

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 15 | DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 29°C
Min: 20°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Karthigai 30
Tithi: Prathamai
Star: Moolam
Rahukalam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam:
9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.07 am
Zohar: 12.09 pm
Asar: 3.19 pm
Maghrib: 5.45 pm
Isha: 7.01 pm

SUNSET TODAY 5.46 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.24 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 6.51 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 6.30 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+21,747)	(+352)
99,06,463	1,43,745

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+1,141)
TN: 8,00,029 11,909

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

7,29,28,823

DEATHS

16,24,001

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218

worldometers.info

John Le Carre, master spy story teller, dies

London: John le Carre, the spy-turned-novelist whose elegant and intricate narratives defined the Cold War espionage thriller and brought acclaim to a genre critics had once ignored, has died. He was 89. Le Carre's literary agency, Curtis Brown, said Sunday he died in Cornwall, southwest England on Saturday after a short illness. The agency said his death was not related to Covid-19. His family said he died of pneumonia.



AIIMS Nurses Union announces indefinite strike

New Delhi: The AIIMS Nurses Union went on an indefinite strike from Monday over their long pending demands, including those with regard to the Sixth Central Pay Commission and against contractual appointments, even as AIIMS director appealed them to call off their agitation and return to work.

Wisconsin Supreme Court tosses Trump election lawsuit

Madison (US): The Wisconsin Supreme Court on Monday rejected President Donald Trump's lawsuit attempting to overturn his loss to Democrat Joe Biden in the battleground state, ending Trump's legal challenges in state court about an hour before the Electoral College was to meet to cast the state's 10 votes for Biden.

COUNTER POINT



I don't need a farmer... I am strictly non-vegetarian!

STATE | 3

MoUs signed for ₹19,995 cr investment in Tamil Nadu



WORLD | 5

Electoral College to formalise Biden win

SPORT | 8

Aaron warns Aussies about 'ruthless' Kohli



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GOVT SAYS NO 'RETROGRADE STEP' AGAINST AGRICULTURE

Open for talks, Rajnath tells protesting farmers

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

As the protesting farmers intensified their agitation against the Centre's three agricultural "reform" laws and went on a day-long fast on Monday, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said Centre was trying to engage with farmers' leaders to decide the next date of talks.

"The meeting will definitely happen. We are engaging with farmers," Mr Tomar said. "The government is ready for discussions anytime. The farmers' leaders have to 'decide and convey' when they are ready for the next meeting," he added.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh said the recent reforms were undertaken with the best interests of farmers in mind and the Centre was always open to a dialogue to allay the misgivings of the agri sector. He said: "We are always willing to listen to our farmer brothers to allay misgivings ... Our government is always open to discussion and dialogue."

The contentious farm laws also led to a Twitter spat between Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM Capt. Amarinder Singh, with the two accusing each other of "playing politics" over the sensitive issue. Mr Kejriwal lashed out at Capt. Singh for criticising him for notifying one of the three farm laws passed by the Centre. The Delhi government on November 23 notified the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020.

Mr Kejriwal said: "Punjab



Farmers participate in a hunger strike during their protest against Centre's farm reform laws at Tikri border in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

CM has made allegations against me that I've passed the black laws in Delhi. How can he do such low-level politics in this fragile situation? It's not up to the state govt to implement it. Had it been so, why would farmers of the country hold talks with the Centre?"

Mr Kejriwal asked Capt. Singh if he was accusing the Delhi CM in a bid to form friendship with the BJP. He said: "So, is it (due to) the pressure of these people that you are putting allegations against me? Are you doing it for friendship with the BJP or are you under pressure as the Enforcement Directorate has filed a case against your family?"

Capt. Singh hit back, saying: "At a time when our farmers are braving the winter cold on the roads outside your city and many of them are dying fighting for their rights, all you can think of is how to make the most of the opportunity to promote your political interests."

200 arrested for farm protests

ARULOLI M | DC THOOTHUKUDI, DEC 14

Around 200 men including 15 women were arrested here on Monday for attempting to lay siege to the Collector's office, in a show of solidarity with their counterparts protesting in New Delhi, against the Centre's three farm bills.

The protestors led by CPI and the CPI(M) affiliated farmers associations and the Congress and MDMK, gathered in front of the collectorate here and threatened to lay siege to the collectorate till the Centre repealed its farm bills. Some of the Left party cadres also staged a protest by standing in

knee-deep water in a flooded channel in front of the collectorate.

The agitation which went on for around two hours was cleared by police as they arrested them.

A 85-year-old farmer, Rama Subbu, who also is a relative of veteran CPI leader R Nallakannu, fainted during the protest, and was rushed to hospital, where his condition is said to be stable.

In a similar protest held in Nagercoil, Kanyakumari district, 75 men marching towards the collectorate were intercepted by police at the Derick junction and picked up by police. Around 150 were arrested in Tirunelveli district.



People flock to Elliot's Beach as it re-opens for the public on Monday, after more than eight months in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

— DC

'Life's a beach' in Chennai leisure culture

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, DEC. 14

It was a day of celebration for Chennaites as the city beaches were thrown open.

It was back to the days of taking in the gentle sea breeze and the freshness

of the morning for those accustomed to their early constitutional near the sands on the beaches of Marina and Elliot's or ECR.

The thrill of pony rides could again be offered to kids on an evening.

So too a reminder of the

taste of a few local delicacies like sundal and murukku.

Of greater import was the fact that the smiles were back on the faces of Chennaites who took in the air after being confined for many a Covid month.

Google services back after suffering global outage

London, Dec. 14: Google services, including YouTube, Gmail and Google Drive, were restored for most users on Monday, following a global outage that affected thousands. Google's website that logs outages said the services that were affected for nearly an hour should be restored for most users.

The company has some of the most widely used services in the world. YouTube records over 2 billion logged-in users each month, with people watching over a billion hours of video on its platform. "We're back

up and running!," the video platform said in a tweet. It had earlier tweeted that many users were having issues accessing YouTube.

According to outage monitoring website DownDetector, more than

Something went wrong...



12,000 YouTube users were affected in various parts of the world, including the United States, Britain and India. Outages on select Google apps are not uncommon, but Monday's outage

● **According to outage monitoring website DownDetector, more than 12,000 YouTube users were affected in various parts of the world, including the US, Britain and India**

affected all its popular services, including Google Hangouts, Google Chats and Google Meet, products that people have used extensively during the COVID-19 pandemic.

● **Google services including YouTube and Gmail were down globally for about an hour on Monday**

● **Google confirmed the outage saying all of its services are affected**

A statement from Google read, "Today, at 3.47AM PT Google experienced an authentication system outage for approximately 45 minutes due to an internal storage quota issue. Services requiring users to log in experienced high error rates during this period.

The authentication system issue was resolved at 4:32AM PT. All services are now restored. We apologise to everyone affected, and we will conduct a thorough follow up review to ensure this problem cannot recur in the future." — Reuters

IIT Madras shuts after virus outbreak among students

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, DEC 14

The IIT-M here has been hit by the coronavirus outbreak with over 100 people, a majority of them students, testing positive for the contagion, said health secretary J. Radhakrishnan on Monday.

In all, 104 students and others have contracted the disease and all are doing well in a hospital, he said, allaying fears of further spread of the virus.

Of the 444 samples lifted till date, 104 have tested positive for Covid-19, he said, adding from December 1 to 12, samples from the institute turning positive steadily increased from a few to 33 specimens today.

"All of them are being treated at the King's Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research as per the directive of the Chief Minister and they are all doing well," he told reporters.

Radhakrishnan said though the results showed a 20 per cent positivity rate, there was no need for concern as measures including aggres-



State health secretary J. Radhakrishnan explains about the current situation of the Covid-19 to IIT-M students on Monday.

— DC

● **When asked about the source of infection, the health secretary said it could be from the mess but there was nothing to panic about further spread since all measures were in place to combat it**

sive contact testing are in place as per the protocol.

He later visited the IIT-M campus for inspection and those being treated at the hospital. When asked about the source of infection, the health secretary said it could be from the mess but there was nothing to panic about further spread since all measures

were in place to combat it.

Meanwhile, an IIT-M spokesperson said all departments and labs have been shut and as of now only about 700 students, mostly research scholars, are accommodated in nine hostels.

"Classes are being held online," she added.

AIADMK meets on seat sharing issue

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, DEC 14

Taking stock of the emerging political realities, arising out of mounting pressure from electoral allies for more number of seats and the bid to usurp the MGR legacy by newcomers Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, the AIADMK top brass called its district secretaries for a meeting on Monday to take crucial decisions on alliances, poll strategies and party affairs.

The meeting, held at the party headquarters in Chennai in the evening, deliberated on the demand from alliance partners like the BJP, PMK and DMDK from an increased share of seats to contest the 2021 Assembly elections in the State.

In the event of the AIADMK acceding to the partners' demands, there would be no seat left from the ruling party to contest at all, it was felt. It is said that BJP was keen on about 60 seats and so are the other allies. DMDK treasurer Premalatha Vijayakanth's remark at a party meeting on Sunday to get an adequate number of seats this time has made the AIADMK top brass uncomfortable.

Even when BJP leader Amit Shah was in Chennai recently he is said to have asked for about 60 seats from the AIADMK and the PMK has been demanding a considerable number of

● **The meeting, held at the party headquarters in Chennai in the evening, deliberated on the demand from alliance partners like the BJP, PMK and DMDK from an increased share of seats to contest the 2021 Assembly elections in the State**

seats openly. So if the party has to part with an average of 50 seats each to the DMDK, BJP, and PMK, which would add up to 150, they would have just 84 seats left.

Even if the AIADMK wins all the seats that it could contest, it would not have a simple majority in the House and be able to form a government on its own. It is to sort out this dilemma — to please the allies with the seats they ask for or assert its individuality — the meeting was called for. Some old timers in the party have asked the leadership to leave the BJP out of the alliance if it keeps insisting on a bigger number.

By keeping the BJP out, the AIADMK would only stand to gain by earning the goodwill of minorities, some leaders have said. Some other leaders have also expressed the view that the DMDK and the PMK, too, should not be allowed to bully the AIADMK to part with more seats. ■ P3

New Delhi, Dec. 14: Retail inflation declined to 6.93 per cent in November on softer food prices, though it remained above the comfort level of the Reserve Bank. Retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 7.61 per cent in October.

According to the CPI data released by the government on Monday, inflation in the food basket was 9.43 per cent in November, down from 11 per cent in the previous month.

The RBI, which mainly factors in retail inflation while arriving at key policy rates, has been mandated by the government to keep inflation at 4 per cent (+, - 2 per cent). The central bank had maintained status quo in the policy rate earlier this month due to high inflation. Wholesale prices, however, climbed to their highest level since February due to costlier manufactured items, rising 1.55 per cent in November from 1.48 per cent in the previous month, data released separately showed. — PTI

CIVIL ENGINEER

Man immolates self, son in Adambakkam

New Delhi: A 47-year-old civil engineer and his 10-year-old son immolated themselves at a house in Adambakkam on Monday. According to the police, the deceased has been identified as Paari alias Parimalam, a civil engineer and a resident of Balaji Nagar in Adambakkam. His wife, Rajabalbika (42), is also a civil engineer and the couple had a 10-year-old son, Balamurugan. Family sources said that, due to frequent quarrels and misunderstandings between the couple, Rajabalbika moved out of the house in Balaji Nagar with her son and lived at another house in the neighbourhood. ■ P3

SHORT TAKES

Sit-in by farmers in Thanjavur

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, DEC 14

Farmers belonging to the Akila Indiya Vivasayigalin Orunginaippu Kuzhu staged a sit-in here on Monday before the Panagal building, expressing solidarity with those farmers agitating at Delhi demanding repeal of the Centre's three farm bills on agricultural reforms. Rasta roko agitations were staged in Orathanadu, Papanadu, Pudukottai road, Kumbakonam by-pass road, Palli Agraharam, etc. District coordinator of the kuzhu, NV Kannan, led the agitation. Sami Nadarajan, committee member, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam affiliated to CPM, G Neelamegam, district secretary, CPM, participated.

