

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | TUESDAY | 22 DECEMBER 2020



## NATION | 4

Russia not to side with China in row



## WORLD | 5

Don spiritual adviser tests Covid positive

## SPORTS | 8

India bank on Jadeja fitness for 2nd Test



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## WEATHER

Max: 28.7°C  
Min: 11.1°C  
RH: 27%  
Rainfall: Nil  
Forecast: Partly cloudy.  
Mist of fog likely.  
Max/Min temp. 29/11 9C

## COVID-19 COUNT

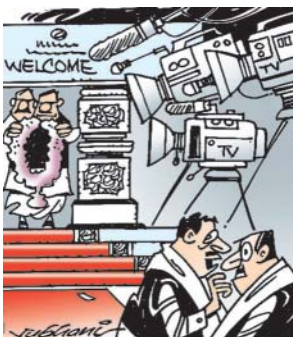
CASES	DEATHS
(+21,247)	(+330)
1,00,75,079	1,46,134
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+316)	(+2)
TS: 2,81,730	1,515
(+214)	(+2)
AP: 8,78,937	7,078

CASES AROUND THE WORLD
7,74,38,173
DEATHS
17,03,852
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218
worldometers.info/coronavirus

## ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana  
Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Ashtami till 6.17 pm  
Star: Uttarabhadra till 1.38 am (Wednesday)  
Varjyam: 9.42 am to 11.28 am  
Durmuhurtam: 8.57 am to 9.41 am; 10.56 pm to 11.48 pm  
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm  
HIJRI CALENDAR  
Jamadi-ul-Awwal 6, 1442 AH  
PRAYERS  
Fajar: 5.36 am  
Zohar: 12.25 pm  
Asar: 4.12 pm  
Maghrib: 5.54 pm  
Isha: 7.07 pm  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.42 AM  
SUNSET TODAY 5.47 PM  
MOONSET TODAY 12.06 AM  
MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.39 PM

## COUNTER POINT



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

## SHORT TAKES

### Cong leader Vora dies due to Covid

New Delhi: Veteran Congress leader Motilal Vora, a staunch Gandhi family loyalist who had a political career spanning almost five decades, died at a hospital here on Monday following post-COVID-19 complications, his family said. He was 93. Vora was admitted to the Escorts Hospital in Okhla here a few days ago with a urinary infection. He developed a severe lung infection and was put on ventilator support, his family said. He completed 93 years on Sunday. He will be cremated in Chhattisgarh where he stayed most of his life. Vora, a two-time former chief minister of undivided Madhya Pradesh and also a former governor of Uttar Pradesh, had served as a Rajya Sabha member four times and as a Lok Sabha member once. He started his political innings as an MLA in 1972 and remained a member of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly till 1992.



Motilal Vora

## Gadkari launches works for 14 highways via state

S.A. ISHAQUI | DC HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari on Monday set the foundation stones for 14 National Highway projects worth over ₹13,169 crore in the state through a virtual mode. These projects are for a total length of 765.66 km of highways in which eight projects account for a budget of ₹9,452 crore and six projects covering 370 km length cost ₹3,717 crore, the minister explained.

Gadkari dedicated six projects to the nation. Speaking on the occasion, the Union minister said that a total of 59 road works with an approved length of 1,918 km and a cost of ₹17,617 crore have been sanctioned for Telangana in the last six years.

Of this, 1,782 km length has already been sanctioned with a cost of 15,689 crore. He said, almost all of the 33 districts in the state have connectivity with national highways. The remaining district Peddapally will also be connected to the network soon, he added.

The minister said that



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari at the launch of the projects online.

there has been a phenomenal growth of 55.71 per cent national highway length in the last six years in the state and nearly 1,400 km have been added during this period.

He said that while construction of 841 km roads worth ₹4,793 crore has been completed since 2014-15 and works were going on for another 809 km at a cost of ₹13,012 crore.

He announced that 14 projects with a length 1,730 km have been identified in Telangana for development under Bharatmala Project. Of them, nine projects with a length of 423 km have been awarded at a cost of ₹7,400 crore.

"Development of green-field and access-controlled

corridors have also been planned in Telangana to ease-out traffic on existing corridors, reduce travel time and costs and also provide a boost to the economy," he said.

These include Surat, Ahmadnagar, Solapur, Kurnool, Chennai (75 km length in Telangana), Suryapet-Khammam-Devarapalli (164 km length in Telangana) and Indore-Hyderabad (136 km length in Telangana).

The Union minister explained that three major projects for 192 km worth ₹2,339 crore are in the bidding process and another 21 NH works with a total length of 1,422 km and a total cost of ₹27,116 crore are under various stages of DPR (detailed project report) preparation. He said that these works are likely to be completed by the financial year 2024-25. He appealed to the state government to take up diversification of agriculture into economic productivity.

He said the country is already over-producing sugar and rice, and sufficient stock is available with the government.

■ Page 2: Surplus crop can be converted to ethanol

## Phase-II MBBS counselling in TS, AP cancelled

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

The phase-2 counselling for admission into first-year MBBS has run into rough weather in both Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh.

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

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

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

A student approached the TS High Court seeking

a direction to the university to consider her name for phase-2 counselling.

A division bench comprising Justices M.S. Ramachandra Rao and T. Amarnath Goud granted "interim order as prayed for". Student's counsel Vedula Srinivas argued that the decision of the university declaring that the student did not join the college and debarring her from counselling as illegal as she already took admission in a city medical college. He also brought to the notice of the court that Siddhartha Medical College, which is a state-wide institute has quota for Telangana state and students who took admission under it should be treated on par with any other students from the state.

Sources told this correspondent that the NTR University cancelled the phase-2 after it was noticed that the Supreme Court directions were flouted in implementing the rule of reservation at the time of sliding of candidates in the phase-2.

■ Page 2: Leaders object to rule violation by Kaloji

## WEATHER | WARNING

## Met issues cold wave warning for next 24 hrs, Kumaram Bheem coolest at 4.3°C

## TS in grip of winter chill, Hyd records 11.1°C

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

After giving the city a miss last year, winter has finally chilled Telangana on Monday. A minimum temperature of 11.1 degrees Celsius was recorded in Hyderabad, which is a good three degrees below normal. Consequently, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) office here has issued a cold wave warning for the next 24 hours.

"Cold wave conditions are likely to prevail at isolated places in northern and western districts of Telangana," the IMD stat-

ed. The coldest districts were Kumaram Bheem and Adilabad, which recorded 4.3 and 4.6 degrees Celsius respectively.

"There are cold winds blowing from the northern direction over the state. Earlier, these winds used to get intercepted by strong winds from the eastern direction, which are relatively hot and humid. Now, that the eastern winds are out of play, cold winds from north are directly reaching the state," IMD director, K. Naga Ratna told Deccan Chronicle.

Monday night will be quite chilly and the same weather conditions will persist till Tuesday, she

## India halts UK flights as Covid mutations surface

## No flights till Dec. 31; states to quarantine travellers

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

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

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

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

## Markets fear superspreader, investors lose ₹6.7 lakh-crore

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 21

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

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

The fall in the Indian

market commenced around 12 noon and peaked around 2.30 pm with the Sensex and the Nifty hitting the day's low followed by partial recovery. The Sensex finally closed 1,406.73 points or three per cent down at 45,553.9 with all Sensex and Nifty-50 stocks in the red. The Nifty-50 closed 432 points or 3.14 per cent down at 13,328.40. Broader market fall was steeper with BSE Mid-cap index down 4.14 and BSE Small-cap index fell 4.57 per cent. BSE's market capitalisation fell over ₹6.70 lakh crore from all time high of over ₹185.38 lakh crore on Friday to over ₹178.67 lakh crore. "India's equity benchmark indices fell the

hardest in seven months as resurgent fears over a new strain of Covid-19 virus found in the UK spread panic across the globe. Basket selling by FPIs likely triggered the sharp fall in Indian markets," said Deepak Jasani, head of retail research, HDFC Securities.

