. Kindly suggest a date and time (for the next round of talks)." Previous five rounds of talks between the government and the unions failed to break the deadlock with the farmers insisting on the repeal of the three laws.

No democracy in India, says Rahul

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

Congress leaders led by Rahul Gandhi met President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday to demand the repeal of the three new farm laws. Gandhi said that his delegation met the President with two crore signatures demanding that he intervene and the new farm laws be taken back. "We told the President that the laws are anti-farmer and that farmers and labourers will suffer due to them. The government said these laws are in favour of the farmers, but the country is seeing that farmers are against these laws," Gandhi said. The march led by Gandhi to the Rashtrapati Bhavan was stopped by the police and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra along with several other party leaders were taken into custody and driven away in buses to the Mandir Marg police station. A few Congress leaders then proceeded to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Only Gandhi, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary were admitted to meet the President. Earlier, several Congress leaders had gathered at the party office on Akbar Road where a suitcase containing a memorandum signed by 2 crore farmers was placed. After meeting the President, Gandhi launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that there was no democracy in India. "There is no democracy in India. If some of you think there is, then it's in your imagination... PM Modi is making money for crony capitalists. Whoever will try to stand against him will be called a terrorist — be it farmers, labourers and even Mohan Bhagwat," he said referring to the chief of the RSS.

PM to credit funds to 9-cr kisans today

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

As the protests against recently-passed three farm laws grow louder, the BJP will dedicate the birth anniversary of its patriarch and former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Friday to the farmers with Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing them and transferring ₹18,000 crores to the accounts of 9 crore farmers under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana. To make the event grand, the BJP leadership has instructed its leaders, MPs, MLAs and office-bearers in its

state units to invite farmers to all the districts and state offices to listen to the Prime Minister's address and it should be widely publicised. The party has also asked its leaders to make arrangements at all Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) and cooperative centres to ensure mass participation. The party has asked its leaders to put up big screens for listening to the Prime Minister's address at every block development centre, ensuring participation of the maximum number of farmers.

51 LAKH TO GET VACCINE IN 1ST PHASE: KEJRIWAL

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 24

The Delhi government is fully prepared to receive, store and administer Covid-19 vaccine to 51 lakh priority category persons in the city in the first phase of vaccination, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Thursday. He said his government is all set to start the vaccination drive as soon as it gets the vaccine from the Centre, and registration is underway for people in three priority categories who will receive it first. Asked about the charges for the vaccine, and if it will be free of cost, a senior official in the Chief Minister's Office said the government has not taken any decision in this regard so far. "There are a total of 51 lakh priority category persons in Delhi — three lakh health workers, six lakh frontline workers, and 42 lakh of those aged above 50 and those below 50 but having co-morbidities," the Chief Minister said at a virtual press briefing. Each person will be given two doses, and a total of 1.02 crore doses will be required in the first phase of vaccination in Delhi, he said.

Sena-led civic body rejects land for bullet train station

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24

A day after the Shiv Sena-led Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) rejected a proposal for handing over land for a bullet train station in the district, the BJP on Wednesday slammed the Shiv Sena calling it a narrow-minded and irresponsible party. TMC's decision comes amid a dispute between the Sena-led Maharashtra government and the Union government over allotment of salt pan land for Mumbai Metro car shed in Mumbai. Maharashtra BJP's media department chief Vishwas Pathak told this newspaper that the Sena is acting just to satisfy Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's ego. "Bullet train project should not be seen as project of Prime Minister Narendra

Kerala Cabinet to request Gov. again for spl session

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec. 24: Days after Governor Arif Mohammed Khan declined nod for a special Assembly session, the Kerala cabinet on Thursday again decided to recommend to him to convene a one-day session to discuss and pass a resolution against the three central agricultural laws, against which farmers have been protesting near Delhi. Instead of the special session earlier, the cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief

Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, decided to recommend to the Governor to convene the 21st session of the 14th Kerala Legislative Assembly on December 31 to discuss the farmers' issue. The Governor had turned down an earlier plea of the Left government to convene a special session on December 23 citing that there was no urgency as a normal Assembly session was scheduled on January 8, 2021. Vijayan told reporters here the government decided to

recommend again as the concerns and problems faced by the agriculture sector and farming community continued to be serious. Explaining the circumstances that forced the cabinet to come up with the recommendation again, he said at the national level, the agricultural sector and the farming community were facing serious issues. The situation was that the southern state was largely dependent on other states for foodgrains, he said. — PTI

MUMBAI LOCAL TRAIN SERVICE LIKELY TO RESUME IN JANUARY

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24

The Maharashtra government is planning to resume the local train services for commuters in the first week of January. Almost nine months after the local trains would be resumed for Mumbaiers. However, the officers said that if a new variant of coronavirus is found in Mumbai, the resumption of suburban services would be further postponed. The suburban services carry more than 70 lakh passengers on all four lines of the Central Railways (CR) and Western Railways (WR). Maharashtra's relief and rehabilitation minister Vijay Wadetiwar said that the decision regarding resumption of local train services for all people would be taken. The government has already allowed water sports and boating (naukavihar). "We will take the decision soon regarding the resumption of local services for commuters. I think by the first week of January, the local services would resume. The chief minister is also trying for it," Wadetiwar added. In October 2020, the Maharashtra government had suggested to Central Railways (CRs) and Western Railways (WRs) to resume the suburban services for the common commuters, but both the railways had asked the state government to decide the technological solution to stagger the rush in the trains.

OWAISI'S AIMIM TO CONTEST MP CIVIC BODY ELECTIONS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, DEC. 24

Asaduddin Owaisi's All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) is planning to make electoral debut in Madhya Pradesh by fielding its candidates in the upcoming civic body polls in the state, expected to be held in January-February, 2021. This was indicated by acting president of the MP unit of AIMIM Naem Ansari here on Wednesday. "AIMIM is seriously considering contesting the upcoming Madhya Pradesh civic body polls. We have set in motion the process of fielding candidates in at least a dozen municipal bodies including in Bhopal and Indore in the ensuing civic polls", he told reporters. This was the first time Owaisi's party is testing electoral waters in a bipolar state like MP after its success in the recent Assembly elections in Bihar where AIMIM secured five seats, taking poll pundits by surprise. Muslims have sizable populations in municipal areas of Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain, Khandwa, Sagar, Burhanpur, Khargone, Ratlam, Jaora, Jabalpur, Balaghat, and Mandasaur. The party is mulling to field candidates in these municipal bodies in the upcoming polls. Syed Minhajuddin, state in-charge of AIMIM and a 3-time councillor of GHMC has been assigned the task of conducting an internal survey for the purpose, Ansari said.

Karnataka withdraws night curfew order within 24-hrs

Bengaluru, Dec. 24: In a U-turn, the Karnataka government on Thursday withdrew its night curfew order, hours before it was to commence into effect. The decision to impose night curfew for nine days from 11 pm to 5 am starting from Thursday was taken on Wednesday in line with the Centre's advice, amid concerns over a new Covid-19 variant spreading in the UK.