19 fishermen, 3 boats held by SL navy

Ramanathapuram: The Sri Lankan navy personnel on Monday seized four fishing boats and captured 19 Tamil Nadu fishermen who went fishing from Rameswaram. Three of the four trawlers were taken to Sri Lanka, while the fourth is anchored at mid-sea and the occupants are being questioned by the Sri Lankan personnel. The boats belong to Andrews, Satiya, Simpson and Ramesh of Thangachimadam.

Tasmac shops closed on Dargah fest days

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUVARUR, DEC. 14

Tiruvavur Collector V Shantha has ordered the closure of all the 14 retail outlets of the Tasmac in the Muthupettai union of Tiruvavur district for two days, in view of the Muthupet Darga Periya Kanthuri festival.

In a press release at Tiruvavur on Monday, the district collector said the flag hoisting ceremony of the Dargah festival will take place tomorrow (December 15, 2020) and the sandal pot procession on December 24 and all the 14 Tasmac retail outlets in the Muthupet union will be closed on these two days.

Residents stage protest with hurricane

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, DEC.14

The residents of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) flat at Sengulam Colony in Tiruchy led by BJP Palakari Mandal president Rajasekaran staged a novel demonstration by carrying hurricane lamps in their hands and laid siege to the TNSCB office at Tiruchy demanding renovation of the street lights in that area.

According to Mr. Rajasekaran, most of the residents of the TNSCB quarters are sanitary workers of the corporation and 685 families reside there. The quarters were reconstructed three years ago but not handed over to the Tiruchy corporation authorities for developing the basic amenities. Despite several letters to the corporation authorities by the TNSCB, the civic body did not act on the requests. Following this, the officials of the TNSCB visited the Sengulam colony and assured the agitators that they will see that the street lights will function.

MoUs signed for ₹19,995 cr investment in Tamil Nadu

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC 14

Giving a boost to industrial development in the state, 18 Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) were signed on Monday in the presence of Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami with a cumulative investment of ₹19,995 crore and an employment potential for 26,509 persons across various sectors like electric vehicles, solar and wind energy, pharmaceuticals, city gas, e-education and textiles.

The Chief Minister also laid the foundation stone for five projects with an investment commitment of ₹4,456 crore and employment potential to 27,324 persons and inaugurated the new GIS web portal of Sipcot with an investment commitment of ₹47 crore and employment potential for 385 persons.

The projects for which foundation was laid were Adani Data Centre in Sriseri, Chengalpattu District, French company Torrent Gas' City Gas Distribution Network in Thirumarugal Village, Nagapattinam District, German company Baetr India Pvt Ltd's casting manufacturing project in Thervoykandigai, Tiruvallur District, SPR Group's IT Park Zone and Market Plaza in Perambur, Chennai, Indospace Vallam II Pvt Ltd's Industrial park in Vallam Vadagal,

Kanchipuram District and NPCI Development Centre's IT / Back Office project in Commerzone IT Park in Porur.

Among the MoUs signed were with Ola Electric Mobility for making electric two-wheelers, Torrent Gas for gas distribution, First Solar for making thin film photovoltaic ("PV) solar modules, Society for Smart Electric Mobility (SSEM) to set up an EV and future mobility park, Voltas for an AC manufacturing facility, Mylan Laboratories for an injection manufacturing project and Swiss-based Gurit to make wind blade components.

Others are Lativian YaClass for an Edutech Project, KPR Sugar & Apparels Limited for a textile mill project, Magnus Infrastructure LLP for an Industrial Park, Stanadyne for manufacture of Fuel Injection pumps, Mahindra CIE for manufacture of auto components, Anjan Drugs manufacture key raw materials and intermediates for APIs, MAIVA Pharma for installing two high-speed vial filling lines, Eickhoff to produce gearboxes for renewable energy sector, Cubic Modular Systems to manufacture sheet metal boxes, Italian company Sabaf for manufacture of home appliances and Crown Group for Drone manufacturing. Another MoU was signed between Sipcot and Foxconn.



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and his cabinet colleagues after inaugurating a mini clinic in the city on Monday.

— DC

2,000 mini clinics launched

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC 14

In a bid to bolster the public health care infrastructure in the state, the government Monday launched 2000 'mini clinics' in places with no public health centres (PHC) where poor people lived.

The clinics would help the poor seek medical assistance for ordinary illnesses like fever from the locality in which they lived itself, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami said.

He was inaugurating mini clinics in Royapuram, Tondiarpet,

Vyasarpadi, Teynampet, Mylapore and Kutchery road in Chennai when he listed the various efforts made by the government to strengthen medical infrastructure in the state.

He recalled every measure taken by the government in medical education, developing ambulance services, providing relief to people during natural disasters and also in coronavirus control. Chief Minister K. Palaniswami also referred to the steps taken by the government in upholding social justice in medical education.

Piped gas for households

Torrent Gas Ltd on Monday pledged

₹ 5,000 crore investment to develop infrastructure to retail CNG to auto-

mobiles and piped gas to households and industries in Chennai, the biggest

city gas license in its portfolio. The firm will lay pipelines and other infrastructure

in Chennai and Tiruvallur districts,

covering an area of 3,569 square kilometres, to provide

piped natural gas (PNG) connections to homes, industries and commercial establishments.

First e-scooter factory to be set up

Ola inked an agreement with the Tamil Nadu government to invest ₹ 2,400 crore for setting up its first

electric scooter factory in the state. Upon completion, the factory will create nearly 10,000 jobs and will be

the world's largest scooter manufacturing facility that will initially have an annual capacity of 2 million units

Rajini, Kamal also invoke MGR's name

FROM P1

So, the general view was that the allies should be soon told that the number of seats that could be allotted to them was made clear explicitly and they be given the option of continuing in the alliance or not.

Another piquant situation in which the party finds itself is the open bid by other political party leaders to appropriate the MGR legacy, which the AIADMK considers as its own. First it was BJP state president L. Murugan, who, in a musical video that he released, sought to portray him as the modern MGR.

Now that Rajinikanth is saying that he would bring in 'MGR rule' and Kamal Haasan, too, seeks to evoke the name of MGR for his brand of politics, the AIADMK leadership finds itself in a

quandary. Though they may not be able object to other politicians invoking the name of MGR, they think that his name and fame belonged exclusively to the party founded by MGR himself and the symbol popularized by him. Another issue that AIADMK leadership may find rankling is the impending arrival of V K Sasikala on the political scene on her release from jail in 2021.

Though Sasikala has been technically removed from the party, some of her ardent loyalists may facilitate her return into the party fold, the leaders fear.

So they wanted to discuss the issue thread bare and seek the views of the party leaders on how to tackle the situation.

One of the proposals was to call for a general council meeting and elect a general secretary.

FARMERS TO GET COMPENSATION FOR CROP LOSS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, DEC.14

Paddy and other horticulture crops in about 80,000 hectares were damaged in Nagapattinam district due to the recent cyclone Burevi, according to the Director of Agriculture, Government of Tamil Nadu, V. Dakshinamoorthy. Mr. Dakshinamoorthy, accompanied by Nagapattinam Collector Praveen P Nair and others, inspected the ongoing damage assessment work by the officials of the agriculture department at Vadakku Panaiyur and Karunganni areas in Nagapattinam district and held discussions with the agriculture department officials and said the government will consider providing compensation.

Son kills mom, himself in Kumbakonam

DC CORRESPONDENT
KUMBAKONAM, DEC 14

Balakrishnan (35), son of Subramanian and Malarkodi of Serudakudi near Kumbakonam, allegedly murdered his mother and hanged himself, on Sunday night. Police said, Balakrishnan who is said to be mentally unsound, knifed his mother to death and

hanged himself from a ceiling fan. The Subramanian couple has three sons including Balakrishnan. The other two sons Rajasekaran and Ramanathan found their brother and mother dead on Monday morning, and lodged a complaint with the Swamimalai police. Inspector Nagalakshmi visited the spot and registered a case.

Wild jumbo kills father, son in Nilgiris district

■ Tragedy said to be third in a week in Gudalur

B RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, DEC 14

A father and son were killed by a wild jumbo on Sunday night at Kollappalli hamlet on the western Nilgiris border. As a sequel to this, tension mounted up at Pandalur taluk since Monday morning, as residents there staged a road roko, paralyzing traffic between TN and Kerala along Pandalur, demanding foresters to take steps to capture the killer wild jumbo moving around in Kollappalli limits.

It may be recalled that this is the third tragedy in Gudalur forest division within a week. In Cherangode panchayat limits alone, this is the second tragedy in three

days. All together, four persons were killed by wild jumbos in a week's time in Gudalur limits.

Prasanth (21) who was returning home to Kollappalli hamlet in Tantea limits, shortly after sunset on Sunday evening, was attacked by the jumbo. He died on the spot.

As news of the tragedy was conveyed to his father, Anandaraj (49), a councilor in Gudalur panchayat union, he with the help of a neighbour rushed to the spot.

Seeing the two men, the wild jumbo which was still standing there, began to chase them. While his neighbour ran for safety, the animal attacked Anandaraj, and killed him also on the spot.

RDO holds inquiry into Chitra's death

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC 14

Five days after the death of TV actress Chitra, the Regional Divisional Officer (RDO) begun their investigations on Monday, December 14. An RDO investigation is done when a married woman, who has been married for seven years or less, dies suspiciously.

It may be recalled that the popular television actor Chitra was found dead at the hotel room she was staying in, with her husband Hemnath, during the early hours of December 9. The actor was best known as *Mullai*, a role she played on the television serial Pandian Stores.

Police concluded Chitra's death to have been suicide, while her friends and family members have alleged foul play. On Monday, Chitra's mother Vijaya, brother Saravanan and sister Saraswathi appeared before Sriperumbudur RDO, Divyasri and it was alleged that the investigation went on for three hours.

Talking to the media people outside the RDO's office, Chitra's mother said that she suspects something fishy in the case and also alleged that Chitra's husband to be the



reason behind her daughter's death. The family further refused to open up and told the media that they will talk about the matter after a police investigation.

The police have booked a suo motu case in this regard and are investigating. But the family members of the actress who spoke to the media have said that they would file a case and fight for justice.

Police are said to have questioned Hemnath. Speculations on social media are that Chitra was pressured both by her mother and her husband. She was also under financial stress due to loans she had taken for her house and a recently purchased car. Police, however, have not confirmed these claims.

CIVIL ENGINEER IMMOLATES SELF, SON IN ADAMBAKKAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC 14

A 47-year-old civil engineer and his 10-year-old son immolated themselves at a house in Adambakkam on Monday.

According to the police, the deceased has been identified as Paari alias Parimalam, a civil engineer and a resident of Balaji Nagar in Adambakkam. His wife, Rajabalambika (42), is also a civil engineer and the couple had a 10-year-old son, Balamurugan.

Family sources said that, due to frequent quarrels and misunderstandings between the couple, Rajabalambika moved out of the house in Balaji Nagar with her son and lived at another house in the neighbourhood. Though the couple lived separately, Parimalam visits his wife and son regularly.

According to sources, on Monday evening Parimalam took Balamurugan to his

house. At around 4 pm, a few neighbours noticed smoke coming from Paari's house. They alerted the Guindy fire service and Adambakkam police.

The fire and rescue personnel doused the fire immediately only to find Parimalam and Balamurugan charred to death. The bodies of the deceased were sent to the Chrompet government hospital for autopsy.

Preliminary investigation by the police revealed that Parimalam took the extreme step due to depression caused by the separation. Police said, "Though they did not recover any suicide note, they recovered ₹3,000 and a letter, which read 'Funeral charges' from one of the neighbours. It is said that Parimalam handed over the cash and letter to the neighbour to pass it on to his wife in the evening."

Adambakkam police registered a case and are investigating the matter.

PROTEST AGAINST FARM LAWS IN TIRUCHY

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, DEC.14

Tiruchy district co-ordinator Ayilal Sivasuriyan and hundreds of members of the All-India Vivasayigal Porata Orunginaippu Kuzhu, members of the DMK and other allied parties were arrested by police on Monday when they attempted to launch an indefinite stayback and to prepare a rice gruel agitation at the Tiruchy Collectorate on Monday in support of the ongoing farmers' stir on the Delhi borders against the farm laws.