"The advance decline ratio on the NSE on December 21 was the worst since March 23, 2020 when the Covid fears were at the peak. This suggests across the board panic selling/profit booking," Jasani said. NSE's volatility index India VIX shot up 24.54 per cent to 23.19 per cent indicating higher market volatility in the near future.

tional quarantine centres set up by states and Union territories, while those testing negative have to be under home isolation for seven days, when they will

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

## Farmers to decide on further talks today



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

— PTI

## MAMATA SNAPS AT SHAH FOR SPREADING 'LIES'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 21

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

Asking Mr Shah to "cross check" his statements, she cautioned him against lying as a home minister for his political mileage and urged him to tell the "truth" about the state.

■ Full report on Page 4

## Army alert as Pak beefs up LoC

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

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

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

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

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

specifically position them close to the border and the LoC.

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

## Lambasinghi in AP witnesses 5°C Celsius

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC. 21

Minimum temperatures have dropped across Andhra Pradesh on Monday. According to Regional Agriculture Research Station (RARS), a minimum temperature of 5 degrees Celsius has been recorded at Lambasinghi.

Chintapalle, where RARS is located, witnessed a low temperature of 6.5 degrees

Celsius. Normal life has been severely affected in the agency areas of Visakhapatnam as thick fog enveloped the entire region till 10 am.

There was zero visibility and all means of transport came to a halt in the area till then.

Elderly and children could be seen around campfires at all the hamlets in interiors of the agency area.



## SHORT TAKES



The seized foreign currency from a smuggler at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport on Monday.

## OFFICIALS ARREST SMUGGLER AT HYD AIRPORT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Customs officials seized foreign currency valued at ₹32.53 lakh at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Shamshabad, and caught one person who was allegedly smuggling the same to Sharjah on Monday.

According to the police, Customs team caught the passenger who was trying to smuggle the currency comprising dollars, Omani riyal, Saudi riyal and Qatari riyal. The passenger was caught on the way to catch a flight to Sharjah.

The currency was seized and a case was booked. Further investigation is on.

## COPS NAB FOUR OVER ROBBERY, ₹25L RECOVERED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

The LB Nagar Central Crime Station police along with the Vanasthalipuram police nabbed four persons in connection with a robbery here on Monday. Police recovered cash and other material all together worth ₹25 lakh from them.

According to police, the accused were identified as V. Nikhil, 23, V. Vinay Choudary, 27, Y. Uday Kumar, 23 and G. Brahma Teja, 22.

"Nikhil knew the victim Sathish Sikha and was aware that Sathish, who lived alone, had kept a huge sum of money and valuables in his house. Last Monday, the youngsters reached his home and attacked him. They tied him up and after gagging him, robbed him pointing a toy pistol," said the police. They stole ₹1.8 lakh, foreign currency notes, mobile phones, laptops, passports, a car and a bike.

"We have recovered stolen goods worth ₹25 lakh from them. Nikhil was earlier involved in several bike theft cases in Bellary and other places in Karnataka. In 2019, he was also involved in a property case in Raidurgam in Cyberabad," added the officials.

## SURPLUS CROP CAN BE CONVERTED TO ETHANOL

FROM PAGE 1

"The surplus crop may be converted to ethanol, which can be used as an alternative fuel for vehicles. This will not only improve farmers' income but will also be an indigenous source of fuel for the country," he added.

The virtual event was attended by Union Ministers G. Kishan Reddy and VK Singh along with Telangana Speaker Pocharam Srinivas Reddy, Council chairman Gutha Sukhender Reddy, Roads and Buildings Minister Vemula Prashanth Reddy, MPS and MLAs, and senior officials from the Centre and the state government.

## LEADERS OBJECT TO RULE VIOLATION BY KALOJI VARSITY

From page 1

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

Several BC organisations and Congress MP Komatireddy Venkata Reddy raised objections over similar violation of rules by Kaloji University as a result of which they said more than 300 BC students would get a raw deal. As the university authorities bungled the admission process in Telangana state, several students approached the High Court. In one case the court gave a clear direction that the candidate's case should be considered for the second phase despite the completion of the phase-2.

# India remains in dark over Corona mutations

Work on identifying viral mutations got hindered due to shortage of imported chemicals, say scientists

## Immediate vaccination programme, contact tracing can check mutations

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Even as India has taken a good step in cancelling travel to and from the United Kingdom, a need is being felt to immediately implement the vaccination programme with the existing chain.

Scientists and researchers are seeking proactive steps of molecular sequencing of the virus as was done in the case of poliovirus. They aver that this will provide more information on epidemiology and the spread of the disease. Acquiring this knowledge will help authorities to align with health research and health services and help formu-

late informed strategies to mitigate the adverse impact of the virus.

Dr K.K. Aggarwal, president of Confederation of Medical Associations of Asia and Oceania (CMAAO) points out, "Protection from vaccine is not immediate as it will take one to two weeks following the second dose. All those who are vaccinated will still have to follow safety protocols of masks, hand hygiene and social distancing."

The new variant has raised doubts of re-infection in the Covid-19 recovered patients. There are also doubts about infection after taking the vaccine. Dr Aggarwal says, "It is possible but the impact

of the disease will be less."

With the efficacy of the vaccine being six to eight months, it is being viewed as a yearly vaccine for protection from the disease. With new variants coming in, the efficacy of the vaccine will be a point of debate.

There are also doubts about it becoming similar to the influenza vaccine where the new strain has to be taken into account and accordingly develop the vaccine.

A senior scientist, on condition of anonymity, explained, "With new variant strains, analysis of efficacy can be known only after a critical mass of the population is inoculated. With the UK already

rolling out its vaccination programme, we will soon find out the quantum of those affected by the new strain."

There is a vaccine readiness among a section of Indian healthcare workers, who are being counselled about its benefits.

A senior doctor explained, "With new strains coming in, the vaccine is the only way forward. There is very little that can be done, otherwise. In order to live a normal life, it is important to get vaccinated."

The adverse effects of vaccines are a concern but many of them reason that vaccines are the only way forward until herd immunity to the virus gets developed.



Hyderabad police commissioner Anjani Kumar along with others addresses the Annual Press meet in front of Arts College Osmania University Campus in Hyderabad on Monday.

— S. SURENDER REDDY

## Hyd cops prepare public safety initiatives for 2021

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

The city police has planned several initiatives for 2021, including construction of 15 centres, improve coordination with other two commissionerates to tackle inter-state criminals.

"We will be implementing Safe City Project under the Nirbhaya Funds Scheme for the safety of Women and implementation of Witness Protection Programme and also establishing a Centre of Excellence (CoEs) at Commissionerate level to render support on 24x7 basis to all the officers manning various Functional Verticals for strengthening Crime Control mechanism," said Police Commissioner of Hyderabad Anjani Kumar.

### OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 2021

- Speed limits to be notified for all roads and such signages to be erected on all roads accordingly.
- Health Check-ups will be conducted of all personnel of the Traffic Branch twice in a year.
- More awareness campaigns on cybercrimes/cyber cheating.
- Improving coordination between three Commissionerates in forming teams to arrest inter-state criminals.

The city police is also constructing 15 counselling centres and installing 1,350 Community Rooftop Camera Network (CRTN) Surveillance cameras. "There will be a BHAROSA Centre installed in the old city area and we will be establishing a Citizen Support Help Line with 25 seats capacity and also implementing a Computer based Inventory Management System (IMS)," added the official.

Officials will also be deploying intelligent conversational chatbots to make Hyderabad City Official websites interactive. "More black spots will be identified, Engineering and other relevant teams will be studied for defects and we will ensure reduction of accidents by 15 percent by taking necessary action," said the police chief, adding that road safety meetings will be conducted quarterly.

## Crime rate drops by 10% this year

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

Marking 2020 as the year of Covid-19 lockdown, Hyderabad floods and numerous bandobasts which replaced lathis with sanitisers, Hyderabad city police officials spoke about how the overall crime rate has decreased by 10 per cent this year. A total of 22,641 cases were registered in 2020 as against 25,187 the previous year.