In a statement, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said, "In view of the public opinion that there was no need for night curfew, the decision was reviewed and after consulting with cabinet colleagues and senior officials it has been decided to withdraw the night curfew." Yediyurappa had initially announced yesterday that the night curfew will be imposed from December 23 till January 2 between 10 pm and 6 am. Changes in night curfew dates and timing were announced later with Yediyurappa tweeting, it will be from December 24 till January 1, 2021, between 11 pm to 5 am (January 2, 5am). The Chief Minister today appealed to the people to exercise self-restraint by wearing facemasks, hand hygiene and social distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The decision to impose night curfew had drawn flak from the ruling as well as the opposition parties. Terming the night curfew as a measure to 'cover up' wrongdoings of the BJP government by diverting public attention, Congress state chief D.K. Shivakumar said, "This is a government which is not accountable. It tries to divert public attention through various means. How does the night curfew help containing the Coronavirus?" BJP MLC A.H. Vishwanath, who is aspiring to become a minister, criticised the government's decision to impose night curfew. "I request the government to reconsider its decision to impose night curfew. Some of the decisions should be taken after much deliberation because it's a government for the people," Vishwanath told media in Mysuru. Another senior BJP leader and Vijayapura

MLA, Basanagouda Patil Yatnal too urged the government to reconsider its decision on the restrictions. Earlier in the day, Karnataka health minister Dr K. Sudhakar defended the government's move to impose night curfew saying it was done on the advice of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for Covid-19. Speaking to reporters in the city, he said, "TAC had recommended imposing night curfews from 8 pm onwards as a precautionary measure. However, after much deliberation we decided to restrict movement of individuals from 11 pm to 5 am." Reacting to criticism of the government's move, Sudhakar sought to know what important economic activities take place at night. "When all the essential services, healthcare facilities and transport are well in place, I would like to know whom the night curfew is going to affect?" he asked. As the festival season started from December 24, the minister opined that thousands of youth may step out in the night for celebrations. — PTI

RANAUT TO MOVE HC AGAINST DEMOLITION ORDER

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 24

Kangana Ranaut is likely to approach the Bombay High Court against the order of a Mumbai local court that dismissed her suit to protect her house from demolition. Her lawyer Rizwan Siddique said, "Yes, it is true that the Dindoshi Court dismissed an application for interim protection which was filed by my client Ms Ranaut together with all other residents of DB Breeze building. The said matter will now be filed before the Bombay High Court." The BMC had sent a notice to Kangana Ranaut in 2018 over alleged illegal construction undertaken at her fifth-floor residential apartment at Khar.

SHORT TAKES

15-YRS' JAIL TO HAFIZ SAEED IN ONE MORE CASE

Lahore, Dec. 24: Mumbai terror attack mastermind and Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed was on Thursday sentenced to 15 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan in one more terror financing case. The court also imposed 200,000 Pakistani rupees fine on him.

Saeed, 70, has already been convicted for 21 years imprisonment in four terror financing cases of late. Now, Saeed will have to undergo collective imprisonment of over 36 years in five terror financing cases at the Kot Lakhpat Jail Lahore. His punishment will run concurrently in these cases.

BODIES OF 20 MIGRANTS RETRIEVED

Tunis, Dec. 24: Tunisia's coastguard on Thursday retrieved the bodies of 20 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa after their boat capsized at sea, a spokesman for the defence ministry said. Five other migrants who were on board were rescued, ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri said, adding that a search operation was underway. Zekri did not give further details, but said the rescue operation took place off the port of Sfax in central Tunisia. Khaled Hayouni, a spokesman for the interior ministry, said the boat was heading to Italy from the Sidi Mansour district of Sfax when it sank.

More than 40 people were on board the makeshift boat, Mourad Turki, a spokesman for the Sfax court, said.

ETHIOPIA GUNMEN KILL MORE THAN 100

Addis Ababa, Dec. 24: Gunmen killed more than 100 people in an attack on Wednesday in western Ethiopia, the national human rights body said, the latest in a series of deadly assaults in the area.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a government-affiliated but independent body, said in a statement late on Wednesday that "more than 100 people have been killed in fires and shooting perpetrated by armed men" in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

The commission said survivors had "disturbing photo evidence of the attack" which started in the pre-dawn hours "on sleeping residents" in the region's Metekel zone and continued until Wednesday.

KANSAS COP FATALLY SHOT SUSPECT

Kansas, Dec. 24: Wichita police say a police officer fatally shot a bank robbery suspect after the man rammed a stolen pickup truck into the officer's police cruiser.

Paul Peraza, 50, was fatally shot Monday afternoon after allegedly robbing a credit union and leading police on a chase that ended in a crash. Police said Tuesday that after striking an SUV, Peraza put the truck in reverse and struck a police cruiser. "The officer, concerned about his safety and the public's safety, fired shots and struck Peraza," Deputy Police Chief Jose Salcido said in a written statement. The truck then struck a Honda Accord before coming to a stop. Peraza was pronounced dead at the scene.

TURKEY HANDS EXILED JOURNO 27-YR JAIL TERM

Istanbul, Dec. 24: A Turkish court on Wednesday sentenced the exiled former editor-in-chief of the Cumhuriyet daily to more than 27 years in jail on espionage and terror charges for one of the reputable paper's stories.

The court found Can Dundar — who fled to Germany in 2016 — guilty in connection with an article about an alleged Turkish arms shipment to Islamist Syrian rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad.

He was sentenced to 18 years and nine months for "securing confidential information for espionage" and eight years and nine months for "aiding a terrorist group" led by US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen.

The Turkish government blames the cleric for orchestrating a 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

UK, EU clinch post-Brexit free trade agreement

Details to emerge in next few days with final ratification by both Parliaments

London, Dec. 24: The deal is done, Downing Street in London and European Union (EU) officials in Brussels confirmed on Thursday as both sides managed to thrash out a post-Brexit free trade agreement (FTA) just days before the December 31 deadline. Thousands of pages of legal text accompanies the deal, with details of the agreement set to emerge in the course of the next few days, including the final ratification of the FTA by Parliaments on both sides.

"We have got Brexit done and we can now take full advantage of the fantastic opportunities available to us as an independent trading nation, striking trade deals with other partners around the world," Downing Street said in a statement. "We have signed the first free trade agreement based on zero tariffs and zero quotas that has ever been achieved with the EU. The deal is the biggest bilateral trade deal signed

by either side, covering trade worth GBP 668 billion in 2019," it said, adding that the UK has taken back control of its "money, borders, laws, trade and our fishing waters".

"The deal also guarantees that we are no longer in the lunar pull of the EU, we are not bound by EU rules, there is no role for the European Court of Justice and all of our key red lines about returning sovereignty have been achieved. It means that we will have full political and economic independence on 1st January 2021," Downing Street declared.

On the other side, the EU said it has a good deal to show for the "long and winding road". "We have finally got a deal, a fair and responsible deal," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said at a press conference from Brussels.

"The EU rules and standards will be respected... the United Kingdom is a long-standing partner,"

● **THE LAST** few months and weeks have proved particularly tense on the path to such an agreement, with the UK concerned about the EU's insistence to close alignment to its rules even after Brexit and the EU accusing the UK of expecting unfair advantages.

she said, adding that while "parting was such sweet sorrow" it was time to look to the future as the UK is now classified as a "third country" in relation to the economic bloc.

Earlier, it had emerged that crunch talks overnight meant UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson summoned his Cabinet for a late Wednesday night conference call to indicate that a post-Brexit trade agreement is ready to be signed off soon. Johnson and Von Der Leyen have been in close contact over the past few days as the December 31 transition period cut-off

loomed over the negotiations, which have missed repeated deadlines as they failed to agree on key areas of fishing rights in each other's waters and competition rules that would apply to the UK as a non-member of the 27-member economic bloc.

According to early reports, both sides have come to a base agreement which would ensure most of the current tariff-free, quota-free arrangement but unlikely to mean entirely frictionless trade as businesses had hoped. The UK Parliament needed to ratify the deal and as it has already risen for Christmas break, the likelihood is that MPs will be recalled to the House of Commons next week for urgent business. Johnson's comfortable majority in the Commons means the deal is likely to be signed off in time. On the EU side, the European Parliament would then ratify the agreement, which is expected in the New Year and with all

the member-countries briefed on it, they are unlikely to exercise their veto powers. It has now been four and half years since Britain voted to exit the EU in a referendum in June 2016.

It officially left at the end of January this year and entered into an 11-month transition period, or a phase of status quo, to hammer out a new free trade agreement.

However, the last few months and weeks have proved particularly tense on the path to such an agreement, with the UK concerned about the EU's insistence to close alignment to its rules even after Brexit and the EU accusing the UK of expecting unfair advantages.