Mr Sivasuriyan told the media that the agitation was organized as part of the state-wide stir and it will continue till the Union Government withdraws the farm laws.

Similar agitations also took place at Karur, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Pudukottai Tiruvavur, and Nagapattinam districts, he added. Later, the arrested were released from custody.

A section of people representing various farmers associations staged a demonstration at Anna statue at Tiruchy on Monday.

● They attempted to launch an indefinite stayback and to prepare a rice gruel agitation

COVID TREATMENT PACKAGES

HC moved to quash order

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 14

The Association of Healthcare Providers India, Tamil Nadu chapter, has approached the Madras high court to quash an order of the state government, dated June 5, 2020, fixing packages for treatment on testing Covid-19 for beneficiaries under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme/ general public in empanelled private hospitals and labs.

Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana, before whom the petition filed by the Association of Healthcare Providers India, Tamil Nadu chapter represented by its joint secretary J. Adel came up for hearing, ordered notice, returnable by January 11, to the state government.

In his petition, Adel sought a direction to the state government to devise appropriate, rational and sustainable

package rates for treatment and testing of Covid-19 for beneficiaries under CMCHIS /general public in empanelled private hospitals and labs so as to ensure that sustainability of all stakeholders engaged in the said treatment and testing is safeguarded. He also sought a direction to the state government to submit a report by way of an interim direction regarding the steps taken by the authorities to fix the package rates based on the actual operational cost for treatment and testing of Covid-19 for beneficiaries under the CMCHIS/general public in empanelled private hospitals and labs.

Senior counsel K. Subramanian, appearing for the petitioner, submitted that the package rates of CMCHI scheme were not rational and unrealistic. The rates were not prepared after detailed deliberation and consultation with the empan-

elled hospitals or their association who were the main stakeholders. The petitioner association requested the authorities to revise the package rates in order to ensure better clinical outcome and patient satisfaction. The package rates of CMCHI scheme were not financially viable for the petitioner association members. There were about 300 hospitals in Tamil Nadu, who were members of the petitioner association (Tamil Nadu chapter). The tariff fixed by the authorities for performing surgical procedures as well as cost of medical treatment under the CMCHI scheme was too low. Due to increase in operational cost without any subsidy many of the hospitals in tier-II and tier-III towns and rural areas were struggling to maintain the results. Since the rates fixed were too low the quality of healthcare would suffer and if the quali-

ty suffers the patients will ultimately suffer. Moreover, low prices could result in patients getting substandard care. The initial package rate under the CMCHI scheme was prepared by the authorities without consulting the empanelled hospitals under the CMCHI scheme and these rates were fixed not based on any costing studies. Therefore, the petitioner has sent a representation to the authorities suggesting a tariff proposal in respect of the three categories of Covid-19 patients. However, without considering the representation dated June 2, 2020, the authorities have by the impugned order June 5, 2020 arbitrarily, and in gross violation of principles of natural justice, fixed the ceiling rates for treatment and testing of Covid-19 patients under the CMCHIS scheme as well as the patients under the general category, he added.

SHORT TAKES

MODI, HASINA TO HOLD VIRTUAL SUMMIT ON DEC. 17

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

India and Bangladesh will hold a crucial virtual summit on Thursday (December 17) that will be co-chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina during which the “two leaders will hold comprehensive discussions on the entire spectrum of the bilateral relationship, including further strengthening cooperation in the post-Covid era”, New Delhi announced on Monday. This is likely to include the progress of development projects, sharing of river waters including the Teesta issue, the Rohingya migrants issue, border security, Covid-19 vaccines as well as the forthcoming golden jubilee celebrations of the 1971 war of liberation.

The summit will take place at a time when India is making a renewed bid to reach out to its immediate neighbourhood and also when Pakistan is trying its best to improve relations with Bangladesh.

On Monday, New Delhi said, “India and Bangladesh have continued to maintain regular exchanges at the highest level. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid an official visit to India in October 2019. Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a video message on the historic occasion of Mujib Borsho in March 2020. Both leaders have remained in regular touch during the Covid pandemic.”

“Mujib Barsho” refers to birth centenary celebrations of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman — popularly known as Bangabandhu — who had led the Bangladesh freedom struggle in 1971.

GMAIL, OTHER GOOGLE SERVICES FACE OUTAGE

New Delhi, Dec. 14: Gmail and a host of other Google services faced disruptions on Monday evening and the tech major is in the process of fully restoring the services. The company, which faced a similar outage in August this year, is yet to specify areas on for the outage.

In an update on the Google work space status dashboard at 18:17 hours, Google said Gmail service has already been restored for some users, and “we expect a resolution for all users in the near future. Please note this time frame is an estimate and may change”. At around 17:25 hours, Google had said it was “aware of a problem with Gmail affecting a majority of users” and that the affected users are unable to access Gmail.

As per the dashboard, other Google services like Google Calendar, Google Drive, Google Docs and Google Meet have also been affected. Down detector, which detects outages and interruptions on networks, also showed that services like YouTube (Google's video platform) and Gmail were facing disruption. Netizens turned to Twitter to express their emotions.

MAHA GOVT OFFERS HELP TO PRESERVE INS VIRAAT

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 14

Claiming that the Maharashtra government is willing to help restore and preserve “the historical ship” *INS Viraat*, Shiv Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi on Monday said she has written a letter to the defence ministry seeking a no-objection certificate to preserve the decommissioned aircraft carrier.

The Shiv Sena leader in her letter addressed to defence minister Rajnath Singh has stated that the government of Maharashtra was happy to cooperate in restoring and preserving the historical ship. She has also requested Singh's immediate intervention to grant No Objection Certificate (NOC) to preserve the aircraft carrier. *INS Viraat* is being dismantled at the Alang ship-breaking yard in Gujarat.

According to Mukesh Patel, chairman of the Shree Ram Group which bought *INS Viraat* as scrap, “About 5 per cent of the ship has already been broken.”

In her social media post she has stated that *INS Viraat* served as India's aircraft carrier for nearly 30 years. “It has been the pride of our seas and our Indian Navy. To see it sold as scrap and dismembered will be a huge disservice to our naval legacy. With RM's NOC, a memorial on *INS Viraat* will be a reality,” she said.



People witness the launch of GRSE-built first Project 17A stealth frigate Himgiri in Kolkata on Monday.

— PTI

India geared up for any China build-up: Rawat

CDS says armed forces can counter PLA's constant moves

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 14

In a veiled warning to China amid a prolong stand-off, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat on Monday affirmed that the Indian armed forces, undertaking steps on this side of the Line of Actual Control to counter the People Liberation Army's military build-up on the other side, would leave no stone unturned to protect the nation's interests from land to air to sea.

“We are in a stand-off situation in Ladakh and based on that there is some development activity which has been ongoing in Tibet Autonomous Region of China. Every nation will continue to prepare for ensuring it's security based on its strategic interests. I do not

think there should be much concern in that because we, on our side, are also carrying out similar activity. China's attempt to change the status quo on the LAC along the northern border amidst the Coronavirus pandemic necessitates high-level preparation on land, in air and at sea. I am fully confident that Indian armed forces will leave no stone unturned to safeguard our frontiers be it on land, in air or at ocean. We are fully prepared for any eventuality we may be faced with,” Gen Rawat said at the launch of *INS Himgiri*, the first GRSE-built P17A stealth frigate in Kolkata.

Referring to the Doklam stand-off between the two sides, Rawat elaborated, “A situation had evolved in Doklam in 2017. Ever since we have taken meas-

ures to ensure that the situation does not escalate. The PLA on the other side has been carrying out certain activity. We, on our side, have also been watching this activity very carefully. We have also taken necessary action to counter anything that could be a cause of concern to our national security.”

Underlining the importance of technology in military, he added, “What we are looking at is getting technology. Time has come to look at the future of warfighting imbining technology into systems. We have adequate force and reserves available to counter any threat or challenge that we may face on the northern border.”

On the Navy's push for a third aircraft carrier vis-a-vis submarines, Gen

Rawat observed, “Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Sub-

marines have their separate place in naval warfare in domination of the sea. So does an aircraft carrier. I am no way saying the navy does not need it's air wing. Yes it does. But how to manage air wing and how to ensure the security and sanctity of the sealine of our communication is something we are thinking about. I think we also need to look at our Island territories that we have in large numbers. We can leverage the island territory to our advantage. Then we can balance whether these can be used for launching our naval aircraft or do we need an aircraft carrier. Once we study all that and we understood in detail, we will take a call on that.”

UK FOREIGN SECY ON 4-DAY VISIT TO INDIA

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is beginning a four-day visit to India from Monday and will hold ministerial-level talks with his Indian counterpart External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday. This comes just days after media reports that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been invited by India to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade next month. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had recently evaded questions from the media on the reported invitation, saying earlier that in such matters, “the announcement is made closer to the event”.

In a statement on Monday, meanwhile, the MEA said, “The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, secretary of state for foreign, commonwealth and development affairs, United Kingdom, will pay an official visit to India from 14-17 December 2020. During his stay in New Delhi, Raab will hold talks with Minister of External Affairs Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on 15 December 2020 on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. He will also have official meetings with the minister of environment, forests and climate change Prakash Javadekar and the minister of education Ramesh Pokhriyal.”

It may be recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken on phone to his British counterpart Johnson last month in which the two “leaders agreed that officials from both sides would continue their work to quickly finalise an ambitious long-term roadmap for the India-UK partnership”.

Heavy voter turnout in last phase of Kerala polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 14

Heavy polling was recorded in the third and final phase of local body polls in Kerala.

More than 78.62 per cent polling was recorded till 8 pm in four northern districts Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargod which went to polls on Monday.

Malappuram recorded 78.86 per cent, Kozhikode 78.98, Kannur 77.54 and Kasargod 77.14 per cent. A total of 89,74,993 voters were eligible to vote in the third phase in 6,867 wards across 354 local bodies. The polling was held strictly complying with Covid safety protocol. Voters turned out in masks, maintained social distancing while waiting in the queues and used sanitisers before and after casting their votes. Barring minor incidents of scuffle between the supporters of rival parties, no major violence was reported from any of the northern districts.

The state had witnessed heavy turnout of voters in all three phases which



Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan casts his vote during the last stage of Kerala local body elections at Cherikkal in Kannur on Monday.

— PTI

clearly indicated the enthusiasm of the electorate.

Leaders of LDF, UDF and BJP are keeping their fingers crossed over the heavy polling with each party trying to interpret the trend according to their respective calculations.

It may be recalled that 72.67 per cent polling was recorded in the first

phase on December 8 southern districts Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha and Idukki.

A higher voter turnout of 76.38 per cent was witnessed in the second phase when central districts of Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakkad and Wayanad went to polls on December 10.

Rajnath lauds valour of forces deployed at LAC

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 14

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said that unprovoked aggression on India's Himalayan frontiers by China is a reminder of how world is changing and how power is being asserted across Indo-Pacific. He lauded the valour of Indian armed forces deployed along the LAC for standing up to aggression by Chinese troops and said our troops fought the Chinese military with “utmost bravery,” forcing it to go back. On farmer's issues Singh said there is no question of taking “retrograde steps against our agricultural sector ever”.

“Unprovoked aggression on our Himalayan frontiers is a reminder of how the world is changing, how existing agreements are being challenged, how power is being asserted not just in Himalayas but across Indo-Pacific. How

uncertain the future of the region and world could be in this backdrop,” said Singh while virtually addressing the annual general meeting of apex industry chamber FICCI. Defence minister said that there is a big build up of armed forces at LAC in Ladakh. “In these testing times, our forces have shown exemplary courage and remarkable fortitude. They fought the PLA with utmost bravery and forced them to go back,” said Singh. He said that the coming generations will be proud of what our forces have managed to achieve this year.

Defence minister pointed out that whenever there is a situation at LAC the most obvious outcome is comparison between India and China's military strength.

“There can be a serious debate on who owns more military might but when it comes to soft power there is no scope of ambigui-

ty India is far ahead of China when it comes to leading the world with ideas,” said Singh. “If one looks at East-Asia from Burma to Thailand to Indonesia and Malaysia and even Japan “there is a huge Indian cultural impact on these countries,” he added “Buddhism had a monumental impact on China to the extent that before the 1949 revolution almost 80 per cent of China population followed Buddhism,” said Singh.