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed some peculiar issues for the police, like having to play at the forefront completely unprepared, said Hyderabad police commissioner Anjani Kumar adding that our police personnel were deployed in the high-risk areas like providing security to the Covid-19 treatment hospitals, quarantine centres and containment zones, etc.

"Although the Hyderabad City Police are tasked with enforcing social distancing, the activities have been much broader. We instilled confidence in the medical staff, enabling them to discharge their duties and the police stations and check-posts have become sites of India's public health campaign. As many as 33 police personnel have laid down their lives in the battle with the pandemic, and many hundreds have survived the vicious tentacles of Covid-19 related health problems," he said.

The downturn and the deluge earlier in October had tasked the police with heavy duty work and officials said that they have left no stone unturned in going that extra mile, right from alerting the river bed colonies about the imminent threat of rains, rescuing residents from water-logged houses, to putting their own lives at risk to evacuate the stranded individuals, all the while trying to maintain Covid-19 related precautions to the best of their abilities.

"The core functions of policing such as maintenance

# THE YEAR THAT WAS CRIME-WISE

COMPARATIVE STATEMENTS

Overall crimes - (10 percent reduction)

2019 - 25,187

2020 - 22,641

Bodily offences - (8 percent reduction)

2019 - 2,126

2020 - 1,565

Property offences - (27 percent reduction)

2019 - 2,694

2020 - 1,964

Crime against women - (19 percent reduction)

2019 - 2,354

2020 - 1,908

Crime against children (35 percent reduction)

2019 - 339

2020 - 221

DRUG SEIZURES

Marijuana

2019 - 958 kilos

2020 - 851 kilos

Charas

2019 - 0

2020 - 40 grams

Cocaine

2019 - 31 grams

2020 - 6 grams

Heroin

2019 - 33 grams

2020 - 4 grams

Opium

2019 - 4.250 kilos

2020 - 0.450 kilos

MDMA

2019 - 5 grams

2020 - 8 grams

OFFENCES IN THE LAST 3 YEARS

RAPE

2018 - 274

2019 - 281

2020 - 265

ROBBERY

2018 - 101

2019 - 107

2020 - 75

MURDER

2018 - 80

2019 - 84

2020 - 64

GHMC ELECTION SEIZURES

CASH

₹1,46,55,520

LIQUOR

Approx 414.835 litres worth ₹2,07,135

MARIJUANA

₹15,500

2.1 kilos worth

MEPHEDRONE DRUG

80 grams worth ₹10 Lakhs

NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARRESTED

2019 - 215

2020 - 213

HIGHLIGHTED CASES OF 2020

● West Zone Task Force team seized ₹3.75 crores of hawala cash from four men.

● Man posing as an Army officer arrested for cheating 17 women in the pretext of marriage to the tune of ₹6.6 crores.

● Stolen durga matha idol worth ₹1 crore recovered

● Recovered ₹1.28 crores from a gang of house burglars

● Smuggled boxes of foreign cigarettes worth ₹1.03 crores seized by North Zone Task Force team.

● Automobile theft case cracked and recovered 77 vehicles worth ₹1 crore from a gang of three men.

ZONAL WISE REPORT

CENTRAL ZONE

Cases investigated - 3,838

Cases finalised - 2,503

Petitions received - 11,006

Dial 100 calls received - 43,435

EAST ZONE

Cases investigated - 3,962

Cases finalised - 2,852

Petitions received - 10,332

Dial 100 calls received - 31,534

NORTH ZONE

Cases investigated - 4,538

Cases finalised - 3,321

Petitions received - 14,692

Dial 100 calls received - 29,359

SOUTH ZONE

Cases investigated - 6,300

Cases finalised - 4,796

Petitions received - 19,484

Dial 100 calls received - 27,854

WEST ZONE

Cases investigated - 8,234

Cases finalised - 5,438

Petitions received - 26,387

Dial 100 calls received - 73,682

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

"2020 was a year of traffic tragedies and awareness," said the traffic officials, adding that the Hyderabad city witnessed 226 fatal accidents, in which 119 were because of commuters not wearing a helmet.

More than 2,000 challans were issued on an average every day through CCTV cameras for violations like signal-jumping and wrong-side driving.

As per an independent research, the traffic movement is the fastest in Hyderabad as compared to other Metro cities, said additional CP of Hyderabad Traffic Anil Kumar.

"The work done by the traffic officials during the Hyderabad floods was such an excellent execu-

THE WORK done by the traffic officials during the Hyderabad floods was such an excellent execution of command. I have never seen such determination in the force before to go all out and tackle a problem as a team.

— ANIL KUMAR  
Additional CP of Hyderabad Traffic

tion of command. I have never seen such determination in the force before to go all out and tackle a problem as a team. We recently had a convergence meeting with the GHMC officials, in which they appreciated the decrease in accidents and the way we handled the crisis of Covid and floods," said the official.

## Cyberfrauds up due to lockdown

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

The only increase in offences were cyber crimes, where cases of scams and cyberfrauds were reported in huge numbers. More than 50 percent of cyber crimes were linked to Jamtara, which is the underbelly for cyber frauds which gave many officials sleepless nights, said Shikha Goel, additional commissioner of Hyderabad city police.

While the Cyber crimes police registered 1,393 cases in 2019, 2020 saw a jump upto 2,314 cases.

With lockdown and availability of smartphones and internet, scamsters have become tech savvy this year.

● WHILE THE Cyber crimes police registered 1,393 cases in 2019, 2020 saw a jump upto 2,314 cases.

● WITH LOCKDOWN and availability of smartphones and internet, scamsters have become tech savvy this year.

"We received multiple cybercrime complaints ranging from OTP fraud, OLX scam, cyber abuse, indecent exposure, unsolicited obscene pictures, threats, malicious emails claiming the user's account was hacked, ransom demands, blackmail, and more. We also saw a huge increase in cyberstalking, bullying, and harassment against women," officials said.



OTHER STORIES

Four Maoists held, explosives recovered

**Bhadrachalam:** A person transporting explosives to Maoists and three couriers of Maoist party were taken into custody in two separate incidents in Bhadradi-Kothagudem district. Madakam Haribabu, 20-year-old, native of Uduthamalla village in Bijapur district in Chattisgarh was arrested while he was collecting explosives from a person at Kinnerasani bridge near Paloncha. Police caught him and seized 25 gelatin sticks, two detonators and an electric wire bundle from him. While interrogation, Haribabu agreed that he got it to give Maoist leaders. In another incident, three militia members of Maoist Party were arrested at R Kothagudem in Charla mandal.

WARANGAL-YADADRI SECTION OF NH 163 ASSIGNED TO NATION

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, DEC. 21

Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari inaugurated the Warangal — Yadadri section of NH 163, which completed four-laning, through virtual mode on Monday.

The 99km project was expedited at a cost of ₹1,890 crore. The minister also inaugurated and laid the foundation of 14 NH projects in Telangana on the day.

Speaking on the occasion, Gadkari informed that a total of 59 road works with approved length of 1,918 kms and a cost of ₹17,617 crore have been sanctioned in Telangana in the last 6 years.

He said, almost all of the 33 districts in the state have connectivity with National Highways except Peddapalli.

SRLIP DRY RUN IN FIRST WEEK OF FEBRUARY

RAVINDRA SESHU | DC KHAMMAM, DEC. 21

The works of Sitrama Lift Irrigation Project (SRLIP) are going on war-footing. The officials planned to conduct a dry run of the project in the first week of February. The pump house works in V K Ramavaram and Kamalapuram will be completed by January 15.

The officials are considering starting the dry run to the three pump houses at a time. The state government advisor on Lift Irrigation projects K. Penta Reddy proposed that the government start the dry run to three pump houses on one day.

Erection of electrical panel boards and pump boards is commenced and works will be completed in a couple of weeks.

A checklist on the works to be taken up is ready and the contract company Mega Engineering and Infrastructure Limited is going as per the list.