The main sticking points were fishing rights and the so-called "level playing field" — measures to prevent what is seen as unfair competition through the lowering of standards or the use of state subsidies. — PTI

UK-France border to stay open



Police speak with a driver as freight lorries remain queued up on the M20 motorway, leading to the Port of Dover in England on Thursday, as rail and sea links between the UK and France are to remain open over Christmas to clear the backlog of trucks stranded by a new strain of Coronavirus. — AFP

French border at Eurotunnel, Dover & Calais WILL remain open throughout Xmas in order to help hauliers & citizens return

home as soon as possible," UK transport minister Grant Shapps wrote on Twitter. The massive testing operation, which is

being bolstered by the military, began late Wednesday under an agreement between London and Paris. — AFP

JEWISH CENTRE BOMBING: MAN CLEARED

Buenos Aires, Dec. 24: A court has said it has cleared the only Argentine still facing charges in the 1994 bombing that killed 85 people at a Jewish cultural center in the nation's capital.

The federal court ruling came on Wednesday after former auto dealer Carlos Telleldin again denied knowing that the truck he sold would be used as a bomb in the attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, which caused the organization's main building to collapse. He proclaimed his "total and absolute innocence." — AP

Release men charged in Pearl murder: Pak court

Karachi, Dec. 24: In a surprise move, a Pakistani court on Thursday ordered the release of British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, who were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of US journalist Daniel Pearl.

A two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court, presided over by Justice K K Agha, directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under "any sort of detention" and declared all notifications of the Sindh government related to their

● **THE COURT** observed that the four men's detention was "illegal". In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment.

detention "null and void". The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal".

In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment.

The court also acquitted

Don vetoes def bill; cites certain provisions as risk

Washington, Dec. 24: US President Donald Trump vetoed a broad defense funding bill sent to him by Congress Wednesday, complaining that it helps Russia and China and objecting to provisions to rename military bases.

The bipartisan bill was passed by high enough margins in both chambers of Congress for lawmakers to — in theory — override the president's rejection. The veto of the \$740 billion measure to fund the military for fiscal 2021 came a day after the US leader, with less than one month left in office, threw a separate \$900 billion Covid-19 relief bill and overall funding for the government into question.

Trump criticised the annual National Defense Authorization Act for not responding to his demand to end liability protections for social media companies, known as Section 230 — an issue with no relationship to the US Defense Department. He also objected to a provision in the NDAA to rename military bases bearing the names of generals from the secessionist, slavery-supporting South in the 19th century US civil war.

And he objected to a provision which could impede his decision to sharply cut US troop levels in Germany, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The NDAA "fails to include critical national security measures, includes provisions that fail to respect our veterans and our military's history, and contradicts efforts by my administration to put America first in our national security and foreign policy actions," Trump said in a statement.

Without the changes to Section 230, Trump said, the NDAA "is a gift to China and Russia." — AFP

Rocket hit: Trump warning to Iran

Washington, Dec. 24: US President Donald Trump warned Wednesday he would hold "Iran responsible" in the event of a fatal attack on Americans in Iraq, as the first anniversary of the killing of a top Iranian general in a US air strike approaches.

"Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets," Trump said on Twitter, referring to an attack that caused damage but no deaths. "Guess where they came from: IRAN," he added. "Now we hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq," he

added, before offering "some friendly life advice to Iran: if one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over," he said.

Responding to Trump, the Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted on Thursday: "Putting your own citizens at risk abroad won't divert attention from catastrophic failures at home." He also attached an image of years-old Trump tweets that claimed ex-president Barack Obama would have started a war with Iran to win reelection. — AFP

NEPAL: CHINESE ENVOY MEETS PRACHANDA

Kathmandu, Dec. 24: Chinese ambassador Hou Yanqi on Thursday met Nepal Communist Party's executive chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who claims control over the ruling party after removing Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli from the posts of the party's parliamentary leader and chair. The meeting at Prachanda's residence in Khumaltar — which lasted for about 30 minutes — dwelt on the contemporary political situation after the NCP split.

"They discussed the issues of bilateral concern," according to sources close to Prachanda. Bishnu Rijal, a leader close to the Prachanda faction, tweeted that "Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Hou Yanqi met Chairman of the Nepal Communist Party Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' this morning. They discussed the issues of bilateral concerns."

Hou's meeting with Prachanda comes two days after she called on President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Tuesday at the latter's office in Sheel Niwas.

Hou is said to have discussed the latest political development following the president's move to dissolve the House of Representatives and announce mid-term elections. *My Republica* reported. This is not the first time that the Chinese ambassador has intervened in Nepal's internal affairs at a time of crisis. — PTI

CHRISTMAS | CHAOS

Since poll loss, Prez has almost vanished from public engagements

No Christmas vacation for angry Trump

Washington, Dec. 24: An enraged Donald Trump helicoptered off the White House lawn for one of the last times in his presidency Wednesday, leaving Americans chaos as a Christmas present.

The Republican was bound with his wife Melania for a vacation at his lavish Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. From Marine One, the first couple must have got a magnificent view on a clear, wintry day of the White House, decorated in chocolate box fashion with Christmas wreaths and red ribbons at every window.

But with the clock ticking to Joe Biden's January 20 inauguration, there

won't be too many more occasions to enjoy the experience.

And Trump, consumed by election conspiracy theories, abandoned by allies and determined to take opponents down with him, is not exactly in a merry mood.

Crises engulf the man supporters call "disrupter in chief" ("chaos president" to his critics.)

What's more, most of them are of his own making:

— Trying to overturn the result of the election.

— Unexpectedly refusing to sign a massive economic relief bill for Americans struggling from coronavirus fallout, insisting at the last moment that it be

● **YET FOR** all his bluster, the larger than life showman who for four years held the media, his party and the entire country in thrall now cuts a diminished figure.

rewritten.

— Choosing to say nothing, other than to play it down, about what senior officials and members of Congress describe as a devastating Russian cyberattack.

— Vetoing just before he left for Florida the bill funding the US military.

— Declaring war on top members of his own party who dare concede that Biden won.

Yet for all his bluster, the larger than life showman who for four years held the media, his party and the entire country in thrall now cuts a diminished figure.

Normally, the departure on Marine One from the South Lawn of the White House has been a favorite stage for Trump to act out his flamboyant press conference/performance art routine.

Boasting, ad-libbing, entertaining and insulting, Trump used to love nothing more than "chop-her talk" with journalists jostling to hear the world's biggest media star against the roar of an idling military helicopter.

But since losing the

November 3 election and embarking on a desperate mission to reverse the result, Trump has almost vanished from public engagements. His last extended Q&A with journalists was a bad tempered Thanksgiving encounter on November 26.

The once epic Marine One departures have been whittled down to the perfunctory exercise of a man catching a ride to the airport. With Covid-19 restrictions, only around a dozen journalists can attend the sessions anyway, meaning that even if Trump decides to stop and talk, the old, manic energy is gone.

Wednesday, he just walked past. — AFP

DECCAN
Chronicle

25 DECEMBER 2020

PM's platitudes at AMU
play up contrast to reality

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University the other day offered Indians a reassurance that this nation belongs to all of its citizens, that India is on the path of progress and that no citizen would be left behind because of their religion. "Everyone would get equal opportunities so that everyone can fulfill their dream," the Prime Minister told the young people, and through them, to the nation, rekindling the spirit of the speech the first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru delivered on January 24, 1948, months after India's Independence and days before the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. "The basic objective," Pandit Nehru had said, "is to build up a free India of high ideals and noble endeavour where there is equality of opportunity for all and where many variegated streams of thought and culture meet together to form a mighty river of progress and advancement for her people." Mr Modi went on to say, quoting the university's founder Sir Syed, that "for the body to remain healthy, every body part should be healthy." Mr Modi also urged people not to look at everything from a political lens.

One may have points of difference with the Prime Minister when he compartmentalises politics and development but none would quarrel with him when he says nobody would be left behind because of their religion as the nation makes progress. All that one would doubt is whether the Prime Minister is reflecting the realities his fellow citizens experience in their daily lives. Uttar Pradesh, where the AMU stands, has a different story to tell. The recently introduced, patently discriminatory, anti-conversion law that militates against the basic tenets of our Constitution has been used indiscriminately against interfaith couples. It's nothing less than horrendous to learn that the Uttar Pradesh police have arrested 17 persons under the provisions of the law when the Allahabad high court, and several other high courts, have made it abundantly clear that the state has no business intervening in the decision of two adults on how they would live their lives. The fundamental rights to equality, life and religious freedom are violated by the state even as the Prime Minister wants to remind us that we have a shared future.