He added that famous Chinese thinker Hu Shih, who was also the vice-chancellor of Peking University had said that: “India has culturally dominated and controlled China for more than 2,000 years without sending a single soldier.” “This statement by Hu Shih underlines the fact that India as a civilisation state has been inspiring and influencing the world through its cultural and soft power for centuries,” he said.

Kamal Nath hints at political retirement

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, DEC. 14

Former chief minister and Madhya Pradesh Congress president Kamal Nath has created a ripple in the political circle here when he hinted at retirement from politics.

Nath who is facing growing resentment in the party following the poor show by Congress in the November 3 by-elections to 28 Assembly constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, said, “I am ready to take some rest. I have no ambition or greed for any position or power. I have served in various posts at Centre. I have already achieved a lot. I am ready to stay at home”.

He was addressing a rally in his Assembly constituency of Sasaur in Chhindwara on Sunday evening.

Nath's statement comes in the wake of reports of his running feud with veteran Congress leader and former chief minister Digvijay Singh.

“Nath is responsible for the drubbing of Congress in November 3 Assembly by-elections. The party suffered a setback in the

by-polls because Nath sidelined Singh in the Assembly by-elections”, Congress MLA Baburam Jandela said.

Jandela is considered close to Singh. Congress spokesman Narendra Singh Saluja, however, sought to underplay the development, saying, “Nath has several times in the past said he has achieved a lot and has no greed for power or position”.

Nath who holds dual posts of Madhya Pradesh PCC president and Congress Legislature Party chief is under pressure by a strong section of the party to leave one of the posts in the wake of party's poor show in the November 3 Assembly by-elections.

Congress could win only nine out of 28 Assembly constituencies which had gone to by-elections on November 3.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan took a jibe at Kamal Nath for reportedly weighing the option of retiring from politics, saying, “It is up to him to decide whether to retire or sit at home. It is his affairs. If charges and counter-charges are made, he should come up with clarifications”.

— PTI

Centre upgrades Vijayvargiya's security with bullet resistant car

New Delhi/Kolkata, Dec. 14: BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya's VIP security has been upgraded with the addition of a “bullet resistant” car in his convoy during his West Bengal tour, official sources said on Monday.

The Union home ministry has issued an order directing the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to include an armoured vehicle in the convoy of the 64-year-old national general secretary of the BJP and ensure he only travels in that SUV, they said.

“The security of Vijayvargiya has been upgraded with the inclusion of a bullet resistant

four-wheeler in the convoy. This has been done keeping in mind the security requirements of the protectee in the wake of the recent attack on his vehicle that was part of a convoy of BJP president J.P. Nadda,” an official source said.

The CISF has been providing ‘Z’ category VIP security cover to Vijayvargiya since February last year. The protection includes a mobile team of about seven armed CISF commandos as well as a pilot and an escort vehicle. Vijayvargiya's vehicle was attacked with stones during a visit to Diamond Harbour area in the state's South 24 Parganas

district on December 10 when he was accompanying the BJP president.

Vijayvargiya confirmed his security upgrade to reporters after he arrived in Kolkata on Monday afternoon to take part in a programme at Mathurapur in South 24 Parganas.

“As per the order of the Union home ministry, I have been provided with a bulletproof vehicle,” he told the media at the airport. On December 10, several vehicles in Nadda's cavalcade were damaged in the attack. Sources in the BJP said its leaders, including Vijayvargiya and vice president Mukul Roy, sustained injuries in the melee.

— PTI

WOMEN | SAFETY

Bill gives death penalty, ₹10 lakh fine for crimes on women, modelled after AP

Shakti Bill tabled in Maharashtra Assembly

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 14

In a historical move, the Maharashtra government on Monday tabled the Shakti Bill in the Vidhan Sabha that provides a death penalty and a fine up to ₹10 lakh for crimes against women and children in the state.

State home minister Anil Deshmukh tabled the Maharashtra Shakti Criminal Law (Maharashtra Amendment) Act, 2020, as well as Maharashtra Exclusive Special Court (for certain

offences against Women and Children under Shakti Law) on the first day of the two-day winter session of the state legislature.

Based on the Disha Act in Andhra Pradesh, the bill has proposed strict punishments for crimes such as rape, acid attack and derogatory material on social media against women and children.

It has also proposed special courts ensuring speedy trial in cases of crimes against women and children, amendments in sections of Indian Penal

● **BASED ON** the Disha Act in Andhra Pradesh, the bill has proposed strict punishments for crimes such as rape, acid attack and derogatory material on social media against women and children.

Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) to sternly deal with such crimes.

The bills have assured to bring down the investigation period from two months to 15 days, the trial period from two months to 30 days, and appeal period to 45 days from the present

six months. It is expected to be cleared by the House on Tuesday.

The new law will have a separate judicial system to fast-track the cases that come under the Act's purview with at least one special court in each of the districts. It has the provision for special public prosecutors and special police teams, which will have at least one woman

officer. It also aims to establish institutions for providing services to victims, including medical or psychiatric support and care, counselling, facilitating legal and financial aid, and rehabilitation.

Deshmukh said the legislation proposes to complete investigation, trial and sentencing within a stipulated time frame. “The offences against women and children, especially heinous and sexual offences have increased many fold in the state. The proposed law will also

have provisions to tackle threats and messages on social media platforms. It is an important legislation and provisions have been made to ensure that the accused are booked and sentenced at the earliest,” he added.

Several women's groups had earlier urged Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to not table the Shakti bill, calling it draconian legislation that is fundamentally anti-women with the potential to negate the very offence of rape.

SHORT TAKES

RAWALPINDI
BLAST: 3 ULTRAS
HELD IN PAKISTAN

Lahore, Dec. 14: Three Taliban terrorists, involved in a blast in Rawalpindi, were arrested on Monday by Pakistan's security agencies.

At least 25 people, including women and children, were injured in the grenade attack in the Ganj Mandi area near a police station in the garrison city of Rawalpindi on Sunday. The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of the Punjab police said in a statement on Monday that a CTD Rawalpindi team got information that three terrorists were hiding on Adyala-Kharakan Road along Swan River Rawalpindi. "On this information and evidence collected from Pir Wadhai crime scene, CTD raided the place on Monday and arrested three terrorists. Explosives, detonators, cell phones and other articles recovered," it said.

U.S. REMOVES
SUDAN FROM
TERROR LIST

Khartoum, Dec. 14: The United States has formally removed Sudan from its state sponsor of terrorism blacklist, its Khartoum embassy said Monday, less than two months after the East African nation pledged to normalise ties with Israel.

"The move opens the way for aid, debt relief and investment to a country going through a rocky political transition and struggling under a severe economic crisis exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

US President Donald Trump had announced in October that he was delisting Sudan, 27 years after Washington first put the country on its blacklist for harbouring Islamist militants.

"The congressional notification period of 45 days has lapsed and the Secretary of State has signed a notification stating rescission of Sudan's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation," the US embassy in Khartoum said on Facebook.

GUNMAN SHOT BY
POLICE IN NEW
YORK CATHEDRAL

New York, Dec. 14: A man has been shot by police on the steps of a landmark New York City cathedral after he began firing a gun at the end of a Christmas choral concert.

Police said there was no indication anyone but the suspected gunman was shot. The man was taken to a hospital in critical condition.

The shooting happened just before 4 pm on Sunday at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, mother church of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. The 45-minute concert had just concluded and people were starting to walk away when a series of shots was heard, sending people running down Amsterdam Avenue screaming and diving to the sidewalk.

Officers who had been on hand to provide security for the event quickly moved in and shot the gunman, who police believe was armed with a rifle.

ECLIPSE BLACKS
OUT SOUTH CHILE,
ARGENTINA

Pucon, Chile, Dec.14: A solar eclipse that lasted around two minutes plunged southern Chile and Argentina into darkness on Monday.

Heavy rain had threatened to prevent thousands of star gazers in Chile from seeing the eclipse but at the last moment the clouds parted just enough for the phenomenon to be partially visible.

"It was beautiful, unique. The truth is that no-one held much hope of seeing it due to the weather and clouds, but it was unique because it cleared up just in time. It was a miracle," an emotional Matias Tordecilla, 18, said from the town of Pucon on the shores of Lake Villarrica.

"It's something that you don't just see with your eyes but also feel with your heart," added Tordecilla, who traveled 10 hours with his family to see the eclipse.

In Argentine Patagonia, several families and foreigners had set up camp between the towns of Villa El Chocón and Piedra del Aguila hoping to see the eclipse.

While there was no rain there, strong winds had threatened to impact visibility of the second total eclipse for Chile in the last 18 months.

Hackers infiltrate
US fed networks

Experts suspect Russian hand in attack on FireEye, major cybersecurity player in US

Washington, Dec. 14: Hackers broke into the networks of federal agencies including the Treasury and Commerce departments as US government officials said Sunday that they were working to identify the scope of the breach and to fix the problem.

The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security's cybersecurity arm are investigating. The hacks were revealed just days after a major cybersecurity firm disclosed that foreign government hackers had broken into its network and stolen the company's own hacking tools.

Many experts suspect Russia as responsible for the attack against FireEye, a major cybersecurity player whose customers include federal, state and local governments and top global corporations. There was no immediate connection between the attacks, and it wasn't immediately clear if Russia was also responsible for the hack of the Treasury Department, which was first reported by Reuters.

National Security Council spokesperson John Ulliot said in a statement that the government was "taking all necessary steps to identify and remedy any possible issues related to this situation." The government's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency said separately that it has been working with other agencies "regarding recently

Data leak exposes
China in top firms

Melbourne, Dec. 14: Amid simmering tensions between Australia and China, the media here on Monday reported a major data leak containing official records like party position, birthdate, national ID number and ethnicity of nearly two million alleged members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) living and working across the world. The data leak obtained by 'The Australian' newspaper has revealed how the alleged CPC members are employed with some of the world's biggest corporations in the areas of defence, banks and pharmaceutical giants manufacturing Coronavirus vaccines.

Among the companies

identified as having alleged CPC members as their employees are Boeing and Volkswagen, pharmaceutical giants Pfizer and AstraZeneca, and financial institutions including ANZ and HSBC, according to the reports.

The leak has exposed details of 1.95 million CPC members after being extracted from a Shanghai server by whistleblowers. An investigation by 'The Australian' has found that at least 10 consulates in the eastern Chinese metropolis Shanghai have CPC members employed as senior political and government affairs specialists, clerks, economic advisers and executive assistants. —PTI

discovered activity on government networks.

CISA is providing technical assistance to affected entities as they work to identify and mitigate any potential compromises." President Donald Trump last month fired the director of CISA, Chris Krebs, after Krebs vouched for the integrity of the presidential election and disputed Trump's claims of widespread electoral fraud.

Federal government agencies have long been attractive targets for for-

eign hackers.

Hackers linked to Russia were able to break into the State Department's email system in 2014, infecting it so thoroughly that it had to be cut off from the internet while experts worked to eliminate the infestation. Reuters earlier reported that a group backed by a foreign government stole information from Treasury and a Commerce Department agency responsible for deciding internet and telecommunications policy. —AP

FORMER AIDE
ACCUSES CUOMO
OF SEXUAL
HARASSMENT

New York, Dec. 14: A former aide to New York Gov Andrew Cuomo who is now running for Manhattan borough president accused him of sexual harassment in a series of tweets Sunday, saying he made inappropriate comments about her appearance.

Lindsey Boylan tweeted that the Democratic governor "sexually harassed me for years. Many saw it, and watched." "I could never anticipate what to expect: I would be grilled on my work (which was very good) or harassed about my looks. Or would it be both in the same conversation? This was the way for years," she continued. —AP

Electoral College to
formalise Biden win

Washington, Dec. 14: Joe Biden's march to the White House — overshadowed by President Donald Trump's frantic attempts to overturn the US election — is to be formalised on Monday when the Electoral College meets to confirm the Democrat's win.