SRLIP executive engineer Babu Rao said that the project works were hit a little during the lockdown period and some works were done during the time. He said that they sent a report to the government on the progress of the works.

Bandi asks officials to work for all round development of district

PULI SHARATH KUMAR | DC SIRCILLA, DEC. 21

Karimnagar MP and chairman of the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (Disha) Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Monday directed the officials of concerned departments and public representatives to work in coordination for the all round development of the district and to create awareness among the people about the various welfare schemes that are implemented and to strive hard for providing employment opportunities for the unemployed youth in the district.

Presiding the meeting that was held here at Podupu Bhavan in Rajanna Sircilla district, Sanjay Kumar ordered the officials to take necessary steps to prevent spoiling of food grains stored in the schools and to implement the mid-day meals scheme perfectly after re-opening of the schools.



MP Bandi Sanjay presiding over a meeting held at Podupu Bhavan in Rajanna Sircilla district on Monday.

He asked the district officials to hand over the details of the beneficiaries under Ujjwala Yojana Scheme so that he can send proposals to the centre for sanctioning of gas connections to them.

The officials of the health department informed the committee that Janani Suraksha Yojana Scheme is implemented perfectly in the district under which each pregnant woman belonging to rural areas is

sanctioned with ₹700 and urban areas are sanctioned with ₹600. The patients who are suffering from TB and Leprosy are also given pension of ₹500 every month under Nikshaya Poshan Yojana.

The centre has sanctioned ₹10 lakh funds during Covid-19 which were used for purchasing of masks and sanitisers.

Sanjay Kumar said that the state and central government are introducing

several welfare schemes for the development of all sections of people.

It is the minimum responsibility of the officials of the concerned department to take them to every person living in the rural and urban areas.

Irrespective of political parties, the public representatives along with the district officials must work in coordination to provide better services to the people transparently.

For every six months, Disha committee meetings must be conducted and whenever time permits, a special meeting will also be conducted with the officials of various departments keeping in view the welfare of the people, he advised.

District Collector D. Krishna Bhaskar, ZP Chairperson N. Aruna, Additional Collectors R. Anjaiah and Sathya Prasad, ZP CEO Gautham Reddy, DRDO K. Koutilya were among those who were present along with others.

Cong slams TRS, BJP over crop insurance

Demand release of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bheema Yojana funds

DC CORRESPONDENT ADILABAD, DEC. 21

Congress leaders on Monday criticised the TRS and the BJP for not releasing state and Central due share of premium towards the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bheema Yojana. They gave a call to the farmers to question elected representatives of both the parties whenever they visit their villages.

The leaders also strongly opposed the three farm Acts introduced by the Centre.

Stating that the TRS and the BJP are playing out a drama over crop insurance, the leaders asked them to stage dhar-

na in front of the Krushi Bhavan in Delhi instead of Pragathi Bhavan if they are really committed to the farmers' cause.

The state government is to get its due share of ₹205 crore for 2018 kharif and ₹320 crore for 2019 kharif.

Addressing a massive dharna in front of the collectorate attended by a large number of farmers demanding the release of pending insurance for cotton farmers, the Congress leaders also asked the farmers to stage protests in their respective mandals till they get the insurance.

It might be recalled that farmers of Adilabad have been waiting for insur-

ance under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bheema Yojana and are yet to get total of ₹525 crore for 2018-19 and 2019-20.

MLC Jeevan Reddy described Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao as 'Chhota Modi' who failed to come to the rescue of the distressed farmers and the same is the case with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Both the Modis cheated the farmers," they said.

Former minister and Adilabad MLA Ramachandra Reddy said the farmers should fight to get their right and added that farmers are not beggars and they are asking for the crop insurance for which they

had paid premium.

TPCC state general secretary Gandrath Sujatha said farmers should raise their voice and question the elected local MLAs such as Jogu Ramanna, Rathod Bapurao and MP Soyam Bapurao for the delay in sanctioning the crop insurance.

Adilabad DCC incharge president Sajid Khan recalled that it was due to the Congress that farmers benefited the most through various welfare schemes like crop loan waiver and free power for agriculture.

Congress ZPTC Goka Ganesh Reddy and senior leaders Digamber Patil, Yasam Narasingh Rao and others also spoke.

New project



The four lane NH 163 between Warangal and Yadadri at Pembarthy village in Jangaon district.

Kolam PVTGs denied Kalyana Lakshmi benefits since 2-years

DC CORRESPONDENT ADILABAD, DEC. 21

Two married women belonging to Kolam tribe, considered a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), have not got their Kalyana Lakshmi assistance though they got married in 2018 and applied for the benefit.

Instead, Adilabad district revenue officials

have now asked the tribal women to produce medical certificates to prove that their grooms had attained the marriageable age when they got into wedlock in 2018.

Many Adivasis face the problem of having accurate data about their birth and age. These are rarely recorded, particularly in the interior areas. Often, their real age will not match the

age mentioned in their Aadhaar card. Thus, most Adivasis get denied their rightful benefits, remarked Kolam Seva Sangham leader Kumra Gantu Bai of Kolamguda.

Gantu Bai says officials have no hesitation in sanctioning Kalyana Lakshmi to ineligible persons who indulge in fraud, but neglect genuine applicants.

She said Madavi

Jangubai and Atram Vijaya of Kolam-Dahiguda in Adilabad Rural mandal had got married under her supervision in 2018 and applied for financial assistance under Kalyana Lakshmi. The two Kolam women, who are orphans, got married with the hope that they will get financial assistance under Kalyana Lakshmi and their life will improve.

113 KITS students placed in Cognizant

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, DEC. 21

As many as 113 students belonging to disciplines of engineering secured jobs during the on Campus recruitment drive conducted by Cognizant Technology Solutions at the

Kakatiya Institute of Technology and Sciences, Warangal, said Rajya Sabha member and secretary & correspondent Capt.V. Laxmikantha Rao.

He congratulated the students who have done exceptionally well in the exclusive Campus Recruitment drives, held

in the present 2020-2021 academic year.

According to him, the number of students who were placed this year has crossed the 300 mark and currently at 303.

Rao said the institute is also focusing on placements for PG students with industry relevant curriculum, and two

M.Tech students of power electronics secured jobs in GE Energy and the salary (CTC) offered to them is ₹10.4L per annum.

Earlier, Experian, a leading Global IT company picked 2 students of CSB, offering them a Salary (CTC) of ₹8.1 L per annum.

STUDENTS TOLD TO TAKE HIGHER EDU. SERIOUS

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, DEC. 21

Mahabubabad district collector V.P. Gautham on Monday distributed six laptops to six SC students who had secured seats in various institutions across the country for higher education after studying up to Intermediate in Telangana state residential schools in remote areas.

During a meeting held by the department of social welfare in the conference hall of the Collector's office on Monday, Gautham interacted with the students and asked them to pursue higher education seriously and understand that economic development comes with education.

The students thanked the collector and presented him with plants. Additional collectors Abhilasha Abhinav, M. Venkateshwarlu, SC welfare officer Raju and staff were present among others.

VH arrested while on his way to attend NSUI strike

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, DEC. 21

Former MP V. Hanumatha Rao was arrested on Monday at Pembarthi of Jangaon district and was lodged at the Lingala Ghanpur police station while he was on his way to Warangal to participate in the relay hunger strike organised by NSUI at Kakatiya University in protest of the central government's new farm laws.

Speaking to media persons, Rao criticised the KCR government for arresting him. "It is not right to suppress the voice of the opposition leaders. It seems like KCR is giving more preference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi by ignoring the welfare of farmers," Rao said.

In protest against the arrest of Hanumantha Rao at Jangaon, the students and Congress leaders blocked the highway near KU second gate in Hanamkonda.

Demanding the Central government to roll back the three farm laws, the NSUI along with other students unions staged a relay hunger strike programme at Kakatiya University (KU) crossroads at Hanamkonda. Warangal



Congress leaders staging a protest at KU crossroads in Hanamkonda on Monday.

District Congress Committee president Naini Rajender Reddy criticised the Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao for his double standards over the farm bills.