The Central Bureau of Investigation recently chargesheeted four persons for the gangrape and murder of a teenage dalit girl in Hathras in the state. It may be recalled only with trepidation that a very senior police official of the state had stated that there was no rape in the case as no semen was found in the body of the victim, displaying extreme insensitivity and complete ignorance of the law. The same state police had burnt the body in the dead of the night against the wishes of her family, sending all right thinking people to doubt whether Indian laws are in force in the state or not when it comes to minorities and dalits.

When the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy speaks of equality, then everyone has a duty to listen to him and work towards fulfilling that ideal. It must be a national endeavour, and not a national pastime.

Curtains for Netanyahu?

Will it be curtains for the artful survivor Benjamin Netanyahu who will soon be facing an even greater existential crisis? His former allies Naftali Bennett of the Yamina party and Gideon Saar, who broke away from the Likud party to set up his "New Hope" party, are setting their sights on March 23, 2021, the day of reckoning in the fourth election in two years, as an ideal opportunity for them to dethrone the longest serving Israeli Prime Minister.

Endearingly called "Bibi", the master political strategist has been brought down this time as an unorthodox coalition between his right wing Likud and Benny Gantz heading the centrist Blue and White party gave way under the weight of near impossible contradictions. The two rivals had been brought together in May 2020 to resolve a 17-month political stalemate after Israel's top court had ruled that Mr Netanyahu could head a government while under indictment for corruption charges.

Glowing in the benign warmth of his friend Donald Trump at the White House, Mr Netanyahu had prospered in the eyes of the world as his country wiped away years of solemn history to gain the diplomatic recognition of four Arab states. A prominent face in Bibi's last election campaign had been Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi whose friendship the Israeli had flaunted to win votes and remain in power amid the political minefield that Israel has become in its Left and Centrists versus the Right politics that has been dragging the country into bitter electoral battles, which are known not to yield clear mandates.

Indicted for fraud, breach of trust and graft in a series of scandals involving quid pro quo with wealthy media moguls, Bibi has displayed phenomenal dexterity. The court ominously said its legal ruling did "not diminish the severity of pending charges for violations of moral integrity". Blame it on the times we live in but leaders with conflicts against the highest moral and ethical standards seem to constitute the "New Normal" on the world's stage. It is in standing up to the coronavirus sweeping nations across the globe that they seem to be failing.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUBHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234
Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208
Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalpalay Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433
Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burrupur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennimudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580
Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325
Coinbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Rammagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Christmas, like Diwali,
is a special day in India



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Something I have always been proud of is the fact that India celebrates Diwali, Christmas as well as Id. Regardless of our faith, we keenly anticipate each occasion and participate with enthusiasm. There aren't many countries that can make a similar boast.

The Gymkhana, Rotary and Lions Clubs across the country hold special Christmas tea parties for their members' children. There is always a Santa Claus, dressed in red, with a straggly white beard and a discordant ho-ho-ho! Most of us can sing *Jingle bells* and many can hum *Silent Night*. And no matter how many they make, our bakeries always run out of Christmas cake. The truth is that Christmas in India may be different but it's also special. Christmas is as much our festival as it is that of the majority Christian world. Unfortunately, however, the Narendra Modi government neither understands this nor respects it.

If a report put out by the ANI news agency and published by a number of leading newspapers turns out to be correct, "the Bharatiya Janata Party is planning to dedicate December 25, the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee, to farmers". The report suggests that the Prime Minister will make this announcement on Christmas Day itself when he will also speak on the controversial issue of the new farm laws.

Frankly, this would be terrible. It would be reprehensible and deplorable. It amounts to a blatant and unforgivable

breach of India's valued tradition of respecting every religion. Worst of all, it ignores the fact that Christmas is as important a festival in India as it is for the countries of Europe and America.

Unfortunately, this will not be the first time that the Modi government has denigrated Christmas Day by trying to convert it into something else. Narendra Modi had barely been in power for six months when in December 2014 he decided to designate Christmas as Good Governance Day. That, too, was done in memory of Atal Behari Vajpayee. Because December 25 is Vajpayee's birthday the Modi government feels it can designate the day in any way it wants. The fact that it is Christmas Day is either secondary or irrelevant.

This logic is not just bizarre, it's offensive. December 25 is Christmas Day, first and foremost. Vajpayee's birth on that date was a coincidence. It cannot take priority or prominence over the birth of Jesus Christ. Nor can India's farmers, who are the purported excuse for the new dedication this year.

If you disagree with me, just ask yourself a simple question — would Narendra Modi dare to designate Diwali or Holi as Good Governance Day or dedicate it to India's protesting farmers? Even the thought of it would not occur to him. Why? Because, as a Hindu, he knows too well that this would deeply upset his co-religionists.

Why then as the Prime Minister of a secular country does he feel free to proclaim Christmas as Good Governance Day? Or, as ANI sug-

gests, dedicate December the 25 to India's farmers? Nothing could hurt our Christian brothers and sisters more. Our Prime Minister should be protecting and defending their emotions and sentiments, not wilfully and repeatedly disregarding them.

In 2014 the Archbishop of Bengaluru publicly questioned why Christmas had been chosen as Good Governance Day. The government's response was that it happens to be Atal Behari Vajpayee's birthday. What the government did not address was the obvious next question — is that a sufficient reason for redesignating the holiest day in the calendar for Christians? The same question will occur again if today is dedicated to India's farmers. And I'm pretty sure we'll probably get the same hurtfully dismissive reply.

The irony is that were he alive Atal Behari Vajpayee would be as upset as I am. He would not applaud the government. Instead, he would lacerate it with his stinging criticism. He was, after all, a secular man with great respect for Christians. He would hate to be the excuse for this affront to them. And although I have not checked with her, I do not believe this would please Vajpayee's daughter Namita either.

Let me make one further point. This year the attempt to redesignate Christmas is likely to be more hurtful to India's Christians than the 2014 redesignation as Good Governance Day. This is because fear of the virus

This year the attempt to redesignate Christmas as Atal Behari Vajpayee's birthday is likely to be more hurtful to India's Christians than the 2014 redesignation as Good Governance Day

has already changed the character of this special day. We may not be locked indoors as the British are, but we are equally fearful of congregating in churches or celebrating in large family gatherings. For many Christmas is likely to be spent "home alone". Redesignating Christmas Day will only increase the sense of loss.

Again, this is something that Mr Modi's government should readily understand. Diwali was no different for India's Hindus. The virus ruined it for tens, if not hundreds of millions. But on that occasion the government was only too aware of the need to lift spirits. Why is that not the case now?

I know mine is not a lone lament. Millions — indeed the vast majority — of my countrymen are likely to echo my concern. For them, the sanctity of a day of God is beyond questioning. Then why are our politicians silent? If I recall correctly, in 2014 I did not hear a clear protest or even criticism from the Congress Party. I suspect this year too its voice will be silent. But why? I really want to know.

If there is a politician in India who understands the importance of Christmas and what it means to Christians, it has to be Sonia Gandhi, who was born a Catholic. Yet she said nothing in 2014 and I fear that could be the case again.

Today, I wait to see if the India I am so proud of is changing for the worse. I so much want to be proven wrong. In fact, I would really like the day to end with readers of this column proclaiming that I was terribly mistaken. This is one occasion when I sincerely want to be totally incorrect... well, we'll soon know.

Finally, and if it's not too late, Merry Christmas.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

WELFARE SCHEMES

States implementing welfare schemes without generating matching revenue are falling a prey to the draconian reforms of the Centre which will have a back-breaking effect on the people. While welfare schemes help poor people in a certain way, they cannot be fed in the long run. Taking advantage of the financial status of the states, the Centre is going the whole hog forcing the reforms which will have a debilitating effect.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

PV'S REFORMS

This refers to your editorial *BJP's new politics fails to get off the ground in J&K* (DC, Dec. 24). The decision of the mainstream J&K parties for contesting and coming together putting aside their differences is welcome and appreciated. The polls are a sign of victory for democracy in the region. It needs to be seen as a launching pad towards normalisation in J&K.