Electors in all 50 states were meeting to cast their votes in a tradition that has long been considered mostly a formality for confirming the will of the people expressed at the polls. But this year the somewhat arcane procedure is at the center of an unprecedented — and many warn dangerous — challenge to the credibility of US democracy led by Trump.

Soundly beaten by Biden on November 3, Trump continues to cl-

aim, without evidence, that he was the real winner. Court after court has turned down his team's claims of election fraud around the country and last Friday the Supreme Court dealt a final legal blow when it threw out an appeal lodged by Trump allies from Texas and other Republican-led states.

Based on the already legally certified state-by-state vote tallies, the Electoral College representatives are expected to vote by 306 to 232 in favor of Biden over Trump — a process expected to take much of Monday.

This will draw a thick line under a contest that saw Biden make Trump a rare one-term president after campaigning on a message of vanquishing the Covid-19 pandemic. —AFP

EU's chief negotiator still hopes
to clinch EU-UK trade accord

Brussels, Dec. 14: EU negotiator Michel Barnier on Monday signalled there was a "narrow path" to a post-Brexit trade deal with Britain, as key sticking points remain after both sides abandoned a supposed make-or-break deadline.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU chief Ursula van der Leyen pledged to "go the extra mile" on Sunday as they side-stepped a self-

imposed cut-off point to end talks if there was no progress towards a pact.

Johnson insists it remains "most likely" that Britain will crash out of the globe's largest single market on World Trade Organisation terms by year's end as the two sides spar over regulating future standards and fishing.

But von der Leyen on Monday said "there is movement. That is good".

"We are on the very last mile to go. But it is an essential one," she told a conference organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

An EU diplomat said following a briefing from Barnier that "there might now be a narrow path to an agreement visible - negotiators can clear the remaining hurdles in the next few days". —AFP



Sandra Lindsay, a nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, is inoculated with the Covid-19 vaccine by Dr. Michelle Chester, at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in the Queens borough of New York. — AFP

US kicks off Covid-19 vaccine drive as
Germany returns to partial lockdown

New York, Dec. 14: The United States kicked off a mass vaccination drive Monday hoping to turn the tide on the world's biggest Coronavirus outbreak, as the country's death toll neared a staggering 3,00,000.

A nurse in New York became the first person in the US to be vaccinated when she received the Pfizer-BioNTech shot live on television.

"I feel great. I feel relieved," said Sandra Lindsay, a critical care nurse at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center, imploring all Americans to "to do our part" by getting vaccinated.

"I hope this marks the beginning of the end of the very painful time in our history," she added.

The landmark moment comes at one of the darkest phases of the pandemic, with infections in the United States and many other countries soaring, and health experts still struggling against vaccine skepticism, lockdown fatigue and uneven adherence to safety rules.

The US has the world's highest death toll of more than 2,99,000, and the largest number of reported cases, at 16.2 million — including more than 1.5 million new infection in just the past week.

"First Vaccine Administered. Congratulations USA! Congratulations WORLD!" tweeted President Donald Trump.

The start of the US vaccination campaign came as Germany announced a partial lockdown from Wednesday, with non-essential shops and schools to close in a bid to halt an "exponential growth" in infections.

The restrictions, agreed by Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional leaders, will apply through the holidays until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or offer extended company holidays.

Europe's biggest economy has been severely hit by a resurgence of the Coronavirus, with daily new infections more than three times their spring-time peak.

Italy meanwhile overtook Britain as the European nation with the highest coronavirus death toll. —AP

Santa infects 75 at
Belgian care home

Belgium, Dec. 14: A man from Belgium, who dressed up as Santa Claus to spread Christmas joy, ended up being labelled as 'super spreader' after inadvertently infecting 75 people at an old age home with Covid-19.

According to reports, the unnamed man visited the Hemelrijk aged care home in the Belgian town of Mol to entertain its residents and staff. However, he had no idea that he was already infected with Covid-19.

The man was welcomed to spread joy among 150 residents at the care home. While everything went smooth during the visit, he ended up infecting 14 staff members and 61 residents, one of which required oxygen support for breathing.

Fortunately, the other infected people only suffered mild to moderate symptoms, without any breathing troubles.

Just three days after the

visit, the man who dressed up as Santa fell ill and tested positive for Covid-19. The aged care home made it mandatory for residents and staff to wear face masks. But pictures from the Christmas event showed that not all residents wore masks and 'Santa' and his helpers stood very close to the elderly people.

"It was made with the best intent, but it went wrong. It has been a very dark day for the care home. It is a very great mental strain to bear for the man that played Saint Nicholas, as well as for the organisers and the staff," Mol's mayor, Wim Caeyers, told Belgian news organisation VRT News.

"Initially they said that the rules had been followed, but then straight away you receive photos from the families of residents where you can see that this wasn't the case," he added. —Agencies

REMDESIVIR DRUG
MAY BE HIGHLY
EFFECTIVE: STUDY

London, Dec. 14: Remdesivir may be a highly effective antiviral against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, according to a new single-patient study that contradicts previous research which found the drug had no impact on death rates from the disease.

The researchers from the University of Cambridge in the UK who gave the drug to a patient with Covid-19 and a rare immune disorder, observed a dramatic improvement in his symptoms and the disappearance of the virus.

Scientists had previously pinned hope on remdesivir which was originally developed to treat hepatitis C and subsequently tested against Ebola. However, results from large clinical trials have been inconclusive, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced in October that the drug did not significantly reduce mortality rates. —PTI

SOUTH KOREA TO
OPEN MORE
TESTING SITES

Seoul, Dec. 14: South Korea was opening dozens of free Covid-19 testing sites in the greater Seoul area, as the country registered additional 718 new cases on Monday amid a surge in infections.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said the additional cases took the country's total since the pandemic began to 43,484 infections with 587 deaths. It said about 65 per cent of the new cases were found in the Seoul area, which has been at the centre of a recent viral resurgence.

Observers say the lower figures for Monday are a result of fewer tests taken over the weekend and that the country's caseload is expected to surge again this week. The announcement comes two days after New Zealand said it planned a similar bubble with the Cook Islands. —AP

Pak played over
overcrowded jails

Islamabad, Dec. 14: A human rights report released on Monday harshly criticized Pakistan's response to the Coronavirus threat faced by tens of thousands of inmates stuck in overcrowded and often unsanitary prisons.

Instead of following through on promises to ease prison overcrowding made when the pandemic first hit, Pakistan's government has actually increased its inmate population by over 6,000 between April and August, from 73,242 to 79,603.

Some of the few who were freed were later rearrested. The joint report by London-based Amnesty International and Justice Project Pakistan said inmates face a growing risk of infection, and called for renewed efforts to free

certain prisoners, particularly the elderly, women and "prisoners of conscience." "As Pakistan braves the second wave of Covid-19, prisoners remain dangerously exposed as the authorities not only failed to reduce overcrowding, they actually worsened it," said Rimmel Mohyidin, South Asia regional campaigner for Amnesty International.

In the first weeks of the outbreak in February, the Islamabad High Court ordered the release of pretrial inmates charged with nonviolent crimes as well as those whose bail had previously been denied.

In the southern Sindh province, 519 prisoners were to be released on bail. But in late March, the Supreme Court suspended all bail orders that were granted because of the virus. —AP

END OF | AN ERA

He wrote 25 novels, 1 memoir in a career spanning 6 decades, selling 60 million books

British spy thriller author John le Carre dies at 89

London, Dec. 14: John le Carre, the British writer best known for his Cold War espionage novels "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" and "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold", has died aged 89, his agent and family said on Sunday.

The author, a former British intelligence officer whose real name was David Cornwell, wrote 25 novels and one memoir in a career spanning six decades, selling 60 million books worldwide.

His wife of nearly 50 years, Jane, and sons Nich-

olas, Timothy, Stephen and Simon, said in a statement that he died on Saturday night after a short battle with pneumonia.

"We all grieve deeply his passing," they said, thanking staff at the hospital in Cornwall, southwest England, for their care. "We know they share our sadness," they added.

"Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" was adapted for television in 1979, with Alec Guinness starring as the enigmatic spycatcher George Smiley, and became a classic. Gary



John le Carre

Oldman reprised the role in the 2011 film, winning an Oscar the following year.

"All who follow are in his debt," Oldman said in a statement. "His characters were drawn deftly and deeply... For me, inhabiting George Smiley remains one of the high-points of my life." His friend, the novelist Robert Harris, called le Carre "one of those writers who really was not only a brilliant writer but he also penetrated popular culture — and that's a great rarity".

Harris told *Sky News television* "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold" was a

"masterpiece".

"It's an incredibly engrossing tale and very deep, and it transformed the writing of spy fiction. It was a brilliant, psychological portrait of spying and of betrayal and of the decline of British power," Stephen King, the best-selling US author, called le Carre "a literary giant and a humanitarian spirit".

Jonny Geller, le Carre's literary agent, said: "His like will never be seen again, and his loss will be felt by every book lover, everyone interested in the

human condition." And historian Simon Sebag Montefiore said he was heartbroken at the death of a "titan of English literature".

Le Carre's life could have been the stuff of fiction and he once said he owed his career in the shadows and later literary success to an "impulsive adolescent decision" to flee an unhappy home life.

It involved a spell in Bern, Switzerland, learning German, where he took his first steps in British intelligence, doing

odd-jobs across the border in Austria.

From Switzerland, he returned to Britain to study at Oxford University, then went on to teach at the elite Eton school before joining MI5, the country's domestic intelligence agency, in the late 1950s.

He later transferred to the overseas spy agency MI6, serving in the West German capital Bonn, where he witnessed the building of the Berlin Wall.

—AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

15 DECEMBER 2020

Vaccines only way out of Covid; shun politics

The vaccine against Coronavirus is the silver bullet. A world caught in the throes of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic has no alternative but to trust the apolitical integrity of science, which has brought humanity to the point that it can hope to inoculate large sections of the population in order to spread immunity. There is no knowing how long the vaccines will continue to trigger the production of antibodies in the human body to stave off the virus. It isn't clear yet if two shots will be sufficient for life. Will the vaccine be a seasonal jab? The fact that it has found its way into 70 million people causing 1.6 million deaths globally — the figures for India is close to one crore persons infected and 1.43 lakh deaths — is proof enough of its insidious ways.

Indian drug regulators are yet to permit even emergency use of vaccines that have received approvals in Britain, the United States, Russia and China. The need for thoroughness in studying the trial data is a priority right now, considering how even minor ill-effects or side effects of the vaccine can prove inhibiting and erode people's confidence in taking the jab. Dedicated scientists have led international efforts to make various types of vaccines possible and their best efforts in giving "warp speed" to the projects have been beset not only by the logistics of distribution but also the politics injected into prioritising beneficiaries.

The United States and large parts of Europe, which are going through a nightmarish second Covid-19 wave in the autumn, are bracing for a winter of discontent, and they have found it necessary to fast-track the vaccination process. Their experience should prove useful as a case study for India to avoid the pitfalls and maximise the efficiency of what has been a truly international effort at finding vaccines. India, as the world's largest manufacturing hub, has a pivotal role to play in this as vaccines are the most effective route out of the pandemic as the production of monoclonal antibodies, which President Donald Trump might have been given, is painfully slow and mitigation of the disease is a complicated process that can overwhelm the health infrastructure.

The biggest stumbling block, as seen in the attitude of people, are the anti-vaccination sentiments. A recent survey reveals only 60 per cent of Americans are saying they will "definitely or probably" get a vaccine, while 21 per cent, constituting members of the "anti-vaxxer" movement, are dead against it. While spreading awareness to build confidence in the vaccine should be a priority, the offer of free vaccines for entire populations as Kerala and Delhi have done is a political move.

The idea of a free vaccine should, however, be welcomed if it were to become possible to inoculate all vulnerable people who must take it, even if it were to cost at least ₹2,000 per person to cover the vaccine, logistics and inoculation costs, and the total number in India is close to 100 crore people. Above all, we must disavow the politics and embrace the idea that a vaccine which promises to work, be it of any type or from any nation, is the only viable route out of the pandemic.

The greatest spy writer ever

The great English novelist John Le Carre — whose real name was David Cornwell — who died on Saturday at the age of 89 will probably be known as the greatest spy writer of any era, anywhere. But he showed through his nearly two dozen novels that he had transcended the genre of spy-writing from the moment his first book came out in 1961.