"KCR who recently made a trip to Delhi needs to clarify his stand over the farm bills. TRS government which supported the Bharat Bandh, a nationwide shutdown call opposing the Centre's recently enacted farm laws, has suddenly changed its stand," Reddy said. He questioned why the TRS government was trying to prevent the student unions' protest against the farm laws.

The DCC president criticised KCR for arresting former MP V. Hanumantha Rao who was on his way to Warangal to take part in the protest.

NSUI state president Venkat Balmoor said that KCR cannot stop the agitations with illegal arrests. He appealed to people to condemn the arrest of Hanumantha Rao and other Congress leaders.

NSUI leaders P. Sathish, M. Abhinav Goud, Ajith Reddy, Premchand, senior Congress leaders Meesala Prakash and K. Srinivas were among others present. The police arrested several protesting leaders.

AP rice millers pay more to farmers

RAVINDRA SESHU | DC KHAMMAM, DEC. 21

The rice millers of Andhra Pradesh who came as saviors for paddy farmers of Khammam district that raised sannarakalu (quality rice) are hitting the interests of Khammam rice millers. As per the details, the farmers of Andhra Pradesh used to raise and produce doddu rakalu like MTU-1061, MTU-1010 and MTU-1001 more than sannarakalu line BPT-5204, MTU-1262 and RNRI-15048. The AP government is lifting sannarakalu rice to supply the beneficiaries of the public distribution system.

With this, the rice millers of Andhra Pradesh are coming to Telangana districts particularly Khammam and lifting sannarakalu from 45 villages in Kallur, Sattu-

palli, Penuballi, Kusumanchi, Mudigonda and Nalakondapalli mandals in Khammam district.

The supervisors of the AP rice mills visited various villages in these mandals two months back and identified the sannarkalu paddy varieties which did not face pest attacks.

They are lifting 450 tonnes of sannarakalu paddy per day from Khammam district. These varieties are being milled as rice and selling the kirana shops in AP. The farmers of Khammam districts are happy over the purchase of paddy by AP millers.

N. Ramaiah, a farmer from Jakkepalli in Mudigonda mandal said, "The AP millers are coming to the thrashing floors and lifting paddy by paying ₹1,888 per quintal, which is MSP."

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With Specification No. 1/2020-21  
Sealed tenders are invited from TSNPDCL registered contractors of Warangal District for the work in Hanamkonda Town Division. The details of works can be obtained from our website [www.tsnpdcl.in](http://www.tsnpdcl.in).  
**The important dates of tender are:**  
1) Last date of sale of tender schedule : 28.12.2020 up to 17:00 hrs.  
2) Submission of sealed tenders : 29.12.2020 up to 13:30 hrs.  
3) Opening of tender schedules : 29.12.2020 at 16:00 hrs.  
The Tender schedules are to be purchased on above dates from O/o. Divisional Engineer, Operation, TSNPDCL, Hanamkonda Town payable at Warangal on payment of Rs. 1050/- (inclusive of GST) in shape of Demand Draft in favour of Divisional Engineer, Operation, TSNPDCL, Hanamkonda Town.  
**SD/- Divisional Engineer, Operation, Hanamkonda Town.**  
**SHORT TENDER NOTICE NO. 03/2020-21 OF DE /OP/ MAHABUBABAD.**  
WITH SPECIFICATION Nos. 01 & 02/2020-21  
Sealed tenders are invited from TSNPDCL registered contractors of Mahabubabad District Proposal for Releasing of 13 No Agri load each 5HP(13\*5=65HP) to Sri.Dandu Shoban S/o Venkataiah and others at Jangamvenigudem (V) in Kothaguda section & Releasing 15 No's Agri loads each 5HP (15\*5HP= 75HP) to Sri. Daresani Sariniah s/o Ramiah and others at Jangalapally (V) in Kothaguda section Sub-Division, Mahabubabad Division of Operation circle Mahabubabad.  
The details of works can be obtained from our website [www.tsnpdcl.in](http://www.tsnpdcl.in)  
**The important dates of tender are:**  
1) Last date of sale of tender schedule : 28.12.2020 up to 17:00 hrs.  
2) Submission of sealed tenders : 29.12.2020 up to 13:30 hrs.  
3) Opening of tender schedules : 30.12.2020 at 16:00 hrs.  
The Tender schedules are to be purchased on above dates from O/o. Divisional Engineer, Operation, TSNPDCL, Mahabubabad payable at Mahabubabad on payment of Rs. 1050/- (inclusive of GST) in shape of Demand Draft in favour of Divisional Engineer, Operation, Mahabubabad.  
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## SHORT TAKES

ARJUN RAMPAL  
APPEARS BEFORE  
NCB FOR 2nd TIMESAURABH JOSHI | DC  
MUMBAI, DEC. 21

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) questioned actor Arjun Rampal second time in connection with the ongoing drugs probe involving Bollywood, which began following the suicide of actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Rampal (47) was grilled earlier in November along with his girlfriend Gabriella, a South African national, whose brother Agisilaos has been arrested by NCB over his links with international drug cartels.

The officials said that Rampal arrived at the NCB office before noon after having sought time to appear till December 22. He was issued summons last week. The agency grilled Rampal in the backdrop of the data retrieved from the electronics that were seized from his residence following a raid in November.

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

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

CRPF CONSTABLE  
RENEGES ON  
RAPE CLAIM

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

Police said Khajan Singh was questioned and his statement has also been recorded by the investigation team but refused to divulge further details, saying the investigation is still underway.

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

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

This came after the victim registered her statement before the magistrate, a police officer said.

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

J&K'S DDC POLLS  
VOTE COUNTING  
BEGINS TODAYYUSUF JAMEEL | DC  
SRINAGAR, DEC. 21

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

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

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

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

Didi asks Shah to check  
facts on Bengal growth

Shah lying to gain political mileage in WB, says Mamata

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, DEC. 21

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

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

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

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

Earlier, at Nabanna, the state secretariat, Banerjee boasted of WB's achievements in all sectors with facts and figures, and attacked Shah and his party.

CONG LEADERS  
HAND OVER  
SONIA'S LETTER  
TO UDDHAVBHAGWAN PARAB | DC  
MUMBAI, DEC. 21

Indicating that the Congress is not happy with the Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government, senior party leader Prithviraj Chavan on Monday said the state government must implement the common minimum programme.

He said the CMP is not a manifesto of any particular party.

A Maharashtra Congress delegation led by state party chief Balasaheb Thorat met CM Uddhav Thackeray and gave him a letter written by Congress president Sonia Gandhi seeking implementation of common minimum programme (CMP) and welfare measures for Dalits and tribals.

"The objective of the CMP was that there should not be anything done that is contrary to Congress's fundamental principles. Common minimum programme was not any party's manifesto. If any decision is taken is not in accordance with our fundamental principles, then we will have our objections to it," Chavan said.

However, the Congress leader also reiterated that there are no serious references among the MVA partners.

"Sonia Gandhi's letter is only a communication in the form of a letter. The MVA government is strong and working together," he said.

In the letter, dated December 14, Sonia Gandhi reminded Thackeray of the CMP of the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress government and sought implementation of certain measures for the welfare of Dalits and tribals.

She demanded reservation in government contracts for SC/ST professionals to promote entrepreneurship among them, among other things.

● CONGRESS LEADERS reiterate that there are no serious references among the MVA partners and Sonia Gandhi's letter is only a communication in the form of a letter. The MVA government is strong and working together.

BJP MP gets ready to divorce  
his wife for joining the TMCRAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, DEC. 21

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

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

divorce notice. In the afternoon Sujata, who was found working actively for the BJP to ensure her husband's victory in the last Lok Sabha polls, walked into the TMC office.

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

With tearful eyes Khan,

also the state BJYM chief, said, "Our relations were of 10 years. But I did not know that politics could end it. I am not stopping her. Love is above politics. I quit the TMC for the development of Bengal. I knew the TMC steals cattle and coal. But I never thought the TMC would steal someone's wife."