Dr Shankar Chatterjee
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN
DECCAN
Chronicle

NGRI devises cheap
aerial survey for
minerals

By a staff reporter

HYDERABAD, DEC. 24.

The National Geophysical Research Institute here has developed instrumentation and methodology for air-borne magnetic surveys for mineral reconnaissance, this saving for the country considerable foreign exchange.

Dr. Hari Narain, Director of the Institute, told a news conference today that highly sensitive and sophisticated instruments developed and perfected in the Institute were now having good demand, both among the sister research institutes in the country and the Universities.

The Director also claimed that the Institute was now in a position to undertake aerial survey for mineral location at a cost which would be one-fifth of what the American Survey Team had charged or what had been quoted by the French Party which was due to undertake an air-borne survey early next month.

Matt Ridley



Why the mRNA
vaccines could
revolutionise
medicine soon

Almost 60 years ago, in February 1961, two teams of scientists stumbled on a discovery at the same time. Sydney Brenner at Cambridge University and Jim Watson at Harvard independently spotted that genes send shortlived RNA copies of themselves to little machines called ribosomes where they are translated into proteins. "Sydney got most of the credit, but I don't mind," Watson sighed last week when I asked him about it. They had solved a puzzle that had held up genetics for almost a decade. The shortlived copies came to be called messenger RNAs — mRNAs — and suddenly they now promise a spectacular revolution in medicine.

The first Covid-19 vaccine given to the British people earlier this month is not just a welcome breakthrough against a grim little enemy that has defied every other weapon we have tried, from handwashing to remedial and lockdowns. It is also the harbinger of a new approach to medicine altogether. Synthetic messengers that reprogramme our cells to mount an immune response to almost any invader, including per-

haps cancer, can now be rapidly and cheaply made.

Katalin Karikó, the Hungarian-born scientist who doggedly pursued the idea behind this kind of medication for decades at the University of Pennsylvania before joining BioNTech, and her collaborator Drew Weissman may be the Watson and Brenner of this story. They figured out 15 years ago how to send a message in a bubble into a cell and have it read. For years they had tried putting in normal RNA and found it did not work; the body spotted it was an alien and destroyed it.

But by subtly modifying one of the four letters in the message (replacing uridine with pseudouridine, a chemical found in some RNAs in the body anyway), they made a version that escaped the attention of the cell's M15 agents. Further refinements five years ago produced a recipe that worked reliably when delivered to cells inside a tiny oily bubble. The pandemic is the first time the technique has been tried in anger, and it worked: the first two Covid vaccines, BioNTech's and Moderna's, rely on these messengers.

The message tells the cell to make

part of one of the virus's proteins which then alerts the body's immune system. Once invented, the thing is like a general-purpose vaccine. You simply rewrite the message between the same opening and closing sequences, put it in the same kind of bubble, and fire it off — almost as easy for genetic engineers these days as writing a text is for teenagers. It is faster, cheaper, safer and simpler than the old ways of making vaccines.

More conventional vaccine designs may still make a vital contribution to defeating the pandemic, Oxford's included. And the messenger method has its drawbacks, such as the need for extreme cold storage. But in the long run, messengers probably represent the future of vaccines. Now the principle has been approved by regulators, there may be no need to go through the same laborious and expensive three-phase clinical trials every time.

What if 2020 went down in history as the year synthetic biology dealt a mortal blow to future viruses?

What is more, at the cost of a few billion dollars, the world may now be able to build a library of messenger

vaccines for every plausible coronavirus and influenza virus with pandemic potential we can find, test them in animals and store the recipes on a hard disk, ready to go at a moment's notice. Moderna's vaccine was first synthesised in mid-January, before we even knew the coronavirus was coming out of China.

There are already improved variations on the messenger theme too: self-replicating messengers, for example. Vaccine development has long been the Cinderella of pharmaceuticals, and this would not have happened without the pandemic. But nor would it have happened without the 30-year scientific slog Dr Karikó undertook.

A fast, adaptable vaccine platform has long been the dream. Let's try it against hepatitis, Zika and several kinds of common cold. We may begin to do to viruses what we have already done to most intestinal worms, many blood parasites and not a few bacteria: abolish them from the human experience. If the message is the recipe for a protein characteristic of particular tumours, the immune system may learn to mount a devastat-

ing attack on a cancer. How about Alzheimer's?

There will be setbacks, side effects and unintended consequences. There always are with innovation. There will be scares based on false fears spread by unscrupulous cranks. Already some worry that these vaccines might cause infertility. It's nonsense, but with just enough plausibility to alarm some people.

One problem we will probably face if this RNA dream comes true is a rise in allergies, asthmas and autoimmune problems. These are caused by the loss of parasites which used to suppress our immune systems. The more infections we get rid of, the more likely we are to get intolerant reactions to things like pollen and gluten. But then messenger vaccines may also be a way to tackle these and teach the immune system to behave.

What if 2020 went down in history as the year synthetic biology dealt a mortal blow to future viruses and illnesses in general, rather than the year a virus ruined our health, wellbeing and livelihoods?

By arrangement with the Spectator

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,973.54	1.14
Nifty 50	13,749.25	1.09
S&P 500*	3,700.86	0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.54	0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.01	-1.04
Euro (₹)	89.66	0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,030▼119	0.24
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	51.10	-0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.929	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.936	-0.019

* As of 9:30 PM IST

ESIC adds 11.75L new members in October

Around 11.75 lakh new members joined the ESIC-run social security scheme in October against 11.49 lakh in the previous month, official data showed on Thursday, giving a perspective on formal sector employment in the country. Gross new enrolments with ESIC were 8.27 lakh in June, 4.87 lakh in May and 2.62 lakh in April, showing an increase in enrolments after easing of the lockdown, the data showed.

India challenges Voda arbitration in Singapore



India has challenged in a Singapore court a verdict of an international arbitration tribunal that overturned its demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes from Vodafone Group PLC, sources said on Thursday. An arbitration court had on September 25 rejected tax authorities' demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes and penalties relating to the British telecom giant's 2007 acquisition of an Indian operator.

SpiceJet ties up with GMR cargo for Covid vax

Low cost carrier SpiceJet on Thursday announced that it has signed an MoU with GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo, a GMR group company, for providing a seamless service to all vaccine manufacturers in the region. As part of this association, SpiceXpress the cargo arm of SpiceJet envisions to provide efficient, speedy and reliable solutions for vaccine delivery, while also creating a sustainable cold chain network.

Auro signs deal with Covaxx for Covid vaccine

Aurobindo Pharma Ltd and Covaxx, a United States-based company, have entered into an exclusive license agreement to develop, commercialise and manufacture UB-612, the first Multitope Peptide-based vaccine to fight COVID-19, for India and UNICEF. According to a release issued by the city-based drug maker, Covaxx is currently conducting a Phase 1 clinical trial for the vaccine candidate.



Smartphone sales to see 2-digit growth

New Delhi, Dec. 24: When the pandemic forced people to stay indoors, smartphones became their window to the world, helping them stay connected with friends, work from home (WFH) and even learn new recipes.

And 2021 promises to bring back double-digit growth for the smartphone industry as people embrace hybrid work models, binge on web series and continue the pursuit for the perfect selfie on their six-inch screens.

This year has been challenging for the industry right from the beginning as supply chains for components were disrupted amid rising Covid-19 cases in China. Given the heavy reliance of Indian phone and electronics industry on imports from the neighbouring nation, there were apprehensions that stocks would run out, hitting local assembly.

By March, there were bigger worries. Rising number of coronavirus cases in India forced the government to impose a nationwide lockdown that barred movement of everything but essential items like food and medicine.

However, after the lockdown was eased, the industry saw a never-seen-before level of demand. Shipment in the September quarter is estimated to have touched an all-time high of over 50 million units. Pent up demand, coupled with people rushing in to buy devices to ensure continuity of work and studies, saw tech brands literally struggling to keep up.