His third book, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, published in 1963, established beyond doubt that it is human condition, and its frailties and moral ambiguities, that Le Carre depicted with delicate nuance and exquisite detail, using the field of spy-work as the medium for his message.

Before him, it was Ian Fleming and his flamboyant spy character James Bond who ruled the roost in the spy genre. Le Carre was a wholly different story. His books had no bang-bang stuff and they provoked reflection. Graham Greene, the famous English writer who was once an ordained priest, has called Le Carre the greatest English writer of the second half of the twentieth century.

John Le Carre's intricate plots came from the Cold War, in which, for a time, he was himself a participant as a junior British spy. But in his writings, men and women who fought from the Soviet side in the great ideological divide were not, as individuals, moral inferiors of their British (or Western) counterparts. It is not so well known that this writer of studied detail had once visited New Delhi, meeting people on the security circuit, with a view to writing a novel on Kashmir, though nothing came of it.

Le Carre shunned literary awards and state honours. When the Cold War ended, he wrote grippingly, fluently, and with understated eloquence — following on deep on-location research — about the drug trade, big pharma, and torture, in the wake of America's questionable interventions in Iraq and its "war on terror". He even began to take part in street demonstrations in Britain on such issues. The writer whose characters teetered on the fine line between right and wrong, good and bad, had begun to cast off ambiguity.

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Subhani



BJP in Bengal: Bruised, battered... still upbeat?



Shikha Mukerjee

Bullets, bombs, bricks; broken glass, bruises, broken bones, blood and death. The BJP's offensive in West Bengal has not been a peaceful, orderly and rapid occupation. It has been a laborious endeavour, with the party's popularity waxing and waning.

To sustain the 40 per cent votes it polled in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP will have to deal with the physicality of the political space it so ardently wants to capture. And West Bengal's political culture, its history and traditions require the BJP to do much more than verbally assault the Trinamul Congress bastion. It will have to find the resources and the skills to match the confrontational capability of the state's ruling party.

Claiming that it is the victim of the Trinamul Congress' aggression may not be enough for the saffron party. The bricks that were hurled at the party's president J.P. Nadda on his way to a meeting in Diamond Harbour may have shocked the BJP and shaken Mr Nadda who, incidentally, was not injured because he was travelling in a bullet-proof car, but the response to the obviously pre-planned attack is sadly feeble.

Bricks hurled at VIP convoys are par for the course in Indian politics. In August 2017, Rahul Gandhi's convoy was attacked with bricks in BJP-ruled Gujarat when he was vice-president of the Congress. The BJP did not apologise for the incident; it was dismissed as "unfortunate" and Mr Gandhi was verbally attacked for making the visit.

Warning that the

Union home ministry would hear of it, orchestrating a media offensive on the "anarchy, lawlessness and intolerance" prevailing in West Bengal, declaring that orderly democratic politics was no longer possible, by the 2017 incident measure, is a serious overreaction. It falls short of a politically savvy response. Even with the state governor, Jagdeep Dhankar, weighing in and declaring that Mamata Banerjee was "playing with fire", that there was a "deterioration" in the law and order situation in the state, that he had written a special report and sent it to the Government of India because it was an attack on the "leader of the national party," the BJP missed its chance of using the situation to deliver a political punch. Having taunted both the "bhaipo" or nephew, Trinamul MP Abhishek Banerjee, and the "pishi" or paternal aunt, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, for an unholy nexus, accusing her of fostering "dynasty" by cutting out senior leaders of the Trinamul Congress who in their disenchantment were waiting to defect to the BJP, the visit to Diamond Harbour was a red rag that Mr Nadda waved. If the reaction shook up the "leader of a national party," it ought not to have surprised him. The BJP leadership needs to get it — that West Bengal is, like many other places, a mass of contradictions. Its people write and recite poetry even as they make bombs, perhaps plan to attack the convoys of VIPs and create chaos. In West Bengal, politics, peaceful demonstrations that are always edgy with the possibility of violence,

The BJP needs to reread the history of Mamata's hard labour before she became Chief Minister. She fought the CPM on the streets for decades.

poetry and piety coexist in perfect harmony. A familiarity with Rabin-dranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda is not enough. The BJP needs to delve into Sri Aurobindo's evolution to begin getting a glimmer of an understanding of what is a Bengali. For that matter, the BJP needs to know that Swami Vivekananda had a brother, Bhupe-dranath Dutta, who was a member of the "Jugantar", an organisation that believed in armed opposition to British imperialism, and who joined the Ghadar Party, toyed with the Comintern, met Vladimir Lenin, and then joined the Congress on his return from travels in the US, Germany and the Soviet Union.

The BJP in West Bengal needs to create a playbook that is in sync with the political culture of the state. Using the Government of India as a bogeyman or a shield can be effective only in very limited ways. Having imported many workers from the Left Front and Trinamul Congress, it has to know how to deploy these resources most effectively.

And the BJP has to work out how politically useful it is to constantly trash Mamata Banerjee. She is a grassroots leader. If the BJP really thinks that encouraging the governor to publicly reprimand the bureaucracy and the police in West Bengal for being an extension of the ruling party and then amplifying the message is savvy politics, it does badly need to have a rethink. However deplorable and however cynical it may be, voters are unlikely to be scandalised about

non-specific accusations of the police-politician nexus in Bengal, or even across India. It is passé.

Taking on Mamata by publicly discrediting her shortcomings as Chief Minister or making personal attacks about her probity can be the frills on something much more substantial. By itself, accusing the TMC of corruption does not work.

The BJP needs to reread the history of Mamata's hard labour before she became Chief Minister. She fought the CPM on the streets for decades. She was relentless in her criticism of the Left. In 2001, Mamata Banerjee thought that she would win. In 2006, she again thought she would win. She finally won in 2011 and what a spectacular victory it was — chief minister Buddhadeb Bhat-tacharya lost the elections as did droves of his Cabinet colleagues and of course sundry CPM and other Left party candidates. It was a bloody, pitched battle that Mamata fought to oust the CPM-led Left Front. And she did not have the limitless resources that the BJP seems to as a party and the resources it has as the ruling party of the country.

The signs of disenchantment with the Trinamul Congress and disappointment in Mamata are growing stronger.

But that does not make West Bengal any easier for a BJP takeover. The BJP's baggage is its performance as the ruling party at the Centre. The farmers' protest, now into its third week and just as robust, spontaneous and united as it was on the first day, November 27, is a challenge that the BJP has to be able to win with laurels. What happens in New Delhi will certainly have an impact in West Bengal, which is as politically conscious as it is culturally proud.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

ACCEPT SC VERDICT

Now that the farmers' unions have taken the agri bill issues to the Supreme Court they should immediately withdraw all other acts connected with the agitation. The road blocks and rail roko they are indulging in should be withdrawn without further delay as they have already caused much inconvenience to the general public in and around Delhi. It should be understood by them that if the apex court's decision is found not in conformity with their expectations they should receive the verdict in toto without further fuss.

S. Nagarajan Iyer, Coimbatore

KAMAL MAKES SENSE

MAKKAL NEEDHI MaiaM (MNM) president Kamal Haasan's statements listing out some of the policies that would be pursued if MNM party was elected to power are not only feasible (unlike false and gullible promises usually made by politicians normally) but reveals his truthfulness, practicality and modern approach. He has kickstarted the election campaign like an experienced and seasoned politician. When most politicians make a false and impractical promise of introducing prohibition in the state (to woo the women voters) Kamal Haasan has to be appreciated for not doing so but saying that Tasmac would be placed in private hands so that IAS officers need not run it. His suggestion to introduce an education system as found in US by changing the syllabus regularly and follow a modern mode of study is praiseworthy.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

CARBON EMISSION

THIS HAS reference to the report *Carbon emission down 7% in Covid* (Dec. 12). It is a good sign that the strong lockdown measures and restrictions on movement in many countries led to carbon emissions falling to a record extent. A large share of global emissions is from transport, road and aviation, besides industries. In our country, we may consider limiting the vehicles or adapt the Delhi odd even scheme to reduce congestion on roads.

Suresh V.V., Vellore

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

Aakar Patel



Modi govt's real eco strategy: To let Big Biz grow & forget the rest

The head of the Niti Aayog had said something the other day that upset many people and so he had to explain himself. This was, of course, his statement, repeated twice, that India had "too much democracy". However, something else was said in the same speech that did not get as much attention though, in my opinion, it was far more important and concerning. The fact checking website alt-news.in analysed the video recording of his speech and confirmed that he had indeed used the word that he had denied using. It reported: "In India we are too much of a democracy, so we keep supporting everybody". He went on to elaborate: "For the first time in India a government has thought big in terms of size and scale and said we want to produce global champions. Nobody had the political will and the courage to say that we want to support five companies who want to be global champions. Everyone used to say ... I want to support everyone in India, I want to get votes from everyone."

That second bit is the thing that got ignored. The head of the Niti Aayog, which is the Prime Minister's think tank, was explaining the strategy of the Narendra Modi government on the economy. It has not been articulated as clearly as it was in this statement but has been expressed in policy quite clearly.

In brief, the theory is that India has too many small companies and this is inefficient. It should instead have only a handful of very large players running its economy, and these giants can then compete with the world. So, what will the government do to make this possible? It will try and make it difficult for the small and medium sized industrialists to compete. This is also called "formalisation".

It assumes that the small and medium sized entities in business are all tax thieves. They cheat the government by operating in cash. To make their existence difficult, if not impossible, the first step is to remove cash from the economy. This was done on Tuesday, November 8, 2016. Businesses that

depended on cash transactions, even if they were legitimate ones, were not able to operate for weeks and were hampered for months. The large businesses were not affected because they could do with electronic transfers just as the upper class in the metropolitan areas managed with their credit cards.

The second stroke against the small and medium sector was the Goods and Services Tax, which was made so complicated as to require large teams of people in-house for compliance. The repeated and frequent filing of returns and the mangling of the digital system meant that once again a large number of people exited from businesses that became unviable because of the added cost or simply because people could not cope with the complications and chose to do something else. Who benefited from the exit of the small and medium businesses was again the large ones.

The third stroke was the lockdown of this year, which broke the back of the small and medium sector, who had neither the cash

reserves to be able to deal with such a blow or the ability to get their staff to "work from home".

The *Economist*, the most respected global magazine, reported that the net worth of Mukesh Ambani had gone up by 350 per cent since November 2016. The net worth of Gautam Adani has gone up by 750 per cent in the same period. And all this happened in an economy that has been in decline. This month, December, is the 36th straight month that India's economic growth has been slowing down.

The collapse began in January 2018, according to the government's data, and has continued for three years. The finance ministry's chief economic adviser last week urged that a survey the Narendra Modi government had refused to release be finally released. What did it show? It showed that Indians were spending less money in 2018 than they had been in 2012. Meaning that they were earning less as well. Not all Indians, of course — some were making much more precisely because of the fact that the others were making less.

Everything that appears to be puzzling to many people about the Modi government's economic policy makes sense after we consider what it is deliberately doing to this nation. Mr Modi's former adviser and enthusiast Arvind Panagariya had complained about the "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" programme, saying that it was merely import substitution and had failed before. What does that mean? It means that Mr Modi has applied tariffs on imported things that Indians buy, like television sets and mobile phones, so that local industrialists can sell their goods at a higher price than the imported ones.

"Atma Nirbhar" privileges the industrialist over the consumer, but that is not the way that it is advertised. Who does the policy seek to make "Atma Nirbhar"? It is not the consumer or the citizen. It is those selected favourites of the government who have been tasked with winning, while the rest of us are made deliberately to fail.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,253.46	0.34
Nifty 50	13,558.15	0.33
S&P 500*	3,676.49	0.36
Dollar (₹)	73.56	0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.65	1.32
Euro (₹)	89.41	-0.19
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,371*460	0.95
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	49.72	-0.25
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.946	-0.010
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.921	0.030

* As of 8:30 PM IST

IIM-B achieves 100% summer placements

All 525 eligible students of IIM Bangalore were recruited for summer placements by over 130 companies, which made 529 offers. Roles offered included in the domains of PE/VC, business analytics, consulting, finance, general management, IT/product management, operations, sales and marketing*, IIMB said.