Getting the legal notice from her husband, Sujata Khan broke down and said, "Ours was a love marriage. I loved my husband a lot and braved many odds for him. If joining a different party (leads to) divorce, then it's purely his personal decision because I know politics and family issues should remain separate."

In a blistering attack on the BJP over communal politics, the CM said, "We love our Constitution. It is our pillar. But can you tell me if it is thoroughly nurtured, and accepted in real sense, secularism in India? No. It is typical politics of hatred that is going on. I condemn it."

Earlier, at Nabanna, the state secretariat, Banerjee boasted of WB's achievements in all sectors with facts and figures, and attacked Shah and his party.

She alleged, "The BJP is a party of cheats. For politics, they can do and say anything. Hope Shah knows what is gold or not. Speaking for a political party and furnishing false information does not suit a home minister. Amitiji, yeh aapko shobha nehi deti hai. (It is not right for you to talk of false and wrong information which were prepared by your party workers.) You do not have an idea of it. Please cross check what you say. I have

the evidence against whatever you claimed."

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

## All for a glimpse



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

## SPECIAL SESSION

## Cabinet to recommend Governor Khan convene session on December 23

## Kerala to pass resolution against farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
DEC. 21

Kerala Cabinet on Monday decided to convene a special session of Assembly on December 23 to discuss Centre's farm bills in detail.

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

farm bills against which farmers across the country are currently agitating.

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

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



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

Earlier the Kerala government had shot off a letter to the Union agriculture minister Narendra

Russia will not take sides  
in India, China tiff: EnvoySRIDHAR  
KUMARASWAMI | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Russia will "not take sides" in the Sino-Indian border dispute but wants an atmosphere of cooperation and enhanced dialogue between the two Asian giants, top Russian diplomats said on Monday, adding that "non-inclusive" Indo-Pacific concepts like the four-nation Quad can be "detrimental" to regional stability and inclusive cooperation in the region.

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

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

Boeing pitches its  
jet for Indian NavyPAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

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

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

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

The Indian Navy, which is now operating MiG-

helicopter and AK-47 203 rifle deal processes are expedited, "we will see good progress".

On the Sino-Indian border dispute, Russian deputy chief of mission (DCM) Roman N.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NIGHT CURFEW  
IN MUMBAI TILL  
JANUARY 5BHAGWAN PARAB | DC  
MUMBAI, DEC. 21

Amidst the reports of new Coronavirus variant spreading rapidly in Britain, the Maharashtra government, as a precautionary measure, announced a night curfew in metropolitan areas of the state from December 22 to January 5. We need to remain more alert during the fortnight, said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

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

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





## SHORT TAKES

## ARMY TO RUN MAYA TRAIN: MEXICAN PREZ

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

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

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

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

## RARE SALES OF CHRISTMAS ITEMS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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

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

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

## ISRAELI PARL TO VOTE ON BILL TO DELAY POLL CALL

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

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

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

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

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

## RWANDAN TROOPS DEPLOYED IN C. AFRICAN REP.

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

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

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

A spokesman for the UN's MINUSCA peacekeeping force in CAR said Sunday that armed rebels that had been advancing on the capital Bangui had been pushed back.

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

## Countries begin to seal off UK

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

London, Dec. 21: France became the latest European country to close all its borders with the UK after Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, the Irish Republic, Turkey and Canada suspended flights amid growing concerns of an "out of control" new variant of Coronavirus spreading at a much faster pace in parts of England. India, so far, remains in the travel bubble with the UK, with strict testing and self-isolation rules in place. But with most of Britain now in the strictest Tier 4 lockdown, all non-essential travel remains banned for the majority.

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

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

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

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

The government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) estimates the variant could increase the R number — or rate of

infection — by between 0.4 and 0.9. The R number is how many other people one person will infect on average and an epidemic is in effect if it rises above one. Fears of the new variant meant that over 21 million people in England and



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

## EU regulator approves vaccine

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

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

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

vaccine for the next year.

"This is really a historic scientific achievement," said Emer Cooke, the head of the agency. "It is a significant step forward in our fight against the pandemic." The approval needs to be rubber-stamped by the EU's executive branch on Monday evening, a move its chief said is likely to happen Monday evening.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted that the EMA's approval was "a

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

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

## Oz detects new UK strain; HK cancels Britain flights

Singapore, Dec. 21: Australia said on Monday it had detected cases of the new fast-spreading coronavirus strain identified in the United Kingdom, while Hong Kong and India said they would suspend flights from Britain.

Two travellers from the United Kingdom to Australia's New South Wales state were found carrying the mutated variant of the virus that Britain has said could be up to 70% more infectious. Both are in hotel quarantine, and the recent spike in infections in Sydney is not linked to this, authorities said.

The new strain has prompted Britain's European neighbours and several others including Canada and Iran to close their doors to travellers from the country.

Much is unknown about

the strain, but experts said current vaccines should still be effective against it.

Asian nations, including Japan and South Korea, said they were monitoring the new strain even as they battle a rise in infections at home.

Hong Kong banned flights from Britain in a bid to curb already rising case numbers in the dense financial hub. The Chinese special administrative region said on Monday that people arriving from Britain before Dec. 22 would have to quarantine for three weeks instead of two.

India announced a suspension of all flights from the UK until the end of the year and said all passengers arriving from the UK before then will be tested on arrival at airports.

Taiwan, which also has a 14-day quarantine, said on

Sunday there were no plans at present to stop flights from Britain.

Britain is one of 23 countries that India shares an "air bubble" with, India's health minister said the country was prepared to deal with the new strain and that there was no need to panic.

Japan, where entry from Britain is already banned in principle, said it would keep in close touch with other countries as well as the World Health Organisation to see how the new type of virus was spreading. The new strain in Britain comes as cases have surged recently in several Asian countries that successfully contained the pandemic earlier. The spikes have prompted localised lockdowns in some countries.

— Reuters

Wales who entered new restrictions at midnight are being told to stay at home, while non-essential shops and businesses have to close. Those living under the newly-created Tier 4 restrictions in England will now be unable to mix

with other households indoors at Christmas, unless they are part of their existing support bubble.

Opposition Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer accused Prime Minister Johnson of "gross negligence" and said he should apolo-

## PUBLIC MEETINGS BEING CURBED IN S. KOREAN CAPITAL

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

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

— AP

gise for his handling of the pandemic. He said the British people were paying the price for Johnson's "incompetence", "indecision" and "weak leadership" that was "costing lives and costing jobs".

— PTI

## Biden to receive Coronavirus shot

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

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

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

## Congress deal on Covid-19 reprieve

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

The House was expected to vote on the legislation very late Sunday or Monday and Senate action would follow. Lawmakers are

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

— AP

## MAJOR OUTBREAK

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

## Virus spikes after jail inmate transfers

Detroit, Dec. 21: Families of men incarcerated at Michigan's Kinross Correctional Facility believed its remote location would spare it from a deadly Covid-19 outbreak. For a while, they seemed to be right.

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

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

Though agency officials say it's not because of the transfers, more than 1,100 prisoners have now been infected, at least seven have died and more than 100 guards have fallen ill. The prisoners who came to Kinross had been transferred twice, sent first to Marquette after a riot where they were held, and then had tested positive for Covid-19 there before

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

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

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

The reductions were keeping in line with medical guidelines. But most of

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

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

— AFP



DECCAN  
Chronicle

22 DECEMBER 2020

Battleground Bengal:  
Didi faces a huge test

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

The BJP as a challenger has many advantages — the virtually limitless funds it has access to, which neither the TMC nor any other party in India can match. Add to this is the dominance due to its control of the Central government and of several states, most of which made possible by the election machine Mr Shah and his boss Narendra Modi have devised since 2014.

However, West Bengal isn't quite the fertile ground the Modi-Shah duo are familiar with in northern India. Mr Shah had to acknowledge, during his just-completed visit, that here the Bengali identity transcends all the different ways the BJP slices and splices Hindutva-related issues elsewhere to produce electoral victories with remarkable regularity. The cries of "Jai Shri Ram" at Mr Shah's impressive roadshow at Bolpur did elicit roars of approval, but it later transpired the crowd was brought in from a neighbouring Hindi-speaking state. If the BJP is wise, it won't repeat that exercise in a hurry.