Counterpoint Research senior analyst Prachir Singh said that despite losing almost one-and-a-half months to lockdown, there is just a six per cent year-on-year fall in shipment at 148 million units in 2020, reflecting the "resilient nature" of the



Laptops, desktop sales continue to rise in 2021

Oakland, California, Dec. 24: The world stocked up on laptop and desktop computers in 2020 at a level not seen since the iPhone debuted in 2007, and manufacturers still are months away from fulfilling outstanding orders, hardware industry executives and analysts said.

Remote learning and working has upturned the computer market during the coronavirus pandemic, zapping sales of smartphones while boosting interest in bigger devices, which had become afterthoughts to iPhones and Androids over the last decade.

Annual global shipments of personal com-

puters, the industry's collective term for laptops and desktops, topped out at about 300 million in 2008 and recently were sinking toward 250 million. Few expected a resurgence.

But some analysts now expect 2020 will close at about 300 million shipments, up roughly 15 per cent from a year ago. Tablets are experiencing even faster growth.

By the end of 2021, installed PCs and tablets will reach 1.77 billion, up from 1.64 billion in 2019, according to research company Canalys.

They added 2021 sales forecasts would be higher if not for the supply issues. — Reuters

Indian smartphone market.

"In 2021, the Indian smartphone market is estimated to grow at 20 per cent year-on-year. Major reasons for such a high growth will be increased consumer spending as economic activities grow, and aggressive product

strategies from top brands," he said, adding that Jio's anticipated launch of low-cost 4G smartphone with Google could add further momentum.

Domestic players like Micromax could also make a strong comeback next year. — PTI

Taxmen train guns on GST input tax credit fraudsters

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 24

Detection of input tax credit-related frauds has witnessed a rising trend of late. Of the total number of fraudsters arrested by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, almost half have been held in the past six weeks.

The CBIC has booked 12,000 cases of Input Tax Credit fraud and arrested 365 persons in such cases so far. In the past six weeks alone more than 165 persons were arrested. These are people who avail and pass on ineligible ITC credits through fake or fly-by-night firms.

According to industry experts, the government

has been focusing on identifying such fraudsters in the past two months. They have been analysing backend data to find out fraudulent cases.

"Data driven targeting of the fraudsters is the need of the hour. The data is being collected from Income Tax and Customs departments and banks and necessary matching is being down to identify fraudsters... Precise targeting of fraudsters is being down only in specific cases after doing a comprehensive analysis using advanced data analytics tools," said CBIC.

CBIC also has issued a few notifications to deal with the menace. It has introduced mandatory

authentication of Aadhar number, wherever applicable or physical verification of business premises for the purposes of obtaining GST registration.

It has now restricted filing of outward supply details in GSTR 1 return for businesses who have not paid tax for the past periods by filing GSTR 3B. Till now, non-filing of GSTR 3B resulted in blockage e-waybill but will now result in GSTR 1 blockage as well.

"The government's idea here seems to be to curb input tax credit passing by businesses which have otherwise not paid their GST liability," said Abhishek Jain, Tax Partner, EY.

2020 turns out best for IPOs, debutants trade at twice price

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 24

The year 2020 has been a good year for the primary market initial public offerings (IPOs) with several of the initial public offerings trading at double their public issue price or at a hefty premium.

In December, after Burger King's grand listing, another IPO by Mrs Bectors Food Specialities on Thursday provided investors more than 100 per cent return on debut.

Compared to the public issue price of ₹288 per share, Mrs Bectors Food listed at ₹500 on NSE and ₹501 on BSE and touched a high of Rs 601.20 on BSE and stock settled 106.79 per cent up at ₹595.55 on the BSE.

Mrs Bectors Food's market capitalisation at market close on BSE stood at ₹3,498.65 crore. Happiest Mind, Route

2020 IPOs That Trades At Over 50% Premium To Public Issue Price

Company	Public Issue	Current Market
Mrs Bectors Food Specialities	288	592.50
Burger King India	60	180.95
Gland Pharma	1,500	2425
Computer Age Management Services	1,240	1,685.90
Route Mobile	350	1,119
Happiest Minds Technologies	166	346.90
Rossari Biotech	425	939

Figures price in Rs Source: NSE



Mobile, Rossari Biotech, Gland Pharma, CAMS, Burger King, Mrs Bectors Food have given handsome returns to investors, to name a few.

All 14 IPOs listed in 2020 so far traded above their public issue price, the year saw few large IPOs. Gland Pharma raised ₹6,479.55 crore and shot up to be among the top ten

Indian pharma companies after successful listing.

SBI Card also raised ₹10,354.77 crore but the shares got hit after listing due to Covid led market meltdown and touched a low of ₹495.25 against public issue price of ₹755 per share before a sharp recovery as the broader market recovered.

Computer Age Manage-

● All 14 IPOs listed in 2020 so far traded above their public issue price, the year saw few large IPOs.

● Smaller size IPOs like Happiest Minds, Burger King, Route Mobile, Rossari Biotech, Mrs Bectors Food made higher listing gains and continue to trade at a hefty premium to the issue price.

Top 3 cities recruit 53% of e-retail employees

Mumbai, Dec. 24: Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai have emerged as the demand hot spots for recruiting talent in the e-commerce segment, a report said.

The report is based on a survey of 5,000 employees from e-commerce and traditional industries working in over 100 roles. It also took input from over 25 e-commerce players.

Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai emerge as the demand hot spots, accounting for 53 per cent of the total demand on an average, when it comes to generating demand for top talent in e-Commerce, as per Catenon India's *Decoding Talent in E-commerce Report 2021*.

Indore, Kochi and Coimbatore are also coming up as the new recruitment frontiers.

The report revealed that the most in-demand jobs are product management roles, which are the highest paid ones and also see the steepest hike in annual compensation for higher years of experience. — PTI

Indian economy is coming out of deep abyss, says RBI

Mumbai, Dec. 24: The economy is coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic's deep abyss faster than most of the predictions, and the growth will enter positive zone in the third quarter of the current fiscal, said an article on the 'state of economy' in the RBI Bulletin.

"More evidence has been turned in to show that the Indian economy is pulling out of Covid-19's deep abyss and is breaking out amidst winter's lengthening shadows towards a place in the sunlight... it is refracting at a pace that beats most prediction," said the article written by the officials of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, the

Indian economy dipped by a historic 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of the current financial year. The contraction narrowed down to 7.5 per cent in the second quarter.

Quoting reports, the article said, "Real GDP growth is expected to break out into positive territory in Q3 — albeit, to a slender 0.1 per cent."

Two important forces are conspiring to bless this turning of the page on the virus, the article said. "First, India is bending the Covid infection curve: since mid-September, barring localised surges, infections are slanting fashion to support investment and consumption demand," it said. "The fiscal measures

have been sequenced in a designed shift in focus from consumption expenditure in Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package to investment expenditure in Aatma Nirbhar 2.0 and 3.0," the article added.

Abstracting from the inherent flux in high frequency indicators, the underlying trend would reveal that the pick-up in momentum of economic activity that commenced with the onset of the second half of 2020-21 is sustained, it noted. "The absence of the dreaded 'second wave' of pandemic in India so far has imparted elevation to this momentum in an environment of supportive macroeconomic policies," it added. — PTI

Tata Motors launches its most advanced LCV

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 24

Tata Motors, India's biggest commercial vehicle maker, has introduced the new Ultra T.7 light commercial vehicle or LCV that has been specially designed for urban transportation. The Mumbai-based automaker claims that it is the most advanced LCV that it has

ever developed. With the new Ultra T.7, Tata Motors is targeting applications such as transportation of e-commerce products, FMCG, industrial produce, consumer durables, electronics, essential goods and LPG cylinders.

The reefer variants of T.7 are best suited for transportation of vaccine, pharmaceuticals, perishable goods, food items

such as eggs and milk, along with farm produce.

The Ultra T.7 range comes with a modular platform with variants of various deck lengths and in 4-tyre and 6-tyre combinations to suit a wide range of applications.

The model's 1900mm-wide cabin has been engineered to offer the best-in-class comfort to reduce the turnaround time.