Accenture, Amazon, Bain, BCG, Kearney and McKinsey were the top recruiters, it said.

Hyundai gets 30,000 bookings for i20 in 40 days



Hyundai Motor India said it has received around 30,000 bookings for the all-new version of its premium hatchback i20 in last 40 days. It has already delivered 10,000 units of the model, the firm said. "We are witnessing a truly superlative customer response," director (sales, marketing & service) Tarun Garg said. He said 85 per cent of the bookings are for higher trims. Hyundai launched the new i20 on Nov. 5.

UP plans medical colleges in every distt., woos PIOs

The Uttar Pradesh government plans to have a medical college in each of the 75 districts in the state, chief minister Yogi Adityanath has told potential US investors, adding that 30 are being constructed. Addressing an investment and tourism event organised by the Uttar Pradesh Association of North America, Adityanath assured every facility to those who planned to invest in the state.

Godrej Properties tops global sustainability list

Godrej Properties said it has been ranked first among listed global residential developers by Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB). In a regulatory filing, the firm said GRESB, which provides environmental, social and governance (ESG) benchmarks for real estate organisations globally, has recognised the company as a real estate development sector leader both globally and in Asia for listed residential real estate.



Seek 51% stake with each staff putting in ₹1 L Employees bid for Air India

RAGINI SAXENA
DEC. 14

A group of 219 Air India Ltd employees submitted a bid to purchase 51 per cent of the loss-making state-owned carrier.

The remaining 49 per cent will be held by a financial partner, said Meenakshi Malik, Air India's commercial director. Each employee will have to contribute at least Rs 100,000 toward the bid, she said.

Air India has been on sale since 2017 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet signed off on a plan to sell all or part of the debt-ridden carrier. The government sweetened the deal earlier this year when it extended the bid deadline to December 14 from October 30, saying potential suitors will be allowed to decide how much of the flag carrier's debt they want to take on as part of the transaction. The rules before that required bidders to take over the carrier's \$3.3 billion of aircraft debt, deterring buyers.

"We always believed Air India can be a profitable set up," said Malik. "The government has removed a huge part of the debt, so we thought who better than us? We know the airline inside out, we know where the problems are. We're not bidding to win or lose, we're doing it because we believe we can run the airline well."

Air India has been unprofitable since its 2007



merger with state-owned domestic operator Indian Airlines Ltd, and has relied on taxpayer money to keep flying, with the bailouts adding to the pressure on already strained government finances.

The airline, which began operations in 1932 as a mail carrier before winning commercial popularity, saw its fortunes fade with the emergence of cut-throat low-cost competition. The state-run carrier's entire debt totals more than \$8 billion. The government didn't find a single bidder when it tried to sell the company before.

That said, the airline does have some lucrative assets, including prized slots at London's Heathrow airport, a fleet of more than 100 planes and thousands of trained pilots and crew.

Malik said a financial partner had already been found, without disclosing

that entity's name. Employee participation has come from "the most junior employees to the most senior board members," she said, without elaborating.

A local media report on Monday said that US-based Interups Inc plans to bid with the employees. Interups chairman Laxmi Prasad confirmed the development, telling Moneycontrol that he "will be submitting a bid."

Tata Group is also said to have submitted an expression of interest for Air India over the weekend. Its interest was submitted via AirAsia India, in which Tata Sons Pvt Ltd has a significant majority stake. Singapore Airlines Ltd, with which Tata Sons operates full-service airline Vistara, won't be part of the bid in the initial stages, according to a news report.

— Bloomberg

Burger King more than doubles on debut



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, DEC. 14

Burger King India shareholders made a bumper listing gain of 130.67 per cent on the stock's debut on the bourses.

Burger King's shares closed at Rs 138.40 per share against the public issue price of Rs 60 for each share of Rs 10 face value.

The public issue of Burger King, a subsidiary of US-based fast food chain, received overwhelming response from investors, with the Rs 810-crore issue getting subscribed 156.65 times.

The shares listed at Rs 115.35 on the BSE, a premium of 92.25 per cent over the public issue price of Rs 60, and at Rs 112.50 on the NSE. The stock moved up till the market close, indicating more upside as the shares closed at the day's high of Rs 138.40 on the BSE and Rs 135 on the NSE.

The market capitalisation of Burger King stood at Rs 5,282.10 crore, close to Rs 6,224.15 crore m-cap of Westlife Development, McDonald's India franchise.

Public, private partnership needed for inoculation programme, study

SANGEETHA G
Chennai, Dec. 14

India may need 1.3 lakh-1.4 lakh vaccination centers, 1 lakh healthcare professionals and 2 lakh support staff/ volunteers for the mass-inoculation programme, finds a study. The public and private sector will have definite roles to play in the vaccination programme.

The estimated infrastructure will help inoculate 30 crore prioritized individuals as identified by the government by August 2021. This includes healthcare professionals, frontline workers, people above 50 years and also people with comorbidities. Further, the entire adult population of 80 crore also could be inoculated by the end of 2022, finds a study by EY and FICCI.

In order to meet the demand of 1.3 lakh-1.4 lakh centres, 60 per cent of the existing public health infrastructure will have to house a vaccination centre. Against the requirement of 1 lakh inoculators, the public sector can potentially provide 60,000-70,000. This could lead to a capacity constraint especially in key states such as Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and

Madhya Pradesh.

In the early phases of vaccine roll-out for the prioritized beneficiary categories, the programme will be largely managed by the government, provided their capacity of human resource for vaccination is adequate.

However, with expansion of the programme to include the general public, a hybrid model involving resource sharing between public and private players is likely to emerge to bridge capacity gaps across the value chain.

"It is imperative that the government draws on the commitment, capability and capacity of the private sector to fulfill this national duty in the most effective and efficient manner, for the relief of citizens and in a bid to help the country to return to normalcy as soon as possible," said Kaivaan Movdawalla, partner, healthcare, EY India.

Both the government and private sector will have definite roles to play in the programme. The government will have to finalise a number of vaccination centers for defined catchment areas across public and private healthcare setups and allow the private sector the flexibility to decide

on the degree of participation. The categories of healthcare professionals have to be defined and companies have to be permitted to utilize their CSR funds for inoculation of their own employees.

The interoperability of IT systems of private set ups with public sector IT interfaces should be ensured for seamless automation. It will also have to invest in a strong analytics engine.

Private players will have to adopt specific catchment areas for immunization coverage. They should allow their facilities to be used as vaccination centers by the government. Various medical bodies should encourage maximum enrolment of their members as vaccination centres and leverage the network of service organizations such as Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Gymkhana, Grand Lodge of India and other regional clubs for vaccine administration.

The private sector can approach large corporates who undertake CSR initiatives to contribute their funds for the administration of vaccines and create modules and certification programs for inoculator training.

GST shortfall: States, UTs get ₹42,000 cr

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 14

The central government has so far borrowed and released Rs.42,000 crore to states and union territories to meet the GST compensa-

tion shortfall of Rs 1.10 lakh crore.

The amount under seven installments was borrowed through the special borrowing window at an average interest rate of 4.7 per cent. Of the 7th weekly

instalment of Rs 6,000 crore released on Monday, Rs 5,516.60 crore has gone to 23 states and Rs 483.40 crore to the three union territories. The interest rate on the amount borrowed this week is 5.13 per cent.

India aims to surpass China in mobile mfg

New Delhi, Dec. 14:

India is now aiming to surpass China in the field of mobile manufacturing with the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme attracting global majors in this segment to the country, telecom and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said on Monday.

He said the government is looking to make India a hub of other electronic products as well with the expansion of the PLI scheme to other sectors. "We wanted India to become the second largest mobile manufacturer in the world. Now I am pushing India to surpass China. That's my goal and I am very clearly defining it," Prasad said at a Ficci event.

India became the second largest mobile manufacturing country in 2017. The National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE) envisages electronic manufacturing turnover of more than Rs 26 lakh

crore by 2025, out of which Rs 13 lakh crore is expected to come from the mobile phone segment. PLI is designed to propel India's stature and ease of doing business under the leadership of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to showcase India as an alternate manufacturing destination, Prasad said.

"PLI is designed to enable global champion companies to come to India and make Indian companies national champion," he noted. The government has started a PLI scheme under which eligible companies can get sops of around Rs 48,000 crore.

The government has cleared 16 proposals from domestic and international companies entailing investment of Rs 11,000 crore under the PLI scheme to manufacture mobile phones.

— PTI

Boeing ex-CEO hits ground, to head e-tractor firm



Dennis Muilenburg

JULIE JOHNSON
DEC. 14

Former Boeing Co CEO Dennis Muilenburg is joining Monarch Tractor, a Silicon Valley startup that's angling to be the Tesla Inc of the agriculture world with an all-electric tractor that is "driver optional."

While Monarch isn't a household name, it combines longstanding interests for Muilenburg, an engineer by training who grew up on an Iowa farm and served on Caterpillar Inc's board for nine years. He is an investor and adviser as the Livermore, California-based company prepares to deliver the first of its \$50,000 tractors late next year.

"They have all the elements to be a strong, robust, growing business," Muilenburg said in an interview.

The former Boeing chief has largely flown under the radar since being ousted a year ago after fumbling the plane-maker's response to two deadly 737 Max accidents and their aftermath. Since then, Muilenburg has pursued passions such as cycling—he's logged 17,000 miles this year—and advising companies with promising technology.

Monarch is one of about a dozen firms working with Muilenburg, who started a consulting business after a 35-year career at Boeing. He's embracing his new role with characteristic intensity, providing pointers to an executive team at Monarch. —Bloomberg

APP | RIDE Firm plans to launch app-based ride-hailing service in select cities

Amazon's Zoox unveils driverless robotaxi

ED LUDLOW
DEC. 14

Zoox Inc, the self-driving startup owned by Amazon.com Inc, unveiled a fully autonomous electric vehicle with no steering wheel that can drive day and night on a single charge.

The vehicle, which Zoox describes as a driverless carriage or robotaxi, can carry as many as four passengers. With a motor at each end, it travels in either direction and maxes out at 75 miles per hour. Two battery packs, one under each row of seats, generate enough juice for 16 hours of run time before recharging, the company said. To commercialise the technology, Zoox plans to launch an app-based ride-

hailing service in cities like San Francisco and Las Vegas.

"This is really about reimagining transportation," Zoox chief executive officer Aicha Evans said in a television interview. "Not only do we have the capital required, we have the long-term vision."

The company also plans to launch ride-hailing services in other countries, Evans said. Executives didn't say how much rides would cost but that they would be "affordable" and competitive with services operated by Uber Technologies Inc and Lyft Inc. Nor did they say when the service would launch but confirmed it wouldn't happen in 2021. In a video released on Monday,



Evans used Zoox's app to hail the vehicle outside San Francisco's Fairmont hotel and took a spin around the block.

Acquired by Amazon in June for an undisclosed sum, Zoox is one of several companies racing to put fully autonomous vehicles on the road, an effort that's taking longer than anticipated. Most are testing retrofitted conventional cars on public roads, and few are commercially deployed.

In October, Alphabet Inc's self-driving unit Waymo started a fully driverless taxi service in suburban Phoenix. General Motors Co-backed Cruise LLC is also testing autonomous cars—recently without safety drivers—in San Francisco, using a fleet of electric vehicles based on the Chevy Bolt.

Despite being years from deployment, several of Zoox's quirky-looking mint-green vehicles are already being built at a facility in Fremont, California. The factory has the capacity to eventually produce 10,000 to 15,000 units annually, executives said. Suppliers send the major components — the drive unit, body, battery pack and so on— pre-assembled, and Zoox then does final

assembly in stages, a process it likens to building a Lego set. Executives declined to reveal the battery supplier.

The unveiling of a production car marks a significant step for a company that has been working on an autonomous passenger vehicle since its founding in 2014. At times Zoox was "ridiculed" for what it was trying to do, chief technology officer Jesse Levinson said.