The BJP's posters in Bolpur and Santiniketan, home to Rabindranath Tagore's Visvabharati, in which the home minister's photo was placed above Gurudev's, which set off widespread protests, was yet another ill-advised move by a party whose local leadership seems singularly clueless about how it would hurt Bengali sentiments. Likewise, to speak of the homogenisation and standardisation of Indian culture, there couldn't be a more inappropriate spot than Gurudev's campus celebrating diversity, where "narrow domestic walls" have no place.

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

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Is China behind Oli's move?

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

Whatever the court's verdict, it is evident the Himalayan nation is in the throes of a political crisis. The dissonance within the ruling establishment had been brewing for eight months. Mr Oli was PM and co-chairman of the Nepal Communist Party along with Pushpa Kumar Dahal Prachanda, a former PM.

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

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

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

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Subhani



Congress drifts as real  
issues are left ignored



Parsa Venkateshwar  
Rao Jr

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

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

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

The dissidents said that there would be another

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

This has always been the way of the Congress, in the party as well as in the days when it was in power, not to face up to problems or to solve them. The issues are left unaddressed. At the most, consultations without outcomes are held. It looks like procrastination is the chosen path of the Congress even now. It might have been the secret of the party's success in the past, but it does not look like it is effective any longer.

It looks like procrastination is the chosen path of the Congress even now. It might have been the secret of the party's success in the past, but it does not look like it is effective any longer. An aggressive BJP is not marginalising the Congress as much as the Congress is busy making itself irrelevant. Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy. Rahul Gandhi has instinctively

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

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

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

The real crisis in the Congress is that of managing the economy. Rahul Gandhi has instinctively

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quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	45,553.96	-3.00
Nifty 50	13,328.40	-3.14
S&P 500*	3,669.42	-1.08
Dollar (₹)	73.79	-0.29
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.54	1.75
Euro (₹)	89.84	0.30
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,421▲117	0.23
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.11	-2.15
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.957	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.930	-0.018

\* As of 9:30 PM IST

FinMin releases  
₹6K cr to states  
for GST shortfall

The finance ministry on Monday released the eighth weekly instalment of ₹6,000 crore to the states to meet the GST compensation shortfall, taking the total amount released so far under this window to ₹48,000 crore. The Centre had set up a special borrowing window in October, 2020 to meet the estimated shortfall of ₹1.10 lakh crore in revenue arising on account of implementation of GST.

Booking for new  
Audi A4 sedan  
begins in India



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

AstraZeneca gets  
nod to market  
asthma drug

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

Vineet Agarwal  
takes over as  
Assocham chief



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

Corporate profits hit  
an all-time high in Q2

Margins widen on lower input costs, better utilisation

Mumbai, Dec. 21: Corporate profits rose 15 per cent to touch an all-time high in the September quarter as margins widened on softer input costs and better utilisation levels, the research arm of leading rating agency Crisil said on Monday.

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

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

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

FPI inflows touch  
12-yr high in Nov.

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

At \$8.1 billion, India has received the highest FPI inflows among the emerging markets in

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

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

in sectors excluding banking and finance and oil and gas, said improving utilisation levels, along with better management of power, fuel and raw material cost by large

companies contributed to the handsome profit growth.

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

rial cost during the quarter, it said.

From an employee costs perspective, which is leading to the concerns, it said 370 manufacturing firms in its sample showed a contraction of four per cent while the same for the service sector reported a moderate growth.

The growth in profits came even as the revenues did not go up, the report said, pointing out that the topline was "stable" in Q2 as compared to the year-ago period after falling 29 per cent in the April-June quarter.

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

Delhi High Court refuses to restrain Amazon

SANGEETHA G.  
CHENNAI, DEC. 21

In a relief to Amazon Inc, the Delhi High Court on Monday declined to grant an interim injunction to Future Group which had sought an order to restrain the global e-commerce company from interfering in the \$3.4-billion deal between Future

Group and RIL. However, the court found that the board resolution approving the Future-RIL deal was not prima facie void.

"...the present application is disposed off, declining the grant of interim injunction as prayed for by Future Retail, however, the statutory authorities/regulators are directed to take the decision on

the applications/objections in accordance with the law," the court said.

After Future Group announced the sale of its retail and wholesale business to Reliance Retail in August, Amazon had filed an arbitration petition with Emergency Arbitrator at Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) in October, claim-

ing that Future breached the contract which was entered while taking an indirect stake in their retail business by buying shares in Future Coupons.

The High Court also observed that the parties have expressly chosen the SIAC rules as the curial law governing the conduct of arbitration proceedings.

SUCSEED VC FUND  
INKS DEALS WITH  
3 STARTUP FIRMS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

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

Making the announcement, Vikrant Varshney, co-founder and managing partner of the venture capital fund, said, "We are excited to state an overwhelming response and oversubscription to our first closing of the maiden ₹100 crore fund. Angel Investors, CXOs in large Domestic and global enterprises, family offices, and few family trusts have participated in the first successful closing of ₹40 crore."

Announcing the details of new early-stage investments, Vikrant said "Indovation Fund has identified three startups — Stargate, Auris, and Freestand — for investment and has signed term sheets."

GMR gets nod for  
demerger plan

New Delhi, Dec. 21: GMR Infrastructure on Monday said that it has received consent from stock exchanges, with no adverse observations, on its proposed restructuring involving demerger of its non-airport vertical business.

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

The company said it had filed an application to "the BSE and National Stock Exchange of India towards the composite scheme of amalgamation and arrangement amongst GMR Power Infra (GPIL), GMR Infrastructure, GMR Power and Urban Infra and their respective shareholders (scheme)".

In August this year, GMR Infrastructure unveiled a strategic group restructuring plan involving demerger of non-airport vertical business as part of efforts to simplify the corporate holding structure.

The restructuring is a

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

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

The vertical split demerger will go a long way in facilitating deeper understanding of the airport business independently as compared to other business verticals within the group, the statement added.

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

Global pharma may  
look at India for APIs

SANGEETHA G.  
CHENNAI, DEC. 21

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

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

Indian companies have an edge, given their long history of supplying formulations and APIs globally, better quality and regulatory compliance and better supply reliability. However, the financial

Mahesh Bank election  
ends up in controversy

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, DEC. 21

In a dramatic turn of events, results of elections of a new board of directors for AP Mahesh Co-operative Bank have been withheld by the returning officer, following allegations of malpractice.

As many as 32,000 shareholders cast their votes in the elections conducted at LB Stadium on Sunday to elect 15 directors of the bank. The counting commenced on Monday at Nizam College.

After the completion of six rounds of counting, Bhagwati Devi Baldewa, the challenger to the incumbent chairman Ramesh Bung, objected to

After rival candidate Bhagwati Devi alleged bogus votes, returning officer S. Tharani abruptly stopped the counting and withheld the results. This resulted in a mild tension between supporters of both the panels.

the counting of votes in the seventh round alleging that they are bogus votes.

Returning officer S. Tharani abruptly stopped the counting and left the counting centre. The withholding of results triggered a mild tension between supporters of both the panels.

Bung alleged that the

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

According to sources, the panel led by the incumbent chairman had secured 12 posts, while the Baldewa panel got three seats.

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

89% Indians are keen to  
resume travel, says survey

New Delhi, Dec. 21: Travel services firm Thomas Cook India and its Group Firm SOTC Travel on Monday said that 89 per cent of respondents in a survey conducted by them across tier-1 and 2 cities in India displayed keen interest to resume travel, revealing resurgence of consumer confidence.

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

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

About 67 per cent respondents are willing to travel in the next 6 months while 33 per cent indicated that they would wait for the launch of the vaccine, according to the survey.

"Respondents continue to display an increasing focus on hygiene and safety — with 93 per cent respondents highlighting

this as the most important factor while deciding a holiday," Thomas Cook India said.