L&T 3D prints India's 1st building

New Delhi, Dec. 24: Larsen & Toubro Construction on Thursday said it has successfully 3D printed a ground plus one building, claiming it to be the first in India.

The company has 3D printed the building of a 700 square feet built-up area at its Kanchipuram facility with an in-house developed concrete mix, using indigenously available regular construction

● Except for the horizontal slab members, the entire building structure was 3D printed 'Cast in Situ' at the job site in an 'open to sky' environment within 106 printing hours.

materials. "L&T Construction announced having successfully 3D printed a G+1 (ground plus one)

Building with reinforcement for the first time in India," the company said in a statement.

With the country aggressively pursuing the objective of creating 60 million houses under the Housing for All by 2022 programme, this achievement will certainly give a huge fillip for the mass housing segment, it added.

The building was printed with both vertical rein-

forcement bar and horizontal distributors, using a welded mesh that satisfies provisions in the Indian codes and optimises the cost of construction. Except for the horizontal slab members, the entire building structure was 3D printed 'Cast in Situ' at the job site in an 'open to sky' environment within 106 printing hours, using a fully automated 3D printer.

DEAL | BOOK

More than \$1.3 trillion worth deals were clinched in Q4 alone

M&A deals come roaring back

New York, Dec. 24: Global merger and acquisition activity clawed its way back from near-decade lows in 2020, facing down the Covid-19 pandemic with a string of large transactions in the second half of the year that dealmakers hope will continue.

Deal volumes are now down about six per cent for the year to \$3.5 trillion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Still, the fact that about two-thirds of those were inked since the start of July has advisers talking about a dramatic comeback, after the first half of 2020 froze M&A and sent North American deal activity down more than



50 per cent.

How transactions got done also changed, as bidders flew drones to conduct due diligence and the head of a UK pharmaceutical giant inked his biggest-ever deal while quarantined in a hotel room in Australia. Globetrotting bankers transitioned to days of nonstop video calls, either from

home or nearly empty offices. "We saw a sharp decline in M&A activity after the outbreak of the pandemic but then a very strong recovery in the second half of the year," said Berthold Fuerst, co-head of investment banking coverage and advisory for Europe, the Middle East and Africa at Deutsche Bank AG.

As the pandemic shut down cities in the first quarter, companies around the world scrambled to move their businesses online and organise newly remote workforces while plugging holes in their supply chains. The chaos left chief executive officers too busy to make acquisitions, and deal-making got off to the slowest start since 2013.

The situation started to stabilise as companies realised they could operate in the new environment, said Scott Barshay, chair of the corporate department at law firm Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison.

"All of a sudden, you could see a real shift in

thinking to what will the world look like post-pandemic, and how do we put ourselves in the best position to succeed post-pandemic?" Barshay said. "It seemed to be coming from companies in all sectors all at once."

More than \$1.3 trillion of deals have been announced in the fourth quarter alone. S&P Global Inc.'s all-stock \$39 billion acquisition of IHS Markit Ltd. came on the heels of technology megadeals including chipmaker Advanced Micro Devices Inc.'s \$35 billion purchase of Xilinx Inc. and Salesforce.com Inc.'s agreement to buy Slack Technologies Inc. for \$27.7 billion including debt. — Bloomberg

Key products to have separate warehouses

New Delhi, Dec. 24: The government on Thursday said that it will set up product-specific warehouses at ports and national waterways.

The purpose of development of this infrastructure is to reduce the storage losses, minimise logistic costs and facilitate distribution of cargo in the hinterland, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) said in a statement.

"The (MoPSW) intends to create product-specific warehouses or silos at various ports (including both major and non-major ports), Multi Modal Logistics Parks located near port area and alongside the national waterways," the statement said. The ministry is target-

ing to develop the product-specific warehouses at ports for cement silos, liquid tanks, chemicals tanks, cold storage, electronics product storage, and pharmaceutical storage, among others.

"While the big players have their own warehouses and storage spaces, the smaller players find it difficult to get their product-specific storage silos at various locations," the ministry of port said in the statement.

The development of these world-class warehousing spaces will give a big push, especially to such small logistics players for their ease of doing business with better planning and inventory management, the ministry added. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Tatum leaves Bucks in tatters

Los Angeles: Boston Forward Jayson Tatum banked in a game-winning three pointer over Giannis Antetokounmpo with 1.5 seconds left to give the Celtics an 122-121 NBA season-opening victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday.

Antetokounmpo, the two-time defending NBA Most Valuable Player, had a chance to tie it from the free-throw line with four-tenths of a second left, but the Greek superstar missed his second free throw after being fouled at the rim and the Celtics came away with the win on their home floor. "Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be in that position," Tatum said.

Tatum, who said he "played terrible" after making only 12 of 28 shots from the floor, still finished with 30 points with seven rebounds and two assists. Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 33 points, five rebounds and four assists. Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee with 35 points, 13 rebounds, two assists and two blocked shots. — *AFP*

Oly-bound athletes get vaccine priority

New Delhi: A parliamentary panel on Thursday recommended putting athletes, coaches and support staff going for the 2021 Japan Olympics in the priority group for the Covid-19 vaccination process. The committee also voiced concern over large number of vacancies of coaches, saying they should be filled up in a time-bound manner so that Olympic preparations do not suffer. The Japan Olympics are slated to be held from July next year. The panel has also recommended identifying training facilities, stadia and sports centres for Olympic qualified athletes which have not opened yet. It said the closed centres should be reopened "at the earliest" or the athletes should be relocated to alternate centres which have opened. — *PTI*

Odisha to have new hockey stadium

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced that a new world-class hockey stadium would be constructed at Rourkela in Sundargarh district as part of preparations for the 2023 Hockey World Cup which will be hosted by the state. The proposed stadium would be the largest hockey stadium in India with a seating capacity of 20,000 people. This is going to redefine the sports landscape in the region, the chief minister said. The stadium along with the allied facilities will be developed as a benchmark for other hockey stadiums around the world, he said, adding that it would be constructed over 15 acres of land in the Biju Patnaik University of Technology campus in Rourkela. — *PTI*

BCCI AGM approves 10 teams for 2022 IPL

Ahmedabad, Dec. 24: The BCCI's governing body on Thursday ratified the entry of two new franchises in the IPL to make it a 10-team affair from 2022 and also decided to back the ICC's push for cricket's inclusion in the 2028 Olympics, during its Annual General Meeting (AGM) here.

"Two new teams will be introduced in the 2022 IPL," a Board source said. It is learnt that time at hand is too short for even a nine-team IPL next year as an elaborate tender-floating process, increase of matches and ensuring that all foreign players' international calendars are adjusted, would be prove to be a Herculean task.

T20 CRICKET IN OLYMPICS

In another major development, the Board, in principle, decided to back the ICC's bid for inclusion of cricket, in the T20 format, in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics "after getting some clarifications from the International Olympic Committee".

"Look, the BCCI is an autonomous body and it would like to maintain its autonomy. Our legal team

is looking to get a few clarifications. Obviously, cricket in Olympics is great for the game. Let's hope we can move in the right direction," the member, who attended the AGM, said.

The Board, however, did not reveal the nature of its queries with regards to the matter.

BCCI LIKELY TO LOSE \$123 MILLION

The BCCI has decided that if its does not get full tax exemption from the government of India to host the World T20 next year, as sought by the ICC, then it would agree to deduction from its annual revenue of \$390 million from the global body.

"We have told the ICC that we will approach our government for tax rebate but if we don't get that exemption, the amount, which is around \$123 million, will be deducted from our annual revenue, so we will get around \$267 million. But India is hosting the 2021 T20 WC," the source said.

COMPENSATION FOR DOMESTIC PLAYERS

Also, it was decided that all first-class players, both



(from left) BCCI treasurer Arun Dhumal, president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah pose after the 89th Annual General Meeting in Ahmedabad on Thursday. — *PTI*

men and women, will be suitably compensated for the curtailed domestic season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The BCCI plans to get the domestic season underway, after several months' delay, in January with the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 championship.

Asked about the money to be set aside for this, the Board source said: "The BCCI will give a lump-sum compensation amount to the state units. Now they will draw up their own list

and accordingly compensate their male and female players."