Zoox isn't the first to unveil a fully autonomous passenger vehicle. GM's Cruise showed off a battery-powered shuttle in January. Called the Origin, it also does away with many of the controls present in conventional cars: pedals, rearview mirrors, steering wheel.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Ex-Reds coach
Houllier dies

Paris: Gerard Houllier, a Frenchman who won three titles in one season as coach of English club Liverpool, has died. He was 73. Liverpool announced the death on Twitter on Monday. French sports daily *L'Equipe* said Houllier died following heart surgery in France. "We are mourning the passing of our treble-winning manager, Gerard Houllier," Liverpool wrote on Twitter. Houllier had a mediocre stint as coach of France's national team in the early 1990s, his short-lived journey ending with an embarrassing failure to qualify for the 1994 World Cup. His tenure at Liverpool was far more successful, leading the Reds to the FA Cup, League Cup and UEFA Cup treble in 2001. He is one of only three managers along with Alex Ferguson and Pep Guardiola to have won three trophies with an English club in the same season. — AP

Shuttlers alerted
about fake events

New Delhi: The Badminton Association of India on Monday again cautioned its players, coaches and technical staff and asked them to stay away from unauthorised tournaments after it came to light that a Goa-based organisation is conducting such an event next month. According to a release issued by BAI, Goa-based organisation Youth & Sports Development Association of India is conducting the third National Federation Cup next month in Madgaon, Goa with the organisers claiming that it will be a selection trial for upcoming international championships. "Neither BAI nor its affiliated unit Goa Badminton Association is aware about such tournaments and organisation," BAI General Secretary Ajay Singhania said in the release. "Surprisingly the organiser have mentioned that they will select players for international championships which is totally a false and misleading." — PTI

Hockey may get
foreign tour soon

Bengaluru: His side's Olympic preparation hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic, Indian men's hockey team chief coach Graham Reid is hoping to resume international action from early next year. The Australian said the sooner India gets to play international matches, the better will be their preparations for the Tokyo Games, which has been shifted to next year due to the global pandemic. "With the support of Hockey India, we have planned for matches from early next year. These matches will ideally show us the level we are truly at and the areas that will require work on leading into the Olympic Games," Reid said in a statement issued by Hockey India. — PTI

Injured Neymar
stretchered off

Rio de Janeiro: Brazilian star Neymar gave fans a reassuring message on Monday after undergoing tests on the ankle he injured in Paris Saint-Germain's 1-0 Ligue 1 defeat to Lyon at the weekend. Neymar left the field on a stretcher in apparent agony on Sunday but on Instagram he said: "It could have been worse. These tears, it's the pain, the fear, the worry, the surgeries, the crutches and other bad memories," Neymar wrote on his Instagram.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Hobart Hurricanes vs. Adelaide Strikers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Hyderabad FC vs East Bengal from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Premier League: Wolves vs Chelsea from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Serie A: Udinese vs Crotone from 11 pm, Benevento vs Lazio from 1.15 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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Finch wary of Virat

Aaron warns Aussies about 'ruthless' Kohli

Melbourne, Dec. 14: Australia limited-overs captain Aaron Finch wants the home team players to strike a "fine balance" when they confront Virat Kohli in the opening Test as he believes, if provoked too much, the India skipper can be "ruthless" against his opponents.

India and Australia have always shared an intense rivalry on the field, filled with verbal volleys, banter and controversies over the years.

The last time the two teams faced off in 2018-19, the Test series saw some heated exchanges between the two captains — Kohli and Tim Paine.

"I think there will be times when things boil over and when you have got strong characters on either team that's going to come to a head at some point," Finch was quoted as saying by *'Sydney Morning Herald'*.

"(But) there is a fine balance there, isn't there? You don't want him (Kohli) to get up and about in the contest. When he does, he can be ruthless on an opposition."

The first Test of the four-game series, a day-night contest, begins on Thursday in Adelaide and it gains prominence since Kohli will be returning home after the match for the birth of his first child.

Finch, who was part of the last home Test series between the two teams, said the Indian skipper looks much calmer the way he goes about his job now.

"I think the change is in the way he goes about it now. I think as a person he is probably a bit more relaxed out on the field and understands the tempo of the game."

Finch, who had played under Kohli in



A file photo of India captain Virat Kohli (left) and Australia's Aaron Finch.

— AFP

Royal Challengers Bangalore, said he was "surprised" to see the Indian's confidence in this year's IPL.

"What really surprised me was how, he obviously does a lot of planning and preparation himself, and into the opposition, but he never focused more on the opposition than his own team," he said.

"At Bangalore, he was always confident in the XI players that were picked and knew that if you played well, you had every chance of winning.

As someone who had many on-field duels with Kohli, Finch said it was good to learn about his relaxed side. — PTI

HENRIQUES REPLACES INJURED ABBOTT

Sydney, Dec. 14: All-rounder Moises Henriques was on Monday added to Australia's injury-hit squad for the opening Test against India while pacer Sean Abbott was ruled out of the match due to a calf strain.

Henriques, who had missed the three-day second practice game due to a hamstring strain, cleared the fitness Test on Monday to return to the Test squad after a gap of four years. The opening game, a day-nighter, begins on December 17 in Adelaide.

"All-rounder Moises Henriques has been added to Australia's squad for the first Test against India

after the hosts' camp continues to be hit with injury," a report in *cricket.com.au* said.

Abbott became the latest Australian player to join the injury list after being picking up the strain during the second warm-up game here. He is, however, expected to be available for the second Test in Melbourne, which begins on December 26.

Abbott, who had taken three wickets in India's first innings, will not travel with the team to Adelaide.

"Fast bowler Sean Abbott will not travel to Adelaide with Henriques and the remaining Australia squad members from Sydney

today after picking up a calf strain in the day-night four match at the SCG on Saturday."

Henriques last played a Test more than four years ago in Sri Lanka. He made a comeback to the national set-up after three years by featuring in the limited-overs series against India. He is the second player after Marcus Harris to be added late to the Test squad.

Harris was included in the squad for the opening Test following a spate of injuries, including David Warner and opener Will Pucovski being ruled out of the first game due to a groin injury. — PTI

NZ BEAT WINDIES IN SECOND TEST TO SWEEP SERIES

Wellington, Dec. 14: New Zealand joined Australia atop world cricket's Test rankings on Monday when they beat the West Indies by an innings and 12 runs in the second Test to sweep the two-match series.

The West Indies resumed their second innings at 244/6 on the fourth day, trailing New Zealand by 85 runs after following on 329 behind.

The tourists were eventually out for 317, their highest innings total of the series.

New Zealand made a positive start on Monday after a short rain delay, dismissing West Indies captain Jason Holder for 61 in the fourth over of the day and ending his 82-run partnership with Joshua Da Silva.

Holder was bowled by Tim Southee with a fuller ball which straightened and beat the outside edge of the bat. — AP

Brief scores: New Zealand 460 bt West Indies 131 & 317
(Adams 34, Armstrong 62, Redmond 83)
Sheffield United 57, Wagner 3-54, Boult 3-96).

INDIAN | SUPER LEAGUE

Mumbai fail to crack open JFC

Goa, Dec. 14: A flurry of missed chances saw table-toppers Mumbai City FC settle for only a 1-1 draw against Jamshedpur FC in the Indian Super League at the GMC Stadium, here on Monday.

Owen Coyle's men took the lead through Nerijs Valskis (9') before Mumbai hit back through Bartholomew Ogbeche (15'). A red card for Aitor Monroy around the half-hour mark saw Jamshedpur reduced to ten-men but some dogged defending and a number of missed chances for Mumbai, saw the former get away with a draw.

Mumbai dominated the early exchanges as Monroy had to dive to block Ogbeche's shot as early as the first minute. But it was Jamshedpur who drew first blood. Just nine minutes had passed when Jackichand Singh found Valskis in the penalty box. The Lithuanian's first-time shot was unerring. Barely three minutes later, Monroy could only find the side netting from a free-kick.

Monroy was in the thick of things a couple of minutes later, hacking Cy Goddard down and getting himself in the referee's book.

Then, Mumbai found their equaliser. Adam Le Fondre made a run down the right before squaring the ball to Bipin Singh. The

HYDERABAD FACE EB IN TRICKY TIE

Vasco, Dec. 14: Hyderabad FC will be keen to continue their unbeaten run when they take on a struggling SC East Bengal in an Indian Super League fixture at the Tilak Maidan here on Tuesday.

Four games into the season, Hyderabad FC are one of just three teams that are yet to lose a game (a win and three draws) and they will be eager to convert their efforts into a victory, against the ISL debutants.

SC East Bengal have not had the best of starts to the season. They are yet to score a goal, but logged first point in the league table in a feisty clash against Jamshedpur last Thursday. They remain bottom of the table but could prove to be one of the biggest tests for Hyderabad so far this season. — PTI

latter found Ogbeche and the Nigerian unleashed a powerful drive past Jamshedpur keeper T.P. Rehenesh. — Agencies



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (centre) vies for the ball with Levante players during their La Liga match at the Camp Nou in Barcelona on Sunday. — AP

Messi comes to Catalans' rescue

Madrid, Dec. 14: Lionel Messi saved Barcelona from another embarrassing result by scoring the decisive goal in a 1-0 win over lowly Levante, while Real Sociedad returned top of La Liga on Sunday.

Messi struck with 14 minutes remaining of a lacklustre display from Barca at the Camp Nou which will do little to ease fan fears following their 3-0 hammering at the hands of Juventus midweek.

Ronald Koeman's side are still way off the pace in the title race, nine points behind Real Sociedad who reclaimed first place despite only drawing 1-1 with Eibar.

Barcelona do however have two games in hand on the Basque outfit.

Atletico are level on 26 points with Sociedad and also have two games in hand while Real Madrid

are now just three points behind the leaders having played one less after beating their local rivals 2-0 on Saturday.

Villarreal are four points off the lead in fourth after drawing 1-1 at Real Betis, who are one point behind Barca in ninth.

Barca managed to force several saves from Aitor Fernandez, with the Levante goalkeeper doing particularly well to push away a stinging shot from Martin Braithwaite in the 16th minute and Antoine Griezmann's header five minutes later.

However the best chance of the opening period fell to Jorge de Frutos in the 12th minute, the Spaniard somehow shooting straight at Marc-Andre ter Stegen after the ball broke kindly for him right in front of goal. — AFP



Leicester's James Maddison (right) celebrates his goal against Brighton in their Premier League match at the King Power Stadium in Leicester on Sunday. — AP

Leaders Spurs, Liverpool held

London, Dec. 14: Tottenham and Liverpool remain tied at the top of the Premier League after both were held to 1-1 draws at Crystal Palace and Fulham respectively, while Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's own goal condemned Arsenal to another shocking home defeat, going down 1-0 to Burnley on Sunday.

Leicester took advantage of slip ups by the top two to close to within one point of the leaders as James Maddison scored twice in a 3-0 rout over Brighton and Southampton are up to fourth as they also comfortably saw off Sheffield United 3-0.

Liverpool and Tottenham

THE RESULTS

Crystal Palace (Schlupp 81)
Tottenham (Kane 23)

Southampton (Adams 34, Armstrong 62, Redmond 83)
Sheffield United

Fulham (De Cordova-Reid 25)
Liverpool (Salah 79-pen)

Arsenal (Aubameyang 73-og)
Leicester (Maddison 27, 44, Vardy 41)
Brighton

face each other at Anfield on Wednesday and, after Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United failed to win on Saturday, they both missed the chance to open up a gap at the top in the title race.

The champions needed a Mohamed Salah penalty 11

minutes from time to avoid an embarrassing defeat at Fulham after a dreadful first-half performance left Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp seething on the touchline.

"We needed half an hour to get our feet in the game, that's why I shouted a bit at

them," said Klopp. "I think in the first half an hour we could have lost the game, in the last 60 minutes we should have won it. In the end we get a point and that's it."

Bobby DeCordova-Reid's thunderous finish into the far corner to take the lead was no more than Scott Parker's side deserved as the returning Alisson Becker kept Liverpool in the game before the break.

Liverpool dominated the second-half to pin Fulham back, but needed a penalty to salvage a point when Aoubakar Kamara was penalised for handling Georginio Wijnaldum's free-kick. — AFP