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

With health and safety topping the priority list in travel decisions, 73 per cent respondents said that they are willing to increase spends to ensure higher levels of health and safety on their holiday, the company said in the filing. —PTI

MOST INDIANS SEEK  
TO BUY 5G READY  
SMARTPHONES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOCUS | PROFIT

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

Centre plans tough annual targets for PSUs

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

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

State-run companies have traditionally largely targeted raising output

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

stake sales.

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

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

For the first time, India will include annual targets for state-run companies on metrics such as earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA), according to the sources

and a document on the draft guidelines, which is currently before a government committee.

Other targets will include increasing market capitalisation or share price, as well as measures such as return on net worth and capital employed, they said.

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

Managers at state-run companies will have their bonuses and incentives linked to meeting the annual targets. The finance ministry did not respond to emails seeking comments. —Reuters



## SHORT TAKES

## Man Utd revel in 6-2 win vs Leeds

**Manchester:** Manchester United waited 16 years to play old rivals Leeds in the English Premier League, and then made it look distinctly second-class. United charged to a 6-2 victory on Sunday, though both teams could easily have scored more, as they roared back into the EPL title race in third. The easy win put United ahead of Tottenham, which swept United aside 6-1 in October. Scott McTominay looked like one of the Premier League's top scorers as Man United swept into an early lead over Leeds. Defensive midfielder McTominay who hadn't scored in the EPL since March netted in the second and third minutes after he was left plenty of space to run through the Leeds defense. Bruno Fernandes and Victor Lindelof extended United's lead amid more static defending from Leeds, with more goals from Daniel James and Fernandes in the second half. — AP

## Mariners give BFC the blues

**Goa:** David Williams' 33rd-minute strike proved the difference as ATK Mohun Bagan got the better of Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League at the Fatorda Stadium on Monday. The Australian scored his first goal of the campaign with a stunner which was enough to inflict on Bengaluru, their first defeat of the season. The win took the Kolkata side level to 16 points from seven matches, the same as Mumbai City FC. Bengaluru stayed third with 12 points. ATKMB looked threatening from the start and had good opportunities to convert their dominance into goals. But Manvir Singh saw both his efforts easily saved by the keeper during the first quarter. ATKMB deservedly took the lead at the half-hour mark.

## Benzema leads Madrid to win

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

## AC Milan's Leao scores in 6 secs!

**Milan:** AC Milan forward Rafael Leao scored the fastest-ever goal in Serie A history on Sunday, netting after just six seconds in a 2-1 win at Sassuolo which kept his side top of the table ahead of city rivals Inter Milan. Milan, chasing a first Serie A title since 2011, launched straight into attack from kick-off, with Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu setting up Leao to slot home the rapid opener. The previous fastest goal in the Italian top flight had been Paolo Poggi's for Piacenza against Fiorentina in December 2001 after eight seconds. Milan have a one-point advantage on Antonio Conte's Inter who beat Spezia 2-1, with champions Juventus four points behind the leaders in third after a 4-0 win over Parma on Saturday. — AFP

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

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

## FOOTBALL

**Italian League:** Cratone vs Parma from 11 pm, Juventus vs Fiorentina from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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

## WWE

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

## All eyes on Jadeja

## Ravindra likely to replace Vihari in playing XI for second Test

**Adelaide, Dec. 21:** The Indian team management will be keenly monitoring Ravindra Jadeja's progress leading up to the Boxing Day Test against Australia this weekend as, if fit, the all-rounder could walk into the playing XI in place of Hanuma Vihari. Jadeja, who suffered a concussion during the first T20 international, also sustained a hamstring injury which ruled him out of the first Test.

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

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

But if fit, the axe will fall on Andhra Pradesh batsman Vihari, not because of his low scores in the Adelaide Test but purely based on the best combination that Ajinkya Rahane and Ravi Shastri can put on the field.

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

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

## INDIA'S PRACTICE CANCELLED

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

With skipper Virat



India's Ravindra Jadeja stretches during a practice session in Adelaide on December 16, ahead of the first Test against Australia. — AFP

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

## ROHIT GUARANTINING IN SYDNEY

Senior batsman Rohit Sharma can start training from January 3 ahead of the Sydney Test. He is currently locked in a hard quarantine in a two-room apartment in Sydney. The BCCI, at the moment, can't shift Rohit in the middle of quarantine. — PTI

## BOXING DAY TEST IS CRUCIAL, SAYS BURNS

**Adelaide, Dec. 21:** If opener Joe Burns' views are any indication, another onerous task awaits an embattled Indian team, as Australia are entering the second Test believing that a favourable result for them in Melbourne could "decide the fate" of the four-match series.

"We have got some scars as well, we just have to prepare well, start well and carry on the momentum from the last game," Burns said during a virtual press conference on Monday.

"We know that Indians are going to bounce back in

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

— JOE BURNS  
Australia opener

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

The absence of Kohli and Mohammed Shami will be "big losses" but Burns is expecting a strong comeback by the visitors.

"I think Shami and Virat

are obviously big losses for India. In saying that the Indian team does have very good depth as well. So, they are still going to be very challenging," Burns said. "It is always hard to replace world class players like that, but when we look (at the guys) that they got to come in, we are going to prepare well for the next game. We know that Indians are going to bounce back strongly."

Shami was ruled out of the remainder of the Test series after a nasty blow on his hand led to a wrist fracture. — PTI

## KALLIS NAMED ENG BATTING CONSULTANT

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

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

"Seven coaches will join the squad for the two-Test tour," the ECB said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Brad Haddin

bowling attack.

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

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

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

one beats Australia. These next two wickets will be suited to Indian cricket, but I don't think they'll be able to turn it around," Haddin added. India created history by registering their maiden series win Down Under in 2018-19 on the back of a lethal pace-bowling attack.

"They had a great bowling attack the last time they come out here, and now with Shami out with a broken arm they don't have enough depth to cover that," Haddin said.

"Yes India were driving the game and we were talking at the start of day three about how Australia would get back into it, but the collapse they had has to leave some marks." — PTI

## Ian bats for on-field safety rules

**Adelaide, Dec. 21:** Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has advocated a review of on-field safety measures in cricket, saying it would be a good idea to "strengthen any law" that can protect tailenders when they face short-pitched bowling.

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

of banning the delivery altogether.

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

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

"In conducting this

review it would be appropriate to strengthen any law regarding the protection of tailenders in facing short-pitched bowling."

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

He said complaining about a player not being a like-for-like replacement "seems pointless".

A concussed Ravindra Jadeja being replaced by

leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal in the T20 series is a case in point.

"The heat rose in this argument when Chahal claimed three wickets and the player-of-the-match award in India's narrow victory. Complaining about a player not being a like-for-like replacement seems pointless; it's always going to be difficult to please all parties."

Chappell also stressed on improving the batsmen's technique to face the bouncer. — PTI

## Sindhu, Saina ready for action

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

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

The team, consisting of Sindhu, Saina, B. Sai Praneeeth, Kidambi Srikanth, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Ashwini Ponappa and N. Sikki Reddy, will begin their campaign with Yonex Thailand Open from January 12-17.

That will be followed by Toyota Thailand Open (January 19-24) and the prestigious HSBC BWF World Tour Finals which is rescheduled for January 27-31.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## GOLFER KO CAPS YEAR WITH CME GROUP TITLE

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

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

Ko, the No. 1 player in the world, put an emphatic caper on her truncated year on Sunday by shooting a final-round 6-under 66 and winning the CME Group Tour Championship by five strokes over Hannah Green and Sei Young Kim.

"I still can't believe it, that I'm here, that I won this tournament," Ko said.

With a birdie on the final hole, the LPGA's final putt of the season, Ko finished at 18 under for her seventh career LPGA win. Green's final-round 67 — on her 24th birthday — helped push her into the second-place tie.

Kim, who took a one-shot lead into the final round, shot 72 and that was good enough for her to clinch Rolex Player of the Year honours. Danielle Kang won the Vare Trophy for the lowest scoring average.

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