JUNIOR AND WOMEN'S CRICKET DURING IPL

The BCCI has decided that women's tournaments (senior and junior) along with age-group tournaments (U-23, U-19, U-16) will be held simultaneously at the time of IPL-14 which, in all likelihood, will be held in India despite the raging Coronavirus pandemic-related concerns.

SHUKLA BECOMES NEW VP

In other decisions, veteran Congress leader Rajiv Shukla was officially anointed the Board's vice president in place of his protégé Mahim Verma from Uttarakhand.

Brijesh Patel will continue as the chairman of the IPL Governing Council.

GANGULY-SHAH, INDIA'S FACE AT ICC

It was also learnt that the general body decided in favour of BCCI President

CHETAN SHARMA IS NEW CHAIRMAN OF SELECTORS

Ahmedabad, Dec. 24: Former India pacer Chetan Sharma was on Thursday appointed chairman of the senior national selection panel by the BCCI's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC), which also picked Abbey Kuruvilla and Debashis Mohanty in the five-member team.

The selection panel also has former India players Sunil Joshi and Harvinder Singh.

As per the BCCI constitution, the candidate with the most Test caps becomes the chief selector. — *PTI*

Sourav Ganguly continuing as a director in the ICC Board. Secretary Jay Shah will be the alternate director as well as India's representative at the Chief Executive Committee meets of the global body.

WOMEN'S TEST MATCHES

The house deliberated on having women's Test matches and there could be a two-Test series in the offing next year but a final call in this regard will be taken by the BCCI Apex Council.

GM SACKED

The BCCI has sacked GM (Game Development) KVP Rao, who was asked to

resign. While Rao termed leaving BCCI as his "happiest day", it is learnt that in general, his lack of proper action plan amid the Covid-19 pandemic was one of the big reasons for his ouster.

RETIREMENT AGE OF UMPIRES INCREASED

The BCCI's affiliated scorers and umpires will now retire at 60 instead of 55 years after the governing body ratified the move.

"We believe that both umpires and scorers are physically fit enough like any other profession to continue till the age of 60 years," source said. — *PTI*

Aussies charged up

Hosts look to pile misery on Kohli-less India in Melbourne

Melbourne, Dec. 24: Coach Justin Langer said the mark of a great team was to keep winning as he threw down a challenge to Australia Thursday against a depleted India desperate to restore pride in the second Test this week.

Australia head into the Boxing Day clash at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on a high after crushing the visitors by eight wickets inside three days in the opening Test at Adelaide.

The dramatic victory was built on the back of devastating spells from pace spearheads Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, who skittled India in the second innings for their lowest Test score of 36.

Langer said it was an incredible effort, and he wants to see it repeated.

"I've said that to become a great team we have got to get better at winning after we win. Really good teams keep winning and winning ... it's an area that we have addressed," he said.

With star opener David Warner again ruled out with a groin injury, Langer said Australia would stick with the same XI, barring last-minute



Australian players take a break during a training session ahead of the second Test against India, in Melbourne on Thursday. — *AFP*

issues. That means the under-pressure Joe Burns retains his spot as opener after a handy 51 not out in Adelaide, with Matthew Wade again moving up the order to accompany him, while all-rounder Cameron Green earns his second cap.

India have far more selection dilemmas, with captain Virat Kohli missing the final three Tests for the birth of his first child. Either the experienced KL Rahul or the uncapped Shubman Gill are tipped to take his place at number four,

while Ajinkya Rahane assumes the captaincy.

Although India haven't officially confirmed it, Mohammed Shami is also expected to be absent after reportedly fracturing his wrist after being hit by a Cummins thunderbolt in Adelaide. — *AFP*

INDIA SWEAT IT OUT AHEAD OF BOXING DAY TEST

Melbourne, Dec. 24: The Indian cricket team on Thursday tried a hitherto unseen training drill that vaguely resembled a wrestling bout, with a pair of two players each seemingly striving to outdo each other.

New Zealander Nick Webb, India's strength and conditioning coach, had introduced a few drills in the past and among them is a wrestling-like strength training activity. But the players haven't really been seen performing this particular drill in the past.

One of the purposes of this activity is to help players get ready for high-intensity duels. There was also a bit of touch rugby-like session happening.

Ravindra Jadeja was the first to arrive at the nets for the training session and he was put through a fitness test as he ran between the wickets with a bat on his hand. — *PTI*

Warne serves a warning to India

Melbourne, Dec. 24: Spin legend Shane Warne believes Australia will "blow away" India in the Boxing Day Test as the visitors are still a "bit shocked" by the Adelaide humiliation.

"I think Australia is probably going to blow them away," Warne, who claimed a record 708 Test wickets for Australia, told *Fox Cricket*.

"Having said that, they have some class players to come in like KL Rahul. Young Gill will come in. (Ajinkya) Rahane is a class act. We know what (Cheteshwar) Pujara can do," he said.

"(Mohammed) Shami is a huge loss as well. He's such a quality bowler. And if you look at bowlers for the Melbourne conditions drop in pitches. Shami hits the seam and stands it up and bowls a good length and straight," he added.

Indian batsmen drew a lot of flak after the Australian bowling unit, including Pat Cummins (4-21) and Josh Hazlewood (5-8), bamboozled the visitors in the opening Test.

However, Warne believes the Australian pace battery deserves more credit for the win in the series-opener than the criticism faced by the Indian batsmen.

"Yeah, you can have a go at the Indians but I think you would rather give cred-



Shane Warne

it to the Australians and how well they bowled," the 51-year-old former leg-spinner said.

"They were outstanding, that bowling attack. The four bowlers plus Green, they have been good bowlers for a long time. They are turning themselves into great bowlers now. To watch them go to work in Adelaide was fantastic."

Warne believes the current quartet of Cummins, Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon is already on track to become Australia's greatest bowling unit.

"They are definitely in the conversation (to compare them to my era). They are outstanding those four bowlers and they have been for a while," Warne further said. — *PTI*

Man Utd, Spurs cruise into semis

London, Dec. 24: Manchester United left it late to book their place in the League Cup semi-finals with a dramatic 2-0 win at Everton, while Tottenham joined them in the last four after beating Stoke 3-1 on Wednesday.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side dominated for long periods of their quarter-final at Goodison Park, but it took until the 88th minute before Edinson Cavani broke the deadlock.

The former Paris Saint-Germain striker's fourth goal for United since joining on a free transfer in October came at the same venue where he opened his account for the club last month.

Anthony Martial bagged United's second goal in stoppage time.

After a rocky period that raised questions about Solskjaer's future following their exit from the Champions League, United have recovered their equilibrium.

They are third in the Premier League and have

won their last three matches in all competitions.

United joined holders Manchester City, Tottenham and second-tier Brentford in the League Cup semi-finals.

Meanwhile, Jose Mourinho accused Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli of creating "problems" for his own team during their win against Stoke.

Wales forward Gareth Bale made the most of a rare start to put Mourinho's team ahead at the Bet365 Stadium.

But Alli was at fault when his flamboyant flick was intercepted in the build-up to Jordan Thompson's equaliser for Stoke. Alli's latest mistake drew an angry response on the touchline from Mourinho, who rebuked the star before substituting him minutes later.

Ben Davies put Tottenham back in front with his first goal since 2017 before Harry Kane sealed Spurs' place in the semifinals. — *AFP*

GRAND RELEASE

BAPINEEDU.B PRESENTS

SVCC

SRI VENKATESWARA CINE CHITRA LLP

TODAY

IN THEATRES

ZEESTUDIOS

SAI TEJ

శారదా బతుకే శా వెంకట

BVSN PRASAD SUBBU

THAMANS VENKAT C DILIP

NAVIN NOOLI SATISH BKR AVINASH KOLLA

SONY MUSIC

ZEES

ZEELUX

ZEEMOVIES

ZEETHEATRE

ZEETV

ZEEMUSIC

ZEEMEDIA

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2018-20

Printed and Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajahmundry, Vemagiri, Diwaleswaram Rd. Rajahmundry. Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: Kaushik Mitter